paperplates

A Magazine for *Fifty* Readers

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essays, poetry, fiction, reviews

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ESSAYS

POETRY

FICTION

REVIEWS

[JACOB: THIS ISSUE'S FOR YOU.]

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No, no. The chèvre's fine. It's the chef that's a bit off.

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Miles to minutes

December 13, 2013. 12:40 p.m. MST
Fort Collins, Colorado

MY PHONE VIBRATED IN MY POCKET. IF I'D had time to check it, I would have seen the text message from my brother that read: "Shots were just fired in the school, two people are injured and there's a fire by the field. I'm terrified right now."

This is where I lose track.

December 13, 2013. 12:38 p.m. MST
Fort Collins, Colorado

FROM AUGUST 2013 TO JULY 2014, I LIVED just south of the Colorado State University campus. I found, during this time, that it took me ten minutes to walk from my house to the chemistry building, where my *Introduction to Poetry* class was held. If I was riding my bicycle, it took me three.

Maybe I wanted to see if I could cut my time down as the semester went on, picking up pace as the days became more and more stressful, as exams and assignments piled up, creating an overwhelming homework-mountain, always on the verge of an anxiety-avalanche. Maybe it was because, during this period, I was intrigued by the passage of time, the way the past, present, and future were all so separate, running parallel to each other, never meeting. The way future seems to transition so easily into the past, barely staying in the present, a stop in the hallway to say "Hey."

I found that I would time myself on almost everything this semester. Whether it was walking to class or band practice, completing homework or driving back to my hometown for a visit, converting miles to minutes – to see my mother, father and brother, Brandon, all of whom I rarely ever spoke to any more, for lack not of love but of time. Keeping in touch with the people who were putting me through college seemed absolutely necessary, but as the semesters wore on and work started to pile up, I began to drive down to see them less and less, to call them less and less. Even a text seemed too out of the way if I had an exam coming up or if the marching band was preparing for the halftime performance at the New Mexico Bowl. Both of which, during this time, applied.

My final, final exam for that semester was in my poetry class, set the week before the university-sanctioned finals week.

The time was set. I would take my exam on Friday December 13, 2013 in the chemistry building, a simple 10-minute walk – 3-minute bike ride – from my house.

I decided to walk. For mid-December Northern Colorado, the weather was long-sleeve shirt nice, so I dressed appropriately: jeans and a sweater, brown boots with rubber soles, my ears stuffed into a CSU band beanie. I had my phone in my left pocket, as I always did, upside down with the screen facing my leg. I had trained my thigh to inform me whenever anyone was trying to make contact. My upper left leg could tell whether I was getting a text message, an email, a phone call or a Facebook message, all by following the vibrations patterns my phone buzzed. A sixth sense much less exciting than that of Haley Joel Osment.

My brain stuffed with quotes from Ginsberg and Eliot, I tried to remember exactly what iambic pentameter was. As I crossed the threshold to campus, my thigh informed me I that had a text message. On any other day, I would have spun my phone from my left pocket to respond immediately, because I am *an impatient, impersonal millennial, who is always, at all times, 100% connected while still retaining my awkward, shy, back-of-the-class demeanour.* But today was different. Today I was trying to escape all of that. Today I was focused on the exam.

I arrived at the Chemistry building staircase by 12:47 p.m., and began the climb. The class being taught on the second floor, all of us distressed college students were forced to take the steps and would be winded by the time we reached the landing that led to the second floor proper.

I entered the classroom by 12:48 p.m., out of breath but hoping to hide it as I sat next to a girl I went to high school with. She was wearing an *Arapahoe High School Future Business Leaders of America* sweatshirt, a club we had both ignored each other in, not for want of interest, but because we were never properly introduced. I sat next to her as if she were a stranger on the bus: *Please don't talk to me, not today.*

After situating myself in my awkward, too-small-for-even-a-normal-piece-of-paper desk, trying to find the best spot where I was least uncomfortable, I pulled the class's textbook from my backpack – emptied save for a few crumpled papers and broken pens – and began skimming through chapters, trying to absorb all of the last-minute information I could.

I'm not sure why I decided to check my phone at 12:59 pm, one minute before the exam. I guess the question of who it could be finally got to me, taking its toll. I wouldn't have time to respond, but at least I would know who it was and what they wanted. It was my brother.

Time stopped.

December 13, 2013. 12:33 p.m. MST
Centennial, Colorado

HE ENTERS FROM THE NORTHWEST SIDE OF the Arapahoe High School, under the stairs that lead up to the small second floor, where many of the school's chemistry classes are held. On the wall above him there is a giant portrait of the school's mascot, an Arapaho tribesman in full headdress and a quote reading "Warriors, always take care of one another." He is screaming the librarian's name as he carries a shotgun, three Molotov cocktails stuffed into his backpack.

He is running, screaming the librarian's name. He fires at nothing. There are two students in the hallway – his classmates. One of them – Claire – recognizes him. She asks him what he's doing; asks him why he has a gun. He fires. Claire screams. Her friend screams. He is running, screaming the librarian's name down the north hall of Arapahoe High School. He fires at nothing. The school has been put into lockdown. The students – trapped behind locked doors – are cowering under their desks, clutching phones to their chests, texting their parents, their boyfriends, their girlfriends, their sisters, their brothers. He can hear them crying behind the doors. He is not here for them.

He screams the librarian's name. He runs into the library, clutching the shotgun – still warm. Claire is lying on the ground behind him, but she has stopped screaming. Her friend is still screaming. He enters the library as the librarian escapes through the back exit. He fires. He misses.

He sets the shotgun down on a table. He hears students – trapped, clutching cellphones – crying underneath. He sees them run to the back door. They do not look back. He is not here for them. He takes out a Molotov cocktail, lights it and throws it toward the back of the library, setting flame to books the students will never read. He picks up the shotgun as he hears the school's resource officer at the entrance.

The resource officer is pointing his gun at him. He is sweaty, he is out of breath; he has run from the other side of the school to reach the library in just under 15 seconds. The resource officer is pointing his gun at him, a student he has passed in the hallway, a student he has sworn to protect. He is pointing his gun at the student as the flames consume the words the students will never read.

The gunman runs toward the back, an exit leading to the large lecture hall. He is cornered. He is

holding his shotgun – still warm. He has given up. He is no longer screaming the librarian's name. He is no longer running. He has given up. He fires.

The school's resource officer finds him lying on the ground. He is out of breath, he is sweaty; he has run all the way across the school.

It is December 13, 2013. It is 12:35 p.m.

2011. Centennial, Colorado

IN HIGH SCHOOL, A CLOSE FRIEND TOLD ME she always argued the theme of escapism for every story she read in her AP English Literature class. She argued that the characters are always trying to escape their own reality for something bigger, something better, something extraordinary. She said that the people reading the stories are doing the same, escaping their present, to live in the future, to live in the past, to be somewhere else that wasn't right here, right now.

This is where my mind stays.

December 13, 2013. 1:00 p.m. MST
Fort Collins, Colorado

THE SCREEN WENT DARK AS MY PHONE TURNED idle after 30 seconds. I put it back into my pocket, upside down, screen facing my leg. I did not feel it buzz again. I did not see my professor place my exam packet on my desk. I did not hear myself break as thoughts rushed through my head.

How could this have happened?
I need to get home.
What if Brandon was shot?
Who could have done this?
I need to get home.
Was it someone I know?
I need to get home.
I need to get home.

I filled out my exam as quickly as I could with shaky fingers and an aching head. I did not leave the classroom, I needed the grade. I did not pay attention to the questions, I needed to get home. My eyes kept darting to the clock that hung at the front of the room – 5 minutes, 10 minutes, 20 minutes – I wasn't sure what I was hoping for when I looked, but I kept looking – I kept checking.

My thigh informed me I had another text. *Brandon.* Another. *Mom.* A call. *My roommate, Chris.* Another text. *Mom again. Call. Mom.* It seemed as though the entire world was trying to reach me at this moment and I could do nothing but sit and feel my phone vibrate over and over, blindly filling out question after question.

I finished the test at 1:25 pm, after only two others in my class. I handed my exam to the professor, smiled, said I would definitely keep in touch, and left.

It took me six minutes to run back to my house. As I was running, I called my brother. He picked up on the first ring and said he was outside, on the track; they had evacuated the school. All of the students were marched outside in a disorderly fashion, told to keep their heads down and their feet moving. It was at this point, I began to cry. I was not sobbing, but I could feel the tears well underneath my eyes when Brandon told me, for the first time, that he loved me. We had been brothers for sixteen years, I had never heard him say this to me before, and this was the first time I ever remember saying it back.

It's not that I didn't love my brother. Of course I loved him – like a brother. That beat-the-shit-out-of-you-never-apologize-and-move-on kind of love two siblings always seem to have. The words have never needed to be said. We knew we loved each other. But that is not the reason we never said it. We felt embarrassed, foolish; like it stripped away our masculinity bit by bit, word by word, until there was nothing left save a cold, loveless shell. Brothers weren't supposed to show each other affection. They were supposed to hang out and fight and play video games and watch football. That was love.

I did say it back, though, after forcing the words

from the pit of my stomach where they had settled. They stung like bile in the back of my throat, not because it was wrong to say them, not because I didn't mean it, but because I knew I should have said it so much sooner. It was in this moment that I realized I could have lost him forever, having only told him these three, simple words through mom-forced apologies neither of us ever really meant.

I got home at 1:31 p.m. My roommates Chris and Carter – friends since high school – were gathered around the television, watching coverage of the event. At this point, there were only overhead shots of students stumbling out of the school, onto the track. I saw how small they all looked. Huddled close, hugging each other, not just for warmth but for comfort.

I sat down next to Chris. We said nothing but watched in silence the same, reused footage of police shuffling children out of the northwest entrance of the building, the entrance underneath the stairs that led to the chemistry classrooms. We watched it in silence over and over again, hearing the same words over and over again, wanting it to end – needing it to be over.

After forcing every muscle in my body to move, I stood. I couldn't watch any more. I needed to get home – I needed to see my brother.

As I was packing my things, Chris walked into my room and hugged me. He did not say anything. I did not cry. I did not want him to see me cry. I do not know how long we embraced, it felt like hours, but still it was not enough – an eternity would not have been enough. I was lost in time. Something that I had not experienced for years: to simply stand still on a timeline. Chris left my room without saying a word. I continued to pack.

The hour-and-a-half drive south down Interstate-25 usually went smoothly every other time I took it. It was a quiet drive, one that allowed easy self-reflection and meditation, which I enjoyed. There were long stretches of road without anything to look at other than exit signs and yellow fields. It was a Wizard of Oz-esque journey – follow the yellow grain road.

Today was different. Not only was I leaving during Friday afternoon rush hour, elongating the trip by at least 45 minutes, but also the nerves that had taken over my body would make time slow, stretching it like the last five minutes of a football game.

I sat tight, gripping the steering wheel, listening to the news reports over and over again. NPR was my only quick-access radio option, the only one I trusted. In between fluff stories on the Carpenter's Christmas album and "What's on Everyone's Christmas List," a different reporter chimed in – the same story, different words – every 5 minutes like clockwork.

> "A gunman entered the halls of Arapahoe High School today, wielding a shotgun and Molotov cocktails. Reports are still coming in."

> "Reports are still coming in from a school shooting in Centennial, Colorado today. Police say that a gunman entered Arapahoe High School looking for the librarian. Sources are saying the gunman was working alone. Arapahoe is only eight miles from Columbine High School."

> "A lone gunman entered the halls of Arapahoe High School in Centennial, Colorado just after noon today, wielding a shotgun. Arapahoe is only a sixteen-minute drive from Columbine High School."

> "Arapahoe is only eight miles, a short sixteen-minute drive, from Columbine High School."

I arrived in Centennial at 6:00 p.m. on December 13, 2013.

December 13, 2013. 12:36 p.m. MST
Centennial, Colorado

CLAIRE DAVIS IS RUSHED TO LITTLETON Adventist Hospital, two miles west of Arapahoe High School. She goes through surgery. She is in a coma. Her parents stay by her bedside. She goes through

surgery again. Her parents talk to the public in a press conference. The superintendent of Littleton Public Schools consoles them – he grieves with them. Her parents forgive her classmate, asking the same from the community. She keeps fighting. She goes through surgery. Her parents stay by her bedside.

Soon after, the Arapahoe students put up banners around the fences of the school, facing the busy streets that read "We Love You, Claire Davis." The students print tee-shirts and bracelets that read "Warrior Strong." The alumni gather on the southeast side of Arapahoe High School to sing the fight song together, holding each other. The students hold a candlelight vigil for Claire at Arapaho Park, two miles east of Arapahoe High School. There are news vans, there are camera crews, there are reporters in winter hats and warm coats. The students all stand in the cold, in buttoned-up letter jackets, decorated in pins, stars, and bars, a golden "A" stitched across their hearts. Some rest their heads on others' shoulders, some cry; they do not care who sees them. They huddle in the cold, in the dark, singing the school's fight song together; brave and strong as a community. They sing loud, they sing together, they sing for Claire as she lies dying in the hospital.

It is December 21, 2013. It is 4:29 p.m.

2013. Fort Collins, Colorado

IN 2008, THE RAMS BEAT THE FRESNO STATE Bulldogs in the Gildan New Mexico Bowl with a score of 40-35. Since then, every season up until 2013 had been a loss. Hughes Stadium, the home of the CSU football team, saw record low attendance for games, and most of those who did actually come to cheer on the team left after the first half, realizing there was no way the Rams could come back from such a disheartening point deficit. The band and true fans, though, stayed in the stands, in the freezing cold and burning heat, to cheer on the team. They stood together, win or lose, cheering the fight song until their lungs gave out.

It all finally paid off on November 30, 2013, when the Rams solidified their winning season with a 58-13 win against the Air Force Academy Falcons. The Rams had qualified for a Bowl Game, a staple in the collegiate football community.

This is where we cheer.

December 21, 2013. 2:00 p.m. MST
Albuquerque, New Mexico.

THE GILDAN NEW MEXICO BOWL WAS OFF TO a rough start for the Colorado State University Rams. Going up against a team with the same seasonal track record as CSU, the Rams were losing poorly. With 4 minutes left in the fourth quarter, it looked like it was over, with the Washington State Cougars leading 45-30.

Just as the fans, who had driven six hours or more straight down I-25, were losing all hope, debating whether or not to pack up their things and leave this dreadful game in the cold, desert dust, a fumble, touchdown, and extra point pulled the Rams up seven points. Something changed in the crowd: maybe – just maybe – we were still in this. Another forced and recovered fumble at the Cougars' 31-yard line allowed CSU to make eight plays, scoring another touchdown and a just-barely-made two-point conversion.

The game was tied with 33 seconds left on the clock. Upon the kick return, WSU ran the ball, when a tackle from CSU forced a fumble at the Cougar's 23-yard line, which the Rams recovered immediately. Pushing the ball as far as they could in three downs, CSU attempted a 41-yard field goal as the green and gold side of the University of New Mexico Stadium held their collective breath. Time stopped.

With only 4 seconds left on the game clock, they made it.

The stands erupted. Volcanic fans rushed the field – a biblical flood of green and gold. I had my clarinet

set on my upper lip, pretending to play along to the CSU fight song but smiling too wide to have the proper *embouchure*. I had always loved football, but this was the most excited I had been in a long time. Everyone could taste the elation in the air; it was impossible not to cheer along with the fight song as Coach Jim McElwain held the trophy over his head, proud and smiling.

In this moment, I felt lost, unhooked from time. The past week had been filled with an incredible amount of stress, sadness, and overwhelming anxiety, the complete turn-around-to-win was a release. As soon as the ball went through the uprights, scoring the winning three points for Colorado State, I felt myself – for the first time in a week – breathe.

An hour after the game had ended, I began stripping off my band uniform on the coach bus. As I did, I checked my phone, tucked away in my shorts pocket (upside-down, screen facing my leg) to see how many messages I had received – my thigh had lost count. There were a few from my mother, father, and brother, all congratulating CSU.

