

Paper Mill Press
A Journal of Creative Arts
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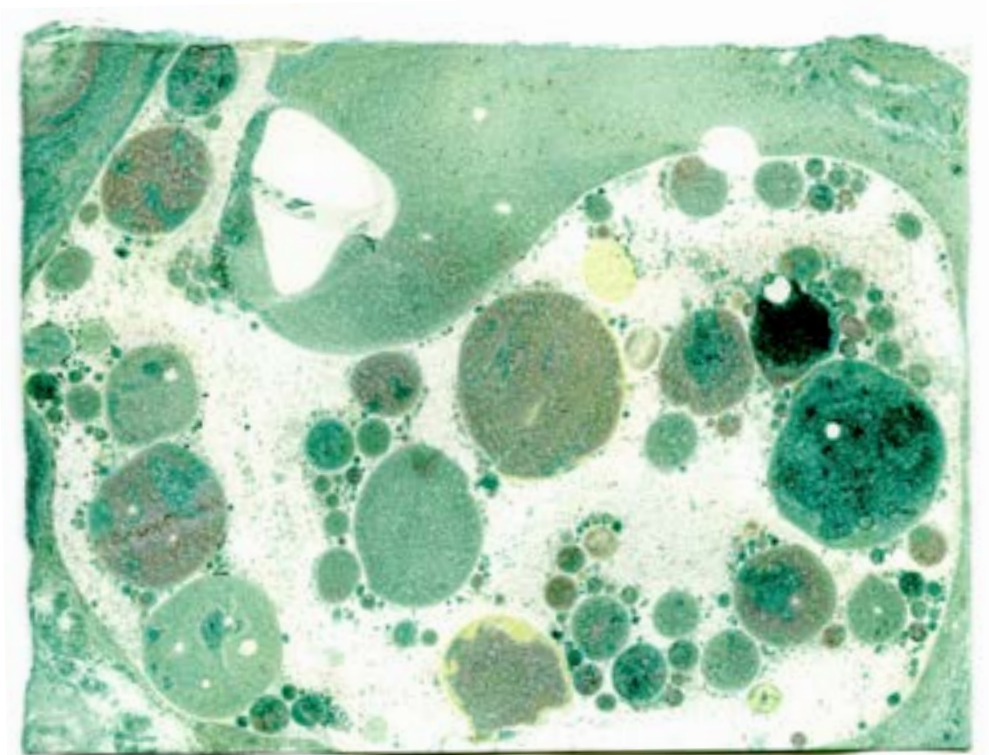
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Whale

Ashley Hemmings
oil paint on paper



46 centimetres overnight

Lindsay Bird

We rise together around noon. No sooner.
No school, no work, no milk for coffee
just a black mug before the common slog,
the weight, the wind, the wet of it.

The white and white and grey of it.

And then, the neon dots of dads
appear, an army of old ski jackets
called in to unbury the universe:
our driveways, the longer days,
our unburnt skin beside the unswum sea.

The blue and green and grey of it

Buddha

Lindsay Bird

It was the last thing my sister sent,
from a trip to the Caribbean that must
have tipped the scales
somehow, some tropical slant
of light setting off the schizophrenic clock.
A figurine to ward off the same
thing from striking her closest kin,
a silver-plated little god for luck.

Tuesday nights at the Y

Lindsay Bird

It seemed like as good a way to pass the time as any, burn off
lunch, meet some friends. But eight weeks in it's taken over
and you're dribbling on your pillow in the dark, your wife's
low whistling beside you, a sleepy referee. Walking the dog,
you keep an ear out for what bounces – bus tires, baby hiccups
– before succumbing to the nearest sports bar to stand trans-
fixed before the scores. You don't tell her that's where you've
been. You're starting over, taller this time. You never thought
you were a team player, no matter how much you put it on
your resumé. She asks you the most important question and
you blank: basketball?

Notes on my grandmother's cabin:

Ashley Hemmings

Red stairs led to a green-doored yellow hilltop cabin.

Skeleton key to which the back lock was never introduced.

Chopped logs by the wood stove. Day bed. Dinner table.

Smoke-stained lace curtains overlooked the ocean. Windows wide open.

Bunny in a floral dress. Floral pillows and wallpaper surrounding.

Plastic flowers in a plastic juice bottle. Another lace tablecloth.

Water-stained print of a painting hanging sideways. Peeling wallpaper.

Top of the stairs spinning wheel. Home to Raggedy Ann.

Walls of photos hung salon style. Above board game shelves.

First visit after her death. Dirty carpet. Locked back door.

