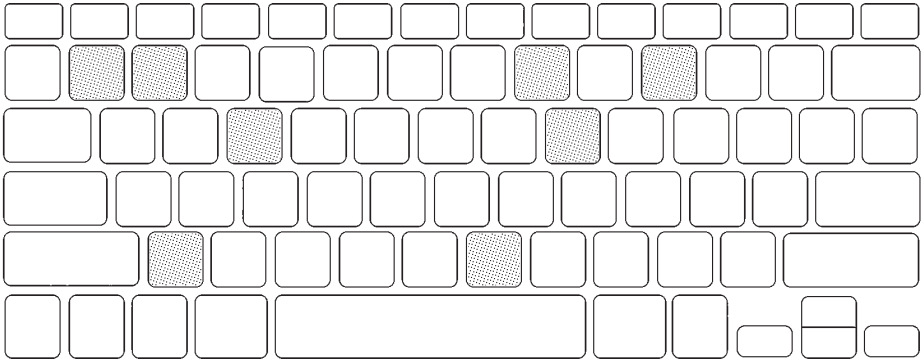

2018 Zine

Berkshire Community College | Pittsfield, MA

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Journal of literary and visual arts

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The Eighth Day

by Christian deManbey

God died one Friday morning at 10:58 A.M.

It was about fifteen minutes later when Isaac's phone would start ringing with a call from his mother.

"What is it you want?" he said as soon as he answered the call. "Is there something else you need from the store?"

"God is dead, Isaac."

"What?"

"God is dead."

Isaac pressed firmly down with his teeth, pulling his father's old 1989 Ford Bronco to the side of the road. He could hear his mother's heavy breathing on the other side of the line, and he dragged a hand across his face.

"Ma," he said firmly, as if talking to a child. "Stop believing all the news you read on the internet."

"Just turn on your radio, Isaac."

The phone went silent, and for a moment he felt he was going to have one of those quiet sessions of his where he'd be in the car voicelessly screaming and slamming the wheel with maddened fists. His online therapist told him he did that too often, so instead he smacked his hand onto the radio button.

It was supposed to be on his favorite music station, but instead there was only static. Then a high-pitched beep rang out, followed by a recorded message: We are taking a day of silence in honor of our dearly departed God who passed away today. May he rest in peace.

Isaac's hand reached for the radio button again, but his fingers froze above it, as if it had some kind of magnetic repulsion pushing away his touch. The button began to swirl in his eyes, becoming the sole focus of his vision, everything else blurred.

The beep rang out again, followed by the message once more.

His index finger twitched a little, trying to move forward, but unable to stop the beeping and the message.

All in a moment he forgot his therapy and began to slam onto the wheel.

Screamed silently while the beeping carved into his ears.

...

Dinner between mother and son was usually silent, but the silence held between them that night was unnerving: it didn't seem real, it felt like some construct from another world slithering through and racing into their souls. Mother ignored it, busying herself with organizing the dozen or so pills she took with every dinner. Isaac, though, kept stabbing his fork in and out of his bloodied steak, watching the red liquid pool in his plate.

"So what happens now, you think?" he said, pulling at a loose vein in the steak with his fork. "With him gone, I mean."

Her snide laugh in response made his hand twist sharply. Her laugh always reminded him of Joan Crawford, somebody he was thoroughly unfond of. A razor-sharp smile took over his face, and son's eyes met mother's, an electric pulse resonating through the air between them.

"What does it even matter to you?" she said, downing a rainbow assortment of pills all at once like they were cheap candy. "You've never once stepped foot in a church."

"And you only stepped foot in one after dad died."

The mother shook her head, spreading her arms out wide like a mighty gladiator, standing up tall and looking around. After a moment the act died down, and she picked up another pill which she chewed on instead of swallowing.

"Does it look like there's any other fucking people here?" she said. "You don't have to be polite with me. 'After dad died'…you mean after the miserable bastard blew his own brains out."

Isaac slowly raised a hand up to one of his ears, trying to block out the echoing ring of that shotgun blast. It had made the whole house tremble when it had gone off, felt like lighting had struck outside their doorstep.

"The fucking blood never came out either," mother continued, motioning off to the wall behind her and the small brown splotches on it. "Bastard couldn't have even been considerate enough to do it outside at least."

Isaac raised up his plate, putting it to eye-level, then began to swirl it around in a circular motion. He was watching the blood race around and around, and the thought came to him of throwing it against the wall. To see if animal blood stuck and raced down the same way human blood did.

"How would things in the world be if we didn't know there was a God?" Isaac said, not even aware of his own words, too hypnotized by the blood. "If we didn't know there was Heaven. If we didn't know everyone gets a chance to get in as long as they can wait it out to make up for what they've done."

"Your father was a miserable coward." She picked up the last pill, spinning it around in her fingertips. "Maybe it would have happened later, but his brains would've been out of his head with or without Heaven. Why don't you just ask him

yourself if you're so curious?"

The swirling of the plate stopped cold, Isaac's grip tightening to a point that ever the slightest more pressure would shatter the glass to pieces.

"He's emailed you, right?" she kept on. "From that purgatory place or whatever. Just talk to him."

"Have you ever talked to him, ma?"

"No, but then again, I'm not the one bitching and crying about him." She shook her head, a subtle look of disgust on her face she loved to carry around in full view. "Something more important than your damn father has happened today. God is dead. Show the man some respect."

"Why? What has he done to deserve my respect?"

"If you have to ask..." She pulled out a cigarette, stuffing it into her mouth. "Then there's no fucking point in trying to explain it to you."

Isaac nodded, carefully moving his fork towards his plate, scrapping some blood off the side of it and onto the table. It was with the utmost attention he watched the blood sink into their perfectly white tablecloth.

...

Isaac had retreated back to his little room and precious computer to escape the world, but found himself laughing aloud with how idiotic that thought seemed the moment he turned on the internet. God was everywhere. God refused to let himself be forgotten or driven out of Isaac's mind. If he went to YouTube, there were in-memoriam and reaction videos to God's death on the front page. If he went to Facebook, there were just more people acting sad and posting their fanart of God, or reposting some cute picture of God looking as fuzzy as a bundle of marshmallows while snuggled up with his beloved cat, Clementine. Clementine, the flat-faced orange tabby who was quickly becoming the internet's most beloved new meme.

Not even pornography was left unsullied by the holy wave suddenly overtaking such a previously complacent and unaware masses. He had switched on to the website so he could switch himself off, but on the front page it went glaring into his eyes. A couple of people had already made an amateur sex tape with one guy dressed up as God, and the girl as an angel. Isaac tried to click something else, but all desire had left him as the image of God bent over that angel kept circling around his head.

Isaac shut the internet off, but left the computer on, its singular light the one he was most used to illuminating his room. His room didn't comprise much. Just a single bed with a ragged concert poster hung above it advertising David Bowie's *A Reality Tour*, and those media storage towers you put together yourself pressed against every inch of wall space. One for music. One for television shows. One for movies. One for video games and consoles. One for books. One for graphic novels, with a special section for anime and manga. One for showcasing the various artwork he had bought online from across the world. One completely empty and covered with dust. He had never decided what to put on it exactly, and so nothing was all it held.

He moved over to his music tower, pulling off Bowie's "Outside." He stuck the CD in his computer, turned the volume to full, and pressed play on track seven. As the music slowly began, he fell backwards upon his bed, twisting his gaze to the same spot on his ceiling he had been looking at for the previous fourteen years. He was honestly surprised he hadn't worn a hole through the ceiling after so long. Maybe if he had discovered the spot in those first thirteen years of life he could've done it.

...it seemed like God was around to stay, feverishly clinging to the world like a bad cold.

"There is no hell," he whispered along with the song, the words sinking into his flesh. "There is no shame. There is no hell, like an old hell." His head fell to the side, eyes turning to the light peeking out from under his door. "There is no hell."

It made a curdling in his stomach as he wondered about how much better the world would be if they weren't sure about Hell. If it hadn't been dispelled so long ago that it wasn't real. How much better people would live their lives. What things they wouldn't do. As Bowie's voice kept on flowing into him, none of it really mattered. Bowie wasn't even singing about that biblical Hell anyway.

Just the hells where the fires don't burn anywhere that can be seen, the ones that wait around the corners to catch you when you aren't aware.

...

Isaac sat on the dilapidated pink sofa in their living room flipping through channels mindlessly, television blaring in front of him. It had been a month, but it seemed like God was around to stay, feverishly clinging to the world like a bad cold. Isaac had made a secret promise to himself if he were to see another story about God where they used that picture of the old man snuggling with that fucking cat, he'd throw the remote through the television.

"Don't you have work?" his mother growled, sliding along on slippered feet, coffee in hand, tie-dye bathrobe blowing along. "Don't you get enough sitting around on your ass when you're up all night in that room of yours?"

"No work today. Something to do or other with

honoring God."

