

A stylized graphic illustration of Aztec architecture. The background is a gradient of teal and green. In the upper left, a dark blue silhouette of a building's roofline is visible. To the right, a series of dark blue arched windows are arranged in a grid-like pattern. In the lower right, a large, dark blue archway is partially visible. The overall style is flat and geometric.

AZTEC LITERARY REVIEW

SPRING
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VOLUME 2

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CREATIVE WRITING

BED BUGS

Donna P. Crilly

Our apartment is infested with bed bugs. I take some Epsom salt and spread it along the perimeter of the rooms; then I spritz it on the carpet area. Lucy takes our sheets to the laundromat that has the four-foot washers and dryers. The beds are sprayed with pesticide and the floor is vacuumed. Although relieved the problem seems fixed for the day, our sleep is still disturbed.

Every few days they return full-force, bulbous and brownish red. Online, it says bed bugs can live for six months without feeding. We can tell which ones have just eaten. They suckle blood from our tender forearms and ankles. We scratch before realizing there's an itch, and lift our sleeves to see three little red bumps form a constellation with the scabs from previous bites.

Everyone thinks we're junkies again, even my mom who checks up on us every once in a while. She knocks on the door early one morning. The lights are out and the curtains are shut, but the window is slid open, so I can hear mom gently tapping as if she doesn't want us to hear for fear of finding out something she doesn't want to see. I spoon Lucy tight and kiss the back of her head. She lets out a kitty purr and motions for me to get the door.

When I answer, Mom looks up at me and straight through my pale eyes. She scans my face and torso, making her way to my forearms and biceps, which are covered in scabs and tiny circular scars. She grabs my hand and leads me out to the sunlight to examine my arms. Her eyes well up.

"Are you using again?"

"Mom. This isn't what it seems, I—"

"Oh, you're so pale. Bend down so I can look at your eyes carefully."

I pull my arm back and retreat into the shadows of my apartment.

"I'm going to call your parole officer if you don't tell me the truth," Mom says.

"No, it's not that. We have bed bugs," I say.

As I tell Mom of my chronic problem, a fat sucker crawls around the collar of my white undershirt.

"Oh my goodness, Hunter, there's one there."

She points her leathery finger toward the red bump on my shirt and I squash it. The bug crunches under my fingertips. My mom winces at the sight of blood splattering on my shirt and I wipe my index finger on the outside wall.

"We don't want to spread it."

"How is my soon-to-be daughter-in-law, by the way," she says, trying not to look at the raindrop-sized bloodstain on my shirt.

"Still looking for a job. She has a couple of interviews next week."

We talk for a few more minutes and instead of leaning in to hug me before taking off, my mom hands me a check for \$1000. I don't ask her if Dad knows she came over, and I wait for her to drive away before going back inside. Lucy's in the same position I left her in, with her back to the bedroom door and her knees hugging a pillow. Without turning toward me, she asks, "Was that a check I heard your mother writing?"

"Yeah, 500 bucks to call an exterminator."

"You know we need rent money."

"I know, I was already gonna use it for that," I say. "And who knows, maybe I'll make a few extra sales this week."

I'm a canvasser for a cable company that's probably going to go out of business soon, but it's the only job I can get that gives me some freedom. Really, it's about the only job I can get. There's this stigma against hiring convicted felons in the workforce.

Every morning we have a meeting at the local coffee shop where my team leader tries to invoke inspiration with an uppity speech and game plan for the day. The tablet they gave me has a list of neighborhoods with names and addresses for me to solicit cable to. I'm supposed to close at least one person a day, but I'm lucky if I do one a week. We're paid purely on commission, so one would think it would inspire more urgency. I've never been good at asking people for things; I've been good at taking them.-

I take a long lunch break to deposit \$500 of the check Mom gave me. A miracle happens and I close my one person for the day early, so I skip out on the rest of work and head to Joey's. I recently started hanging out with him again because I can't stand to be in my bug-infested apartment. I can only imagine what Lucy has to go through, sitting alone with them atop the couch all day with nothing but her soap operas to give her temporary relief. If the bugs could think, they'd probably think Lucy was their mother, since she squats on their nest like a chicken incubating its eggs.

Joey's face is shrinking more and more every time I see him.

"I'm down to 135," he says, slapping his emaciated stomach.

Joey's nearly six-feet tall and weighs as much as a little girl. He'll at least have a reach advantage over the Filipino he's fighting this Friday. He locks the screen door behind me.

"Are you betting on yourself this time?"

"Nope, Emily's betting on the Filipino. The odds are against him 10-to-1."

"Just don't get caught like last time," I said.

His ranch-style home was once his parents', who left him everything when they died. The house used to have fancy drapes and a hutch and classy paintings hanging from the walls. It used to smell like pot roast and lemon because his father liked everything lemon, from the herb spice right down to the cleaning products. Now the smell of pot and cigarettes emanate from the walls and

the tile floor is covered in dirt a quarter of an inch thick.

Joey keeps his hair short and tight. He's in a robe and boxers, and a cigarette burns on a ceramic ashtray I molded and gave to his family in the sixth grade. We don't talk much about the stuff we used to. It's all pretty much the same conversation over and over again.

"I got the stuff. You got the money?" he says.

I hold up two \$100 bills. For a while, Joey was making good money as a fighter, but he recently had to resort back to selling.

"The bugs are taking me alive. I really need something to help with that, you know?" I say.

"I totally feel you. Emily's got the bed bugs and I stopped going over to her place. It's like an epidemic or something. I almost quit sleeping with her...almost," Joey says. "I just make her remove her clothes on the porch before coming in so she don't infest the house."

"You didn't make me do that."

He smiles. He's missing a couple of teeth, but it's nothing serious.

I continue, "The bugs. It's like they're little supernatural monsters that won't die. And when there's nothing else in the world, there will be bed bugs."

"Well I can help you with that, brother. You're getting the salad today," Joey says. "Bowl before you go?" He hands me a loaded bong.

I take a long drag and leave, thinking I better walk home instead of ride the bus. Last time I rode the bus, I got kicked off for petting an old poodle-headed woman's hair. I pop a couple of pills and take the long way.

It's starting to cool down. Parents are bundling their children with scarves and poofy jackets, but I'm in a T-shirt, arms exposed because the cold keeps the itch away. The houses get worse and worse as I get closer to my place. The streets and sidewalks have cracks in them. Neglected piles of trash sit in front of homes, leaking juices that flow into the cracks. I don't really

notice the smell anymore.

A block before I turn onto my street, I slap my face a couple of times and tell myself to pull it together. I'm flying. The ground beneath me is expanding and contracting as the moon swaps positions with the sun above the horizon.

Before opening the door, I brace myself for the bloodsucker sleepover. I go in and there's Lucy on the couch with her eyes fixated on the TV. She lifts up a hand to greet me without tearing her eyes from the program.

"How was the interview?" I say.

"Oh yeah," she says. She shrugs.

"Did you even go to it?"

"Yeah. They'll call me," she says, shrugs again.

I need a shower. All I care about is a stream of cold water against my numb cheeks. I drop my bag and undress on the way to the door. I haven't had much deep conversation with Lucy lately, either, but we still end up naked together every night.

I come out of the bathroom and sit next to her with nothing on but my towel around my waist. The number of scabs and bumps and scars has reached the hundreds, but everything's more bearable after a couple of pills. I put my arm around her shoulder and pull her head toward my armpit. Whatever she's watching is not the least bit interesting to me, but I pretend to care long enough to slide her hand through the opening of my towel.

Her forearm is silky, smoother than it was even before the bed bugs arrived.

"Your skin," I say, rubbing the backs of her arms.