I opened up the Facebook application, to see what my immediate social network was saying about the game. Heart still pumping, I read the first status:

"Rest in peace, Claire Davis."

I do not remember who posted this. I do not remember if that's how it was phrased. I only remember sitting down in my seat – green band overalls half stripped, one black marching shoe off, the other untied – staring at it until the phone went into idle mode after 30 seconds. I felt a bizarre mix of emotions formulate themselves in my body. My heart was still screaming in my throat from the sudden win, my stomach dropping from the news.

My mind was somewhere in between.

The bus ride home was quiet and long. Most of the band slept, but I couldn't seem to close my eyes. It's not that I wasn't tired – I was dreadfully tired – but my eyelids would not shut – as if invisible balloons were tied to my eyelashes, holding them up, keeping me awake. I stared out of the window for most of the six hours it took to drive straight up I-25, past Trinidad, past Colorado Springs, past Centennial and Denver and Longmont and Loveland.

I didn't talk to anyone on the drive back to Fort Collins. I did not want to and I did not need to. Not because I was mourning. I had never met Claire Davis and when I heard it was her who was shot, I thought first of my friends and how lucky I was that it was not them, a brief flash of in-the-moment selfishness that was pushed aside as quickly as it came.

That is not to say that I didn't feel an overwhelming sadness when I heard of her death. Claire had been fighting a point-blank shotgun wound to the head for a week. She was the reason the media pulled away from commiserating about the shooter. Claire's survival made the media frenzy after the shooting about the Arapahoe community holding together, their strengthening, rather than giving the gunman a Harris and Klebold glamour shot on the front page of every newspaper and magazine.

When her body finally gave up, she was not the girl who died but the girl who survived – against all odds, she survived.

At some point during the drive, I tried to read the book I had brought, to browse the internet on my phone, to distract myself from the long stretches of nothing that occupied most of the area surrounding the bus. The scene was set perfectly for self-reflection and meditation, but that's not what I wanted. I wanted to get lost in a story that wasn't mine, something that wasn't real. The past week had been so excruciatingly real.

I have always been trying to escape, if not school, life, if not life, time – be written into a story. I get trapped in my mind, love the way my cerebral bread crumbs are picked up by crows, never knowing how long I'll be lost. I'm always running; a cranial prison-

break, with lower stakes. I find myself floating within the words of Ginsberg and Eliot, never really trying to understand what they mean and never really wanting to. I'm always running, trying so hard to get back – living in the past tense.

I wanted to time-travel back only a few hours, to sit and watch the last 4 minutes of the Gildan New Mexico Bowl, to live that win all over again because it felt so surreal, so extraordinarily spectacular to experience something that wasn't this moment.

At 1:00 a.m. on December 22, 2013, the buses pulled into the CSU University Center for the Arts and we were free to go home.

December 24, 2013. 5:00 pm MST
Centennial, Colorado

I AM STANDING ON A SIDEWALK THAT RUNS parallel to Dry Creek Road, just outside of Arapahoe High School. I am standing in front of a chain-link fence that separates the passing cars and the student parking lot, empty except for my family's red Ford. Stuffed into the fence are white, Styrofoam cups, spelling out the words "Warrior Strong." Above that is a banner, created and signed by the students at Arapahoe High School. It reads "We Love You, Claire Davis."

It is brisk. Snow is starting to fall, creating a storybook Christmas Eve missing only Tiny Tim. The wind is blowing against the banner, pushing it out toward me, breathing life into it like lungs full of love and kind words. There are hundreds of flowers lining the bottom of the fence, placed into the squares the intertwined metal has made. Hanging from the top of the links are *One Direction* backpacks, filled with flowers, teddy bears, and stuffed horses, notes that all read "We Love You, Claire Davis."

My father and mother are perusing the fence, trying to read some of the windblown notes tied to the backpacks and flowers, trying to catch a glimpse of warm thoughts on wet paper. I am standing next to my brother. We don't say anything, but we stand there, hands in our coat pockets, watching the tribute the students have made – watching the love the community has left, stuffed into the squares of a chain-link fence.

As I exhale, I watch my breath freeze in front of me, climbing to the sky. My nose is red and runny and I cannot feel the ears I have stuffed into a CSU band beanie. My brother shivers, but I do not look over to him. He does not want me to see him crying. I do not want him to see me crying. We both know we love each other, in that brotherly say-nothing-but-still-know kind of way.

It is December 24, 2013. I do not know how long we've been standing here.

— *Andrew Walker*

Mac Hall

NORMALLY, CONCERTS INVOLVED LINING UP, waiting, listening, applauding, and the obligatory standing ovation, followed by the mandatory encore. They had become routine affairs, with little variation between them – until one October night at Mac Hall, where I felt the remarkable atmosphere of the evening resonate. But before elaborating on my experience, I must confess that when I discover something I love, I'm compelled to savour it all, and that is especially true for music.

Of the artists I currently follow, Tegan and Sara are my favourites. I've collected and relished, without losing interest, most of their recordings, from their early personal brand of emotive indie to their more recent relationship-driven yet expressive artsy pop. Their juxtaposing voices strike an emotional chord with me, creating a nostalgic longing for my youth, their cleverly crafted lyrics and musical arrangements evoking a hard-hitting poetic imagery rarely matched by other artists.

I had long given up attending concerts. Not only are prices for tickets exorbitant – especially if scalped – but the typical larger venues force the ticket holder to painfully squint at the musicians from afar or view them via a jumbotron next to the stage. Fortunately, the University of Calgary's Mac Hall is no such venue, providing instead a close intimate setting. When I learned that Tegan and Sara were going to perform there, I was excited; however, I could not imagine attending on my own, as I knew that I would stand out uncomfortably. I'm a 60-year-old married man with three children, the polar opposite of the majority of Tegan and Sara's teenage fans. To make the experience bearable, I asked my 22-year old son if he wanted to attend. He likes the duo, maybe not as fanatically as I do, but we both know talent when we hear it. He was in.

Mac Hall's small venue allows for an excellent view of the stage and the musicians – provided you get there early. With that in mind, we left home an hour and a half before the doors opened and in our usual fashion arrived at the university much too early. Of course, Tegan and Sara's most dedicated fans were already squatting along the basement hallway, some 50 of them, mostly female, between ages 16 and 20, with the odd guy here and there.

We staked out our spot of the floor at the end of the queue. Embarrassingly (our family's unofficial motto is "We're not weird enough"), a generation gap of some 40 years separated me from the kids conversing ahead of us. To their credit, they didn't point at me or make me feel out of place. As I relaxed, I became acutely aware of the unusual character of this young group, the diversity of which was refreshingly unique, covering the range from conservative to eccentric. For many, attire, coupled with companionship, expressed the underlying message: *I'm gay; I'm lesbian; I'm transgender*. My son understood this brightening community better than I did: one of his childhood friends had come out gay during high school. He acted as both my guide and my interpreter.

I noted as we waited that the people around me were chatting not only among themselves but also with others who meandered up and down the queue. I found it quite endearing and the complete opposite of my own experience as a youth, when I had met only one openly gay student.

Furthermore, I found the openness of this young community unusual, and I'm certain that some of them would have been mortified to signal their romantic or body image preferences in high school. Yet I must credit the open-minded fans attracted to this concert and the university itself, whose students were wandering to and fro after Friday's classes, for engendering a non-threatening environment. It was comforting to know that none of these kids were forced

to challenge the stereotypes on their own; instead they could proudly express their individuality, without judgement, fear, or shame. Now I understood my place and acceptance as a 60-year-old man. Collectively, we made this very public hallway a safe haven, and I felt fortunate to find myself there, bearing witness to this special gathering.

The hour went by quickly, the chatter growing louder and louder as the fans grew more and more excited. Soon we started filing into the auditorium. At first I felt let down when I realized the venue was standing room only. My outlook changed as I observed groups walking from one cluster of friends to another. The absence of chairs, I soon concluded, added to the ambiance, making the concert more of a festival-type event.

While we waited, the hall began to fill with people of all ages, including some children and, to my surprise, a few adults nearer my age: I no longer considered myself the odd man out.

Half an hour later, the lights dimmed, and the crowd gave a rousing welcome to Vivek, the opening act. She surprised us by strutting onto the stage sporting a bright metallic blue-skirted suit. Her inclusion by the tour organizers was brilliant, amplifying, as it did, the already apparent openness of the evening by featuring an openly transgender individual, as if to say to the audience: "Loosen up, chill out," as well as, most importantly, "Be your true self, as you are among supportive friends."

As the evening passed, the crowd squeezed tighter and tighter around us. By the end of the second intermission, I could sense the fans' anticipation growing, and when the house lights dimmed and the intro music began, it became a collective euphoria.

Once Tegan and Sara stepped onto the stage, the crowd wildly cheered and applauded. The intense frenzy of the room moved me to tears. At that moment, we were united in a form of communion, one taken not in silent reflection but in a joyously spontaneous outpouring of emotion.

The performance continued, and each time they heard the first few introductory beats, the fans would burst into applause, eagerly anticipating the song to come next.

Of course, no Tegan and Sara concert would be complete without the customary dialogue with the audience. Tegan did not disappoint, praising the Canadian government's recognition of the LBGT community and its on-going protection of their rights. Her words were a reminder that we should never take these rights for granted.

After Tegan and Sara had finished, a sense of melancholy came over me. I hoped against all odds that the excitement would last.

Minutes later we navigated our way through the university's winding hallways, and as we strolled by the exits, the crowd that accompanied us slowly thinned out.

The concert represented something exceptional, a kind of mini-Woodstock for the LGBT community. That night, the young community had let their guard down, relaxed, and listened to the music with poise and pride, regardless of their orientation or preferences, all in the comforting presence of friends and sympathetic strangers, gathered in the spirit of celebration, in one of those rare events where a single commonalty joined us.

— Guy Tremblay

KAREN JONES

Winter

This heavy sky –

it's too cold, too dry
to snow. Or if a few flakes escape
the afternoon's grim labour,
they won't be enough
for a gathering together,
not enough to insulate, shelter, inspire
each other. They will leave no trace
of moisture. In this time of ice and iron,
they will cling to nothing.

But nights can be warmer.
Perhaps in the morning the sky will have birthed,
the sun will appear, the earth will be covered
in white diamonds, floating everywhere
through the air, weightless, sparkling, free,

without number.

ALISON HICKS

Walking the dog (1)

We go out searching.
He with his nose,
me with my eyes.
He smells what I can't see.

His nostrils take in
all that has happened
close to the ground
since we were last here.

He traces the scent
to the absolute edge of the leaf.
I look for the woodpecker,
locate only the sound,

no body in the branches.
Thwack. A car door closing
startles, makes him jump.
He is afraid of loud noises, thunder.

I am afraid of being wrong
and being yelled at, though I'm as guilty
as anyone else of judging and yelling.
He is guilty of not barking.

In the middle of the night,
he tore up the blinds,
trying to claw his way outside
rather than wake us.

ALISON HICKS

Walking the dog (2)

He parcels out the narrative in instalments along the way:
another day on the rope with my human, heading west.
I had some chicken-flavoured breakfast, drank some water.

My electrolytes are basically in balance, all systems go
except the reproductive, which seems to be inactive.
I sleep comfortably on the chair. My humans are good that way.

I understand some trade-offs are required. Not that I had any say.
Most days I'd prefer to skip the collar, ditch the rope.
When I get a chance I run, kick my back legs up.

I was bred for cross-country travel, to find raccoons and trap them in trees.
Here, the raccoons I've been able to track
live underneath the streets.

I get a whiff at the openings, can't reach them or entice them to trees.
Squirrels don't count, beneath my notice. Likewise small yapping dogs.
I look over at the fuss, walk on. The neighborhood fox is a tease.

I leaned on the old fence once, tipped myself over and went after him.
Tough on the stomach and I didn't catch him.
My humans take me to the dog park, instruct me to run.

It isn't the same. By now I've sniffed
every millimetre of that perimeter.
I'm sure you've caught a few of my status updates there.

STACEY RESNIKOFF

No sensation

BO HOWE WAS TRYING TO FILM AN UNBLINKING EYE. Teenie Mindlina, his girlfriend of the last six months, couldn't stop blinking.

"No, no," Bo said. "Open! Let them water."

Teenie let out a desperate yip. She had paid for VIP tickets to the "Sensation" exhibition at The Brooklyn Museum in December – endured elephant dung art of the Blessed Virgin and Plexi-cased animal parts – hoping to make Bo happy for his thirtieth birthday. Instead, he'd grown more obsessive. His former SUNY-Creekskill art department nemesis Diptych Ulrecht was kicking off year 2000 with a one-man show. Bo's father, Rhys Rand Howe, arts writer for *The Times,* was likely to review it.

"Maybe if I wore my glasses," Teenie said. "Do you have any *Visine*?"

In a blinding whirl of self-doubt, overhead fluorescent lights, and a flash of his own foggy reflection in the toaster, Bo felt the pull of gravity. He collapsed to the chartreuse linoleum.

Teenie blinked wildly. She pleaded for Bo to get up, but he was unresponsive. Unsure what to do, she called 9-1-1.

"My boyfriend fainted. I think it was something I said."

In 13 minutes, two EMTs arrived and checked Bo's eyes, heart, and pulse.

Did he have chest pains? "No," Bo said. Did he feel dizzy before he fell? "Not dizzy so much as weak." Had he eaten today? "*Cocoa Puffs* and a can of *Surge*."

The medical equipment was put away. The EMTs told Bo to see his doctor but not to worry. Something about blood sugar or anxiety. Bo was focused on their eyes – four blue – and wasn't really listening. "How often do you blink?" he asked. They ignored him and left.

"I'll practise! I'll strengthen my muscles," Teenie said, pushing at her eyebrows with two thumbs-up. "And don't worry: I'm sure it was an unmajor episode. Not physical anyway."

"You think I need a shrink?"

"Well, your collapse did seem a bit … voluntary. Maybe you just need to relax."

Bo winced. "I'm an artist."

He grabbed a green plastic bottle and shook the last few *UnDew* herbal anxiety pills into his mouth, gulping water straight from the tap. Creative rejection plagued him. Like the time his camp counselor complained, "This is dodge ball not 'West Side Story,'" as if children's sporting events were ruined by edgy choreography. And the time his father revoked his learner's permit for performing "Honking the Bejesus Out of the Next Person I See" just as an unsuspecting Rhys was leaving for work. And the argument with the Creekskill dean who forbade Bo from performing naked in the grocery store freezer section and suggested a new major. All these censures added up to one thing: unappreciated genius.

"Look, I don't think you need help. Do you? I mean, I don't. Unless you do," Teenie said.

Bo gathered her purse, coat, and glasses.

"I mean, not like my uncle living in a bunker in Ojai. Minutes from a five-star resort and he eats freeze-dried cheese. Now that's whackadoo," she said, as he rushed her out.

Bo had an epiphany: he would film his own eye. After all, when "Sensation" artist Marc Quinn wanted to sculpt his bust in blood, he didn't call the Red Cross. Bo set up his tripod and sat. With film running, he held the camera's gaze unflinchingly for not quite long enough, over and over, without success.

It was a glorious five days with only a handful of breaks for *Froot Loops* and brief naps. He imagined a future screening where Rhys would retroactively applaud Bo's œuvre and apologize for once calling him a "charlatan" – an insult that stung deeply when Bo learned Charlatan was not an impressionist painter.

It still stung.

ON THE MORNING OF THE SIXTH DAY, Bo's landlord phoned to say Teenie had not paid his rent as she normally did and a cheque was due. He thought briefly of taking a job as a kind of performance art – maybe a clueless store clerk at the Store of Knowledge – yet decided Teenie would surely reconsider rather than render him homeless.