"Is that so? If that's what you say." She walked up closer, then quickly snatched the remote away from Isaac. "You aren't a child anymore, so just watch one damn thing, will you?"

Isaac nodded, and proceeded to watch a news special that was being presented on Lucifer, longtime friend of God. It was a common misconception there was bad blood between them, and Isaac sat in listless uncaring as the reporters began to recount how Lucifer was taking a Forrest Gumpian trek across the United States preaching the truths about God to dispel the media lies. It was just another ring of the circus it had all become, and Isaac shut the television off, bored with the performances.

He sighed deeply, staring out the window, wishing his work hadn't been cancelled so he'd have had an excuse to go outside. To leave. To have any reason to move. It looked nice out, but looking nice wasn't enough to spur his legs to movement. Instead, he reached into his pocket and pulled out one of his mother's antidepressants, popping it into his mouth. He wasn't an addict, but every now and then he enjoyed the quiet tingling sensation it gave him.

The numbing of body and mind.

...

Isaac was surprised one day to get an invitation to lunch from his cousin David. He was around the same age as Isaac, and the two of them used to hang out a lot as children before David's parents had moved away. They had been in and out of contact over the years, and part of Isaac knew the only reason he accepted the invitation was because last he heard David was studying to be a minister. It seemed intriguing enough to spur action.

When they met up at McDonald's, sitting outside under the shade of large umbrellaed tables, Isaac had expected something to have changed with David. Barely anything was different, though, and the same impish grin that set freckles to dance remained upon David's face. The only thing to change about him was a sparkling new necklace of a cross around his neck.

"Did you see some of the shit on that menu?" David said, barely containing a snicker. "God Burgers and Heavenly Fries. Every single corporation on this planet is trying to cash in on God's death and we're all buying into it."

"You can't expect them not to."

"And there's my Isaac!" David clapped his hands together, grin continually returning to his face. "I always liked that about you. You see things plainly and get to the point."

"Speaking of points, why did you invite me here today?"

"What, I can't invite my cousin out for old times' sake? Just because the Lord of Heaven is gone, everything has to involve him somehow?"

"Yeah, that's about right."

"Can't bullshit you." David winked, waving his finger about. "That's another thing I like about you."

As David was about to continue, their Heavenly Burgers and Holy Fries arrived, a brief vacuum of silence appearing and leaving the world around Isaac to come into full view. At another table across from them, a mother and father sat with their young son. The boy was playing with a miniature God action figure he had gotten with his meal. God was in the middle of getting eaten by the boy's other action figure, Godzilla. For a moment Isaac could swear it was the exact same Godzilla he had owned as a kid, the Godzilla who'd go around eating all his other action figures too. Yet there were too many years between him and the boy for the toy to possibly be the same one.

"Yo," David said, snapping his fingers in front of Isaac. "I wanted lunch with a person, not a vegetable."

"Sorry." Isaac shut his eyes, if only to stop watching Godzilla being smashed around into God. "So why'd you want me here?"

"Just wanted to talk, you know, see how you were doing. You were the kind of kid that cried for a week when you found out Santa Claus wasn't real."

"I...I don't think it was quite that long a time."

"That's beside the point. Santa was fake, God was real. You should see how fast they're working to get new blood like me ordained because everyone is jumping ship. The church is in chaos, and people are too."

"And why do you think I care about God dying? You know I've never been religious."

"Maybe." David sucked in a deep breath, tapping his fingers along the table. "But his death didn't just affect the religious. If anything, he was the figure in people's lives. A constant. Something they could rely on to always to be around. With him dying, people have nothing they can call certain anymore. Everything's been thrown up into the air."

"It didn't take God dying to tell me nothing in life is certain."

David turned around, Isaac's hand curling into a tight fist almost immediately: it was quite clear where his cousin's vision was. At whose car in the parking lot he was staring at.

"Why do you still drive it?" David said, not turning his gaze away from Isaac's Bronco. "Why don't you trash the old thing?"

"Because it still works and cars are expensive."

"But doesn't it get...you know...after all these years?"

"He didn't shoot himself in there, David. It's just a machine that gets a job done. It's been around my whole life, and we're even the same age. It's like

the brother I never had."

"You do know how fucking depressing that sounds, right?"

Isaac's eyes drifted towards the table where the happy family had been, except in their place was only emptiness. They had left without his noticing, but the boy had forgotten his God action figure. The old man just lay there on the ground, eyes towards the sky, cold painted features seeming warm in the light. His father's body all dolled up and prettied looked exactly like a plastic toy. Except, of course, Isaac knew corpses didn't get to look at the sky. They get to have their eyelids either glued or sewn shut.

"Do you still ignore his emails?" David said.

"He chose to go to that world, so he can talk to the people there if he wants. If he had wanted to stay in our lives, then he wouldn't have put a bullet in his fucking head."

"You know it's not as black and white as that."

"It is. I don't care how much shit was in your life beforehand, and how many mental conditions you may have...if you have a family, you don't shoot yourself in the fucking head in the kitchen. You don't let your son find you there with that perfectly baseball-sized hole in the back of your head. To have your son nearly slip and fall on all the pieces of your brain lying on the floor. It's fucking black and white to me."

"Sorry I brought it up." David raised his hands up, moving from his seat. "I just thought that fourteen years would be enough for something to have changed, but I won't talk about it. It'll be as its always been: like it never happened." David smirked, walking over to the empty table where the family had been. "Look, my lucky day, a free toy for me."

Isaac's gaze dragged along, watching as David held up the toy God in the light, twisting it around, looking ready to throw the thing in a nearby garbage pail.

"Can I have it?" Isaac said.

"This?" David pointed to the figure, Isaac nodding. "Sure, buddy, Merry Christmas."

David threw the figure over to Isaac, who caught it tightly between his hands. The plastic felt cold to his touch, and he lowered the object down, unfurling his hands like flowers petals from his early Christmas gift.

Santa Claus had been young Isaac's God, and the dispelling of that myth wasn't some fading dream, but a murdering of his idol. A killing of some piece of his childhood that'd never come back. And, because, he thought if Santa was dead then there'd be no one left to give him presents anymore.

Yet on the eighth day of his crying streak his father came into the room, didn't say a word, and just silently handed young Isaac a box covered in bright red wrapping paper, a glittering emerald bow on top. Isaac stopped crying then because he thought there'd always be someone around to bring him presents when Santa couldn't.

His father always had sad eyes, the kind that looked like they just finished crying, but without any of the redness. When Isaac's tears stopped, when he squealed with joy at the new toys he'd been given, there was a look in those eyes of his father's. He didn't notice it then, but he saw it later in his memories, what had been so wrong with his father's eyes.

It was for once they didn't seem quite so sad.

...

Isaac once knew a couple of people from college who'd go out dancing in the rain together. They seemed to abandon all human inhibitions and found pure joy in bathing in that cold water from those out-of-reach clouds, laughter ringing from them as their bodies twisted and moved. They always tried to get him to go out too, to join them, the only ones in school weird enough to approach the silent loner he was. He always declined them, but every time he did, he'd immediately walk up to the nearest window and watch them outside together. Everyone at the college thought they were pure freaks with mental problems, but Isaac always had to stop himself from crying while watching them, for they seemed like the most beautiful things in the entire universe while dancing in that rain.

Outside the lonely window of his room the rain poured again, but on his lawn there was no one dancing: just a shattered lawn gnome with half a face, and maybe a hundred or so cigarette butts being dissolved by the water. He didn't like the rain without those dancers in it. All he could think about anymore was the drowning worms in the soil, poor creatures completely and utterly defenseless against the forces of nature destroying them.

Isaac's computer was on, though the thing was hardly ever off, even when he wasn't around. The screen glowed with the image of an open email inbox of an ancient account Isaac had. It was some stupid little thing his parents had set up for him when he was a kid, though he had barely ever used it. Still, it was the only one his father ever knew of, and fourteen years of unread emails lay piled among each other. Whenever it rained, Isaac always got the thought of simply deleting them all. He never did. He couldn't even glance at them, in case he should see the slightest of words written out by that hand resting in another world.

On the edge of the windowsill, pointed outwards to the rain like Isaac was, the toy God stood. Isaac's hand wrapped around the plastic deity, twisting the figure about, his father's corpse coming back to mind.

During the wake, Isaac was surprised by how

well they put that meatshell his father had occupied all back together. He had even been tempted to lift up the body's head just to see what they had done with the hole there, but thought better of it with his mother close by. No, he simply stared at the thing, and could feel confusion in his stomach. To see the corpse before him, but know the soul that occupied it was lying around somewhere else. It made him wonder what the whole fucking point was. That they could've dressed up a bunch of rocks and put them in an expensive box and it would have had the same effect.