I notice she doesn't have scars anywhere, not even the gnarly ones she got as a little girl, the ones I like to kiss when we're about to make love. She pulls her hand away and breaks her gaze on the TV to look at me.

"Something's happening to me," she says.

"Whatever it is, I want it to happen to me too. Look at my arms."

"I can arrange that."

She climbs atop me and kisses my neck. I don't ask follow-up questions.

The next day, I take another long lunch before heading to Joey's. We get pretty faded and it's dark before I realize the time. Lucy hasn't called or texted all day.

"I'm gonna need you there for good luck tomorrow, brother," Joey says.

"What good luck? You already know how the fight's gonna go," I say.

"I know, but I need you there to make sure things run smoothly...like old times."

"Joey, you know I'm trying to stay outta trouble."

"I got five grand on this fight, Hunter. If we win, that's fifty thousand fucking dollars. There's some in it for you too." He jabs at my shoulder. "Think about it."

"It's dark. Lucy's probably worried about me," I say.

Joey gives me a ticket for the fight. I slide it into my jean pocket and leave. Emily has just arrived and is on the front porch undressing. She kisses me on the cheek and takes the bottle of pills from my front pocket. The bottle rattles. Her hand twists the lid open and she takes two out. She puts one in my mouth and pops one herself.

"See you tomorrow," she says.

"Bye, Em."

From the street, my apartment looks dark. Silhouettes move about behind the curtains from every other window. But my apartment is still.

My living room is empty. No TV, no lights, no Lucy. Our bedroom door is closed; a muffled moan oozes from it, beckoning me.

I step lightly toward the bedroom and press my ear to

the door. It sounds like thousands of tiny voices are whispering something faint but uniform. There's rustling and moaning, which is louder now than moments before. I open the door and see Lucy at the foot of the bed, back arched and head tilted toward the mattress. Her arms are outstretched, her hands clench the sides of the bed, her body is covered with dark, moving things – the things that I think are always crawling on me. The floor is also moving, but then again, everything has for the past couple of hours. She doesn't seem to notice me.

I flip the light switch on and the creatures vanish. Lucy's back hits the bed and she lies there with a peaceful grin upon her face.

"Where did they go," I say.

She turns to greet me.

"Where did what go?"

"Don't lie to me. I just saw..." I begin shaking. "They were calling me."

"A little bug tells me you've been using again. Is this true?"

She breaks her listlessness and steadies her gaze upon my glossy eyes.

"Oh and your mother stopped by today while you were at work," Lucy says. "She wanted to see our progress on getting the bed bugs exterminated."

"And what did you say?"

"I told her we were taking care of it."

"Did she mention anything else?"

"Not much...just that she hopes the thousand dollars helped."

I turn away and head to the kitchen. I need beer, no, something stronger. Before I can open the cupboard, she grabs my arm from behind. I contract it out of defense and smack her hard. She's on the floor and I'm trying to realize what I've done but I can't grasp the moment.

Blood dribbles down from the corner of her mouth and she wipes it with the back of her hand. Her tongue brushes against her

hand as she wipes. The whole time, her gaze upon me is steadfast.

She gets up and tiptoes over to me. She takes her claw-like fingertips and scratches a scab over a tattoo I got when I was sixteen. A well of blood fills the freckle-sized crater. Her lips move toward it and when they touch, she sucks it in.

My arm goes numb. From inside my chest, a burst of heat radiates my entire core. No other trip compares to this moment, not even close. But I'm completely paralyzed now. My lips won't move, my eyes won't shut, not even my hair will jiggle. I fall into a blissful sleep with my eyes open. – END OF EXCERPT.

PAPER ROSE

Donna P. Crilly

Gus peers out the window of his second story studio apartment to the street where drunken people are yelling and falling all over each other.

A pretty girl with blue feathers in her hair stumbles out of a bar across the street. She's followed by her chubby friend in a tunic two sizes too small and a few Marines wearing muscle T-shirts and running shoes. They're all smiles, laughing beneath the dim light of the street lamp as the bouncer stands tall and firm, eyeballing them, judging them like Gus is.

The pretty girl whispers something in the chubby girl's ear and the chubby girl lets out a hyena's wail, falling to the ground and splaying her legs as if it were to cue one of the Marines to help her up.

Gus decides he's killed enough brain cells for the night, watching those G.I. bros and their hoes, and pulls the curtain to cover the windows.

He makes toast and sits in front of the TV, flipping through the channels, not really watching anything, but kind of watching everything. Gus gives up on the TV and grabs one of the myriad self-help books stacked atop his nightstand. His thoughts wander. Tension builds in his chest and he discovers that he's been on the same page for ten minutes. Dale Carnegie and Napoleon Hill can't make him friendly or motivated, so he abandons the book and grabs his laptop. The rest of the night is spent checking Facebook every three minutes for comments to his cleverly crafted

status updates. There are a few likes and comments here and there, but mostly by his mother, who poked him.

In the morning, Gus is late for work. His boss scolds him.

"One more time and you're out. Oh, and organize your desk, please. Important people are walking through here today," the boss says. He uses his hands when he talks and Gus wants to break them.

The boss walks with authority toward his office. On the way, he passes a sign with the golden rule in fancy lettering printed on it.

Gus droops in his chair, overwhelmed by the amount of work he has to do. His desk is a jungle of invoices and post-its, which he was supposed to sort through weeks ago. He resolves to temporarily dump everything in his file cabinet. He reminds himself to remind himself to clean it later.

During lunch, he notices Juanita reading a book on origami. She seems consumed by it, handling the pages delicately, sometimes tilting her head to get a better look at the pictures. Gus wants to ask her if he can look at the pictures with her, but can't get himself to say much more than "hi" to her in the break room every day. Even then, he can't look her in the eye. He just sits at the table next to hers, eating and pretending to occupy himself with his phone.

Gus is a few pounds overweight but it's not that bad, his sister says. He doesn't smile much because he's a 30-year-old who wears braces. His sister told him he's a solid seven who acts like a three or four. Sevens can be 10s if they carry themselves right, so she gave Gus some gel to smooth his hair and a book on how to act like a 10.

Juanita is petit with wavy hair. She's always smiling at every one, Gus too, but he knows it's not in the sexual smile sort of way; it's the professional one. Juanita doesn't look up from the origami book when Gus drops his phone and when he finally ambles by her to get back to work.

On the way home from work, Gus stops at an arts and crafts store to purchase some square paper and an origami book. He imagines wooing Juanita with their coincidental shared hobby. They'll take an origami class together where she'll fall for him and regale the story of how they fell in love through the ancient art of origami at their wedding.

At home, he thumbs through the pages of the origami book.

"That's kind of cool, I guess," he says, stopping at a picture of an elephant. "I'll try that one."

An hour goes by and several sheets of wrinkly paper form a pile on the floor next to Gus.

"Am I such a loser that I can't even fold damn sheets of paper?"

He yells a lion's roar and throws the book against the wall, causing a lamp to tip over and break. Defeated, he leaves the wreckage and goes to sleep.

The next day, Gus tries again, this time taking a humbler approach. His hands, shaky at first, begin the base folds of a pinwheel. With each crease, his breath quickens. The folds are lopsided and wrinkled at the edges, and when he finishes, the pinwheel vaguely resembles the picture in the book.

He tries again. This time, the folds are a little neater, but nowhere near perfect. He stares at the pinwheel and realizes it is no longer just a piece of paper. It is a child's toy. All night long, Gus makes pinwheels until he runs out of paper. He does this for the next week straight until he can do it blindfolded.

The next thing Gus tries is the flying fox airplane, beginning with the valley fold. For a week, he practices the airplane until he produces one that cuts the air and glides in perfect formation, landing smoothly on his kitchen counter.