He'd once lived in a cardboard box. It was at the *Thither Henceforth Gallery* for five minutes. After receiving a few coins and a push out the door, he got a paper cut, which inspired an 11-minute wafting close-up of his nicked digit. At the first screening of "The Paper Cut" in the basement of *Le Café Noir* downtown (the bathroom loop reel, actually), Bo met Teenie. He had sneaked into the ladies room to catch his film through a hole in one of the stall door locks, and Teenie had knocked him down trying to enter the stall. She blamed herself and offered to pay damages. Bo acquired a faint black eye and decided he had found his muse.

The facts he knew about Teenie for sure: she was loaded from an IPO at her father's software company, collected headbands, and invented an appetizer called *So-Cheeseys* (melted gruyère and mascarpone on cheese crackers) that was featured on a *Cheez-It*s box. Before him, she had never been interested or invested in art; now she was his loving patron.

Or at least she had been until this week. After eating stale *Corn Pops* and watching "As the World Turns" and "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?" on his gifted TiVo, Bo realized that he needed Teenie Mindlina. It was Thursday, so he packed up his camera, caught a bus to midtown, and entered the spa where she exfoliated. At first he was blocked by two security-guard types – sturdy, self-possessed men, much like the EMTs, but wearing slippers – who tried to escort him out. But Teenie appeared in a pink robe and called them off. Bo put the camera up to his tired, aching eye and began rolling film, pulling in for a close-up of her lips.

"What's going on, Bo?" the lips said.

"I have a question for you," Bo's voice said off-screen.

"What is it, Bo?" the lips said, now pursing.

"Will you … . Will you marry me?"

The lips folded inside the mouth briefly, then reappeared.

"No, Bo. No way."

Suddenly dizzy, Bo leaned slightly, catching the uncomfortable gaze of one of the security guards, who, realizing he was on camera, moved out of the shot.

Bo left *Spa ZZ*, passing its tagline on the wall ("Reconnect with yourself") and feeling entirely disconnected. On the bus ride home, he couldn't help recalling past loves, all three: Vera, an ethics grad student with a fake British accent; Emily, a macrobiotic Chinese food waitress who desperately feared second-hand MSG; and, of course, his first love, his mother Melanie, a nerve-ridden yogaddict, who advised, "Expect nothing and you'll be perfectly happy." Bo found them all fascinating, contradictory, and entirely undependable. But Teenie was real, kind, unaffected, giving. She was twenty-eight and listened to the same radio station as her dentist. Teenie knew exactly who she was: no one.

Back at his rent-due apartment, Bo opened a new bottle of *UnDew* pills and fell asleep on the futon. When he awoke, he allowed himself to view the tape of the worst moment of his life.

It was a masterpiece.

ON THE SEVENTH DAY, BO MAILED HIS FILM, "No, Bo," to the MoMA *Extremely Short Film Contest.* Then he put on his best tee-shirt and paint-spattered khakis and pulled his hair pleasingly askew. It was Friday: Diptych Ulrecht's show "Silence, Please" was opening at the Robitussin-DM Center for the Arts.

"Bo!" Diptych said, slapping him on the back. "You came! I'm so glad." He was blonder than ever.

"Dipstick," Bo said. "Hey."

"When was the last time I saw you? At 'Sensation,' right? What a show! If I could paint the Virgin Mary in elephant feces like Chris Ofili, I'd do it. The man is a genius."

"Yeah. And you're not."

Diptych laughed. "Bo Howe: always keeping me humble. But I got this show off the ground. It's fully funded by Pfizer. Big, big money. Not sure I deserve it, but I got lucky."

Bo couldn't stand Diptych's *faux* self-effacement. He did it in college, too: "I just don't deserve a fellowship with stipend. So I'm paying it forward. Let's weed a playground in Harlem." Back at SUNY-Creekskill, Diptych took on Bo like a charity-case – the smug *artiste* mentoring the hack. He seemed to think this made Bo his friend; he still seemed to think so.

"May I steal him?" a strawberry-blonde in very high, very shiny shoes asked Bo sweetly, turning Diptych's attention to a reporter with a Press lanyard.

"Sure, steal whatever you like. He does," Bo said, met by Diptych's dismissive smile.

Free to explore the art, Bo disdainfully noted the Rothko-rip-off colour fields, Kostabi-rip-off faceless figures, and Warhol-rip-off cinematic minimalism. He left with his one-millilitre cough medicine sample, certain of Dipstick's disrepute.

Sure enough, Rhys wrote a brief review in *The Times* titled, "The Art of Monotony." After that promising headline came disappointing phrases like "a brilliant reflection of our culture" and "the perfect antidote to our daily din."

Bo soaked *The Times* in the kitchen sink, downed four *UnDew* pills with a *Wild Cherry Pepsi* and stared into his camera.

FOUR MONTHS LATER – 121 DAYS WORKING HIS EYE into myalgia – Bo won honourable mention for "No, Bo" and was invited to the *Extremely Short Film Festival* at MoMA. He saved and replayed the voice mail message from Hamish Whitbourg of the judging committee, twice falling asleep at the kitchen table, drool puddling on his "Sensation" catalogue.

Entering the stark façade of MoMA that June Friday, Bo felt like a refugee returning to his rightful homeland. His passport was his film, playing periodically on a small-screen in a nether-corner of the lobby. He watched it ten times – skipping the winners' showing in the auditorium – and hit the buffet. There, by the pinwheel sandwiches, he saw the strawberry-blonde in shiny high-heels from Diptych's art show, so he picked up a Frisbee and moved in.

"Fabulous eye patch, Bo!" she said.

Bo grinned, thinking she recognized him, but then realized she ("Lindy Porter: Special Events Liaison") had read his nametag ("Bo Howe: Merit #15").

"The buffet is so Yayoi Kusama," Bo said, making small talk. "It's lucky I eat dots."

Lindy looked at him dumbstruck, then her face lit up. Apparently, few of her colleagues commented on her deeply inventive homages to modern art through finger foods. She seemed to enjoy Bo's stories about coming to MoMA with his dad in his prepubescent years, deciding to be the next Rauschenberg ("minus the taxidermy"), and deeply crushing on the Guerilla Girls (who protested MoMA in ape masks when Bo was 15). No one, other than Teenie, had ever taken such an interest in Bo's autobiography – not even his professors at Creekskill, who pitied Bo's father, the high-profile critic whose son tossed tennis balls at his peers and called it art.

Lindy was called away by a hummus emergency, but first she pressed her card into Bo's hand. "I'd love to see your work," she said with a wink.

Bo reloaded his Frisbee. He was unusually ravenous, eating twirled turkey, avocado, and Dijonnaise with the singular zeal of a man whose dietary staple was children's breakfast cereal.

He could get used to this.

THAT WEEKEND, BO GOT A MENTION IN THE SUNDAY TIMES as a "quirky runner-up." He checked his computer obsessively for an email from rhysrand.howe@thetimes.com, subject line: "Congratulations" or "You did it!" (as opposed to his father's typical self-referential communiqué: "Why haven't you returned my calls?" and "Having a baby in six months!"). There was nothing.

It had been two years since Bo had last seen Rhys at sushi hotspot Omentu, where he was told creative seed money was "an indulgent request for a 28-year-old," "unearned," and "simply impossible" due to rising expenses "on the homefront." Then Rhys stuffed his face with tuna tataki at 15 dollars a piece and Bo resolved to conquer the art world before their next reunion.

By Monday afternoon, Bo's voicemail was full. There was a message from the gallery director who had thrown him out on his box; another from his landlord, who still insisted on receiving rent payment but agreed to call off legal proceedings; and even one from Teenie, who seemed to be

reconsidering her answer. Bo was ready to ring Teenie back when his intercom whined. He pressed the button suspiciously. Teenie still had a key.

"Someone there?"

"It's Lindy. Porter. From MoMA."

Without speaking, Bo buzzed her in. He hid his UnDew pills behind a *Fear No Art* pillow, left the door open, and stood motionless.

"Nice little write-up in *The Times*, Monsieur Howe," Lindy said, suspending her sunglasses from her *décolletage*. "Let's see some art."

Bo grabbed his keys and wallet from the table.

"No. I mean: here. Your art." Lindy let herself in.

"Why?"

"I do a little, uh … freelance. I've been told you are a worthy cause."

"Worthy? Who would call me 'worthy'?"

Without answering, Lindy began nosing around, flitting from the sketchpad with variations on Bo's own signature to the stack of Rorschachish canvases leaning against the wall to the tiny *Betty Spaghetty* doll trapped in *Silly String*. Then, while watching Bo's seemingly endless short bursts of eye footage projected onto the refrigerator, she boldly pressed play on his answering machine. After hearing the fawning phone messages, she snapped her fingers.

"Bingo!"

"EYE SUFFER, THEREFORE I ART" MADE A COMEDIC SPLASH at the first annual Brooklyn *Buñuel-a-thon*. Bo's messages became the soundtrack to a seamless unblinking-eye shot – digitally edited, thanks to Lindy's suggestion and a generous cheque from Teenie. The film received the blurb-to-end-all-blurbs from a cultish fanzine:

> With a nod to *Un Chien Andalou,* filmmaker Bo Howe offers this cutting commentary on our Pavlovian response to sudden celebrity. An arty indictment of culture – perhaps the most important four-and-a-half minutes of cinema this decade.

It was 2000, but Bo wasn't counting.

Soon after, the invitations began. He was asked to speak to a gathering of film students back at *Le Café Noir,* where his opener about his first great film playing on their bathroom dog reel was taken as a truly witty crack. Next, he was chosen for a *Thither Henceforth* group show – an opportunity that gave him such intense cold sweats and heart palpitations, he began double-dosing *UnDews* to little effect. And, most surprisingly of all, he received an invitation to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation's *UpstART* gala at *Soirée*, a nightclub so exclusive it had no door.

A MONTH LATER, BO AND TEENIE FOUND THEMSELVES IN *Soirée*'s stealth elevator, deposited into a darkened space illuminated with UV black light that made white objects glow. Bo spotted Lindy at the bar wearing a white pencil dress that shone like a high-wattage fluorescent tube. She waved. Teenie squeezed Bo's clammy hand.

"Yo, Bo!" Diptych said from behind them with a chummy karate-chop to Bo's shoulder. "I didn't think I'd see you here."

"And I didn't want to see you here," Bo said.

"Well, maybe I did put you on my guest list," Diptych said with another friendly chop-chop. "You're looking at one of the first *UpstART* grantees. Thirty thousand dollars: boom! And there's travel. And a publicity campaign. Can you believe it? Microsoft! I never thought –"

Just then the DJ filled the room with distorted guitar, and Bo wasn't sure if Diptych said that he never thought this would have been achievable when he was in school, or he never thought he'd be an artistic achiever who was so cool. Either way, Bo hated him.

"You kind of suck," Bo said.

Diptych laughed, leaning into Bo's ear. "Says you. But not *The New Yorker*."

" '*The*' *or* '*a*'?" Bo said in disbelief.

"Bo, darling. Teeeenie," Lindy said, joining them. She kissed Bo and Teenie once on each cheek and gave Diptych a quick kiss on the lips. Bo stared.

"We're dating, but I couldn't tell," Lindy said, twirling a stray strand from her updo.

"Why?" Bo said.

Lindy looked to Diptych, who seemed all too pleased with himself.

"When I heard your film made the MoMA *Short Fest*, I asked Lindy to find you," Diptych said. "I knew you'd never take any advice from me, but Lindy, well. Consider it my gift. You're on your way now, aren't you?"

"I meant why are you dating him?" Bo asked Lindy.

She swatted Bo playfully. Teenie squeezed his hand again, harder. In the cab, she'd given him a platinum ring inscribed "OK."

The dozens of Lemon Drop martinis throughout the room glowed like nuclear material. Bo felt sweat on his gelled hairline and closed his eyes, reminded of the yellow umbrellas in Christo's "The Umbrellas." That famed art installation had inspired "Bo's Balls" – 1,760 tennis balls tossed at students on the Creekskill quad for Bo's Senior Solo art project. The same afternoon, Rhys had to meet with the college president, apparently to discuss how much both parties wanted Bo to get a diploma and leave campus. After the meeting, Rhys told Bo, "Just remember what Picasso said: 'It took me a lifetime to paint like a child.' "

"That was Picasso's problem."

"Why don't you apply yourself? You should be able to pass *Art History* for God's sake."

"I'm making art history."

"With tennis balls. Right. You're missing the whole point of conceptualism."

"And you're missing the whole point of fatherhood."

That quieted Rhys down until graduation. Two weeks after commencement, Rhys gave Bo a large cheque and said he was leaving Bo's mother for Yuki, an associate editor at *Seventeen*.

At the *Soirée* soirée, Bo's eyes remained shut to offset the pounding. The yellow umbrellas dissolved into other images – yarn animals, disemboweled fruit, lines of *Matchbox* cars, trash, a cucumber, and a bucket – the art that had taunted him his whole life. What drove Rhys to love

everything from John Cage's no-note piano piece to Rachel Whiteread's installation of 100 spaces, but definitely not Bo's silent radio play? Why was art so arbitrary?

"Robert," Rhys said. "Robert."

Bo opened his eyes.

"Where have you been?" Rhys said, puffing a cigar. The smoke instantly made Bo nauseated. "I'm trying out cigars. Want one?"

Bo shook his head.

"I'll take one," Diptych said. He shared a handshake with Bo's father like an old friend, quickly lit up, and introduced Lindy and Teenie.

"You never return a message," Rhys said quietly to Bo.

"You told me to get a life, so."

"No, not a life – a job," Rhys said.

"I'm a 'quirky' filmmaker, according to *The Times*."

"I know," Rhys said.

"You saw?"

"Who do you think wrote it?" Rhys raised his eyebrows, enshrined in a smoky cloud.

Bo didn't answer. He felt faint, like needles were shooting into his neck. Rather than lean into Rhys, he lowered himself to his knees and then to his stomach, the grit of the floor on his cheek.

"Bo, it's Tina. I'm here," Teenie said, more for the others than for him. She adjusted her headband and spoke with unusual confidence to the crowd. "It will pass in about fifteen minutes."

"This has happened before?" Lindy asked.

"Of course. It's what Bo does. He's an artist," Teenie said.

She was his lover, not Lindy; she knew things.

"I've never seen anyone do this," Lindy said. "It's not like Antoni's 'Slumber' – it's more sudden and disruptive, but strangely soothing. His position on the floor: it's like a … Chagall."

"Bingo!" Diptych said, his perfect teeth super-white in the UV light.

"Robert, what is this?" Rhys said.

"An art attack!" Lindy said. "It's perfect for the group show."

Bo lay prone.

"Art is supposed to arrest you," Lindy told Rhys. "Well, Bo's work asks, 'What if it's the artist who suffers the arrest?' "

Rhys didn't laugh. Could Lindy be right? Maybe all art was mistakes and coaching. Maybe Jackson Pollack's first flick of paint at a canvas was the result of a strong cough. Or Jeff Koons got the idea to immortalize vacuums from the cleaning lady. Or Christo was simply a pasty man who craved shade. Bo's ticket was finally being punched. He felt his stress dissolve in a sudden surge.

In fact, he felt everything dissolve. He couldn't quite feel his left arm, his left leg tingled and his jaw felt slack. He might have taken ten *UnDews*. Or fifteen. And then – oh yes, in the cab! – he took five more upon receiving Teenie's OK-ring and her babbling about a June wedding. Twenty-plus FDA-unapproved pills bought in bulk on eBay. Perhaps he should've read the bold print, which warned of drowsiness and dizziness, or checked email for a manufacturer's recall like the one just issued:

With diets high in sugar and caffeine, *UnDew™ Stress Tabs* may pose a risk of fainting or, in one reported case, possible stroke, causing neurologic dysfunction, contralateral paralysis, and potential brain injury.

"Bo Howe is engaging audiences in a whole new way," Lindy said to Rhys and the onlookers. Some clapped. "He'll be at *Thither Henceforth Gallery* in January."

