

# AUDEMUS


POETRY, FICTION, ESSAYS, ART



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MOUNT ST. MARY'S COLLEGE, LOS ANGELES



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# AUDEMUS

The Literary Journal of Mount St. Mary's College

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Fiction Editor: Cassandra Krieger

Nonfiction Editor: Erica Graham

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Publisher: Marcos M. Villatoro

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by Kathleen Araiza

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

I have been thinking about my last semester as Editor in Chief of *Audemus*—that's right, in mere weeks I am off this mount and into a world supposedly more real than the one I am living in. I'd like to take this opportunity to reflect on the unique collaboration among the editors of *Audemus*. Usually a magazine staff is a silent group of editors that makes decisions behind the scenes. The only mark of a genre editor is the work he or she chooses. The *Audemus* editors, however, are part of the process each step of the way. Sometimes they contribute their own work to the magazine. In the last issue, nonfiction editor Erica Graham shared with us her personal stories about her mother, proving how nonfiction can be an intensely intimate exercise. Art editor Kathleen Araiza has for us in this issue a piece about the art of Hans Burkhardt, which she took in at the Jack Rutberg Fine Arts gallery. Fiction editor Cassandra Krieger contributes a review of Philip Roth's new novel, *Indignation*. Along with their literary additions to the magazine, I admire each of their talents and brilliance so much that I am proud to call them friends.

It makes me glad that this is the issue I am leaving you with. After going through the process of creating a literary magazine from its inception to the final product, the staff and I have grown more confident in our ability to produce this journal.

In May we said goodbye to our fiction editor, Natalie Gutierrez, as she left us for graduate school in New York. I am happy to report that she is in love with the city and doing well in her pursuit of a Master's degree in Publishing. We brought Cassandra Krieger on board for this issue as fiction editor, which was a great addition as she jumped right in and made some fine editing decisions.

The very idea of *Audemus* is to include voices other than those of the students of Mount St. Mary's College, where we run the magazine. This opens the magazine to a wider array of styles and perspectives, while also publishing Mount students' work (you'll read in this issue pieces by our Humanities students).



For the first time this issue, we decided to advertise our magazine outside of the LA area. We appealed to other universities across the country with finely designed posters by Kathleen Araiza. Along with the young, unpublished voices we've included, we wanted established authors to contribute as well. To that end, there is an interview I conducted with Marvin Bell, well-known contemporary poet of our day. We also have poems by Percival Everett, Eloise Klein Healy, and Ally Acker. Marvin Bell wrote a poem especially for our magazine, a poem in a form of his own creation called the "Dead Man" poem. It speaks about "the dare," and after you read it, you will see how well that captures both the spirit of our magazine, and how it touches on contemporary issues we should all be aware of. Bell's "Dead Man" poems are accessible, yet they reveal more layers with each reading. First it appears to be speaking about one thing, and on a second or third reading it is quite another thing entirely. That, I imagine, is the purpose of the dead man; he is both here and there.

It remains to be seen in what direction *Audemus* will evolve once the last of our original staff graduates. I can only hope that we have started something that others will want to continue, because they understand what we are trying to do with it. The idea of a provocative literary magazine is not new, and every incarnation has its own idea of what it means to be that. While the *Audemus* staff is not trying to reinvent the wheel, we felt the need to create a magazine with this specific purpose because it feels relevant to us today. The staff attends Mount St. Mary's College, a school that is thirsty for a literary community. Though it attracts many a potential nurse, perhaps one day the Mount will also attract writers of poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. Marcos Villatoro, our publisher and professor of English, has been working hard to create a literary following on this campus. I hope that *Audemus* is one step in that direction. It provides a place where talented and unheard writers can see their work in print, thus making them and their work immortal. Who could resist that?

Another reason *Audemus* is relevant is because of the climate it was created in. We're in the middle of a war, the US economy is in shambles (making me very confident about graduating now!), and because of the momentous election year, more than ever a magazine like *Audemus*

is vital. Creative writing is not lost in all these current events. In fact, it is even more important now that we continue to publish writing with socio-political undercurrents, or at least something that peels back the obvious layers of the human experience and reveals to us something we haven't yet considered. That's another aspect of *Audemus*, the name meaning "let us dare," in this particular point in history, is extremely powerful, and in the future it will develop new meaning for creative writers and the readers of our magazine.

Ileanna Portillo  
Editor in Chief

## Percival Everett

### *This Cadaverous Topography*

The strangest of our rivers races muddy,  
Juniper berries falling and rolling off hillsides,  
Collecting notions of what is need,  
Of what is want, sweeping them into  
The flow, with the malm and dull roots.  
The sun is forgetful and so shines again,  
Surprised to find herself in her own light  
And cutthroats splash in the eddies,  
Along undercut banks, near some confluence.  
We follow it down to a place that matters,  
Where we drink coffee and remember our boots.

The strangest of our rivers divides us,  
Wedges deep with the push of storms  
And drives hard the harsh rush  
Of events that shape our fear of each  
Other.

The moon took us and showed us the springs,  
Gently suggested that we not drown.  
Said so with a handful of desiccated earth,  
The chrome yellow reflection of his eyes in the pool.  
And so the moment tells us that  
Death, disillusionment, xenophobia, stupidity  
Has undone so many,  
What I tell you three times is true.  
What I tell you three times is true.  
What I tell you three times is true.



*Exit*

**Mayra Rodriguez**



*Elgin, Tenn.*

**Danielle Arender**

## Patrick O'Neil

### *Barack and the Art of Dental Hygiene*

Saturday sucked. I woke up late. I woke up anxious. I looked at the clock and cursed. Most mornings I can't sleep in and now when I was supposed to be somewhere, I had. All the enjoyment I could've reaped from the subversive complacency of staying under the covers, ignoring the world, was lost to the fact that I was late.

With crusty bits of sleep clinging to my eyes, I scrambled out of bed and rushed through the morning necessities. And then without the proper beginnings, as in no time to get coffee, I ran out the door intent on doing things and being places I had promised people I would.

Unfortunately no one else appeared to know or seemed to care I was late. Traffic was bad. Buses, cars, pedestrians, bicyclists, and an unusual amount of women with kids in strollers blocked every intersection. Gaggles of tourists crowded sidewalks and street corners, pointing and ogling and taking pictures. And yes, I know the Euro is strong, and yes, yes, thanks so much for the needed turismo cash and all. But isn't there more to see and do in New York City? And why in hell is the entire EU in my neighborhood on a goddamn Saturday morning?

Without any of the usual screaming or rude hand gesturing on my part, I steered my car through it all, eventually making my way across town to my first destination on time and a little out of breath. Which wasn't that easy. I'm not used to dragging my pathetic un-caffeinated ass anywhere first thing in the morning other than down the hill to the café for my usual latte.

Still a bit sleepy, I picked up Barbara and drove to the meeting. We had committed ourselves to setting up the eighty chairs and putting the elusive card table in the corner by the door. Last week when nobody else had raised their hands, we'd both sighed and took on the responsibility.

With all the chairs set up in rows and the meeting about to begin, I ran to the nearest coffee shop and ordered a four shot latte. The

woman behind the counter looked at me, shook her head and said,  
“No, three shots.”

“Excuse me?” I sarcastically asked lifting my hands palms up in the universal expression of “what the fuck?”

“Too strong,” she said. “It won’t taste good, only three shots.”

“Really?” I said. “Couldn’t you let me be the judge of that?”

“No.”

It would be a gross understatement to say that when I left with my lowly three shot latte I had only a slight resentment toward the woman behind the counter. And yeah, okay, four shots may be a little over the top and yeah, I’m strung out. But I can quit anytime I want. Really. I can. I just don’t want to. Besides when I try I get this insane frontal lobe headache from lack of caffeine.

But enough of that.

An overwhelming sense of anxiety prevailed as I walked up the hill, my three shot latte in hand. The hot liquid scorched the roof of my mouth as I climbed the stairs and took my seat in the rear of the room. For an hour and a half I stared at the back of some unknown person in front me and waited for the meeting to end—my empty stomach making gurgling noises as the acidic coffee churned away.

When the meeting was finally over I walked out front and met with the usual suspects. “Are we eating?” someone asked. And like every Saturday for as long as I care to remember, we all went off to breakfast at the café down the street. And as usual the place was crowded and very noisy. Raising my voice I ordered—eggs over easy and home fries—and watched as the waitress blinked. Which caused me to stress she hadn’t gotten my order right. Then I figured it really didn’t matter and turned my attention to the seemingly endless and highly speculative conversation on the upcoming election and the economy. Only no matter where the conversation went, it returned to the same uncomfortable place because really they were all talking about their mortgages. And just hearing how my friends’ lives were being affected made me tense and my anxiety increased until it became a pounding sensation that pulsed through my entire body.

Five minutes later our waitress reappeared and delivered a mas-



sive amount of food to our table. With my plate of coagulated eggs and tepid home fires in front of me, I reached for the silverware and began to eat.

“Mmmm, that looks good.”

“I should’ve gotten that.”

“Mayo?”

“I’m craving meat man!”

“My mortgage is killing me.”

“No more talk of money while we’re eating.”

One look at Harvey’s salad and Beth decided she didn’t want her greasy starch laden home fries and scraped them off her plate onto mine. I really shouldn’t eat potatoes; relative of the deadly nightshade, their nasty lectins get deposited in the flesh tissues surrounding bone joints, which causes arthritis. But fuck it. I ate hers anyway, and then I ate mine, a double dose. I should be crippled for weeks.

After breakfast I drove Barbara home. Parked in front of her house, I looked at the rows of nice single-family houses and wondered if everyone was going to lose their property and if the entire country was going into a depression like 1929. Black and white images of stern looking men in soup lines flashed through my mind as I leaned back in my seat and thought about what I had planned for the rest of the day. For a brief moment I considered going back to the coffee shop for the missing shot of espresso. Instead I made a u-turn and started to drive to the other side of town. I had promised Anna Lisa I’d meet her at some art show/political benefit where her paintings were being shown.

When I passed by the elevated freeway I thought I smelled burning plastic. Although I presumed it was coming from somewhere outside. Then two blocks later I still smelled burning plastic, only now it was much stronger. Thinking that wasn’t good, I stopped and looked underneath the car, worried that a plastic shopping bag had stuck itself to the muffler and was melting away causing the stink. But there was nothing. I opened the hood, peered around, touched a few leads to see if they were hot, everything seemed normal and working. So I got back in and started driving.

All the way out to the benefit the car continued to reek. The scorched plastic stench invaded my nostrils and I started to get a head-



ache. Then I had visions of my car bursting into flames and I stressed over the possibilities: a melting tiny fuselage nozzle leaking fuel, a gas line filter ruptured from overheating, a miscellaneous malfunction of fused overheated wires under the dash. Any one the plausible cause of my death in a fireball inferno.

After parking the car across the street from the fundraiser, I went inside and looked for Anna Lisa. Only she wasn't there and the place was filled with all these political types with agendas in their eyes. And I must have looked like fresh meat because they all wanted to talk to me about whatever political platform they were promoting. But it was a room full of people with similar beliefs and opinions as myself. So I told them all, "I agree with you, I just don't want to talk to you." Reluctantly they finally left me alone and I walked around and looked at the art and felt self-conscious and went outside and called Anna Lisa to tell her I was leaving.

"I'm on the bus," she said. "I'm two minutes away. Can't you wait?"

I looked in the doorway of the fundraiser. A somewhat cute tree-sitting-anarchist-vegetarian-for-Obama waved at me. I returned her wave, hissed "hurry" into the phone, and then looked at my car and realized I hadn't put any money in the parking meter. Dodging traffic I crossed the street and stuffed what little change I had into the meter.

"What's wrong?" asked Anna Lisa as she walked up behind me.

"My car is melting, those people are weird, I gotta go, I'm stressed outta my mind, I can't deal with this shit right now."

"Oh. Well okay," she said as I walked her inside the front door of the benefit. A woman I hadn't seen earlier stopped us, looked me up and down and said, "We're asking everyone to donate to the cause. You can even do it online," and pointed to a laptop on a desk.

"Melting plastic," I mumbled. "Gotta go." Then gave Anna Lisa a quick hug and fled out the door.

Back in my car, the turn signal on, I pulled into traffic. With all the subtlety of a Bush-sponsored financial bailout my anxiety was back and attached to my chest like a frantic weasel. I couldn't catch my breath as thoughts of the presidential race attacked my brain. Between visions of political talking heads, I stressed over my unfinished list of things to

do. I needed mailing labels. I needed stamps. My electric toothbrush was on the fritz. There was no food at home. Maybe I should take what little money I had out of the bank and horde it under my pillow?

Driving along the congested city streets, I desperately looked for an office supply store while simultaneously trying to remember where a post office was, or a department store, or a place that sold vegetables. But all I saw were liquor stores and coffee shops and every time I stopped for a traffic signal, the smell of burning plastic enveloped me and all I could think about was the car dying. Or worse, it bursting into flames, my charred body fused to the synthetic fabric covered seats. Finally I gave up and drove home.