As weeks pass by and roll into months, Gus folds increasingly more beautiful and precise objects. He buys a zoo pass and studies the animals. He walks through the botanical gardens at Balboa Park and watches the koi fish swim about in the lily pond. The pieces of paper transform into lifelike creatures from observing the animals' movements, the flowers' half-bloomed petals and the koi's colorful scales.

With steady hands and even breaths, he folds the Samurai Helmet Beetle and some Happy Good-Luck Bats. With deep concentration, he makes a few Arizona Humming Birds and Jacobina blossoms for them to suck pollen from. And with love, he makes a rose.

Gus gets to work early the next morning carrying the paper rose and a note. He places them on Juanita's desk and goes back to his cubicle, checking the door every thirty seconds for her arrival.

Juanita arrives exactly on time and sits at her desk. She's wearing her power suit. Probably has one of those important meetings today, the ones that Gus never gets invited to. He lifts his head and watches her, keeping an eye out for people who may be watching him watching her. She notices the rose and looks around the office for clues as to who left it. Gus ducks his head

and slowly lifts it back up. When he does, Juanita's holding the rose up to her nose with her eyes closed, smelling the folded paper as if it was freshly picked. She reads the note and places it back on her desk, then goes to work, not looking up or seeming the least bit distracted by Gus's gesture.

When she walks by Gus's cubicle to fax some documents, she keeps her head forward, not even glancing down toward Gus, who no longer hides that he's looking at her. She walks by Gus's cubicle again and Gus says "Hi, Juanita." She says "hi" back without stopping.

The boss hovers over Juanita's cubicle, looking over her shoulder at whatever she's working on. They hi-five each other. He chuckles as they exchange inside jokes and rubs her shoulder and winks at her before heading back to his office.

At home that night, Gus watches the partiers and the drunkards from the window of his apartment. A couple is leaning on the hood of a car – which probably doesn't belong to them – and sloppily making out. The bouncer stands outside of the door, stiff and broad-shouldered, eyeballing the couple. Gus realizes the bouncer isn't judging them. He's jealous of their fun.

"That's it," Gus says, and pulls the curtains closed.

His eyes circle the interior of his apartment. A paper pinwheel rests atop his TV set. A crane hangs from the ceiling above the toy, its beak pointed toward the elephant on the coffee table. The elephant's trunk faces the door, which is unlocked.

Gus checks to make sure his ID is in his wallet. He grabs his keys and coat, and follows the path of the elephant's trunk.

DIARIES FROM TIMELINE 2XLOGY

Shelby Glynn

It has now been 520 hours, 12 minutes and 33 bananas since I first began to suspect I was trapped in the wrong parallel dimension.

You are probably wondering how, I – a mortal human child of dimension 2xlogy (my annotation of my current position) – could ever be untrusting of the reality which I have been led to believe as genuine my entire fallacious life. But let me tell you – the signs are everywhere.

Yes, literally everywhere. But no time to go into that now. Now, I officially begin my diary so that you, anonymous reader, Prole – as you may well be – can have the chance to sympathize with my struggles and epiphanies and, by Neptune I hope, enlighten yourself before the thought-police of our narrow little sphere find me out and silence me from telling – the truth!

Like I had been saying, it was just over seven solar months past that I first woke up from a vivid dream to consider the possibility of ATD, or Atmospheric Timeline Displacement. My dream had been about trolls and the government, and me, and I – in the dream – was the first person in 200 years to awaken the powers of a magic flying dollar bill, which I mounted and rode around the Casino of the Aladdin resort in Las Vegas, much to the astonishment of the authentic Arabians working there.

You see, when I awoke from this dream, after I had been properly jilted from that unsure half-awake state into the stuffy confines of my current reality logarithm, I realized how easy it was to believe in what I had henceforth considered the only form of “stimulated realism” – a dream.

In this dream for example, I had not once doubted my reality. Not once had I questioned the nature of the stimuli

which probed me in my foreign environment. To doubt one's surroundings, even within what we may consider to be the strangest of dreams, is simply unfathomable...most of the time.

Alas – *most* of the time. For there are some who have created a test for themselves in order to slip into Lucid dreaming, or dreaming while being conscious that you are in a dream. These tests are often called “reality checks,” and usually involve pinching or prodding oneself at random times throughout the time span of a day. Ideally, once this habit becomes ingrained (so the theory holds), one will continue the habit into the dream, and when this happens, the test, supposedly, will not yield the same result as in the awake state, thereby alerting the dreamer of his or her altered reality.

Now, the importance of this concept to my own studies, if it is not self-evident, is that it later opened me up to the concept of doubting the sanctity of my awake-state system of reality. Thus I embarked on my studies of parallel universes and theories of perspective. And, though they helped me little in applicable data for my estimations, they did help me realize, which I did not truly before, that the probability of an immutable single reality was absolutely preposterous.

The next challenge on my journey of enlightenment was the challenge of creating a “reality check” for my conscious state that could, somehow, alert me to a deviation from my original reality timeline. However, as you could imagine, such was a hefty burden – to find a reality check for one’s own reality in the context of a *different* reality one perhaps had never even seen!

But this was all long before I had any notions of my ATD, long before I started applying my logarithms to scope out my position or make estimates about the reality systems of other atmospheric timelines – most importantly my one of origin.

The hardest part is keeping it all to myself – the truth. Especially in cases which are such injustices through the eyes of me, an outsider whose perspective is so biased by the things I

already know about my should-be environment.

One does not know the excruciating side effects of ATD until one has experienced them for oneself! –that is for sure.

For example, there was today, approximately three o'clock PM our time, fifteen minutes prior to the commencement of one of my small section lectures. At the moment of reference, I'm sitting in my desk – which is unforgivably rigid here, of course – exposing my shoulder flesh in a tang-top which also leaves vulnerable, in some places, the straps of my brassiere. The result of this is of course the protruding adjustable part of my right bra strap digging into my shoulder against the desk chair, making me have to sit awkwardly askew, leaning forward. In my private thoughts I am filtering through images of particularly amusing past Spongebob scenes, interwoven with particularly unsettling human pornography viewed the previous night, with the chorus of Bill Withers' "Lean on Me" strumming precariously throughout. Such is my state of mind when I focus into the following conversation:

"I mean, I know she's pretty old and shit so I keep kind of hoping that she'll like die so we don't have to finish the semester like..."

"Taylor you're such a dick!"

"No like, I mean, I'm sure she has like a family and shit and but okay – "

"You're such a dick dude – "

"Or like maybe a heart attack like..."

"No yeah I get what you're saying though."

"I mean she probably almost has a heart attack like every day she fucking like talks so much, can't even understand half the shit she's saying, she's fat as fuck – "

"I feel like if she would like actually try to stand up and walk around sometimes, she would like, if she – if she put down the coffee, you know? Fuckin Starbucks mammoth."

"Dude! Dude and she dresses like shit too it makes her probably look fatter than she is already she comes in here with – "

"Well that's 'cause she's a dike."

"Yeah."

In walks another male student of similar stature, taking a seat with the two conversers in front of me. He is about the size of two and a third diminutive dwarves stacked on top of each other, with waxy head hair and a lack of natural hair growth anywhere else. His smile is big enough to make the introvert feel inexplicably violated and he is always waving his arms in big important body language as he talks.

Summarily, he quite resembles one of those undulating inflatable tubular figures that American automobile sales companies put out in front of their dealerships.

"Sammy," or "Sam the man," whichever you prefer, cannot be distinguished much from the other members of his fraternity, as his personality is quickly found to be dully formulaic, his responses archetypal and lacking wit, his intelligence a mere average and his disposition stale and narcissistic. He has a paid internship with Microsoft, a gaggle of physically pleasing women who dote on him in each class, and high respect from his colleagues and peers.