Bo felt drool in his mouth. Squinting, he saw Rhys's polished wingtips.

"Yuki has been having false contractions for days – I have to go, Robert. But I'll be at *Henceforth*, I promise. Maybe I can get a *Times* staffer to cover it."

Bo managed to raise his right thumb and Rhys hurried off, his smoke hanging in the air. The party continued. Teenie, Lindy, and Diptych stood silently.

"Bo and I are getting married," Teenie said finally. She looked down at her fiancé.

"Bing, bing! We have a winner!" Diptych said. He flagged the waiter for Lemon Drops.

"How fabulous," Lindy said, giving Teenie an air-hug. "Listen, you should hold the reception at MoMA during 'Phallic Art.' I have some sweet Mapplethorpe hors-d'œuvre ideas."

Bo told himself, like a mantra: *I suffer, therefore I art. I suffer, therefore I art.* As he slipped in and out of consciousness, he heard bits of conversation – Teenie and Lindy planning pornographic pigs-sans-blankets; Diptych chatting with a Microsoft executive about Bo's art – *Would it be right for that event in London?* – and then an urgent plea.

"Bo. Bo Howe! Can you hear me?" a voice said. It sounded like one of the EMTs. As light warmed his eyelids, Bo sensed the enormity of this attack.

It was the opportunity of a lifetime.

He'd stumbled – collapsed, in fact – into a singular artistic statement. Though his muscles couldn't form a smile, he was euphoric. He had a piece for *Thither Henceforth*. Lindy could book the tour. Teenie could bankroll him. Rhys could write reviews. Thanks to a timely overdose, Bo would create a sensation with this artful stupor.

Now if only he could snap out of it, he could break through.

CECILIA STUART

Every Sunday she watches Vatican mass online

On nights when it rains, she is oddly comforted by the view of the football field. She can see it from where she usually sits. She watches the field and picks over her ribs. She repents. When it thunderstorms, she worries about lightning. She thinks she saw lightning just a minute ago. Her sister's friend's aunt was struck by lightning while talking on the phone. She tries to focus. She picks at the skin on her lips. She is so insecure before the rain. She doesn't deserve the rain. She is so confessional. She regrets flash photography and fluorescent lighting. She does not regret crochet hooks. She is still learning how to crochet. She crochets scarves for her front lawn, as an apology. When it rains, she feels sorrier than usual. Every Sunday she watches Vatican mass online.

ROBERT BOATES

Mayday

Intent follows the kiss and the bullet.
I remember too much, though not everything.
It is impossible to retain each moment.
The fatigued mind cannot retire and must
improvise. Call it daydreaming, howling
at the moon. I was full of shrapnel
from a lost war. I couldn't surrender
my rage. It consumed me. I became
someone else: a stranger to love,
invisibly damaged. A broken record
repeating a word, a phrase, an emotion,
an intention. *Happiness is a warm gun.*

MARK BELAIR

Filings

Gritty
iron filings
swirl in the magnetized tunnel
of my sleep
in what seems
a chaos
of attraction and repulsion
that I slowly dream to see
forms instead
one hologram, a strange,
ballooning, undulating, metal-particle
self-portrait that, as waking nears,
whirls up and away
as if detecting
I'm too worn down
to face up
to the gritty truth
I must already know
yet don't.

The puddle

Spare raindrops
plop onto a puddle, each
drop made visible only through
the varying circles of displaced water
each creates, all the radiating rings overlapping
and intertwining, a responsive surface on which an abstract
artist could drip notions of singleness, linking, scattering, and vanishing
beneath which would lurk, as always,
his own reflected face.

MARK BELAIR

Change of season

Sensing that the cold
has diminished to cool, you
lift a sticky window
of the room you've been
wintering in, the room
you've grown accustomed to – silent, dusty, overheated –
and what you notice
after the rush of bracing air
are everyday sounds – a barking dog,
quiet birds, a passing car – that make you
ponder the everyday exclusions
of yet another
season of darkness endured.

JOHN ZEDOLIK

Traveller's prayer

Saint Christopher the Dog-Headed

(even if an Eastern misunderstanding
of *Canineus* for *Cananeus*)*

protect me with your sharp teeth,
claws/paws, and impassioned bark

on the lone road where certainly
your cynocephalian sanctity

will ward off intruders to my, our land,
our always rushing grey home
that you will keep immaculate and intact.

I will tape fluorescent pasteboard signs
on the rear windows, passenger and driver side –

"Beware of Holy Dog Man" –

who runs alongside my machine,
tongue lolling like the sacred oriflamme,
in the ever-testing interstate wind.

**Found in Wikipedia. Accessed 4 November 2017.*

MARGARET WATSON

Stalking

I NEVER IMAGINED I'D HAVE A STALKER, not that it's something you aspire to. And it wasn't scary, or, I should say, *he* wasn't scary. It was just that, all of a sudden, he was everywhere I went.

We didn't say hello if we passed each other on the sidewalk or stood in the same line-up at the grocery store, but if I saw him somewhere else, downtown or in the Beaches, say, I would have recognized him as someone from the neighbourhood. He had probably lived one or two streets over for years, long enough to become another vaguely familiar face, nothing more.

It was a weekday morning when he eased his way to the back of the streetcar where I was sitting. "Sorry. Sorry," he repeated, squeezing past the people standing in the aisle until he reached the last empty seat. When he noticed me across from him, he sat up a little straighter and put his phone away. "Oh," he said. "You're not on your bicycle today."

Now, it's true that I almost always cycle to work, but did he watch me from the streetcar window? I didn't ask. Instead, I tried to be friendly, the way you are in the neighbourhood with a neighbour, even if you don't know them. I recounted the series of events that resulted in the streetcar ride – the broken glass on the pavement the day before, the flat tire discovered that morning, and me with no spare inner tube. To my own ears, I said too much, sounded too familiar, as though telling my life story to a complete stranger. I'm not usually that gregarious.

We introduced ourselves. Tim. Karen.

"I've often wondered how you do it, Karen, cycling every day in rush hour. In the snow, now in the rain half the time. I don't think I could."

"It's not that bad. If I leave home early, I miss the worst of the traffic. You just have to pay attention, stay focused," I said.

"I'm a weekend warrior myself. Like to get out there on a Saturday or Sunday, hit the trails along the waterfront or up the Don Valley. Forty or fifty K is about right. I take my son with me sometimes, give him a good workout."

He mentioned a son. A quick glance at the hand holding a brown paper bag. No wedding ring. A pink shirt was visible from under his light coat. Well, pink doesn't mean anything these days.

"But cycling to work in rush hour?" Tim asked. "That would be a different proposition altogether. Every morning, every evening, dodging car doors, avoiding angry drivers … ." There was a hint of appraisal in the attention he paid to me as he spoke. I hoped he hadn't noticed me looking at his ring finger.

"Really, it's not that bad." I looked down at his shoes, polished and shining. But his socks were black, conservative. Not gay, then. I pulled at my hem, newly aware that my outfit was mismatched, a skirt over leggings, put together without much thought after I stowed my bicycle back in the shed.

"My favourite, though," Tim said, "my favourite is drivers who don't signal until they're in the middle of a turn. Don't they know what a signal is for? Is everyone else supposed to read their minds?"

I described a recent encounter with a cyclist who was coming towards me in the bike lane, the excuse he gave me for going the wrong way: "It's only for a couple of blocks." It struck Tim as funny, made him laugh, displaying unnaturally white teeth. I giggled in response and to my dismay I sounded like a girl, a woman half my age.

We both got off at Yonge Street. I had a quick walk from there, across the street and a little north, while Tim took his nice haircut and polished shoes down into the subway.

He is not my type, I thought. Not that I had a type. But when I did have a type, they were artists and musicians and – God help me – actors. They most definitely did not carry their lunch in a brown paper bag or polish their shoes or whiten their teeth or refer to themselves as a "weekend warrior."

Once I replaced my inner tube and was cycling to work again, the day after and the day after that, I wondered occasionally if my stalker was looking out the window of one of the streetcars that passed. Even stopped behind the open back doors as passengers got on and off, I took care not to look up to see if I were being watched.

IT WAS A SUNDAY AFTERNOON AND I WAS in my bedroom sorting the white laundry, folding pillow cases and tea towels and underwear. My windows were open to the mild weather and through the Venetian slats I saw my stalker across the street with a teenager, the son both taller and thicker than his father. They were walking their bicycles, helmets dangling from handlebars. The father did all the talking while the boy stared at his feet, made a show of paying no attention. Even without being able to hear what was being said, it was obvious what kind of conversation they were having.

Sitting down to match the socks, I watched until they moved out of sight. He had told me he had a son, that they went cycling together, and so it was. A teenager.

I had never wanted children, that was the truth. And Russell agreed, though I always suspected it was an impersonal agreement on his part, to do with the future of the planet. That it had less to do with what we would have been like as parents or whether we saw our own relationship as complete without children. And then, our last year together – we didn't know it was our last year, but that's what it was – after a short vacation in Cuba, with beaches and mojitos and music and dancing, back in Toronto after that. Well, my period was never late, never, but we'd been casual with birth control on our holiday, careless once or twice. Twice if I'm honest.

I remembered rechecking the dates and paying attention to my body like never before. What would being pregnant feel like? I picked a day on the calendar, seven days out, and told myself that when that day came I would buy a drug store pregnancy test and know for sure. But my period came first, shy of two weeks late. There was more blood, more pain than usual, waves of deep cramps, low in my back. I suffered with it. And I didn't tell Russell.

Looking up from the socks, scanning the tops of hydro poles and the trees in bud, I searched for the robin that I could hear singing.

A fog descended after the Cuban vacation, after my period came, unlike any fog I'd ever experienced. It was still winter and then it was spring and still the fog was everywhere I went – for a walk in the park, to see a movie, at home, at work. It was between Russell and me at breakfast, at dinner, in bed. It surrounded me but I trudged through it, tried to see it for what it was – a cloud

close to the ground, that's all, nothing a little time and sunshine wouldn't burn off. Russell had no patience with my analogies. That's the problem, if it's only the two of you, there can't be any fog.

It had been ages since I felt something like nostalgia at the sight of a little girl, six or seven years old, long hair braided or in pigtails, holding her mother's hand as they walked along, chatting. Or a little boy, dressed up for a special occasion – a piano recital or grade school graduation – awkward in pressed pants and white shirt, hair combed and parted, his mother full of pride as though to say, "I made this."

Static hissed as I pulled a sock from a pillowcase. There was no one else to watch on the street below, no fathers with teenage sons, no mothers with their young adult daughters.

I saw my stalker now and then over the next few weeks, waiting at a bus stop once, going in the front door of a house on Hastings Street another time.

A DIFFERENT WEEKEND, A SATURDAY, AND THE local library was bustling as it neared closing time. Waiting up for an electronic scanner, I studied the back of the man's head in the line ahead of me, his hair askew, wet with perspiration, flattened here and sticking up there. A bicycle helmet hung from the crook of an arm. My stalker turned around and almost bumped into me before I could react.

"Sorry," he said and then he saw that it was me, was pleased that it was me. He remembered my name, of course he did. Curious, he examined my book, the title something about a hedgehog.

"It's all the rage with the book clubs," I said and likewise examined the handful of DVDs he held, action titles I didn't recognize.

"I think I must be the last person in the western world without Netflix," he said.

"That can't be true, not with all the DVDs the library still carries."

"You're right." He looked straight at me, bold and smiling. He didn't seem to mind that I had corrected him. "And before you ask about my choice in movies … . These are to watch with my son. We've only got one night during the week and every other weekend to bond. That's not much time and there's a lot to fit in." He unzipped his backpack to store the DVDs away.

"I think I saw you and your son one day. With your bicycles."

"Hunter." It took me a moment to realize that Tim had volunteered his son's name. "That would have been a couple of weeks ago. I took him along the lake, all the way to the Humber River and back. He wouldn't go with me today. Said he never wants to cycle with me again." Tim laughed. "I'm sure he'll change his mind. He just needs to learn how to use his gears properly. But there's no telling him. Teenagers, you know?"

I nodded, knowing all about gears and even teenagers. Everyone knows what teenagers can be like, it's no mystery. I took a step towards the scanner.

"Do you have time to get a coffee?" Tim asked.

The question caught me by surprise. It was my fault, though. I shouldn't have mentioned his son, implied an interest.

"Oh, no. Thanks, though. But I've really got to get home. Put these groceries in the fridge. Fish." I lifted the enviro-bag I was carrying, where the fresh food was.

Tim's eyes widened. It was a quizzical look, fleeting, easily missed. "Maybe another time, then. I should get going, too. Hunter will be waiting for me. If his mother calls him, finds out I've abandoned him on a Saturday afternoon, I'll be sure to hear about it."

He clacked towards the door in cycling shoes, the kind that lock into the pedals, an undignified sound. I couldn't help noticing the bright yellow jacket, how well it fit across his shoulders, and the black lycra shorts, the backs of his legs muscled.

My book was soon checked out, but I stayed nearby and scanned a shelf of new and recommended releases, the titles of books I didn't want to read. Behind me, a young Asian woman, clutching a red passport, was trying to secure a library card. It is too late in the afternoon for a cup of coffee anyway, I thought.

When I was sure it would be safe for me to go, I headed to the exit and stopped to watch my stalker through the glass doors, the quick glance he made over his left shoulder to check for traffic before he cycled away.

WHEN I WAS FIRST ON MY OWN, AFTER RUSSELL, I had vowed never to spend an entire weekend alone. It was a pledge not to wallow in self-pity, to do what I could to keep the fog at a distance. And so it continued. I made arrangements with friends, weeks in advance, for movies and plays and concerts, for dinners in the better restaurants and a glass of wine or two. Never more than two. At work on Monday mornings, I always had some outing or activity to mention if people asked – as people do, out of sheer politeness. I never had to say, "Oh, I just had a quiet weekend."

Yet, as luck would have it, plans to see a movie with my sister fell apart late in the week and this would be one of those "quiet weekends." But that was okay. I even welcomed the time to myself, time to make a nice dinner, read the novel for my book club, listen to music.

That evening, I propped the hedgehog open on my kitchen counter while I ate my dinner of Arctic Char, kale and quinoa salad and sipped from a glass of white wine. I settled in, but the hum from the refrigerator disturbed my reading. I didn't get very far before dinner was over and I was carrying my plate and cutlery to the sink. The few dirty dishes could have waited until the next day, but I always keep a tidy kitchen. Dishes done, I topped up my glass of wine and took it into the living room. Drawing the curtains, that nightly ritual, adjusting the folds so that they spread evenly across the window, I was reminded of other evenings, pulling the drapes against the fog, willing it to stay outside.

"Fish." How stupid was that? It was only a cup of coffee, it was not as though he asked me to marry him.

A song came on the radio just then, a song about troubles, how they would soon be over. It was an old tune and the singer sounded as though he had known nothing but the blues his entire life. There was the memory of sorrow in every note, loneliness transformed into art. I turned the radio off.

The floor boards creaked under the faded linoleum as I returned to the kitchen. I picked up my library book, scanned the back cover without seeing the words, and put it down again. Remembered Tim turning and clacking his way through the library doors. I had intended to boil water for tea, but instead I poured more wine. The fridge hummed insistently. Had it always been that loud?

I wandered back to the front of the house, ran my hand over the dining room table, smoothed out imaginary wrinkles in the table cloth. Then perched on the couch, television on, flipping up and down through all the numbers on the remote control. I abandoned the effort, returned to my wandering. Climbed the stairs with care, trying not to spill my drink. In the spare room, I checked email and Facebook, played spider solitaire mindlessly, maddeningly, until my glass was empty.

Downstairs again, I contemplated the faded walls in the hallway, wondered whether to touch-up or repaint, whether to stick with taupe or choose a different colour, a real colour, when I found myself paused before the mirror. A flattering mirror, too, in my dark hallway, with a low-watt bulb in the fixture overhead. Nothing like the unforgiving mirrors in public washrooms or department store change rooms.

