



**The Externalist:**

*A Journal of Perspectives*

featured artist

**PETER SCHWARTZ**

fiction by

**KEVIN P. KEATING, DIANE PAYNE, and YU-HAN CHAO**

nonfiction by

**LAURA TANNER and MICHAEL GURNOW**

poetry by

**CHARLES GROSEL, STEVE MEADOR, and SANTIAGO DEL DARDANO TURANN**

*Issue 8*  
*June 2008*

*The Externalist: A Journal of Perspectives*  
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Editor

Larina Warnock

Assistant Editor

Gary Charles Wilkens

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# *The Externalist: A Journal of Perspectives*

## A Note from the Editor

Since Issue 7 went live, the primaries came to a close, more natural disasters have struck various parts of the country as well as other countries, and the Supreme Court ruled on a landmark case in Washington, D.C. regarding gun control. In other news, a scientist revealed that there is a 50% chance the North Pole could be iceless this summer, a man was sentenced to three years in prison for keeping house slaves in New York, and North Korea dismantled a nuclear reactor cooling tower. Not surprisingly given the intensity of Midwest storms, world-wide weather-related destruction becoming a seeming norm, and scientific evidence piling up that our world is changing rapidly, much of Issue 8 takes an environmental approach.

Our Editor's Choice pick for this issue looks closely at the problem of overpopulation and almost humorously asks us to consider the paradoxical implications of such a crisis. Mira Coleman's poem "In the Superstore" brings us reflections on globalism and capitalism while John Miller's poems abound with animal imagery.

But *The Externalist* wouldn't be what it is without a variety of stories, essays, and poems to choose from, so this issue also includes an essay from Professor Laura E. Tanner that considers the way news imagery affects our emotional ties to the war in Iraq and a short story by Yu-Han Chao that provides a difficult look at the practice of purchasing brides by mail. Charles Grosel's poems "War Villanelle" and "Auden Hereafter" are some of the best I've seen, and I couldn't be more pleased with this month's Featured Artist, Peter Schwartz.

On a broader note, I recently presented an essay on literary activism and disability rights literature at PRESS: a cross-cultural literary conference in Olympia, Washington. The conference was organized by and held at Evergreen State University and I strongly encourage those interested in an activist literature to watch for more from this dedicated group. As mentioned in Issue 7, *The Externalist* is in the midst of a long-term planning process. Part of this process includes a change in our publication schedule. August 2008 will be our last bi-monthly issue and we will be moving to a quarterly schedule after that. We hope this will allow us time to find the best literature as well as improve our format and broaden the range of services we can provide.

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## *Editors' Choice*

### **Editor's Appreciation**

Once in a great while, an essay or story or poem comes across my desk that forces several readings and several hours of thought. Michael Gurnow's biting satirical essay "The Paradox of Survival: Why Mass Depopulation is Humanity's Only Hope" was such a piece. The essay begins with well-documented facts and scientific explanations in layman's terms, then rapidly progresses into a diatribe of obvious faulty logic and exorbitant rationalizations that are, for all intents and purposes, entirely too human. What seems on the surface as the essay's biggest weakness becomes its greatest strength. Not only is the reader forced to seriously consider the implications of arguably the largest crisis humanity has ever faced, but we are forced to do so with tongue pressed firmly in cheek.

### **The Paradox of Survival:**

#### **Why Mass Depopulation is Humanity's Only Hope**

*by Michael Gurnow*

"What to do when a ship carrying a hundred passengers suddenly capsizes and [there is] only one lifeboat? When the lifeboat is full, those who hate life will try to load it with more people and sink the lot. Those who love and respect life will take the ship's axe and sever the extra hands that cling to the sides of the boat."

— Pentti Linkola

Imagine a small aquarium which can sustain five goldfish comfortably. The area allows each animal to swim freely without the threat of territorial intrusion, thus decreasing the likelihood of injury and premature death due to fighting, as it readily permits each organism its own requisite supply of food. Due to over breeding, 65 currently reside in the tank. Understandably, only a few fish are able to acquire ample sustenance, violence is frequent, and illness is rampant due to poor overall health, constant stress, and close proximity. It is prospected that in the near future, 90 will inhabit the area. The fear is not that such numbers will bring about mass starvation or that the quality of life will drop below that preferable to death, but that nitrogen levels from the fish's waste will cause the aquarium's inevitable collapse long before the number can be reached.

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The previous hypothetical is a mathematical allegory. Experts state that Earth can comfortably harbor half of a billion people (by ratio, five fish). Currently, there are 6.5 billion people on the planet (by ratio, 65 fish). It is projected that the population will reach its apex at nine billion (by ratio, 90 fish). However, many predict that the species will not witness this time because, like the fish's ammonia-laden territory, the World is unable to sustain its current numbers, no less more. But, unlike the fish tank, humanity's predicament is not solely due to the sustainability of its environment.

Despite 4,500 years of theoretical inquiry, a consensus—aside from not contenting ourselves with mere animalistic existence—has yet to be made in respect to the race's ultimate purpose. We have nonetheless, and continue to, forge ahead in the attempt to conquer every facet of our world. Yet, if there is no discernable destination, what is our catalyst? Our drive is hubris, which is partially evidenced by humanity's inability to reconcile itself with its own morality, as witnessed and epitomized by the prevalence of theism with its promise of life after death. Goaded by greed and lethargy, our egocentricity—in addition to issuing a justification for warfare—has endeared us to a philosophy whereby our narcissism has been winnowed to the microcosmic level of the individual: capitalism.

Capitalism decrees that, through the pursuit of individual interests, the whole will not only be sustained, but profit. As such, an individual is given no cause to act unless physically coerced or prompted by the potential for gain. As time and technology have progressed, an uneven balance of power has arisen whereby those with the greatest wealth have harnessed the largest amount of control. This is seen in modern business owners, who have garnered control of the masses through consumer exploitation, media manipulation, and political funding. When this is placed alongside war, a form of exaggerated anthropocentrism—"exaggerated" in that war posits that, not only *Homo sapiens*, but specific ones possess more inherent value than others—an evolutionary paradox seems to arise for members of a species are seen readily eliminating their own kind. However, from a Darwinian perspective, this is the mere exhibition of Natural Selection via the eradication of competition. Having acknowledged this, how do we reconcile the viral act of the whole of humanity decimating the planet, the bioform which sustains its despoiler, due to the demands brought upon by overpopulation? Such is irrefutable evidence that Man is an unfit organism which, by evolutionary definition, is one which cannot aptly regulate its numbers and/or live in harmony with its environment.

By meeting demand, business permits population growth, the revenues of which provide the assurance that the enlarged consumer-base can be steadfastly supplied, ad infinitum. The severity of the continuing influx of humans is seen in, at the turn of the century and for the first time in human history, over 50% of the world's population is employed by the agriculture industry (which is economically foolhardy given the unpredictability of annual weather conditions). Moreover, mass production necessitates environmental devastation, the need to take unstable scientific liberties, and gross fuel consumption.

In respect to environmental renewal, as demand grows, greater quantities of raw materials are needed. Unfortunately, the demand is immediate and does not allow for resources to replenish themselves naturally. (Even human-led reconstitution beleaguers the fact that a sapling cannot perform the duties of the felled tree.) When the World's population stood at 5.5 billion in the early 1990s, it necessitated 40% of the Earth's resources. At its current rate of increase, the population will double between 2025 and 2032, thus requiring we utilize 80%. It follows that, shortly thereafter, the environment will no longer be able to sustain its occupants.

In an attempt to compensate for nature's languid pace, dangerous scientific liberties are taken. As history has proven, to alter an organism or system's natural equilibrium runs the risk of detrimental change. Due to the belief that all human life is sacred, i.e. humanism, which eschews biological (as opposed to social) Darwinism and gradual evolutionary development, artificial manipulation of the human organism (primarily the elderly and the weak) in the form of modern medicine has aided the population in expanding to 13 times its natural capacity, which has resulted in the desperate scampering and oftentimes violent battle for the natural resources of land, food, and fuel. This biological presumptuousness is readily applied to the environment. For example, through genetic engineering, a single-season seed has been created, which forces the consumer to rely upon the agriculture industry for continued stock. The dangerous consequence of this is that natural variations upon a vegetative strand evolve so as to include defenses against potential blights. Artificially modified varieties, due to the fact that there is no financial reward for including such precautions in their design, are thereby made susceptible to disease (which Natural Selection automatically instills). Though by happenstance some select specimens may prove immune, this renders the populace liable to mass starvation.

As the population grows, the need for fuel increases. Fossil fuels have become increasingly sparse, thus threatening production rates, and biofuels have been offered as a viable alternative. Accordingly, more land will not only be needed to generate enough food for the populace in the ensuing

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years, but even more will be required in order to sustain fuel demands. Predictably, this will deplete the soil at a more rapid rate, thereby obligating humanity to resort to artificial stimulation, the consequence of which will leave the land barren for reasons previously mentioned. Even in the unlikely event that humanity severs such dependency by way of wind and solar power, these avenues for energy are not bountiful enough to maintain current, no less ensuing, human numbers.

Therefore, capitalism will be unable to continue unless demand decreases, which—given the aforementioned restrictions—means a decrease in population. Yet, companies' favoritism of conservative politics due to the latter's laissez-faire attitude toward business as well as its Pro-Life platform whereby more consumers are created is no more the predominate threat to the continuation of life on Earth than liberal campaigns which exacerbate the dilemma by sustaining those who cannot provide for themselves, such as underdeveloped countries, the lower classes, and the homeless. Rather, the crux of the matter lies in the fact that most every individual deems it his or her right to bear children.