When I got to my house I pulled into the garage and held my breath as the burning smell was overpowering. Outside on the street, I breathed the fresh air and closed the garage door hoping the car wouldn't burst into flames. The afternoon sun shone on my face as discarded trash swirled around my feet and I looked around, thinking what a dump my neighborhood was. Then I climbed the stairs, went to my room and jumped in bed, pulled the covers over my head, and fell asleep.

Saturday night sucked. I woke up late. I woke up anxious. I looked at the clock and cursed. It was nine o'clock. I'd been asleep for hours. With my head on the pillow, I stared at the ceiling knowing I had to get up or I'd fall back asleep and then be wide awake at three in the morning. But I really didn't want to get up. So instead I recalled unpleasant past digressions and people I hadn't thought of in a long time. Then their faces morphed into Bush and Cheney's and then I was back with all those grumpy looking men in the soup lines of the Great Depression, which caused my stomach to gurgle. And I thought about food and remembered my breakfast and then I really felt ill. But for some reason that made me think of my writing and I started to think about my book, about what it needed, because it wasn't working. Something was missing. That something that would pull it all together.

Then an idea came to me and I began to figure out the narrative my book so desperately needed. Still unwilling to get out of bed, I lay there tangled up in the comforter and thought about how it could work and played with the possibilities. There was a voice in my head and it was exactly the voice I heard when I thought of telling the story to someone

else. When this same idea kept coming back and I felt I'd worked it out as far as I could, I got up and scribbled a quick outline on some coffee stained piece of paper. Feeling a bit smug, I went to the kitchen and scraped together some food, and watched an unremarkable DVD on the television in the living room and then went back to sleep.

Sunday morning I woke up calm. I woke up rested. I looked at the clock and didn't give a shit what time it was because I knew what I had to do. I had to take it easy. I had to take care of myself—too much anxiety lately. It was messing with my mind and my creativity. I needed to calm down, relax, and come Monday I was going to fix my book.

With that purpose in mind I walked down the hill to get my coffee. At the café, I said hi to Paul who has been there for years making espresso, and as usual he didn't say I couldn't have a four shot latte. He didn't say shit. He just made the drink, took my money, and then said, "Hi, how ya doing?"

Latte in hand I walked home with the Sunday paper. And then while sitting at my kitchen table I carefully ignored the financial section as well as the front page. Halfway through a ridiculous movie review, I put the paper down and thought about my car and decided I couldn't deal with it either. It was too much stress to even think about what was melting and I didn't want to go downstairs to the garage and spend all day under the hood trying to figure it out.

But I did need to do something. I couldn't just sit around ignoring the news, trying to forget about fucking Bush so I could stop worrying about the economy being destroyed by his cronies. I needed to do something mundane yet healthy to clear my thoughts. The shit these politicians were doing in the name of democracy was driving me insane.

But what was the answer? How was I to keep my sanity while the country was being destroyed? I already knew there was shit—all I could do in the way of immediate relief. Yet I had to do something different, even if it was so small a change that it really didn't matter in the grand scheme of things.

"I need a new toothbrush," I said aloud as a sudden a sense of calm spread over my body.

The truth was I'd been stressed about this for a while. My cur-

rent toothbrush was on its way out; the once finely honed brushing action now reduced to a gentle vibration that sort of rubbed my teeth and caused me anxiety as I wasn't getting the full tooth brushing experience I knew I should. Convinced I'd found the cause for at least some of my internalized apprehension, I searched the adverts in the Sunday paper and came across a huge twenty percent off sale for the exact toothbrush I wanted.

"Providence," I mumbled and searched my pockets for my credit card.

Monday morning I woke up rested. I woke up feeling I had a purpose. I looked at the clock and asked myself why I had one by my bed. I never really needed it and I actually fucking hated it being there. In the bathroom I turned on my new toothbrush and felt the bristles vigorously messaging my gum, the plaque miraculously disappearing, the teeth becoming pearly white. And somewhat cheerfully I hummed along with the motor's purr.

On my way down the hill I noticed the sky was a brilliant blue against the gray fog that hovered on the hills and thought what a beautiful place it is that I live in. When I got to the café I said hi to the artist guy in the leather hat, and tried to avoid the weirdo with Tourettes. Then I thanked Paul when he handed me my latte and left.

Finally home, latte in hand, I sat down at my computer.

"Okay," I said. "I know what to write." And then stared at the large flat screen as it glowed in my face. Outside a bus drove by, shaking the house. A couple of parrots yacked as they flew overhead. The smell of fresh coffee wafted up my nose as a low rumble of sound coming from the neighbor's TV in the room above me echoed in my mind.

At that moment, for some unexplainable reason my brain screeched to a halt and a small voice not unlike the voice of the narrator I'd hope to write said, "I give you nothing." Then my head started to ache.

Pushing aside my latte, I leaned my elbow on the desk and scratched my chin. Was it possible my mind had finally unraveled? I really wanted to work on my book. Instead I sat there and wondered if it was better to stay at the computer and force some mediocre writing out? Or was it better to throw up my hands in disgust and move on to some-

thing unimportant like doing nothing?

I didn't know the answer, but I tried to tough it out, and wrote two pages of crap. Only it felt like my heart wasn't into it. Then as usual the self loathing that accompanies these moments of failure came rolling through me and I worried if I was a fraud, that everything I'd ever written was a fluke and that I really didn't have any talent and the truth was that I was just an unproductive loser.

Sitting at my desk, I stared at what I'd just written and asked myself what was worse: churning out some forced worthless crap and then beating myself up over it being crap, and then having to go through the ensuing self-inflicted mental barrage of the usual drivel? I can't write, I'm a fraud, I suck, the last good shit I wrote was a fluke and being an unproductive loser is who I really am. Or not write at all and then beat myself up with the usual drivel?

Ah, the choices.

Sort of anti-climactic of me to have figured out what my book needed and then be floundering in the doing. Maybe I'm just too close? I thought. Maybe I need to take an extended break? Maybe I need a hobby? You know, something to take my mind off the creative process and give myself a bit of breathing room. Maybe something mundane and simple like golf. I could putter around the fairways and wear argyle sweaters, and polyester slacks in vibrant colors. Maybe a whole "Fat Elvis" era jump suit/super hero costume while driving golf carts to the clubhouse and drinking frosty cold ones at the "nineteenth hole."

Or maybe I need a ghostwriter? One that plays golf, wears polyester and could write for me dressed as Elvis and then tell me to my face that I'm useless, a loser, can't write, or play golf.

It is always good to get a second opinion.

After saving my writing, I closed the computer, and went to go make myself some food. Then the phone calls started. Friends wondering if I'd seen the news, the stock market a floundering mess because Congress had refused to bail out the financial sector. Wall Street screaming that Marx was right and it was time for Socialism. Bush proclaiming it the fault of the Democrats influenced by foreign investors. Cheney silent as usual as he waited for his farewell bonus from the American people.

Hanging up the phone, I resisted the urge to check the Internet and jump right in with the rest of America as the fear factor was once again being turned up a notch. There was fuck-all I could do at this point and wrapping myself in anxiety wasn't going to help. Somehow I knew the universe was going to right itself, even if that meant 1929 was back again for a replay.

Somewhere in the middle of my plate of rice and beans, I stopped thinking about the economy and remembered my writing and thought maybe I was being a little too hard on myself. Maybe it just wasn't time to write and instead I should focus on the good in my life and worry about finishing the book when it comes, after all this morning's brushing experience had been nothing short of amazing. Afterward I felt those little areas, the one's between the teeth, deep in the gums, and I knew that I had been shorting myself on preventive dentistry maintenance, and I was a tad overjoyed at the prospect of future gum stimulation and shiny white teeth.

Perhaps that is what I should write about?

"The Oral-B Vitality Precision Clean rechargeable electric toothbrush reduces up to 2X more plaque than a regular manual toothbrush which can cause gingivitis. It uses Advanced Cleaning Technology to surround each tooth and removes plaque for a clean feeling and healthy gums. Superior stain removal versus a regular manual brush means teeth are naturally whitened.

Precision Clean brush head moves 7,600 times per minute, surrounding each tooth, for thorough cleaning that can help prevent gingivitis. And you can even interchange Oral-B Dual Clean or Pro White brush heads on your Precision Clean toothbrush handle. Plus, now you can enjoy a choice of limited edition Vitality handle colors to match your décor."\*

Yes, the simple pleasures in life...

And now, Barack. What the hell else were we gonna do?

\* lifted without permission from the Oral B website. (<http://www.seize-oralbpower.com/us/mypowerchallenge/products/vitalityPrecision.asp>)





*Needles Motel Lot*

**Danielle Arender**

## Marvin Bell

### *The Book of the Dead Man (The Dare)*

Live as if you were already dead.

Zen admonition

#### *1. About the Dead Man and the Dare*

The dead man edges toward the precipice because he dares.

He dares to wake the audience.

He is of a mind to taunt and defy, to provoke and to goad.

The dead man urges the stuntman to repeat his death defying  
spectacular.

He dares the trapeze artist and the wire walker to flaunt their  
nonchalance.

He is of a mind to exploit the acrobatic.

Where in the lexicon of good government did threat and menace replace  
courage?

The dead man is a reminder to the lawmakers.

It was dead men who won the revolution.

It was dead men who wrote the laws.

It was dead men who armed the citizenry that they might turn on one  
another.

It was dead men who defended the cities, and it is dead men whose  
names are etched in the town squares.

The dead man dares to tell you what you know you know.

The dead man would have dared more, had he known the outcome of  
waiting.

To the dead man, existence is like a bungee on which he must fall and  
rise, and fall again, until the distance is erased between up and  
down.

It was a split-second decision to take the cord and jump.

The dead man was a thought that became tactile, became palpable,  
some like to call him corporeal.



The dead man is the overarching presence, the coverall that let him  
kneel, the tarp that covered the weapons, the canvas bag, the  
muslin sail, the percale sheet, the cotton handkerchief into which  
he breathed.

Tell him you know.

Cover your mouth if you need to, but speak up.

## *2. More About the Dead Man and the Dare*

The dead man has been afflicted by life, no complaint there.

The dead man does not make more of it than it was.

How best to call out the unjust and violent, the barons, the  
conglomerates, the cabals, the cartels and all who rise on the  
bent backs of others.

It is the dead man's place to call them out.

Everyone believes a dead man, and all men are dead men, we can get  
together and dismiss those who are daring us to.

The dead man says you know.

The dead man lives serenely in the backyards, in the surrounding  
farmlands, by the sides of ski trails and firebreaks, he is the one  
who will be coming from every direction.

The dead man's studies do not conclude, his decisions are not  
countermanded, the outcome of his being both here and gone  
can only mean that there will be daring.

The dead man has endowed daring in the arts but also in the streets.

He has fomented peace and made himself present on the battlefields.

He has placed himself in the way, who will step over him?

Now he asks you to whistle up your daring.

The dead man thinks there is enough in the dumpsters to feed an army.

The dead man hears the senators in the cloak room.

To the dead man, their language is flame retardant, their speeches are  
the cracking under the ice.

The dead man will turn the page if you will.

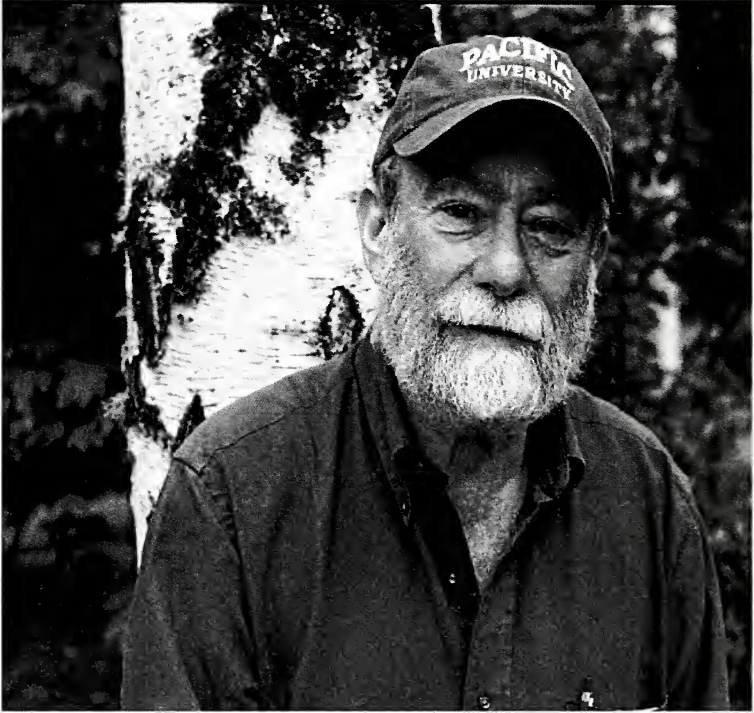
The dead man will lie prone to see into the abyss if you are beside him.

