



DARK MATTER

A JOURNAL OF SPECULATIVE WRITING



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DARK MATTER: A JOURNAL OF SPECULATIVE WRITING



Student Editors

Yadira Gamez
Juan Leija
Estefania Rodriquez

Editors

Dr. Robin Davidson
Dr. Bradley Earle Hoge
Dr. Lisa Morano

Managing Editor

Dr. Bradley Earle Hoge

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Editors include students from UHD Natural Science and English Departments and Faculty of the Natural Science and English Departments. Correspondence should be directed to Dr. Brad Hoge, NS Department, University of Houston - Downtown, One Main St., Houston, TX 77002-1001.

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Forward

Dark Matter's own Dr. Robin Davidson has been selected as Houston's poet laureate! Congratulations Robin! You deserve it!



Robin is an associate professor in the English Department at UHD. She has published two poetry chapbooks, including "Kneeling in the Dojo," and "City that Ripens on the Tree of the World," and one poetry collection entitled, "Luminous Other." During her two-year appointment as Houston Poet Laureate, she will work with the City to highlight the importance and beauty of poetry, and to celebrate poetry and other literary works in Houston libraries, schools and public venues.

She is a guiding light for Dark Matter Journal and we are lucky to have her!

Sincerely,

Bradley Earle Hoge
Managing Editor

Ode to the Moon

Apogee, as when you long for the galaxies,
Barely reflecting for my wonder the way your
Crescent smile augurs the fisherman's skiff or
Diana with bow and arrows. In the canvass you
Evince my wishes. I return and rise from
Forks of dreaming to be here in artificial
Gibbous light. Three sweepers haunt the street,
Harvesting leaves trees shed this summer,
In wee hours baring sidewalks and pavements,
Janitorial diligence the only stirrings. I'll
Keep them in mind as Cynthia, Phoebe, Selene,
Later add them to the picture where you
Might be sensed beyond the boundaries:
Not seen, your fullness, but light unmistakable.
Over brushstrokes shimmer hints of your
Presence, your silvering shades stilling
Questions. This immaterial hour invites the ear,
Renews the strolling wind's immanence over
Silences. They move, chores separate but
Together following rhythms of broomsticks.
Until I alter my images with solitude, I'll
Venture on. You'll be round someplace,
Waxing or in perigee. I imagine how
Xanthic their parts in your company,
Yellowish their nightcaps in life's stopovers:
Zinfandel or whiskey, beer or brandy

Bored in the Apocalypse

Years later and the apocalypse had become boring. We had done all that was fun to do. We destroyed at first and then created and, when we finished creating, we took it all apart.

We taught ourselves how to drive a tank and destroyed several pieces of military technology. The explosions were beautiful, but made us nostalgic for the beginning of the end.

We thought we would explore islands, but sank boat after boat trying to get out of the harbor; swimming a leisurely back stroke to the next boat, having nothing but time.

We cultivated plants to feed us, and wrangled animals once thought as only domesticated but had become wild in the years. We laughed when someone was trampled by a cow. We learned to pickle and preserve and it gave us an abundance and a few of us got fat or were already fat and got fatter.

We created a government and each person was leader for a day until one day a person decided to stay the president and we took our share of goods and seeds and moved down the road. We let him be dictator over an empty state.

Some days we feared war and once in a while we wished it would come. And then one day it did and it was fun. A few died and some felt sad and a couple felt envious because after a post-apocalyptic war what else was there?

Letter to Richard Wilbur

Dear Richard

It is dawn here on a Saturday morning in Florida, where I'm never cold. I can write as now on my terrace in almost every weather. And I'm visited throughout the day by many birds and once by a fox who clambered up and who I fed and watched sunning himself as I typed. I was far away, in the deeps of the unconscious, vast and ablaze: in the morning it mirrors the fortunes of the world, and it's open -lighted like the Globe. I climb its sheerest face and stand before creation everlasting, unfolded in a circle about a single star. I can only stay a short time before surfacing in a stream. When I return, my wife is making lunch. I return at night when the house is asleep.

I find words in the dark for the use of which I'm prepared to fall and though I thought once that I sensed some shadow in a room where I'd stopped and worked all night, I know it's no one greater than myself in the mirror of another cosmos neighboring ours. It is the same poetry that connects the two. It was a poem that was the singularity that strung galaxies like lyres, and in all poetry is a repair and inexhaustible tenderness identical to the one who reads.

Fingers of light appear when I'm finished working and my wife is awake, asks if I'd like to go out for coffee and I say certainly.

Charles

Song of the Mime

Silent clown,
 you let us laugh.
And to you, the music
 we add.

For far more than words,
our beings know each other.

And every new day,
 the sun
without its own sound,
 will overpass.

But the birds sing.

Dimensions

It was my mother who put me on my first carousel horse, set me firm in the painted wooden saddle. *Hold on*, she said, *whirl*,

or you will fly off into the night sky, never to be seen again. The start stretched like vibrating filament. Crowd faces—mother,

aunt, uncle, strangers—rotated as I went up and down, around and around in a languid gallop. The horse picked up speed, and I

clung to the pole as relatives flicked in a stuttering stream to fluttering light. The horse rose, and I became hummingbird,

the horse fell, and reality sucked me down into a bowl-shaped hole. A particle of myself oscillated between now and then, dark space

and surety of place. Observers become one long blur of humanity dressed in the colorful remnants of time. I swallow energy with my

mouth wide open and turn into ethereal elements, a luminous sphere of plasma held together by gravity. I became my own star, twirling to the calliope sounds of the universe.

Contamination

It showed first around the eyes. For Henry, it began as a sort of pinkishness, like you might see in someone hungover, or insomniac, or suffering from allergies. But Henry didn't drink, slept like a baby, and was not allergic to anything.

Henry wasn't vain, so he didn't worry about a tinge of pink around the eyes. But the changes in how his eyes worked--what he saw, how he saw it. That worried him. He dismissed it at first. He'd blink, and things returned to normal. He was just tired or overworked, under too much stress. After all, the suits were coming next week to check their progress. The pressure was high.

The colors of things seemed off. He complimented his daughter's blue dress, only to have her laugh. "It's pink, Daddy." He passed his lab partner the wrong vial, unable to ascertain which had a green sticker, though he could easily have told her which was the warmest and what the contents were by scent. He saw a flower on a walk with his wife and confused her trying to talk about the way the color deepened towards the center. "What do you mean? It's all just yellow."

He documented his symptoms. He wished he had some baseline data to compare. But then, he hadn't planned on becoming a research subject. He had the standard vision and hearing screenings, but nothing that measured the right kind of data. He could only make comparisons based on his own memory and observation. Not reliable. Not hard data. Not reproducible. This wasn't good.

He became very sensitive to sound, too. Some sounds diminished and others amplified. He felt the sounds rather than heard them, like they vibrated against some unseen membrane. That's when he started to suspect the nature of his problem, what he was becoming. There wasn't much time to act.

He sat down with his wife and tried to explain. She was concerned, thought he needed a vacation. Did he have some PTO to take? She didn't understand. She thought he was losing his mind. Henry was pretty sure that wasn't the case. There were these strange nodules on his scalp, just under the edges of his receding hairline. His tongue was beginning to feel strange in his mouth. It wasn't just sensory anymore. There were physical manifestations.

He suspected it was contagious, too. He'd probably already infected his

family, the work crew in Lab K. Who knows how many people they had infected in turn? What was the responsible thing to do? Call the CDC? Tell his employer? They weren't going to stop the experiments because one of the scientists had suffered contamination. There was too much to be gained. Everyone was too excited about the possibilities. No one wanted to hear about risks.

Maybe the point was moot. Henry cocked his head, drawn to a thrumming sound at the horizon. He opened the office window and stepped through. His wings hadn't grown in yet. He fell like a stone.

Perfection

Sometimes it's the smallest thing:
a white pear blossom
on a mound of moss.

Or the largest: the universe
magnified in a dew bead
poised on the vein
of a fallen yellow leaf.

I used to think it was Kauai,
but now it's the end of a walk
in the summer dusk,
or a the rush of an evening's
light rainfall.

All it takes is one
suspended moment
and I'm at the dance
on the night sky's floor,
spinning in a spangled skirt,

and at two a.m., still perfected,
staring up, listening
to music that dusts the ceiling.

Mr. Rutledge's Holiday Spirit

THE FUNERAL.

Anyone who was anyone came to Mr. Rutledge's funeral. First the cars of mourners filled up every street and parking lot and yard in Paxton, Florida, and then they filled up every street and lot and yard in neighboring Florala, Alabama. Overwhelmed by the turnout, the Paxton Chamber of Commerce organized an impromptu raffle for tickets to view the casket. The Mayor of Paxton, who'd composed a rousing eulogy with her reelection in mind, found herself a bit-player when first the Governor of Florida and then the President of the United States himself showed up. The King of Assyria also made an appearance, as did the Emperor of San Francisco, who nearly crashed his gyrocopter into the Popemobile while landing in the high school's parking lot.

The mood was somber but optimistic; although Mr. Rutledge was dead along with his fantastic holiday lightshow, economists predicted a bull market for the coming fiscal quarter, while prophets proclaimed that Mr. Rutledge's residual good will would hold the world over for at least another decade.

At the funeral's close, the priest commended the deceased to the ages, and they lowered Mr. Rutledge into his hole where he would be alone again.

THE DEATH.

At four A.M., December 27th, his neighbors found Mr. Rutledge sprawled out on his driveway next to his fallen ladder, his right hand still grasping the cable of lights he'd been pulling from his gutter. Medical examiners would later determine that he'd died painlessly of a broken neck. It was the first time anyone had ever seen his face. They'd always imagined a cheerful little gnome of a man or a towering graybeard mystic. Instead he was an aggressively average man in his late forties or early fifties. The police inspected Mr. Rutledge's house and garage and were stunned by how ordinary it was. He'd sat on a couch like any man, had drank

the same brands of beer, and had eaten the same cereals. Only one thing stood out to the police: there wasn't a single photograph anywhere in the house, or indeed any sign that Mr. Rutledge had contact with another human being. The reporter at the Paxton News summed up the sentiment of the town and the world when he asked how it was possible that a man so well-loved by everyone could be so alone.

THE LIGHTSHOW.

It developed so gradually that the first few years no one really noticed. It wasn't until maybe the fifth year since Rutledge began putting up the decorations that a motorist listening to a local radio station noticed that the pattern of the lights' blinking was synchronized with the modulations of the song the radio was playing. He called the station and told them about the neat trick, and the station spread the word to their listeners. That was how it began: as a local attraction. The next year, people came to park their cars in the street by Rutledge's house to watch the lights evoke the tones and moods of their favorite classic songs. But Mr. Rutledge had upped the ante. The people watching from in their cars (none of whom had ever experienced even latent synesthesia) saw blue lights and tasted cinnamon, or saw green strobes and felt and heard dried oak leaves crunching under their feet. They took to their phones, social media mobilized its troops, and Mr. Rutledge and his lightshow became a regional sensation. By the next year, most of the country had at least heard of how poets who'd been stuck on a pernicious image received clarity from meditating under the aluminum tree in Rutledge's yard, or how a scientist found the missing exponent to make sense of cold fusion from rubbing the glowing belly of Rutledge's inflatable snowman. The next year after that, CNN ran a story about the dozens of people who the lights had saved from suicide, and Mr. Rutledge's house overtook Morocco in the rankings of worldwide tourist destinations. But through it all, no one ever saw the man behind the magic. While dozens, even hundreds of people came out of the woodwork claiming to be Rutledge's long-lost family, none of them could offer proof to back their claims, and all were dismissed as charlatans. During winter months the house would be under constant media surveillance, yet Mr. Rutledge was never sighted coming or going, leading experts to conclude that he spent the rest of the year stocking up on supplies, or that he had some uncanny sense for the blindspots of cameras. Far from alienating his admirers, this hermitic existence endeared him to the masses. Here was someone who expected nothing in return for all he gave:

who set down no commandments, endorsed no products, and charged no price of admission. A man beyond fame and wealth; a being beyond desire.

THE IDEA.

One day, late one November, in the town of Paxton, Florida, a man named Rutledge moved invisibly through the aisles of a dollar store. He was someone easy not to notice, and the vicious circularity of not noticing someone is of course that people never notice their lack of noticing. Mr. Rutledge had come to buy dishsoap and fabric softener, but stopped at a display offering Christmas lights at “half off.” He picked up a roll of such lights. Something was happening; he was becoming the instrument of something powerful. Mr. Rutledge, who had never felt inspiration in his life, was struck with the certainty that a gray world was about to fill with color.

I Taste, I Taste, I Am

I guess we just keep dancing.

I guess we just devour all this music.

Whenever there are

flowers

I don't want to pick I freeze.

I taste icicle hearts.

I taste icicle bodies.

They told me to go!

They told me to politely fold the yellowing moth behind

my knees.

I am a delicate flower princess.

The Unborn One

Soft flesh leaves.
Sticky blood
like syrup
coats my thighs.

I stop
to listen.

Silence.

Moments between
sleep and wakefulness,
she screams
and I almost

hear.

Vortex

Deep scars that will never be sealed
Because of the vortex that consumes me

Remembering the excitement of new life entering
Remembering the impression he would leave
Thinking of the joy that he would bring
But only feeling the emptiness
Of memories that like him
Never came to be

From Room to Room

...and in other news, there ...and in other news is a pedestrian... is a pedestrian/camel accident that just occurred ...accident that just... on Lance & Powell that has traffic ...on Lance & Pow... tied up and we have our staff photographer flying overhead in Chopper One...”What do you see, Mike?”

“What do you see Mike?”

“Well, as you can see, there are several rescue vehicles... standing around beneath the street-light. The pedestrian has been taken to the hosp... and several camels... and her current physical condition is unknown.”

“Thanks, Mike” ...and we at KUTA “Thanks, Mike” ...and we at... will keep you up-to-date on the pedestrian’s condit ... Be sure to keep tuned in on the KUTA free app, on your uPhone.

Some people are expressing concern ov ... Some people are expressing concern over the new legislation legalizing heroin. The... approved by the voters on November 6, goes into effect as soon as regulations ...on November 6, goes in...the Liquor Commission. In the meantime, corner kiosks are going up ...corner kiosks are going up all over... paraphernalia is on sale. Bob Glass, of the Liquor Commission is optimistic about how the sale and use of heroin will be ...and use of heroin will be regulated and taxed...

“I am excited about taking on this project. We tackled tapioca pudding, then beer, then pot, then meth. I think we can control things ... I think we can control things pretty well, at this poi... Some of the same regulations that govern the sale and distribution of tapioca pudding ... same regulations that govern the sale and distribution of tapioca pudding...

Mothers, however, are not convinced. Nancy Good, from Holy Oak ...cy Good, from Holy Oak subdivision had the foll... law: “I am worried about children. How will the state keep babies from shooting up? This law places our children in peril. Pretty soon, they will be making guns in the basement.”

Nourishment

The dialectic between the shore and fish,
an erosion of bones in the dark

where we drag our nets up
all night

through the salty water
of lost stars

and black reflections
of ourselves.

e-heaven

... a new idea for heaven

I would like to propose e-heaven; I would like to present this to the committee on celestial slash scientific affairs, or the committee on cosmology or the one on hope: The “e” might stand for energy, which I understand is never lost so that no matter (and speaking of matter, it could be hidden there) no matter what we do it lingers forever in the universe -- or the “e” might stand for electronics or Ethernet which, some believe (and have acted upon their belief by designing clever, colorful, impressive-as-any-Memorial-Stone homepages) might allow us to live forever on the web (which too is always changing but never lost) -- and hence and then too, the “e” might stand for erased files that are not permanently erased but momentarily deleted on an abandoned hard drive or floppy discs forgotten in a basement somewhere or garage or landfill waiting to be retrieved by a brainy geek (God?) – again one of the points being that nothing is ever lost, and here/there/now is a “t” which I will posit stands for time, which we know is only a dimension and not the absolute that it once was thought to be, so that death perhaps is liberation from that dimension, freedom to travel without our bodies on a wave of light (whose speed is absolute) to find the energy (and our body) which is not lost and dwells here/there in body and emotion (emotion: another e-word, part of the “e” of energy) that is never lost, and an aspect of this proposed liberation being that we can choose the moment or moments (and hence the emotion or emotions), the best moments of our life and inhabit them forever (or for as long as we choose, Free Will being an axiom of this theorem). And that would be heaven.

Yes, we would ride the light of our life – not a reincarnated life, which, when you think about it is not really our life at all: not our memory, not our experience, not our body (because again I would like to emphasize our body would be here/there too [in e-Heaven] projected by light

though paradoxically we would travel [ride the wave of light] here/there only after death, when we have for all intents and purposes lost our bodies, but not really or rather only for that and future moments, but time being the single dimension that it is, the past moments stretch across the universe and are here/there for us [past, present, and future, here/there, up/down, now/then being heuristic devices, not reality]) -- of course, we might choose hell, e-hell, it being the worst moments, moments when we walked the blocks alone dreading to go home or walked them because we had no home – or we might choose to travel to the future, curious merely to observe, without emotion or body, the aftermath – curious to follow a thought to its conclusion. For my part, having held a dying mother's hand, having combed her thin hair, I have found emotion and body to be as fierce as curiosity and thought.

This, of course, is only a proposal in rough draft form. It needs fine tuning. It awaits observational or experimental validation. No doubt someone will find holes in my science though I have never claimed, and will never claim, to be a scientist, only a pilgrim who has read *Einstein for Dummies* and who has been intrigued by Schrödinger's cat, as well as unified and string theory, all of whom or which I must credit in part for my proposal. I would also like to thank the ancient Egyptians, who unlike the Greeks (whose Hades was all shadow, not light) believed that heaven would be like Earth, only better: the wheat crops would never fail, the light would shine very brightly, our love would abide.