Considering the human organism's uncontrollable libido and ego (epitomized in the desire for self-replication)—even with tax incentives—any appeal toward vasectomies, tubal ligations, birth control, or even mandatory abortions would prove ineffective. (Moreover, corporate-controlled-government would never limit population growth, lest its profits cease to rise.) Thus, considering that for every eight deaths there are 20 births, humanity must begin to retroactively decrease its numbers and this can only be achieved through a predominately-conservative agenda, one comprised of an immediate secession of embryonic stem cell research, (perpetual large-scale) war, continued (and expanded) gun ownership rights, religion (especially those which advocate killing in the name of one's deity, i.e. Islam and Christianity), privatization of government programs and public education (so as to eliminate those which prove incapable of sustaining themselves financially), government subsidies for the tobacco, alcohol, and fast food industries alongside the refusal to aide destitute, financially-despondent, or underprivileged individuals or groups, be it in the form of welfare, charity, or civil rights programs. (To state that such is fascist by way of its eugenic implications ignores that Nature does this through Natural Selection.) However, to aide the process, humanity would need to allow recreational drug use and homosexual unions. The decriminalization of murder would also be advantageous alongside universal support of capital punishment but only in so far as the latter is not the penalty for the former.



But why should a person do anything which does not ultimately serve one's advantage or desire? The vainglorious possibility of being credited for doing one's ethical, humanitarian duty so as to contribute to civilization lies at the base of such altruistic motives in that the egalitarian plea for a better life for all is the cry of the weaker of the species seeking to fashion an equilibrium in hopes of enabling itself to survive where it might not otherwise. Regardless, an existential futility nonetheless exists in that, and again, the yearning to be remembered posthumously for one's benevolent deeds becomes pointless because, even if humanity should sever itself from its ego-driven motives, the Earth's biosphere will be destroyed in approximately five billion years when the Sun becomes a Red Giant, which will eradicate all of human history and, with it, one's legacy.

.....

*by Helen Tzagoloff*

### **History of the World**

The mother nurtures the child in her body.  
The doctor helps the child enter the world.  
The father pays the doctor.

The cow feeds the child milk and meat,  
the earth, vegetables and fruit,  
the chicken, eggs.

The grandfather takes the child to the movies.  
The grandmother reads stories.  
The teachers teach to read and count.

The child grows up, becomes an adult,  
gets together with another adult.  
Soon they will present the world with a child.

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*by Mira Coleman*

## **For Wilderness**

*-for Annie Goss Fish*

Rocks heave up in our field, scar the fescue and rye  
and spots where the milkweed winters-over  
grow more sturdy each spring, curly dock and orchard grass

undermine lupine I carefully placed  
in the garden bed, the wild taking its torturing  
place every day, a quiet riot of root and sinewed weed,  
vetch and purslane, creeping like thieves.

An old farmer tames this field on a mottled orange tractor,  
mows once in spring and once when school begins,  
bent with farmed-out bones, bow-legged and thin;

he rides up the big hill and looks back as he mows  
six fields for his cows' fodder and to make friends of  
neighbors and we know without saying that when he goes,  
our fields will go lousy with pod and weed and quaking aspen,

they will shoot up beyond reclaiming with a tiller and lime.  
His son and grandson pitch the bales, itchy with chaff, they  
each work a side of the wagon, a team of timing.

In the garden plot, I bend to see pale aphids  
cover the lupine, make nectar for ants to feed  
on a perfect globed bud of peony,

peony grown waist high in just a cycle of moon  
in early June and I can hear the snapping flag  
on its whitewashed cedar pole  
out beyond the felled stone wall bowled down  
more each year by  
March heaves.



**Secret Industry by Peter Schwartz**

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## **In the Superstore**

-for the Shipbreakers

Here, between chores, I wheel the steel carriage  
past gasket-cold chests of buttermilk  
and soft cheese, down a vast aisle for bread,

loaves by the hundreds twist-tied in plastic wraps  
like a line of caskets too many to choose,  
rushing by cereals in the breakfast aisle  
additives in popped oats, glazed and boxed

while lives from other continents crowd into our kitchens,  
our schools, spill onto the glossy gym floor  
rushing at us like a monsoon.

They target me  
even as I pass charcoal and paperbacks,  
inhaling tempered air

and dark barefooted men stand their shrunken bones  
just next to us as we order from the deli at  
Buckley's Cafe, people starving and warring

but surviving, their sunken eyes dull marbles of need,  
clavicles like brittle bows;

we find them in our radios, secreted in our desks,  
the people whose lives we cannot explain to  
our sons and daughters, lives our parents knew nothing about  
now streaming to us from satellite so that we begin  
to feel that inchoate force passing through our souls,  
attaching all of us pulling one toward another,  
marionettes or prisoners on a chain gang.

In our meetings, our sleek jets, and quiet canoes  
or the dark of the cineplex  
they are there, bobbing like ambient living ghosts  
anchoring our lives and letting us rise up,  
showing how we must  
embrace them like we hold our own

children, close, soon, so that we may  
survive.

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## **Being Thirty**

*by Diane Payne*

You know how you walk directly to the barstool, sit down, order a beer, and start talking with the customers as if they're old friends.

It doesn't even seem true. You're not even sure it did happen.

The men at the bar laugh. You do too. It's good beer on tap. Good laughter. Good conversation.

Doesn't matter that it's the first time you've been at this joint. Surrounded by mounted fish, you tell a fishing story about when you were a boy. You tell them about tugging that line, hearing everyone screaming, cheering you on, but instead of reeling in a big fish you received a slap from your mother. You almost tore your sister's ear off. You saw the blood pouring out of her ear and imagined what it'd be like to gut and clean your first fish. You looked at your sister helplessly, saw the angered looks of everyone on shore, and wondered how you could be so stupid. Just like that you felt nausea and leaned over the dock, spilling your guts into the lake. A bona-fide idiot.

"It's all right. We've all made mistakes. Get him another beer, Joe," an old man a few stools down signals to the bartender. You thank him and feel like a jerk for telling that story. It doesn't even seem true. You're not even sure it did happen.

"We ain't all that stupid," the fisherman to your left says.

A young woman walks inside the bar, strolls through the restaurant, then returns and sits on the stool to your right. She orders an Anchor Steam and turns around so she can look at the view of the ocean instead of the mounted fish behind the bar. When Joe brings her a beer, she thanks him. You tip your mug toward hers and say cheers. She laughs.

"This is a great bar," she says. "Reminds me of a place in my hometown where all the fishermen hang out."

"Where's that?" the old man next to her questions.

"In Michigan."

"They still fish there?"

"Net fishing laws have changed things," she admits.

"Damn laws. You fish?"

"Not really. I had a boyfriend that wanted to fish every evening. We lived on a small lake

and he'd get stoned and hardly notice the mosquitoes. After awhile, I don't know if I got more tired of the mosquitoes or him."

You're not interested in her boyfriend story and cut her off to ask her where she lives. She tells you she's in San Francisco for a teacher conference but never says where she's from. You tell her how you're a DJ in Sacramento and are visiting a friend later that night to celebrate your 30th birthday. She buys you a birthday beer and the two of you swap boisterous stories one after another. It may be a by-product of the beer, but every story is hilarious. You feed off each other by exchanging zany tales. Everyone at the bar leans over to hear the two of you, and the more the fishermen laugh, the more the free rounds keep coming. She offers to buy you dinner to celebrate your birthday. You tell her nothing this great has happened in a long time. "You only turn thirty once," she says. A teacher can't make that much money, especially for this expensive restaurant, and you feel a little guilty about her paying, but better her than you.

The people in the restaurant turn around and watch the two of you find a table because you've been a bit loud at the bar, yukking it up making the fishermen laugh. She orders a bottle of champagne and a lady at the next table leans over to say, "It's so nice to see such a happy couple. May I ask what you

two are celebrating?"

"It's our honeymoon," she says, then gives you a peck on the cheek. She doesn't know your name and calls you honey and sweetie and other silly endearing words. People in the restaurant applaud.

While you wait for the food, she makes up an outrageous story about how the two of you met just six months ago and knew you were meant for each other. You add crazy elements to the story. Throughout the meal, the two of you go on and on about your wildly romantic adventures and get dreamy about your future. You feel like you've always been together. Every now and then you turn around to ask romance questions of the customers sitting at the tables near you. Someone buys you a bottle of wine and soon everyone's swapping marriage stories. The waiter brings free desserts to all those gathered in your vicinity. He tells his own romantic story quickly, blushes, then races back to the kitchen. "I didn't know love could be so fun," she says, and everyone does another toast.

When the restaurant closes, she isn't sure how to get back to her hotel since she spent the day exploring the city and walking at a park, she thinks it was a John Muir park, and she remembers taking a trolley from the hotel, a

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*He's my lover, you admit.  
She looks devastated.*

subway ride, then lots of walking. She blew off the conference to have fun. You quiz her about the name and location of the hotel and offer to share a cab to make sure she gets back safely. After all, she is your wife. You can't leave separately. You shake hands with the good folks in the restaurant and they wish you the best. You continue joking in the cab and when she recognizes the hotel, she invites you in and mentions that there's a refrigerator filled with free booze. You go upstairs, drink those little bottles of booze in bed, those bottles you know she'll be billed for the next day, and you know her school won't really pay for all that booze and food at the restaurant, but you say nothing, not sure if she already really knows this, and if she doesn't, you wonder what she'll say when the school hands her the bill.

It feels too good when she rubs her hands through your curly hair. She wants more than your hair and you remind her you need to leave and meet that friend. She looks close to tears. You mention he works at a comedy club, and she offers to go with you, and you tell her it's a gay club, and she thinks that'd be even more fun. *He's my lover, you admit.* She looks devastated. You tell her you're actually feeling sexually aroused and can't understand it. Tell her you haven't felt like this since you were with

that girl in tenth grade. You get out of bed and she gives you a hug. You thank her for the great birthday and feel like staying, just to see what may happen. But you leave. You wonder if she returns to the empty bed and cries.