The signs are everywhere.

Sammy comes into his two classmates' conversation and through a showing of teeth asks, "Are we talking about this professor? The Asian dike?"

And they all three strangers are instant friends.

Now, in the eyes of someone not really belonging in this strain of reality, such a scene, as you may imagine, is intensely chaotic and frustrating. Beyond the spatial and gravitational conundrums, which I'll mention more later, the content of the scene itself is appalling.

The first matter of upset is the illogical interpersonal bonding between multiple specimens of similar intellect and low characters. To put it in layman's terms, in my ETO – or estimated timeline of origin – such bonding rituals between such like individuals with such a thirst to increase their likeness to each other would be like a form of incest.

Second, to hear Professor Techung slandered and

ridiculed in such a way, by such simpletons, is so profoundly ironic, considering in my timeline Professor Techung's extensive knowledge in the applicable field of Cultural Studies wins her a Nobel Peace prize, the money from which she afterwards uses for surgery to install a row of switchblade knives into her right hand, sort of like Wolverine from the X-men comics, and with this she works as a guardian for unprotected rural villages in Zimbabwe.

As you can imagine, knowing the social mores and outcomes of things here in my own ETO gives me little comfort in such situations. There is nothing I can do or say to alter the reality at present.

If anything, I must act more convincingly persuaded by this reality than the others around me.

Though I used the term solely as a reference of understanding earlier, I really must be careful of the thought police, wherever they are, because some form of thought police exists in any and every universe parallel to this one.

That's my hypothesis, at least.

With this in mind, I have decided to create a brief list for you, the reader, to memorize and ingrain into your behavior in order to protect yourself from detection. The more you abide by this list the safer you will be from discovery. Here it is:

- 1) Never, in conversation or behavior, openly entertain the notion of parallel universes or altered reality, unless you are simply doing the latter to attract a marijuana consumption partner
- 2) Never write books, songs, poems, or make drawings, which suggest the existence of parallel timelines
- 3) Consider joining a religion (the more ancient the better), radical political party, or cult
- 4) Do not be openly affectionate to spiders, rather, be fearful of them.

- 5) Watch lots of pornography (not too kinky) and Nicholas Sparks movies
- 6) Deny the possibility of determinism; embrace and idealize free will
- 7) Display the words "Live," "Laugh," "Love" as much as possible in your living environment
- 8) Do not question
- 9) Buy a Golden Retriever and name it after a dead president
- 10) Never give the impression you are well versed in quantum physics

Now, by claiming yourself as the receiver of this diary of classified and precious truth, a gift and a curse, given to you indirectly through me; you hereby verify yourself as the first disciple of knowledge under my currently exclusive underground society, which I hope will someday expand into a legion of confidential intelligence bearers.

You – meaningless arrangement of cells and cultural influence – have been chosen, to use your imperfect measures of judgment and discretion in order to expand our dyad into a secret society. The purpose of this of course is for us to build off each other's collective experiences and suppressed genius in the hopes that one day, long from now, my original calculations may not only be perfected but put into use to make teleportation between the atmospheric timelines a plausibility, and maybe even directly achievable!

Now, I am quite sure this prospect excites you at least a fraction of the amount to which it excites me, for let me assure you, it quite rustles my scientific jimmies. However, I must take a moment to pause and caution you not to misinterpret the ramifications of such a concept.

To enter another realm, hypothetically of course, would not simply be a chance for an individual to make a different or "better" life for themselves. It would not be a familiar world of new possibilities.

These timelines which I describe are not based off potentials, nor human decisions. This is not a Schrodinger's Cat scenario, where universes exist based on the outcome of single events or triggers. This is not *Back to the Future*, either, where choices are changeable and can affectively create new timeline branches.

Keep in mind that the term "parallel" in the description of a timeline does not simply suggest an almost identical environment besides maybe one's choice in house décor, as a particular *Twilight Zone* episode suggests...These parallel realms are only synonymous through the people they house and the galaxy they host – and sometimes even those boundaries of definition can become blurred.

So you want to enter another dimension? – tell me, fool: are you prepared to survive in a reality where an army of cyborg women with automatic rifles installed into their breasts hunt obese children for sustenance? Are you prepared, thoughtless one, to live where day is night, gravity is ten times heavier, and under direct sunlight your nether-regions can spontaneously burst into flames?!

Forgive me for presupposing your critical understanding and slipping into unsupported hypotheses. Nevertheless, I think it important you understand fully the extent to which media may have skewed your presumptions of what travel between parallel timelines would entail.

Now, there will be plenty of time later to brood over the infinite difficulties of ITT, the acronym which of course stands for Interconnected Timeline Travel. For the moment, we must concentrate on finding ways which could offer us more depth in our hopes of understanding the different timelines.

Currently, I am logging from a public location in my

university's library. I am skimming through some of the more useful sections of Brian Greene's *The Hidden Reality* but I have it sheathed behind a *Walter the Farting Dog* book so that no one suspects anything. Far off to my left are two exchange students speaking either Mandarin Chinese or German, and though they seem to be focused on their notes, one can never be too sure with exchange students. Far less suspicious but still under my watchful eye is a boy with a shirt that reads "Sex, Drugs, Dubstep," who is vacantly focused on his laptop screen.

I try to always maintain a keen sense of my surroundings.

As I was just getting to, the thought came to me, as I have been seated here – a step which has so far been neglected in my process of building knowledge about timelines. Even though I have thus been so bold in mapping out probable characteristics of other timelines, I have heedlessly forgotten to begin work on the vast properties of this timeline, and so henceforth I will use this journal as a mapping device for important details I gather myself, and hopefully, perspectives from others as well.

I try to think of an authentic name we can use for this volume, which will encompass the very essence of the "now" in our current reality. I have decided the title shall be *Sex, Drugs, and Dubstep*.

I suppose I will have to accommodate some of my writing to be more appealing to the five senses. Before I do that, hasty me, I should probably accommodate our imaginary other readers with the five senses themselves.

I shall say: humans in the dimension 2xlogy primarily use visual, auditory, olfactory, kinesthetic and gustatory filters to interpret their surroundings. Currently, I see lots of books but I do not hear them. The librarian here smells like suicidal oysters but does not look like one. Yet, the boy to my right looks *and* smells like earwax. Therefore, we can conclude that the filters do not always overlap, but they sometimes do.

My previous train of thoughts was interrupted at the

scraping of Crocs across the carpet behind me. I had quickly slammed shut my reading material and stashed it between my legs, folding the picture book neatly on top of my lap to cover it before swiveling my chair.

It was a student I had previously made acquaintance with in a past class, so he claims. His whereabouts in my ETO are currently unknown to me. I have recorded what I can remember – with my semi-photographic memory – of our confrontation:

“So it's Celina right? No, I'm just kidding, I'm just kidding – as if I could forget you!”

“Ah, yes.” I could not pinpoint which class I had witnessed him in, though he looked familiar.

“So have you written anything new at all?”

My first reaction to this was that I was caught, that he was a member of the thought police who was onto me. But his continuance quickly relieved me.

“I loved the one you did about the anthropomorphic watermelons. You're so imaginative...I just don't know how you think of these things.”

Anthropomorphic watermelons actually exist in my ETO.

“I was always so jealous of your work...you were one of my favorite writers in that class, even though you said you weren't even a Lit major, right?”

But of course! A creative writing class I completed a good many solar months ago. Thus I answered him: “No. I currently employ myself in both Geology and Liberal Studies.” Hence lays the difficulty in my mathematical calculations.