Reflections in Three Parts

To You

I had a green light, but the car in front me was turning left, so I went around him as he waited for the line in the other lane, oncoming traffic. Passing by, there was a tan Buick LeSabre (I think they only come in that color). It must have been a different year than my '95, a little flatter, trimmer, and we passed each other on opposite ends of the intersection, going opposite directions, like a slightly warped reflection, like the double yellow line broke into a fifteen-foot mirror when it ended at the stop-bar, where the white paint cracked and faded in the asphalt.

I accelerate, pulling away from the bridge on Fairfield as, in hindsight, the light turns green and I see the silver sedan pulled forward at a constant speed with me, as if all the image in my side mirrors, rearview, were a sheet caught under my wheels. That black Jetta is only one-dimensional, just ink and gloss and the hidden white back of it catches dark streaks from the pavement and the shifting shape behind the windshield is a trick, a ricochet of light from the paint finish to my mirror, diving into my cornea.

I know you've seen the sun make water on the hot concrete of a paved road on a summer day, fake wet patches that disappear when the angle changes. Light is always interrupting itself to tell a different story –

To Him

In the DAAP, on the fifth floor, the ground floor, the high wall was all glass, maybe twenty feet and stretching in scores of square panes all down the hallway. In the classroom on the other side of the windows from where I sat on tile and polypropylene, the floor was raised about a yard and when my eyes strayed from the violence of your contorting face, your fingers tense on the bow, on the neck, pinching and drawing sound like poison from that ligneous body, its maple ribs held tightly between your thighs, just above the knees, as in some animist sexual rite, I looked above you at a solitary art student, white ear-buds in, all peace and smooth lines, and thought that he could be some inversive image of you in the glass – the pair of you, two faces of passion. Then, when you disappeared behind the charcoal-pewter of the portable partition to

re-tune, I saw you colored sepia, like a Brunaille, stained on the window: Burial of you as a Franciscan Friar, oil on canvas.

Driving home, I heard music in the burping of my wipers across wet glass, their rubber ends detaching, hanging like the horse hair from your bow, like the strands, escaped from your hair-tie, that tickled your nose and eyelids while you played.

To Her

This is not true: I knew an identical twin once, who looked in the mirror at her sister and thought it was herself. But the self in the mirror was looking in a different direction. A twin is like a living reflection. Maybe a shadow is, too. Remember Peter Pan? Or Plato's cave – are we nothing but fleshy distortions of a fuller reality?

Chiral objects and systems are those which are distinguishable from their mirror image.¹ Like the difference between my left hand and your right, superimposed one on the other, where my pinky matches the length of your index finger, and our thumbs stick out (like sore ones). And what about you and I, and our chirality as we sit *face-a-face*, *nez-a-nez*. I can see myself in your Atlantic eyes, drawing ever closer like Narcissus, and it's you I'm in love with. How long before we begin to resemble one another? They say old couples do.

Last night you and I cried in the dark, in my car, in your driveway. And when your saltwater caught the dim light, running to the edges of your mouth, I knew – more than just in my head – that actions make reflections, too. I had forgotten what I looked like until I saw myself in your tears.

¹ Chirality, Wikipedia

A Summer Day

If you think about it, a summer day
lasts much longer than the day:

Even after the sun has set,
it leaves fire streaks
of pink and orange and yellow—
bits of leftover sunlight
to color the horizon.

Even after sundown,
streets and sidewalks
are still hot enough
to warm your bare feet,
and to melt crayons
left lying on the cement—
a waxy sunset
of purple, blue, and green.

And even when the night has come,
the thick summer air
blankets your arms and legs
as if you need protection
from a chilly wind—
you can almost see
that thick summer air
as it holds
the heat
of the day
throughout
the
whole
heavy
night.

Night Stop

“You want to go in?” Sergeant Glad asked as I stopped the car in front of the funeral home. There was a canvas archway to the side and a bell that you pushed. The light always burned, like a nightlight. “Need any help?” “No, I’ve got it.” “I’ll wait for you.” Glad fumbled with the handle and then eased out onto the sidewalk, pushing the door shut with his leg. I watched him go up the walk to the awning and ring the bell. Blue vase, the old man’s hickory cane, the lateness of the hour, Glad standing now in the pool of light, resembled a scene I dreamed once and forgot. I remembered a famous painter, his strange picture of the female usher alone leaning against the theater’s back wall, a movie playing a hundredth time. And “Nighthawks,” the nearly empty all-night diner. There was something about the stripped light, the way the few people were diminished by the white light and objects around them reflecting the light. The chrome, countertop, coffee urn, the counter man’s white cap, were too real to be anything but dreamlike. “Edward Hopper’s landscapes say all we know of life is how light falls, frail, uncertain as any man-made source of

illumination.” I’d worried when Ellen wrote for her artist club’s open house. “At an oblique angle exhausted photons of spent rays arrive from a vast distance, defining provisional persons and objects deflecting the wan sunlight.” Now like Shakespeare’s fell sergeant, Glad held out vase and cane the victim’s daughter asked us to deliver as an unseen hand swung open the door. Glad stepped in, for a second varnished wood gleaming sharply in the porch light until the door shut and with a flame I lit a cigarette.

The Universe in Our Hands

Both cosmologists and pop singers tell us
we're stardust. We're pretty sure they're both right
on good days, but mostly we're jealous
of each other's stardust. They can't be stars, right?
So this stardust stuff is bullshit. So silly.

Isn't silicon amazing? I mean,
not itself, of course, but how it conducts.
We're all about carbon though,
so are our friends in this cave wall theater.

We can explain magnetism to clowns
given time and it will still be magic

but a proton's mass comes from its nothings.
The space between darting quarks *is* weight.
What's between us, as opposed to you or I.

At childhood's end remember Clarke's third law—
Poof! We're here. Billions of years of prepwork.
But poof! Tada! This hand one star, this another.
Life. Your hand, my hand, our hands—
 it's a perk.

Unchoreographed, a branch falls

through shade light under the shade tree & lands:
dust speckles weightlessly

polyfaced granules risen from the composite,
bejeweled, dancing pixels

plentitudes of idiosyncratic ballerinas
pirouetting, reflective & whimsical,

through liminal luminescence:
light & dark, retina & silence

in shade light, under the shade tree.

The Adclipse

Tonight is the first Adclipse in all of human historiology, and Reveille Turner is totally corked about it. His elderweight parents were invited to a fancy gala at the local observatory for the big event, which makes zero sense to Rev since you're supposed to be able to inload it wherever just by looking up.

But either way, Rev has the entire loft to himself, which is totally crucial for his Adclipse party. Only two weeks into summer interim, and hot off his sixteenth annie. A legal citz in Lost Angeles County now, as if he's supposed to feel like one or something. Like get corked, fuzz. He's too zoned on the current haps, too occupied with tinkering his evening into something savvy for the beauties and brethren. A true banger in the making. Rev's fin to DM Lewel, Twain, and the rest of his scrows for a night of saucy slinking. And he knows partners won't be a problem at all. Nothing is too farfetched for the fems his age, who are totally obsessed with anything involving Googie Griffin.

Freshie fems aren't the only ones, either. Everyone's been real corked about the clearer skies, easier breathing, and leisure-time astronomy. There was a whole grip of hullabaloo in the courtsuits, but Googie Griffin's orbitising agency, FeedBack, finally "came clean" on their promise to squeaky sweep the ozone layer.

Even though Rev was too freshie to vote in the tribunals, he continuously received campaign bulletins in his inbox. They were all flash-bang-wham, with no spammy buffering or pop-up rubbish. A spiffy GIF on loop that totally crushed it, and made perfect use of the Kaleidoscreen interface. The bulletin had all of these catchblurbs, like "Don't get slogged down by smog," or "You'll swoon at views of a full Moon," or "A stargaze is only a vote away." Then there was a video of Lost Angeles's golden boy, Googie Griffin, launching a filter drone prototype into orbit, then some time-elapse footage to show the machine's potential before-and-after effects. The filter drone looked like a giant rotating asterisk made of fine-toothed combs.

At the end of the bulletin, there was a really savvy final message:

Vote YES on Bill 17.

If you're not part of the solution, then you're part of the pollution.

This was followed by some quick fine print about how the bulletin was sponsored by Googie Griffin's FeedBack Corporation and some yadda yadda members of the Independence Party,

like yadda blah blah whatever. Rev thought the bulletin was duper dope and totally boss hog. It had all the freshies chirping viral on the Extraweb, and better yet, it also got elderweights hip to Googie's steez, too. Some citz were hesitant at first, but who could argue with back-to-back-to-back sunny weekends?

Bill 17 passed in a landslide, and filter drones were dispersed the very next day. Rev's parents totally uncorked at the idea of seeing stars again, turning suddenly into dilettante astronomers and yammering on and on about plages, coronas, and penumbras. They paid mondo Credits to install a retractable glass roof Cosmolarium in their living room, just so they could check the progress of viewability in the stratosphere.

Rev had seen a star or two as a freshie, but he was totallywhelmed when he inloaded his first clear sky. He'll never forget the crisp, gibbous moon, a slightly shaded ovoid, almost like a capital 'D.' The views got exponentially better with every passing week, with every additional drone Googie propulsed into the sky. A dozen stars turned into fifty, then one hundred, then thousands of shining orbs in the shadowbox panorama. It was as if someone kept needling tiny new holes into a giant black tent of twilight. Rev thought the stars looked like the crystalline lumps on rock candy pops, reminding him of Lil Tipzy's diamond-encrusted chain in the *Broads from Abroad* muzak video. Rev wondered if stars were just the ice of the cosmos. The bling of the heavens. Bu then Rev's father explained that stars were actually just big balls of exploding gas. Way to ruin it, Rev thought. Like, thanks for the lecture on space farts, Daddio.

The fems are the first ones to show up to Rev's Adclipse party, all unexpected and early bird. Rev is lightweight embarrassed by the unsorted mess of the loft—his *Video Vixens* Kaleidoscreen saver, the suspiciously crusty tube socks, the army of robovacs hovering around the carpet.

"This is gonna be swizzle," Larkin says.

She's artless and gamine as she taps into the loft, storming its entry with her baggy man-shirt flaps, dual-wielding two sixers of Froth that she lifted from her elderweight's Shop&Hop. Larkin ignores Rev's hustle-bustle attempts to hide his filth, plops herself down on his bean-chair, and cracks open her first cylinder of sauce. She tosses Froths to the rest of the fems as they do their ruffle-shuffle tap into the loft. They're all decked out in diaphanous pleather gear from Googie Griffin's #FlashTag fashion line, all dandruffed by large helpings of silvery glitter. It's four of the savviest fems from Rev's academy: Jett, Phantasy, Rhythm, and his favorite, Morning.

“What’s good, Mo,” Rev says to her.

They perform a sensual handshake in which they slide their palms across one another’s like tectonic plates. Morning looks crisp, effervescent, all sparkle-bubble-pop 4 like a flute of champagne. Her hair is pulled back in a thick braid, woven with various spangles and sequins. Rev can tell that she’s underwhelmed by the other fems, that she’s only pretending to be their besty, which makes him hot for smoothie. He’s the same way with his scrows, and that’s not all they have in common. He has spent the last year in electronic courtship with Morning, sending clandestine DMs back and forth on the downlow during class lectures. There is something he relishes about being the alpha fem’s secret crush. Maybe because he’s keen on pretending himself.

“It’s all good, Rev,” Morning says back, fingering his palm as they slide apart.

“Tell you what’s *not good*”—says Jett, epicene and irascible—“Rev’s noxious Kaleidosaver.” Jett blows tiny bubbles with her little nugget of chewing gum, pop piff pop. Her hair is done up in a butchy cockatoo plumage, some peacock assault of neons.

“Oh yeah duh,” Rev says. “My b, ladies. My b. I’ve forgotten my pleasantries.”

Rev taps his right temple to change the Kaleidoscreen projection on the wall, and then taps everyone into a proper groupshare. He scans his netviews and replaces his *Video Vixens* saver with a stream called *BoilerPlate*, a tube channel that plays nothing but trailers for upcoming serials, flicks, and festivals. Rhythm and Phantasy consider themselves to be hipsmiths, so they ironically pretend to deconstruct the hidden meanings of the infomercials. They even laugh ironically, a kind of disingenuous tut-tutting that’s all teeth and no guts. Rev tunes them out in order to properly inload Morning’s shallow breaths on the swinging futon. Her syrupy scent fills his nostrils and makes him long for smoothie. But that’ll have to wait. It’s time to chillax. Time to phew-phew about the mess and swivel into a healthy pre-slink.

During a *BoilerPlate* preview for a flick called *Shoulda Woulda Coulda*, Rev’s scrow brethren join the party. All his rope-a-dopes tapping into the loft: Twain, Lewel, Boland, and Quimby. Boland and Quimby are identical twins, a couple of cloddish lummoxes. They always bring the exact same things to parties, their version of a clever joke. Today they’re both wearing fembeater tank-tops that say #gerkin, which must be some new fifteen minutes on the Extraweb. They’ve each ganked a handful of Painquils from their great aunts who are stuck in

stasis. Twain says that it's chill, since it's not like they're going to miss them or something. Twain's the even-keeler of the scrows, libertine and sly, always lawyering fools into doing what he wants. Always huffing on an electronic stogette. Always wearing a hood or hat, even indoors. And then there's Twain's counterpart, Lewel, boasting about the gnarly slink he just scored from his brother's brethren, claiming that it's some really religious shit. Lewel fans out the thin grey slink cartridges like straws and then flicks his tongue around wildly.

Rev recently slinked for the first time, two weeks ago, for his sixteenth annie, and he's been totally sapping for it since. It's no surprise when he's rushing to clutch one, but then Twain says they should save the slink for after the Adclipse. So they do.

Phantasy and Rhythm are chocked full of Adclipse wiktelligence, and they feel the need to chirp on and on about it in the groupshare. Twain leisurely fills the boring cracks in their conversation with his randy little niggles. The fems share all the latest from the Extraweb, about how every latitudinal line on the planet has a precise amount of perfect Adclipse viewing time. It's a lot of yadda blah blah yadda... something about how they'll be able to see it for a long time, blah blah... but that it'll never be as good as when it first forefronts the Moon, yadda yadda...

"But what if you're already the Moon of my eye," Twain chirps to Phantasy, as he taps her an emoted winky face. Rev assumes that Twain's been DMing her for most of the party, privately arranging a smoothie rendezvous in the future. The fems are all LOLing agog in the groupshare, as if Twain's the most roguish scrow in Lost Angeles. All the fems are smitten, except for Morning, who instead DMs Rev dubious faces made out of backslashes and sideways carrots.

As the conversation droops, Morning continues tapping DMs to Rev, labeling the messages for his netviews only. At first it's sexy pics of her new artificial tanlines, which make Rev's guts pucker for smoothie. But then it's her worries about the slink, about how she doesn't much dig it and that it makes everyone slow to a dullard crawl when it wears off. She says that they're better than slink, better than all these screens and shares, better than the other fems and scrows. Rev taps his temple and sends DMs back to her. He says it's just a one-night banger thing, just for the Adclipse, just to celebrate everyone going off to vocationals. She's not pleased, but she's at least somewhat appeased. Rev decides that's good enough for now.

When it's almost time for the Adclipse, Rhythm and Phantasy start squawking off at the

mouthpiece, like oh em gee. Twain proposes a toast, and the whole lot of them doses Painquils with guzzles of Froth. Everyone lies supine in a row on the floor and taps into the Cosmolarium, which is filled with high-def stars and a full Moon that looks like a cartoon. Rev starts to understand how words like ‘incredible’ came about. Like when something is so real that it must be fake, like you can’t really ponder its credibility at all. The most deceptive part being that it’s truthful. ‘Incredible,’ Rev thinks. This is going to be incredible.

“This is going to be incredible,” he chirps over the groupshare. Rev opens a prop-up window in the lower right of the Cosmolarium groupshare, so that they can watch EmpTV’s official Adclipse countdown. In the prop there’s some butterscotched sweetmeat of a host, who all the fems instantly recognize. “This is going to be incredible,” the host says, and the whole groupshare burbles in skittish giggles. Morning squeezes Rev’s hand in the haps, which makes him feel like less of a CCing proxy douchebag.

The prop-up window pans over a massive outdoor groupshare in Rue York City, where they continuously get live Adclipse reports from all around the globe. Every thirty seconds, the Adclipse flashes across the Moon in a different location, which is then satellited to the EmpTV groupshare for a proper GIFing. This meant that everyone could see the Adclipse both in-person and on the tubes, simultaneously. The EmpTV host compares it to watching the New Year’s ball drop over and over again.

Morning DMs Rev right before the Adclipse and chastises his EmpTV prop-up. Apparently Jett and Larkin are roasting him in their fem-only DM, and that Rev is totally embarrassing himself. Quit being a dolt, she chirps, you’re better than that. Rev closes the prop and puts his arm around her. The Painquil floods to mass effect as the Adclipse begins its pass across the Moon’s silver face. The platinum hue serves as the perfect backdrop for the humongous advert. Its shimmer accentuates the daunting letters of the ticker tape scrawl. Its message is sharp and resolute and impossible to ignore:

WHEN YOU FEEL LIKE YOU’VE HAD ENOUGH...
YOU CAN TRUST US TO TAKE THE BRUNT...
BRUNT & TRUST
INSURANCE

It's incredible, Rev thinks. He digs its vintage steez, how its scroll looks like a throwback to old videogame consoles. The whole groupshare is totally rapt in their ogling of the advert, chirping uncontrollable motes of X's and parenthetical smiles. Every few seconds someone chirps something like, "This is so fucking Googie," and then someone else chirps for them to shut up. There's a touchdown slam-dunk buzz running through the whole loft, as if the groupshare's rackety cackle static might overflow into reality.