The next day you realize you left your day pack in her room and call the hotel, then remember you don't know her name. You go to the hotel and discover she has checked out. You explain to the manager about what happened but he still won't tell you her name. The story sounds stupid, like the fishing story; but at least this one is definitely true. The manager looks disgusted with you. He seems self-righteous. Like he's never had a one-night stand. You want to tell him you didn't have a one night stand, that you called her sweetie pie, and that was kinder than using her real name. Instead you say nothing, just shake your head sadly and leave.

You wonder if she'll send your pack in the mail. Then you remember what's in it. Your address book. Your journal. Your toothbrush. A pair of socks. You think about what items you're forgetting, regret things you've written in your journal.

You return to the hotel and ask the manager to at least let you look for the pack in the room. He



assures you the room has been cleaned and nothing was found.

You want to tell your lover about this woman, about the pack, because maybe he'd understand about the woman and have some ideas about how to find her so you could get your belongings back, but he gets upset quickly and holds long grudges, so you decide to

say nothing about your evening with this woman.

Later in the day, while floating on air mattresses in the swimming pool, your lover asks what you're thinking about, and you want to tell him you miss being married to the crazy woman, but simply say, "It's weird being thirty."

***Rethink, React, Respond!***

Send your "Gut Reaction" to this or any other story or poem in this issue in 200 words or fewer to [editor@theexternalist.com](mailto:editor@theexternalist.com) and it could appear in a future issue of *The Externalist*! Be sure to include 'Gut Reaction' as the subject header of your email. For more information, see our Submission Guidelines on the web site.

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by Santiago del Dardano Turann

## **The Festival**

A metaphor of our times

Their glossy eyes all flash together  
    Reflecting neon lights  
The curves of tubular letters and shapes  
    Electric color rain  
That shields hard tones in airbrush focus  
    Layered intercourse  
Of luminous shadows on the crowd  
    Here everything is pastel  
Balloons with plastic toys as clouds  
    Float just outside of reach  
Silk banners undress rolling on  
    Artificial steamy winds  
They wrap around the painted polls  
    And beckon over shouts  
Of voices in their juggling tricks  
    The sticky webs of gunk like  
The fifty dollar cotton candy  
    In rotted Chinese cones  
Endless chatter endless games  
    From booths they bark or flip  
Mascara faces masked mouths empty  
    Jingle counterfeit words  
Their Gucci collars cover fur  
    Wands tap on top hats  
In flourish pulling bleeding hides  
    Nice ties nice shirts nice manners  
Wind-up emotions clock and turn  
    With tears or smiles or laughs  
The naked werewolves hunt peripheries  
    Their noses smell the fat  
And sweat the bleeding excess sugar  
    Watching crowds shift towards  
Shears and scalpels whetted ready.

## **Screens: The War at Home**

*by Laura E. Tanner*

### I.

All day we waited for news. Waited in winter's last hours for a war we knew was coming in a place too far away to find. Pulling out the dusty globe, we spun the world on its axes, fingers covering names of cities an eight year old can't say. Everywhere we turned were surfaces we didn't touch: the radio muted, newspaper face down in a pile, the T.V.'s shiny screen shimmering black and jumping with reflections. The boys in bed, it takes an hour for the first bombs to break through; even then they're muted, occasional and slight. In the dense dawn light the only images show what is not there: the city's unilluminated. An American reporter on his deck talks us through it, shouting to be heard. The sky's quiet now: it's the dogs he cannot silence. Set off by sounds we cannot hear, the dogs in Baghdad keep barking in our ears. From the kitchen, our setter answers their call, flies from window to window searching out a source with no location, sees things moving in the dark.

### II.

The list is in the paper but I don't know a single soldier. In this town we take kids to hockey camp or trek the hill towns in Tuscany, reluctant teenagers in tow. In the summer, news cycles slow, the little protest makes page one. We find ourselves in the picture wielding candles at awkward angles, the slow drip of wax held stiffly at arm's length. Right before the shutter snaps a warm breeze sweeps my hair away. My oldest, not quite 13, stands just apart. The image blurs bodies and erases depth, my son's face topping a jacket I've never seen him wear as shoulders too broad to be his strain against cloth in dim light.

### III.

The boy I went to college with had half his head blown off and lived to tell about it. A handsome guy, serious and smart, he left the network anchor desk and rode the tank in Taji to find the war and make the story real. Twenty eight days of a dream job, a moon cycle, and the blood rushing out nothing compared to what the body absorbs, what the flesh takes and refuses to let go: the stone in the neck, the shrapnel in the scalp, pieces of bark buried in soft tissue that swell into spots on the MRI. Now that the words came back and the hair grew in you can hardly see the piece of skull the surgeons cut to leave room for his brain to swell. In the home movie

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cable broadcasts his kids laugh while he struggles to sound words they mastered long ago, tries to name things -- hammer, scissors, belt buckle -- he can't quite place from pictures. When he asked them to open the hatch and he stuck his head out to take it all in and bring it back here he couldn't know how hard they'd work to get the shrapnel out. The imaging tracks the brain's swell but not the mind's motion and on the screen the foreign bodies in his head glow white and eerie in the dark.

### IV.

He's known her since preschool, this chubby girl who told my son not to worry on the day they put the spacer in his mouth. Open wide, she said, admiring the metal that kept sticking to his tongue. You're not lisping, she said, You sound good. Almost eleven now, she wears pink leggings and shirts that show her soft brown belly. Listening as his phone rings with texts we can't hear written in codes we can't read, we wonder nights how long a boy and girl can last as friends. We sit for dinner to the sounds of gunfire filtering from the radio below. "Serena's family lives there," Cole pronounces without segue, gesturing toward the sounds. "In the basement?" his older brother asks, his voice flat with apathy or sarcasm. It's news to us, the grandmother in Sadr City, the cousins in Saulaymaniyah -- a name I'd seen on the phone for months now, a word so odd and lyrical I thought they'd made it up.

### V.

They called her the "crazy woman" of al Ghazi. When her eyes met theirs instead of looking down, they thought they knew what she held close to her chest. Body, bomb, birds all burst from the deep black folds of the abaya when they blew her up in the Baghdad animal market. As she opened her arms the force sent donkeys flying, the blood of boys mixed with pigeons exploding in the air. Blocks away and hours later, a mother keens for two sons wandering the market on school holiday. The bruises on her face mark the places where her fists hit the skin over and over and her hair is laced with dirt, gritty remnants of her mourning like ashes in the air. Where I touch the picture she's bent double, the outline of her body indistinguishable or empty beneath the covers of the robe she keeps clutching in her hands.

*by Charles Grose*

### **Auden Hereafter**

About heroism they're almost always wrong,  
the TV news: how little they understand  
its real position: how it takes place  
off camera when the lights are out and equipment packed away;

How, when the viewers are eagerly, passionately,  
waiting for the next sound bite, there always must be  
children who especially didn't want it to happen, riding  
bicycles up and down the driveway:  
They always forget,  
that after the dreadful martyrdom runs its course,  
the children must return to their lives, while reporters  
go on with their reporterly jobs and the news  
directors to the next big story.

On September 11, for instance: how everything turns toward  
the disaster; the news shows may have picked up  
explosions, the shadows of the forsaken falling through the air,  
but for them it was the drama; tragedy, yes, but the cameras still shone  
as they had to on the firefighters disappearing into the smoke,  
and the viewers saw something amazing, an airliner  
slicing through a building, while hosts of parents  
left their children behind, doing what they had to do.

### **War Villanelle**

Isn't this a road we've been down before?  
Democracy at the point of a gun.  
Greater good can be accomplished by war,

we argue, but what we mean is we're bored,  
simply tired of waiting—just get it done.  
Isn't this a road we've been down before?

It's different now, we pretend to the core.  
Video games any dull child has won.  
Look at all the good accomplished by war.

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We watch it on TV, they from the floor  
of basement or bunker, nowhere to run.  
Isn't this a path we've taken before?

Desert-fatigued soldiers pounding the door,  
smart bombs just as likely to blot out the sun.  
Greater good can be accomplished by war.

Hungry, angry people begging for more,  
praying it's not just a John Wayne rerun.  
Isn't this a road we've been down before?  
Look at all the good accomplished by war.



**The Most Nervous Thing by Peter Schwartz**

**Zanzibar**

*by Kevin P. Keating*

The wind would blow, the sand would settle, and in some as yet unforeseen manner time would bring about a change, which could only be terrifying, since it would not be a continuation of the present.

--Paul Bowles, The Sheltering Sky

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Brendan Cavanaugh sits on a folding chair in the drummer's studio apartment--a confined space that is all dripping faucets, squeaking doors, inexplicable pockets of icy air--and in a tone of well-rehearsed nonchalance explains why his parents have, once again, kicked him out of the house. Only this time it's different. Despite their feigned religiosity and regular attendance at the stone church at the center of town, the one with the holy family enshrined in stained glass staring out at the county courthouse across the square where drunks and petty thieves await their day in court, his parents have threatened to disinherit him. Not that there's much left to inherit anyway. Like so many upper middle class people, they enjoy the finer things in life; it's paying for it all that gives them so much trouble. His mother's fashion sense, faux haute couture, and weekend shopping sprees to the suburban boutique shops, not to mention

his father's penchant for single malt scotch, hand-rolled cigars and occasional peccadilloes with aging divorcees in lavish downtown hotel suites, aren't exactly indicative of people who possess much in the way of self-discipline. They're big believers in debt management and the redeeming power of the confessional.

Brendan knows all of this because he's seen the credit card statements piled high on the kitchen counter, a Mount Vesuvius of bills with the whole works about to go up in one great cataclysmic bang, threatening to suffocate them under a noxious cloud of fees and interest rates. Since the outstanding balances are so insurmountable Brendan feels no guilt about "borrowing" (as he later tries to explain it to them) one of their credit cards and treats himself to that steel-string guitar made from Brazilian rosewood that he's had his eye

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on for the better part of a year; buys a dozen shots of Tequila for the band after a gig one night; gets a hefty cash advance to score some quality dope, bright green and fragrant as a meadow at the height of summer, the kind of shit that makes you forget your troubles for a while, provides inspiration for your inner genius. Brendan is a musician after all, and writing songs for a death metal band requires loads of inspiration--he has to consider tempo and key changes, at what measure to include tremolo picking, blast beats, alternating rhythms, grunts, growls, snarls, wailing harmonics. There are subtleties, techniques of composition that require craftsmanship and skill.