During the rain was when he used to think of God as well, but there was no one left to think of anymore. When he'd talk to God, he'd say to the Holy Father: fuck you, fuck you, fuck you, ad infinitum. Like a pastor in fervor, Isaac would preach his hatred and anger at that fuzzy old man in a flurry of expletives, and throw blame around at God for every single wrong that had ever happened in his life. He had hated God, and yet...

The rain droplets didn't seem like water anymore, but tears savage and unending.

On the quiet nights. On the cold nights. The nights all alone with nothing but himself and the thoughts of death and his wasted life, he'd become a child again clutching to another old man with a beard who was supposed to make everything better. Isaac would cry for forgiveness for everything he had ever called God, and would beg him, plead with him, scream to him for any number of wishes. Like God was some magic genie, and Isaac the only person who had ever asked for anything. For love. For meaning. For happiness. To go back in time and go running out into the rain and join in the dance. To have woken up to get a glass of water and found him there before the stains had gotten on the wall. To go back to the beginning of his father's life, his mother's life, his own life, and with the careful hands in which he'd removed all the pieces in Operation without sounding the buzzer, so he would carefully remove all those broken pieces in their heads that they had been born with.

But there was no more God to hate, and no more God to cry to, just a little piece of plastic probably put together by some child slave worker in a factory across the world. He didn't even have to think about it to know it wouldn't have the same effect to put the figure down and scream at it, to wish to it.

Sometimes, standing at his window, he'd think of sending his father a message. Just one word: why. From that he'd imagine a million different responses—ones that'd make everything become clear and good, and others that'd serve to cut him into finer pieces.

Other times he'd think of flinging the window open and kicking the screen out, jumping forth and into the rain. To let the water melt into his body and soul, to let it take control of him so he could feel its unspoken melody. To be part of the rhythm those two people in college he never even bothered to learn the names of could tap into instantly. Could free themselves from the world in.

He smiled, drumming his fingers beside God, knowing that whenever some kind of move to action was building into him, the same thing would happen. When the door slammed open mere moments later, he had to stop himself from bursting into laughter.

"Stop brooding by the window again," his mother said, his eyes clearly able to see her expression without having to turn around and look at her. "You aren't a fucking teenager anymore. So get your ass out here, there's some more shit I need you to go get for me."

"Why don't you drive yourself, ma?" he said, watching two rain drops race down the window, betting on which one would reach the bottom first. "Go out and get those things yourself. Go on, take the keys and pick up all the things you need."

He turned around to face her. His mother's mouth flung open, as if about to snap out another set of barbed words, before sealing shut again. Her hand gripped tight to the side of the doorway, and he could see the slightest shaking in that hand of hers. Watched her eyes fall dead to the floor.

"You know I can't drive anymore with all my medication," she said. "I-I can't do it...and I..."

She stopped talking when Isaac's arms wrapped around her, when they pulled her in for a tight hug. His mother breathed in deeply, clutching back, hiding her head in his shoulder.

"It's all right, mom," he whispered softly as he always did. "Don't worry about a thing. I'll get the stuff for you, just lay down and rest." His head leaned down on top of hers, and he could feel the movement of her body as she breathed in and out, could feel the pulse of life in her fragile form. "Thank you for always being here, even if it's hard for you."

He gave her a pat on the head, sending her on her way, and for a moment stood quite still in the middle of the doorway. His head twisted back to look out the window once more. The rain droplets didn't seem like water anymore, but tears savage and unending. He moved back into the room, walking towards the window which separated him and that weeping world. He took the

toy God into his hand, and then pulled the window open, storm winds blowing the bitter tears into his room.

Walking over to his computer, he turned the thing off, picking up his car keys which were resting on the desk. As his feet drifted by the empty media tower of his, he froze in place. The toy God twisted around in his hand for a moment, the wind screaming in his ears, and with the utmost care he placed God perfectly centered on top of the tower.

Into the vacant room the wind swept the tears all about, splattering droplets around like some child's mad art piece. On top of the media tower adjacent to the one upon where God rested, Godzilla stood glaring at him, a Godzilla different than the one a child had gotten in a present with an emerald bow. A Godzilla different than the one an angry child would burn away in searing flames on a stovetop and then spend the rest of his life regretting.

That he had wished to God to have his toy back to make him feel better again.

Just to have his present to stop him from crying.

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pt 6. Literary Criticism

Second-Day Snow

by Jahaira M. DeAlto

Coming where we come from, sometimes you gotta do the wrong things for the right reasons.

Rita uttered those words to me, swinging her long braided extensions over her shoulder. The streetlamp illuminated the pristine white toga she was wearing that night. She was my hero and she was generous. She freely gave of her knowledge in all areas of life, love, and how to be an effective prostitute. Information which I sorely needed. I was a teenage sex worker who almost lost my life on the job, and eventually decided to be something else. This is my story.

The weather had cooled down to the seventies on a June night in 1997. I was 18 and predictably invincible in my own mind. Having accepted the mantle of "theater geek" in high school, and gravitating towards friends who shared my obsession, we were only too thrilled to learn that the touring company of *Rent* had descended upon the Schubert Theater in Boston. Our motivation was bolstered by the incentive that if you slept outside of the theater, the first two rows of seating tickets were sold for twenty dollars. As most of us were quasi-homeless and at the very least, broke, this was a golden opportunity to experience culture in a language that we could understand.

After a quick pooling of our collective resources it became clear that while I could afford admission into the theater, my best friend Derek could not. We did everything together. We navigated the streets as one unit. We were so inseparable that strangers believed we were related by blood. This was simply unacceptable. I had known a few girls who worked "the track," a long stretch of poorly lighted road, just a few blocks away from the Theater District, where commerce of a more hedonistic variety could be found. Ladies were bedecked in miniskirts and stilettos, or tank tops and jeans. They eagerly leaned into the open window of opportunity towards their next surgery, next meal, next hit. I respected those women, admired their lip gloss reflecting the fluorescent light of the streetlamps. They had grit. They had gristle. Their wit was acerbic, their humor sharpened to a katana's point. I longed for that spirit, that sass. Still, I had seen glimpses of the other side of their bravado. I drew a mental line in the sand at the prospect of delving into that line of work. However, this was my best friend, my brother, my heart outside of my body. To experience something as immense as *Rent* without him would be nothing short of treason. Just this once, I would send in the high tides of devotion and loyalty to erode that line in the sand.

We started walking around the block. I couldn't possibly have looked more nondescript. Lacking the glamour of a call girl and the jitters of an addict, for all anyone knew I was a lost tourist in jeans. This was not going well. In a momentary flash of brilliance, I brought my comrade back to the theater, promising that I would walk one time alone around the block. If nothing happened, we would adjust our strategy. I had barely made it fifty feet away before a car pulled over.

The cardboard tree dangling from his rear-view mirror said "New Car Scent." He talked about the Red Sox and I blithely gushed about Manny Ramirez, whom I only knew about from leaving the news on past the weather forecast. He parked in an alley and slid his wire-rimmed glasses down while looking at me expectantly. I thought about dolphins, how graceful they were. Maybe I was subconsciously thinking about grace in general. I knew there was none here.

Coming back to the theater entrance, I dropped the crumpled bills into my best friend's hand and retreated deep into my thoughts. Emotions floated to the surface like vegetables in soup. The shame coursed through me but there was something else. A realization that if only for only those few minutes, I was desired, important, and even vital. There was a sense of power that had previously been hidden from my purview. The notion that a body could be leveraged for far more money than anyone in my neighborhood had access to quickly began to take root.

Thus began my foray into the world of sex work. Not so different from above-ground work, really. Monday and Tuesday were my days off, mainly because they were 'dead.' Traffic was scarce on those days. If you were a crackhead, however, none of that mattered. I hadn't succumbed to the call of addiction, at least not at that early point in my career. I was living the dream, basking in my newfound independence. My routine was so methodical that the older working girls began to call me "Midnight," after the time of day that I "punched in." Wednesday through Sunday I could be found wandering in a blouse cut just low enough to advertise, but not so blatantly undone that the police would notice. Blue jeans with a hole in the knee were a staple in my uniform. The frayed hole offered a suggestion of skin, but the starchy denim was surreptitiously used as an assault deterrent. A lesson I learned courtesy of my more seasoned colleagues; it's harder to get raped in jeans. To complete my uniform,

I would finalize my look with a black kitten heel, courtesy of Payless. This was strategic as well. Far too many girls fell victim to occupational hazards while in a stiletto, or worse yet, a stripper's platform shoe. The day Giselle tried to skip across the street in a seven-inch heel and found herself horizontal and bleeding on the cold concrete, we all learned a valuable lesson. One simply must choose their heel height wisely. In a kitten heel, I could be coquettish and run from police. In this new line of work, those were two skills I quickly learned to excel at.