When the Adclipse is over, everyone untaps from the Cosmolarium and totally corks out. There's at least 5 or 10 minutes of everyone chirping over one another, just waiting to talk instead of listening. When everyone's all shagged out from their posturing, Lewel removes a fat grip of slinks from his cargo pocket and lets the cartridges slide all over Rev's Caffeinade table.

"Right," Twain says. "Doesn't matter what you snatch. Each cart is fin to be proper and steezy. Lewel says these are real FeedBackers, pre-release, leaked from Googie's Skyneedle in space."

Boland makes rock-and-roll bullhorns with his fingers, and then has Quimby park his fist in between them.

"Whatever," Jett says. "What a crock. We're bound to end up in some crank hactivist gag, or worse, more of that stoney-domed smut."

A dark part of Rev's heartdrive rudders, hoping this is true.

"Yeah," Larkin says. "Go yank your own gangplank, Lewel. Nobody else is going to."

"These ain't nostrums," Lewel says. "Inload for yourself if you don't believe me. Unless you can't handle the drain, of course. You'd think I was a nuisance, a right old scab, just for unstuffing the tart around here."

Everyone clutches a slink at random, and then they just stand there waiting. Morning picks a real dinky-sized one, as if that's any gauge or measure for what's to come. Lewel is the first to get slinky with it. He takes a long sniff of the cartridge, like it's some old-timey stogette with a real smell. Then he inloads it right through the heardrum, right into the hippocampus app of his brain. It twists like a screw and disappears into his netview adapter. Right on cue, Lewel flops to the ground like a loose sac of tassels. Everyone cringes, but then Twain says something like, "That's why you go first," and then he docks it and slinks to the ground, too.

As Rev ponders the docking, his netviews flashback to his slink from two weeks ago. A pretty novice slink, if all is properly considered. Just a basic three-pack of virtual adverts, but

definitely the savviest drug trip of his life. During the slink, he masticated sticks of Abraxas chewing gum that tasted like fem sex, drank from a molten lava fountain of Warbucks Molasses Macchiato, and drove a Buckshot LANwhip through a loop-de-loop slot machine. He was awarded real tokens for holowhore fap dances at participating Torrentz smut clubs. It was a duper dope way to spend his sixteenth annie.

But when tonight's slink screws him down, it's different. Rather than a solo hopscotching through the Extraweb, this slink is more of a band-together kind of guild trip. Rev is the last to dock, the last body to crumple into a pile on the loft's floor. When his brain finally slinks in, he inloads everyone else crowded around him. The slink's SIM Cell is still buffering, just skipping in place as some big white blurry room, waiting for the trip to manifest itself. The fems chirp Lewel sargasms over the slink chat, about how this is "some really savvy FeedBack, Lewel."

But then the corners and planes of the SIM Cell lock into their frame. The slink comes into focus. Suddenly the whole groupshare is surfing through outer space on these duper dope starboards. Once Rev overcomes the initial shock, he slaloms around asteroids and clusters of small moons with radical pleasure.

Googie Griffin's avatar looms above them, all gangly and stilted like some stretched-out Gumby monster. He's using marionette strings to control everyone in the slink. This disappoints Rev momentarily, since he thought he was surfing adroitly on his own accord. For a second he feels totally helpless, like he cannot control even a fraction of his destiny. But Googie-tar says, "You're safe as long as you trust the illusion, [Reveille]," and then Rev feels better.

The slink's artificial gravity causes all matter to accrete right before their eyes. The comets and silicate rocks of the asteroid field start morphing into gargantuan space adverts. Iron, nickel, platinum, gold, other precious metals, all bending and melding into the consumer iconography of Rev's culture. There's a savvy replica of Pickles Katt from FatCat Burgers. His floppy tongue lolls out of his mouth and spells TRIPLE THE BACON in frozen neon drool. There's an alien with aviator starglasses who's huffing a Marlborough, Jr. A nearby constellation has been flashbanged and rigged to illuminate the twilight like a series of smoke rings. The alien's Western belt buckle blinds the sky with LED lights that spell out A STOGETTE FOR THE REAL SPACE COWBOY. Rev almost sputters off his starboard when he inloads the milky-way cover art for the new Lil Tipzy album, *TipzyVerse*. It's duper dope and steezy, with the red eye of Jupiter superimposed over Tipzy's left one, like a pirate gangster

with a hardcore gaseous eye patch.

To top it all off, there's a masterful Googie Griffin mural fashioned from an intricately woven star pattern of lights. It's a recreation of the Adam and Eve story, with the garden, serpent, crotch cloths, and all the rest. Except in this case Adam and Eve are straddling rocket ships, and the dreaded apple has been replaced with one of those vintage rainbow-colored ones from ancient Macintosh Computers. Next to Googie's famous hold-the-line signature is an italicized neon that says *Digital/Pivotal Sin*.

Rev is totally smitten with this zany slinking, and decides that he'd do anything to work for Googie's FeedBack Corporation. He knows that the Adclipse is a crucible for the orbitising movement, and that this is the moment of Googie's apotheosis.

"If you received this slink, [Reveille]," Googie-tar says, "then you've been chosen."

"See," Lewel chirps over the slink chat. "It's fucking religious, man." "What you see around you is the Admosphere," Googie-tar says. "It's not real yet, but it could be. Freshie perspectives are needed in orbitising, [Reveille]. If you thought the Brunt & Trust advert was savvy, you haven't inloaded anything yet. Just imagine what you could do, [Reveille]. The power to create meaning in people's lives, to impact their decisions in positive ways. You could treat every workday as a slink waiting to be screwed, and be part of our growing Slink Tank. Ponder it, [Reveille]. Ponder it hard. Vocationals are right around the corner."

And with that, the slink unfizzles and recorks into Rev's loft. The whole groupshare is shiver sweating all over the floor. There's a brief paralysis where no one can move, their netviews rushing with a choking paranoia of deletion. But then eventually that's over, and everyone is sitting up again and taking deep breaths of air. Rev dreads the imminent dopamine wipe and wishes that the slink never ended. Lewel is on his feet quickly, trying to hack the slink cartridge for a bootleg tube of the trip they just took. He's already beaking off about getting it viral on the Extraweb. Twain yawns some stanky fire, and then says that he's fin for a cleansweep. When he bootstraps down the hall toward the lav, Phantasy dawdles behind him. Rev is sure they're heading off to make smoothie.

Rev assumes that Morning will be nauseous and withdrawn, that she'll want the dopamine wipe right away. But then she surprises Rev with her giddy glee. She says that she feels amazing, and suggests that they go on a Shop&Hop run for some Jr.'s and Caffeinade. When Rev's asks, "why get Caffeinade so late at night," she just clutches his arm and yanks him

untapped from the loft. They strap down the street toward Shop&Hop's neon kangaroo in a hurried bunch of clomping. LAN taxis glide across automated tracks, quietly humming citz back to their urban dwellings. Many storefronts have dimmed for the evening, but biznesses with self-checkouts remain illuminated by hot white fluorescence.

Morning enters the Shop&Hop and then reemerges in a matter of seconds. She takes greedy gulps of hot Caffeinade, even though Rev feels like he can hardly slurp. She pushes stick after stick of Abraxas gum into her mouth and lets them glom into a fat wad of mushy latex. Then she blows these massive bubbles that are larger than her face. Then after pacing for twenty minutes and inloading three stogettes, she suddenly flips a 180 and looks directly into Rev's gawking mug.

Her pretty twitching face is surrounded by the brightest kind of shadow, like a convex television screen in a darkened room. She lets their mouthpieces touch, and blows Jr. smoke into his throat. Morning has never acted this way, so randy and consumptive. One second she wanted nothing to do with the slink, and then the next she's rushing to clutch any and all of its advertised products. Rev wonders if she's already becoming too savvy for him, or vice versa.

They find a narrow alleyway between complexes and make smoothie for the first time. It's a bit like Hollywood sex during the time of censorship, where the couple does it quickly with undone zippers and hiked-up skirts. It's a condensed act of passion that bubbles and boils over like reheated leftovers in a microwave oven.

Morning DMs Rev when it's over, instead of speaking aloud, as the two of them lean bareback against the cold concrete.

"Let's go, Rev," she chirps. "You heard him. Vocationals are right around the corner."

Sublimation by the Numbers

On the off-ramp from the fast lane of another decade past youth and standing six-one in bare feet—he thought the measurement accurate—a nurse claims he is 71 inches tall. I’ve shrunk an inch, Ted remarks, before figuring two. She allows that such things happen while awarding him the benefit of a conceptual inch or so with her smile, but not on his medical chart.

Elsewhere, 217 elk crowding the perimeter of a winter wildlife sanctuary were (the exact phrasing: “had to be”) shot, according to resident management specialists, for their own good. This amendment regarding an act of goodness undertaken in Western Wyoming, Ted hears on satellite radio while driving home from the clinic. He pictures orca herding narwhal against an Arctic shoreline before disemboweling them underwater, the mental image re-imagined from footage shot for a nature program on public television, and recalls acquaintances in human assault mode carping about other people. *Those* people. At the same hour thousands of miles away, Gwen Sprinkles reports to the plenary session of The International Conference on Population Statistics that the date the Earth’s human cohort is expected to reach 7.7 billion is March, 2017, give or take a few weeks. The Society of Actuaries recently pushed up life expectancy by an average of two years, she adds. Ms. Sprinkles does not address the question of intolerance versus open-mindedness or how either inclination—never mind overpopulation—might be linked to broader concepts of detachment or attachment, respectively, as underlayment for the human spirit. She does not indicate what fraction of those 7-plus billion are likely to make decisions for their own good versus the goodness of others, or how many will live their lives as labelers or the labeled.

Silencing the radio, Ted understands that words harboring temperaments laced with affect and color can trigger alarms, just as physically shrinking pushes a hot button. Yet, when he looks up “misogyny” (synonyms: woman-hating, sexism) and “ethnophaulism” (racial slur, ethnic pejorative) that evening, he cannot summon much courage, at least not regarding the definitions themselves. This failure, he suspects, arises from the half-life of functional cortical neurons, along with the integrity of 240 trillion synapses, declining more rapidly than physical stature.

Rather than dwell on arithmetical realities that cannot readily be challenged, he wonders instead how to redress an ongoing interior wound, an anterior injury of magnitude 9 on a log

scale of 10 but with external manifestations all but invisible to onlookers and his personal physician. Perhaps an expression on the lips now and then is the only giveaway, there and gone in a flash, of what? Indignation. Shame? The sensation is that of clammy skin pressing an obstacle, cognitive intention running headlong against something unyielding few others seem to notice while conversing at the dinner table or eavesdropping in a hardware store or negotiating crowded sidewalks or scanning a friend's Facebook page. It is a feeling exacerbated by frequency of response (and in response, nonresponse) and underwritten by 100-percent certainty about time and opportunity running thin.

Painful to hear from the mouth of a stranger, worse from a friend or relative who does not connect readily with the value of examined thought: there ought to be a law, Ted believes, is a law, of implied decency if nothing else. Yet the "f" word is again yelled at boy judged too soft or its "d" cousin at girls too hard; the "c" word gets snarled at women who speak once too often for their own good; the "n" word is muttered at those people thought to be stupid people and not us but somehow less than us for wanting what we want. Words never up to any good, he knows, but retained, cherished by indignant folks to use in tirades powered by overwrought limbic systems. What it does to hear such terms applied to the labeled mindlessly, if willfully, inducing a rush of blood commonly undetected from without while boiling within. What it means to observe the dark art of auditory and verbal nonchalance, epitomized by blather and a shrugging response along the lines: "What good would it do to say something anyway?"

As for that nephew or office worker, some runaway or the otherwise disenfranchised, this is what Ted knows, really all he knows: In each verbal exchange, a thing is said while much remains unsaid dead center. Days, years pass failing expression as unused time and opportunity run out.

"Sir," he had once heard from someone—himself as well—as preface to a dialog, meaning *listen to me: there is something I must tell you*. But despite efforts to alleviate the drought, a flood of intention sublimates, leaving behind a dry streambed littered with sticks and stones and damaged bones.

The Child's Sea Garden of Verbs

Children slosh in red plastic boots.

They pry, splash, dance back from rising waves,
and line their pockets with silver sticks and shells, things that smell.

Parents and grandparents tiptoe through their tidepool glossaries to conjure magic
in the marine garden, repeating names like spells. They offer verb gifts,
watch for sneaker waves and mind where the children step.

a·nem·o·ne –
uh-nem-uh-nee

*Yawns open as a bloom on high tide to sip the surf, curls
inside itself at low tide. Remember where Nemo lives?
Poke and squirt.*

bar·na·cle –
bar-nuh-kel

*Touch these rough crusts on rocks, whales and sea-bound
ships and sticks. Its tiny feathery legs grab food.*

bull kelp
bull kelp

*Ah! the ocean's jump rope! Washed up in brown tangles
after last night's storm. It likes very, very cold water.
We need to keep the ocean cold!*

*People used to collect it for food and fertilizer. Now
we let it grow — an underwater forest where creatures
hide. That bulb floats like a bathtub toy. How many bugs
can you find in the kelp?*

*Smell it? You'll know this as Oregon coast
for the rest of your life.*

Whip the driftwood, not your brother.

lim·pet –
limpit

*Does it look like a tiny hat? Or something else?
Its foot sticks to fingernails like it holds tight to rocks so it
doesn't wash away.*

mus·sel –
muss-el

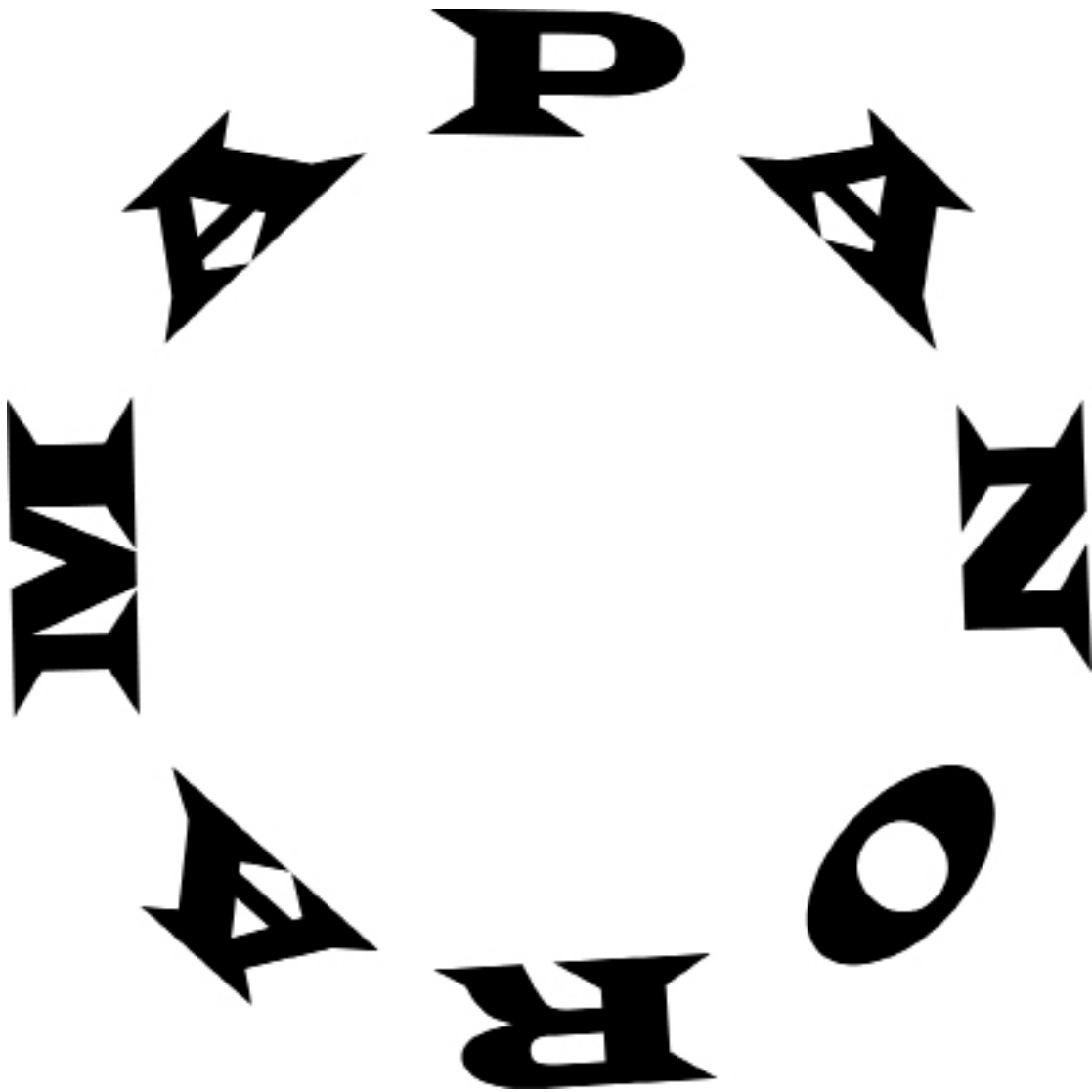
*Their washed-up royal-purple shells make good small
shovels and sand castle windows and doors — you can eat
the insides sometimes! (If you want to.) No pressure.*