Of course his parents find his musical aspirations contemptible, liturgical music is what they like best, and after they discover his crime they fly into a rage that is almost comical in its theatricality. With deadly talons his mother clamps onto his mop of greasy black hair and shakes his head with such uncharacteristic vigor that she chips a nail and dislodges from the prongs of her ring the two-carat marquise-cut diamond that is the envy of the parish ladies. With a sharp cry like a penny whistle, she slumps to the floor and, running her fingers over the carpet, looks up at her son and shouts, "Well, don't just stand there! Help me, goddamn you!"

Of course his parents find his musical aspirations contemptible, liturgical music is what they like best, and after they discover his crime they fly into a rage that is almost comical in its theatricality.

The real trouble doesn't start until his father, face sinking with resignation, returns home after another "business trip." From his suitcase wafts a fragrance so exotic and titillating that it can only belong to a woman ten years his junior, a perfume so expensive that it must be bottled by the ounce with a medicine dropper. Why he never bothers to launder his clothes before returning home is a mystery. More mysterious still is why women find him so appealing. Bald and thick in the middle but solid and firm like a marble rotunda--ceremonial, severe, cold--his father has an authoritative presence that intimidates subordinates at his law firm, those confused and emotionally distraught paralegals who shudder as his corrupt fingers dance like the legs of a millipede along their naked flesh. Though outwardly kind in the presentation of gifts (or bribes, depending on the circumstance) he is also capable of inflicting great violence, and as his son



brazenly smirks at him his fingers swiftly curl into tight fists of rage.

Two days after the confrontation, Brendan's eyes are still bruised, his left cheek discolored, his upper lip swollen, nothing that a couple of bong hits won't cure, but the mirror hanging cockeyed on the crumbling plaster wall in the drummer's apartment provides a stinging reminder of just how much his old man loathes him.

"My parents are delusional," Brendan says, a bit embarrassed by how shaken he sounds. "They're crazy, they're like children. Shit, what's a few hundred bucks to them?"

Though he would like to whisper these things, he has to shout in order to be heard above the din of the tiny television in the center of the room. On the flickering screen a marauding band of mercenaries on horseback appear out of the wobbling dust spouts of the vast desert flats, and with the creak of leather and the high wild cries of pillage and slaughter they sweep through the post-apocalyptic streets of a warn torn city where no building remains without at least some trace of destruction. A machete-wielding maniac with yellow eyes and yellow teeth pursues a girl, hacking wildly at her scalp then lifts the child's head, now

drooping and blackened with blood, to his cracked lips. The drummer, never taking his eyes from the TV, clutches his sides and erupts with shrill laughter.

"Now, that is totally cool! Ate the brains like a big bowl of custard!"

Brendan fidgets, scratches his chin, sighs. Heavy drops of rain pelt the apartment windows, turning the neighborhood into a scene from the film, the colors muted, gray, crepuscular, with a soundtrack hissing and crackling in the background. Lazy trails of orange soot rise above the nearby shipyards, bending and twisting in the sky like the hypnotic fingers of some roadside magician before descending on a row of bungalows and brownstones, but of course magic doesn't work here, not among these streets, these people, and the buildings remain vacant, neglected, patiently awaiting the wrecking ball. Century-old oaks and elms, their heavy limbs creaking back and forth above the labyrinthine streets, shed the last of their shriveled leaves on the cars parked below. Despite the dearth of consumers in this forgotten quarter of the city, a few small business owners, for reasons no one can quite fathom, refuse to close their doors--a hardware store, an ethnic bakery, a barbershop. Perhaps

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the B-movie bandits will ransack the small café on the corner, gorging themselves on the plump breasts of the middle-aged barista who has long anticipated a stunningly horrific demise--or perhaps blessed cessation--to all of her woes.

For several weeks last summer the drummer worked at the Christian bookstore across the street but was fired for

Things are bleak.  
Compromise can't be  
far down the road.

stealing cardboard boxes to furnish his otherwise barren apartment. Sadly, the boxes contain nothing of value, only the lingering scent of acid-based paper and the occasional louse that crawls with strange curiosity along the drummer's shoulder and into his ponytail. With so many empty boxes stacked one on top of the other, the apartment looks like a warehouse in miniature.

On one wall the drummer has tacked a faded show bill with the word Zanzibar printed in bold black letters set against a background of blue and green. There is nothing striking about the poster or about the band of the same name. Dozens of death metal bands compete for the same five or six hot spots in town, and many club managers insist that Zanzibar, in order to distinguish itself from the competition, needs to invent some kind of gimmick to draw larger

crowds. "You oughtta wear masks and capes," suggests a manager from behind a makeshift desk of plywood and sawhorses. "Run around the stage with chainsaws dripping with blood." Regardless of their desperation for cash, the band

members have some vaguely defined sense of artistic integrity and are unwilling to turn their music into a grotesque

stage act. They settle for playing corner bars that attract an audience of working class stiffes from the shipyards that heckle them or, worse still, ignore them altogether. At the end of the night the bartender, smiling sheepishly, slinks over to the makeshift platform and hands them a few dollars, slips them a joint, some pills that they divvy up between them. Things are bleak. Compromise can't be far down the road.

"Maybe we should change our name," says the lead singer.

It was Brendan's idea to name the band Zanzibar, and when people ask how he thought of it he fails to think of a good reason. "Dunno. Just came to me. Like in a dream." Vaguely he recalls hearing an ad on the radio, the narrator's baritone, soothing and earthy like cinnamon and cloves,

beckoning him to come to an island paradise: "Zanzibar, home to Sufi mystics, powerful sultans, wise viziers."

A man drinking alone at the end of the bar overhears this conversation and says, "I been there. Oh, yeah. Real fucked up place these days. Islamic fundamentalists run the show." In the darkness it's difficult to tell what the man looks like, whether tall or short, lean or fat, but his voice has a certain richness and depth, like the low chords of an old church organ that has survived an air raid and is now in need of careful restoration; it is the voice of someone who has participated in the nightmare spectacle of the world, has used his wits on some occasions and fled in naked terror on others. He gulps down his bourbon. "I once seen a group of clerics in white robes take this poor sonofabitch out to the public square and hack off his cock and balls with a machete. Don't know what he did to deserve that kind of treatment. Probably tapped one of the cleric's old ladies. Well, that's the way of the world these days, ain't it." The man stares at Brendan. "Hey, kid, anyone ever tell you that you look like Freddie Mercury?" Brendan says he's gotta take a piss and walks away, infuriated that someone would dare compare him to some pop star homo.

More screams. On TV a bandit shoots a dog, then a cat.

The drummer leans over. "You still got that credit card?"

"Naw, I told you," says Brendan, "my parents are tight with a dollar. They're greedy. They think they need trips to Egypt to see the pyramids and excursions through the Belgian countryside to buy cases of beer from Trappist monks. Hell, just give me a little mystic and my guitar and I'm cool, I'm doing alright."

On the sagging cardboard box that serves as a coffee table there is a pack of cigarettes, but when Brendan reaches for it the drummer lashes out and grabs him hard by the wrist. The fury comes without warning, spittle flies from his lips, his face contorts with rage.

"Fuck, dude. You and your goddamn personal problems. Where's your dedication, man, your fucking dedication. When you gonna find us another gig? We haven't played a decent joint in weeks. And you haven't written any new music in months."

Even though the rain is coming down hard Brendan decides that

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now is not the time to ask if he can crash on the drummer's couch for the night. Outside, the coppery clouds of coal-fire soot collect along the window sills, tinting the world with what looks a lot like the trails of blood left behind by the mercenaries who drag their prey back to their desert hideouts where the raping and feasting continues with wild abandon until the film's final frame.

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No one wants him around for very long, maybe because like a highly contagious and abhorrent pathogen there is something viral about homelessness, worse even than the medieval plague. Angry pustules of defeat erupt on the faces of those who give him shelter for the night. For a few days he crashes with the lead singer, then with the keyboardist, then with a stagehand who cracks open his first beer at eight in the morning and spends most of the night mocking and slapping his girlfriend who, despite occasional trips to emergency room, refuses to leave her man.

In the course of his wanderings Brendan quickly commits to memory a new list of rules that for pure soul-stifling masochism surpass all of those pages and pages of thou shalt nots from the

Bible that his parents profess to read, a turn of events that he finds ironic in that he's spent the better part of his eighteen years circumventing rules of any kind to the great consternation of those in positions of authority. Regardless of where he stays the rules remain the same: never to eat the food in the refrigerator and cupboards unless you're invited to do so first; the same goes for cigarettes and dope--don't touch them or you'll soon find yourself back on the streets; and if anything goes missing, anything at all--a comb, a guitar pick, loose change scattered on a dresser--suspicion immediately falls on you. Not that Brendan is beyond petty theft. Around every corner there lurks a new temptation, and he must always remind himself of the consequences of breaking the rules.

To spend the night beneath a bridge or curled up in the corner of an abandoned warehouse, listening to the scuttling claws of a dozen flea-infested rats, is not as adventurous as once it seemed ("camping out," the street people call it), but because he prefers self-righteousness to self-pity Brendan convinces himself that only by living as a penniless nomad on the brink of total destitution can he pin down the elusive artistic Truth he's been wrestling with ever since he

first picked up a guitar ten years ago, and so homelessness becomes just one more part of his burdensome quest, another kind of suffering, sublime in its ability to wreak havoc with his self-esteem, but

Depending on the day of the week he sees himself as either a runaway from a particularly cruel Dickensian workhouse or an epic hero...

the Stone Town Café where he strums random chords on his guitar, trying to write new material for the band, always thinking that because he can't discover an original melody, a satisfying

one that offers the potential reward of adoration from millions of fans willing to wait in long lines to see him play in stadiums and arenas. Everyone loves a good rags-to-riches story, and on that glorious day when he grants Rolling Stone his first interview he will proudly boast of his misadventures on the mean streets of Cleveland, how he survived on cans of cold soup and bottles of warm beer and how he turned down solicitations in public restrooms from nervous, middle-aged men in suits and ties.