I had been into this job for a year and a half when I experienced my first hostile work environment. It was winter now; fishnet stockings flirted with the hems of fur coats. The clomp of boots beat a muted rhythm to replace the sharp clack of heels. I had secured my first apartment with my earned money, and this purchase had earned me a brand-new job title. The ability to finally take my business indoors meant that I was now an escort, and not the "ho" that drunken sailors would hurl at me during Fleet Week. There was a sense of pride that came with my new title, a feeling of entitlement. I was moving up.

One February morning, I was out on the street, making the rounds. These were the days long before digital pimping was a thing. If you didn't have the money to pay for your ad in the newspaper, you worked the streets until you came up with it. The snow was two days old, the ice had mercifully been salted off of the sidewalk. The ascension of the sun offered no succor for the brutal wind whipping my hair across my shellacked lips. I was freezing, and I'm not talking about "bring a sweater, you might get chilly" cold. I'm referring to actively daydreaming about The Little Match Girl, wondering where it all went wrong, please-God-I-need-all-ten-toes type of frigid. Maybe it was some combination of the weather and the fatigue that led me to commit the cardinal sin of sex work: you never get into a car with more than one man in it.

I heard the voices of my elder courtesans beating in my head like a djembe drum at a tambor in Queens, "Pendeja, jamas! There's only one of you, right?" But it was going to be a fast job, only one of them wanted anything, and I could get a few hours' rest before posting my ad. Of course, I didn't anticipate the request for their money back after my job was finished. I neglected to register their annoyance when I calmly explained that I couldn't take my service back, so they wouldn't be getting their money back. As I walked away, my confidence in myself as a businesswoman was firm and intact. However, I failed to predict the unblinking eyes of the white Ford Explorer those men were driving, staring me down as it sped towards me.

A realization that if only for those few minutes, I was desired, important, and even vital.

It turns out that second-day snow can save your life, if you jump into it at just the right moment. This should be the place where I tell you that I took heed to that lesson and never looked back. In reality, it would be another twelve years before I finally quit my job. At the very end, I was working as a "phone actress." I had already dabbled in being a madam, a fetish model, a writer for adult films, and now I was here. I'd love to say that there was one grand come-to-Jesus moment that signaled the end for me. The truth is, I just got weary. I felt intellectually barren and morally bankrupt. There had to be more to life than this.

Starting over for me was as much of a literal act as a figurative one. I turned my back on the siren call of the big city and made my way to Berkshire County, in Massachusetts. The lifelong residents would say that I live in the city here, as well. I guess it's all relative. There are people out here doing the wrong things for the right reasons, too. In my case, it came down to survival: a warm place to sleep, a hot meal, a winter coat. Everybody has their reasons. Rita certainly had hers. I wish I had asked her what they were. She was murdered in 1998. I never got the chance. Her words are fused to my soul, and I share her legacy wherever I go. I know what it is to survive. I know what it is to be saved. I know the value of second-day snow. ●

Some Call It Courage

by Will Hatch

I wake up with a crème brulee almond package making eyes at me across the top of the bed. The taste of last night's bong-induced sugar bomb coats my mouth. It's more dignified than waking up with tar and cocaine-laced post nasal drip though. Anyways I've been trying to stay away from "the pot." My therapist gave me the newest schpeal against weed and functional MRIs and all that jazz. Of course, I pointed out the obvious negatives of legal pharmaceuticals' effect on functional MRI's, because weed grows in the ground…man. I actually googled the research lab to confirm the credibility of the article she was quoting. It's not that I don't believe what she says. I'm not under some impression that lighting something on fire, breathing in, and becoming a disconnected couch potato is healthy, but I also know that the four pills a day she prescribes me aren't cutting it. So I take the lesser of two evils: weed over Xanax.

The doormen of Park Avenue see some fucked up shit, which they are paid well to keep discreet.

Except today. Last night my buddies hooked me up with a Xanax. Just one. I wanted it for Thanksgiving, which if you haven't done before is a serious upgrade on an American classic…turkey, pumpkin pie, and benzodiazepines. I woke up and decided I only needed half a bar for Thanksgiving. I'll be responsible, I think. I definitely can't have my girlfriend thinking I'm high at Thanksgiving. So I take a half a bar, and make my way to the Rodin exhibit at the Met, the reason I gave for this trip to the city. I'm feeling good. I put my mom's collagen protein in my coffee this morning, which makes me feel like I'm healthy in the fitness Instagram "influencer" sense. It feels like my next step should be a sound bath or hot yoga, but the collagen protein is enough for today.

Walking out of my mother's apartment building, I run into the doorman, Lenny, as he's hailing a cab for some yuppie Upper East Side mom. Hermes bracelets, a Barbour field jacket, and probably a banker husband who cheats on her, I think to myself. I wait for Lenny to see this woman off to her "ladies who lunch" appointment, so I can shoot the shit with him. The doormen of Park Avenue see some fucked up shit, which they are paid well to keep discreet. This has been particularly beneficial for me over the years. All this to say that Lenny knows my deal. I can tell in the way he asks, "How are you?" that he really means, "How's your abusive relationship with drugs and alcohol going?" I ask him if he saw last week's fight. This is what we talk about…boxing, mixed martial arts, anything you can bet on, really. Per usual, Lenny gives me a fully animated rundown of the fight despite my telling him that I too saw the fight. He's a good guy though, so I humor him, even asking for gambling advice.

The walk is cold. It's really windy. Late fall made up for lost time. I don't know what it is, but every morning it feels like I see how far I can push my heart within legal parameters. I had a good coffee buzz at one point, but I've been sucking on this vape like it's my air supply, despite the full body clench that started five minutes ago.

Cutting across from Madison to Fifth, I see what appears to be a line. I decide to be the asshole who questions the legitimacy of the line just to let everyone know how absurd I think it is. The woman I ask, who I figured would be pleased to have a young man interact with her, was not amused. The curt, throaty "yeah" makes me think that maybe I should have opted for a quarter bar as opposed to a half. I was definitely slurring my words. I always forget how strong these things are when I manage to stay away for a few months.

I feel comfortable in this museum. I grew up three blocks away, went to school five blocks away, and got detained one block away while trying to smoke a joint with a buddy during a blizzard. Walking through the Greek and Roman sculpture wing, I always stop at the same statue – Marble Statue of a Youthful Hercules – a hilariously ambiguous title. It was the first sculpture we studied and drew when I came here on my first school museum trip. I don't know why it's stuck with me – probably because of the blatant exposure to a penis, which at the time I'm sure was hilarious to me. I really loved art in middle school. I was drawn to it, but the clever dickheads of seventh grade found a way to ruin that with a few gay slurs. I made sure to try out for football in eighth grade.

I get to the Rodin exhibit. It's surprisingly empty, at least at first. I turn around the corner to see the totality of the exhibit population surrounding his most famous work, *The Thinker*. Yeah, it's incredible, but this scene gives me the sense that these people are here to fulfill some vapid responsibility to be cultured. It pisses me off. I'm not joining

that group. Instead, I walk to the drawing room, which includes photographs that Rodin commissioned of his work. The photographs are stunning. There's the distinct fuzz of 1800s photography of course, but this only enhances the kind of living dead feeling of the work. The drawings are similarly interesting. I always wonder what these guys were thinking when they sat down and decided to create something that would offer them some form of immortality – that somehow hundreds of years later, people would wait in lines and pay to be in the presence of their creations. My guess is they weren't taking doctor prescribed, insurance covered methamphetamine. The works are timeless though, not to get sappy and cliché. They're fluid and alive. I like the fact that *The Thinker* isn't some stiff demi-god or Mary and child – he's just a man. Not that I'm sold on the whole "God is dead" thing, but he's definitely had a tough few centuries.

The exhibit begins to flush out as the early birds have gotten their fill of *The Thinker*. It's time for me to leave as well. I have to catch a train back to my life.

On the way out of the museum I walk by my old teacher, Mr. Morales. He's walking a group of students from the sculpture wing to the Impressionism section. I don't know if he saw me. I certainly didn't make any effort to be seen, but I couldn't help but wonder what he would think of me now. ●

Reese's & Coke

by Mathieu Moreau

I can time travel. I do not own a DeLorean with a flux capacitor, however I have "junk food" to take me back. Back to the times I would be greeted by the smell of cigarettes and roses. Back to the times I would be the King of Slapjack against the Queen of Checkers. Back to the times the French language would accompany the sound of a rock band upstairs. Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and Coca Cola are what send me 88 miles per hour to travel back to my grandmother Moreau's house.

The welcoming aroma of cigarette smoke and rose petals fills the air the moment my father and I open her front door to enter the porch. "Bonjour Grandma!" he hollers to my French- Canadian grandmother. A distant "Nous avons de bon visiteurs!" is heard from the other end of the house, which is French for "We have good company!"

According to my mom, they would only create ugly cavities in my teeth, but they only created beautiful memories in my mind.