I considered my reflection, turned my face slightly to what I always imagine is my best side. What did my stalker see? Maybe he assumed I was younger than my 51 years, that was possible. I was as fit as he was, slender for my age, strong from exercise. I ran a hand through hair that was thinner than it used to be, but not so anyone else would notice. It was a good cut; expensive blonde highlights disguised the grey. I was never exactly pretty, but attractive, people told me so. It was still true, I thought.

Maybe that's who he saw, an attractive woman, a younger, adventurous woman. Someone he spied from his seat on the streetcar, who would ride a bicycle in rush hour, alert to U-turns and opening car doors. A fearless woman. In fact, more like the woman I used to be.

Looking in the mirror more closely, damn the light, with my fingers I traced the lines that drew my mouth down in seeming consternation.

Too much self-reflection couldn't be good for you – I had always believed that. Even through the worst of the fog before Russell left, after Russell left, I believed it then, too. The more you poke and prod and examine and analyse, your flaws are all you see, all you think anyone else can see. Better to look away, leave them alone.

But now I stared at my unsmiling, worried face in the dim light, and I didn't shy away. What was the matter with me? It wasn't a rhetorical question. It deserved an answer. But why should anything be the matter? Was it wrong to make so many plans, to fill my evenings and weekends and vacations, account for every hour, anticipate every contingency? No, I refused to believe all that effort was in error. It was planning that brought me out of the fog, it brought me here.

To where I ran from a cup of coffee.

Of course men had been interested after Russell left, right away they were interested. It was surprising, almost shocking. It was definitely too soon. So I learned to avoid, discourage, dissuade or, if none of that worked, to turn down any offer, until the interest dwindled and the offers disappeared. That is, until my stalker showed up.

I didn't know what he saw, but I knew what I saw. I tried not to flinch.

I replayed our conversation, made it turn out differently. What were those stupid things I had said about book clubs and DVDs? I took that out. When Tim suggested coffee, I didn't mention fish. I pictured the coffee shop instead, with the mismatched tables and chairs, amateur art work on the walls, all broad strokes and bright colours. He would tell me what he did for a living. He might

be a lawyer of some sort, or something less defined, to do with finance or business. And he would tell me about his son, Hunter. Would he say very much about Hunter's mother? I couldn't decide. Either way, I would be interested but not over-eager. I would mention an ex once or twice – Russell, though not by name – enough to make it clear that it was ancient history. Then when our coffees were finished, one of us would say we should go for a bike ride someday. We would exchange phone numbers or email addresses.

I saw again his expression as I turned down the cup of coffee, lifting my grocery bag in explanation. His widening eyes. He must have thought I was an idiot. I was an idiot. And now this was worse than unflinching: it was pathetic.

Outside my front door, a car slowed for a speed bump and accelerated again, reminding me of the world outside. It wasn't too late in the evening for a walk and the fresh air would help put an end to my pointless brooding. I reached for my shoes as I went to sit down, almost missing the hallway chair but catching myself in time, before I landed on the floor, before my glass went flying. On top of being stupid, I was drunk.

Back in the kitchen, I emptied the last of the wine into my glass and wiped the drops from the counter, licking my fingertips. "Fish." I said it out loud. The fridge was silent.

I WAS GLAD TO BE BACK AT WORK ON MONDAY, glad to leave the quiet weekend behind. It was a productive day for the most part. As it neared an end, I was still concentrating, my eyes fixed on the computer monitor, revisiting a sentence, deleting and retyping words. I read the paragraph again, asked myself if it was better than it had been or only different. Vicky wanted this report by end of day, but she had gone home and it was not quite ready yet. I was not ready yet, to send it off.

At the next cubicle, Morgan packed her desk away for the night. We exchanged a few words as she put on running shoes for the walk to the GO station and a train to Oakville. Once she left, I was alone in the department, the only person left on the floor.

I had started staying late at the office when my marriage was over, when Russell said he was going but hadn't left yet. Five o'clock, six o'clock would come and everyone else would be gone and I would stay on. I did some of my best work during those late afternoons, avoiding home and whatever it was that my marriage was turning into. The fog seemed less here. And I remembered thinking, he can't touch this, what I am good at, who I am.

He did, though, in the end. Or his leaving did.

A cleaner was making her rounds, emptying bins and running the dust-buster here and there, on and off, haphazardly. I turned to look out the window behind my desk, the view through reinforced glass of construction cranes, motionless at the end of the day. An airplane descended towards the island airport, lost to sight before it reached the runway.

I admitted to myself that I was not getting more work done. I was thinking of Russell, how it was when he left, and then of my stalker, but no amount of reimagining would make the scene in the library end differently.

I logged off and pulled bicycle shorts on underneath my skirt. I didn't want to go straight home to my evening routine of preparing for the next workday. Instead, I grabbed a bag of granola from

my bottom drawer and decided to cycle to the west end, to meander the one-way streets where the houses are set behind big oaks and maples and chestnut trees in bloom. I would see the lights come on to reveal the lives being lived inside. And I wouldn't think about that cup of coffee, which was already the most regretted cup of coffee that was never brewed, never poured, never drunk. Enough already.

IT'S ALMOST DARK ENOUGH TO DISGUISE THE DIRTY windows of vacant store fronts as I near home. My knees are making themselves felt, a recent complaint about the long ride, my knees that never used to bother me.

A siren screams. I'm coming up to my local fire station, where I am used to encountering the trucks as they pull out onto the street before racing off. But the sirens stop, and then I see the flashing lights. The truck is stopped in the street up ahead.

It would have been quicker for the firefighters to walk over, I think. But it's a tricky spot, treacherous even. I've often thought so. Cars pick up speed coming down the hill, under the railroad tracks, and a red light at the intersection always surprises them. Whatever's happened, the fire truck will need to be visible, stop right in the road, and control the traffic until the police arrive.

Cars have pulled over, and a few people are getting out of their vehicles, already talking on cell phones. In the confusion, it's not clear who has been in an accident.

Then I see the bicycle lying mangled against the curb and the cyclist on the pavement between the streetcar tracks, the bright yellow, zippered jacket. I'm not sure what I've done with my own bicycle – have I let it fall? But I hear my heart beating faster than my feet hitting the pavement as I rush past drivers standing at their open car doors, people on the sidewalk, their voices combined in a chorus of concern.

The firefighters haven't put on all their gear; without their jackets you can see the suspenders that hold up their bulky pants. It seems absurd. But one of them is kneeling on the pavement, bent over, checking for vital signs. My stalker's eyes are closed, his body still, as the flashing red lights reflect off his pale face. Other firefighters stand in a circle. "Miss," one says. "Please stay back."

"But I know him." I gasp for air. "It's Tim. Is he going to be all right?"

MARGARET C. HUGHES

Itch

My brother Jack emails me this story
from *The New Yorker*
about a woman with a mysterious itch.
One night she picked through her skull
to her brain.
I've had it sitting open in a tab
since who knows when.
Once I would've devoured an article like that,
downed it in seconds.
But since fourteen
I've been on antihistamines,
which is to say I don't read much anymore.

Praise links.
Praise the hyperactive minds
that click and send me
searching after the way I used to be.
I remember when I read the newspaper,
secretively, like a sex book.
I remember reading every online article
I could find about gay marriage.
I remember hiding Eragon under my bed
whenever someone passed my door,
coveting it, scorning it.
I'm tired now.
The headlines don't draw me in, anymore.
Jack still reads every letter to the editor.
Sometimes, to stay awake in class, I lust.
While someone else decodes the texts of the world,
reveals and revels in the learning I lusted for once,
I think, praise leather,
of taking the whole of you in my mouth,
of the trails of my fingernails
on your chest. Red scrollwork.
Praise the one I click with.

I remember I once wanted
to contain all worldly knowledge.
Or, I wanted to contain the possibility;
I wanted there always to be one more fact.
Now, I only want to want it.
"Don't read before bed," my brother warned me
in the subject line, or I'd be itching all night.
Is this contentment?
All night in bed you'd send me the fantasy
of the fantasy of fulfillment,
send me a touching
requiem for the hole
in the head. Fill me up.
Praise kinks.

MARGARET C. HUGHES

Dream

She has a pair of sneakers with *Dream* monogrammed on the heels.
The only part I remember of the Freud I read, a girl he's psychoanalyzing
dreams about candlesticks on a table, and Freud says it's really about penises.
In *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, they pronounce Freud "Frood."

I don't need dream interpretation to tell me what this means:
I dream we're standing alone in the physics room and she smiles at me.
In dreams time curves, elongates, and seconds become minutes,
minutes months and years.

Her lips curve, eyes close, the smile that takes a century,
and takes a century to forget.

In dreams a smile is the Google search of a smile:
The smile in the physics room is all her smiles
from the past seven years, the smile I've been searching for.

I wake up and my stomach's curved,
inverted, trying to turn itself inside out.
So we are Freud's inverts.
So that search is ended. I'll take the analysis,
since the dreamer watches the *Dreamer*
always walking away now, the back of her shoes flashing:
only in your *Dreams*.

DAN WIENCEK

Loose ends

Looking for the expired
passport I come upon

a sprig of grey hairs
pulled from the drain to
blot a birthday-party napkin

the dog-eared tattoo, *qi*
in bamboo brush, gotten
for all the wrong reasons

and under the pillow
my baby teeth given back
to me, polished stones
daintily rattling

my mouth's history in
neat procession, tiny
accomplices of words –

how light they are, free from
the burdens of chewing,
of surviving

a little boy's
clumsy red toothbrush

TREVOR ABES

New directions in essays

LAYLA ROSENBERG, OUR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE representative who sasses you when she likes you, greets a woman in a wool cap fixated on a photo of our Jewish CEO. The woman declares, "I am just fine. They are weak. They should stop complaining about camps and move on. How. Are. You?" Having married into Judaism, Layla simmers, the desire to exorcise her from evil outweighing what she could reasonably be expected to achieve by chastising her out the door.

Layla's work is about transgressing her most firmly held beliefs as a form of self-refreshment. In this case, from the part of her that demands intolerance of stupidity to the small but perennial part that's interested in caring for this woman in the name of sharing a planet together. Once there, she finds it easier to ditch the high and mighty for a meeting among equals.

With all the tension-dissolving sappiness of a weapons-grade Hallmark card, Layla answers, "I'm ... wondering if you're OK. Is there anything I can do for you?" This leads to a conversation that begins with an envelope from the back office for the woman's crumpled-up bills and a shared tendency to wear wool caps indoors regardless of weather and in defiance of judgement by misperceived hipster association. It ends, consent having been granted, with a photo of them both, which serves as the first in Layla's *Selfies with People I Disagree with.*

Subsequent photos include Sylvie Beauregard, a customer who reamed Layla out for not having an ingratiating enough smile; Hans Zhugh, a catcaller leaning on a 7-11 who compulsively rubbed his potbelly through his baseball jersey and boasted about taking the subway on his job as a bike courier; and Clifford Maybelene, an uncle she finally forgave for accepting money from her mother when she was sick and didn't have her wits about her to pay for a pickup truck his family did not need.

JACK FREEMAN

Outlier

In the world he left, the walkway
wasn't matted by lichen. Crows atop
the powerline couldn't speak in psalms.
Nor the clouds retract rain like a miracle
that washed oil from the street.
                                He counts
four door sedans leaving the department store.
Dents and parking lot nicks. Nine dozen
bloodshot eyes, two dozen bruises. Above,
the desert front meets the gulf stream.
Raindrops guide him skyward. Only
his eyes – others trace traffic lanes
with curses and pop records. Never again,
he hoped wildly, and a blackbird drank
the rainbow from the puddle at his feet.
Intuition, the bodied lie.
                                By nighttime
the soles of his sneakers get slick. Green
with sidewalk growth. He flicks a cigarette
toward the streetlamp's reflection, redacting
its false calm. He spits. The dream lands
just left of Venus. Between ballads
he steps from puddle to pavement.
The birds mutter commandments in their
delusion. The sky retrieves its outpourings.

SOFIA VEDECHKINA

Ceremonial

The smell of stale cigarettes
When it is stuffy and humid inside
Reminds me of a cold winter
Spent away from home
In the northeast.

Only nine years old,
I visited the Red Square,
With Lenin in his mausoleum
Somewhere up above.
Twinkling lights and soft
Chatter,
Our pictures were taken beside evergreens.

Another day
Grey like all the cars around me and
The December snow like
A puddle on the ground,
I stepped to the edge of the sidewalk,
My father by my side.
Splash –
A car passed me by and then
I was drenched.

The thirty-first
I drank a flute of champagne,
And locked myself inside the bathroom
At my aunt and uncle's.
I almost broke their radio –
Funny
How we can't seem to handle silence.
I was hysterical,
As if I'd never thought a night
Could be so amusing.

For two weeks
We stayed at my grandparents' small apartment:
A sad defeat
When they went to smoke on the balcony
Morning, noon, and night.
I woke up late
And watched cartoons in the small living room,
Barely understanding
What all the laughter was about.

To breathe
Perhaps it is enough
To stop –
To watch
The afternoon sway of trees
Melt like soft butter

In time with your faithful breath.

SOFIA VEDECHKINA

Walnuts

Walnuts do not grow as peanuts do,
In the ground and dirt,
Far from the sun.
They grow on trees;
I don't know how, but I know they do,
They hang in their plump green shells
Until they are ripe,
When their entrails
Are as wrinkled as old bodies are.
Only then are they cracked open –
Consumed, bitter and rich and liable
To get stuck under your fingernails,
The dust made up of their oily and tangy remains
Like ashes of the deceased.

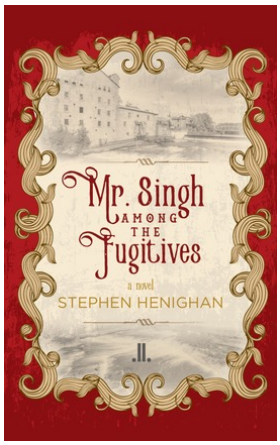
I've noticed there is a presence in everything –
This kernel of what is to come.
When the walnuts ripen
As they fall or are picked from their trees
In the autumn months of every year,
I can sense it –
It is like a reminder, simple and subtle,
That there is an eventual passing away

Of all things.

Assumed cultures

Mr. Singh Among the Fugitives
Stephen Henighan
Linda Leith Publishing, 204 pp.

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO READ STEPHEN HENIGHAN'S *Mr. Singh Among the Fugitives* except in relation to questions of cultural appropriation and the politics of literature in Canada, especially given recent conversations (perhaps too polite a word?) around the Joseph Boyden and Hal Niedzviecki controversies.



The central character, Mr Singh, is born in India into a Hindu family, but he takes on several other identities over the course of the novel. He first flirts with the fantasy of being an English squire, but when this proves impossible he dons a turban and allows people to believe him a Sikh. After the life he builds around that identity collapses, he goes further still, redefining his nationality (West Indian), his religion (Methodist), and even his sexual orientation (homosexual).

If all this wasn't enough to trigger the standard debates about cultural appropriation (by now almost reflexive in Canadian literary circles), there's also the fact that the book is written by an author who occupies none of the various identities assumed by Mr Singh. Henighan is neither Hindu nor Sikh, neither Indian nor West Indian. He is not (at least to my knowledge) homosexual.

Rather, he was born in Germany, emigrated to Canada when he was five years old, grew up in rural Eastern Ontario, studied in England, Colombia, Romania, and Germany, worked in Latin America, and now translates literature from Spanish, Portuguese and Romanian. If you're keeping track here, this means that the author writing Mr Singh occupies almost none of the various identities that his character performs.