The dead man does not dare to say how happy he was.

It was the daredevil moment, when he decided.

He dared, he chose, he spun round, and in time the ground settled.

Here he stands, the dead man in his composure, but do you dare?



Marvin Bell

Photo by John Campbell

## Ileanna Portillo

### *Dancing with the Dead Man: An Interview with Marvin Bell*

The car was hot at three in the afternoon, and although my internship at a small press is situated in a quiet residential neighborhood in the Valley, I had to give in and close the windows so I could hear Marvin Bell on the phone. Having never met him before, I was nervous about calling him for our interview, even though we had been exchanging emails leading up to it.

I did see Bell once, this past January at AWP in New York City. The conference for authors and those involved in writing programs attracts the literati to a hotel for a few days each year to hear readings by eminent writers and attend panels about what's new in the literary world. I was in the lobby of the Hilton New York waiting for the rest of my group when I saw a gentleman who looked lost. I had been watching him for a minute as he circled the lobby and was just about to go offer my help when someone in my group informed me who he was. I didn't end up helping him, but I'm sure he found his way just fine. I am also glad that was not the last chance I would have to speak to a man who has been called one of the most influential poets of his generation.

The author of several books, Marvin Bell was born in 1937 in New York City but grew up in Center Moriches, Long Island. He taught at the prestigious University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop for more than thirty years as the Flannery O'Connor Professor of Letters. Currently he teaches for the low-residency MFA program at Pacific University in Forest Grove, Oregon. His most recent book of poems, *Mars Being Red* (Copper Canyon Press 2007) takes a path away from most contemporary poetry (which tends to stay away from political themes) and speaks out against the current administration and the Iraq war.

Though he can be very outspoken about current political events in his poetry, he is down to earth and funny on the phone. Bell is often traveling, and when I called him I caught him at his home in Port Townsend, Washington. The duplex is made up of two one-bedroom

units side by side. Bell likes to open up both of the houses and use one of them as his study. He and his wife began visiting Port Townsend twenty-four years ago for short respites, but now they spend up to four months at a time there.

Over the phone, Bell kindly describes the scene in his study for me. The desk he and Sam Hamill—founding editor of Copper Canyon Press—built is ten paces across, according to the size of Marvin Bell’s shoe. It faces a big window, which overlooks the street and further out the water where the ferry runs from Port Townsend to Keystone. Outside, the wind is blowing, moving the trees about.

My correspondence with Bell, over one phone conversation and various email exchanges, spanned the western portion of the United States from Los Angeles to Port Townsend, Washington, from Missoula, Montana, to Buffalo, Wyoming.

—Ileanna Portillo

*Who in your life encouraged your literary endeavors?*

The poet John Logan may have been the first older, established poet to indicate that I might have some ability. That was in 1959 or so, in Chicago, when I took a class with Logan. Along the way, there were good friends and kind editors. I cherished encouragement from others, but I didn’t depend on it. I encouraged myself.

*Where else does your spirit of independence and self-reliance come from?*

I have one sibling, a sister four years older. My father, who died when I was a young man, came to the U.S. from Ukraine as a teenager. If I complained about an adult, he would say, “Well, he has to make a living, too.”

*In general, what would you say you are trying to reach in any given poem? Do you have a goal in mind?*

My goal is always to express the otherwise inexpressible. Also, to make

something original in the language. To make a whole of seemingly disparate elements. And sometimes to call out the fools and war criminals. But I don't start a poem from an idea or a program. I start from my senses, which includes that sensory organ we call the brain.

*What was the process of writing the Dead Man poem you wrote for Audemus about "The Dare?"*

I am guilty of having created the form known as the "dead man poem," so by now I know it well. In this case, I took the concept of daring and ran with it, welcoming into the poem ideas, personal memory, and, as it went on, subterranean political feelings. The dead man is alive and dead at the same time. That allows him to burrow into the earth one moment, and the next moment to transcend the earthly.

*Why has the Dead Man form been labeled "infamous?"*

Oh, that's just shortcut for saying some readers hate it. I can imagine that those who are sure they know what poetry is, and should be, might not cotton to the form. It's experimental. It does away with the enjambments that writers of free verse are so beholden to. It has an overtly philosophical character. It can get fiercely sociopolitical. It puts together all sorts of things that arrive from every direction. It is neither linear nor proudly nonlinear. Dead Man poems are not like other poems, which is enough to discombobulate some people. The very idea of two titled sections is enough to undermine some expectations. "You thought the poem was finished? Nope, it can go on. It can always go on."

*You've called the Dead Man not a persona, but "rather, an overarching consciousness." Can you elaborate on that?*

His voice is more universal than that of a persona. And he is both dead and alive at the same time. If he were a persona, you'd know what sort of shirt he wears, or have a good guess, but for all you know he's wearing grass or nothing at all. The voice in a dead man poem is bigger than the

voice in a persona poem. It can seem to come from a great distance or be nearby.

*You've been writing Dead Man poems since 1990. How have they evolved since then?*

I no longer include the bad jokes that the early dead man poems sometimes liked. And I have come to like using the form to write occasional poems--such as when asked to contribute a poem to *Audemus*. In recent months, I have written dead man poems in response to requests to provide a poem about a river that flooded, and another about Mount Rushmore. The Mount Rushmore one got political in a hurry. I wrote one for a magazine in Texas about borders. I wrote one for a collection of "new odes." I'm always willing to try.

*Are today's politics influencing the writing you're currently working on?*

I have always written poems of sociopolitical content, but lately the sociopolitical seems to be inescapable. Warfare, torture, corruption, ineptitude rising to the level of evil, and all the while decent people trying to make a living and a life. How can anyone of a certain age avoid it? Don't forget: I'm a geezer. I have lived through several major wars and a whole lot of bad politics.

*What purpose does political poetry serve for you?*

Can't help it. I'm a citizen. I'm a voter. I'm a veteran.

*What purpose do you think your political poetry serves to your readers?*

I wouldn't know. I think political poetry can be part of whatever consensus may be growing. Political poetry doesn't stop a war, say. But it is part of the voice of a citizenry that decides to stop one.

*You've said about poetry that it is "a manifestation of more important things. On the one hand, it's poetry! On the other hand, it's just poetry." Do you ever*

*wonder about the state of literature in general? Will young people especially always want to read books?*

There will always be readers. It doesn't matter how many. Poetry that, in any way, pushes the envelope will always have a specialized audience. And that's okay. The person who gets the most out of a poem is the person who writes it.

*Will people always want to read poetry? Why?*

Some will, I think. Why? Because they have an ear for verbal music, a mind for the poetic brain, a love of invention, a feel for the truth of the imagination, or maybe just because they are the sort of people who pay attention to their inner lives. Because, after all, that's where life is felt-inside.





*Peace Be With You*

**Esteban Jesus Cons Narvaez**



## RILEY WILKINSON

### *Judith and I*

Scarlet ripe tomatoes litter the ground beneath the garden's canopy of green, amidst the basil and squash. A few of them sit right in the path of the late afternoon sun, pulling in the warm rays like red magnetic orbs, pulsating on the ground in Technicolor. If I close my eyes, I can see only spots of red piercing through gauzy leaves of dappled green. Airplanes sporadically cross the sky overhead and bisect the open patch of blue wash between the roofline and the tops of the still verdant treetops.

This is the waning of summer. This is the putting away of idle time. SPF goes into storage. Swimsuits fall out of fashion. I can hear sweaters being pulled out of storage in quiet rooms within the house. At least, I imagine I can hear this.

She exhales her cigarette next to me into the air, sexily. Her feet are sunk down into the grass. She's blowing the smoke up and her neck is silken, tan, shining. The cicadas whir louder and louder and in unison with the mower while she exhales.

Heat, smoke, buzzing.

We're silent.

Beyond the edge of the lawn is where the forest begins. It is a distinct dark wall and another world in its own deluge of sound. The high croaks of toads and the chirps of crickets seem like such a contradiction to the cloud of heat I stand in. They'll soon hasten their beat and swell with volume as the sun trades places with the moon. We'll be at the table under a lamp by then, licking sauce and wine and thinking about kissing.

My heels are wet and green. Cut grass sticks in between my toes. This smell of blades broken, julienned, mixes with the clouds of exhaust the mower leaves behind. Santiago pushes it steadily with its motor sputtering while Judith and I watch. He's coming into view again, back from the front side of the house. His t-shirt sticks to him and we

just stand and stare without words.

Judith exhales again and opens her eyes to the sky. A leaf falls behind her and lands on the cracked planks of the deck. An edging of red outlines this leaf.

I'm staring deeply at the leaf and nobody feels the sadness I see in what is merely going to fade away into a summer of moments just like this; these moments when Judith and I are silent and in our perfect youth, unafraid of the cold seasons ahead.

Santiago mows. More leaves fall. Judith exhales again and looks at me, saying nothing.



*Ponchi*

**Mayra Rodriguez**

**Danielle Arender**

*When I Was*

You

I crashed my tricycle  
on the sidewalk at two.  
My mom panicked,  
the paramedics came, and  
my older sister had to  
eat my melting popsicle for me.  
I had cut open my chin  
and blood was everywhere.  
My mom didn't even care  
it was getting on the sofa.  
I got butterfly stitches  
and later a small scar.

I was two  
but I remember this story  
because my mom or my sister  
would tell it to me.  
Though I was only two years old  
That day I learned something about humanity  
and what it means  
to be cared for  
by a stranger from an ambulance  
or your sister  
standing next to you  
with popsicle juice down her fingers.

Me

At 7 I wished like a mother  
that I could take away your pain  
Small brown fingers of one hand  
clutched around a popsicle stick.  
The fingers of the other hand  
waiting but helpless  
on the arm of the couch,  
saying my own kind of prayer.  
The red sticky juice running to my elbow  
the bright blood running down your jaw  
as the tallest people I'd ever seen  
worked on you and talked only to each other.

And now you've hanged yourself  
while our parents slept upstairs  
and I was 1,912 miles away from you.  
And the brown couch is gone  
but I'm left remembering  
blood seeping through  
the thin skin of your chin  
butterfly stitches  
and popsicle juice.

## Leonard Chang

### *Q-Zombies*

**M**y interest in zombies began at twelve years old when I watched George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* on TV, one of the many late nights when my drunk father had passed out in his bedroom and my mother had curled up on the living room sofa with one of the cushions as a pillow—leaving crisscrossing indentations on her cheek—and an old electric blanket that no longer worked draped around her legs.

I had my own room in the basement with a TV I had hooked up to an antenna outside, the antenna wire running through the translucent slat basement windows and leaving an opening large enough for a constant draft. I didn't like turning on the heat because the old baseboard units creaked and groaned all night and scared me. There were also insects, particularly beetles and crickets, living in the heaters, and whenever I turned the thermostat up I'd find the bugs dragging their deformed and burned bodies across my carpet, their spiny legs getting caught in the fibers. I once woke up to find a beetle on my pillow, almost eye to eye. In my half-sleepy state I wasn't sure what I was looking at until the antennae flickered up and down. I yelped, and with a rush of adrenaline jumped a few feet off the futon. I vowed never to use the heat again.

So I huddled under my blue plaid sleeping bag and extra comforters, read novels and watched TV. Although I was an avid reader, I was also addicted to movies. I loved Kung-fu flicks, the poorly dubbed Shaw brother's classics with titles like *The Five Deadly Venoms* or *Shaolin Bloodshed*, and science fiction, anything related to *Star Wars* or *Star Trek*. It wasn't much of a leap from science fiction to horror, since many movies blended the two, but my interest in horror stopped at truly frightening movies that exploited my limited and uneasy understanding of evil and the devil, since my mother was a Bible teacher at Sunday school.

A movie like *Don't Be Afraid of the Dark*, in which little wrinkled

homunculi with razor blades and nasty murderous intentions who could only come out in the darkness kept my lights on for weeks. Poor Sally, whom nobody believed, kept trying to tell her husband about the demonic creatures, but the little men only seemed to appear to her. The glimpses we had of the red-faced killing demons scared the hell out of me. My basement was often dark. There could very well be little murderous men hiding under the stairs or in the boiler room that hissed at me. But zombies were different. I realized this after watching Romero's movie.

The horrors in *Night of the Living Dead* were frightening enough to keep me riveted, but not so frightening that I wouldn't be able to sleep. It was the perfect mix of thrill, fear and manageable dread. It helped that the zombies were slow moving and even half-comic in their relentless, encroachment on the people hiding out in a small farmhouse. There was enough gore and surprises to keep it scary, but not too scary. The movie was also in black and white, which helped me by muting the gore and giving the film a deceptively dated sensibility, further distancing me from it.

*Night of the Living Dead* was, I later learned, a particularly good entry in the genre because of the way Romero integrated social and racial issues into the film, something I noticed in a distracted way—for example, one of the racist members of the make-shift posse kills the sole African-American man in the house under siege without a second thought—but these subtexts didn't really register until years later.