Good company it was, especially when Grandma had an unlimited supply of my favorite candy and soda specifically reserved for me. I emphasize the word "unlimited." Eight Reese's Peanut Butter Cups and two cans of Coca- Cola a visit seemed unlimited in the eyes of a 6 year old. According to my mom, they would create ugly cavities in my teeth, but they only created beautiful memories in my mind. Beautiful memories of the 19th century home with pastel yellow walls from cigarette smoke and floorboards that would welcome you with each croak. Thoughtfully placed around her house were antique plastic doilies and roses that were veiled in a delicate blanket of dust. The well-aged doilies, which certainly had roses on them, would complement the ashtrays rested atop them. Watching over the antiquities were pictures of her patron saint, St. Therese of Lisieux, cradling her roses like a newborn baby. I was only focused on the fridge and the cabinet. The refrigerator held my cavities in a can and the cabinet kept my plaque in a package. Reese's and Coke are what fueled me to compete against the Queen of Checkers in a game where the odds where in my favor. Slapjack.

A thunderous boom would be heard whenever a jack appeared on the table. The long rectangular table covered with an elegant tablecloth would shake like a beat up car hitting a deep pothole. Either my hand hit the card or my grandmother's hand. With youth on my side I was quick and could often get to the card before my grandmother could. On the days I won, I felt like a king who'd just won a war enjoying the rich taste of fine delicacies. Chocolatey peanut butter goodness and an open "can of happiness" would be all I needed to increase the feeling of euphoria. My grandmother held her victories in a different game where wisdom was in her favor instead of youth: checkers. Grandma would toy with your emotions midgame like a cat playing with a mouse. You would think you had the upper hand when you actually fell into her trap. I did not play her often in checkers because I did not have the patience, however she was known as the best checkers player in the family. Effortlessly winning against my father and sister along with other relatives, she earned the title "The Queen of Checkers." Fortunately the Queen of Checkers, or La Reine du dames in French, shared some of her wisdom to those who had lost to her. This wisdom was vrai de la vie or true to life as "one must lose some to gain some." In life and checkers alike, you must sacrifice something to gain something else of greater value. In my example I had to lose some games of checkers to hear such words of wisdom.

Words of wisdom were not the only sounds that danced around the homey atmosphere of my grandmother's house. Raspy spitted "R"s, hard consonants, and frequent "eau"s from the foreign language I had yet to learn combined with the thumping from the rock band tenants playing songs upstairs, created an air unique to her house. These sounds were exclusively associated to her house just as horns and sirens are paired with large cities. Such sounds became an ambience once effort was required to realize what I was listening to. The French language and rock music became just as easy to listen to as elevator music and I started to accept and enjoy that. I was a fan of rock and it was interesting to hear a completely different language once in a while. With my Reese's and Coke in hand I could stay amused listening for hours. This combination of food is just enough to send me back to these times like a person with a former city life seeing a yellow taxi.

As I finish the last drop of Coca-Cola and the last bite of my Reese's Peanut Butter cup, the visit to my grandmother's house is sadly ending. I am about to say "Au revoir" with my dad, turning our backs on the ambiance and antiquities that first welcomed us

into her home. St Therese watches over us and my grandmother as we close the door and walk to our car. I reflect in my head about the fun games we had played and good advice she gave. The French language was left at the door and the audibility of the rock band slowly faded out as we drive away. The chocolatey peanut butter taste flees my mouth and I am left with wrappers and empty soda cans around me. Fazed at what just happened I realize that I had traveled back in time to visit my grandmother's house. No DeLorean with a flux capacitor was required, just a favorite childhood food combination to recreate childhood memories. I cannot wait to open the fridge and cabinet again to take a visit.

Don't Dent The Door!

by Alice Van Deusen

I can remember the greenish, neon flashes in the sky. The tremendously loud, fearful sounds of crashing thunder made me cringe and cry as I attempted to open the back door of my mother's four door Ford Escort.

That was a night I remember well. I was just a young child, probably about seven or eight. We were coming from some inappropriate place, like Green Mountain Race Track in Pownal, VT. We often were forced to go there, and many other rotten places. My sister and I were just young girls. The adults in our lives always seemed self-absorbed and dysfunctional.

We lived out in the middle of nowhere in New Marlborough, MA. Actually, it was Clayton to be exact. We lived in a township of small villages. When we had bad weather, we could be out of utilities for days, due to downed trees and lines; we would rely on candles and bottled water sometimes.

In an area such as ours, people were often strange and set in their ways. There was a lot of alcoholism, drug usage, and domestic violence in some households. Our household was one of those that experienced that sort of lifestyle. In storms such as this one, my sister and I were often terrified.

My mother could be as mean as a tornado, and we were just as afraid of her as we were about getting hit by lightning, or listening to the sounds of loud, clapping thunder. Her words were sharp and firm, as were her hands when she slapped us. Usually, I would keep as quiet as possible, so as not to anger her.

On this particular night, I was so frightened that I just about shot out of the car when we got into our tiny garage. "If you dent that door, you're going to get it!" That was what I heard on my exit out of the vehicle. Usually, when I heard that shrill, authoritative voice, I knew that there was Hell to pay.

It was too late and too stormy to check for scratches or dents after I got out of the car. I had a very nerve wracking and sleepless night. I shook and my stomach was very upset. This was the case most of my childhood, so I was really quite used to it.

The next morning I got up out of my bed when I was told to. I looked out of the back window of my bedroom, where a tree had been hit by lightning, to see the damage that the storm had caused. I gulped and took a deep breath. I must say that I secretly wished that she had been near that tree that had been struck by lightning. I say this because I wanted her to feel the fears that coursed through me.

As it turned out, I apparently hadn't damaged the car door. My mother's mood turned like the weather, and I seemed to be safe from harm for the moment. Now, as a young child, I just had the fear of the next storm to come.

On Dogs

by Kim Sawyer-Wheeler

This particular piece of writing has no real purpose except to talk about dogs. I have no other idea about which to write, and am lacking creativity today. Lincoln, our junkyard looking mongrel that we rescued, just gave me a slight bit of inspiration. He accomplished this by trying to catch a bug. He did succeed in his endeavor, which made me laugh. I know that the subject of dogs as a theme is probably overdone, but I'm going to discuss it anyway. I know my prose nor my imagination is even going to come close to what W. Bruce Cameron achieved when he wrote A Dog's Purpose or A Dog's Journey, but I'm going to write about the subject anyway.

When I opened the link and saw him, I thought he was homely and looked like he was from a junkyard.

Without getting into anything too deep, dogs and humans have been companions for thousands of years. Both parties go together like peanut butter and jelly; they are meant to co-habitate. My life would be super boring if it weren't for dogs. There are some days I wish my two dogs would run free and find new homes. Please do not misinterpret my last statement in a derogatory way, but I work with dogs all day long and then come home and have two crazy, wild beasts to attend to, and sometimes it is too much. I love them dearly, but sometimes you need a break. It is what I assume having children is like. The significant difference is, I can put my dogs in their crates and leave the house; you cannot do that with children. Well you can, but it is frowned upon by society.

Dogs are great companions and have so much unconditional love to give. They truly are pack animals and need to be around their humans. I can tell when I have not been home or have been running around doing chores because when I finally can sit down, I do not have any personal space. Both Lincoln Jameson who weighs in at 36ish pounds and Clover Jean, our adorable, too-smart-for-her-own-good, yellow lab, who tips the scale at almost 70 pounds, are lying on top of me, making it difficult to breathe. At the same time, I love this. Just having them with me usually drops my stress level tremendously. I feel good when they are around, at least when they are not trying to start trouble or get into things. They both can act like toddlers and it is beyond frustrating.

The days I want them to run away and find new homes are the days that work has been loud, frustrating, crazy busy, and shitty. By shitty, I mean literally shitty. When all our boarding clients have upset stomachs at the same time, it makes for a really long day of cleaning, bad smells, doctor visits, and frustrations. Thankfully, days like this are few and far between. Days that are full of non-stop barking are tough too. It is a sensory overload and I cherish silence when I get home. Clover seems to know when I have one of those days at work because she will stand in front of me and stare. She will then proceed to bark for no apparent reason other than to bark. The only way to try and stop her is to put her security blanket around her neck which takes the form of a citronella bark collar.

Clover and her relationship with her bark collar is like Linus from Peanuts and his blue blanket. Most days she stops barking and settles down whereas other days she barks over it while it sprays up into her face as well as mine. The smell of citronella fills the room, and it's like being outside at a picnic. Dumb dog, but I love her all the same.

Lincoln came into our lives last August because Clover is such a sensitive soul. Our family suffered a devastating loss when her brother, Giblet passed away. Giblet was an adorable white and black pied French Bulldog. He was nine years old when he passed and the first dog I raised from a puppy. Giblet was Clover's best friend; he did not feel the same way though. Giblet liked her well enough but mostly tolerated her. GG had some health issues and could not keep up with the boundless energy Clover has.