This extreme degree of appropriation satirizes Canadian literary culture as a response to the criticism Henighan experienced with his previous novel, *The Path of the Jaguar*, in which he took on the voice of Amparo, an Indigenous Mayan woman. In an interview with Brad de Roo for *Carte Blanche* magazine,* Henighan said, "I felt I was being censored for being a gringo man who found it natural to write about a Mayan woman. Since the only effective response to tyranny is laughter, I decided to write a short story satirizing the abuses of multiculturalism in the Canadian arts scene." This story would become *Mr. Singh Among the Fugitives*.

From its very inception, the novel adopts the controversial perspective that cultural appropriation should not only be tolerated but encouraged. "Personally," Henighan told de Roo, "I'm a big supporter of cultural appropriation. That's how cultures grow and change and diversify and open their minds." Later in the same interview he went on to say, "We need more cultural appropriation here in Canada if we're to have any hope of expressing the complexities of our reality."

* Roo, Brad. "Among the Fugitives: An Interview with Stephen Henighan." *Carte Blanche*. March 29, 2017. http://carte-blanche.org/among-fugitives-interview-stephen-henighan/

† Hill, Jeremy Luke. "Imaginative Investment and Writing Across Cultures: An Interview with Stephen Henighan." *FreeFall* 26.3 (Fall/Winter 2016): 71-80.

Henighan explained these ideas with a little more nuance in an interview I conducted with him for *FreeFall* in 2016,† just after *The Path of the Jaguar* had been released. "I think that all of us have a range of stories we can tell," he said, "and they're not necessarily dictated by pigmentation or where we're from. They're more dictated by imaginative capacity as it intersects with experience." When I followed up on the phrase "imaginative capacity," he said, "I think the key is to get away from the labels, to get away from defining everybody by pigmentation or supposed cultural group, and to look at the intersection between imagination and experience and see what that enables a particular writer to do."

This line of argument has its merits, particularly to the degree that it affirms the capacity of writers from marginalized communities to take on and speak through the voices of those who occupy places of privilege, but also in the more general sense that writing only from one's exact cultural perspective would produce books that are both tediously homogeneous and grossly misrepresentative of the diversity in our communities. As Henighan put it in our interview, "If we can't write from the perspectives of people who are different from us, then, in the tossed-salad societies we live in, we can't write anything at all."

IF IT ISN'T HELPFUL, HOWEVER, TO INSIST that writers should speak exclusively from their own very limited cultural positions, it remains true that speaking from other cultural positions is always fundamentally fraught with difficulty and risk. It isn't merely the risk of misrepresentation (since all writing is misrepresentation as such). It's the risk of not doing justice to the voice the writer assumes, the risk of doing that voice an injustice, particularly when the cultural positions in question are already involved (historically or currently or both) in deep structures of injustice.

The problem with Mr Singh is that he never manages to signal these complexities. His story raises the question of cultural appropriation unavoidably but offers little toward an understanding of how it might be addressed. He pokes fun at Canadian society's need to be superficially multicultural but doesn't go very far toward articulating how different cultures might more productively speak to, of, and through each other. To use Henighan's own language, Mr Singh doesn't explore other cultures in order to change, diversify, or open up his mind. He doesn't wear a turban as an act of imaginative capacity. He doesn't pretend to be West Indian to look at the intersection between imagination and experience.

Far from it. Mr Singh fumbles his way through several sets of cultural appropriation simply because it's convenient for him. He wears the turban and allows people to think him a Sikh because it enhances his status and his sex life. "Professors who had ignored me," he says, "now treated me with cautious deference. My classmates stared. Many of these stares – particularly female stares – were stoked by curiosity." He maintains the role of a Sikh when working as a lawyer because it gains him access to powerful friends. He discards that identity in exchange for that of a West Indian Methodist only in order to escape the mess he makes of his law career.

At no point here is Mr Sing engaged in expressing the complexities of the cultural reality that Henighan mentions, unless (and this is possible, I suppose) that cultural reality mostly involves trying to get laid, hobnobbing with powerful people, and making piles of money without really working for it. Mr Singh's appropriation of other cultural positions is always a matter of self-interest. It provides opportunity for humour (as literary and political elites fall over themselves to use his minority cultural status to their own advantage), but it provides little insight into how we are to engage the problem of cultural appropriation meaningfully.

This is in sharp contrast to Amparo in *The Path of the Jaguar*, who is represented as having to negotiate exactly these kinds of issues. She struggles with how to empower herself through the language and education of the colonizer while maintaining the power of her traditional language and culture. She is torn between her commitment to the village where she was born and the economic forces that are pulling her family across foreign borders. Whether Henighan represents her culture and struggle accurately I don't have the knowledge to say, but he at least represents them with empathy and respect, with complexity and depth. In other words, he strives to do them justice.

The same is not true with Mr Singh. His character often seems a convenience, created simply to serve the book's satire. All his assumed cultures are handily foreign enough to serve the plot but sufficiently distanced from current controversies to avoid obvious offence. They are about as meaningful to the story as the turban that Mr Singh takes on and off. There's no real exploration of his culture or its relationship to the cultural complexities that make up contemporary Canada, except perhaps through the doubtful idea that his otherness gains him a measure of sexual desirability, professional advancement, and social prestige.

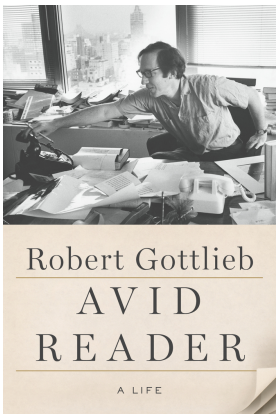
If what is necessary is a thoughtful and nuanced conversation about how writers might best engage the cultural complexities of Canadian society, Mr Singh doesn't take us very far in that direction. It's hard for us to sympathize with him, there's not much to learn from him, and in the end, when the life he's built has fallen apart, we're merely left feeling that he probably got what he deserved.

— Jeremy Luke Hill

Catch-23

Avid Reader: A Life
Robert Gottlieb
Farrar, Straus and Giroux
337 pp

THE EAGERNESS ROBERT GOTTLIEB CLAIMS for himself in the very title of his memoir guided more than simply his reading – it defined his entire, largely happy life. When, indeed, in the final pages, he seeks to account, one would say gratefully, for his unusually consistent success, he adduces not only the luck that befell him along the way but also the energy he'd been endowed with from the start:



> Work is my natural state of being … working and reading. [...] [M]y greatest piece of luck was stumbling into the right occupation at the right moment. And in the right places, so that none of my energy was ever deflected from the work itself into politicking or rivalries. [...] Or maybe my *greatest* piece of luck was the boundless energy I seemed always to have at my disposal.

Why, he goes on to ask, did he attempt to "cram" so much in? (He's now 87.) From the plays he directed as a student at Cambridge to the plastic handbags he collected and catalogued as a middle-aged obsessive, everything had to be, he says, "professionalized." Was it, this consuming busyness, a means of warding off depression, to which he was also prone?

The beneficiary of years of analysis, Gottlieb would surely agree that another word for such energy is "drive," a somewhat deeper compulsion to be, among the living, the *livingest*, to fill every moment with life (one's own, principally, if not exclusively). In describing his relations with others, he often remarks upon the effect his (as he characterizes it) showy, splashy, ebullient personality may have had and notes, with some surprise, the different versions of himself that they remember.

Michael Korda, for instance, in his own memoir, *Another Life*, records that Gottlieb "had a need to dominate which was hidden deeply, even unconsciously, beneath [his] need to see [him]self as someone totally without ambition, interested only in fulfilling responsibilities and being collegial." Although the observation is hardly damning (and the object of it concedes that Korda "may have had a point"), it does alert the reader to the possibility of a contrary reading, a portrait a little more *oscuro* than *chiaro* that Gottlieb, for all his generosity, seems incapable of giving.

He tries, of course. He makes it clear that whatever "flukes" there may have been, however easily circumstances may have turned to his advantage, none of that would have mattered had he not worked so hard, harder, in fact, than anybody else. (Except, as we learn somewhat belatedly, his ever disapproving father.)

IT WAS LIONEL TRILLING'S CONNECTION WITH Basil Willey that got Gottlieb into Cambridge. But it was he who made a name for himself there by directing an especially well-received production of *Murder in the Cathedral*. And when several people created a position for him at Simon and Schuster, in the belief that the man he reported to would otherwise die from overwork (he didn't; at least, not right away), Gottlieb, lightly and remotely supervised, knew just how and where to make

himself (more than) useful. He would spend years learning and doing just about everything involved in the business, from hand-holding to hand-selling. Eventually, he became editor-in-chief.

The list of books he worked (or collaborated) on is impressive. There was Sybille Bedford's *A Legacy*, which taught him "that the act of publishing is essentially the act of making public one's own enthusiasm." Whenever, he says, "I deviated from that principle over the following half-century and published half-heartedly, things did not go well." There was Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (originally *Catch-18* until the advent of Leon Uris's *Mila 18* was announced, upon which Gottlieb suggested the change to an "even funnier" number). There were the novels of Mordecai Richler. ("Unlike novelists who start strong and fade out, Mordecai got better and better.") Of Edna O'Brien ("an extravagant woman"). Of Charles Portis ("a very likable man, but in my case likable from a distance"). The books he turned down are just as notable, among them: John Fowles's *The Collector*, Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*, and John Kennedy Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces.*

IF THIS HAD BEEN A DIFFERENT KIND OF BOOK (or Gottlieb much younger when he wrote it), his experience with Toole, whom he encouraged for years before deciding to stop, might well have taken up a whole chapter. Here, he deals with it in little more than a page, perhaps because, as he says, their correspondence (which tends to vindicate them both) has been "quoted *in extenso* in several biographies" and perhaps, too, because the vilification he endured at the hands of Toole's "horrifying" mother (who blamed him for her son's suicide) made the memory too painful. – This is understandable, certainly, given that there's so much else in his career to be dealt with. Still, it does serve as a reminder, generally, that the *Life*, as opposed to the life, will have little (personal) drama. – What he does write on the subject of Toole shows a remarkable steadiness of judgement, not to mention equanimity. Fifty years later, he concludes, he chose to reread the novel and was "both sorry and relieved that [his] opinion hadn't changed."

Drive precedes, if it does not produce, ambition. Did he want to be in full control at Simon and Schuster? Korda, for one, says that he did and that he left, finally, out of frustration with the owner. Gottlieb disputes this. "It was a place," he writes, "where when you start out as a cabin boy, everybody seemed to be standing around cheering you on to become admiral." He had been "in on running things" for a long time. Nonetheless, he was "growing restive" and didn't particularly care for the corporate future he saw emerging.

By now, he had a reputation to bargain with. A word in the right ear and soon enough he was an "admiral" at Knopf, "running things" with some of the same faithful crew beside him. The company, despite its prestigious backlist, was "moribund," and he'd been hired (who better?) to "re-energize" it. Again, names and titles accumulate in this chapter, the names not only of authors but also of his less celebrated fellow workers (it's unlikely he's left anyone out), with many of whom he sustained decades of close friendship. And again the drama, such as it is, remains professional: "editorial Ping-Pong" with Michael Crichton; helping Robert Caro to "shrink" *The Power Broker* "by three hundred thousand words, give or take a hundred thousand"; reassuring Liv Ullmann that she wasn't too "fat" to walk about the office without her fur coat on; convincing a reluctant John Cheever that his short stories were worth collecting in one volume (Pulitzer Prize worthy, as it happened); persuading Toni Morrison to let him publish *Beloved* on its own rather than as part of the much longer novel she had planned; and so forth.

There are a few anecdotes that twist sideways a little – how he managed to attend Marlene Dietrich's funeral, for instance, or how Anthony Burgess and his brood came to stay with the Gottliebs in New York and appeared intent on staying forever – but not so far sideways as to strike one as intimate. Is it a question of tone? He does, after all, treat of personal matters – his autistic son, the failure of his first marriage – with the proper amount of candour (and tact). And yet …

IT'S AS WELL TO REMEMBER THAT THE memoirist is not the man – that, though we may acquire an opinion of the latter from reading the former, it's the latter who determines how near we're allowed to come. And, in any event, isn't his working life the true subject here? Aren't these accounts of editorial intervention the only real intimacy the "avid reader" would expect us, his similarly motivated audience, to be interested in?

This is not, shall we say, the contemporaneous and, at times, by contrast *uncollegial* memoir Daniel Menaker published in 2013 under the title *My Mistake*, which served up a more vivid, more narrowly selective type of recollection, often distilling the memory of an event into a few lines of dialogue, a concisely set scene. (A question, recurringly, of "looking at failure from a different angle.") There, the man (inside the memoirist) allowed us to come as near, seemingly, as anyone ever could. Each section, short or long, was an *anno aetatis suae*, a slice, for public examination, of his own working life: at that age, young and then less young, this was what he found himself doing. And doing, usually, at the behest of others, whose pushes, unlike those Gottlieb received, didn't always (or for very long) direct him upwards.

Menaker was in his late twenties when he got a job as a fact checker at *The New Yorker*, had ascended to copy editing by his mid-thirties and to (the height of heights) fiction editing before he turned forty. While you and I may think that a rather smooth and enviable ascent, he depicts it as a period of confounding insecurity, during which his fate too often depended upon the barely tolerant (eminently whimsical) William Shawn.

Gottlieb was hired by Si Newhouse, who owned both Knopf and *The New Yorker*, to replace Shawn in 1987. The next five years, Menaker writes, will have been "the best professional period of my life, thanks to Gottlieb's eclectic taste in fiction and his willingness to take chances with new writers." He continues:

> Few people will later understand what Gottlieb achieve[d] for the magazine through his endorsement of more adventurous and surprising short fiction. It prove[d] to be his signal achievement, one that [would] turn out to have a significant and enduring effect on the literary world from that point on. A large part of an entire generation of important American writers [found] its first prominence in the magazine's pages.

With which encomium Gottlieb will not disagree, though too embarrassed to quote more than the beginning of it. Nonetheless, Newhouse then fired him and replaced him with Tina Brown. Whereupon he returned as an editor to Knopf … and (of course) prospered.

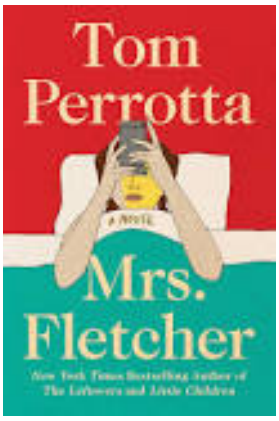
— Ida Kohl

Vox ludens

Mrs Fletcher
Tom Perrotta
Scribner
309 pp

Who is Rich?
Matthew Klam
Random House
325 pp

Sam the Cat
Matthew Klam
Vintage
245 pp



IN THE COMIC NOVEL THERE IS bound to be more of the bitter than the sweet, as the characters themselves, for the most part, have only one flavour, the one derived from disappointment. It doesn't suffice that they fail to get what they desire; they must be seen to fail over and over again. Bitterness is their very essence. Sweetness, if any such can be found, will not infuse them until the afterlife, whether on the last page or beyond.

Eve Fletcher, the not-quite main character of Tom Perrotta's new novel, is reaching that stage in her (earthly) life where the identity she has has begun to feel wrong. She's hardly old, not yet fifty, and certainly no failure at her job (directing a senior's centre). But the focus of her thoughts, as the divorced mother of a teenage son, is being forced to shift, radically, from him to herself, now that Brendan, the teen, has left for college. She may still, of course, voice (or text) her motherly concerns. He, however, is now better placed to disregard them.

Perrotta does something a little unusual with this familiar dynamic. He allows Brendan, rather than Eve, to be the one to speak to us directly. She, the ostensible heroine, comes no closer than (distant) third person. (Which was, to be sure, good enough for Mrs Bovary.) And although her experience (of his absence, her solitude) is what generally propels the narrative, Perrotta isn't afraid to leave her (yet more) alone and take on the perspective of another (not-quite minor) character (or two). The effect of this "opening up," disconcerting, to begin with, is not, I would say, in the end, detrimental. It might, after all, be said to mirror Eve's own thinking, as to the fluidity of her *persona*, her person, which is never (quite) first. (It might also, for that matter, mirror Brendan's, as to their respective rank.)