I began seeking out zombie movies from that point on, often scanning TV listings for the word "Dead" in the titles, and would often go over to my friend Scott's house, since he had cable TV and access to the premium movie channels.

But what exactly is a zombie? The standard definition and understanding of what a zombie is should be known to everyone. This is crucial for surviving the next apocalypse. But for those who aren't sure: a zombie is a corpse that has come back to life. It's the undead.

Most people believe zombies to be strictly a fictional construct, a plot device really, to propel the story forward and put the protagonists in jeopardy. Zombies, to the uninitiated, have the same level of believability as a vampire or werewolf, or even something more potentially

silly. It's true that zombies in movies have often had a comic quality to them, but in recent years, more animalistic and predatory traits. What many people don't know is that the concept of the zombie has been around for hundreds of years. During the Middle Ages, a variant of the zombie existed in French folklore, with the dead coming back to life to pursue the murderers who had sent them to the grave. In many ancient cultures the return of the dead was a common motif, a corporeal ghost to come haunt the living.

Zombies were explored by Canadian Ethnobotanist Wade Davis in the 1980's as an actual phenomenon. Although his research methods were suspect and plenty of critical objections were raised once his book *The Serpent and the Rainbow* was published, he did come up with some interesting theories. By analyzing the powders that witch doctors used on victims, Davis found some common ingredients, including neurotoxins present in puffy fish and tree frogs, toxins that could conceivably shut down a person's metabolic activity to give the appearance of death, and then, once the effects wore off, the person would arise from death in a zombified state. Of course they weren't lusting after human flesh, but it's not too difficult to imagine, considering the origins of the zombie and the folklore that sprouted from these origins. Davis went as far as to argue that this intentional zombification was a common practice in some Haitian secret societies, a punishment to keep everyone in check. Even fifty years before Wade Davis wrote about Haitian zombies, Zora Neale Hurston, while researching Haitian folklore for her essay *Tell my Horse*, came across stories of people who had died and been buried, only to reappear later, sometimes decades later.

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I've been thinking about zombies recently for a number of reasons. A friend of mine is a very big fan of the genre—he is a filmmaker and has in fact made a zombie movie, the title of which he doesn't want me to reveal. After the recent spate of zombie films that have come out, films that have updated not just the atmosphere of the genre, but the zombies themselves reflecting the sophisticated tastes of moviegoers, we've been talking about what the next stage in their cinematic evolution may be. Our discussions prompted me to wonder why zombies continue to fascinate me, why I'll sit through the poorly written, poorly



directed and poorly acted movies just to see if there's something different and unique about this depiction. I'm almost always disappointed, but optimistically continue to rent movies like *Zombie Honeymoon*, *Zombies Gone Wild* or *Nudist Colony of the Dead*.

Is it the idea of returning from the dead that compels me to continue watching? This is definitely part of my interest, undoubtedly prompted by my relatively short but complete semi-religious upbringing. It was short because my mother became a Bible teacher for only a handful of my teen years. Once she divorced my alcoholic father and was burdened with raising three kids on her own, she found that religion was a solace she no longer had time for.

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Philosophers love zombies. The undead have a peculiar function in the philosophical world because they are metaphysically possible. We can conceive of their existence—not necessarily the flesh-eating kind, but the unconscious, physical manifestation of the walking dead kind. This poses questions as to what exactly we are as thinking, rational beings compared to zombies.

Zombies are generally mindless, motivated by instinct, and propelled by the basic desire of hunger. They move in herds, often following other zombies for no real reason. Philosophers often label these zombies “p-zombies”, or “philosophical zombies” because they are human beings without consciousness—they may have physical reactions to pain or pleasure but they don't truly experience the mental states—and yet still function as physical beings.

This notion of mindless human beings without any true consciousness isn't really an unusual phenomenon. In fact, this possibly describes most people. I can look out my window on a weekday morning and see commuters gathering at the carpool corner, briefcases and bags in hand, iPod headphones in their ears, and a distracted expression on their faces as they line up and slowly pile into cars heading into San Francisco.

My father used to be one of these commuters. He took the train from our small suburban Long Island town of Merrick into Manhattan, and worked in various capacities for commercial banks. After returning home he'd start drinking beers, and then eventually would move onto

whiskey. Most of my memories are of him sitting on the sofa, watching TV, with a tumbler of Jack Daniel's in his hand. He was a functional alcoholic who grew more and more frustrated with his life until he destroyed everyone and everything around him.

A former commando in the Korean Navy whose violent reputation followed him to the U.S.—another ex-Navy SEAL recognized him at a Korean church and told my mother who her husband *really* was—my father seemed to plod through his days and stumble through his nights with a mindlessness punctuated by drunken violence.

There was one time, in a moment of rare sobriety, when he told me that all his life he just wanted to buy a big sailboat and live on the sea. I remember this vividly because it was such a surprise to hear any kind of personal revelation, especially one that seemed to rise above the din of his many pathological lies about himself. I've become very good at detecting liars.

But this lifelong desire of his to live on a sailboat made sense to me, since I remember seeing boating magazines on his bookshelf and blueprints for a small wooden carver hull sailboat.

What I never did understand was if this was his dream, why he then constantly anchored himself to his wives (three, and counting) and why he continued to pursue a career in business for which he was so obviously ill-equipped (fired a number of times, and even sued at least once). There were many times in his life, particularly in between wives, when he could've pursued this goal of his, but instead shackled up with another woman and started another job and found himself exactly in the same place he detested: on land, with a family he resented, a job he hated, a life from which he fled into alcohol.

The stories I heard about him came from my mother, who knew much of his background not just from him, but also from his mother, and she had also known his first wife because they had gone to the same high school. The son of a drug runner who often abused him and disappeared without much warning, my father often had the difficult task of finding his father and bringing him back, once even having to sneak into China. An irresponsible and volatile man, my grandfather had apparently foisted the responsibilities of the family onto my father. When the responsibilities became too much for him, my father ran away from

home and joined the Korean Naval Academy before the start of the Korean War, and became a commando. He thrived in the Navy, and during the war had achieved a reputation for his ruthless and sadistic interrogation of Chinese prisoners of war. After the war he emigrated to the U.S., married, had a son, and his wife abandoned both of them shortly after the birth. A few years later he married my mother, who raised my half-brother, me, and my sister. She divorced him after over a dozen years of abuse.

One story my mother told me was of him beating her while she was pregnant with me, repeatedly kicking her stomach. I always wondered if somehow I knew this *in utero*, because of his three children I am the one with the most animosity toward him.

I haven't spoken to my father in over sixteen years, but the last time I saw him he threw me out of his office. I had told him bluntly that I didn't think he was in any position to give me advice about my life since his seemed like such a failure. Yes, I was goading him. Yes, I was seeing how far I could push him before he would rear up and threaten me. But I was no longer a frightened eight-year-old, and couldn't help telling him exactly how I felt, which was scornful and dismissive. He was trying to advise me about my post-collegiate life and my career at that point as a teacher. He said something about starting a family and getting on a career track in business. I kept asking why. Why should I start a family when I didn't want kids at the time? Why should I work for a company when I really wanted to be a writer?

He spouted platitudes. He talked about the "American way." I realized that he really didn't have an answer. I reminded him of his dream of living on a sailboat and how every year he grew older the dream was less likely. I reminded him of what having a family and a career he hated had done to him. I reminded him of the times he would get drunk and beat my mother, and how he probably had a bottle of whiskey in his desk right now.

That was when he threw me out.

That was also when I decided not to take the paralegal job at Sullivan & Cromwell, when I decided to attend graduate school for creative writing, and when I committed myself to finishing a novel I had begun a few months earlier. I knew with more certainty the kind of life I didn't

want—my father’s—and wondered if he ever thought about why he was so miserable.

Not too long ago I heard that his last wife had stolen money from him and disappeared, and he was living alone, his health failing, and he had found religion. Instead of trying to live a life he viewed as the American way, he is now living the Jesus way. He simply replaced one with another, and is now landlocked somewhere in Georgia.

Sometimes I wonder what would’ve become of his life had he done what he truly wanted to. I understand the responsibilities he thought he had, and the pressures he undoubtedly faced, and I could easily imagine his motivation for trying to live the American way, but what’s the point of staying with a family if he was just going to beat them? What’s the point of working jobs he hated if he was only to be fired from them? Once my mother left him she made more than enough money to support us. In fact she bloomed without him. Why didn’t he run off and live on the sea?

He was undoubtedly following the advice he had given me, but in doing so was ignoring the inner calling that probably would’ve made him happy. He was doing what he thought he had to, and hated it. He was following the herd, waiting on top of the Long Island Railroad platform, filing into the grey metal trains, and being shuttled into Manhattan, and it was killing him.

My father is another kind of zombie, one that I would call a “q-zombie,” a quotidian zombie who moves through everyday life, doing what is expected of him, and rarely achieving any kind of consciousness of what he is doing. Q-zombies may have glimmers of self-consciousness that they repress with drugs or alcohol or a series of sophisticated denial strategies, but for the most part they just don’t think about what or why they are doing what they are doing. Like most zombies in the movies, they stagger with the herd.

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The zombie metaphor is reductive and simplistic, but unavoidable. Whether it’s a contrived goal of a house in the suburbs, a picturesque family and an SUV in the driveway, or a life devoted to the Bible, my father seemed too easily drawn onto a path that required little self-reflection. Perhaps his newfound faith may force the kind of consciousness he

needs to understand what havoc his life had wrought, but judging from the stories I hear from my siblings, that my father is content to spout platitudes of a different kind to them, I doubt it.

I can still picture my father vividly sitting at the dinner table, red-faced and slurring, as all of us sat quietly, each one of us getting lectured about something. The more he drank the more his voice would get both animated and harsh at the same time, and the leaps in logic from one topic to another became bewildering. What happened from that point on was a balancing act. If any of us argued with him, contradicted him in any way, we'd set him off. Once, when for some reason the conversation turned to the post office, and I told him that we could leave our outgoing mail in our mailbox, he flatly denied this was possible. We had to drop letters off at the corner box, he said. Because I had been ordering Kung Fu supplies by mail order, and because I had been to the post office that week, I had read a poster that listed the ways to send letters, and one of the options was leaving the mail in your box for the postman to pick up. I insisted I was right. I had read the poster just a few days ago. My father said this couldn't be.

My mother once told me that I was one of the most stubborn children she had ever known, and despite my father's growing drunkenness, despite my full awareness of what would happen, I shook my head and told him he was wrong.

Everyone grew still as my father bared his teeth in disgust. He sucked in air and slapped his hand on the table, which made everyone jump. Everything happened quickly. He moved fast. He lurched out of his chair and pushed me up against the wall; he gripped my shoulder and yelled at me never to disrespect him again. My sister began crying, my brother slipped away out back, and my mother screamed at my father to leave me alone.

I saw something in my father's bloodshot eyes—a moment of regret, an embarrassment, a hitch in his anger—that made him pause for an instant, and he shoved me away and ordered me to leave the house and not come back. I yelled back, "Fine!" and stomped out of the house.

I remember that night so clearly not because of what happened at the dinner table, but because of what happened afterwards. When I was about three blocks away, walking at first without any real desti-

nation until I decided to go to the Merrick Library, which along with the train platform were my favorite escapes, I heard my sister's terrified voice calling my name. When I turned around, I saw her on her tiny pink bicycle, racing to catch up to me, her short legs pedaling in a blur. She kept yelling my name and asking me to wait up. She was afraid I was really leaving forever, and she didn't want to be left there alone. I think that was one of the first times I realized how much I loved her.

I took her with me to the library, and we sat in the downstairs children's room, choosing books to check out.

But when I think back to that moment when my father's eyes seemed to register something, when he seemed to hesitate before hitting me, when my mother's pleas and my sister's crying seemed to halt him, I wonder if at that precise moment when he wasn't drunk enough to ignore everyone, including his own sense of guilt, I wonder if he had a glimmer of what he was doing and who he had become. I wonder if at that moment there was a spark of consciousness that stopped him, that caused him to push me away and order me out instead of beating me. And then, he quickly doused that tiny spark with more Jack Daniel's and returned to his oblivion.

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The fact is that true self-consciousness is difficult and frightening. George A. Romero has been pushing his zombies toward more self-consciousness, beginning with the zombie named "Bub" in *Day of the Dead*, who could learn activities, and, more recently, the zombies in the 2005's *Land of the Dead*, where Big Daddy and his zombie brethren learn to team up and fire automatic weapons. Purists decry this movement away from the mindless versions, and other zombie films, such as Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later*, update the zombies as instinctual and aggressive killers, amplifying the threat by making these modern-day zombies faster and more predatory. This is a development that is completely predictable—contemporary audiences don't have the patience for slow-moving zombies, and with the popularity of torture porn, or the *Saw* and *Hostel*-esque gruesome blood fests, the threshold for horror has been raised to disturbing levels.