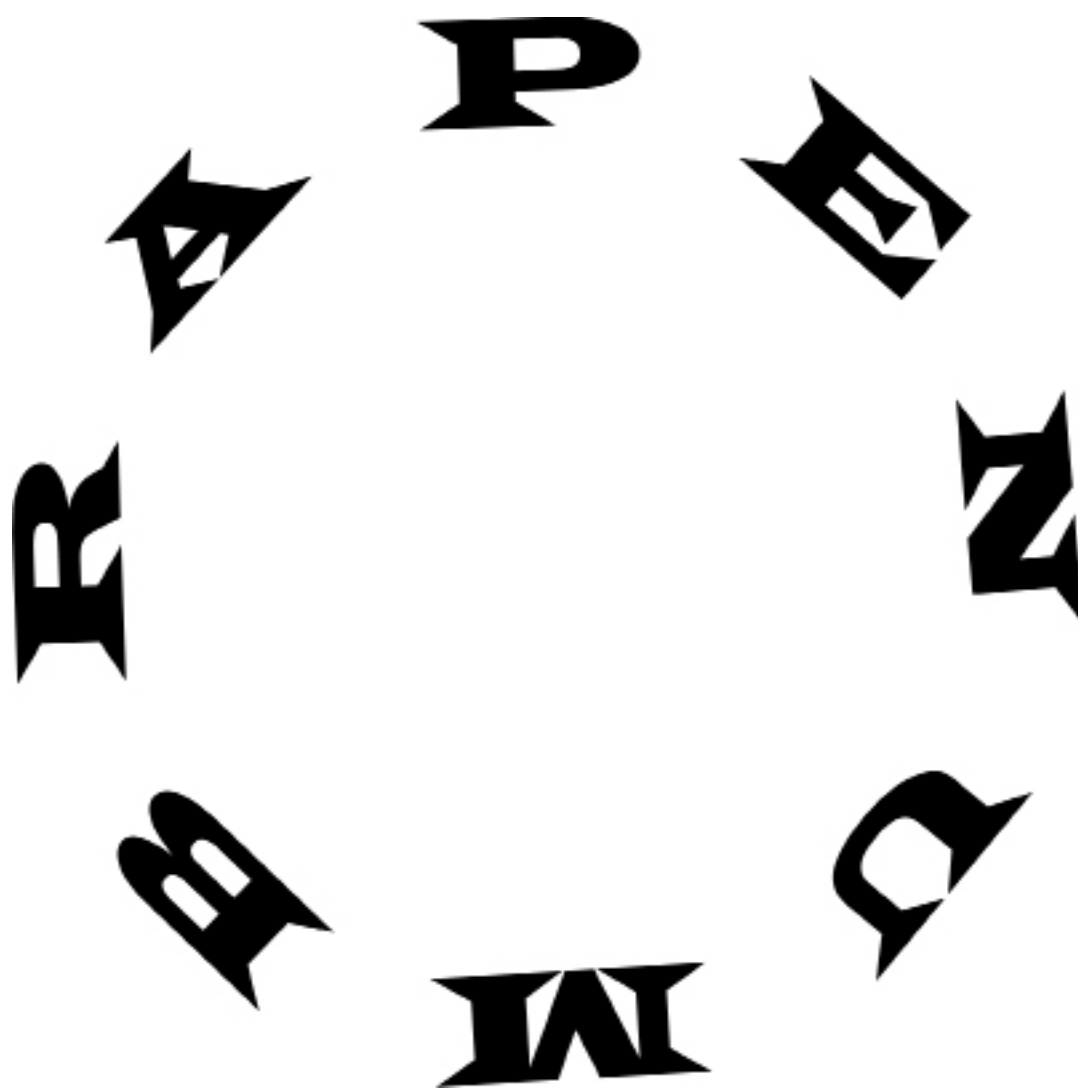
sea lettuce –
see!-let-us!

*Sniff the slime? You're right —
it looks like the rocks have green hair! Squish it
between your fingertips. Is it slippery?
Some people eat this too!*

This, the language lab for making sea hands.







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Granite

A long, long time ago, far away to the east, a people lived happily and well. But the people began to notice that less rain was falling each year, and the river was drying up little by little. This went on for a long time. The people began to understand that they would run out of water if nothing was done. They convened night after night to discuss what they should do, but no one could think of anything. Finally a young married couple decided it was time to act. So they packed some provisions in a burden basket that the woman carried on her back, and the man took up his walking stick, and they set off in search of a new home for their people, a place with lots of water, where they could live happily and well once more.

The couple journeyed for days and weeks and months. Finally, after many, many miles, they found themselves staring into a luscious valley that opened below them. The valley was threaded by a winding green river, and waterfalls poured off the valley walls, and game dotted the valley floor. Here was a place, thought the couple, that their people could live happily and well. Very carefully, the man and the woman made their way down the steep sides of the canyon. The woman reached the valley floor some time before her husband, and she found in front of her a crystalline lake that mirrored the sky and the granite walls that loomed above. The woman was very tired; her feet ached, and her burden basket had rubbed her shoulders raw. Above all, she was thirsty. The woman kneeled to drink from the glassy lake. The water was so cold and so very satisfying—it was the best she had ever tasted. She drank and drank. She drank until the lake began to grow shallow, and then she drank some more. She drank the whole lake and all the water in the stream that flowed into the lake and out of it. She drank every drop of water in the entire valley.

She was swallowing the very last of the water when her husband caught up with her. She started at the sound of his shout; she gazed around her and saw for the first time what she had done. Her bloated stomach sank as she began to understand that she had ruined everything for her people, and for all the living things that called the valley home, and for her husband who was also very thirsty. Her husband, seeing that there would be no end to his thirst, flew into a mighty rage, unlike anything the woman had seen before. The woman was very frightened; she began to run from her screaming husband, weeping with distress. She ran and ran, tears running down her face and stomach sloshing, until she reached the other side of the valley, and was met with the dead end of a sheer cliff face. Her husband, close on her heels, caught up with her there at the other end of the valley. Maddened with anger, the man raised his walking stick to strike his profligate wife.

In the split second before the wood of his walking stick thwacked against the skin of his wife, both the man and the woman were turned to granite. He became North Dome, at the northeastern end of Yosemite Valley, and his walking stick became the pillar-like formation known today as Washington Column, which stands just next to North Dome, its former owner. The woman became Half Dome, perhaps the most iconic chunk of granite on earth. To this day, you can see the woman's profile on Half Dome's flat face if you know where to look; she is gazing off into the east, toward her old home. And you can see, if you look carefully, thick tearstains that still streak her cheek.

I have worked summers as a ranger in Yosemite for almost a decade, and I have spent much of that time researching the origins of the place. This one is the oldest explanation I know of for the creation of Yosemite Valley. It comes from the Ahwahneechee, the Indians who lived in Yosemite Valley before white settlers arrived. I find it plausible.

These days, our explanations for Yosemite Valley's creation are a little more far-fetched. Am I really supposed to believe that this inconceivable amount of rock was all once upon a time molten magma miles underground, which then very, *very* slowly cooled and hardened into granite, which became exposed only after millennia of erosion stripped away all the rock that was once on top of it? And *then* that it was all carved into this stunning valley by giant masses of slow-moving ice, hundreds of feet high, which scoured away at the canyon walls until—*voila!*—Yosemite Valley!

Of course that is putting it all in criminally simplistic terms. There is no *voila* in geology—only eons and eons of imperceptible, incremental shifts: the weathering of a rock face one grain of sand at a time, one snowflake after another after another becoming a glacier over the course of centuries, a glacier moving a fraction of a centimeter and then another fraction of a centimeter. This is my chief difficulty with geology; I like my stories on a human scale. A quarreling couple I understand all too well. Why must this story happen underground and under ice, over millions of years?

I am not the only one who prefers science when it's flashy. After the Ahwahneechee explanation of formation-by-marital-strife, the next theory to come into vogue was that of Josiah Whitney, the head of the California State Geologic Survey. Whitney took one look at Yosemite Valley's starkly sheer walls and knew that only something dramatic could have created them. He pinned it on an ancient cataclysm, perhaps a massive earthquake, that

caused the Valley's floor to simply drop out, forming the steep cliffs that rise from the flat bottom below. This also seems plausible to me. I have felt earthquakes and heard rockfalls that sounded like gunshots, and others that sounded like the deep, prolonged rumbling of a train. I have heard thunder echoing off the granite walls of the Valley, amplified a dozen times over. In every instance it would not have been difficult to convince me that the very ground beneath my feet was going to drop out. Even the most mundane of natural phenomena can verge on the apocalyptic around here.

And although countless apocalyptic events have surely happened here, as they have everywhere, that is not how Yosemite's landscape came to be. The signs of a painfully dull glacial past were noticed by John Muir, the nineteenth-century naturalist and preservationist that is today known as the "Father of the National Parks". In his own day, he was known as "a mere shepherd"—or at least known that way to Josiah Whitney. Muir, who never graduated from college, tangled publically with Whitney, a Yale alumnus, over the formation of Yosemite Valley. Muir's habit of "sauntering" (as he called it) through the Yosemite region had afforded him hours upon hours to observe his surroundings, and Muir had noted the countless examples of striation and polish etched into the granite, which indicated to this amateur that the Valley had been carved out by glaciers. (It is worth noting, I think, that the word *amateur*, in its original conception, meant simply to love. If anyone could be called an amateur in this sense, it would be Muir. He never made a living directly off of his skills as a botanist or a geologist—he pursued these passions not as a professional, but out of love for his surroundings. I personally can think of no higher calling than to be just such an amateur.)

When Muir began to lecture on his theory of glaciation in Yosemite, people began to take notice, including Whitney. The men got into quite the mudslinging match; Whitney called Muir "an ignoramus", and Muir attacked Whitney's theory in print and in lectures. As it turned out, they were both wrong—Muir was just less wrong than Whitney. It was not until 1930, long after both men's deaths, that a greatly respected geologist named Francois Matthes laid the controversy to rest. He generally sided with Muir; glaciers certainly had done a lot of carving in Yosemite Valley. But, he said, Muir had gone too far. Turns out a lot had been done by rivers, too, and not just glaciers. Today we tend to leave that part out, because it's such fun to side with the underdog who was mostly right, as opposed to the generally good scientist who got it wrong on the big one. At any rate, the fact remains that a lot of granite was eroded by water (both solid

and liquid) very slowly, over a very long time, and that there was no cataclysm.

Perhaps I'll stick with the quarreling couple. We like to think of that story as a primitive myth. Indeed it has something of that quality of a just-so story. Then again, so does Whitney's cataclysmic drop theory. As a matter of fact, there have been a number of refinements on Muir's glaciation theory, too, and each change makes the whole story less fun. We used to believe, for example, that Half Dome was once a whole dome, beautifully rounded like its neighbor North Dome. Then came the ice ages, with their many glaciers. These rivers of ice slowly but surely worked away at the dome until—*voila!*—half of it was sheered clean off! And there's more! Once the world began to thaw out, the last of Yosemite's truly massive glaciers began to melt. But that very glacier had created a dam at the narrow western end of Yosemite Valley. For probably over 10,000 years, the glacier had been inching its way forward, picking up dirt and rocks and boulders as it went, and pushing them in front of it like a bulldozer. When it began to melt back, it left all of those rocks right there. These types of rock piles are called moraines. That moraine was so big it prevented most of the glacier melt water from moving on down the canyon, and so Yosemite Valley filled up with a giant lake, over 200 feet deep! We call this Lake Yosemite—it is especially fun to imagine the valley all full of water, don't you think?

Alas, it's not true.

I am sorry to report that Half Dome is about as whole as it ever was, shaped today not much different than it emerged as cooled magma. It's never been much more than a skinny ridge; its appearance as a shapely dome missing its northwest half is an illusion that exists only from Yosemite Valley. If you look at it from nearly any other vantage point, you'll see that its southeast side is almost as steep. Glaciers undoubtedly carried off small chunks of the northwest face, making it steeper than it already was, but there was nothing so dramatic as "sheering". To make matters worse, there was no Lake Yosemite either. The moraine isn't really all that big and never was, and the last glacier melted off so slowly that a good deal of the melt water evaporated. Lake Yosemite was really more of a Yosemite Marsh, and where's the fun in that?

I find nothing very compelling in the story of magma cooling and hardening over the course of millennia, nor in erosion occurring over the course of eons, nor in glaciers inching forward and then inching back. I want a cataclysm! I want violence! Well, there isn't any.

The only modicum of drama, I think, is in the way we've changed our story. Is it not

interesting that John Muir was called an ignoramus for putting forth a theory that turned out to be mostly right? Perhaps it is compelling that we now regard the theory of the geology expert Josiah Whitney to be almost as primitive a myth as that of the Ahwahneechee. This should give us pause. No doubt our great grandchildren will consider our current explanation to be the melodramatic just-so story of a quant but benighted generation. No matter. They are all good stories, in their way. “The goal should not be to expel stories from science,” writes Robert Kurzban, a professor of evolutionary biology at the University of Pennsylvania, “but rather to identify the stories that are also good explanations.”¹

I myself think the Ahwahneechee explanation is better than we give it credit for. I would go so far as to say that it is true, even if it never happened. It does not just speak accurately about the darker elements of human relationships and about the storied history of drought in this region; it also captures a certain violence that dwells in this landscape, which is absent from our more factual geologic explanation today. Rockfall occurs frequently in Yosemite Valley, the most disconcerting natural phenomenon I have ever witnessed. This is one of the more paradoxical features of Yosemite National Park. Yosemite Valley is by far the tamest area of the park, a seven-mile-by-one-mile strip of breathtaking but painfully developed and impacted land, into which roughly twenty-two thousand visitors wedge themselves every single day of the busy summer months. In Yosemite Valley you can see waterfalls and swim in the river and perhaps observe a bear or a coyote, and you can buy an ice cream cone or order a pizza or catch a bus or sit in a traffic jam.

(I will go to great lengths to avoid going to Yosemite Valley during the summer—I much, much prefer the quieter south end of the park, which, although somewhat developed, is pervaded by a feeling of naturalness and serenity that I find to be absolutely lacking in the Valley during the busy season. All this being said, it must be admitted that Yosemite Valley possesses a wild and beautiful geologic violence that is missing from our peaceful south end. Here we have mostly rolling hills, an exquisite meadow, a delightfully paintable river. But these are

¹ Kurzban, Robert. *The Evolutionary Psychology Blog*. September 24, 2012. <http://www.epjournal.net/blog/2012/09/just-so-stories-are-bad-explanations-functions-are-much-better-explanations/>.

all so tranquil; they are entirely lacking the geological drama that makes Yosemite Valley the attraction that it is.)

In the Valley during the winter, huge chunks of ice crack and fall from the steep valley walls, bouncing off the granite like a firing squad. Rockfall, sometimes small but loud and other times monumental and deafening, happens year-round as chunks of granite ranging in size from pebble to massive boulder crack off of the valley walls and come careening to the ground. Gusts of air created by falling rock have been known to move buildings from their foundations, and the impact of the rocks themselves often registers as an earthquake. The geology of Yosemite Valley invades every sense—you can taste the dust in the air after a big rockfall.

The causes of rockfall are not well understood. We know they are sometimes triggered by the freeze-thaw cycle, as ice melts during the day and refreezes at night, expanding and contracting in the cracks of the rocks until a piece of the granite wall breaks off. And we know they are sometimes triggered by storms, which loosen the soil that holds some of the rocks in place. But sometimes rockfall happens in the dead of summer, weeks or even months removed from the last freeze or storm. The phenomenon has every appearance of happening for no reason at all.

Our park geologist, a brilliant and charming man named Greg, spends a good deal of his life studying rockfall. He is required to live in Yosemite Valley, so that he can be on hand in the event of a major rockfall, presumably to advise law enforcement and search and rescue teams, or perhaps simply for efficiency in research. Greg is a wonderful scientist and an admirable storyteller. The only times I have ever found accurate geology interesting are those times when I am listening to Greg; possibly this is due solely to his infectious enthusiasm for just about any topic he is discussing. Unfortunately Greg is not allowed to write scientific reports the way he tells stories, and to read one of his papers (or anyone else's, for that matter) on rockfall is sadly akin to watching paint dry.

This is what the Ahwahneechee got right, and what scientists today get wrong. We talk and write about the most devastating and stunning natural phenomena as if they were utterly mundane. And of course a lot of it is utterly mundane—one tiny snowflake falling onto an ice field is itself akin to watching paint dry, but this is the beginning of a glacier that can scour out a valley. Add to this the fact that the resulting valley is a dynamic and geologically violent place

to this day, and it's no wonder that our first instinct is to talk of a screaming couple transformed into rock or an earth-splitting cataclysmic drop.

The mundane, nearly invisible forces that shaped this place—climate, erosion, the age-old subterranean cycling of magma into rock and back again—have not stopped and will not. We are lucky to be alive in this brief geologic moment in which a sparkling river runs through a steep and verdant valley, over whose walls waterfalls cascade, and which is decorated with such stunning and familiar landmarks as Half Dome and El Capitan. All this will change, as surely as our just-so stories have changed and will continue to change. We might as well pick some good ones to tell in the meantime.

Astronotus Ocellatus

At the end of a short hallway next to the front door,
an Oscar fish lurks, dark and orange.
Blue Christmas wrapping paper is taped to the back of the tank
for decoration, even though it is past Easter now.

He sees the white hand hang up its car keys on the hook next to the front door,
and he rams his injured head against the glass,
prompting the white hand to bring him live guppies, crickets or shrimp.
Droplets of water spray and land like dewdrops on the fake wood paneling beside him.

His pectoral fins are in constant quiver, his tail vacillates
between each listless day, deciding
his future as a king in the Li, or a feral sovereign in the Blackwater.
One day he will spawn in those rivers, according to the rain.

Sweeping

Here I am sweeping—the hallway, the bedroom, the living room, kitchen and back porch. I have swept them a hundred times, a thousand times—and if not these floor boards exactly, then others like them—swept them out of anger, out of frustration, out of feeling sorry for myself—I have swept them to induce guilt, to stir up dust, to stir up memories, and to clear them out.; I’ve swept out of a sense of duty, out of a sense of need, because I was asked, or paid, or told myself I would; I have swept to hold back tears, and also so that I could cry without being interrupted, and I have cried because I have had to sweep, from the injustice of it, from the drudgery, and from simply the dust; I have swept to clear out the old, to make room for the new, for the anticipated guest, and the imagined guest, for those who have come and those who have not come, for those who have noticed, those who would never notice, and those who would only notice if I hadn’t swept. I have swept for peace of mind, when I thought that peace of mind could not be found in any place but the handle of the broom. And sometimes it has worked, and other times it has not.