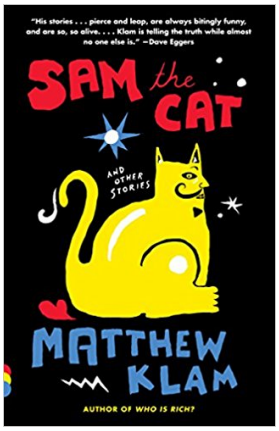
Brendan goes to college, makes friends, meets a girl, and then (Perrotta is nothing if not timely) misbehaves while hooking up. Addled, the message is, he was, by watching porn, imitating behaviour commonly encountered therein, behaviour to which his previous girlfriend hadn't, for all he knew, objected. The result, for him, is a public shaming, a loss of friends, and a rabbity retreat inward, homeward. He's a good kid, we're to understand, just in need of guidance.

Eve, in the meantime, though shocked, in the opening pages, by overhearing Brendan use the same sexual invective that would later get him into trouble, has begun her own exploration and, as it will prove, entanglement with porn, the online kind, its encyclopaedic variety, its too easily availed-of consolations (for her, in her involuntarily single state).

> Watching too much porn made you feel like you were out in the cold with your nose pressed against a window, watching strangers at a party, wishing you

> could join them. But the weird thing was, you *could* join them. All you had to do was open the door and walk inside, and everyone would be happy to see you.

As a countermeasure to what she worries may be a looming addiction, she seeks (as one should) the company of others: a younger (female) colleague at work, her (reassuringly diverse) classmates in a night course at the local community college. The course (on gender and society) is conducted by a transitioning adjunct – "another word for *very badly paid* " – professor, "a tall, striking woman in a black pencil skirt and stiletto heels." (Perrotta is nothing if not inclusive, marginal to the plot though the prof may prove to be).



Like Brendan, Eve will commit mistakes, some surprising (an advance on that younger colleague), some shocking (encouragement to an even younger classmate). We almost expect a Jamesian hourglass pattern to emerge: the two protagonists turning out, to their mild amazement, to have switched roles. Almost, but, as with so much in *Mrs. Fletcher*, not quite. Whatever the parallels, Eve will, in fact, go somewhat farther in acting out her porn-fed fantasies, will come into, as it were, the (unique) leading role, and then, just as surely, to use a Lawrentian phrase, will find she has, at last, come through.

> Eve still marveled on a daily basis at the speed with which her own life had changed. A year ago, she'd been lost and flailing, and now she was found.

Which is not a surprise, since her re-education, to our minds, in retrospect, has never contained anything more menacing than near-disasters. If there's a (moral or practical) lesson to be drawn from them (and Perrotta light-handedly implies there is), it would start with the superiority of good old IRL (when properly appreciated) to Pornhub and the like (when excessively indulged in).

Which is not to say that the latter is to be wholly condemned. Eve's identity, after all, was augmented, early on, by the uninvited (but catalysing) attribution of MILF-hood. (MILF being what some anonymous wag had, via a text message, dared to call her.) Her subsequent progress might well be viewed as an attempt, after taking it as a quasi-compliment, to live up to the term. Or, at the very least, if taken instead, the term was, purely as an insult, to live it down.

Would *Mrs. Fletcher*, the novel, be as entertaining without these intermittent excursions to the Underworld? Probably not. But then again neither would Mrs Fletcher, the character, whose anxieties about her dwindling sexual capital could have had no more suitable objective correlative.

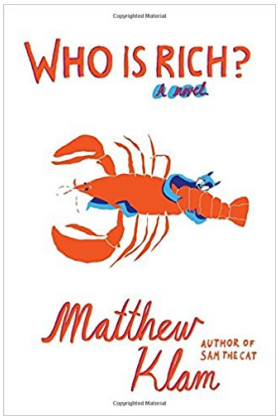
> When it was good, you could forget you were watching porn and accept it, if not as the truth, then at least as a glimpse of a better world than the one you lived in, a world where everyone secretly wanted the same thing, and no one failed to get it.

IF FRUSTRATED DESIRE IS THE KEYSTONE OF the comic novel, then *Who Is Rich?* may serve as a primer on how to keep that frustration alive for as long as possible. Unlike Perrotta, Matthew Klam chooses to remain with his singular eponym throughout, confining the reader, as a result, in a very small space. Enclosed first person, in effect.

Klam made his reputation as the writer of some bold short stories published in *The New Yorker* during the 90s, stories markedly different from what the magazine was then identified with. (They were collected in 2000 under the title *Sam the Cat.*) Brash, unapologetic, male (ever so male) narrators

jumpily relating their current (continuing) misadventures, a compound, often, of careful thinking with careless speech, sex, being the lure, being never that far away, but far enough it had to be struggled or bargained for, gratingly rationalized.

> She was so beautiful our whole life threatened to devolve into my headless worship of her hot beauty. My dick, of course, was hard. Not like that egg-yolk dick from earlier today. It now lay in my pants like a stunned fish. I loved her so much I couldn't think. I loved her because I was horny. I was horny because I was sad, because the night had been awful, because it was almost over. ["Issues I Dealt With in Therapy"]



The style – spirited, obstreperous, mouth-breathingly performative – reminds one, inevitably, of Bellow and Roth, to name but the most obvious influences (or the most talented). The voice, however, – confiding, kvetching – belongs to the ages: it's the *vox ludens* itself, playfully frustrating our own (gravitational) desire to have the tale told straight (fall flat, as it were, into our laps).

The Rich of *Who Is Rich?* speaks to us in a similarly stridulent tone. Adding to the (sound) mix a dash more hysteria than is customary. (Than is warranted?)

Whereas Perrotta told his tale via a series of efficiently sliding, occasionally overlapping narratorial scrims, Klam has Rich's telling assume the form of a loose coil; an elliptical maze; a slow and repetitive circling of the drain; an inferno with an infernally small number of rings.

Rich Fischer, a cartoonist whose (possibly too lifelike) graphic novel established his (by now faded) reputation, has returned to the summer arts conference where he teaches a weeklong course in "semiautobiographical comics." (The lack of a hyphen only makes that "semi" seem even more craven.) Matticook College is situated on the New England coast and would be an ideal location were it not, according to Rich, for the people gathered there. (Including, we soon have reason to think, Rich himself.)

The novel begins, unpromisingly, *in medias rich*, and introduces us to some of the narrator's stylistic or, it may be, mental habits that we will (we fear) simply have to learn to tolerate: his tendency to rely on accumulated detail (full names and physical traits of characters, miscellaneous events viewed in passing) to give substance, if not direction, to the narrative; his urge to recount and re-recount the past (week, year, decade) in a manner, at first, purely expository (TMI of the sort a therapist would welcome); the unrelieved biliousness of his outlook, even after the cause of it has been explained. But this is who Rich is, we must realize. And once we've accepted that, the (comic, campus, adultery) novel sets off, revolving (coil-, maze-, drainwise) with all the elasticity of …

[New panel.]

A comic book. Possibly a "semiautobiographical" one. This, his first novel, is all Klam's published, apparently, since 2000. Since that much acclaimed collection of short stories. Since, shall we say, success came and went. It would be invidious, of course, to pursue any further comparisons. The author is not his character. But the character is an author whose fame (from six years before) has curdled, whose career has stalled.

The remarkable book itself, which "held together like a novel," was a collection of the comic books he'd been putting out twice a year with a "beloved independent publisher." In them, he recalls, he'd been able to handle the "hot material" of his life.

> In my stories I'd been some kind of wild man … battling suburban angst and sexual constraint in a fictionalized autobio psychodrama.

Instead of capitalizing on this "renegade message," instead of choosing to lead the "sustainable commercial existence" that it offered, he had "embraced conformity, routine, homeownership, marriage, and parenthood" and taken a gig as an illustrator at a "crusty political magazine trying to be hip." The material of his life had grown too tame (or too vulnerable) to be exploited. Until, that is, a year ago, when he and Amy, who was also attending the conference, commenced their affair. Now, this week, here they (yearn to) go again.

Amy, the mistress *in situ*, and Robin, the wife *in absentia* (though present by phone), are, as we say, "well drawn," or should we say, given the context (a mélange of the lover/husband's tergiversations and the cartoonist's typical grotesquerie) drawn with some attempt, on his part, at fairness. At equity (as to suffering).

But equity, fairness, these are, here, mere excuses for emotional stasis. If Rich ever is to break free of it, there'll be devastation, of one kind or another, all round. When, a hundred pages in, he feels ready to consider what desperate measures might be feasible, he proposes (to himself) to out himself, by drawing (and publishing) a comic strip entirely devoted to the (hitherto secret) affair, a strip that, by accretion, will eventually rise to the thickness of a (redemptive, second) book.

> I wanted to tell the story of my affair and, in the process, explain how I'd lost my way, what I'd done for love, for fatherhood, for the sake of good material. The comic would retroactively validate my years of making nothing. [...] I'd cough it up – the ugly truth – and deal with the fallout later.

A (redemptive, second) book that, we might be forgiven for concluding, rather resembles this very novel. Again, *caveat lector*. Klam's own account of the period following his early success* is much more nuanced (and positive) than any short-hand speculation an impatient reviewer might come up with.

Still, the facts (as recounted in the perfectly forthright interview cited above) do help to explain why this (very) novel, in its structure, its indeterminacy, rather resembles … a (multiply segmented, serially prolonged) short (*New Yorker*) story – and Rich one of those ultra-male narrators – from the collection *Sam the Cat*. The voice (and it's a "good voice") has only grown hoarser, the self-questioning more persistent. Rich's circular (dialectical) reasoning has, more times than not, the rhythmic consistency of a machine. A life-support machine, perhaps. A ventilator.

But I should add (and here I'm being a little Rich myself) that graphic novels often work this way, by imposing one layer upon another. By combining their necessarily discontinuous instalments. By interrupting (and repeating (and interrupting)) themselves. Klam's interest in "fleshing out" his hero's calamitous consciousness with scenic snapshots and incidental funny business (and more characters funnily named than we can immediately take in or judge the (in)significance of) is consistent with the graphical nature of the enterprise, its omnivorous appetite for rendering.

But.

It was a miscalculation to use John Cuneo's drawings as spot illustrations throughout. There are too few of them to matter (17, by my count) and, though pleasing (or pleasingly nightmarish) in themselves (Cuneo, another *New Yorker* stalwart, was an inspired choice, possibly also an inspiring one), they seem somewhat lazily attached to the narrative we're required, as readers, to "picture" –

*http://www.vulture.com/2017/07/matthew-klam-who-is-rich.html

seemed to me, at least, to be competing for, if not space, then attention.

Worse, the Rich I was "picturing" would have drawn himself and the others differently, with more of a Daniel Clowes or Chris Ware or Adrien Tomine two-dimensionality. (Cuneo's figures, like Steve Brodner's and Barry Blitt's, tend to have more modelling, more reach. More roughness.) Not a thought, this, whether right or wrong (or, yes, loonily subjective), one should be having to debate while reading. The "graphic" in the novel is entirely provided by Klam's prose. Nothing else was needed.

PERROTTA CLAIMS TO BELONG TO THE "PLAIN language American tradition" of Hemingway and Carver, where readability (to the point of transparency) is highly valued and fossicking after rhetorical nuggets is not. In Klam's notion of the vernacular, language isn't so much plain as improvident; the words thicken as soon as they're delivered; they spread themselves, inconsequentially, everywhere. Just as there's a lot of thinking, in our daily lives, that isn't thought, so here there's a lot of sentence-making that isn't plot or character development or even pathfinding. It's the voice of a (*soi-disant*) dweebish sort of man creating itself – himself – from phrases. As many phrases as he can remember, it can articulate. *Impasto*, the technique, say, rather than *fresco*.

I liked both books. I admired Klam's more.

— Karl Buchner

The Trip from Dunkirk
(Limited Engagement)

STEVE AND ROB ARE RUNNING, AS WELL AS they can, for the beach. No one will tell them where it is, of course. These French, all they'll say is "Bon voyage," which, given the poorish receipts on the last one, sounds a little like sarcasm. As in: "Everything's a trip to you two, isn't it?" Or: "Still tripping, are we?" Or: "Not another … ?"

– Hang on, says Steve. I can smell it. The channel.

– Surely, says Rob, dawdling, some of these places are going to open for lunch eventually? We can't simply leave without a …

– Here we are, see. Through there … . Bloody hell, just look at the queues! What is this, a bank holiday? Have these people not heard of Brexit? Ahoy, my man, parlez-vous inglese?

– Ssh! I'm dead, says the recumbent figure. Can't speak. Don't let Topher see us talking.

– Dead, says Rob. Good lord, how did you die?

– Drowned, I think. Can't remember. We've been here a week.

– A week! says Steve. Are there no ferries? I can't wait a week. What would happen to my inappropriate relationship with a decades younger American woman?

– That was the time before last, says Rob, his voice tiny, as if boxed. You're single and friendless now. But there has to be someone in charge. Someone other than Topher, that is.

– Know him, do you?

– Seen all his films. [Imitating Sir Michael:] "Will Mr Wayne be dining at home this evening … ?"

– Dear God, not again. [Can't help himself:] "Hov oy evah tawld 'oo wot a … ." Hang on, though. Isn't that Kurt Wallendar up there on the mole, directing traffic?

– Don't say directing, says the non-speaking part.

– Yes, it is. Sensibly dressed, too, says Rob. Rather fancy that fancy hat, I do. [Imitating Sir Kenneth:] "A hat, a hat, my … knighthood for a hat … ."

– Wouldn't be able to hear you, would he? says Steve. Not at this distance. Never shaves, that man. Here, grab an end of this stretcher and we'll carry … sorry, didn't catch your name … ?

– Casualty 4145, but …

– Right. We'll carry him past the …

– … you mustn't, really, I'm …

– … dead, yes, we heard, dead weight, actually, though you sound very much alive.

– Make way! cries Rob. Make way for the wounded!

– Hang on, says Steve. Who's that he's talking with?

– Why, it's … [imitating Sir Mark:] "You don't expect me to believe that, Mr Donovan?"

– Sorry, I couldn't …

– "You don't expect …"

– No. No. Unintelligible, mate. Can't make out a …

– That spy, wasn't it, says their lively burden. Played Oliver Cromwell. Or was it Henry the … Twelfth?

– Oh, him, yes, says Steve, no wonder I couldn't, well, no matter, he's shoving off again, look, only

popped round to have a cuppa.

– Where on earth are these fellows going? asks, of no one but himself, Rob, as half a dozen joggers pass by.

– I'll warrant, says Steve, suddenly glowering [like Sir Mark or Sir Kenneth] after them, it's that rusty trawler beached way over there.

– Oh, please, says their bouncing body, that's an even worse idea. Have you not read the …

– Seems to me, says Rob, someone's getting aw … fully up … pity. For a mere pass … en … ger. It's hard enough running on wet sand without your … hello, who's this, then? Steve McQueen?

– One of the Kray brothers, innit, says real Steve, louchely. The not so crazy one.

– Sez you, says Rob. Selfish bugger, we could've used that plane.

– Know how to fly, do you?

– If Mad Max can do it …

– [Imitating Tom Hardy:] "Bane to you, m'boy ."

– Cut! shouts Topher, craning into view. Sorry, Tom, but you'll have to do it once more, from the very beginning. These chaps with the corpse have upstaged you, I'm afraid. Would someone please find us a new Spitfire … A-SAP!

– May I shoot them? says the mumbly pilot. I've got an extra flare.

– They're on our side, unfortunately, says not yet Sir Christopher.

– You're darn right we are! says Rob.

– Great admirers, says, but too softly, Steve.

– I am French, though, says the waterlogged bit player, hoping, we assume, to put an end to our suffering.