But the cinematic evolution of self-conscious zombies seems unstoppable. There have always been glimpses of consciousness in zom-



bies—momentary memories of former lives and routines—but true self-awareness is yet to come. I am waiting for the pivotal Cartesian scene in a zombie movie in which a zombie thinks and therefore exists to him or herself (or itself). I want to see a zombie realize that he or she is a zombie.

If Romero's zombies are evolving into more aware beings, then the next steps are clear. Imagine a zombie film in which the zombies, either infected by a bite or an airborne virus, move from one generation to the next with more cognitive abilities. After all, if zombification has a viral source, and viruses replicate rapidly and can evolve and adapt to a host, then why couldn't each successive new zombie have symptoms that reflect a burgeoning consciousness?

When I studied genetics in high school we used fruit flies to track hereditary characteristics in successive generations. Their life cycles were quick enough to see results within days. The replication of zombies is even faster than fruit flies. One bite and you're a zombie. When you, as a zombie, bite someone else, he or she becomes one. Now imagine there's something in the virus that allows for some consciousness, and each successive generation of bitten zombie retains more and more of that consciousness.

Maybe you're in a haze of anguished bloodlust. All you know, as a zombie, is that you must have fresh human meat. It's not even a conscious desire but an instinctual action – you smell human flesh and you scramble for it. The hunger is beyond hunger—it's excruciating and tormenting. You exist like this for days, weeks, even months.

But something is changing. You have inexplicable flashes of puzzling images, memories of something you're not sure of, but which you may have some connection to. When you see your victims screaming and running, you have a brief and fleeting image of a woman, an older woman, running down the hall, crying, running from a drunken man. The way the people slam into each other as they try to escape somehow reminds you of the woman slamming into a wall and struggling away.

You stop, not sure where this came from. You shake it off and continue chasing your victims. The smell of flesh is overpowering. Your starvation is searing through you. Nothing but tendon and muscle and fat and blood will ease the anguish. When you catch a victim and tear at

her flesh, gorging yourself on her entrails, you hear her cry out for mercy and for God to help her, but the only thing that registers is the screeching of the other zombies tearing at other victims.

Then, after you have satiated yourself, the hunger easing, you look up. Without the craving for flesh driving you, something is different. You see more. You're more confused. The screams of the other victims dizzy you. The other zombies then move on, having sniffed more fresh humans in the distance. The herd of zombies runs off, and you are compelled to follow them. They run through a playground, long since abandoned, chasing another group of frightened humans. One man gets entangled in a small child's bicycle and stumbles, his leg lodged in the rusted wheel. A hoard of zombies pounce on him and begin tearing him apart. You move toward them out of instinct, though you're not hungry. You look at the bicycle, and something shifts inside you. The bicycle is somehow...familiar. It's pink with a white wicker basket. The wheels are so small. There are streamers on the handgrips. Then, an image of a little girl pedaling as fast as she can flashes through you. The little girl is calling out a name. Your name. She is asking you to wait up. She pedals faster. You stare. The little girl's voice echoing in your head is your sister's voice.

You move closer to the bicycle, and you see in the small handlebar mirror another zombie with blood running down his chin. Again there's something familiar. And when you move, the zombie moves. You touch your face, and the zombie touches his. Then, slowly, you begin to understand that the mirror is showing a reflection of yourself. You back away, still touching your face. You look down at your fingers and see blood.

You look at the bicycle. You see the pedals and think of your sister racing to catch up with you. You remember your sister. And then, you look at your decomposing fingers, your hands with the skin falling off and bones exposed. You begin shaking. You look in the handlebar mirror again. You remember what you used to be like. You are...you are a zombie. You realize you have just murdered another human being. You hear the screams of the victims around you. You think about your sister. You let out a long, mournful screech in a voice you don't recognize. You fall to your knees. Where is your sister? What happened to you?



You watch the hoard of zombies rush off to find more victims, but you can't seem to stand up anymore. You sink to the ground and curl up.

\* \* \*

This idea of q-zombies was prompted not just by my conversations with my filmmaker friend, but also because I've entered a period of major reevaluation, prompted by my 39<sup>th</sup> birthday. I realized that I had been writing for almost twenty years—not just writing, but living the writer's life, with the same daily schedule of waking up at dawn, writing at my computer, and publishing stories, novels and essays for two decades. What startled me was that it doesn't seem like twenty years, yet I remember very clearly my decision to live the life of a writer, based on the biographies I read of Hemingway, Faulkner and other contemporary writers I admired—I learned that the only way to be a writer was to write every day, so when I was a junior in college I started the routine of writing in the mornings. I was living in Boston with roommates, and had my own coffee machine in my bedroom, and would wake up without my alarm while it was still dark. I'd start the coffee, shuffle to my desk, and get to work.

Six novels later I find myself doing exactly the same thing. Right now, in fact, I am writing this at my desk in Oakland, California. It's seven-thirty in the morning. The sun is casting an orange glow across Lake Merritt.

I've always periodically stopped and looked around, taken a survey of my life and asked if everything was moving along as I wanted. For the first time in a very long time I looked around and suddenly wasn't sure if I was on track.

This happened before, when I was sophomore in college, and was on a pre-law, pre-business track, taking courses in money and banking, preparing for the LSAT's and GMAT's, and was profoundly unhappy. I was drinking a lot, often getting wildly drunk three to four nights a week, becoming depressed, and feeling as if I wasn't accomplishing anything, and certainly not getting my money's worth as I sunk deeper in debt to pay for school. I was doing what all my other classmates were doing, especially moving along a pre-professional track, and I didn't like it.

I woke up one morning and knew something was wrong. I couldn't be there anymore. I packed everything I could into my car, and left. I dropped out of college, joined the Peace Corps, and became committed to being a writer. When I returned to a different college as a junior, I knew what I had to do to become a writer, and that was when I began my daily writing routine.

Two decades later, I find myself with a familiar and unsettling feeling of restlessness and uncertainty. The major difference between then and now is that I'm doing what I want to be doing, and yet it's not entirely satisfying.

I am worried that I am becoming a q-zombie. True, I am living a life that some would envy, and I don't regret any of my decisions, but I'm worried that I've fallen into a life without enough contemplation, that I'm losing some of that self-consciousness that brought me here in the first place. If I am honest with myself I find that I now approach my writing and my daily life in the same way that the commuters outside my window seem to approach theirs, with a routine that borders on mindlessness, and I've vowed to myself never to do this. One of my greatest fears is to become my father. I don't think this is happening, though, because I'm doing what I want, and I have no longing for a life other than my own. But I must be vigilant. I must always be sure that I am mindful of what I am doing and where I am going. I must keep checking the handlebar mirrors.

I do think, however, that I am getting tired. Perhaps this has to do with my age, or with the fact that I've been working like this for two decades, but making a living as a freelance writer is a struggle. It's not just the lack of money or the fact that most people don't read. One of my biggest struggles has been battling the expectations of editors and readers, trying my best to subvert the desire for racial and ethnic stereotypes. I have strived to present Asian Americans as unexoticized and regular Americans, sometimes even using genres to shroud and camouflage my intentions, but in many instances readers were disappointed not to get wise old grandmothers spouting tidbits of Asian wisdom and Kung-Fu experts knocking around villains. In many instances, a novel about a Korean American that has nothing to do with race or ethnicity is an oddity in American fiction. No one knows what to do with it.

In many instances, using stereotypes of immigrants allows readers to have a fix on the characters and the novel. Never mind that the stories of Asian Americans are becoming more and more removed from immigration and acculturation; ethnic and racial issues, although important, aren't the only things that comprise our stories. Yet this reality seems to matter very little to most readers. This struggle, after twenty years of writing, is beginning to wear me down.

Zombies have always been depicted with negative stereotypes, which is why I've been encouraged by Romero's attempts to give them slightly more mental capacities. Boyle and other filmmakers who use zombies as violent and frightening plot devices make very simple choices that are understandable in the context of the stories, but it's disappointing.

I know I am particularly sensitive to the depiction of characters as plot devices, since Asian Americans have been used in this way ever since the silent film era, and if you've ever seen a Fu Manchu movie with Boris Karloff or the various incarnations of Dragon Ladies or martial arts bad guys, you'll know what I'm talking about. The worst instances involve Asians as comic relief, as Mickey Rooney portrayed "Mr. Yunioshi" in *Breakfast at Tiffany's* or Gedde Watanabe as "Long Duk Dong" in *Sixteen Candles*. Those depictions were racist and humiliating, and completely superfluous, which made it even more offensive.

What's amazing is that there was a time in the early years of film that was unfettered by racist stereotypes. In 1914 Sessue Hayakawa was not only the first (and only) major Asian American movie star, he was also a romantic leading man, a sex symbol, and was constantly paired with white actresses in torrid love stories. He predated Rudolph Valentino, and was seen *on screen* making out with his famous co-stars. The rise of anti-Asian sentiment in the U.S. during the 1920's ended his career here, but for a short time he was one of the highest paid actors of his era.

Now it's all gone to shit, and I grip the edge of my seat and watch with one eye closed, ready to flinch, whenever I see Asians in a mainstream Hollywood movie.

Perhaps this subversion of the expected is what Romero is contending with when he tries to push his zombie movies in a new direc-

tion. As exciting and compelling the new zombies movies are, with the very latest, *I am Legend*, based on Richard Matheson's novel, depicting the zombies as vampire/zombie hybrids, I hope that the flash and scariness of the new zombies don't overwhelm the burgeoning consciousness of this other line of zombies.

It's easy to conflate the various mythical creatures, crossing vampires with zombies, mummies with zombies, or even zombie leper ghosts out to get revenge in John Carpenter's *The Fog*. But at the heart of all these depictions, whether it's of the semi-conscious variety or the action-packed lightning fast killer variety, whether it is a hybrid or pure zombie, what is binding all of these permutations of zombies is the central conceit of having some kind of life after death—some kind of existence, however awful or disgusting or terrifying, that enables a human to survive beyond his or her demise.

Isn't that what makes zombies so frightening? If we compare zombies with aliens or creatures from the sea, there's no doubt about the non-human creatures offering thrills and fear, but what puts zombies in a completely different and unique category is that they are us. Or, they were us. Or, we could become them.

And perhaps this is one reason why Romero's push to make zombies more self-aware is truly unnerving to fans of the genre, because it reduces the distance from them, it collapses the Otherness of the zombies, and makes them all too real. Zombies with self-awareness and self-consciousness are no longer monsters, but diseased, decrepit humans tormented by uncontrollable instincts. We cannot cheer their decapitation and demise. We cannot celebrate the triumph of the non-inflicted because we can easily imagine ourselves as the inflicted. What is zombification but a disease? And who hasn't either battled or been involved in a battle with disease?

And perhaps the quintessential Cartesian scene that I desire so strongly in a zombie movie, in which a zombie would look in the handlebar mirror of a child's bicycle and slowly and disturbingly realize that he is now the undead, is just too horrible to imagine. *Cogito ergo sum* would become "I think therefore I know I am a zombie." This revelation of our zombification, whether it's in a zombie horror movie or whether it's fully acknowledging our own q-zombie status, would shake us to the core.

The truth of our diseased state would either force us into more repression and denial—which would be very difficult, given the evidence before us—or dealing with the disease with some kind of concrete action, and this is truly frightening. We wouldn't be running from zombies; we would want to run from ourselves.

Yet isn't this what it means to have consciousness? If this is what separates us from animals, what truly and distinctly makes us humans, then this confrontation seems absolutely necessary, no matter how difficult it may be, and so I will continue questioning myself in ways I wished my father had. I will continue asking myself what it is I want, and where I should go from here. This will, I hope, inoculate me from the disease.

That glimmer of consciousness I thought I saw in my father's eyes the night he kicked me out of the house—that glimmer could've sparked something momentous in his life. What if he had allowed himself to think about what he was doing, where he was, and where he was headed? What if he stopped and registered how derailed his life was? What if he put down his drink and walked out of the house and went to sea? Instead he grabbed his bottle of whiskey and trudged into the living room. He turned on the TV news and drank until he raged through the house and beat up my mother. I know that for me to avoid q-zombification I must never ignore that glimmer.

\* \* \*

I remember one vivid scene in *Night of the Living Dead* when a zombie woman was walking by a tree and plucked a huge beetle off the bark and ate it. Because of my proximity to beetles and crickets, knowing full well the one click of the thermostat would send them clawing out from the heaters, this one startling gesture alarmed me more than the frenzied attack on the hapless victims, their bodies being torn apart and eaten. The simple and quick popping of the beetle into the zombie woman's mouth gave me a bizarre connection to her, and thereby made her zombification all the more real and unnerving. The leap from being some kid in the basement to a staggering and moaning zombie wasn't that far to make, and that night long after the movie was finished and I was thinking about it, images swirling and scenes replayed in my imagination, I huddled with my sleeping bag over my head, making sure no



*Alegria*

**Mayra Rodriguez**



## Jessica Flores

### Juarez

A glint of bronze on silver.  
A medal, an honor earned.  
A delicate shade of brown.  
A hint of pink.  
Soft bumps and ridges  
erect in an involuntary last reaction to sensation.