Clover had always been around dogs from the time she was born until the day Giblet passed. She was even allowed to say good bye to him after his life force left his body; we were hoping she would understand and be able to grieve the loss of her brother with us. Dogs have feelings and are very attuned to their surroundings; it would not be fair to her if we said our goodbyes to our boy, but she did not. Once we all arrived home, things were not the same. There was a big hole in our lives that could not be avoided. We were all sad.

Clover slid into a very noticeable depression within a week. Just looking into her eyes was heartbreaking and did not make the loss of Giblet any easier. I made sure I brought her to work

with me every day so she would be able to interact with other dogs and feel part of a pack. This did not help much. Even while she played, the look in her eyes was still sad. Clover began to go on hunger strikes. If you know anything about labs, you know that is highly unusual. This went on for three months.

I did not want another dog and neither did Shell but Clover was making a silent case for a new friend. We have always looked at rescue sites and other dogs, just like people day dream about vacations. She happened to be on Berkshire Humane's website one August afternoon and sent me a link for a dog named Batman. When I opened the link and saw him, I thought he was homely and looked like he was from a junkyard. Shell suggested we go look at him.

Batman turned out to be a rescue from Atlanta, and was a Boston Terrier and probably a Boxer cross. He had big ears (hence his name) and was a beautiful brindle color with splashes of white. We asked to meet him and once we did, he turned on the charm. He had to convince me that he was a "good" dog and would be a good fit for our family. I was totally against getting another dog. I just was not ready. Batman made a good enough impression for us to set up a "date" for him and Clover to meet. Once they met, the look in Clover's eye instantly changed. Batman and Clover clicked immediately. I had no choice but to say yes and bring him home. Lincoln, who was once called Batman, is now Clover's sidekick and they hate to be separated.

I cannot imagine life without a dog in it. They are a lot of work, but the joy they bring to your life is immeasurable. They are role models for us as well; even though they are not on this earth for very long, they leave lasting marks on your soul. We need to respect each other, love unconditionally, and cuddle more often. All while stuffing down the urge to punch your dog in the face, as I see Clover counter-surfing and snagging a notebook from the desk.

Clover thought it would be fun for her and Lincoln to make confetti out of the notebook which contains all our passwords for our online accounts. I just chased them around the dining room trying to save it, laughing the whole time. Oh well, I don't want to pay my bills anyway. Thanks, Clover and Lincoln! We may be homeless after this if I can't log in and pay the mortgage. You really will have to find new homes. HAHAHA!!! ●

pt 1. Fiction

pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction

pt 3. Poetry

pt 4. Visual Art

pt 5. Other Genres

pt 6. Literary Criticism

Reincarnation

by Kara Curtin

Darkness envelops us
as I sit in deep space.
A single golden light
Outlines softly
the contours of your face.

The moon shines through
the deep window set
in the night, and you tell me a story
of windless snows
cold and wet.

Of trees standing alone
In the white vast expanse
Of Eskimos and igloos
And of flying fish
that dance.

And evade the mind
as it tries to think
Of the place by the sea
where wind doesn't blow and ice
doesn't sink.

Souls journey there you say,
And there they stay.
for Infinity.
And ebb and flow
with the waves as they go
knowing that even in death,
All is okay.

These souls travel far and wide,
Over oceans and valleys
throughout life they glide.
Through the still snow
and on the wind they ride.

And when it's time to go
Back home they abide
and journey into others
that live their lives out
in stride.

And when they die
going over the plane
The souls who keep going
Adopt a new name.

They continue their journey
through clouds of mist and light
Knowing that
even in death
everything will be alright.

Two souls who die
Having felt love in their hearts
So still they shall love
Even in death, though they part.

From bodies of flesh
and of heart filled love,
The souls who die loving
Will love from above.

They don't ever lose
the ability they had
to love one another
even though death
may be sad.
The souls who have loved
and the souls who die
Will continue to love
and so shall I.

In the whispering trees
and voice of the sea,
the snow and the ice
thou and I shall be.

Safe as long
as life shall last
Continuing to love
with a love long past.

And as the night wanes
You hold my hand and tell me
Worry not my love because you and I
Will go to the windless sea
We'll be in love
For Infinity
And never die.

Mother Luna

by Raine Dash

The moon, a soothing sight for a soul
Its glow, grand
Its beauty, breathtaking
My heart sings at the sight of the moon
Obscured as it is by the innumerable
    pinpricks of light that small
    people use to run from a dark
    that is both beautiful and terrifying
I sometimes yearn for the chance to see the
    sky unfiltered by the sheen of civilization
    to see the stars dance
    to see the moon bright

Triumph

by Raine Dash

The shattered blade stood alone
The top most path her home
She faced a foe she knows well.
The right hand of her former home

His smile cruel, his step sure
She smiles faintly, her blade at ready
She will win.
She will overcome her past.

With a cry she leaps, her movements jerky
Her path only the bravest can follow
With a slam of her blade
Her rage and sorrow given form

The Hand is stunned
Shocked by the pain in her gaze
His heart hardening he recovers
His job is clear
His goal is set
Her will against his

Power against power
Steel against steel
He laughs at her attempts
With a thought her blade reforms
Her head clears, gone are the thoughts of revenge
Her rage replaced with cold clarity

No time to waste
Her might awakened
Her hesitation gone
She slashes and dashes
A whirlwind of blades
With a mighty yell
A blade of wind unleashed
Her stamina spent
Her mind drained

She stares at her fallen foe
Sorrow at her loss
Pain at what she must do
Her wanderings weigh heavy
She will free her home one day

Dreams of You

by Christian deManbey

As easy it was to tell black from white
It was all that easy to tell wrong from right
And our choices they was few so the thought never hit
That the one road we traveled would ever shatter and split
How many a year has passed and gone?
Many a gamble has been lost and won
And many a road taken by many a first friend
And each one I've never seen again
-Bob Dylan

I.
The first time we were by a lake
People were all around like the Fourth of July a 50s nostalgia glow in the light
You stood by the water's edge and cheered me on
And I swam in a race against somebody else

I don't really ever swim at all
And to see you so excited was out of character
Still I felt a happiness so very deep
To know that you were cheering just for me

II.
I think we were at a hotel
That we were on some kind of school trip
I don't know where we were but I didn't care
Whatever it was we were experiencing it together

When we were leaving you hugged me
And gave me a kiss on the cheek
But when I tried to hug you back you seemed angry
It felt like I had done something horribly wrong

III.
We were by my garden
The one that's just dirt and dead plants now
There was a boa constrictor longer than I could see
The same creature from a recurring childhood nightmare

The snake used to come out from under a rock and kill me
And now it started to wrap around my body
Yet you came up and hugged me and held me
And I wasn't afraid of anything anymore

IV.
This one was chaos and I can only remember pieces
I remember flying
I remember the oceans drowned in oil
I remember looking for you down by the poolside

I remember hoping for the end of the world
That maybe then I could see you again if everything was destroyed
I saw your image over everything in all the faces on the TV
I finally found you again at the harvest festival and you greeted me with a smile

V.
I fall in love with a girl who likes me too
We go and collect fake rubies in what looks like a landfill
On a tower out in the ocean she is killed
Children look for the rubies except they've turned into my old baby teeth now

The girl who died is back and we get married
It's when I'm happy with her that you show up and talk to me
I think I wake up from it all then and I'm back in my room
But I turn and see you behind our door and you stare at me without saying a word

VI.
Cobblestone streets falling to pieces with nineteenth-century shops
You owned a shop that looked like an alligator's mouth
I tried to impress you by sneaking between its snapping jaws
My foolishness did not amuse and I apologized

In some warehouse faraway there are endless metal drums
I constantly try to be alone with you but there are always other people
I'm with you and my brothers and they're wearing my clothing
When I try and get them back you tell me to leave and I do

VII.
It's so short it's done before it starts
It's just me turning on my phone
It's just a message from you
It's you saying you want to meet up with me

VIII.
In the store I steal Heroscape and a tin of Yu-Gi-Oh cards
When I go back home you are waiting there already
You say you're sorry for what happened to me
I grow very afraid and start to cry but you hug me

Things are better now between us
At 3:16 we'll be seeing *An American Werewolf in London*
It's Christmas we're at the table and your arm is around my shoulders
Music is playing but when I try to shut it off it keeps turning back on

We're talking with each other like nothing ever happened
My family is trickling out while we go to shut off the music manually
My brother is lying on the table eating cookies saying he'll fall asleep soon
And I go to hang up your coat from where it's fallen onto the floor

My other brother comes out of the room and asks why you're back
I tell him that life sometimes isn't so bad and that good things can happen
I wake up then and feel like screaming like crying like tearing the whole fucking world apart
Because it felt so completely real and I have to go back to being alone again

IX.
I'm in autumn woods with my camera
I'm pretending to look for something to photograph
I'm pretending as an excuse to run into you there by your house
You're happily surprised to see me and your brother who exists only here isn't

We get to talking and upon the ground you grow rows of grass
The grass has all the seasons in it and I photograph it and secretly you
Your brother offers me Bazooka bubblegum but I refuse it because it never lasts long
I'm trying to get into your world into your family but all I am is nerves and doubt

X.
The walls to the bathroom are gone now
Mother said that they're too expensive to keep
I go to wash my hand in the sink
But end up spilling water all over myself

In the Mall of America I see you with someone I know is your boyfriend
Someone I can feel right away is truly kind and wonderful
There's a matchstick in my mouth and I want to run to hug you
But I'm too scared that it'd hurt you and so I stay still

XI.
I think it was a nightmare at first
Monsters and violence and death
Running and feeling fear throughout
But then I ran into a parking lot

On the trunks of cars were rows of lit-up computers
You were with your family nearby one of them
I awkwardly smile and glance at you hoping you notice me
I think you see me and I think maybe I see you smile back

I wish, I wish, I wish in vain
That we could sit simply in that room again
Ten thousand dollars at the drop of a hat
I'd give it all gladly if our lives could be like that
-Bob Dylan

I Hate Poetry

by Chase Rahilly

Oh, how I hate poetry
An often confusing array
And befuddlement
Of every norm I've known

Every time I find a trend
It ends up on its head
For there is no set pattern
No norm for me to follow
what a bother.