“So well, I was wondering if you still did creative stuff at all because you know, maybe me and you could like, I don't know we can – if you ever want to edit each other's work sometime we should do it you know? Hit up the coffee house up the street or something – have you ever been there?”

“Yes. I find it exceptionally mediocre.”

He laughed abrasively at this. “So you up for it?”

My hesitation of an answer caused him to withdraw visibly

into his seat. "I mean you don't have to. I mean I don't know about your...what you're up to or anything I'm just throwing it out there you know."

Suddenly I considered his earnestness in a new light. He fits all the qualities - this simple, unaffiliated specimen - to be a possible delivery servant of this very journal to you, future reader. Such an employee would have to be plain and uncomplicated, enough to trust with such a task, but distant enough to be protected from ulterior motives, from curiosity, moreover.

I could see then, in his flinching brown slithery eyes, the makings of an effective courier.

So, I agreed to his request.

SPOON

Sergio Lopez

"Excuse me, can I help you?"

Tall, grey haired, and ugly. He stands and observes the eating utensils hanging on the wall. Fondling the metallic forks, caressing the silvery spoons; he was entranced. The words of the clerk bounced off his ears like a bullet ricocheting off a metallic surface.

"Excuse me, sir?"

Fondle. Caress.

These are nice.

The clerk stares at him, like many did and continued to do. In fact the aisles – pregnant with items – would have also stared, for he was a peculiar fellow, even to the inanimate.

"...Yes they are."

She was uncomfortable. Was it his ugliness that stopped her words from flowing? Maybe, but he didn't give a damn. Ha ha. Funny.

They're metal. And round. And straight.

Caress. Fondle.

"Did you want to buy them?"

Maybe. Perhaps. Possibly (caress).

The s sound was too long. Everything had an order, everything. The words he said. The air he breathed. The things he touched. Everything had an order and the s was too long.

"You've been here a while now. I need to know if you're going to buy anything."

He stopped and looked to the left. Nothing. To the right. The clerk. Shift focus to behind the clerk, an empty register.

There's no one here.

The clerk stared at him. Uncomfortable. Nervous.

"Sir, if you're not going to buy anything I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

He shifts his focus to the clerk.

What are you doing here?

Her muscles tighten at the sound of his words.

"I work here."

In her head she tries to convince herself that she is strong and brave, but she does not believe herself. Still, she tries.

You don't have to be nervous. You. Do. Not.

He smiled after he finished speaking. The T was a good sound to make. It was perfect in pitch and frequency and its length was stimulating. Turn. Spoon. Caress.

"I'm not nervous and you have to leave now please."

Staring into her brown eyes the man thought, maybe she really is as tough as she is trying to be. Possibly. Cause? Stepfather. A drunk and wife-beater (both worn and done). A promise to herself to "never let anyone treat me like shit again".

Do you know why you're here?

"Excuse me?"

No excuses.

Do you know why you're here?

Caress.

"I'm here because I work here."

He stops caressing.

You work here, yes. But why?

She becomes confused.

"Because I get paid, that's why. I need money to be alive, now if you could plea--"

You survive everyday, but that doesn't mean you're alive.

His words affect her. She feels off balance, as if someone has pushed her.

"Yes I'm alive."

He turns to the clerk.

Are you sure about that?

His attention turns back to the spoons on the wall.

You breathe, you eat and you walk but you're not alive. You just exist.

She is offended.

"You don't know me sir."

The man looks up at the ceiling.

Know, know, know, know, NO.

As each sound escaped him, his voice raised in a crescendo of echoes and vibrations. The clerk becomes nervous again. Understandable.

Do you let your stepfather keep you at a chains distance? Like a pet?

The clerk stayed in silence as her nervousness turned to fear; the fear that had held on all her life and ate away with a cancerous speed. Slowly, but efficiently.

He hit, he kicked and yet you stayed and she stayed until eventually she left.

The clerk began to breathe rapidly, trying to catch the air that escaped her lungs. Out went her chest, and then it quickly fell back.

Outward. Then inward.
 She left her body underground and left.

Her eyes fill with liquid.
 "How do you know this?"

Her words – soft and weak – were
 premature when they birthed out from her
 trembling lips. They'd have to do.

I know a lot of things that others don't, and one of those things
 that I know is you.

One tear falls away from the confinement of
 her right eye.

"How do you KNOW THIS!"

Her scream echoed through the store and
 her body now trembles. He pulls out the
 caressed spoon from its cell on the wall.

I know what I know and you don't.

He lifts the spoon and begins to examine it.
 You pretend to know, but you don't. You block yourself, you stop
 yourself and *pretend* to know.

He glances at her. He returns to the spoon.
 But you *don't*. You let him keep you from knowing, so you don't
 know. You don't know that you don't live.

He moves the spoon in an arc over his
 head. He turns to the clerk. She is numb;
 her emotions had tangled together like a
 knot, unable to tell where one ended and
 another began. He looks back at the spoon,
 his attention on the clerk.

I once met a man who was just like you. He didn't know. He had
 no job, fake love, and most importantly he was not living. I told
 him he didn't know, and that he didn't live but he ignored me and
 eventually he left too. He left thinking of a bullet then put a bullet
 in his thinking.

She is scared. Some became scared, others
 angry, and some violent. But in the end they

all left because either way they listened or they didn't. They learned to know or they stayed ignorant. They freed themselves or were kept in the order that life had put them in.

"Who are you?"

All his attention shifted to the clerk. No one had ever asked him that question quite the way she did. Looking into her mind he saw that she truly looked for answers when most did not. That was unexpected, and there was nothing that he did not know or expect. Interesting.

Interesting indeed.

His mind thought that maybe she could wake and leave this disastrous order that she was placed in; that she could change her perception of life and finally know what it is to be alive and free. Or perhaps she would stay in her place, in the God given order of things and continue to allow her stepfather to influence her. The man was her chance to awaken and throw off the natural order of her predestined life, but only if she listened.

I'm simple. I like things and I don't like things. I am satisfied when others are not. *You are not satisfied.*

The man holds out the spoon and examines it.

This is a good device. I control it by grabbing hold of it and using it. If I were to scoop up water with such a device it would not be able to escape. You see, the edges are too high and the water too low. I am in control, not the water or the spoon. They are being used even though, because of the nature of being inanimate, they don't know it.

The clerk stares at the man while tears continue to fall. Now, he *could* look into her and see what effect he was having but it was always much more fun to find out after the fact. He could play more but she has a chance to change, unlike many others before her.

Your stepfather is the hand and you are the spoon. Everything you do is predetermined by his hold over you and you don't even stand a chance. You might want water, but instead he forces you to scoop up the shit of a dog.

The man returns his attention to the clerk and faces her. This was her chance to change the order of her life and start knowing

you can stop his manipulation. It's up to you though. You can always escape the same way your mother did; with a drop and a short stop off of a balcony. Or you can truly free yourself and start over, because unlike what many people say life is indeed beautiful. It's up to you to know that.

Her lost stare is now focused. She wipes the tears from her watery cheeks and walks away. The man is now alone,

holding a spoon in my hand.

The man could look into her and see if he was effective or not, but for once he decided to not know.

I'm done

and there was nothing left to do. Tall, grey haired, and ugly; the man exited the store. He knew he would eventually find another who was lost and did not know, but until then he always had his spoon. Caress.

CINDERELLA

Jacquelyn Phillips

There lived a rugged man who was forced to visit his once beautiful wife in the hospital. She had lost half of her body weight, her voluptuous brown hair had fallen out limp and lifeless, and the vibrant blue of her eyes had faded to resemble a dull grey. The man brought their handsome teenage daughter with him, giving her the opportunity to say goodbye to her dying mother. The beeping machines and the smell of latex made the daughter anxious, but she knew her mother was only alive because of the tubes connected to every inch of her deteriorating body. She leaned over and kissed her mother's forehead, stunned when she heard her hoarse voice whisper, "Be good, modest and forgiving – no matter what."