Depending on the day of the week he sees himself as either a runaway from a particularly cruel Dickensian workhouse or an epic hero, the survivor of some long forgotten war, an exile bound for a glorious but still unknown destiny. From time to time he has his doubts, of course, especially during the dull and dreary afternoons when everyone has gone off to their jobs in the factories and shoe stores and fast food restaurants.

Brendan sits in a remote corner at

rhythm, a memorable riff he has finally hit rock bottom. Things can only get better. But he suspects that there are even greater depths of despair and misery and that unless fate intervenes he may soon reach them. He stares into space, considers walking next door to the pawnshop, getting whatever money he can for his instrument, but he is prevented from doing so by the battalions of failed novelists and poets who frequent the café and engage him in rambling conversations about art and god and their own unrecognized genius. Patience, they say, is the first prerequisite of an artist, the muses can never be summoned through sheer willpower.

Maybe this is true, but the plaintive voices of these teetotaler scribes, droning on and on without end, begin to sound like the steady hiss of the gas fireplace where he warms his feet, and with the approach of evening Brendan locks himself in the restroom where he fires up a joint that he's pilfered from the bass guitarist's dwindling stash,

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inhales deeply and, using the same black magic marker he uses to jot down forgettable and poorly arranged chord progressions in his notebook, draws abstract patterns on the toilet stalls, pretends he's charting his way through a treacherous maze of strange cyclopean dimensions. When he emerges from the restroom the owner is waiting outside the door.

She peers inside, sniffs. "Sorry about the fumes," she says. "I just painted the walls in there. Chartreuse. Sounds fancy. You'd think they'd just call it green. It looks green to me. Except it's not. No, not quite. There's a little yellow in there, too. Hell, I'm colorblind. The stuff was on sale so I bought it. Don't know why I bother. How many people notice the color of the walls in the shitter? Of course I've had my fair share of characters in this place. They always find something to complain about. Name's Shirley by the way."

Although he is very high right now and has never been especially courageous around women, Brendan steadies his bloodshot eyes and gazes for a long time at the woman's face, notices the tip of her nose. How can he not? It's bulbous and pitted and purple, with an array of broken blood vessels. He studies the tattoo of a brightly colored bird on the side of her neck that she playfully

conceals with hair so shockingly red, like an old brick schoolhouse, that there can be little doubt that it has been chemically treated, especially given the fact that she has reached an age when one expects to find a few silver decorative strands here and there.

"My name's Brendan," he croaks. His mouth is dry.

"You live around here?" she asks.

He shrugs, waves his hand toward the window.

"You go to college to study music or you self taught? I don't mean to grill you. It's just that I've been listening to you play and I think you're pretty damned good. I can use some live entertainment. I'll pay you. Fifty bucks a day. Under the table of course. Wish I could give you more but that's all I can afford right now. Maybe we can talk about a raise if more people start coming in."

Brendan listens with interest, he's down to spare change, a handful of quarters and dimes, but he also understands that this woman isn't simply offering him a job, she's reporting the facts, and

the facts are these: he lacks the talent and the persistence and, most important of all, the luck to become a successful musician. A gig at a coffee shop is the best he can do. Another proving grounds, another clear indication of his mediocrity. "I know you got big dreams," the woman seems to say, "but listen, either you take this gig or you're fucked but good."

He nods his head, and the following night he starts on the job, billing himself as Zanzibar and playing the bouncy pop standards one might expect to hear in a small café, tunes in the style of Billy Joel, and though the rhythm is not as sharp and the melody lines not as clear as those of the old master no one seems to notice or care. After each song he is greeted not with applause but with the rude slurping of cappuccino and the wet coughs of winter colds. When she gets tired of wiping down tables, Shirley comes over and pours him a drop of cognac from a bottle that she keeps handy behind the counter.

"My survival gear," she calls it. "By the way, that's funny, you calling yourself Zanzibar. Must be some kind of connection between us. I knew it when I first seen you." She moves her hair aside so he can get a better look at the tattoo of the red and black bird on her neck, its head cocked in an

oddly stoic pose. "You don't recognize it, do you? Thought maybe you would. It's called a Zanzibar bishop. No shit. Hey, listen, I wanna show you something. Come on. Follow me."

Off they go, past a swinging door in the kitchen, then down a creaking staircase where in order to avoid a twisted highway of rusting pipes and heating ducts they have to lower their heads and cling to the banister. Brown spiders and silverfish scurry into dark recesses, swirling tempests of dust shimmer in long shafts of opalescent light that struggle through the glassblock windows. Shirley flips a switch. From a rotting support beam colonized by termites a single light bulb swings gently back and forth, like a man dangling from the gallows, and casts a yellow glow across dozens of wooden crates stacked one on top of the other.

"This is my old man's shit," she says. "He's turned the place into a warehouse."

"You're married?"

"Never went to the altar or nothing. But we been together for ten years. He's gone most of the time. A merchant marine. Sails all around the world on one

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of them big cargo ships. He don't like being tied down. And I ain't dumb enough to think I can change him. Wouldn't want to try. I knew what I was getting into when I first met him.

Anyway, he always finds random junk in the bazaars and opium dens and brothels and then brings it all back home. I keep telling him that one of these days I'll toss it all on the street, but hell, I can't drag this shit up them steps by myself."

Brendan sighs, rolls up his sleeves. He knew there would be a catch. "Should I put the crates out on the curb?"

"Hell, no. My old man would kill me. That ain't no joke either. I really think he would. This is what I wanted to show you. Come over here and take a look. Talk about your weird coincidences, huh? My old man told me all about that place. Said he got chased once by a machete-wielding cleric in white robes." She cackles and coughs and pounds on her chest. "I can only imagine what he did to piss the guy off." She sidles up to Brendan, touches his shoulder. "Say, honey, you gotta a place to stay? Plenty of room down here if you don't mind the mess. Got an extra bed in the corner."

"My old man would kill me. That ain't no joke either. I really think he would."

Though not a believer in chance and coincidence Brendan cannot help but take this as some kind of sign, whether for good or bad he isn't entirely sure, he's never had the ability to interpret signs and doesn't exactly know what this one means, but like a genuflecting penitent before the sacristy he kneels down in the dust, glides his trembling fingers across the splintered wood of the crate and whispers, as though it were an incantation, the improbable name seared into the slats of wood with a hot iron.

"Zanzibar, Zanzibar, Zanzibar."

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Despite the faint odor of chemicals (a sour smell that reminds him of those high school lab experiments that he used to sleep through, the fleshy pig fetuses pale pink to the point of translucence bobbing around in big glass jars of formaldehyde like things half-remembered from childhood dreams), despite the gloom and solitude and constricted space, the basement



provides Brendan with a strange kind of comfort, creating a refuge from the whirlwind of failure and paralysis that await him each day at the top of the stairs. In the far corner there is a utility tub with running water where in the afternoons (he rarely gets up before noon) he brushes his teeth and washes his face and armpits, what the street people call a whore's bath. Below the window there is an end table with an antique oil lamp and a pile of Rolling Stone magazines, the pages yellow and brittle with age but still readable like the delicate parchment of an ancient codex. And of course there are the big wooden crates stacked three or four high like the parapets of a medieval fortress, shielding him from any possible intruders who might slink out of the darkness and do unspeakable things to him.

At night, his thoughts gather like the heavy drops of moisture that collect and fall from the hissing and groaning pipes, thoughts so small and scattered that they quickly evaporate and merge into the mossy cinderblock walls. He waits for Shirley to close up the café and join him under the thin sheets and straddle him with the ferocity of a famished she-wolf eviscerating its prey. "Oh, it has been such a long time," she rasps, stroking his thin body like an exotic object of unknown origin. If she has any thoughts of the

merchant marine whose ship even now may be sailing through the perilous straights of faraway lands she gives no sign.

He sleeps late, in the afternoons he plays guitar in the café, in the evenings he makes love to the aging proprietor--a routine that goes on for months with little variation. Sometimes, out of sheer boredom, he randomly selects a crate and pries it open, trying to guess what he might find buried beneath the straw--peculiar wooden idols with grotesque leers, jars packed with spices, leather bound volumes written in strange and ancient tongues, waxes and oils and containers filled with mysterious dust, the ashes of forgotten kings, revered mystics. In the crate marked Zanzibar he finds a canopic jar of alabaster depicting an Egyptian god--Aten? Horus? Ra?--stuffed with fragrant hashish the color of desert sand at sunset and a great glass hookah pipe with a half dozen hoses that reach out like tentacles to caress his cheek. With the flame from the lamp he lights the bowl and takes in the curative smoke that coils in thick purple plumes around his head. The stuff makes him feel disembodied, divorced from reality, in a vague state of turmoil. Strange sounds fill the basement, spectral shadows dance on the walls, his mind is adrift in an incalculable waste.

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When Shirley fails to appear one night, Brendan ascends the stairs only to find that the door has been locked. He begs to be released, hammers on the walls with his fists until his knuckles are raw. On the other side of the door he hears voices, a heated exchange. A man demands to see the thing that she keeps penned up in the basement, but Shirley says that she's permanently closed, gone out of business once and for all, that no one is allowed in, and with a long squeal of derisive laughter she slams the door shut. There is a moment of silence and then a great shattering of glass. Brendan listens to Shirley's cries of anguish before he hurries back down the stairs and scurries behind a tower of wooden crates.