Absently I trace my own nipple.  
Nipples: nourishment, security, bond.  
Gnashed off for a prize.

*No one will care. Sluts are rarely missed.  
And easily replaced.  
You said it, Compa.*

A mother's desperate plea.  
Her frantic search.  
*¿Han visto a mi hija? Nunca llegó a casa.  
Se fue con el novio.  
No, se fue a trabajar. Las maquiladoras están lejos y el camión pasa retirado.  
Luego llega. Se fue con el novio.*

Blame the victim.

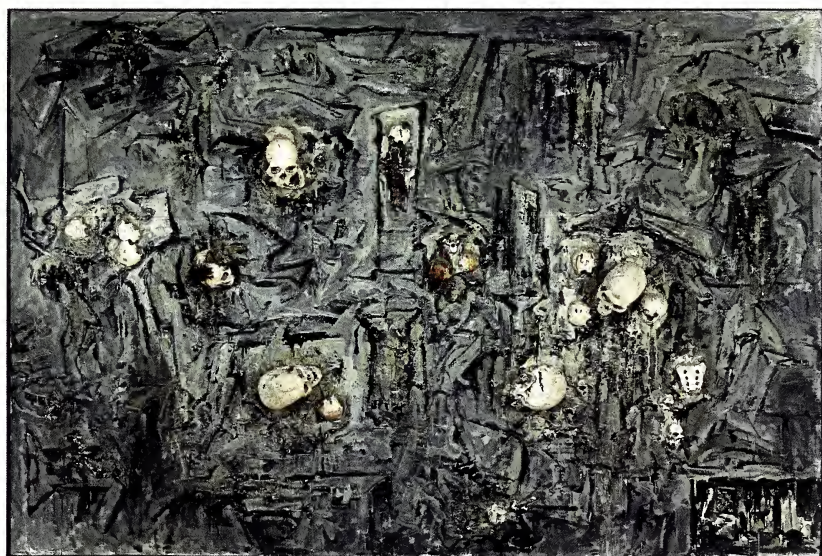
A body found half covered in the sand.  
Baked by the desert sun.  
A carving on the small of her back.  
Work clothes stained with tears, blood, and cum.

*Oyes, la vieja tenía razón. Putas no sangran. Toma, un recuerdo.*  
A bronze glint blinds the eye as the nipple medal flies across the sky.  
A corpse rots under corrupted ground.

Pigs wear medals.  
A mother wears black.

I caress my nipple as  
Tears form in my eyes.  
I change the channel.





*My Lai*

**Hans Burkhardt**

## Kathleen Araiza

### *Hans Burkhardt: The Art of Mortality*

As children of Mexico kicked a skull around like a soccer ball, artist Hans Burkhardt soon followed, picking up lingering teeth and fragments of cranial bone. What others around him viewed as wasted matter, Burkhardt saw the horrors of his time. From this revelation, Burkhardt's greatest works were produced including his 1968 piece, "My Lai," which pertains to the gruesome violence caused by American soldiers during the Vietnam War. "My Lai" represented the dismay felt by Burkhardt's generation and after personally viewing this achievement in modern art, it's safe to say that his intention to shock the general audience remains existent.

Jack Rutberg, founder and director of Jack Rutberg Fine Arts in Los Angeles, has represented the work of Burkhardt since 1973. During a recent visit to his gallery, Rutberg discussed the work Burkhardt created during the 1960s, work that alluded not only to the age of modern art, but Burkhardt's interest towards the reality of inevitable death. As Rutberg came to the "My Lai" piece, he discussed the shock value that cultivated from its first appearance. Rutberg commented that today's young people may no longer be impacted by such art. I'm happy to report that he's mistaken.

As I stood in front of "My Lai," my body developed an uncomfortable heat. Colors of black and grays were splattered on the canvas, creating textures reminiscent of flayed flesh. I saw images which have yet to escape my mind: a jaw with teeth still intact, a skull with hair attached, and vertebrae of spine are all intertwined with oil paint. A friend stood next to me in the gallery as I studied "My Lai" and she too could feel the intense presence of the six foot by nine painting. She smelled what she could only describe as a smell of musk that came from the thickly placed paint. As she drifted closer to the piece, the strength of the smell repelled her from taking a closer look. From this type of reac-

tion, it is evident that the idea of death carried throughout Burkhardt's paintings permeates generation and every age.

The shock value of "My Lai" in 1968 is without a doubt transcendent—it transcends every age, group, race, gender, etc. The violence that derived from My Lai, a massacre of a Vietnamese village by U.S. forces, were the negative reality of Burkhardt and Rutberg's generation. However, each new generation inevitably experiences a social horror that forces them to cultivate a new perception on both life and death. I believe this is a concept Burkhardt understood. Through a work of art such as "My Lai," viewers from my generation and generations who follow after will be able to comprehend the intention of his work.

When viewing a photograph of a painting, it's difficult to completely grab the full attention of the viewer. This idea very much applies to Burkhardt, whose paintings are extraordinary when merely viewed as a photograph, yet physically connect with the person who stands inches away. When I first saw the image of "My Lai," it was on a postcard. What I saw was an impressive piece of art that consisted of dark colors forming a maze strategically placed skulls. The skulls looked as if they were painted. When I finally attended Rutberg's gallery, I came to the great discovery that the skulls were not painted on but literally placed on top of the canvas. The thick layers of paint, the angles and projections of human bone and the violent strokes of the brush are not clearly depicted in two-dimensional images of his work. A photograph of "My Lai" holds some weight as a powerful image but when viewed in person, all techniques, color usage and bone placement becomes so apparent that the piece is inevitably overwhelming.

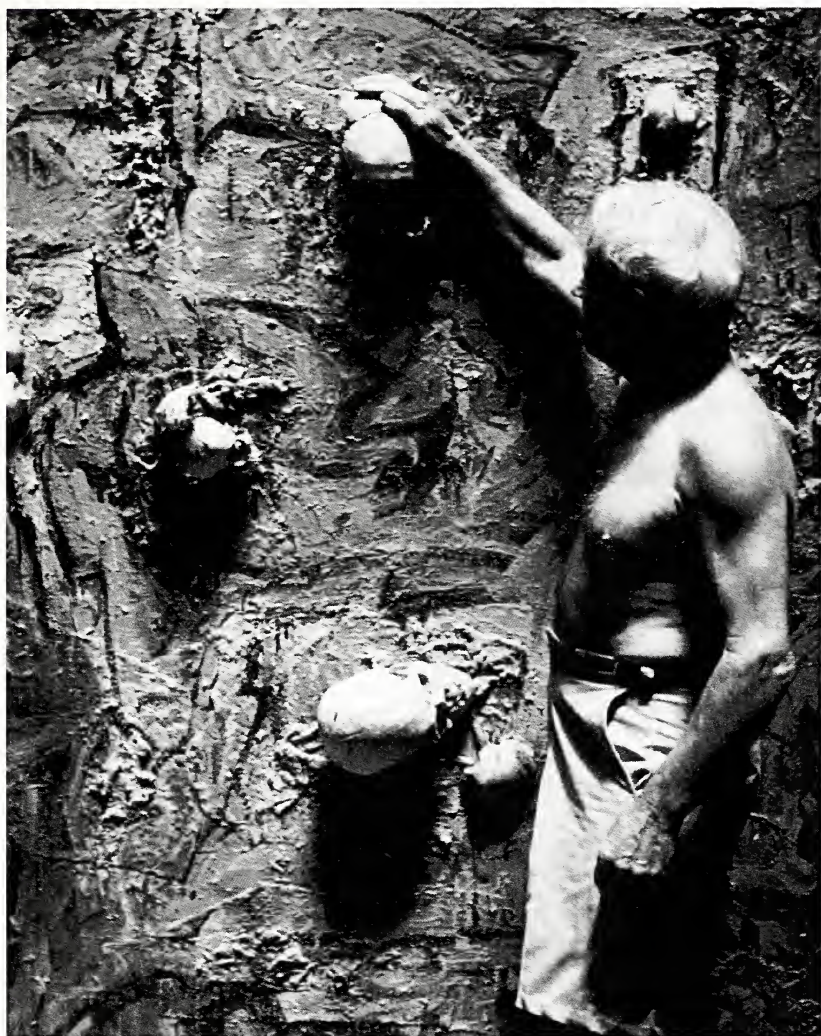
Art critic Donald Kuspit, referred to Burkhardt's "My Lai," as well as his other three-dimensional war painting, "Lang Vei" as "among the greatest war paintings...gestures that give Abstract Expressionist painting its powerful, primal thrust...and make clear that Burkhardt is a master—indeed the inventor—of the abstract *memento mori*."

*Memento mori*, which in Latin translates into "remember you are mortal" greatly pertains to the work of Burkhardt. In his painting, "Gazing at the Stars," Burkhardt depicts the reality of what happens with our cadavers through a misshapen skeleton on its back gazing unto the evening sky. On the back of this painting is an inscription written

by Burkhardt: "You will have plenty of time to look at the stars when the worms are eating you at their leisure." This humorous approach towards death not only appertains to an evidently witty Burkhardt but also emphasizes the belief that his work greatly relies and embodies the ideas of *memento mori*.

Towards the end of his discussion, I asked Rutberg how he was introduced to Burkhardt. He lightly chuckled and simply said it was a long story for another time, leaving my curiosity unsatisfied. Aside from my personal dissatisfaction of not knowing the "full story", what I realized to be the imperative knowledge gained from my visit to the Rutberg Gallery were the social intentions of Burkhardt's art and his ambitious nature to enable his audience to think and react on what lies ahead, mortality.





*Hans Burkhardt with My Lai*

**Eloise Klein Healy**

*What Does Death Want From Me?*

Just hanging around,  
picking up something from the table, say a bill

or the insurance form half-filled in  
or the map of New Mexico or the bird book.

Just looking,  
but not saying much

like people who draw attention  
to themselves by being noisy with their silence.

Death already has the best part, my sweet dogs  
and mom and dad.

It's shopping me now like a garage sale addict  
looking for the first edition nobody talks about anymore.



*Airport*

**Danielle Arender**

**Ally Acker**

*The Silk Kimono*

When we met, I thought it was me you wanted  
Your hand sliding beneath the cool silk  
peeling away the cloth from my shoulders  
soft as love.

When I would go for a while you would say,  
*Leave it with me. I want the smell of you  
lingering with me all night.*

Soon you were wearing it constantly.  
*Take my cotton one, you would say.  
It's shorter. Red. Exactly your color.*

When you left me for the woman with hands  
rough as my father's  
you took the silk kimono.  
Because love is the softest mistake  
I became the color red.



## Lauren Schmidt

### *Falsies*

I used to think falsies were lashes. But no—  
falsies are boobies because we place too much  
on boobies, and they need to be big enough boobies  
and if they're not, fear not, we have remedy.

I used to think lotion would make my boobies bigger. But no—  
I used the very circular motion as directed, repeated  
as necessary because big boobies are necessary  
and if they're not, fear not, we have ideas.

I used to think booby feeding was beautiful. But no—  
a baby on the booby feels like a clothespin  
on the booby because they were necessary  
and when they're not, fear not, we have ways to destroy them.

I used to think my boobies were too small,  
then too big, then too sore. But no—  
my boobies are ruined because I was given a black one,  
a bad booby because not all boobies are good boobies  
and when they're not, fear not, there are ways to rid of them.

I used to think falsies were lashes. But no—  
a falsie is my missing booby, a big enough booby  
to match the pink booby, the good booby,  
the one slightly sagging like an eye without lashes.

## Cassandra Krieger

### *Philip Roth: Enemy of the Righteous*

Philip Roth examines and criticizes American social norms and mores like no other author. No writer in the past forty years has tackled the repressive sexual and social standards, regarded as proper, with the passionate rage and capacity for greatness he has, Sabbath's Theatre, for instance, is one long orgasmic marathon all the way to the cemetery. Roth dares to illuminate our own self-righteous political correctness in the Human Stain and reveals that the liberal, left-wing is not a haven. Roth captures the hypocrisy in everyone, which makes him one of the great, potent voices of American Literature.

In his latest novel, *Indignation*, Roth's anger seethes on every page. He exposes the inherent hypocrisy and stifling effects of politics and prevailing acceptable social behaviors, in this tragic, brilliant work of fiction.

The first chapter, "Under Morphine," begins by introducing Marcus Messner, freshly enrolled in college at nineteen-years-old. Though Marcus is a straight-A student, and dedicated son, often spending entire days aiding his father in the family's kosher butcher shop, his father's attitude towards him changes after his enrollment in Robert Treat College. Marcus' father demands to know the location of his son and his son's activities at anytime throughout the day, fearing the teen has come under the influence of troublesome neighborhood kids. The Korean War, which has produced heavy American casualties, does not help his father's paranoia.