The daughter stared at her mother's fragile figure and nodded. "I promise Mother." With those final words, Cinderella watched as the heart machine flat lined and her mother died.

The funeral was small. The daughter and her father stood in front of the mother's tombstone, sending silent prayers up to their loved one. Even though the father moved on with his life, the daughter bought a single red rose every day and laid it in front of the tombstone, weeping uncontrollably. She continued to keep her promise in honor of her mother and remained good, modest and forgiving, even though her mother's death pained her greatly.

On the one year anniversary of her the death, her father brought home a new wife who had two beautiful daughters. They immediately treated their step-sister with contempt, giving her an endless amount of chores to complete and not inviting her out when they went into town with their friends. One day, while the modest daughter was silently eating her breakfast, the eldest stepsister grabbed her by the arm, ignored her protests, dragged

her outside and threw her in the mud.

“From now on, you live outside with the dogs and horses!” She taunted. “Your father doesn’t need you anymore now that he has us. He could care less about you.”

The daughter sobbed because her mother’s last dress was now covered in filth, and it would be impossible to completely remove the stains. She ran into the stables and crumpled into a ball on a pile of hay, remembering the promise she had made to her mother: be good, modest and forgiving. No matter how much her sisters hurt her, she refused to disregard her mother’s wish and retaliate. She spent her days completing mundane chores created by the sisters and spent her nights huddled in the stables trying to prevent herself from getting ill. She had become so grimy and dirty looking, that her stepsisters named her Cinderella.

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d say that you’ve been sleeping in cinders!” They cackled, tossing dirt and debris on the ground Cinderella had been scrubbing, forcing her to clean it once more. Her father never asked questions – he was too transfixed by his new wife to think anything of his only true daughter.

When the mail arrived the next day, the stepsisters ran into the house – knocking Cinderella’s mop and vacuum to the side, splashing her with grimy water, knocking her to the ground – shrieking for their mother. Apparently, there was a party at the wealthy man’s house down the street, and his son was going to be attending. He was what a woman would consider the perfect husband: tall, dark, handsome, athletic, charming, strong, witty, and intelligent. He was also in line to inherit a large sum of money, so every woman in town wanted the chance to woo his heart. Cinderella stood up silently, crept behind her sisters and snuck a glance over their shoulders, noticing that her name too, was printed on the invitation. She grew excited and asked her stepmother if she could borrow a dress so that she could attend the party as well.

The stepsisters laughed, but the mother quieted them,

smiling maliciously at Cinderella. "If you can clean up all of the muck out of the horses stalls within the next two hours, I'll let you borrow a dress."

Cinderella nodded, collected her tools and went out into the stables, shading her tears from the eyes of misery. She studied the stalls and knew that it would be physically impossible to clean everything up in two hours. Instead, she climbed onto her horse's back and rode to the cemetery. She had forgotten to purchase a rose on the way there, but decided to place the remains of her mother's tattered dress, which her sister's endless tasks had destroyed. The tears that tumbled from her eyes landed upon the dress. Cinderella apologized to her mother for tarnishing the gown before it magically turned into a beautiful gold and silver masterpiece before her very eyes. She held it up in her hands, unable to believe what had just happened.

Appearing suddenly in front of her mother's gravestone were two beautiful glass stilettos, and they fit Cinderella's petite feet perfectly. She needed to bathe before the party, so she tucked her mother's blessings beneath her arm and galloped back to the house. She used the hose behind the stables to wash off, and squeezed a bit of horse shampoo into her hair, hoping that it would help rid her of any strong odors.

Her sisters had seen her arrive at the house and went to investigate. While Cinderella was happily humming beneath the hose water, her stepsisters took sheers to the beautiful dress her mother had given her. They stripped it to pieces, ripping lace, plucking off beads, shredding fabric, laughing all the while. When Cinderella saw what they were doing, she chased after them before dropping to her knees in the pile of destruction. She cried and cried, her chest contracting with pain, her lungs heaving for lack of oxygen, and her willpower to keep her mother's promise completely shattered.

"How can I be good, modest and forgiving to people who treat me this way?"

She carefully pulled the ruined dress over her head,

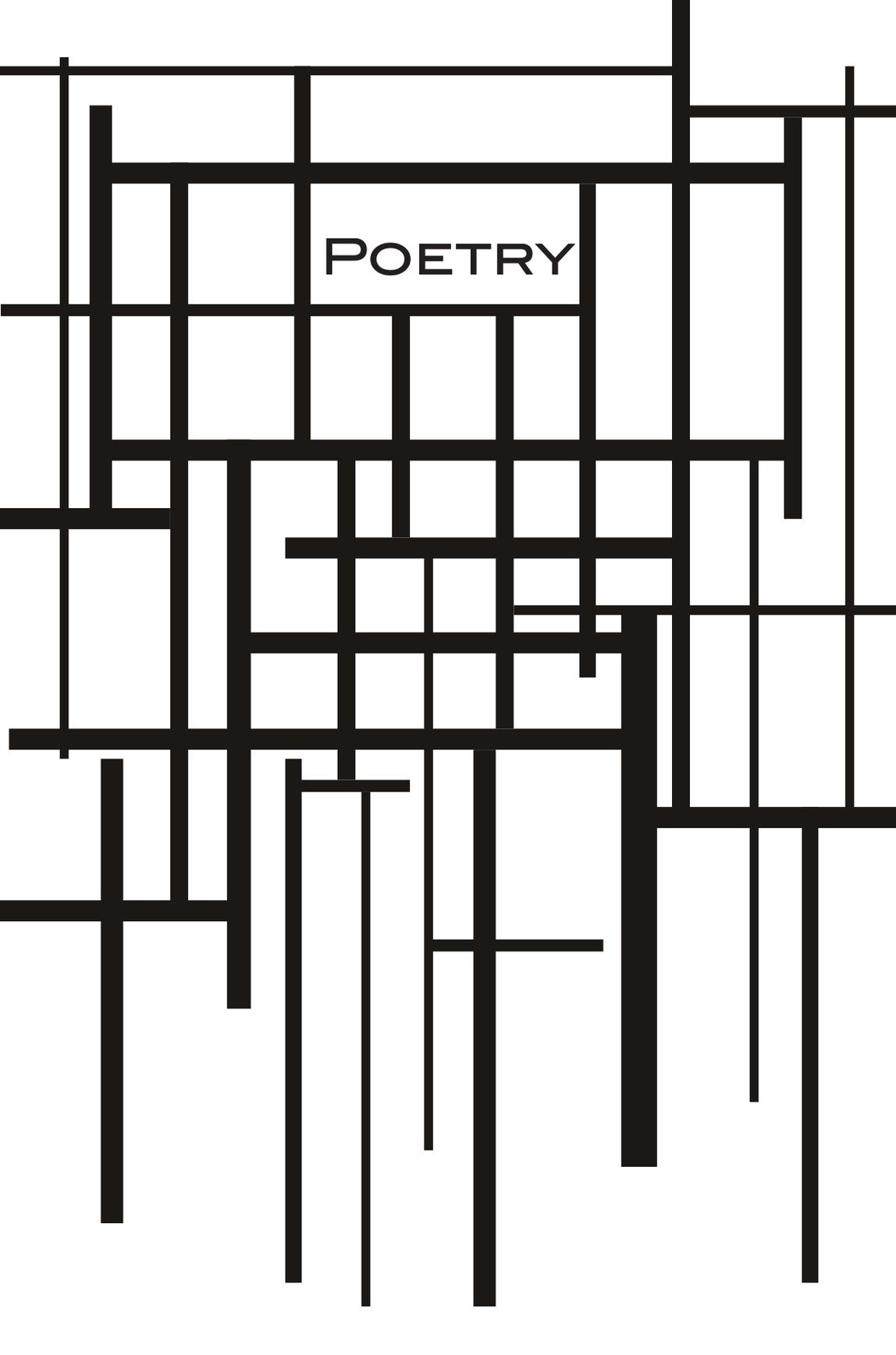
thankful that her stepsisters had been too busy to notice the glass heels by its side. She slipped them onto her feet and held her head up high.