Oh, how I hate poetry
For all this rhythm and rhyme
Something I'm made deaf to
Seemingly all the time

I'm told it's like the beat of a drum
All a simple pattern of thumps
But it is so easily lost to me
Like Morse or Binary code

Oh, how I hate poetry
For all this annoying
Alliteration, alongside
Asinine assonance

But we can't forget
The constant calibrations
That need to be met
For confounding consonance

Oh, how I hate poetry
For allowing such poems
To only exist as a single
"I"

Makes for something
Just as compelling
As a circle painted
On white canvas

Oh, how I hate poetry
For obscuring realities
With all its metaphors
And similes

A muddy puddle
Must be like a murky sea
And become the executioner
Of my socks

Oh, how I hate poetry
As the poets hide
Their true meanings
Behind colorful words

At the very least
I have the courtesy
To make my purpose very clear
And left it in the title

pt 1. Fiction

pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction

pt 3. Poetry

pt 4. Visual Art

pt 5. Other Genres

pt 6. Literary Criticism

Allison Armata
TIW (701)

Allison Armata
TIW (703)

Allison Armata
TIW (670)

Allison Armata
TIW (143)

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Code of Ethics

by Brittany Czarnecki

I first became interested in the Police Code of Ethics through an assignment in my Police and Community class where we were to study the original one and re-write it to fit better with modern police tactics and issues. The Code of Ethics is a very important part of the police community and is used as a set of moral and legal guidelines in how the department should run. When I first started to re-write my Ethics, I got stuck after the first sentence, but after re-reading the original one over and over I started to understand it better. A lot of my inspiration for writing my own Code of Ethics came from my time spent in the US Army. There, we had something called the Soldiers' Creed. This is basically a short version of moral ethics that every soldier should live by. Throughout my Police and Community class I have come to realize that a police department operates almost like the military does: both have their ethics, chain of command, laws to follow pertaining to their job, and a sense of honor in what they do. I have found that many officers take pride in their work but remain humble when being thanked for something they did. Much like a soldier when being thanked for serving this country, we realize that it's a team effort, that working together with your fellow officers and having good communication with higher ranking officers can make all the difference in how a department operates.

As an officer of the law, the land and the people which I serve shall be my responsibility. I shall hold myself accountable for their safety, their health and overall well-being. I will never waiver from the Constitution and the laws of my land and always hold a high standard for the officers under me. I shall set an example for my officers in hopes that they may walk my path after my shift's end. I shall treat all with kindness and never discriminate against another; never offer pity but instead a helping hand. I shall maintain courage in the face of danger; protect those who cannot protect themselves and put my officers before myself. I will recognize my department's regulations and use my discretion appropriately for the given situation. I shall keep my private life in the back of my mind when faced with difficult decisions, but never let it interfere with my duties. I shall do my best to make the public see our badge as an ally in dark times; to never turn in fear of darkness; to trust in the badge and the officers who wear it. I shall not tolerate officers who violate the law, who discriminate against people, or who use the badge as a weapon. Nor shall I tolerate officers who pity the weak; who turn their backs on those in need or hold their power over people. I realize my responsibility for the people, the animals and the dark streets of the land in which I live, in hopes that I may bring some light and a feeling of safety in such a dark world. I shall uphold the oath I took and realize I am of a lucky few chosen to take these tasks at hand. I shall act as a shield for the people so that they may grow and prosper in lands they saw otherwise unfit. To never take my own life for granted, knowing that one day I may need to give it for another; and to walk my beat with pride in what I do. I alone shall know no burden in the decisions I make; to know that I do my very best always; to never ponder on what might have happened. To make my rendezvous with justice every day; to know my officers will follow me and justice into any situation at hand. To have faith in our department as well as the law which we uphold. And I to my pledged word am true, I shall not fail my people, my officers nor my rendezvous. ●

pt 1. Fiction

pt 2. Creative Non-Fiction

pt 3. Poetry

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pt 5. Other Genres

pt 6. Literary Criticism

On Steven Dunn's Novel, Potted Meat

by Rebecca Corkins

Steven Dunn's novel *Potted Meat* is a glimpse into the life of a young boy growing up in West Virginia. He deals with issues such as abuse, alcoholism, racism, and poverty. The novel is written in a "snapshot" form and leaves plenty of space for the reader to fill in the blanks and make their own conclusions. Dunn's use of stunning imagery to engage the reader and distract them from specifics of the abuse adds to the mystique of the story.

A very interesting beginning characteristic of this book is the cover. Usually the reader is told not to "judge the book by the cover," however in this case it seems to be a big part of the story. It is a black cover with orangish lettering on the top and what looks to be a mangled mess of "meat" taking up the bottom half of the page. Upon first viewing, one would immediately imagine the worst. Darkness, ominousness, mangles, messy, and grotesque are just a few words one might use to describe the cover. On the other hand, it may also unearth feelings of intrigue and inquiry because, what could this image possibly have to do with the story inside?

The novel is written in a "snapshot" form and leaves plenty of space for the reader to fill in the blanks…

The preface appears to be a list of ingredients, for a pot of meat perhaps? Or is this list alluding to something greater – possibly the contents of the protagonist's life? It seems as if it may be referencing what is about to come, because in with the gross, dirty, and sickening images of bones, rat turds, beef hearts, corpses, blood, etc. there are also happier images of crayons, trees, and flowers mixed in. Why? Right from the cover, and onto the first page, there are very conflicting images that invoke conflicting emotions in the reader and almost dares them to continue reading – at their own risk! These conflicting images and feelings carry on throughout the story, so that the reader has to continue to guess what is coming next and also serves to keep them on an emotional rollercoaster, therefore invested in the story.

Throughout the novel, Dunn references the abuse that is an underlying theme – and a part of the boy's life growing up – without being too specific about what actually happened. Instead of depicting a clear image of the abuse endured, he describes clear images of childhood, things like drawing a picture on an Etch A Sketch. "I'm thinking of how to draw a face on my Etch-A-Sketch how to draw the eyes and eyebrows without drawing a line across the top of the nose I'd have to draw one eye and make the eyebrow really bushy then from the corner of the eye I'd have to draw the nose down and around and back up and do another eye then I'd have to trace the nose back down to the bottom and make a mustache so the line won't show where it need to connect to make the lips but how do I get to the chin and the outside of the face without showing a line. Start over Shake" (15). This excerpt doesn't have any punctuation; instead it is a run-on description of drawing on the etch-a-sketch in great detail. One would think that the amount of detail is because he is trying to concentrate on something other than the beating he is receiving at this time. He also ends the excerpt with "I pull up my white long johns. Stripes soak through. Red zebra"(15). The image of the zebra reminds the reader the boy is still very childlike. He describes the stripes of blood soaking through, which give the reader insight into what was used to beat him and how awful it must've been. However, the actual beating was never described in detail, though the reader has more than enough information to draw their own conclusions.