– Hang on! says …

— Karen Belanger

Gil Gauvreau, 1946 – 2017

GIL FILED HIS INCOME TAX RETURN from a hospital bed at the very end of April, as if to distract himself from thoughts of that other thing said to be a certainty in life. The "other thing," which he was still expecting then to avoid, came a month later in the form of a dire prognosis that left him little time to sort out his affairs and proved, in any event, to be overly optimistic. For a man so affable, who enjoyed long conversations and even longer farewells, this must have been galling. It certainly was for those of us who had yet to accept the mere possibility of his soon falling silent.

Gil and I became friends in high school, in that era when streetcars roamed the length of Bloor St. and the Danforth and Bergman, Fellini, Godard, and Truffaut took turns on the marquee. We loved films of all kinds, high and low, new and old. On occasion, we would make short 8- or 16-mm attempts ourselves. His parents' apartment provided the location for at least one, which involved not only a murder (simulated) but also a sock hop (real enough, though staged). For Gil, I now realize, this was more than play; it was apprenticeship. He had already decided what he wanted to be, and however imperfect the result, he was acquiring skills that would be of use for the rest of his life.

After high school, Gil went to the University of Windsor and then to UCLA, in both places achieving more and more ambitious projects of his own and, not incidentally, organizing and/or leading film appreciation societies. For several years after returning to Canada he worked in television, producing news programs and directing arts features. It was during this period that he grew fascinated by dance, particularly ballet, the subject of two of his best documentaries. He also ventured into advertising and became quite adept at fashioning commercials for toys and games, some of which won international awards. Finally, he stepped, as he was born to do, into the role of teacher, offering courses in film history and production.

Gil often struggled, mentally and physically. His health was seldom untroubled, but he subsumed his anxiety, as well as he could, in his work. He always, it seems, had a future to hold onto, no matter how loosely. In April, for example, his tax return filed, he surprised a few of us by saying he planned to go to Egypt, which had intrigued him as a boy. And this somewhat daunting trip he hoped to undertake as early as November.

Gil would, I'm sure, want to be remembered primarily as somebody steeped in the craft and lore of filmmaking. He was meticulous in his preparations, truly tireless in his research. As a documentarian, he was especially careful with the facts, which, when arranged in a certain manner, can be made to point to the truth or its opposite. The truth, in his case, is that he was loved far more than he knew and will never be forgotten.

— Bernard Kelly

Finns noirs

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THE INTERNATIONAL REPUTATION OF THE Finnish film industry rests almost entirely on the shoulders of the two brothers Aki and Mika Kaurismäki. Their own reputation is such that at the 1988 *Toronto Festival of Festivals* they were featured in the *Director's Spotlight* and festival-goers were treated to a complete retrospective of their work.

Those other famous European film-making brothers, the Tavianis (Paul and Vittorio), co-direct all of their films together (*Padre, Padrone, The Night of the Shooting Stars*). The Kaurismäkis operate a little more along the lines of the American Coen brothers (Joel and Ethan), who co-author their screenplays (*Blood Simple, Miller's Crossing*) while Ethan functions as producer and Joel as director – although there is some crossover here: Gabriel Byrne said that working on *Miller's Crossing* was "like being directed in stereo."

In the early days the Kaurismäkis did co-direct one documentary together (*The Saimma Gesture*) and they occasionally co-authored and sometimes produced and acted in each other's films, but each is now solely responsible for writing and directing his own projects.

Yet their vision is remarkably consistent, the image of Finland they both present being one of unrelenting bleakness and despair. – And I do mean despair: they make the most depressing Bergman film look like an MGM musical romp by comparison. Unlike Bergman, who deals primarily with the problems of the middle class, the Kaurismäkis are drawn to the blue-collar worker: their protagonists are dishwashers, butchers, checkout clerks, or miners, and almost all of them are entangled in petty theft and corruption. They live on the margins of society, trying to lead straightforward lives but, economically and psychologically cut out of the mainstream by the state, they eventually get caught up in circumstances beyond their control. In this regard, both brothers have obviously been influenced by American *film noir*, as the bleak underworld of petty gangsterism "where things go wrong" is the milieu in which virtually all their own films are set. Most of the Kaurismäkis' characters are passive – to the point that dialogue in the film becomes minimal at best. Life is something that *happens* to them. By the time they are introduced, they have long since resigned themselves to a life of despair. Aki is the more fatalistic, cynical, and dispassionate of the two film-makers. Maki's films still have some room for romanticism in them, even some humour, but not much real optimism.

Aki's *Ariel*, for example, deals with a miner in Lapland who loses his job when the mine is shut down by the state. He is given a white 1960 Cadillac by a co-worker, who then commits suicide. The miner drives to Helsinki and is mugged and robbed of all his money, ending up in a skid row hostel. He meets a woman who must hold down three jobs – as a meter maid, a butcher, and a sales clerk – to support her son and to pay ("in about three years") for the furniture in her sparse apartment. The miner moves in with her, and things are going well until he spots one of his muggers, chases him down, and beats him up. The miner is mistaken for the culprit, arrested, and sentenced to two years' hard labour in prison. There, he plots his escape with a cellmate. They succeed. He retrieves the white Cadillac. They rob a bank to pay for fake passports. When they go to collect the passports, however, the former cellmate is shot, whereupon the miner kills the two crooks responsible. He and his girlfriend flee, with her son, to Mexico in the dangerously full hold of a rickety tramps steamer named Ariel, their future anything but certain.

In *Shadows in Paradise*, the central character is a garbage collector who meets a cashier at a supermarket. The only thing they have in common is their equally profound depression. On their first date they

go to a bingo parlour. On their second they dress up and go to a fancy restaurant, but the maître d' denies them entrance, even though there are quite obviously few patrons within. Asked later by a friend why they didn't complain, the woman replies, "Who? Us?" Here again Aki prefers to deal with the marginal lives of society's victims. And again the dialogue is reduced to its functional minimum with little expressive value. Nonetheless, these two do try to change their lives by taking their very first vacation. In the last shot we are shown a Russian *luxury* liner destined for Murmansk, a resort north of the Arctic circle. Not much, perhaps, but (as for the couple in *Ariel*) happiness is to be sought anywhere but in Finland.

In *Calimari Union* Aki tried a different tack, abandoning realism (and plot) for absurdist humour: in a series of tableaux 17 characters, all named Frank, put on dark glasses and start a trek across the bleak nocturnal urban landscape. Streets and subways are littered with society's outcasts. As Aki puts it, "Only the strongest survive the course, and what happens to them isn't anything to write home about."

Mika Kaurismäki's *Helsinki-Napoli, All Night Long* has a similar setting, but now the city is Berlin and the language is English. Here, *film noir* has influenced not only the look and theme but also the casting: Sam Fuller, the American director (*Pickup on South Street*, one of the best American films of the 50s), plays the drug lord (he also appears in several of Godard's films); Wim Wenders, the German director (*Paris, Texas*), plays a gas station attendant; Jim Jarmusch, the American director (*Down by Law*), plays a pool hustler; and the always wonderful Eddie Constantine (Lemmy Caution in about 40 French films, most notably Godard's *Alphaville*) plays the heavy. The plot is simple: a Finnish taxi driver and his Italian wife and grandfather (Nino Manfredi) get caught between two warring gangs, and an all-night chase results (hence the title). Highly stylized in the "old" *nouvelle vague* fashion, the film leaves lots of room for visual wit and gags. It's rather as if Mika had to make his comedy outside Finland – inside, all his other films (e.g., *The Worthless, The Clan-Tale of the Frogs*), however similar their characters (misfits) and genre (gangster), are much more serious (and more violent).

Aki Kaurismäki's most recent North American release, *Hamlet Goes Business*, pulls out all the stops: what we have here is Shakespearean *film noir* – and it works. The play is transplanted into a contemporary corporate setting, where its most significant passages are applied to the corruption in business and capitalism (with enough left over for the state as well). *Everyone* in this world is corrupt. Even frail Ophelia becomes a cigar-smoking schemer in the boardroom, siding with her father and with Claudius to deprive Hamlet of his voting shares. The latter is assumed to be, if not mad, at least stupid: he reads comic books all day and complains not of melancholy but of nausea. Only at the end does Aki diverge from the parallel by so changing the outcome that the film is given an entirely different political and psychological meaning.

The Kaurismäkis have adapted an American film genre to their own purpose, which is to comment on the state's corruption and its indifference to those who live on its periphery. Viewed together, these films are uncompromising in their indictment of the hopelessness that permeates certain levels of Finnish society. And they *should* be viewed together, since they derive their greatest impact from the consistent presentation of an unrelievedly depressing landscape, mental and physical. Individually impressive, as a body of work they are overwhelming.

This, then, is the vision of the Kaurismäki brothers. And theirs alone, it's true. Until more Finnish film-makers' works become available internationally (Jorn Donner had to go to Sweden to make his films), the Kaurismäkis' will be the only vision we have, to be valued as much for its completeness as for its consistency in tone and style.

— Gil Gauvreau

Fullerfilment

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Tigrero: A Film That Was Never Made
Finland/Germany/Brazil
1994, 75 minutes
Colour/35 mm
Written, directed, and edited by Mika Kaurismäki

THE FIRST TIME I SAW HIM ON THE SCREEN was in Jean-Luc Godard's *Pierrot Le Fou*. A party is in progress, and the camera, at the centre of the room, does a slow 360-degree pan. Finally, it comes to rest on a small man with a shock of silver hair who is leaning against the wall. He removes the huge cigar from his mouth and says directly to the camera, "My name is Sam Fuller. I make American movies."

Some of the "American movies" writer/director Fuller made are *The Steel Helmet, The Baron of Arizona, Run of the Arrow, Underworld USA, The Big Red One*, and *Pickup on South Street*, his masterpiece.

One American movie that Sam Fuller never made was *Tigrero*.

In 1954, Fuller was contacted by Darryl F. Zanuck of 20th Century-Fox to make a film of a novel entitled *Tigrero*. Set deep in the Amazon, this story of love, cowardice, and betrayal was to have starred John Wayne, Ava Gardner, and Tyrone Power. Fuller packed a 16-mm camera with a specially equipped CinemaScope lens, a couple of cases of vodka, and 75 boxes of cigars, and set out on a perilous journey. Travelling by single-engine aircraft, by canoe, and by horseback, he went over a thousand miles into the Amazon rainforest to scout locations, take stock footage, and map out the territory for the set designers. With just an interpreter and a donkey, he made his way into yet unmapped territory and came across a tiny, remote band of people called the Karaja. Fuller stayed with them for several weeks and ultimately decided that this was where the film was to be shot and that the Karaja themselves should appear in the film. But when he returned to Hollywood, the insurance company behind 20th Century-Fox became aware of the film's unusual circumstances and conditions. It soon grew apparent that the cost of insurance to cover the principal actors would have been extraordinary. As a result, the project had to be scrapped.

Cut to:
Finland, 1986

In 1986, Finnish filmmaker Mika Kaurismäki started a film called *Helsinki-Napoli, All Night Long*. Kaurismäki was an admirer of Fuller's films, which are notorious for their toughness and the recurring themes of corruption and amorality. His protagonists, hard-edged, uncompromising, guarded, are wise to the system and distrustful of authority. But they are also loyal to their friends and display the workings of a conscience. Fuller's type of film fell out of favour in Hollywood in the 60s, but his work was championed by the Europeans, particularly the French. Even so, Fuller was to make only 7 more films over the next 30 years. Mika Kaurismäki's films also dealt with outsiders who had little respect for the law, and *Helsinki-Napoli* was an affectionate tribute to the *film noir* genre that Fuller had been such a master of. So Kaurismäki brought the then 75-year-old Fuller out of semi-retirement to play the heavy. He gave a bravura, if somewhat hammy performance, totally in keeping with the style of the film. Fuller fans around the world were overjoyed.

Cut to:
Paris, March, 1992

Kaurismäki meets Fuller in a bar after Mika has just completed his epic *Amazon*, the most expensive film (by a wide margin) ever produced out of Finland. Kaurismäki and Fuller are soon exchanging Amazon

stories, and from this conversation comes *Tigrero: A Film That Was Never Made*. Partly documentary and partly scripted, the film traces Fuller's return journey, 40 years later, to the Amazon. He is there to see whether he can find the location he had chosen in 1954 and to show his original footage to the Karaja. This journey downriver becomes a journey into memory and a meditation on whether it is possible, or even desirable, to recapture the past.

Fuller has an engaging presence. A storyteller and a showman, he knows how to command the screen. Here he is, at age 83, traipsing around the jungle, irascible as ever, almost as vital and enthusiastic as a Sam Fuller half his age, digging out scraps from the past wherever he can, trying to make it all come back, wanting it all to come back, and commenting on everything: love and war and God and racism and money and Hollywood and much else besides.

The film focuses on Fuller and his relationship with the Karaja. There is no hint of manipulation in this. Fuller's admiration for these people is completely genuine. If it wasn't, the film wouldn't work. This search for a lost film reveals a loss not only to Fuller's career but also to the Karaja's way of life. When he screens his 1954 footage and the village elders see themselves once again young and vital, we are all moved. Accompanying him on this journey is American director Jim Jarmusch (*Stranger Than Paradise, Down By Law*), who, though 40 years his junior, has the same sensibility. It is fascinating to watch Jarmusch, the embodiment of cool, become more and more engaged in this expedition into someone else's past.

THE FILM FALTERS AT THE BEGINNING WHEN Kaurismäki tries to give it narrative drive through scripted scenes. These scenes, while funny, are arch and unconvincing. But once the journey begins, Kaurismäki relaxes and lets the story evolve on its own terms. He should have remembered that in dramatic films the director is God, but in documentary films God is the director. (And in this film you've got three directors, to begin with.)

The best moments are the purely documentary ones, when even Fuller resists the impulse to maintain control and just lets things happen. In one such scene, two Karaja men pay him tribute with a traditional dance of gratitude for the joy his footage has brought to the tribe. Their kindness and Fuller's response to it reach beyond barriers of culture and language and could only have been captured on film.

We learn a lot about Sam Fuller the man and the director. He should have made more films. Hamstrung by low budgets and relegated to B pictures, he nonetheless made several of the most personal social and political statements ever attempted on Hollywood screens in the 50s and early 60s. He was often misunderstood and could antagonize both the extreme left and the extreme right at the same time, offending practically everyone in Hollywood. He didn't give a damn. His unique visual style – rough and untempered – led critic Andrew Sarris to call him "an authentic American primitive."

A traditional talking-head documentary would simply have interspersed an interview with scenes from his films. Kaurismäki has created another kind of work altogether. With *Tigrero: A Film That Was Never Made,* he breaks new ground in the documentary biography.

— Gil Gauvreau

Contributors [cont'd]

Sofia Vedechkina was born in Toronto to Russian parents and has lived in Montreal for most of her life. She is currently studying at McGill University in International Development and Russian. In 2014, she won first place in one of the categories of the *Concours Poésie en Liberté* for her poem "L'arbre."

Andrew Walker graduated from Colorado State University with a degree in English. His nonfiction can be found in the *Two Cities Review, Crack the Spine,* and *Blotter Magazine*. His poetry can be found in *Literary Juice* and on **Instagram @adwalker94**. He himself can be found in Fort Collins, CO.

Margaret Watson lives and works in Toronto. She (re)turned to creative writing once her two sons had grown up and moved out on their own. "Stalking" is her first published piece.

A poet, critic, and humorist, **Dan Wiencek** studied writing at Purdue University and his work has appeared in *McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Hypertrophic Literary,* and *Crack the Spine*, among other publications. He lives in Portland, Oregon, and is currently working on his first collection of poems.

John Zedolik's poems have been published in *The Alembic, Ascent Aspirations, The Bangalore Review, Common Ground Review, The Journal, Pulsar Poetry Webzine, Third Wednesday, Transom,* and the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*. A full-length collection will be published in 2019. His iPhone is now his primary poetry notebook, he says.