She strode into her sisters' bedroom and smiled at them through their full length mirror, absorbing their laughter through every pore of her body. They paused when they saw her reflection staring at them.

The eldest snorted. "Nice dress Cinderella. Are you going to ask us to borrow some makeup now?"

Cinderella didn't take her eyes off of the sister. She slipped off her right heel, loving how sharp the glass felt against the palm of her hand. "Be good." She grabbed her stepsister's arm firmly and pulled her away from the mirror. "Be modest." She took the glass stiletto heel and bashed it into her sister's eyes over and over again. The blood felt good splashing against her face, her rage dissipating after every swing she took. "And always forgive." The other sister's screams played through her ears like a show tune melody, encouraging her to swing harder and harder. She turned to her other sister, flashing that beautiful smile which had recently been concealed by dirt. She threw the first stiletto to the side and took off the next one, wiping the blood from her brow.

"I'm sorry Mother. I tried."

The background consists of a complex arrangement of black lines of varying thicknesses. These lines intersect to form a grid of squares and rectangles of different sizes. Some lines are horizontal, while others are vertical. The overall effect is a layered, architectural structure that frames the central text.

POETRY

I FELT A THOUSAND NOOSES COME LOOSE AND I WEPT

Christian Benavides

at a funeral where death reeked more
from those still breathing

and a corpse sat alone by a chipped cross and cold
bouquets from a supermarket chain

where people spoke of faint memories and even more
faint feelings
while musty chairs creaked annoyance and walls
sagged in disgust

and nothing seemed more right than the one girl,
the young girl, laughing and laughing,
crying from laughter, tearing apart the
facade of grief
tearing apart the earth

nothing seemed to make more sense than dying,
dying and fooling the world

IN A LIBRARY

Sicily Famolaro

I wandered lonely, through the shelves
Of quiet rows—all spines and trees;
I heard their words of age and dust:
They whispered soft amongst themselves

Of dying breath, the brighter days
In tender shadows of fading ink;
The soft-static music of minds,
In earth's endless paper memories;

And of old, wise things: the lonely pages,
The echo-beating heart of time;
Of things written, and silent said,
Hard-pressed in canvas-bound cages.

But I stopped—in empathy—to open one,
The cover sighed, a sweet release;
The words stirred, then drifted on this darkened path,
And flew to a brittle ray of sun.

TO ALLEN GINSBERG AND ANOTHER

Sicily Famolaro

I climbed along the edge of my rooftop, sat down
 under the shade of pine trees to look at the sunset
 over the dark, plum-stained roofs and cry

And in the rosy-apricot bruise of the sky
 I saw a plane fly easterly over my head—
 a trailing sunset jetstream over my head,
 and like a smile, the stream faded
 to the indigo starry twilight.

The sweet, sweet scent of Jeffrey pine vanilla
 kissed my nose, and I felt your memory,
 real as a sun-filtered photograph
 taken by our mothers in the nineties
 with an old film camera
 (Though it was only yesterday
 and I'm nineteen)

Yesterday, we loved naturally,
 in the rusty, wildflower hills
 between the wide, flat eggshell blue
 and the sundry, striated stones
 beneath our bare feet.

We danced, arms stretched high
 to touch the love of the sun;
 and through your clear lazuli eyes
 (I feel that we are young);
 and forgot the noon-day shadows

skipping at our feet.

We jumped, on wind-smoothed rocks;
 until our heat-blistered toes bled
 and in the white-hot rays,
 your sunless skin blushed red
 against my bronzing hand;
 and the rocks, you took them along,
 and laughing, threw them far,
 far into scarlet canyons,
 naming them in an echo-song.

We kissed, our lips salt as dried oceans,
 and drifting down a path of desert sea-weeds
 we stopped to lie in the earth,
 to stare at the sea-foam clouds, simply,
 in the deep, aquamarine, pebbled grasses,
 and catch the wild, dusty shade of
 sage and flowers.

But when I closed my eyes to the sun,
 through the sweet blood-orange veins of my eyelids
 and the particles of light-rays
 swimming in the space between us,
 I felt you were so far away—

But I woke from the dream and saw you again
 building a little thing with sticks and stones
 (as children often do);
 I touched it, and it fell.
 I wanted to cry,
 but the river of my eyes was dry,

so a sad smile cracked in my lips
and I quietly rebuilt it.

I found a little yellow daisy,
and put in the center of the tower;
it was a sunflower, a tiny, daisy-sunflower;
then you smiled brightly, sunlight-ly;
Boy, you might be sunshine;
You're a sunflower. . .

We are always children, always
forgetting we grew up;
and I loved you with a neverland heart
and you loved me as the wind.

But now we love a little differently;
our rusty, leaden hearts are heavy,
sinking into the worry
of bigger things as you fly away
with your aeroplane heart—

When did you become an airplane?
And I, an earth-loving locomotive?

No, that day has passed; we are two separate
sunflowers bruising into sunsets. Let's please not
forget we're two sunflowers, let's not be airplane-
locomotives. And as you fly across the nighttime
of America, I'll sleep here, on the rooftop, and
dream of you as the stars die
into
the
morning.

TO THE ONE IN THE DARKENED TREE

Sicily Famolaro

I know your solemn vibrations
 And soft incantations
 Your harrowing murmurs of night

I know your sad intonations,
 And deep ululations
 Your bleak amber eyes in moon-light

I know your blue-shadowed visions
 And feathered derisions
 Your languorous patterns of flight

I know your howl
 Gently liltng,
 Tilting through the weeping ache of braches,
 A whispered tremolo of leaves,
 Falling darkly at the roots

I know your howl,
 Sweetly sighing
 In its wise and rounded melancholy,
 A low and starless dirge
 From a broken violin

I know your howl,
 My lips know it, too;
 The taste of it, and I shudder,
 Lurking ponderously
 As I lie still in mid-night

* * *

But in waking,
My eyes flutter with the wings
Of early morning birds;
I do not know you,
And neither does the day

FOUR MEMORIES

Christopher Gorrie

I
to see the flooding lake I crawl
through the thicket

I imagined
being the devil's
garden
as a child

a lake
I first called
blue prison
but now
love

after swimming
lessons grandmother
funded

II
squatting arsonists occupy
the town's church

during weeknights
I am one of four who knows

When it burns
I'll steal the stoup

III

I dream rarely and only in naps

waking,

I try restraining
fantasies of
faceless women

IV

rainstorms brake
the lake's edges,
muddy the bankside flowers,
leave the canal sullied
forever

looking on, I
recall
generosity

FROM CALIFORNIA WITH LOVE

Christopher Gorrie

I still remember
 the drawn out afternoons,
 the minutes passing without a thing to do,
 the clock just a metronome
 keeping us in time.

I poked fun at you without reason;
 jealousy leads one into themselves it seems.
 Do you recall?
 We were carnal beings...

I'd apologize for my egoistic banter,
 but apologies are best left to the
 eulogizer,
 and this may be some sort of graveside whisper;
 a long-winded to-do list of idle talk.