The butcher shop, which had been a place and source of pleasure for Marcus, is losing its appeal as his father becomes more and more overbearing. The shop is where Marcus had developed some of his fondest memories. Even when he was forced to do the "nauseating and disgusting" task of eviscerating chickens, of slitting "the ass open a little bit," so that one could force his or her hand up inside to "grab the vis-

cera...and pull them out," he enjoyed it. He relished in the opportunity to learn from his father the important lesson: "that you do what you have to do." But these tender moments with his father are not enough to balance the growing hysteria and Marcus transfers to a college in Ohio, far from his father's Newark butcher shop.

Winesburg, the small, private, Lutheran college that Marcus chooses embodies the quintessentially American liberal arts college experience. From the green hill it sits on to its handsome student body in khaki slacks, the college "could have been the backdrop for one of those Technicolor college movie musicals where all the students go around singing and dancing instead of studying."

Marcus is intent on receiving straight-A's. His life, Marcus tells himself, depends on it, if he does not perform with excellence at Winesburg they may be inclined to expel him and then he would be drafted for the Korean War, and killed. Marcus maintains his admirable work ethic and obsession with grades until he sees Olivia. Marcus is absorbed with her. He takes the beautiful girl on a date, borrowing his new roommate's car and is then confused and troubled by her actions in the car. Olivia gives Marcus a blow-job. The source of her behavior, the reason for the oral-sex, Marcus concludes, is the affect her parents' divorce had on her. Marcus does not speak to Olivia after that night, nor does he ask her on another date, but he cannot stop thinking about it. He tells his roommate about the night, and this forces him to put in a request for a room change as they get into a physical fight after his roommate calls Olivia a "cunt." Marcus and Olivia begin sending letters to each other, many of them angry, but almost all of them rife with confusion.

The Dean of Winesburg also sends Marcus a letter, this one requesting a meeting to discuss Marcus' numerous room changes. The discussion between the Dean and Marcus marks the beginning of Marcus' shift away from the lesson his father taught him about doing what needs to be done. Marcus debates with the Dean on almost every issue, the compulsory chapel attendance at the school, the classification of his father's occupation as butcher or Kosher butcher, the value of Bertrand Russell's essay on religion. Each new argument incites Marcus so much that he rises from his chair to thump his hand against the Dean's desk. The Dean concludes that Marcus is gullible and intends to address Mar-

cus' acceptance of the "rationalist blasphemies spouted by" Russell and is worried about the impact Russell's history of anti-war campaigning has had on Marcus.

The Dean tells Marcus that the "social skills" he lacks are going to be a problem. Marcus argues that his behavior has been reasonable and that it should be no business of the administration of the school how many friends he keeps, or how many rooms he inhabits if he can still produce A-material in the classroom. The meeting ends with Marcus standing and vomiting all over the dean's office. Marcus' appendix is removed hours later.

The scene in which Marcus and the Dean debate is one of the most powerful and ultimately frustrating scenes in the novel. It is a scene where the authority mistakenly believes and communicates its infallibility while the young man stands firm and defiantly stubborn defending his argument. It is a scene where the authority, ignorant of its ability to be wrong, expounds paternal nonsense to an individual who is battling alone. It is a scene in which every human being has found themselves.

After being rushed to the hospital for an appendectomy Marcus is visited by Olivia. They immediately resume their sexual relationship as Olivia performs a hand-job within five minutes of her arrival. Marcus' mother also visits and informs Marcus that his father's behavior has become even more paranoid and erratic. His mother explains that she can no longer take the burden of his father and intends to divorce him. The news is devastating for Marcus. His mother, who does not like Olivia and Olivia' scars along her wrist, tells Marcus that she will not divorce his father if he agrees to stop seeing Olivia. While he promises his mother he will stop seeing Olivia he promises himself the opposite for "who deserts a goddess because his mother told him to?" But after leaving the hospital and returning to school he is unable to find his goddess.

While looking everywhere for Olivia Marcus receives another mandatory invitation to speak with the Dean. At this meeting Marcus learns that Olivia has been removed to a psychiatric hospital after suffering a nervous breakdown because of her recent impregnation. Though this is troubling enough news to hear Marcus is then accused

of causing not only the nervous breakdown but also of impregnating Olivia. Marcus argues that their relationship never went that far and that he is still a virgin. The Dean does not believe Marcus and tells him that it is hard to believe what Marcus says. Marcus can't take it anymore, the accusation, the condemnation without evidence, the sickeningly patronizing stare of the ignorant Dean and responds with a loud and determined "Fuck you!"

All of this, along with Marcus' refusal to attend the mandatory religious services, leads to an ending that is as outrageous as it is horrific. The reader may be torn between sadness and rage.

At one point in Roth's novel the president of Winesburg College addresses the students. In one of the most agonizingly intense and wise speeches in the novel the president says to the student body "Beyond your dormitories, a world is on fire and you are kindled by underwear." What makes his speech so especially resonant is that, for the most part, the American public is still only kindled by underwear. We send our country-men, our sons and daughters and brothers and sisters into war under the most noble of auspices and while the world burns and people die we consider the meager and embarrassingly small dramas of our lives as the greatest importance.

We read *Invisible Man* to remember the great American epic of race and independence and the re of the free individual. Faulkner takes us into an American South that is dark, strained and sexual. Toni Morrison is relentless with her tales of the African American woman's struggles. Philip Roth, in genius prose and a poetic fervor bordering on frenzy, reminds us how many chains of social norms still hold us down. He dares us to be outrages.

**Lauren Schmidt**

*Ritual*

A shriek startles summer's hymn. Logs topple  
inside a shed and a boy is shoved out of it.

A throat hooked by father's thumb, pinches  
of fingertip stun haloes into flesh.

His hand tilts swigs of Pine-Sol. Rivulets of piss  
slip down scuffed knees like drinks roll from father's chin

and neck, into the ravine of scars on his chest,  
each churning like rusty chains beneath his grip.

Cankers like flabs of gristle hang from his back,  
twitch as he breathes bouts of stench into tufts of hair.

His thumb reaches a cheek to jam apart  
the jaw and his twin fingers douse a mouth with motor oil.

Small teeth drip curtains of molasses. A tongue drums  
glugs of darkness back at father's cheek. Snorts patter and snarl.

His fingers yank hair and roots into white, string up eyes, lurched open  
like a birthday surprise where the room is on fire.

Too late, a dog sidles. The hair on its hide clumped up like wings  
as if to say, but nothing. Logs land outside the shed door.

A boy turns to his dog, spits dark at its fair-haired snout.  
Piss springs from the arch of its hind legs, blanches the grass beneath.



*Erica*

**Mayra Rodriguez**





*The DLR in July*

**Danielle Arender**



## Sharon Keely

### *Dandelion Clock Time*

**M**y gran had stopped in for tea one evening when I heard Mam say to her, "Look - the sheets are going out, Rowley must have wet the bed again." They were sitting in the kitchen of the second floor flat we rented from Mrs. Horton, watching her out in the back yard.

So that was why Mrs. H was always washing the sheets, kneading them on the big washboard with her swollen red hands. I knew Rowley was a bit old for that. He was nearly thirty and here was I, only seven, and I hadn't wet the bed in a year. Just the same, my gran's response seemed out of proportion. She blessed herself wildly, several times over, saying "Holy mother of Jesus Divine, God bless us and save us and preserve us from all harm." This incantation was usually reserved for news of the latest unwanted P-R-E-G-N-E-N-C-Y. They spelled (and often misspelled) things I wasn't supposed to hear. "You'd never think Protestants would be afflicted that way, too," Gran said. She caught sight of me in the doorway. "Don't over anything you hear in this room," she warned.

I used to think that was why Mam didn't want me going down to Mrs. Horton's basement to eat her apple pie and scones and warm my hands in front of the Aga stove because she was Protestant and Mam didn't want her looking down on us. She corrected Mam over me a lot. "Thinks she can tell me how to run my life," Mam would say, "when she can't control her two sons."

Mrs. Horton's other son was Hank. He was shaped like Mrs. H, heavy and round, and he looked almost as old as her. He worked all the time, up in his wood workshop beside the field, peering through his thick Coke bottle glasses at his whirring sanders and planers and saws. He couldn't hear them; he was almost totally deaf since birth. I liked him though, he gave me threepence when I brought him up a flask of tea from Mrs. Horton, and he showed me how to cure a wart on my thumb with the milk from a dandelion stem.

Now I wondered if Mam wanted me to stay out of the basement

because of Rowley, maybe she was embarrassed for Mrs. H and didn't want me to find out he wet the bed. Not that Mam knew Rowley and I chased each other around the field behind the house after school. She'd have had a fit if she did.

Mam hated it when Mrs. Horton banged on the ceiling with her cane, or, worse yet, came all the way up to our landing to say, "Please stop screaming and have some consideration, think of the child." She walked right into our front room a couple of times. There was no separate entrance to our flat, since it was the four rooms on the second floor. You couldn't put an entry door there without blocking off access to the flat on the third floor, which had been empty for a while. Mam thought about moving up there to get some privacy, but then we'd have to pass the second floor to get to the bathroom the two flats shared.

The day after one of those evenings, when Mam had been yelling and Mrs. H had asked her to be quiet, I ran home from school and chased around the field with Rowley as usual, and then fell down laughing into the grass, thinking no one would be home till after six. So long as I was in the flat by half-past three to answer the phone when Mam called to check up on me, I was ok. Rowley and I could tell what time it was by picking dandelion clocks and blowing the fluffy helicopter seeds off. One o'clock, two o'clock, if I didn't want it to be three, Rowley used to say, then I could gather up the seeds I'd blown away and put them back on the stem and it would still be two. This time, we hadn't even got to three o'clock when I heard our kitchen window open. "Gracie, get down here this instant!" Mam croaked, "Rowley Horton, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

She grabbed me by the scruff of the neck and shoved me into my room when I got upstairs.

"What was going on?" she demanded, all hoarse.

"Tip you're on it," I said.

"Tip you're on it my eye! What were you doing lying down with him?"

"Two blow clocks," I said.

"Blow clocks?" she demanded.

"Off the dandelions..."

"Did he ask you to do that?"

"No. We just did," I said.

I could feel myself getting red. I knew she was going to ask if we'd done this before, and I couldn't say yes, she'd kill me. But I knew

going all red and starting to stutter was making it look like I was lying. She gave me a clatter round the ear and headed down to the basement.

I couldn't hear what was said, but Mam's voice was raised the whole time. I only caught the end, as Mrs. Horton followed Mam half-way up the basement stairs.

"I'll see to it that he has nothing to do with Grace, you have my word. But I assure you, there's no harm in him. He's just a little boy at heart."

"Hah! Some little boy, stumbling out of the Rob Roy every Thursday, Friday and Saturday."

I could hear the satisfaction in her voice; she and dad stumbled out of the Commodore on those nights. A much better class of drinking establishment.

Things were different with Rowley after that. A couple of times, he jumped out and scared me, and when I giggled, he didn't giggle back. Once, he grabbed me as I got to the top of the basement stairs. His breath was hot with whiskey.

"What did you say to your mother about me?" he hissed. I was afraid to answer him.

"What did you say?"

Mrs. Horton heard him.

"Come down here right now Rowley," she said. "Grace, you run along."

I didn't see her for a few days after that. She didn't call me down to the basement and I knew not to go if I wasn't called or had a good excuse to go down. At last Thursday rolled around. This was the day she'd usually ask me down to read Treasure magazine at her old pine table before she posted it to her grandniece. I started down the basement stairs.

"Mrs. Horton, can I come down for Treasure?" I called when I was almost into her kitchen.

"Oh, no," she sounded sad, and a little exasperated, "You can't come down here anymore dear. I have to do a ton of work now, for the church fete and for Rushbrook, I wouldn't have time. Besides, Treasure's a bit too young for you."

The church fete? There wouldn't be more than a dozen people there, she could bake enough for them in her sleep. And she'd never had anything to do with Rushbrook, the croquet club where the last of the landed gentry clung to their white gloves and each other. I backed up the

steps, crestfallen. A hand grabbed the back of my school shirt and spun me around. "That's what you get for telling lies," Rowley hissed.

I ran out the front door, over the Gap, and across the huge barren churchyard, headed for the opposite wall that abutted my friend Louise's house. How dare he, I thought. How dare he, how dare he, how dare he. How dare he think I told lies; but most of all, how dare he make Mrs. Horton stop letting me come to the basement. And Treasure was not too young for me! Hot salty tears rolled down my cheeks. The wall by Louise's was low enough to look over on the church side. I could hear her brothers yelling and screaming in the front. I looked over.

"Tommy," I called to her red-haired brother. "Tommy!"

"What?" he yelled back, never taking his eyes off the football they were all diving after and kicking at the same time.

"Is Louise in?"