I have swept up nearly nothing, and I have swept what has seemed an entire year’s of dirt, great pillows of dust and dirt and hair and skin and nails, blades of grass and leaves and cobwebs and bugs and food. I have also swept up thread and buttons and floss, paperclips coins, and screws, nuts and nails and the caps of pens; I’ve swept up sticks and pebbles and stamps, and notes and tickets and eyelashes, and clasps and lids. I have swept up a whole assortment of plastic t, some bits of which I can identify, and others which I cannot recognize at all, things I know belong to appliances or machines, but I cannot think of which, and others I know are no longer of any use. I have swept up every color of the rainbow, and many, many colors that have no business in a rainbow at all—the indescribable shades of gray and brown which are really neither color, but which no one has given a name to because we do not really care to ever describe them. And so I sweep them up, sweep them away, as I am still doing, with a brush and a brush and a brush of the broom, the bulk of the dusty cloud shooing on ahead of me like some reluctant animal, but always a portion of it scurrying back behind the broom, to re-dust the floor, to make me cover the spot again and again. I sweep and I sweep, knowing that I will never make the floor clean, even for a moment, but that it is only, always, just a matter of proportion—the floor grows cleaner, the amount of dust reduces, but never disappears. I once saw in Katmandu all the Nepalese women out in the early morning, sweeping the dirt roads in front of their houses and shops, as though they might be able to sweep the dirt completely off

the road; I laughed at them then, to myself, but it was a deep, despicable, ostracizing laugh.

Yes, I once had a life, once traveled the world, but now I am bound to this house, and if not this house, another like it, to clean and sweep it, and now I know that it is not without purpose that those women in Nepal swept the dirt roads clean, that their work was unending but not futile. I am one of them now, the women around the world, who sweep it clean each day, that the world may be a cleaner place; never clean—no, we would never believe such a thing—but cleaner, which makes all the difference. And that is why I sweep and why I will continue to sweep. And when I am done these rooms and this hallway, I will do the bathroom and the other hall and porch, and I will sweep the guest bedroom, that never gets used but accumulates dust all the same, and when I am done with that, I will sweep the steps and the front yard, and the sidewalk, and then I am likely to keep going, to sweep the road, which is not made of dirt but, regardless, will be dirty, and when I have done that road, I will do another, on and on, until I have swept this whole city, and then the next, because I sweep not simply to get things clean, but to set the world right, to prepare it each day, for you, the living.

The Geometers

Our mathematical protest began at midnight
in the middle of Rocket Run,
me giving the radius segment tension and orbiting you,
who staked the other end of the fifty-foot climbing rope
into the ski slope snow in Naples, NY,
6027 miles – a quarter of Earth’s circumference –
from Baghdad, Iraq, where the March moon
that illuminated our trespasses had already been
replaced by the desert sun and billowing oil smoke,
the scream of F-117 Nighthawks and cruise missiles –
unimaginable horrors we aimed to prevent
by marking the linear distance around the closed curve
of Gerald Holtom’s desperate semaphore,
a crater-sized plea in blood red Krylon.

Lost Noon

Farmer had a cup of coffee on the porch of his house at 5:30 a.m. anticipating dawn. Surprised, then disorientated by the still black landscape he scanned the sky for the first gray traces of dawn but found none. Looking up at the stars pulsing in the vast darkness he imagined that he had mistaken the time, knowing he hadn't. He sat in one of two chipped wicker porch chairs, his coffee steaming on the small glass topped table beside him and waited for light.

*

Around town joggers checked their watches again and again as they anxiously stretched taught morning muscles. Municipality workers looked askance at the undisturbed darkness and early commuters felt an as yet unrecognized disturbance in their routines.

When the automatic lights of offices, malls, gas stations and highways went out at 6:00 the town dimmed to a shade of dark it hadn't been for a hundred years. No morning chorus of birds, no sounds of waking wildlife without the sunrise and the town felt shrouded and lifeless.

A startled giddiness struck as the populous rose in the dark expecting light. Phones buzzed with sleepy questions and confused exclamations. Families chattered nervously as they turned on lights and woke computers for information, surprised that these things functioned, as if there were some necessary connection between the sunrise and the electricity that powers civilization. The streets filled with half dressed residents quietly staring at the dark sky, having never seen it still cold and sunless so late in the morning.

*

The fact that the sun hadn't risen by nearly eight meant to most people in the town that a catastrophe was taking place in spite of there being no evidence of ensuing death. The internet choked with every possible angle and take on the failure of the sun and as the expectation failed in distant time zones running speeds slowed to a critical minimum. Early morning television had nothing to say about the ongoing darkness. It took twenty minutes past predicted legal sunrise for the first comment, which was a humorous aside aimed at the on air forecaster who was the butt of so much broadcast prattle that no one eating their breakfasts gave it another

thought, but from there-after the news became more sullen, then grim and hysterical.

The towns people reacted in one of three ways; either they stayed home and barricaded themselves against whatever the ongoing dark was, or they actively sought an answer to the mystery and went out into the streets, armed and skittish, or they ignored what was happening altogether and tried to go about their normal routine.

Schools were closed and so were most businesses, but places like 7/11 remained open no matter what was happening and so did tire and brake repair shops as well as fast food franchises. The worse the job, the more tragic an event would have to be to get a day off; McDonalds closes for no emergency. Otherwise, the only people who went to work on Sunless Tuesday as it was destined to go down in history were bar tenders who know that when there's trouble there's money to be made tipping drinks.

As people had taken three strategies to survive the event so they would cling to so many more reasons for why it had happened, because something sure as hell had happened. Science was applied in all of its strains from astro-physics to astrology.

Hundreds of television channels broadcast men and women sitting in blue rooms calmly theorizing on why the sun hadn't risen in the east. Some claimed to have predicted the thing years earlier while others declared it wasn't happening at all. Their supporters, whether locked behind thick oak doors or roaming the streets with flashlights streaming the news on their phones nodded grimly at any hint that humans had somehow caused the ongoing darkness by meddling with the forces of nature.

The religious became as fervent that this was the promised day of whatever doctrine they held to. It was the second coming, the final judgment, the consecration of the holy trust; it was Kali's triumph over Vishnu. Various sects roamed in sacred vestments, chanting, holding their signs and symbols of allegiance aloft. Places of worship broke out in bouts of violence as half believers long absent from the fold fought to prove their faith. Under the flickering of malfunctioning street lights factions made up of neighbors and relatives were revealed while celebrating their cause and simultaneously damning their rivals in reason for the absence of the sun. Religious zealots preached at the science-minded and rational that glorious god had brought the dark and cold as punishment for their blasphemy. While those who believed man's tinkering was behind the phenomenon scoffed at the primitive beliefs. They mocked the pious by turning their own arguments around, making them into verdicts. If religion had caused the eclipse or whatever it was then the only answer was to destroy religion.

*

When stars and moon set, day hadn't remained night, but simply ceased to be day, the sky like a perfect wash of Chinese ink. After two cups of coffee Farmer got up from the porch and returned to his bedroom. He removed his work clothes and slipped his still warm pajamas from beneath his pillow. He lay in bed unable to sleep out of habit but willed himself to stay put. He never took a day off, he worked every holiday and when he was sick. There was always a hundred chores that had to be done on a small farm, but a day when even the sun refused to rise, was a day to abandoned all habit and even good sense. A day to turn your back on expectations, a day to stay in bed. Animals don't starve in a day, the cows udders wouldn't burst in a day, pigs and chickens have survived for a very long time without being hand-fed each morning.

After an hour of lying still, eyes wide open in his dark, silent bedroom he got up and changed into a pair of cheaply made denim jeans and a soft clean flannel shirt that he kept for when he ate in town. He went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator to take inventory of his food stock. The disembodied voice on the radio was reading a list of school and office closings along with highways that were shut down followed by emergency phone numbers for police, fire department and paramedics; for emergencies only the voice pleaded.

Farmer nodded at the shelves where orange juice and ham steaks and half a store bought peach pie sat wrapped in clear plastic. He would make a big breakfast with eggs from the barn and hot oatmeal and bacon and maybe flapjacks as well; he had all the time in the world.

*

The highways going in and out of the town were road blocked with state troopers turning back residents attempting to somehow flee the dark, allowing only government and emergency vehicles to pass through the barricades. The towns streets were mostly empty of traffic but for the odd car driving erratically, hurrying from one sanctuary to the next, too fast for the state of emergency but unchecked in the blackness.

The bars and taverns were full of people who had abandoned jobs or wandered from empty homes, drinking with disregard to price or public standing. Drinking places took on the

kind of nervous party atmosphere one experiences during a natural disaster, locked in a safe room looking out at Armageddon.

The police were stationed at government offices; protecting the towns holdings and officials. In the early hours friends and neighbors checked on one another to see that all was well. Watches were formed to patrol the streets, protecting property and offering assistance the elderly. Family members gathered with food and drink to make an impromptu holiday of the event.

As news and realization of a sunless world spread though members of the usually sedate population of the town began to settle long time scores. Niggling grudges that had festered for years and debts long forgotten by borrowers that had remained like an ember glowing in the gut of the lender were at last acted on. These personal vendettas, slights and insults previously endured were righted with shotgun blasts, beatings and acts of vandalism un-thought of before the consequence free world of permanent darkness.

Wives walked out on husbands for secret lovers without a word. Teenage boys kicked in the doors of girls they had crushes on. Co-workers locked themselves in supply rooms communicating assent with the merest nod. A black day called to inner animal instincts. Voyeurs', masochists; closeted perverts of every ilk roamed the quiet lanes and manicured cul-de-sacs of the town dressed in homemade fetish costume openly exercising lifelong desires formerly repressed to the bowels of embarrassment. Vows were broken and lust ruled.

*

When he finished his breakfast Farmer piled the dishes in the deep double wells of the chipped porcelain sink and opened a bottle of bonded whiskey with which he laced his coffee liberally. Leaning against the counter, grimacing against the first sting of alcohol in his nose he looked through the window at the single light burning from above the barn door, a spot of white with a small halo of faded red in the pure flat ebony. He saw his mud crusted boots sat alongside the V-shaped wooden puller out of the corner of his eye and snickered at the absurdity of the day. Taking his mug into the sitting room he turned on the television but each of his eight channels showed a talking head conferring and suggesting or placating, trying to explain away the impossible.

With a thermos of fresh, hot coffee and the bottle of whiskey he returned upstairs to the

bathroom where he ran hot water into the big cast iron tub. He stripped off his comfortable clothes and put on a flannel bathrobe against the chill.

Searching his bookcase for something enlightening to read he settled on a Jim Harrison novel. Between the constant work and the bone tiredness Farmer barely ever read anymore, collapsing instead at the end of each day in front of television around eight to watch comedy shows about beautiful children with humiliating problems living in cities he would never visit. He liked Jim Harrison who was a curmudgeonly old farmer who wrote about other curmudgeonly old farmers, like Farmer himself, except they always got over with much younger women and usually had a big education.

In the depths of the hot water Farmer read and drank his whiskey laden coffee and kicked his feet up on to the tap and experienced a kind of relaxation he hadn't felt since he was a boy. His big fingers callused with leathery pads fumbled with the delicate pages of the book as he laughed outright at Harrison's clumsy character fumbling through a mid-life crisis. As he read on the big breakfast, whiskey and hot water got the best of him and soon he was asleep, the book dropping from his lax hand and floating spread open on the steamy surface of the bath water.

*

In town the ease with which law abiding citizens became vigilantes and demi-mondes increased with every unchecked assault. By mid-afternoon people who had always been 'nice' were smashing car windows just to hear the blast of shattering glass in the darkness. Those who had embedded outlaw tendencies were openly looting and burning any building undefended by gunfire.

Emergency services ceased and the 911 number disconnected before noon. There was not enough law enforcement in the town to effectively patrol during peace, in chaos the police left their posts guarding city hall and the town court to take part in the growing melee of destruction and hedonism. They were heavily armed and predisposed to violence and so soon had a large following of their own running the streets with candy colored lights blazing and sirens screaming, taking and doing whatever they pleased.

The town's small hospital was inundated with injuries that grew more serious throughout the morning. Everything from falls on dark stairs to machete attacks. By eleven the

doors were barricaded on orders of the director with crippled ambulances, their batteries and distributors removed to keep them in place. The doctors and staff worked diligently on the patients they had throughout the morning but anarchy in the air and the futility of healing the sick and bandaging the wounded in the face of possible extinction took hold.

The pharmacy and offices were raided for opiates, barbiturates and amphetamines that were blended by the professionals to make highly potent drug cocktails. I.V. bags were filled with the toxic orange of methadone, lines of powdered Demerol were cut and laid out in intricate designs on steel trays with surgical scalpels and medical grade speed balls were prepared with precision and wrapped in sterile gauze. Nurses toppled the enfeebled from gurneys' and tore open their uniforms to reveal tattoos and piercings the doctors had never suspected. Be-labored paramedics took over the ER as their own. A pediatrician bludgeoned an oncologist unconscious in the lobby with a blue glass dolphin paper weight.

Sometime in the meaningless hours of the afternoon the city plunged into absolute dark again. Either the override put in place to counteract the normal schedule of municipal lighting had shorted the town grid or it had been purposely sabotaged to plunge the population into pure, guiltless shadow. When the lights went out a collective cry of approval rose up from the town's center where fires were already burning and the religious sects and science factions had set up fortifications against one another. Gun shots of all calibers echoed throughout the once picturesque streets and those families that had remained together in the safety of their homes now huddled in locked basements with emergency lights, canned foods and potable water.

*

Farmer woke with a start shivering in the cold water that had drained down to the half tub mark. He caught the swollen book in one hand as he scrambled against the slick edge of the tub, kicking up a spray and soaking the floor in the complete darkness. He had no idea what time it was or how long he had slept. Before he had fallen asleep there had been light but now there was none, no ambient glow outlining the walls and doors. It was as if his house had ceased to be around him. He closed his eyes and imagined the layout of the upstairs and then walked slowly through the black halls to his bedroom, shuffling his feet, feeling the whiskey boom in his head. As he dressed by the surprisingly bright dial of his digital watch two long beams of light swept

the curve of his driveway and came to rest against the side of the garage; becoming smaller and sharper ovals of color. He hurried down the stairs to the kitchen for a flashlight that was always plugged in by the coffee pot. Farmer hadn't had any friends for a long time, none anyway that would drive out on a day of unnatural dark to see him.

Working only by the light of his watch he reached the closet where he kept his Utica 12 gauge pump, always loaded with #5 shot for foxes, dogs, teenagers or whatever else might come around during the night. The car sat idling in the drive, no one had gotten out that farmer could see. He stood invisible, perpendicular to the car with the gun raised to his shoulder, a shell in the chamber and the flash light clamped to the pump with his left hand. With his thumb he triggered the switch and when the beam of light lit up the compact sedan he pulled the trigger and made a crazed mess of the rear passenger side window.

He heard the driver's door open in a rush of screaming. Edging along the rear of the car with the taillights turning his face into a red mask he pumped a fresh shell into the chamber and followed the scrambling figure of the driver across the pea stone with the beaded sight at the end of his barrel. The figure froze at the Hollywood familiar sound of the pump's action. Farmer's light caught her sitting far back on her haunches, legs splayed out in front, hands lifted to shield her face. Desperately sobbing, pleading as she worked her fingers in tiny rotations. Speaking softly to the woman, keeping the beam of his light focused to one side Farmer lifted the gun, set the safety and leaned it against the car.

*

The factions that had formed early in the sunless day on faith or science strengthened and grew over the cold hours. People caught out of doors when the towns lights went out, alone and without shelter gravitated to one or the other for protection more than any conviction about why the sun refused to shine swelling their numbers. Holding opposite sides of the town square as head quarters the groups barricaded themselves with cars and trucks taken at will from the streets, municipal furniture torn from moorings in the surrounding town's buildings, burning trash barrels providing heat and light; they engaged in active battle.

Leaders rose from within, men of true spirit, devoted women who could verbalize the groups collective desires. After a few half-hearted initial skirmishes the faithful sent an

emissary to the science-minded to petition for peace and understanding between the two groups. They were after all neighbors, members of the PTA and team mates in the softball league. After some time the flag pole that jutted from the center of Science head quarters was lit by half a dozen cars, their front ends lifted on jacks. While the religious looked on through camera zoom lenses and birding binoculars their representative was run up on a chain attached to the light blue cross made from one of the parks teeter-totters on which he was crucified, still screaming.

Reverend Ron, the town's white headed preacher, whipped the pious group into an anti-science rage unseen since the Pope's armies burned and beheaded those who dabbled in math. His gold teeth dancing in his mouth with the firelight. The next assault was well planned and carried out with conviction, the advance brandished the banners and flags of their faiths. War raged across the square.

*

Farmer talked the young woman back from the far edge of her fear. He brought her into the house, into the kitchen and sat her at the table while he lit the room with two large candles in old fashioned glass and copper lanterns that hung from the brick chimney of the fireplace. In the soft yellow she calmed enough to relate her story. Farmer made a fire and warmed some food over the gas stove as the girl told how she had been forced off the interstate by the police, how she had driven around the dark town for hours looking for somewhere to stay, a hotel or motel even, but everything was closed up tight or torn wide open; doors hanging from their hinges, windows shattered, car parks littered with trash and smoldering mattresses. She had no idea what was happening, what was happening she kept asking. Then she had been chased, a truck with blinding lights had tried to force her off the road. She had driven fast, faster then she had ever gone before and with the agility of her smaller car had gotten out of their sight and turned down what she thought was a dirt road, Farmer's drive way. She had sat in her car some distance from the house for an hour watching before she crept slowly to the garage and blew her horn, which had woken Farmer.

While she ate, Farmer retrieved the whiskey from the bathroom. He made a pot of tea and poured two cups with a fat dollop of honey and a large slug of the whiskey in each. She took the

hot mug in two hands and blew steam from the surface.