I'd call you
 "Lesbia", "Rosalind",
 "my diadem stashed away",
 but twenty-two months wore words away
 and it would seem like frantic blandishing.

Maybe in my own life
 I may be able to demonstrate
 what William Yeats had meant
 by a body quarreling with its soul,
 but I think --- *you're delusional!* ---
 that I could be content.

I remember everything ---
I remember the yielded heart feels a subtle sting.
The yew chattered in the wind outside your
window and I felt rooted
as I told you
I was you and would always be.

But twenty-two months is a long time.

DISPLACED CONTINENTS

DL Grunewald

even with our hands over our eyes
we watch the way the glare makes rooftops
bend and reflect the vermillion
sky above the blackblood pumping
through the melting citysystem streets.

the firerage continues above our heads.
at certain hours of what used to be daytime
we watch gods fall into the sea.
we fight over canyoncaves, trapped in cities
spilling into sewers like uncontaminated plague rats.

underground is the new night

we can't help but notice the water levels are dropping.
those who lashed rafts and left the shore watch
displaced continents float by with sides too steep to climb.
with every inch of water that disappears they
look up and we look down, gods ourselves
inhabiting unwanted towering monuments

the children are unaware of the change.

they collect ash on their tongues and
and swallow the embers of what we used to own.

they sway natural with every tremor
of the fallen and are bold enough
to climb trees and attack the sky.

lightning and meteor showers spill off their backs.

undaunted they sit in the treetops,
shout down at the top of our heads
braying and howling insults, challenges,
waiting for an answer

SOMNAMBULIST CITY

DL Grunewald

I contain a city of sleepwalkers.

the city is wilderness overgrown to cover the
cacophony of clinking gears and roaring bellows
bursting through shattered windows and rusted
door frames, stampeding over the dead weeds,
litterscum and vulgarity threaten to wake
my everfaithful somnambulists.

only in the still moments
passing through the eye of this
endless cyclonic energy
can they be seen,
lazy eyelids locked half open in
golden light, eyes replaced by falling, auroral atoms,
remnants of the last supernova.

the open and closed ear of the sleepwalker
desires destruction, detonation,
one fantastic disassembling and
the machine disappears.
the ghost is free to be trampled
by redhorse suns slipping
on the mud of splintered rivers

erosion, I argue(convince), is progression.
it is a step closer to removal,
the transparent through which the wind
blows the sound of matter,

the quiet clatter of chaos constant,
yet ever the disruptor of constancy.

it is Paradox, and best forgotten,

leave the sleepwalkers ignorant of
one another following songlines dissolute.
aware, there is nothing to stop
cities becoming civilizations

THE POOL

DL Grunewald

there was a giant made of wood
who lived atop a mountain.

at night, his breath would push out the tide.
at night, his breath would bring in the tide.

in the day, he sat and watched
the monkey people dangle over crevices by their
fingertips and lift their faces
over jagged ridges to peer up.

and they brought fire to the mountaintop.

* * *

sprinting down the mountain
barefoot and ablaze, the giant left
craters in the junglemud
before he leapt into the sea

and rain fell on the mountainside
and rain fell on the mountainside.

* * *

the craters filled with water
and formed pools that spilled
down the giant's path and collected
in the final footprint where the monkey
people would gather to

drink and swim.

The branches of plants near
the ground would bend themselves
over the great pool to see their reflections
hanging between the water
and the sky in the eyes of the masters
swimming on their backs
holding their breath beneath the surface

* * *

The water lowered, and year by year
the monkey people drifted upwards
from the great pool and sought
refuge further from the ground

into the jungle canopies
into treetop colonies

but the water followed.

some called it a typhoon
others a hurricane.
the flood swept the monkey people
into the sea and their screams reverberated
through the sunken bones of the giant.

* * *

from the empty pools the mud people
slide past grooves marking yearlines.

They stand on abandoned walkways
suspended between trees
and drip onto the leaves.
They are quiet. And listen
to the jungle as it sings.
they harden
in the sun.
soften in the rain

and rain falls on the mountainside.
and rain falls on the mountainside.

MIDNIGHT PSALM

Andres Hernandez

Ferryman, will I rest in the white roses
that can nevermore grow infirm-
where the rivers from the deep blue forest
are joined by currents of blood and ink?

Ferryman, the forest of the sky is beautiful
like blue bitumen, verdigris life moves, expires and is
reborn between the plane of those who do not die
and above the garden of grief

"Come brother, let us sleep" the phantom says
"One-Hundred and Fifty cuts cover me from head to waist-
old and beautiful tears that keep me from sleep
The heat of my lamp is ready to fade"

Ferryman, where in the house of shade shall I finally rest?
The voice of my lord is broken and dried
In the glade of cedar trees, air flushes and suffocates
The blushing of the moonlight fades and the snowy stars elude her

Make me know the ways of righteousness
The ferryman leads me down the tremulous waters
his words have escaped me like the fearful night's eyes

and in the distance the sudden emptiness of the roses

THE GARDEN

Natalie Knuth

Grandma kept the house
like an icebox all year round
shoulder to shoulder
in that baby blue swing
this was your warm
and peaceful sanctuary

lazy summer days when
you relished the dry heat and
my feet didn't quite reach the ground
not saying anything at all
we listened to each other

we watched
the tomatoes ripen
we plucked
radishes from the soil
no turnip will ever taste as sweet
as the one you rinsed with the hose
and peeled in the swing

even then I knew
these days would expire.

I reveled in your company
and all that yard had to offer
I absorbed.

That blue swing is still there
and now, so are you.

ONE MINUTE

Nguyet Pham

If she only had one minute,
she would,
stare into her mother's eyes,
pull out all the pain and
attach it to her deathbed.
Comb out every worry from her hair and
carry it on her back
and then,
she would take a picture
capture every wrinkle,
her smile, her almond shape eyes, her soft yellow skin,
just as a reminder
to God, the God, any Gods
of the beauty he created.

THE ROOSTER GETS TIRED

Alejandro Romero

the onions are almost ready
I can smell them tonight
in the Valley air

next week they'll start picking
4am
wrapped in wax paper
taquitos from God
she packed for him

he cries into his shirt
every morning
the rooster awoken
by the sound of him
tying his shoes

THE RIEN IN FRIENDSHIP

Erik J Wilbur

Once?

 We must have named it love just
 once—
 somewhere between trips to the nurse for bloody noses or skinned
 knees
 & driving drunk on Saturday morning through naive streets,
 somewhere between WD-40 flamethrowers
 & exploding bottles full of sugar and chlorine;

somewhere between eating pizza with triple-chocolate cake in
 damp swim trunks
 & pissing off tailgates into the dense desert night
 while bonfires smoldered at our backs,
 while watching the far off amber-turquoise lights
 of the town, through intoxicated eyes, make tracers on the valley
 floor;

somewhere between tickling bony backs in turns 'til we fell asleep
 &

 the loss of oxygen to
 "flaming fagots" at my bound feet;
 oh, you were a glad soldier,
 But I was (just)
 an uneasy martyr.
 And we learned bravery together
 by hopping chain-link fences
 & passing through bedroom windows

but didn't name it love
just once.
if i'd
whispered *it*.

THE MOMENT OF ATTRACTION

Erik J Wilbur

She sat on the floor of the tub

with her head between bare knees

under the showerhead firing squad—

I guess

hoping to get the turbulence shot out of her.

Kneeling down to draw a curtain of watershed hair,
I knocked over a bottle of six-dollar cabernet

The oily red fled
for cover under the grout between tiles,
& into the fibers of her discarded slip.

I ran my palm down her back
over the purple-red bra strap impression.
She swung her head around to look up at me through
cloudy melted mascara chlorine eyes,

& I thought about my car
idling in the driveway.