The darkness is total and unyielding until the door creaks open and a wedge of bright yellow light slashes across the basement floor. He hears the dull thud of heavy boots. At the foot of the stairs, regarding him with a flash of recognition, stands a man whose shaved head and pronounced cheekbones and stumps of crooked teeth remind Brendan of those B-movie bandits that slobber with an inhuman and pitiless rage, a man who has known exile, driven from society time and again like a thief and forced to hide from marauding warlords in wadi-channels and

cliff-hollows, burying his stool in the sand, burning scrub-brush for warmth, slitting the throats of pack-animals for food, crossing mountain borders by the light of a gibbous moon, disappearing into towns reduced to ashes where children feral and skittish observe him from the shadows of mud huts, cultures ancient and long-ignored come at long last to the final cataclysmic scene and he the last observer of the drama.

He speaks with a voice from out of a dust cloud, "So it's you. Freddy Mercury." He shakes his head from side to side, topples the piles of Rolling Stone magazines with the toe of one boot, picks up the guitar and with one swing shatters it against the cinderblock walls. When he sees that the crate marked Zanzibar has been emptied he scowls at Brendan and points.

"Get in," he says.

Brendan backs away. "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean."

"But. Why?"

"You know why."

"Please."

"I'm not a very patient person.  
Get in."

The man, whose hands are calloused and tattooed with geometric shapes exquisite in their detail, reaches for something in his back pocket. Brendan decides to comply, steps into the box, crouches down, tucks his knees against his chin. The man goes to work. He closes the lid, hammers it shut, drags the crate across the cement floor and up the stairs. Splinters lodge into the back of Brendan's neck, his head bounces violently against the wood. When the café door opens and he feels the icy air of the city streets stab at him through the cracks in the crate he considers screaming for help, but in this neighborhood who would dare rescue him? At this hour even the police are reluctant to get out of their cruisers. The rusted hinges of a tailgate squeak open, a truck engine rumbles to life. The man speaks to him now in a low, reassuring voice, tells him an ages old tale about what they do to adulterers on the island of Zanzibar. The shipyards and loading docks are not far from here.

In time Brendan sleeps, he dreams, he hears a strange new melody in the dissonant twelve-

tone musical scale, there is no middle C, no starting point from which to center his consciousness, and he envisions himself writhing on his deathbed, suffering from some unnamed affliction, one that utterly baffles a chorus of doctors who with perfect impassivity listen to the final beats of his heart and watch his body go limp; the plaintive motif turns into the strangled cries of his grieving parents as they stand before the open casket at the funeral parlor to view his corpse, his eyelids glued shut, lips wired together, features dulled by the artless application of makeup, fingernails manicured and positioned in an unconvincing imitation of repose, neck adorned with one of his father's gaudy silk ties. "What a misguided boy," they say, "what a profound disappointment." During the funeral service at the stone church, the band plays in the balcony, transforming the motif into an insidious danse macabre, but for them this is just another gig, another way to buy dope, and the performance lacks passion or conviction. Outside, in the wind and the rain, the gravediggers wait by the door, shovels at the ready, whistling the tuneless dirge.

In the darkness of the crate Brendan hears the splash of waves and sees seeping slowly from his lips the wraithlike

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quarter notes of the strange  
melody, and he experiences a  
moment of pure tranquility. He  
has no fear that he'll be forgotten  
in this box, just another amusing  
curio, mummified and leathery,

like a thing dredged up from a  
haunted bog. Sooner or later  
the lid will fly open and instead of  
the gray winter skies of home  
he'll see the bright blue sea that  
surrounds the faraway island of  
Zanzibar.

*by Pat Tompkins*

## **Notes on J.-L. David's "Death of Marat"**

who: a revolutionary and writer  
what: murdered  
when: soaking in cool water to ease skin ailment  
where: at home, in bathtub with cover for desktop  
why: politics and passion  
how: stabbed by a young woman

disregard Marat's skin disease  
focus on the victim's face and vulnerability  
use his white turban to suggest halo  
elevate a domestic scene to tragedy  
make Marat, friend of the people, a martyr  
portray the rebel as a still life  
unite tribute and propaganda

light: dramatic  
colors: somber  
setting; austere  
size: larger than life  
pose: borrow from a pieta  
the victim: at peace while bloodied  
the assassin: leave her out

[Originally appeared in Fall 2007 issue of flashquake.]

*by Steve Meador*

### **Cherry Tree**

A bowl is all that remains,  
spun true on a craftsman's lathe.  
I did not see it made, but know the grain,  
the strong heart, and can almost taste the cherries.

Touching it sends Percy on a miracle flight,  
fur rippling along his back, dust puffing under  
all four paws upon return to earth. Even fast-spit  
pits could not catch him before he jumped over  
the cucumbers and zipped past the zucchini.

The bowl is overflowing with confessions.  
For decades the wood witnessed events in and under  
the broad canopy, through seasons of pink blossoms  
and green leaves, until its yellow spears surrendered to fall.

Even in winter, when the tree was no more  
than a charcoal sketch, it was memorable.  
The cardinals it harbored dotted an albicant sky,  
like blood drops on virgin snow.

# *The Externalist: A Journal of Perspectives*

## **Mail Order Bride**

*by Yu-Han Chao*

The only thing I have from home is a jade necklace that my mother had given me. I come from a small Vietnamese village, *My Lai*, where we had a small rice field from which we made a living. The river gave us water and a modest harvest. Then last year, mother died giving birth to a baby brother, a silent infant who died one day later. That was when father became an alcoholic, stopped working our part of the fields, and owed more and more money. I could not keep our land alive on my own. Some of our neighbors tried to help me plant the rice sprouts, but father, drunk on cheap cooking wine, would wave the glistening harvest sickle at them, threatening to kill anyone who meddled in our business.

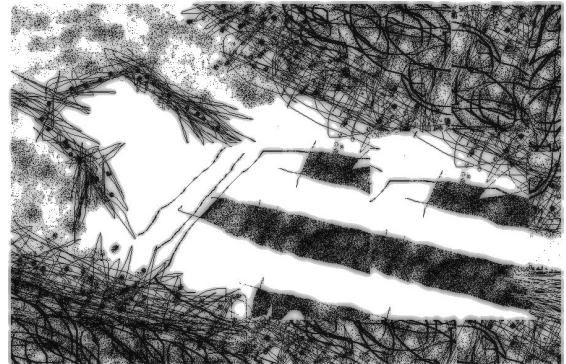
There used to be young men in our village that wanted to ask for my hand in marriage, but now they were all scared away by my father.

"Anyone who touches my daughter will die," he yelled, and everyone heard him. Sometimes when he was drunk, he tried to hit me, but I would run and hide from him.

I missed my mother, and still loved my father, despite everything, but I was young, only sixteen, and wanted more. It was

just a matter of time before I ran away.

My childhood friend Han gave me a lift to Saigon on his new scooter, and introduced me to his friend's cousin, a big deal business lady, Mrs. Rie, who worked in the city. She was the wife of a man who owned a special agency, an agency that sold Vietnamese girls to foreigners as brides. I had no money, couldn't even pay the fees, but Mrs. Rie persuaded her husband to let me owe it to them until I was successfully married to a foreign client.



**Bride in Coffin by Peter Schwartz**

She looked me up and down.

"You're not especially beautiful, the legs too thick and hips too narrow, face all bones, but I think someone will like you."

And she was right. They showed pictures they had taken of me

with a lot of make up and beautiful borrowed clothing to their clients, and in three weeks they had sealed my marriage with a Taiwanese man.

"But I don't speak Chinese."

"He will not mind, my dear," Mrs. Rie smiled, nice to me all of a sudden now that I was bringing business to them. "He's looking for a wife, not a conversation partner. Just smile and look pretty and cook and clean; you'll be fine."

She was pleased that the Taiwanese man was willing to pay nearly half as much as an American would have for a Vietnamese bride. I never saw any of that money, of course, it all goes to the agency and they even claimed I owed them high fees for the arrangement as well as rent for the time I had slept in a cockroach ridden warehouse they let me stay in.

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In Taipei, my new husband met me at the Chiang Kai Shek airport. He was holding a sign with my name written in English on it. Lei Lee. My last name would be changed soon; my husband was Mr. Ting. So I would become Lei Ting, Mrs. Ting.

All the buildings in Taipei are so tall and shiny, the people so

happy, it is strange to me. Their faces are Chinese faces, not so different from us Vietnamese, yet their lives seem so different. The rice comes from burlap bags in supermarkets, not the fields. I don't know where the fields are here.

My husband, a retired soldier, has a long, stubbly chin, hollow eyes, and gray hair. We communicate with very bad English and some Chinese at first, mostly gesturing. I prefer nighttime, when no language is necessary. He gives me little medicine pills to swallow, draws an X with his fingers and makes the shape of a woman's round belly on me. He does not want me to become pregnant, and these pills will protect me.

We live on the eleventh floor of a tall residential building. Our apartment is a one bedroom place, smaller than my old hut in Vietnam, but I like it here because it is clean, bright, and has large windows to let the sun shine in, just like the outdoors back home, but with air conditioning.

The strange thing is that there is no fire in his apartment, no stove, nothing to cook with. Every afternoon, around five thirty, the busiest time on the streets, he used to go into the nightmarket to buy his special dinner. An *o ah jian*, oyster omelette from a food stand, and rice, vegetables and

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fish from a cafeteria in the nightmarket. He shows me the way once or twice, and soon it is my job every night to buy his omelet and some greasy cafeteria food for both of us.

I especially like the period shows in which all the characters wear traditional Chinese clothing, flowing robes with sashes and wide sleeves. I would have liked to wear those clothes.