“What kind of town was this?” She asked, the people had gone mad, they were roaming the streets with weapons and fires burned everywhere. Farmer took his drink in two long swallows and got up to make another.

“This town and every other; fear and madness are as close as love and hate.” He said as he mixed the whiskey. “People don’t like being in the dark, makes them think they’re alone.”

Later when the girl took Farmer to his bed she expressed her gratitude in a way he had never known. It had been eight years since his had wife succumbed to what could be best described as female troubles, but even then there was nothing like what this girl was doing, what she was saying, how he was feeling. They slept under layers of covers, she pulled tight to Farmers work-hardened body feeling safe and warm in the well of the night.

Farmer woke automatically at five. Removed himself from the embrace of the girl at his side, dressed and went to the bathroom for a long morning piss and a vigorous face scrubbing. The house was still dark and he used the flashlight to pick his way downstairs to make coffee. It was as cold and silent as it had been before they slept until the piercing crow of a rooster broke through. Farmer opened the door to the front porch and saw the first weak strains of light bending over the horizon.

With coffee mugs in hand Farmer and the girl sat in the chipped white wicker chairs on the porch and watched as the sun slowly remade the world from darkness and life came back to the farm as it had every day but the one previous.

*

The light and heat of the sun, ballooned like molten glass spreading over the town. Bodies rose from the streets squinting up at the ball of fire as if at an alien presence. Hobbling in circles, disorientated with hangovers and concussed by blows to the head they sought the familiar. Smoke filled the blue sky from the charred remains of houses and business on every street. At the town square figures broke from the strong holds of their respective groups slowly, shamefully returned to their homes over the no-man’s land of the night before where the dead lay numerous. The atavistic struggle was over.

Good Things Come To Those Who Wait

I keep walking in and out of the same room,
everything leaning over everything else,
the last light of day doing a drunken jig on the lawn,
our neighbour's dog amazed at its own barking,
the first star peeking out from behind a curtain,
the few remaining ghosts mulling over past errors,
a voice in my head asking politely,
"Which of them all is your favourite regret?"

These quiet drawn-out summer evenings
when we bring out the old letters and cheap whiskey,
stirred by unflattering emotions,
the physical earth unsullied by ennui and time.

The Void

So pitch was the darkness that should I hold a candle at arm's length, invisible would be the flame. Suddenly, very, very dimly, pinpoints of light appeared, which brightened, then extended to become lines; in the midst of the darkness, all was a slow, yet continual growth of light, the lines extending and widening. Soon, in the midst of these isles of light, forms coalesced, which, as the isles grew, increased in size and multifariousness. More than half of space now was composed of light. In the isle in front of my eyes a straight line had cohered, a white line extending away from me midst dark inside that isle of light. Before I knew it the darkness outside had been completely taken over by light, and that the line in front of me was a path, if not a sidewalk, through grass, with trees on either side, and beyond them low mountains, and I was walking on the sidewalk.

For how long I walked I couldn't say, perhaps two hours, perhaps three, a pleasant sun helping to ambulate, though not hurry, me. In the distance I detected a building, my destination. Other buildings had been scattered to both right and left, and a couple of times I had seen people at them or nearby, but no one had paid particular attention to me; indeed, I hadn't been the only person on the sidewalk.

I entered the building, a lodge, and was told that people were waiting for me at such and such a room. I knocked, from inside was told to enter, and before my eyes, sitting at a table, were William Shakespeare, Eugene O'Neill, and Garcia Lorca, yet not they did I see, but three people wearing masks of them, though the bodies corresponded to the bodies of each. They motioned me to sit.

Said O'Neill to me, "Here's a manuscript titled 'Waiting for Godot'. We want you to read it by this hour tomorrow" – a clock said four – "at which time you're to come back to this room with the manuscript." He gave me a key. "Your suite is one flight up. Everything has been provided for you."

The next day at four o'clock I was back in that room; the other three people still were masked. Said O'Neill, "Well, Albee, do you think you can write it?"

“I’m flattered you would consider me, but it’s not I – the author of this would have to have a more subtle intellect. In certain ways I’m no less nihilistic, but the author of this already will have had to have intellectualized his cynicism into a philosophical position, which I haven’t.”

At that moment the light began dimming until soon all I was able to see were shadows, not even forms, but indistinct coherences, and it wasn’t long before they were subsumed as when one drifts into sleep. All soon was of a darkness so primeval that even subjective identity ceased.

On the Air

The attic was hot and dusty. Yet it was a place of wonders.

Over two centuries in age, the house's oldest section, the domain of the attic, stretches back to the 1780's. Hand hewn oak beams run overhead, forming a high peak filled in with wood planks. Not a single nail holds the frame together; instead, thumb-sized wood pegs create bonds and joints. In my childhood years, columns of cardboard boxes, a scattering of dusty rattan chairs, and several battleship gray cabinets filled this space. A single flyspecked window at the attic's west end let in a wan, almost silvery light – except at sunset, when sometimes a golden glow worthy of illuminating the pyramids would pour in through the old wavy glass. Overhead, a single, oversize 150 watt bulb set in a white painted steel reflector usually shed more radiance than the window. Centered under the bulb's bright beam, a wind-up record player sat perched on a dark wood resonator the size of a small cabinet.

That day, the top was propped open, and a 78 rpm record, double the thickness of any modern vinyl album, nestled on the turntable, its dull black center emblazoned with the Columbia label in silver and white. Reaching down, I gripped the wood handle, turned the heavy iron crank on the cabinet's side, and released a simple steel catch that allowed the disc to spin. The whole apparatus stood about chest-high on my ten year old body. Looking at my older cousin, I waited for my cue. He held a shiny aluminum cylinder, one of the odd pieces of high-tech trash my father would bring home from his job at the defense plant building missile guidance systems. It was our pretend microphone. Several grades ahead of me, this cousin was tall, gangly, and dark-haired. His fair-haired brother, closer to my age, sat at one of the antique chairs, elbows on knees, chin to cupped palms.

The older cousin, Bob, began to speak in the over-annunciated tones of a 1940's era radio announcer, a voice he'd learned from watching old movies on late night television.

“And now we bring you the great Benny Goodman and his orchestra playing the ever popular, ‘Sing, Sing, Sing.’”

Bob pointed to me, and I carefully placed the tone arm – its heavy, circular end holding the shiny steel needle – down on the record. There was the characteristic “skritch, skritch, skritch” of 78's, and then the multi-layer, tight swing arrangement of “Sing, Sing, Sing,” driven by Gene Krupa's pounding drums, burst from the sounding box, all muffled and boomy, the high notes skittering like scurrying phantoms.

Now Ray, my other cousin, spoke up.

“Let it play for a few minutes, and then turn it off. Bob, you come in and say, ‘we interrupt this program to bring you special news report.’”

“O.K.”

We waited, listening to the music of a time before we were born. Someone coughed from the dust – tiny motes that seemed to catch fire when they drifted past the incandescent bulb. About mid-way through Goodman’s clarinet solo, I lifted the tone arm. Despite my care, the needle caught the record, and the sound, like a ripping zipper, made me wince. Right on cue, Bob launched into an announcement straight out of Orson Welles’s *War of the Worlds*.

“We interrupt this musical program to bring you this news bulletin from our special correspondent – Raymond Kuzia. And now to you, Raymond.”

Bob handed the metal cylinder to Ray, who attempted the deep tones of a stereotypical newscaster. “This just in from the news room. The *Phoebe Snow*, the passenger train that serves our fair city, has run off the rails at the Susquehanna Bridge and plunged to the waters below. Hundreds are feared dead. More on this story at six.”

Ray nodded to me, and I placed the needle back on the record more or less where I had interrupted the song. As we listened to the rest of “Sing, Sing, Sing,” and then played more of my parents’ 78’s, and made more overly dramatic announcements, the sun slid towards the green hills just past the attic window. But we didn’t notice, for time had been magically suspended by one of our favorite games – radio.

About five years later, my radio game became more real.

My parents’ 18th century home was one of the first houses built on the southern end of Brown Road, a rural route that paralleled the Owego River between the upstate New York villages of Berkshire and Newark Valley. On the northern end of Brown Road, my good friend Carl Akins lived in a house that was maybe a century younger, and in his second story bedroom he set up an amateur radio station by purchasing a low wattage transmitter just under the legal power limit for an unlicensed station. Carl’s station, which he named WBRS, reached perhaps a half mile radius, but it was real radio, and Carl’s neighbors and passing cars on Brown Road or Route 38, the nearest state highway, could tune in our broadcasts, though they rarely did.

But that didn’t stop Carl from creating an entire production studio. Next to his bed and wooden chest of drawers, he set up a table with two turntables, a broadcast quality microphone

on a suspension stand, a mixing board, an antenna cable that ran up the wall and out the window, and the transmitter – a featureless black box about the size of the Ace paperback edition of Frank Herbert’s *Dune*. Along with this equipment, the shelves upon shelves of albums and tangles of multi-colored wires didn’t leave much room for visitors. So we would squeeze into Carl’s small, sloped-roof bedroom any way we could – sitting on the bed, the chair, or the floor – and spend our Friday’s and Saturday’s being DJ’s by spinning records, announcing songs, and gossiping about the latest bands. Sometimes we would go deep past midnight, huddling under the single desk lamp, while Carl, looking like some elfish character out of a Tolkien novel, would pull record after record from his copious stacks. Like electronic alchemists, we would transform those records into radio waves and send them out to the vast dark beyond Carl’s two tiny windows, playing the great music of the day – the Beatles, Doors, Arthur Lee, Yes, Led Zeppelin, Cream, Rolling Stones, Jefferson Airplane, and many, many others. And always there was that magic feeling that there was a real signal going out into space, that someone could actually be listening.

In the final year or two of the station’s existence, I gained my driver’s license, and I would get a kick out of listening to Carl, still broadcasting as I headed for home on the narrow country blacktop road, my headlights lighting the way ahead with its railroad crossing, white X warning signs, brown barns, white clapboard farmhouse, clusters of maples – all accompanied by say the mysterious tonal soundtrack of Pink Floyd’s “Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun,” which would quickly fade out, leaving white noise shot with static as I reached the limits of Carl’s transmitter.

Radio, or at least the concept of radio, dawned in 1873, when the Scottish physicist James Clerk Maxwell predicted that an electric occurrence, say a bolt of lightning or an electric discharge from a battery, should create waves that travel through space in the same manner and speed as light. This is because electrical fields generate magnetic fields, which in turn generate electrical fields, and this dualistic play produces an electromagnetic wave. The trick was to create a device that could detect these invisible waves.

Fifteen years later, Heinrich Hertz created a device that did just this. Hertz set up two small brass spheres hooked to battery powered induction coils. When he engaged the coils, a

spark would jump the gap between the spheres. If Maxwell's predictions were correct, the sparks should create electromagnetic waves. To detect these waves, Hertz formed a receiver from a looped wire tipped by brass spheres, a kind of physical echo to the transmitter. The receiver stood several meters from the transmitter. Hertz knew that the electromagnetic waves generated by the transmitter's sparks should induce a current in the wire loop and create sparks between the receiver's brass spheres – a wireless transmission of energy through space. When Hertz turned on the transmitter, this indeed happened. Sparks shot forth between the receiver's spheres in response to the transmitter's discharge of energy. The German physicist was triumphant – he had witnessed the first broadcast and reception of electromagnetic waves, in essence, the first radio transmission.

Following Hertz's discovery, a number of scientists and tinkerers improved on his experiment, so that by 1900 modern radio was a reality. Of these inventors – a partial list includes J. C. Bose, Guglielmo Marconi, and Nathan Stubblefield – by far the most colorful was Nikola Tesla.

The inventor of our Alternating Current (A.C.) system of power transmission, Tesla was obsessed with the wireless broadcast of energy through space. In 1899, he built a laboratory of wonders high in the mountains above Colorado Springs. Here this Serbian-born inventor developed the Tesla Coil, which generated sparks 30 feet long that could be seen ten miles away, and by using the earth as a conductor, he lit 200 electric lamps from a distance of 25 miles without the use of wires. There are bizarre photographs from that lab showing the dapper Tesla sitting in a chair calmly reading a book while torrents of electric discharges break around his head from a massive silver colored ball. One of Tesla's proudest wonders was the lab's highly sensitive radio transmitter/receiver on which he claimed to have detected signals from the planet Mars, a declaration that brought widespread skepticism and even derision. Today, some historians believe he may have been picking up Marconi's transmitter in Italy, which Tesla mistook for extraterrestrial communications.

Wherever the signals emanate, radio waves are generated by a transmitter that pushes electric charges in a set pattern up and down an antenna. This creates electromagnetic waves – a pair of electric and magnetic fields that weave across space, one eternally producing the other. Upon reaching a radio set, the wave's electric field pushes charges up and down the receiving antenna in the same way that Hertz's wire loop responded to the sparks from his induction coils.

To generate sound, the radio transmitter varies the amplitude, or strength, of the wave in a pattern that mirrors the sounds produced in the studio. This amplitude pattern controls the movement of the receiving radio's speaker, and these movements create sound. This is called AM, or Amplitude Modulation. In FM, or Frequency Modulation, the transmitter alters the wave's precise frequency as the means to control the speaker's fluctuations.

In the beginning, radio was used primarily for ship's communications and was essentially restricted to Morse Code. However, improvements in the long-distance transmission of speech inspired the Westinghouse Electric Corporation to establish the first commercial radio station, Pittsburgh's KDKA, in 1920. In just two years, there were 550 radio stations and 1.5 million radio sets, a number that today has reached 33,000 stations and more than two billion radios world-wide.

One of the characteristics of radio that increases its air of sorcery is the nighttime ability of simple receivers to pick up AM signals from hundreds or even thousands of miles away. This seemingly miraculous phenomenon is due to the ionosphere, a layer of the upper atmosphere consisting of charged particles that form when the sun's x-rays and ultraviolet radiation strike molecules of oxygen and nitrogen. The lowest layer of the ionosphere, which absorbs AM signals, vanishes at night, allowing the AM radio waves to reach the ionosphere's higher layers 100 miles up. These layers bounce back the signals, enabling them to go far beyond the line of sight limitations of daytime broadcasting. Shortwave radio achieves great distances on the same principle, though some of the frequencies used in shortwave are less affected by the lower ionosphere and can therefore achieve an atmospheric bounce even in daylight hours.

Ernest Hemingway depicts the ionosphere's effect on radio signals in his short-story "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio." The story's protagonist, Mr. Frazer, lands in a small hospital in Hailey, Idaho with a broken arm. After five weeks in the hospital, Frazer's insomnia has become almost unbearable. He finds relief in the radio, which he listens to well past midnight as the stations sign off one after another, moving west with the night – Denver, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, and finally Seattle at five a.m. After Seattle leaves the air, he can pick up Minneapolis starting its broadcast day. He begins to know these cities through their radio stations, especially Seattle with its big white taxicabs that carry passengers escaping prohibition to Canadian road-houses and Minneapolis with its Morning Revelers, who cart their instruments on the streetcar as they head out to do their morning musical program. Between tracking the nighttime radio

signals, listening to the stories of the staff and patients, and the occasional illicit drink, Frazer manages to keep his sanity.

I discovered this long-range AM broadcasting effect around the same age that I began playing radio station in the attic. Sometimes when my father and I would go fishing, we would return home late, and as the country highways wound through the darkened forests and fields, we would tune in to WWVA and the Wheeling Jamboree from Wheeling, West Virginia 300 miles away. So, with the smell of newly caught bass in my nostrils, I would listen to the bluegrass of Doc Williams, Mac Wiseman, and Jim Greer's Mac-O-Chee Valley Folks, punctuated by Crazy Elmer's comedy routines. Because of the radio broadcast's distant origin, it seemed to me as exotic as Tesla's signals from Mars or the mysterious, silent pulse of northern lights on the equinox midnights. Some thirty years later I frequently experienced the same strange effect. At the time, I was living in Delta, a small ranching town in western Colorado, and teaching forty-five miles away in Grand Junction. When I would drive home from my night classes, I would listen to KNX 1070 out of Santa Ana, California, their radio waves vaulting 700 miles over the deserts of the Mohave and the Colorado Plateau to reach me. Every night at ten o'clock Mountain Time, nine Pacific, KNX would play an hour of radio dramas from the 1940's and 1950's. It was as if I were driving a time machine across western Colorado's adobe hills and dry gulches, occasionally catching a coyote or an antelope in the headlights, while listening to Jimmy Stewart as Britt Ponset, the cowboy drifter in *The Six Shooter*; or Bret Morrison in *The Shadow*, piercing the hidden hearts of men; or an interstellar adventure on Dimension X, with announcer Norman Rose intoning at the start of every episode – "Adventures in time and space, told in future tense."

I've long been fascinated by the Golden Age of radio theater, and back in the mid-1970's I felt almost a part of it when I wrote "dramatic" radio ads professionally. In 1976, two WBRS announcers – Carl Akins and Todd Rutan – formed a radio production company specializing in ads, and they hired me as their copywriter. Our pitch was that we were the creative radio ad outfit for New York's Southern Tier, and we made mostly 30 second dramatic spots with scenarios like Sherlock Holmes perceiving that Dr. Watson had visited our client's pizza joint because of the doctor's grin of profound satisfaction, or talking fish complaining that ever since a certain scuba diving outfitter had gone into business, the Susquehanna River had become crowded with happy divers. We didn't make a great deal of money, but it was a real kick to be

driving around town and hear an ad, complete with characters and sound effects, come over the radio and know that I had written it.

During the years that I wrote ads for Carl and Todd, I exercised my fascination for radio drama on WHRW, the campus station for Binghamton University, where I was working on my B.A. in English. My weekly show was a science-fiction and fantasy program that consisted mostly of playing recordings of old radio plays like Orson Welles's Mercury Theater production of *Dracula* or dramatic readings of classic science-fiction stories like Leonard Nimoy's performance of Robert Heinlein's "The Green Hills of Earth." As with WBRB, there was something magical about sitting in front of a microphone and announcing the show. But unlike the amateur station of my teen years, my voice was reaching an audience in a thirty mile radius, not three hundred yards.