Another very emotionally strong excerpt is entitled "DISCO." This is the turning point for the protagonist. "He walks into the house and into the living room and they are all dead. Slumped in sofas, heads down. He sees no marks on the bodies but blood coats the floor. A disco ball lowers from the ceiling and he starts break dancing, spinning on his back makes the blood paint the walls. He does a headstand, still spinning, legs in a split. He stands striking a pose, arms crossed, then moonwalks out the house. A black horse with armor and an afro clops to him and opens its mouth. He reaches inside and pulls out a blood-streaked Samurai sword. He back flips onto the horse's back and says, Giddy-up, goddammit. The horse does not move" (97). After reading this, because of its morbid and very descriptive revenge/escape dialogue, the reader is thrown off and needs to look to the previous "snapshot" for an explanation of what is happening, because it doesn't follow the same style of previous descriptions. In "ALMOST," Dunn writes, "He can hear the wind from the belt before it smacks his bare ass, he grabs the belt, a little sting, and

swings his head around mouth tight, he starts to grow, tall wide solid but the voices come bigger and thicker than he is, flooding dark and stale, righting the wrong. He drops the belt, turns back around, and shrinks like he is supposed to" (96). "ALMOST," when viewed a second time after reading "DISCO," depicts the boy attempting to stand up for himself, gaining his power back, and ultimately succumbing to the abuse and returning to the weak, little, deflated, shell of a boy that has just endured this abuse throughout the book. The readers' emotions are played on. They begin to feel hope, just to have it ripped away again. This emotional rollercoaster keeps the reader engaged and invested in the story, always hoping this little boy will end up on top.

The abuse endured by the boy is very much kept in the forefront of the readers' minds. It is acknowledged and referenced enough to keep it there and very real, but not specific enough to overpower the underlying story. It is only a part of his story, not a defining trait of the character. The gaps in time between "snapshots" and other imagery are used to distract the reader from what is not being said, rather to leave them to draw their own conclusions and insert their own pieces to fill in the gaps. Each person reading this story, because of the pieces left out, will interpret it differently. Was this Dunn's intention? One would think so.

Is this novel actually fiction or is there truth to it? *Potted Meat* is published as a novel, indicating that it is fiction. However, there is a very "real" feeling to it. When asked during an interview on the Rocky Mountain Revival podcast, Dunn states "I don't care about the truth." He also stated that the style is such so that it feels more like someone is telling a story instead of the author reporting it.

Potted Meat is a cleverly written novel that draws the reader in and invites them to fill in the blanks, thus personalizing it on some level. The style makes it easy to read, as well as engaging the reader in the world of the protagonist. This is a truly wonderful story that should be read by all. Dunn has truly created a masterpiece. ●

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The Greatest Nation on Earth

by Will Hatch

Patriotism, "love or devotion to one's country," has been sold to Americans throughout history, though perhaps most notably following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and the years following World War II. Having "won" the war, the United States rose to the position of the world's moral arbiter under the pretense that our notion of justice was, and is, the standard by which all others should measure themselves. However, beyond the "Leave it to Beaver," white picket fence of post-war America, domestic injustice prevailed, because of this self-righteousness. America was simply above reproach. Sexism, sexual repression, and racism, among many other issues, ran rampant despite the "American Dream," being predicated on the idea of "…liberty and justice for all." Per Newton's Third Law, for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. This opposite reaction took the form of a counter-culture that would flourish in the 1960s, but was arguably birthed in the 1950s by the Beats, a group of poets, writers, and artists who lived and created in irreverence for socially accepted standards at the time. Two of these "Beats," Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs, whose very lives were in the vein of resistance, provide scathing indictments of patriotism and American moral authority in their poems, "America" and "Thanksgiving Prayer."

The patron saints of the Beat movement – Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg, and William Burroughs – all met in or around Columbia University in the mid-1940s. The Beats – their name derived from the idea of being beaten down – presumably felt caged and beaten down by a conservative culture that left little room for those who lived outside of the white picket paradigm. This was still a country very much divided between White America and Black America, nary the two shall meet. Burroughs and Ginsberg, though both white, were homosexual men with proclivities for mind altering substances – putting them well outside the tolerance of mainstream American values.

Neither writer shied away from relaying these experiences in their work. In fact, their experiences inform much of their writing. In accordance with the style of the Beats, nothing was held back in terms of their real life details. In Ginsberg's seminal work, "Howl" (1954), he writes, "The tongue and cock and/hand and asshole holy!" (113-14). There is no subtlety, and though provocative, it reads as a declarative affirmation of homosexuality. The government responded in kind by attempting to banish the work, though the courts ruled in favor of Ginsberg while he was in Tangiers visiting William Burroughs. "Howl," a love letter to misfits, could certainly be considered a Beat manifesto, though Burroughs' work does not share the same Whitmanesque "joie de vivre" of Ginsberg.

A year after reading "Howl" at Six Gallery in San Francisco, Ginsberg wrote "America" (1956). It is unclear whether the legal troubles surrounding "Howl" influenced this later work, but the attempted government censorship no doubt added to his frustration with American values. "America" is sarcastic in tone, and flows similarly to "Howl" in free verse. There are moments of pure provocation such as "I smoke marijuana every chance I get" (31) and "I won't say the Lord's Prayer." (37). True to form, Ginsberg is flagrantly proselytizing his counter-culture values, but the poem is more driven by tongue-in-cheek commentary on America's role as the "good guy."

Within the first few lines, Ginsberg states, "Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb" (5), in condemnation of the very force that secured the United States' victory in World War II. Surely, the ethics of the atom bomb had been debated before, but to undermine the source of post-war patriotism with such vulgarity was along the lines of treason, especially in the onset of Cold War paranoia. Ginsberg goes on to say "America I used to be a communist when I was a kid I'm not sorry."(30). He is making fun of this communist paranoia that would come to dominate the geopolitical sphere in the following decades. Ginsberg moves onto anti-communist fear mongering, saying, "The Russia wants to eat us alive. The Russia's power mad. She wants to take/ our cars from out our garages." (80-1). These bouts of sarcasm are ammo for driving home his final point in lines 88-89: "America this is the impression I get from looking in the television set/ America is this correct?" The poem slowly builds towards this big question…is the American propaganda machine to be trusted? Ginsberg is questioning the idea of America as the good guy and arbiter of truth. The reference to the atom bomb in the beginning is part of this set-up. Can we as Americans be the "good guy" if we're willing to kill innocent people on a large scale? Ginsberg seems to be suggesting that through this idea of patriotism we have blindly accepted our role as the "good guy," under the assumption that our actions represent ultimate justice – though ironically, justice seems to always benefit the United States.

Similar in tone to Ginsberg's "America," but written decades apart, William Burroughs' "Thanksgiving

Prayer" is more domestically focused towards the illusion of the American Dream. The form of this poem, with centered stanzas between one and four lines long, is more traditional than the free verse used by Ginsberg in "America." Burroughs sets the sarcastic tone of the piece by dedicating the poem to one of America's most notorious gangsters, John Dillinger – a man who lived very much outside apple pie values. Beyond the seemingly benign title, "Thanksgiving Prayer" is a sneering assault on the tenets of American life. In reference to the American Indians, so closely associated with Thanksgiving, Burroughs writes, "Thanks for Indians to provide a/ modicum of challenge and/danger." (10-11). Similar to Ginsberg's commentary on anti-communist propaganda, Burroughs is undermining the righteousness of the United States and their villainizing of the indigenous people of this country. From there, in eerie relevance to the state of affairs in 2017, Burroughs writes, "For nigger-killin' lawmen,/feelin' their notches."(21-22). The placement of this stanza, after denouncing the American Dream, seems to suggest that this "dream" is not available to people of color, despite our credo of liberty and justice for all. Though not explicitly personal the stanza reading "Thanks for/ 'Kill a Queer for Christ'/stickers" (26-29) seems to hint at Burroughs' own subjugation for being a homosexual man. Again, this is an assault on the founding principle that all men are created equal…except homosexuals and people of color. These criticisms shed light on the hypocrisy of American ideals that ultimately strip innocent men and women of their humanity. The final punch in the gut to Lady Liberty is "Thanks for the last and greatest betrayal/of the last and greatest/of human dreams."(40-42). Burroughs' status as an expatriate living in Tangiers at the time clearly paints his view of his homeland, but why write this poem after living abroad for so many years? The poem is seemingly tinged with disappointment, anguish, and outrage for the failure of the United States to live up to the values it so proudly touts in the name of patriotism.

Ginsberg and Burroughs have been dead for many years at this point, though the issues they so fiercely confronted live on. On September 11th 2001, two planes flew into the World Trade Center in New York City, and claimed the lives of three thousand people. It is, without a doubt, the defining event of this millennium – an event so catastrophic that time and space may as well have split. This new Wellsian "dimension" has given birth to a fresh wave of nationalism and patriotism, in much the same way the attack on Pearl Harbor did in 1941. Patriotism, or "love or devotion to one's country," is seemingly benign, yet more often than not it is used as a mechanism to promote otherness and separate human experience. The idea that being born, by chance, within imaginary lines somehow determines one's moral superiority is completely devoid of rationality. This thought process breeds and evolves into microcosms of superiority that take the form of racism, sexism, etc. In this way, "America" and "Thanksgiving Prayer" are of the same breed. They speak on different scales, but their underlying raisons d'être are the same. In their day, Burroughs and Ginsberg were literary rock stars that used their platform to question that which we are programmed to accept. The world in 2017 could use a few more Beats.

Can we as Americans be the "good guy" if we're willing to kill innocent people on a large scale?

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