Gradually, as I get out more during the day, I make friends. Most of them are maids and nannies from Vietnam. They tell me the latest gossip. One woman, Taiyun, has

From nine in the morning to three in the afternoon every weekday he sweeps the floor in a public library nearby while I have a walk in the neighborhood, clean the house, or watch Taiwanese television at home. We have Japanese cable channels, but I prefer local soap operas. I learn a lot of Chinese from them, especially since there are Chinese subtitles on everything. I had only seen television shows a few times when I was in Vietnam, but they had never fascinated me as much as the shows here. I especially like the period shows in which all the characters wear traditional Chinese clothing, flowing robes with sashes and wide sleeves. I would have liked to wear those clothes. But I still wear my plain blue gowns that begin at my neck and end at my ankles, even in this hot weather. It is important for me to still feel like I am Vietnamese, because even if I married a Taiwanese man, it does not change me inside, I am still Lei Lee. I will not forget my ancestors, it is important to honor them.

a neighbor who got a mail order bride from Russia. Russia! It was such a big deal because a Russian woman is a white woman, and white women are like goddesses in Asia.

"How can you possibly buy a white woman?" I ask.

Taiyun smiles slyly and makes the motion of rustling money in her right hand.

"Money," she says. "Lots and lots of money. And do you know what, that man's family treats her as if she were a princess instead of a mail order bride--no offense, Lei Lee."

"What do you mean?" I ask.

"They are afraid that she will be bored, so they find her little students so she can teach them English, even though her English is so bad even I will laugh at her. But they don't care, they think she is so wonderful to marry their son. Rich people, of course. They are insane. And they can't wait till she gives them little foreign



◦

looking babies, beautiful and creamy-skinned."

"Well, I certainly wouldn't want to teach English, I don't envy her that," I say.

"The point is, they try so hard to please her," Taiyun says. "From what I can tell, your husband treats you like my employer treats me. Like a servant. Because they bought us; they know it and we know it."

"Well, I don't think of it that way. I want to please my husband because if he is happy then I will be happy because he will be good to me," I reply.

"Right, right," Taiyun scoffs. "You are perfect material for a mail order bride. Exactly what he ordered."

"That's not a nice thing to say."

"Let me ask you, if you go out to buy his dinner in the nightmarket and come back, say twenty minutes later than usual, will he be mad?"

"Maybe, if he is hungry. Once I walked a little slow, and..."

"Ah ha!" Taiyun interrupted. "That's exactly what I mean. He treats you like a servant. A man will not scold his wife like a child for being late; he will only scold a

servant."

I didn't say anything. Half of me saw Taiyun as being jealous of my legal status as a wife here, my freedom to stay in Taiwan as long as I like without having to work or bribe officials for a visa. Another half of me understood what Taiyun said. After all, my husband, Mr. Ting, had purchased me. That itself made him feel like I was something he owned, which he could order around. He has trained me to respect him like that--I cannot think of him in my mind as Hsia, his first name, I only know him as Mr. Ting. My friends are used to it and no longer laugh at me for calling my own husband by Mister, but I still feel a tinge of embarrassment about who he is to me. My husband? Lover? Owner? Master?

◦

I was still thinking of what Taiyun said today as I left the house to get dinner.

It takes fifteen minutes just to walk to the omelet stand, and there is a long line. The owner notices me today however and nods; he knows I come every day, and he happens to be in a good mood. He gestures to the cook to give him the next omelet, catches it in a Styrofoam container as the cook tosses it to

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him, and sprinkles coral colored special-recipe sauce on it. I hand him four ten NT coins and he gives me the container in a little red and white striped plastic bag.

"Just one, not two?" he asks, flirting. "Buy one get one free, only for you, number one customer."

He knows I am buying Mr. Ting's omelet, he knows I am a Vietnamese mail order bride, and leers, as he often does. I shake my head and walk away as politely as possible.

I never eat any of Mr. Ting's oyster omelets, I think they are disgusting. I ask Mr. Ting why he will not get a stove, I can cook all this food for less money than we are paying the vender and cafeteria owner.

"Can you make *o ah jian* just like the stand? Eh?" he asks me back.

"I could learn," I say.

"Forget it, I don't want the smell of cooking in my home," he says. "It is a small space, and I won't have it smelling of grease and oysters. Just go buy the food and stop questioning your husband."

I feel the heavy ring of keys in my pocket as I drag my feet in cheap sandals in the direction of the nightmarket. Because of moments

He knows I am buying Mr. Ting's omelet, he knows I am a Vietnamese mail order bride, and leers, as he often does.

like this that come back to me over and over again, when he ends the conversation with scolding me or sending me off to run an errand, I have built up some resentment for him. But I vent it in small ways, little by little, so that I can still like him. I spit in his omelets and his coffee in the morning; he'll never know and it won't hurt him, anyway.

Recently, I even stopped eating the little contraceptive pills. I decided that even if Mr. Ting didn't want a child, I wanted a son, a boy whom I could love, and who would grow up to be tall and strong and who would take care of me. I don't believe that a man would really not want a child once it is here--doesn't every man want a boy, a small version of himself? It will make him feel more manly, to have produced another human being, especially in Mr. Ting's case--he is forty-five years old already. Eventually, when I become pregnant, I'm sure Mr. Ting will change his mind and love the child. It's human nature.

At the cafeteria, the *la ban nian*,

female owner of the store, smiles and nods when I come in. She works hard and is polite to all customers, adult or children, mail order brides or not. As she hands me two paper containers for the food and a plastic bag for the rice, I open my mouth to speak, which somewhat surprises her because she has probably never heard me talk before. She must have thought I did not speak Chinese.

"Can I have *su pi nong tan*?" I ask.

I had seen other customers eating it here before, and could smell the fragrance. *Su pi nong tan*, crisp skin thick soup, kind of a creamy western style soup cooked in a small crock pot with a layer of golden puffed pastry baked on top. It would be the ultimate luxury; I could imagine the crisp skin contrasted with the smooth creamy texture of the soup on my tongue. I would eat it so eagerly my tongue and the roof of my mouth would burn but I would not be able to stop because it was so delicious.

"Why, sure!" She smiles broadly.

She is happy for more business, especially since *su pi nong tan* is not cheap. One hundred NT for a bowl of soup, but it's completely worth it in my mind.

"But it is too hot for you to carry home. And if it spills, you will be burned. You see, the bowl is baked in the oven."

I think about this for a while. "It's okay, I will eat it here then," I decide.

The *lao ban nian* smiles and calls to her chef, a short handsome man who looks half Taiwanese, half some kind of Caucasian. "One *su pi* soup!" Then she turns to me courteously, "Please have a seat and wait here."

"I'll get the food first," I say, and walk towards the steam trays full of green, brown, red, white, and yellow dishes shining with grease.

As I pay her in advance for the soup and the food I had put in the paper containers, she looks at me with concern. "Are you sure it is okay if you make Mr. Ting wait?"

I nod my head. It's too late now. I've paid for the soup and am all ready to eat it.

The soup seems to be taking a long time. The *lao ban nian* turns to me at the table and apologizes every few minutes. "Sometimes the oven is slow," she explains. I smile and say that it is no problem.

The handsome chef finally comes out with my beautiful soup with a rounded pastry top like a breast, golden and perfect. He holds it with oven mittens and an extra rag. The *lao ban nian* rushes to put a coaster down before me as he sets the bowl down.

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"Enjoy," says the *lao ban nian*.  
"And be careful, it's very hot!" she adds as she returns to the counter to accept money from another customer.

I look at my *su pi nong tan*. It is absolutely perfect--I can hardly bear to break the perfect crisp skin at the top, but I do, my husband is waiting for this food beside me at home, and is probably grumbling already. I make a small hole in the pastry skin, which breaks immediately and some pieces crumble into the soup. Steam rises from the hole in the puff pastry, and I smell the fragrance of creamy mushrooms and chicken. I make a larger hole with my spoon and reach into the soup, picking up a small piece of pastry that had fallen in. I blow on it to cool it down, then put it in my mouth. Delicious. I savor every bit of my soup slowly, blowing on every spoonful but still burning my entire mouth. I'm sweating even though it is winter and twenty degrees Celsius, cold for Taiwan; the soup warms me up and satisfies me completely. This is one of the best moments of my life; I feel free, like I am defying the universe by sitting here, enjoying *su pi nong tan* as my husband waits hungrily at home for his dinner.

I want to linger in the store, with that cute little crock pot in front of

me, enjoying my wonderful *su pi nong tan*, but there is no more. I did not even leave a scrap of mushroom at the bottom of the bowl. I smile at the *lao ban nian* and wave cheerfully as I pass her on my way out.

As I walk home, some men look at me. They see my red cheeks and red lips from the soup; they must think I am in love. I turn my head down and walk as quickly as possible. After all that waiting, the omelette must be only lukewarm. I do not want Mr. Ting to be too disappointed, or upset.

◦

When I open the door Mr. Ting is standing right behind it.

"Where were you?" he asks.

"In the nightmarket," I reply.

"Why were you so late?"

"I just...walked more slowly."

"You are forty minutes late and you say you walk more slowly? What kind of lie is that, what were you up to?" He raised his voice.

"Nothing." I say, trying to walk past him to put the food on the counter.

I suddenly remember that he used to be a soldier, and that my mother had warned me to stay away from soldiers.

"Don't evade my questions like that."

He feels more and more free to scold me in Chinese since he knows I understand it well enough now. He seems more angry than is appropriate for my being late, though, even if he is hungry and worried.

"I'm not, I'm really sorry. Here, let's eat now," I say, using my most soothing voice.

"After you explain this," he says.

He holds something out in front of me. It is a blue and white foil and plastic thing with twenty one little pills in it. He had found the contraceptive pills I did not take and had hidden in my underwear drawer.

"I...I forgot all about them," I stammered, sensing his anger.

"Forgot? You lying woman, how dare you lie to me twice in so short a time, did you forget I bought you from your country, gave you a good life and home here, you ungrateful wench! How dare you disobey and deceive me!"

I back towards the door as he advances towards me. I suddenly remember that he used to be a soldier, and that my mother had warned me to stay away from soldiers. They were prone to violence, she had told me, they were not balanced people.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry..." I say over and over again.