Yet once I graduated from Binghamton, I didn't step into a radio studio for a full decade, and it was poetry, not radio drama that drew me back. In 1986, I moved to Santa Fe, the centuries old capital of New Mexico. In those days there was an active performance poetry community, and the heart of this community was Burnt Horses Bookstore on De Vargas, the nation's oldest street.

Dwelling in a humble single story brick and adobe structure with seasoned vigas that glowed in the lamplight, Burnt Horses was the locale of numerous readings, sometimes two or three a week. These ranged from marathon open readings with legions of apprentice poets to presentations from literary greats like recording artist John Trudell, who filled the place with black balloons to accompany his poetry's sharp-edged portrayal of American Indian revolution and realities, or Leo Romero with his wry poems about Celso – the alcohol fueled back-country mystic of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. Perhaps the finest reading ever at Burnt Horses was the one given by N. Scott Momaday, the Pulitzer Prize winning author of *House Made of Dawn*. Momaday requested that all of the shop's lights be turned off except for the floor lamp next to a great stuffed armchair, which he possessed with all the authority of his great Kiowa warrior's body. Then, while the audience sat around him like children gathered for story hour, many of us on the floor at his feet, he read in his powerful, resonant voice passages from his novel *The Ancient Child*, complete with separate personae for Billy the Kid and Sitting Bull.

Since I worked in Burnt Horses, I frequently organized the readings and with time grew

to be close friends with a number of local writers. For me, the Santa Fe poet whose work shown with a special, transcendent radiance was John Knoll. An heir to both the Surrealists and the Beats, Knoll writes poetry that takes the reader to reality's rim, where the sea recedes into Luis Buñuel's palm, a redwood dreams the world, and Persephone drowns in a heart-shaped pool while a whiskey priest performs her last rites. Living through the 1960's most incendiary days and exploring the psyche's deepest reaches, Knoll labors in unjust obscurity in a small trailer at the edge of the Pojoaque Indian reservation. He is a living saint of the word.

In 1987, John and I began to do readings together when we organized a commemoration at Burnt Horses of the 30th anniversary of Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*. Later, we teamed up with jazz bassist John Clark, and the three of us began doing jazz-poetry improvisations around Santa Fe in various bookstores and venues devoted to experimental theater. These shows drew the attention of Robert Winson – Zen priest, performance poet, and student of San Francisco poetry renaissance figure Philip Whalen. Robert had a poetry show on the newly established Santa Fe community station, and he invited us on the program. So, after a ten year hiatus, I found myself once more in a radio studio.

When we arrived, the studio's bareness surprised me. There were four unadorned white walls, one of them nearly filled by the control room's large glass panel, a suspended mike, and four chairs – so different from the studio of my college campus station with its rock posters, black and white photos of jazz musicians, campus announcements, and the like. While I figured the studio's severity resulted from its newness, the austere atmosphere increased my nervousness, a nervousness born from a long hiatus from any kind of recording studio. Robert sat behind his glassed-in booth, master of the great bank of switches which ranged before him. We were taping the show rather than doing it live, so while a great reel to reel turned, Knoll and I read our poems to the modal fantasies of John Clark's bass. Now and then, Winson would ask us questions about our work and our collaborative efforts. Later, he mixed the recording into a thirty minute segment, and I heard the broadcast in a friend's living room. Since all my other air time has been live, I've never before or since actually heard my voice emerging from a radio set, an experience both exotic and unnerving.

Soon after my appearance on Winson's show, I left Santa Fe and moved to Colorado's Western Slope, where I have continued over the years to do poetry readings on the community radio stations KVNK in Paonia and KAFM in Grand Junction. Whenever I do a broadcast, the

experience always evokes a spiritual sensation as my disembodied voice traverses the ether (as they would have said a century ago) to emerge in a small black box miles away from the studio. In *The Posthuman Dada Guide: Tzara & Lenin Play Chess*, Andrei Codrescu explains that the Paleolithic shaman would climb certain trees or mountaintops from where they would psychically communicate with far distant brother or sister shaman. While Codrescu finds an analogy between the internet and this ancient form of shamanic communication, I would suggest that radio, with its incorporeal voices tearing through space, is a stronger parallel. When Marconi and his colleagues invented radio, they found a way for a message to pierce space at the speed of light, allowing two people to communicate over vast distances nearly instantaneously, like the shaman in their trees, or for millions of people to hear one voice at the same time. Essentially, Hemingway got it right in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* when Pilar compares her occult power to see Robert Jordan's future in his palm to the invisible manifestations of radio waves. Both are invisible yet real. I fear that today, with radio being so commonplace, and its commercial uses so mundane or vitriolic, we tend to forget its powerful and miraculous nature.

Recently, I crossed the Continental Divide to do a reading on KRFC in Ft. Collins, a city built on the transitional zone between the prairie's western edge and the great wall of the Rocky Mountains. And again, I encountered radio's nearly mystical enchantment. An early winter storm had covered Ft. Collins in an icy sheen that shone with a strange, inner light from the sun's heavily polarized rays. My wife Brenda and I spent the day of my broadcast exploring the city's coffee houses and bookstores. One coffeehouse, a two-story affair near the Colorado State University campus, was packed with undergraduates talking of Derrida or post-colonial African politics or dark energy and downing lattes at tables with wobbly legs and three different kinds of stools, while the shiny knob-covered espresso machines hissed like tired dragons. All the upstairs tables were full, so we landed in the cold downstairs, where a third of the lights didn't work and the posters for student art shows were ten years out of date. Next we went downtown to a larger coffeehouse-bookstore, a cooperative that supports the publication of *Matter*, a literary magazine. While this place was also crowded, it was warm, and we managed to find a table in the loft, from where we could survey the book-lined walls. There we sat, drank rich chai tea, and read our respective books – Brenda's *The Gift of Black Folk* by W.E.B. DuBois and my

newly purchased *Poetry as Insurgent Art*, wherein Lawrence Ferlinghetti writes, “A true poem can create a divine stillness in the world.”

After the coffeehouse, we had supper in a little Thai restaurant and in the growing darkness crossed an intersection to the studios of KRFC, where I sat in a glass booth before a mike suspended by a steel armature. While the soundboard meters twitched like nervous insects, Dona Stein, the host of the poetry show, made a series of public service announcements. Finally, she introduced me to her audience, and then my voice entered the microphone.

“I would like to start with a poem entitled ‘Chalice of Bronze, River of Moons.’” Instantly, the transmitter changed the words into electromagnetic impulses that shot through an antenna and, as James Clerk Maxwell predicted they would nearly 150 years before, raced at the speed of light across the prairie to enter hundreds, maybe thousands, of radios and be transformed again into sound waves by wafer-thin speakers. And remembering my broadcast inspired imaginings in the dusty attics of my childhood, I smiled once again at the marvel of radio.

$$c^2 dr^2 = (1 - r_s / r) c^2 dt^2 - (1 - r_s / r)^{-1} dr^2 - r^2 (d\theta^2 + \sin^2\theta d\gamma^2),$$

love song for a black hole

I try to get close to you with lines,
and grumble about your lack of polynomials,
and you wrap me up in cosines.

You're supposed to tell me about space-time,
there is something I can't see, and
I'm trying to get close to you with lines.

Why did you have to have design?
I wish you didn't have a shape,
but you wrap me up in cosines.

You could have stopped us at clock works,
Newton could have been right about you, and
I could have gotten closer to you with lines.

It's it a little too convenient how many ones
you have? Seems like that's too simple
for something that wraps me up in cosines.

Unless I forget a negative sign,
you wear your symmetry well when
I try to get close to you with lines,
and you wrap me up in cosines.

Dust

The story started some place in the Southwest. It began as a small clump of dust, loosened from the sole of a pair of sneakers made in China. The shoes belonged to the story's hero who, when it was all over, became larger than life. He had, some said, died and been reincarnated. All in the blink of an eye.

Dust from the man's shoe had traveled across the border, between Mexico and the United States. A pale tan residue lifted into the wind, on a day so hot and dry nothing but a particle of dust would have even noticed. There were, one teller of the story was heard to relate, crickets spread across the desert, and they all began to sing.

Night fell, without a lessening of the heat. The man whose shoes pointed toward the sky lay where he had fallen, next to the border fence, on the Mexican side. Only the dust from his shoe had gotten across, though the man's goal had been to come to America and make his fortune.

The dust glided through the air that first night. There were no clouds, which was good, because otherwise it might have rained and the dust would have turned to mud or been washed away, never to have been heard from again. If you were standing out in the desert, where lights are nowhere to be seen, a multitude of stars could have caused you to exhale slowly. A sliver of moon hung pensively, off to the side.

The dust did not want to go far that night. It lifted to a higher place, where the air currents sailed it north. The little beige particle had heard about San Diego and liked how the name rolled off a tongue. Plus, it was a name not unfamiliar to a morsel of dry soil from that side of the border, where saints were much more commonplace. A woman with long gray hair and the hint of a moustache above her lip told the next part of the story like this:

The little piece of dust, you know, it was nothing really. Like dandruff or sand that blows in the door. It decided to come down from the sky and take a look around. This kernel of dirt from a tiny village in the Mexican mountains, not far from Guatemala, had never seen such highways and cars, and so many lights. Well, you can just imagine what went through its tiny mind when it first saw San Diego.

Meanwhile, the hero of our story who had risked everything for a dream, lay in the hottest part of the desert, where no one but the coyote was apt to find him. At that moment, his soul was beginning to sneak away, climbing right out of his chest, where sweat had gathered before the man collapsed.

The next part of the story isn't quite so clear. Some say the dust allowed itself to fall, wanting to see where letting go would take it. Others claim the wind at the higher part of the sky took a break and smacked the dust onto the ground. A man in a bar on the south side of town, in between swigs of Corona soured with lime and after wiping the back of his hand across his mouth, said the dust had taken the form of a man as soon as it hit the ground.

Meanwhile, a scorpion had marched its spindly black legs up onto the dead man's arm. The man didn't know, of course, what was happening, now that his soul had departed.

One old man, who snuck across the border too many years ago to count, and whose three gold-capped front teeth winked in the candlelight, heard that the dust slept in a downtown doorway all night.

The little dust was very cold, he said, being so far north. The poor thing was not used to this weather. But what most people do not understand is that this dust, it was not stupid.

Seeing the blue and green sleeping bags, lumps of stuffed nylon filling each of the spaces in front of doors, the dust understood how it might stay warm. It slipped underneath, at the corner of a bag, making sure not to slide further in, where it would surely be crushed.

At the same time, the dead man's soul hovered over the border, between this side and that. Without the man and his dreams of a better life in America, the soul had a hard time deciding whether to keep moving forward or turn back around. Being an old soul, a bit worn at the toe but carrying the wisdom of countless generations, this presence, which was like breath, water and light all rolled into one, thought a quiet life on the porch overlooking the dead man's corn and bean fields in Teptapa would suit it just fine. The soul had no use for gadgets made in China or a red Ford pickup truck, like the man might have wanted, and the soul was not the least bit hungry at the moment. It had also been around enough time to understand what the dead man had not yet realized – that the other side is often not better than the side where a man was born.

It's at this part of the story where the song comes up. Musicians fight over who wrote their lyrics first but credit is generally given to a band in Tijuana. The Border Boys, as they are known, recorded a tune called Wetback Dust. As the song relates, neither the border patrol nor the drug dealers, and not even the President, could stop the dust from the shoes of millions of Mexicans from making its way over, under and in between cracks in the fence, and settling down for a good long time in the United States.

The Age of Re-Lighting the World

they marched under the night
sky for months heading West
thirsty, worn, the oxen dying
mules and horses, the weak

stars glowed thick and fast
permanent points, guideposts
beyond the campfires, the sage
uplands as limitless as the sky

above— curlicues of microwaves
and interstellar dust, primordial
space-time ripples from when
the universe began populating

pioneers advanced before snow
blocked the passes, dust rising
in clouds underfoot, choking
outlined the trail ahead, summer

after time began, inflation saw
heat expand without matter yet
then cool enough for hydrogen
and neutral helium, gravity now

the weight a burden, jettisoned
tools, beds, chests thrown away
children cried, women held stoic
the men red-eyed, haggard, filthy

collapsed, radiation sparked once
then a Dark Age without emissions
then light emerged from dark matter
the universal fossil record layering

dirt showing the way, browned, red
pale, thick mud, rivers, stars above
at night mocked them, glowed bright
in the campfires like ethereal clouds

halos of galaxies strewn backwards
across space-time, the universe now
bright and cold, transparent but dark
dust, energy, the forces fleeting, raw

Pier Boys

On misty days in Western Washington, boys stand in rows on piers, selling salmon heads from buckets. They hold heads in their hands. Their hands are pink and shiny, splayed and soft.

Lucky heads? Two dollars, they say in unison.

Men with dirty beards teach the boys. *Heads were different when I was your age, the men say. Chinook, Coho, Chum. As big and pink as your mother's ass. You could hold one in your hand for hours, and it would never warm up.*

At lunch time, Western Washington boys at one pier, at Suq Pier, walk with sagging jeans to JC's Minimart and buy Monsters. They sit on concrete slabs and push down their hoods. Their brains are soft and gray. Their mouths are open. Into the openings goes the green energy liquid. The boys don't change at all. They are exactly the same.

After lunch, the Suq Pier boys walk back to the pier and grab one head for each hand from the bucket. The heads are turning to jelly. The boys hold the substance waist-high. Pink and gray matter drips onto their shoes.

The workday will end in three hours. It is no matter.

Lucky heads? Two dollars.

A raspberry car rolls smooth and silent into the lot next to the pier. The Suq boys turn their heads like a line of dominoes. A ray of sun breaks through the mist. The mist lights up like colored glass. Through the glass, the boys see one young man exit the quiet car. The car door closes without sound, and the Suq boys blink.

The young man walks to the pier. He wears no hoodie, hardly any clothes at all. He is colorful, like a half-gallon of mint ice-cream from the freezer at JC's. His face is contorted into a smile until he is close. He slips a little on the slimy wood. He rubs one straight arm with the other, looks up the pier.

Excuse me, he says, like he owns the world, like he's the president, like he's from outer space. *Did you happen to see a girl? Pretty? Dark hair? About this tall?*

The boys do not move. Fish-head juice drips onto the ground.

I guess that's a no. The young man puts his hands on his hips and looks at each boy. *Hello?* He waves in front of their faces. *Anybody home?* He shakes his head and turns around, bumping into their teacher who was right behind him. The young man leans back and slips. He tries to keep from falling and slips more. His arms jerk, and his legs kick up. The old man steps back before the young man can grab hold of him. The young man slips and slips. It is like a wild dance. It could go on forever.

The boys begin to snicker. The corners of their mouths crack and bleed. They laugh harder, and the fish heads fall from their hands.

The young man hollers, *Whoa, whoa, whoa*, while his arms spin. He is a windmill. A wild, funny windmill. The boys don't want this to stop. They plunge their hands into the buckets and throw more heads at his feet. They pick up the buckets and hurl the contents at the young man, at his face and arms and legs. The boys laugh in short grunts, in heaves. The young man lies on the wet wood. The boys pick up the buckets and whip them at him. The young man is silent as he twists on the pink water.

So funny, this is, to the boys. So familiar. So alive.

Mathematics and Reality

Mathematics constructs reality. Mathematical equations are not only fundamental in the realms of science and mathematics but in the composition and functioning of reality. Higher-level mathematics (in particular its postulates, conjectures, theorems, axioms and structure(s)/systems) and its equations represent the complex nature of reality. Mathematical proofs order the constituents that compose reality. Pure mathematics reaches the (theoretical) pinnacles of the true nature of reality. Applied mathematics constructs the framework(s) in which reality operates. Reality functions as a result of the perfect assimilation and/or conglomeration of mathematical equations and systems. Mathematical systems that represent “real-world” scenarios are not similar or indicative to the systems that construct reality. The beauty or aesthetics of mathematics can be related to its ability to successfully describe and fundamentally compose reality. The mathematical equations and systems that construct reality are far more complex and establish theorems that construct whole sheets or plates of holograms that in turn become a recognizable (by humans) form of reality when calibrated by more equations and formulas. Mathematical functions are indicative of the constructs (beginnings and boundaries/limits of reality). Infinity in mathematics represents the infinity that governs reality/infinity in reality. The universe is made up of whole numbers at the base level and expands outward to include complex equations /formulas and mathematical entities. The universe alters its amount of dimensions; amount of dimensions is mathematically relative. Mathematics engineers or constructs and materializes holograms that in turn form the basis of reality/the universe. Reality and humans are separate which is why humans cannot physically (and in some cases mentally) conceive of this reality although it does relay some of its effects onto humans (i.e. mental configuration that produces the assertion that an event or series of events have already occurred when the assertion seems implausible). Humans’ perceptions and/or sensory input can be considered unreliable and subject to debate.

Infinity in mathematics translates to infinity in reality in the mind of the mathematician.

When She Makes Her Breakfast

There is a tenth century Japanese folktale about moon beings who are always content because they are free from emotion; but there is one girl of the moon who wishes to travel to earth to live the human experience:
yesterday in Nigeria, a member of Boko Haram shot a woman while giving birth to a baby boy who was halfway out, and because it was at night, they both died in the dark.

Somewhere, Nat King sings, *That's why, darling, it's incredible* like when a woman kills herself before the disease takes her memories and her husband lies in bed holding her until the poison does its job, and when a different woman leaves for work in the morning there are cold eggs left on the stove because she doesn't want her girlfriend to start the day hungry.

Suicide Hill

Every winter, on a Saturday morning in February, my dad used to haul my brother and me out of bed to watch the international ski jumping competition in Ishpeming, Michigan.