"Yeah but she can't come out, she's hoovering."

I had to talk to her, had to cook up a plan to get back at Rowley. It might be something we could do ourselves, maybe rig up something to make him fall flat on his face as walked in Mrs. Horton's gate. Or maybe we'd end up needing her five brothers to help, but the more people in on it, the more the chance of being found out. So what. Let him find out.

"Tommy," I called again.

"Whaaat?" he yelled back. Boys only had to be polite for the first question from a girl, after that they could stop pretending we weren't the most annoying creatures on earth.

"Rowley Horton wets the bed."

Kicks and dives were suspended in mid-air, as they all turned towards me. I felt like Queen Maedbh addressing her troops before battle from atop a golden steed. "He wets the bed. All the time." Five McCann brothers, various assorted Browns, and the two fat Forrest brothers, all doubled over in loud exaggerated laughter.

"D'ya cross yer heart?" Tommy asked.

"Cross my heart and hope to die," I said. Tommy knew I never said that unless I was really and truly telling the truth.

The next day, we all congregated halfway up the Gap after school, playing "tip you're on it" while a lookout lurked at the bottom. Finally, he gave the cry. "Here he comes!" Rowley came into view, stiffly and none-too-successfully concentrating on walking a straight line. One-two-three - "Piss the bed!" we all yelled at the top of our lungs, "Piss the bed! The Prdddygod wets the bed!"

He stopped momentarily, his head cocked away from us, as if he were hearing distant music from the sea and trying to place it, and then proceeded on towards Mrs. Horton's gate, his steps less concentrated now. Our chant still blared up and down the Gap. A woman who'd been scrubbing the pavement in front of her little house on Davis Terrace at the top of the Gap shook her brush at us. "Stop that, ya little hooligans. I know all o' yer mothers."

Laughing, and still yelling, we scattered, all uphill of course, except the two biggest Browns who ran down at Rowley, whooping and hollering. The ruckus had brought Mrs. Horton out to the gate. She looked up at us, and I could swear she saw me, even though I'd rounded the corner a split second after I saw her hand clutch the gate.

For the next few weeks, chants of "Piss-the-bed. Rowley Horton wets the bed," followed Rowley all over town. Little girls ran up to him with a dandelion in their hands, saying "Hold this up to your chin, ah look, you chin turned bright yellow!" Showing it was gospel truth that he was a piss-the-bed, even though the dandelion never got within four feet of his chin. Not-so-little boys made peeing gestures with their fists wagging up and down in front of their private parts. Rowley scowled at me whenever I saw him now. He wasn't bothering to try and walk a straight line anymore.

Mrs. Horton was avoiding me completely. She didn't even check up on me on the nights when Mam and Dad didn't come home till all hours. I had my books and Peter panda, but I was scared in the flat on my own. It was one Friday night when I heard steps on the stairs outside, the steps of someone trying to sneak up but having trouble balancing. I smelled him before I saw him. Whiskey and Old Spice. He slid in the door, and took off his shirt and threw it on the floor.

"Get out of my room," I whispered, not sounding at all brave.

"You get out," Rowley slurred. "This is my room. I'm taking it back."

"No! You're not going to wet my bed!" I whispered, emboldened, since it didn't appear that he planned to strangle me.

"Nooo—an' If I do, I'll hang... ya, hang the sheet out your window. They'll call you ha- you wet-the-bed," he mumbled. He was taking off his pants now.

"I'm going to tell your mother," I said, out loud this time.

His head hit the pillow beside me, a trail of sticky Guinness streaking from the corner of his mouth to his chin. He fought to keep his eyes

closed, but he lost and started snoring loudly right away.

I grabbed Peter panda and ran into my parent's room. There was a key on the inside; I locked the door. Then I took out the key. I'd read in a Nancy Drew book how you could put a sheet of paper under the door from the outside, poke through the keyhole to knock the key onto the paper, and then slide the paper out with the key on it and open the door. I wasn't going to take any chances.

The room was pitch black, the only light was that visible through the keyhole. It seemed like eternity before I heard a car drone up the hill and stop at the gate. It wasn't my dad's, I knew the chug-chug-chug of his old Ford Cortina as well as I knew his voice.

"Goodnight, Rachel, goodnight Hank," an uppercrust accent, very English, someone after giving them a lift from her brother's.

"Goodnight Reverend Smythe, thanks so much," said Mrs. Horton.

I could hear the car turn into the churchyard next door, to Reverend Smythe's vicarage beside it, as Mrs. Horton and Hank stepped inside the hallway below. I was about to put my mouth to the keyhole and yell for help, when I heard Hank say, "Why is Rowley's coat on the stairs?"

"And that snoring—only Rowley snores like that. It's coming from upstairs..."

Heavy steps lumbered up the stairs; I stole out of bed and put my eye to the keyhole. I saw Hank push into my room, heard him shout, "Rowley! Rowley you bastard!" I heard Rowley's confusion. I saw Hank push him out and down the stairs. "You've done it this time," Hank screamed, that strange high-pitched scream. "Get out and stay out. You've disgraced us enough."

As Rowley groggily steadied himself against the wall, Hank reached into my room and flung Rowley's shirt and jeans after him.

"How could you do this to my Mother?" Hank's half-formed words, the tongue taut against the roof of his mouth.

"Our mother," Rowley slurred, "she's mine too, whether she likes it or not."

He lashed the jeans back up at Hank, knocking his thick glasses off in the process. Hank stooped to retrieve them, and stumbled, falling on top of Rowley. I could hear Mrs. Horton starting up the stairs, more clumsily than usual.

The brothers thrashed around, Hank shouting to his mother



to stay back. In that instant, Rowley grabbed Hank's throat with both hands, and pushed him back against the banister. Hank arched back, trying to lift Rowley off balance and shake him loose, while at the same time trying to pry Rowley's fingers from his neck. Mrs. Horton was behind them now.

"Rowley," she gasped. "You'll kill him! Stop!"

Rowley grabbed Hank's neck tighter. I saw the washboard as it came down over Rowley's head. "Thwack!" He had to be knocked out. If he was in a cartoon, he'd be through the stairs and half-way to the center of the earth. But no; his eyes looked as if they'd pop out of his head, his teeth had to be breaking his jaw was clenched so tight, but he held on to Hank's neck. Hank's fingers were moving slower and slower, and more weakly. I heard the whoosh as the washboard came down again. Rowley moved aside and for a split second Hank started to right himself. Mrs. Horton tried to alter the course of the board, but only succeeded in turning it sideways so that the heavy edge of it spilt Hank's head open like a pumpkin. Minced meat appeared down the middle of his forehead, and a wash of blood. I thought I heard him groan as he crumpled down into himself and keeled over, his head hitting a lower step, then his heavy body pivoted over his neck and thumped onto the landing.

"Noooo, noooo. Not Hank. Nooo," Mrs. Horton moaned as she picked up his shoulders and placed them on her lap. Rowley was slumped on the landing too, looking dazed. Even in his state, he must have been able to see that Hank was gone. He picked himself up and slithered downwards, his back and palms against the wall, his eyes far away.

I heard him stumble across the gravel into the night.

"Rachel?" it was Reverend Smythe. "Rachel?"

No doubt following the sound of her moans, he appeared on the landing. "I'll go get the doctor," he said softly, clasping Hank's wrist between his forefinger and his thumb.

"Oh, Rachel..."

"I know," she said. "I know." She sounded resigned and weary, but with some of her old fortitude.

"What should I do, Rachel? Should I get the guards?"

She thought a while, then sighed. "I suppose you'll have to, if he's harmed the child. That's her room." She nodded up to her left.

Reverend Smythe started towards my room. He peeked in and turned on the light. "Grace" he called, as he went inside, "Gra - oh, she's



not here.”

He came back out. “She’s not there Rachel; the way the blankets were bunched up I thought there was someone there.”

Tears rolled from Mrs. Horton’s eyes now. “Hank, Hank, Hank,” she cried. “Hank and your poor weak eyes. They must have left her at her grandmother’s for the night.”

“Rachel. You don’t want to lose the two of them.” Reverend Smythe said.

She looked up at him.

“Let’s get him into his workshop,” the reverend said softly.

I watched them pull Hank down the stairs, heard the back door open, I imagined them dragging him up through the dandelion clocks, in the side door to the workshop.

I don’t know how long I sat with my eye to the keyhole, afraid to get up and move, as much because I might miss something as out of fear. It seemed like eternity, that everyone was gone forever and never coming back and there was only me and Petey left, for ever and ever. Finally I heard the Ford Cortina struggling up the hill. I opened the door and ran back into my room. The bed was dry. The room reeked of whiskey, but my parents would never notice. It was just like when you ate onions yourself, you couldn’t smell them on someone else.

Tomorrow I’d go in the field and gather up all the dandelion seeds Rowley and I had blown and stick them back on the stems.

## CONTRIBUTORS

### THE WRITERS

PERCIVAL EVERETT is the author of several novels, a couple of collections of short fiction and two volumes of poetry. He is Distinguished Professor of English at the University of Southern California. His most recent book of poems is *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. A novel, *I Am Not Sidney Poitier*, is forthcoming.

PATRICK O'NEIL holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Antioch University Los Angeles. Mr. O'Neil currently resides in San Francisco's North Beach District, and when not at some dark and nameless cafe on an extended espresso binge, the majority of his time and energy is being spent on the final revisions of his first book. His essays have appeared in *Blood Orange Review*, *The Sylvan Echo*, and *Nouveau Blank*.

LEONARD CHANG's sixth novel, *CROSSINGS*, will be published in the Fall of 2009. He recently gave away almost all his worldly possessions and is currently couch-surfing in Los Angeles. His web site is: [www.leonardchang.com](http://www.leonardchang.com).

JESSICA FLORES graduated from Mount St. Mary's College in 2006 with a B.A. in Child Development and a double minor in English and Spanish. She has returned to the Mount to further her education as a first year graduate student in the Humanities Program. She currently resides in South Gate.

Born in Los Angeles, DANIELLE ARENDER wrote her first short story when she was eight years old and become more serious about creative writing while attending St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota. Her favorite writers are Virginia Woolf and e.e. cummings. She writes imagist poems and impressionistic short stories.

ELOISE KLEIN HEALY is the author of six books of poetry and three spoken word recordings. She was the founding chair of the MFA in Creative Writing Program at Antioch University Los Angeles where she is Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing Emerita. Healy directed the

Women's Studies Program at California State University Northridge and taught in the Feminist Studio Workshop at The Woman's Building in Los Angeles. Her latest collection of poems is *The Islands Project: Poems For Sappho*.

MARVIN BELL'S most recent book, *Mars Being Red*, much of it wartime, was a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Awards. Formerly on the faculty of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, he now teaches for the brief-residency MFA program based in Oregon at Pacific University. For twenty-four years, he has lived part of each year in Port Townsend, Washington. He often performs with the bassist Glen Moore of the jazz group Oregon and is the creator of a form known as the "Dead Man" poem, for which

SHARON KEELY was raised in Cobh, County Cork, Ireland, where the Sisters of Mercy (no, not the band) encouraged her bent for creative writing. She had several short stories published in Ireland before developing writer's block at age ten. The block stayed with her through too many years of lawyering and accounting in London and the U.S., but is now being busted by Professor Marcos Villatoro's creative writing classes, undertaken through the Mount's M.A. in Humanities Program.

LAUREN SCHMIDT is a high school English and Art History teacher in Eugene, OR and a first-year student in the MFA program at Antioch University. Other work is forthcoming in *Ruminate*.

Poet, filmmaker and author, ALLY ACKER is the recipient of numerous poetry awards, including the Carl Sandburg Centennial Award and the Garden Street Press Award which published her first collection of poems. She has directed eleven documentaries on artists. Her book, *Reel Women: Pioneers of the Cinema, 1896 to the Present*, is a staple text used in universities throughout the world.

RILEY WILKINSON is a writer and artist in Long Beach, California. He is currently pursuing his MA in Humanities at Mount St. Mary's College in Los Angeles. He lives with his husband Drew and continues to write fiction.

## **THE ARTISTS**

ESTEBAN JESUS CONS NARVAEZ was born in Los Angeles in 1987. He is currently a student at Mount St. Mary's Weekend College where he studies philosophy. The piece was done on behalf of [www.peacebewithyou.la](http://www.peacebewithyou.la) (under construction), an organization dedicated to creating, promoting and distributing art work that will subjectively help make our world a better place.

MAYRA RODRIGUEZ grew up in South Los Angeles and currently attends Mount St. Mary's College as a nursing major. Photography became her favorite art when in high school her father handed her his film camera. She now works with a digital SLR. Most of her work revolves around life and events in urban L.A.

\*Writer Danielle Arender also contributed her art to this issue.





AUDEMUS: Latin, First person plural verb of the infinitive audeo, "To Dare." We dare. Cousin words: audax, bold; audentia, courage; audaciter, boldly. Done with a certain audacity.