"Sorry is not enough. Where have you been? Have you been sleeping with someone else? The cafeteria cook, that mixed bastard? Do you want his child, is that why you are not taking the pills?"

"No, no!"

I try to push him away as I open the door to run out, but he pushes it shut with his right arm. He is strong, and much bigger than me. He uses his left arm to twist me over to face him, then lands a punch in my abdomen with his right fist. The pain is sudden and fierce, and I fall to the floor. I did not know this was what it was like to be hit--my father had never managed to land his hands on me--it felt like having all the air knocked out of you and you lose your balance. He pulls me up again and punches my stomach again, like I am a punching bag.

Tears stream down my face as I

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try to catch my breath, I feel my consciousness leaving me; the pain is like a screw in my body, screwing tighter and tighter. The last thing I think of is that if I wasn't a mail order bride this would not be happening to me. If I was Taiwanese, like him, he could not feel so much more superior, or if I was a Russian mail order bride, then I would be tall, strong, and beat him right back. With the last strength I have I lunge towards him with my fists and try to punch him back in the

abdomen, as he had done me, but it takes him only a slap to land me on the floor again, where I curl up into a C shape, groaning. I can feel myself bleeding, I think in my womb. He lunges and lands on me, but I kick him hard in a vital place, and it is his turn to fall to the floor.

I open the door and run out, into the street. I do not know where I can run away to this time, but I know I must run, keep running.

*by John Miller*

## Hunters, Late November

As they alight from limousine and staff car at the Chief's private lodge, they feel the rank and weight of office drop from their more elemental selves. They change into the fur-lined garb of hunters.

Cold air sifting through the firs and spruces  
into their lungs, boot-soles crunching  
cleanly profiled imprints underfoot,  
they gain ground for the sense-renewing  
primal interplay of bullet,  
beast, and man

until the beaters,  
boys from the village, drive a herd  
of almost-tame deer down the gorge  
below their leveled firearms.

The smoke lifts for a body count:  
68 shots, 30 deer lying dead  
beneath the evergreens. In compliance  
with the code of the outdoors, they help  
enlisted men gut, hang, and load  
their trophies, cleanse themselves, then join the Chief  
for a steak-and-lobster banquet in the lodge.

## Preserving Wildlife

*The extinction of species is the future of diorama.*

--Durs Gruenbein

Behold through clear glass, like an Eve or Adam  
prior to their fateful knowledge,  
a vivid world of flora and wild fauna,  
fresh from being named.

A saber-tooth lurks, ever tensed  
to pounce upon fresh meat. Two statuesque  
eland tilt their twisted horns  
as if alert to danger, petrified.  
Inscribed against a purple, vaulted sky  
carrier pigeons wing a motionless  
flight from extinction.  
A fox lopes toward its lair, as still  
and odorless as Keats's Grecian urn.

Gaze at the diorama's breathless space  
where no leaf stirs, no twig crackles  
under cloven hoof, no sky clouds over  
at a storm's approach;

only the vague sadness  
of waking from a dream so real  
its creatures could have lunged from underbrush  
to sink their teeth in you

who know  
what lies beyond their crystalline preserves.  
Where are the great wild, roving herds  
of bison, rhinos, caribou?  
Look hard and long into the dioramas  
with their mounted, lifelike carcasses,  
until your loss of ocular enchantment  
brings death into a world  
replenished by some taxidermist god  
upheld by avid hunters.

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## **Birds of the Rainforest**

By day a glimmer in the leafage, a bright  
brief swoosh, peripheral, gone  
when you look, still flitting somewhere  
up in the trees,

identity a disembodied trill  
or low-throated chuckle sifted  
with shafts of sunlight needling  
through overgrowth. At dusk

When massive trunks enlarge  
in the half-darkness and encroach  
on fields clear-cut for beans and maize,  
natives try to humanize the bird cries,

hearing a woman wail in the agony  
of childbirth, or the *tok tok tok*  
they call the coffin bird, as if it tapped  
on hollows of a corpse container,

as if to leave it nameless would increase  
a terror nested in the nighttime forest.  
Once, as men worked, hacking, felling, burning  
at their fields' edge, to enlarge their holdings,

a hawk-like bird appeared,  
swooping into spirals low  
over their settlement, and dropped  
a three-foot serpent from its beak.

That night the *jefe* of the hamlet  
woke to a soft wing-beat near his bed--  
the flutter of a scarcely wind-blown flame  
or, he preferred to think, a fledgling angel.



## **Gut Reaction**

Jesse Rilton on Laurie Kuntz's "Sitting in the Northern Bleachers", April 2008

It was the opening two lines of Kuntz's poem "Sitting in the Northern Bleachers" that grabbed me. "The child spoke these words:/'*Shut up, Jew.*'" In a country where diversity is the word of the day in every corporate office, it's especially sad that children still say and hear these things on the playground. You'd think we'd be past this by now, but Kuntz's poem says we aren't. I believe it.

Submit your own "Gut Reaction" to work in this or a prior issue of *The Externalist* by sending a response of 50 to 200 words to [editor@theexternalist.com](mailto:editor@theexternalist.com). Please include "Gut Reaction" as the subject header of your email. The best submissions will be published in an upcoming issue of *The Externalist*. By submitting to "Gut Reaction," you agree that *The Externalist* has the right to publish your submission and keep it on our web site indefinitely. There is no payment for "Gut Reaction" pieces and we regret that we are unable to respond to these submissions unless we will be using them.

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## Contributor Notes

**Yu-Han Chao** was born and grew up in Taipei, Taiwan. She received her MFA from Penn State University, and currently lives in northern California. Her poetry collection, "We Grow Old," is forthcoming with The Backwaters Press and her short story collection, "Passport Baby," is forthcoming with Rockway Press.

**Mira Coleman** writes from western Maine. Her work has recently appeared in print editions of *Daily Bulldog LLC* Farmington, Maine; *Ink, Sweat and Tears*; *Red Fez*; and is forthcoming in *flashquake*; *Ranfurly Review*; *Wings of Icarus*; *Ghoti* and *Word Riot*. Her work was first published in *Flowering After Frost, An Anthology of Contemporary New England Poets* (Branden Press, 1975 Boston). She worked for 27 years in the Massachusetts Trial Court before retiring as a probation officer in 2002.

**Santiago del Dardano Turann** was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and grew up in rural Butler county. After having moved around, he finally settled [for now] in San Francisco, California. He does not have a college degree and only began writing poetry with the onset of middle age. Since beginning to submit compositions in late August 2007, his work has been accepted by 18 journals.

A writer and editor, **Charles Grosel** lives in Phoenix, Arizona. He has had or will soon have poems in *Slate*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Slant* and stories in *Western Humanities Review*, *Water-Stone*, *Red Cedar Review*, and *The MacGuffin*, among others.

**Michael Gurnow** has been published domestically as well as abroad, translated, and anthologized. His work may be found in *Literary Kicks*, *Plain Brown Wrapper*, *Corrupt*, *Word Riot*, *The Modern Word*, *Clockwise Cat*, *Dissident Voice*, *Maelstrom*, among others.

**Kevin P. Keating** is a writer and educator who lives in northeast Ohio. His essays and fiction have appeared in a number of literary journals, including *Identity Theory*, *The Stickman Review*, *Mad Hatter's Review*, *Underground Voices*, *Perigee*, *The Plum Ruby Review*, *Fiction Warehouse*, *The Oklahoma Review*, *Slow Trains*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Thunder Sandwich* and many others. His story "The Black Death of Gentile da Foligno" was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. You can view much of his work by going to [www.kevinpkeating.blogspot.com](http://www.kevinpkeating.blogspot.com)

**Steve Meador's** book *Throwing Percy from the Cherry Tree* won the D-N Publishing 2008 National Book Competition and was released in April. It has been nominated for several awards, including a National Book Award, for poetry. He has appeared in *Loch Raven Review*, *Word Riot*, *Umbrella*, *Foliate Oak*, *Avatar Review* & many others and he also has two chapbooks by *Pudding House Publications*. "Percy" is available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), Barnes and Noble and [www.d-npublishing.com](http://www.d-npublishing.com). A real estate broker, he lives in Florida with his wife and three sons.

Though born in Ohio (1933), **John N. Miller** grew up in Hawai'i (1937-1951) and retired from college teaching (British and American literature, creative writing) in 1997. He now lives with his German-born wife Ilse in an elegant geriatric ghetto ("retirement community") in Lexington, VA.

**Diane Payne** teaches creative writing at University of Arkansas-Monticello, where she's also faculty advisor for The Foliate Oak (<http://www.foliateoak.uamont.edu>), which is currently accepting submissions. She is also the author of two novels, *Burning Tulips* and *New Kind of Music*. She has been published in hundreds of literary magazines. More info can be found at <http://home.earthlink.net/~dianepayne/>

**Peter Schwartz** is an abstract painter with aspirations of taking over the entire Internet. In addition to having his artwork featured on over 80 websites, his paintings have appeared in such print journals as *Existere*, *Orange Coast Review*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Reed*, and *International Poetry Review*. His most recent exhibition was at the Amsterdam Whitney Gallery in NYC. He is an art editor for both *Mad Hatters' Review* and *Dogzplot*. His work can be seen directly at: [www.sitrahahra.com](http://www.sitrahahra.com).

**Laura E. Tanner** is a Professor of English at Boston College, where she teaches American literature of the last century. She has written extensively on social concerns including violence, race, aging and embodiment. Her most recent book, *Lost Bodies: Inhabiting the Borders of Life and Death*, was published by Cornell University Press in 2006.

**Pat Tompkins** is an editor in the San Francisco Bay Area. Her short stories and poems have appeared in the *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Astropoetica*, *the Aurean*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Mslexia*, and other publications.

**Helen Tzagoloff** have been published in anthologies and literary journals, most recently in *Poetry East*, *Evansville Review*, *Barrow Street* and *PMS*. One of her poems was nominated for the Pushcart Prize and she was a first place winner of the Icarus International Literary Competition.