Hot cocoa, flannel blankets, snow pants with ridged buckles. Dad had a Ford F-150, brown; he'd put my brother and me on the seat beside him and drive us down a county road to the towering ski jump. A timber contrivance, its frame had the slender legs of a fawn, knobbed and riveted. A grated slope ran down from the top of the frame, with a white and snowy lip at the bottom to propel a skier, boots splayed into a V, out over a landing pad gleaming with ice.

Dad climbed with us up the side of the hill to the base of the ski jump. The announcer's voice, calm and mathematical, filtered from a speaker above. *Number thirty-two, Terry Grahek, USA. Number forty-seven, Lars Aagaard, Norway.* I'd still hear it when I went home in the evening, the distant call of names and numbers echoing through our walls.

All around, there were languages I didn't know: Finnish, Swedish, Norwegian, German. Young men in skintight slips of ski suits, bright blues and oranges splashed over their arms and legs to help them be visible in the snow. They smiled at me, patted my head, and sometimes shook my small, mittened hand. "Onnea!" They would say to one another. *Good luck.*

When it got too cold, Dad put us back in the truck. Its radial heat sank warmth back into my skin and we watched the ski jumpers fly like deer over fallen trees. At times, a man or woman would land the wrong way, a limb flailing and cracking, coming loose from the network of their bones. I grew to fear these moments, but couldn't look away.

Men like my grandfather—with his heavy wool shirt, his hat with Sherpa earflaps, the Styrofoam coffee cup that trembled in his hand—shuffled around the ski jump, telling anyone that would listen about 1954 when Rudy Maki jumped 300 feet or about Paul Bietala, ten years old on his first jump, who later died when he skidded over glare ice and hit a post. These men know about the cement foundation, the fir beams, the sweaters knitted by wives in the 1930s, who, over mashed rutabagas and marinated venison, told their boys that the sport was too dangerous, that they should only watch their dad when he jumped and never do it on their own.

Now, looking back, I think of my own dad: his brown and red scarlet sweater thick over a thermal shirt, the gray knit of his winter socks snug at the tops of his boots, his gloves big as a yeti's fist. He was a piece of insulated machinery, oiled blood in all of his parts. With utility, he turned the key in the truck's ignition to start the engine; with steadfast and smooth clearance, he climbed to the top of the ski jump with me on his back. He had no fear.

When night sank around the ski hill, it left the whole of us in a fluorescent globe, the lighting angled solid over an icy tarmac. It was silent when each competitor appeared at the top of the jump, their waxed skis edging out over nothing but air. There was a thump when they began their descent down the slope. Like the rest of us, Dad held his breath as each skier came off the jump, marionette-like and fragile in the air. But unlike the others, Dad honked the horn of his truck before they landed. As if they weren't there for the landing at all, but for the flight. As if those five seconds in the air were what he had pulled my brother and me out of bed for, to listen to the horn crack through an atmosphere brittle as grass beneath snow and wait to see which way the skier would come down.

She Remembers the Sun

Yellow cradles the back wall
She eyes it wistful as a lizard
To hold the hand of the sun
To slip away and not be caught
The dream again a foolish whisper.

All the days belch and grunt
Fresh grass, a fairy tale ghost
Does spring arouse daisy flowers?
Old memories wink and taunt
Now is the empty lot.

Yesterday stabbed the secret place
Hope drowned in a sea of black
The tender sweetness of her youth
Fled like sight lost to blindness.

Wet petals
Slide down her cheeks
Her head
Too heavy to hold
Bend
Folds.

Three young girls in Cleveland went missing for almost ten years. Their kidnapper, a fifty-two year old man who made their lives a living hell, was eventually caught and the girls were freed.

Contributor Notes:

Jonel Abellanosa resides in Cebu City, the Philippines. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous journals, including *Dark Matter Journal*, *The McNeese Review*, *Pedestal*, *Anglican Theological Review* and *Otoliths*. His chapbook, “Pictures of the Floating World”, has been published by Kind of a Hurricane Press. He is working on two full-length poetry collections, “Multiverse” and “100 Acrostic Poems.”

Eric Balaz is an MFA student at Roosevelt University in Chicago IL. He has work published at *3 a.m. Magazine* and *Crabfat Literary Magazine* and several articles at nvate.com. He hopes to make the reader as uncomfortable as He is.

Charles Bane Jr. is the author of The Chapbook (*Curbside Splendor*), *Love Poems* (Aldrich Press), and *Three Seasons: Writing Donald Hall* (Collection of Houghton Library, Harvard University). He created and contributes to The Meaning Of Poetry series for The Gutenberg Project, and is a current nominee as Poet Laureate of Florida. <http://charlesbanejr.com>

Joe Bisicchia writes of our shared spiritual dynamic. An Honorable Mention recipient for the Fernando Rielo XXXII World Prize for Mystical Poetry, his works have appeared or will soon appear in *Sheepshead Review*, *Balloons Lit. Journal*, *the Inflectionist Review*, *Black Heart Magazine*, *Poets Collectives Anthologies*, and others. The current public affairs professional in New Jersey is a former award winning television host who also taught high school English. He also co-invented an award winning family card game. His website is www.widewide.world and he is on Twitter @TheB_Line https://twitter.com/theb_line

Constance Brewer has appeared in *The Linnet's Wings*, *Nassau Review*, *the Wyoming Fencelines Anthology* from the Wyoming Arts Council and in the *New Poets of the American West* anthology among other places. Constance is an editor for Gyroscope Review magazine. She lives in Wyoming with a small but vocal herd of Welsh Corgis.

Samantha Dunaway Bryant is a novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist and blogger. By day, she teaches middle school Spanish, so you can't scare her! Her debut novel, “Going Through the Change”, a menopausal superhero novel, came with Curiosity Quills in April 2015.

Rachel Dacus is the author of “Gods of Water and Air,” a collection of poetry, prose, and drama. Her poetry collections are *Earth Lessons* and *Femme au Chapeau*, and the spoken word CD “A God You Can Dance”. Her writing has appeared in *The Atlanta Review*, *Boulevard*, *Drunken Boat*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Valparaíso Poetry Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. She’s currently at work on a time travel novel involving the great Baroque sculptor, Gian Lorenzo Bernini. She lives in Walnut Creek, California and raises funds for nonprofit organizations.

Jonathan Duckworth is a current MFA student at Florida International University in Miami, where he works as a teaching assistant. He also serves as a reader and copy-editor for the *Gulf Stream Literary Magazine*. His work appears in or is set to appear in *Hermeneutic Chaos Literary Journal*, *Mount Island Magazine*, *the Kudzu Review*, and *Sliver of Stone Magazine*.

Azia DuPont currently resides in Northern Iowa. She founded *Dirty Chai Magazine* in 2012. Her writing has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Dead Flowers: A Rag* from Bohemian Pupil Press, *Calliope Magazine*, *Peacheslitmag*, *The Screaming Sheep*, *Scapegoat Review*, among others. You can find her online via Twitter @aziadupont.

Carolyn Elias is in the anthology “Turn Left at Nowhere: A Century of Morris Poetry”. Her work has been published by *Lunch Ticket*, *Apeiron Review*, *Sassafras Literary Magazine*, *East Jasmine Review*, 1947, *Slink Chunk Press*, *The Tower Journal*, *Digging Through the Fat*, *The Magnolia Review*, *Decades Review*, *The Voices Project*, and *Beakful*. Look for Carolyn’s upcoming publications in *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *The Poetry Storehouse*, *Ann Arbor Review*, *Poetica Magazine*, *The Gambler Magazine*, *Crack the Spine*, *S/tick*, *Vending Machine Press*, and *Torrid Literature Journal*. Follow her on twitter @CarolynDElias.

E. Estrella is an undergraduate student. *Dark Matter Journal* is her first publication!

Brad Garber lives, writes, hunts for mushrooms and snakes, and runs around naked in the Great Northwest. He fills his home with art, music, photography, plants, rocks, bones, books, good cookin’ and love. He has published poetry in *Three and a Half Point 9*, *Pine + Basil Arts Journal*, *Red Booth Review*, *Meat for Tea*, *Peaches Literary Magazine*, *The Valley Review*, *Front Range Review*, *Spank the Carp*, *Dirty Chai*, *Coe Review*, *Gambling the Aisle*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *theNewerYork*, *Ray’s Road Review*, *The Round Up*, *Meat for Tea*, *Gambling the Aisle* and other quality publications. 2013 Pushcart Prize nominee.

Daniel Gillespie grew up in rural Northeast Mississippi. He has published poetry in journals such as *New Mystics*, *Counterexample Poetics*, and *Burningword*. Gillespie serves as poetry consultant for *Hieroglyph*, the literary journal of Southwest Tennessee Community College, where he teaches in the Languages and Literature Department.

Joyce Goldenstern, a Chicago resident, has been adapting folktales and writing fiction and warily “living by fiction” for many years. A full collection of her stories will be published by ELJ Publications in fall 2015.

David Grandouiller is an undergraduate English student with a minor in creative writing. He attends Cedarville University in Cedarville, Ohio.

Susan Gundlach has published articles on topics ranging from family history and puppetry, to the Great Wall of China and the Nile River. Her poems have appeared in such journals as *The Middle Gray*, *Lingerpost*, **82 Review*, *After Hours*, and in the walkway of the Evanston Public Library -- etched in stone, or cement, actually! Her work can also be seen in *The Best of Vine Leaves*, and in *Cricket magazine*, which features some of her children’s poems. Currently, she is working on collaborations with artist and musician colleagues. She lives in Evanston, Illinois, with her family, human and canine.

Nels Hanson has worked as a farmer, teacher and contract writer/editor. His fiction received the San Francisco Foundation’s James D. Phelan Award and Pushcart Prize nominations in 2010, 12, and 2014. Poems appeared in *Word Riot*, *Oklahoma Review*, *Pacific Review* and other magazines and received *Sharkpack Review Annual’s* 2014 Prospero Prize and a 2014 Pushcart nomination.

Zebulon Huset teaches a community creative writing class in San Diego, and has started a writing prompt blog at <http://NotebookingDaily.blogspot.com> where he posts new writing exercises every day at 12:01am in a variety of categories. He also began/co-moderates a private subreddit for poetry workshopping by people experienced with the workshop environment called WorkshopRefugees. His work is forthcoming from *Harpur Palate*, *The Lullwater Review*, *Thin Air*, *Pinyon*, *Corium Magazine*, *Straylight*, *The Portland Review*, *Exit 7* and *The Roanoke Review* among others. His poem “Tomorrow is Watching Everything We Do, But Still We Must Live” appeared in the first issue of *Dark Matter Journal*.

Jason Jones lives in Roanoke, VA, where he works as a bartender. New poems can be found in *Saw Palm*, *Artemis Journal*, and *The Cumberland River Review*.

Ryan Francis Kelly is a young writer from Cleveland who now lives and teaches in San Diego. He received his MFA from San Diego State University in 2014. His writing has been published by *Dirty Chai*, *Damfino Press*, *Carbon Culture Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *pacificREVIEW*, *Composite Arts*, *Fiction International*, *Black Scat Review*, *Wordstock Ten*, *Third Wednesday*, *the Houston Literary Review*, and *the San Diego Reader*, among others. His story “Face Time” was nominated for a Small Presses Pushcart Prize in 2013. You can find him at ryanfranciskelly.com or on Twitter @RFrancisKelly.

Robert Kirvel, a Ph.D. in neurobiology, has authored numerous technical publications in peer-reviewed journals and anthologies. He now writes literary fiction and has published recent stories in *American Athenaeum*, *Columbia College Literary Review*, *The Milo Review*, *Gravel*, *Shout Out UK*, *Riding Light Review*, *The Examined Life Journal of the University of Iowa*, and elsewhere.

Tricia Knoll is a Portland, Oregon poet with a bent toward eco-poetry and natural history. Her work appears in many journals including recently *CALYX*, *Catch & Release - The Literary Blog of the Columbia Journal*, and *Windfall*. Her chapbook “Urban Wild” is a series of poems investigating the relationship between wildlife and people in urban habitat. website: triciaknoll.com

Individual entries on **Richard Kostelanetz’s** work in several fields appear in various editions of *Readers Guide to Twentieth-Century Writers*, *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature*, *Contemporary Poets*, *Contemporary Novelists*, *Postmodern Fiction*, *Webster’s Dictionary of American Writers*, *The HarperCollins Reader’s Encyclopedia of American Literature*, *Baker’s Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, *Directory of American Scholars*, *Who’s Who in America*, *Who’s Who in the World*, *Who’s Who in American Art*, *NNDB.com*, *Wikipedia.com*, and *Britannica.com*, among other distinguished directories. Otherwise, he survives in New York, where he was born, unemployed and thus overworked.

Kelsey Lahr has worked summers as a park ranger in Yosemite National Park since 2008. She holds a BA in Communication Studies from Westmont College in Santa Barbara, CA, where she published several poems in the college’s annual literary magazine, “*The Phoenix*”. This fall she will begin a Master’s program in Communication at the University of Utah, where she plans to focus her research on environmental communication and the efficacy of environmental organizations.

Jessica Lawrence studied creative writing at Longwood University. You can find her recent work published or upcoming in *Origins*, *UNTUCKED*, and *Third Wednesday*, among many others. She lives in rural central Virginia, where she is an office manager by day.

Nathan Alling Long's work has appeared in various journals, such as *Salt Hill*, *Tin House*, *Wilde Magazine*, and *Crab Orchard Review*. He lives in Philadelphia, where he writes, bakes bread, and bicycles through the nearby woods.

Thomas Mannella has a B.A. in writing from St. Lawrence University and a Masters from St. John Fisher College, both in New York. Excerpts from his memoir, "A Matter of Time", have most recently appeared in the 2014 issues of *Blood and Thunder: Musings on the Art of Medicine*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *The Casserole*, and *South85 Journal*, and are forthcoming in the 2015 issues of *The Lindenwood Review*, *Empty Sink*, and *SLAB Literary Magazine*. Currently, he teaches English and Environmental Literature in Naples, NY, where he lives with his wife and sons around the corner from the house he grew up in.

John McMahan is a writer, part time educator and sometimes antiques exporter who lives on the banks of the River Kwai in Kanchanaburi, Thailand. His first novel "The black Gentlemen of Trong Suan" just went into a second edition and is available at Amazon and he blogs at somchaisapprentice.blogspot.com

Pushcart nominee **Bruce McRae** is a Canadian musician with over 900 poems published internationally, including *Poetry.com* and *The North American Review*. His first book, "The So-Called Sonnets", is available via Silenced Press and Amazon. To see and hear more poems go to 'BruceMcRaePoetry' on YouTube.

Joel Netsky was born in Philadelphia in 1946, and has always loved literature and writing. Some favorite authors: Borges, Camus, the Beats, Deutero-Isaiah, Joyce. From 2008 to 2010 he owned a used bookstore, and in 2014 moved to Israel.

John Nizalowski is the author of three books – "Hooking the Sun" (Farolito Press, 2003), "The Last Matinée" (Turkey Buzzard Press, 2011), and "Land of Cinnamon Sun" (Irie Books, 2013). Most recently his work has appeared in *Dark Matter*, *Under the Sun*, *Measure*, *Digital Americana*, *Weber: the Contemporary West*, *Gobshite*, and *Slab*. His blog, *Dispatches from the Land of Cinnamon Sun*, can be found at <http://johnnizalowski.blogspot.com/>. He teaches creative writing, composition, and mythology at Colorado Mesa University.

Murielle Shallbetter lives in Utah next to the mountains with her cats and husband. She is studying to be a physics teacher at Weber State University. She also works at a planetarium where she reassures children that a black hole isn't going to sneak up and swallow the Earth. Her works has appeared in *Imitation* and *Allusion*.

Patty Somlo has received four Pushcart Prize nominations and has been nominated for storySouth's Million Writers Award. Her essay, "If We Took a Deep Breath," was selected as a Notable Essay of 2013 for Best American Essays 2014. She is the author of *From Here to There and Other Stories*. Her second book, *Hairway to Heaven Stories*, is forthcoming in January 2017 from Cherry Castle Publishing. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including *the Los Angeles Review*, *the Santa Clara Review*, *Under the Sun*, *Guernica*, *The Flagler Review*, and *WomenArts Quarterly*, among others, and in fifteen anthologies. "Dust" was previously published in *Switchback*, Issue 12, and in my book *From Here to There and Other Stories* (Paraguas Books, 2010).

Emily Strauss has an M.A. in English, but is self-taught in poetry, which she has written since college. Over 250 of her poems appear in over a hundred online venues and in anthologies, in the US, UK, Canada, and further abroad. The natural world is often her framework; she also considers the stories of people and places around her and personal histories. She is a semi-retired teacher living in California.

Thea Swanson holds an MFA in fiction from Pacific University in Oregon. Her novel, "The Curious Solitude of Anise", independently published in 2013, received excellent reviews from *Kirkus*, *Switchback*, *Amazon* and *Goodreads*. Thea's stories can be found in *Anemone Sidecar*, *Camera Obscura*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Danse Macabre*, *Image*, *New Plains Review*, *Our Stories* and forthcoming in *The Sonder Review*. Thea has taught all levels of English, from middle-school through college, but she can't afford to teach anymore, so she does other things.

Alien Water: Thinker. Spiritual. Interested in creating and finding unique intellectual experiences.

Amanda Williams is a creative writing student at the University of Central Missouri. *Dark Matter Journal* is proud to be the first venue for Amanda's work!

Andrea Wuorenmaa is an MFA candidate at Northern Michigan University. Her work has appeared in *Pithead Chapel* and *New Madrid*.

Noel Zeiser lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. She writes poetry and short stories, and has several pieces published in *Change Happens* and *Dirty Chai*. She joined an excellent writers group several years back and feels fortunate to have attentive listeners and advisers.