16 Westmount

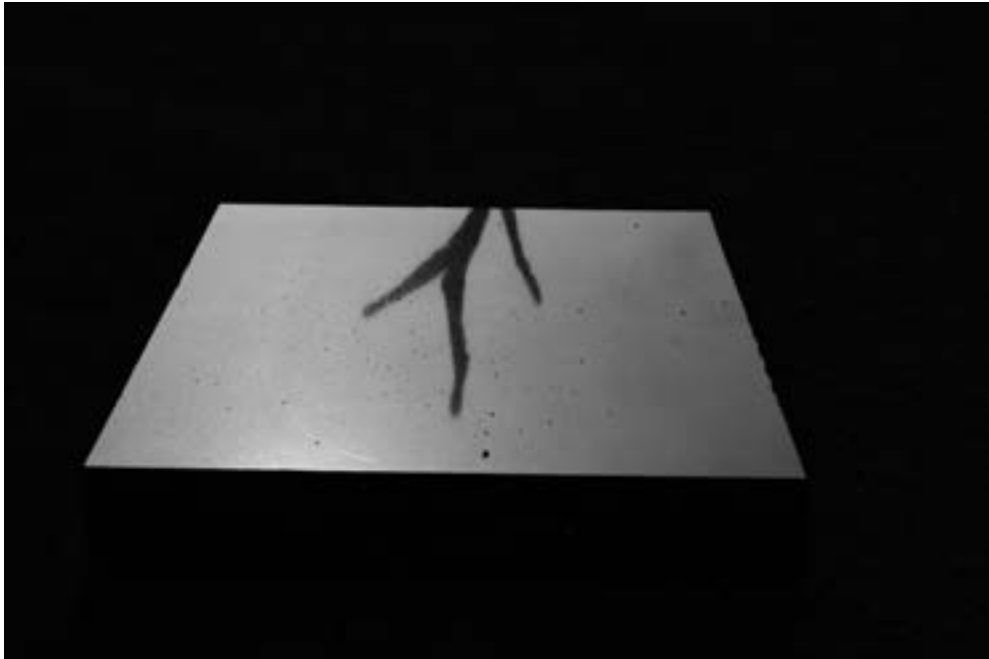
Tyrone Kelly

silkscreen chine-collé on japanese paper



Lumina

Lucia Torres (Faune)
digital photograph



Austere

Sam Westcott

Austere, weren't you? Like a red-breasted robin, gazing, saying nothing. Crows around us, cawing, dill pickle chips open on the dash, evening harbour before us, ebbing, the fog grazing across the bay like contented cattle. Grew up happy, the two of us. Heaven, itself in a graduating class of seven. Inch-worm of a joke, crawling up my back, now; kill it a part of me says, and I do, drowning the joke in a pesticide of silence. Last night we slept in the hammock stretched beneath mandarin orange leaves, until noon-brightness severed our sleep, opened our eyes. Reptilian brain: thought we saw predators, only park pigeons, trotting around us. Queer look you gave me, like Really? Save it, I thought. Savour it. Trainwrecks don't happen every day. Under the dented roof of my second-hand station wagon, painted violet, very 80s, watching the waves and listening to the gulls' squawks like xylophone-sounding muzak in a Chinese restaurant, I turn, say Let's run. Let's get out of this salty clad zoo.

Reincarnation

Sam Westcott

Your split carapace
has a ring for every year
that tried to marry you.
And there's a ring to it
when our bloody knuckles knock
upon your hollowed back, and the frozen
bark litters the ground, where your
life was truncated and the stump that was left is left
like a tombstone, some
man-made monument in grey,
human-coalesced park.

I peer: the last ring marks the year you were
axed. Chopped. Smashed. Bit with
teeth more fierce than that of any
winter storm you ever endured. More
concise, blade sharpened for impact,
aerodynamic for human-thrust.

I can count the years back on your spine,
I was...five, you
were twenty-nine,
and despite my age,
there still isn't a salve for me. I
remember thinking, *any line you
put between yourself and the world is
illusory,*

*you are it and it is you, and every
time you hurt some other, you're also hurting
you and vice-versa.*

But there's an impedance on thought;
a kind of rot, wired into our biology. I think
about the roots beneath you, how
when you died, your
nutrients were delivered like
baby-in-beak-of-stork
to some other tree. Or trees.
Placed on their doormat of roots,
morning-met and taken in. So I watch
and practice
and wonder if you're still listening.

12/06/2016

Emily Critch

photopolymer & chine-collé



Winter Exhalations

Rachel Fraser

Chapped lips,
rough like orange peels,
mist citrus puffs of air –
blown kisses
rising
into cold December skies.

Neon Signs and Nights Alone

Rachel Fraser

Colours slice through the evening dark
reaping shadows across fire escapes
cutting segments down alley edges

Rivulets of water
sent cascading from swirling
mist-topped scrapers
crash against my window pane

Figures cast upon the bedroom wall
ladies rich in contrast
flat in plaster
dance in seamless motion
finding rhythm in the urban pulse

Metropolitan heartbeat
the shadows shift upon the wall
suddenly a womb
pumping fluids
curling fingers
writhing in the ultrasound

Outside the city screams –
the birth of dawn

Endangered Species

Erika Stonehouse

oil on canvas



untitled (*Diaspora series*)

Melissa Tremblett

film photograph



untitled (*Diaspora series*)

Melissa Tremblett

film photograph



“on Love”

Kyle Howe

every rose
has its
thumbs?

or something
like that?
or
What
ever

Natural Habit(at)s

April Fowlow
ceramic



**#01 Building Management,
Échange (Exchange)/Post(e) - Dawson City**

Marc Losier

photocopy on archival paper



**#12 Untitled,
Échange (Exchange)/Post(e) - Dawson City**

March Losier

archival pigment print



Naked

Maria Dussan

I want to be naked with someone who appreciates the extents of skin without the attachment of paradigms—without oppression.

I want to be naked without shame, and in sanctuary space establish the dialogue of skins transforming into neural signals that belong to the beginning of time.

I want to be naked in artistic appreciation of the weird manifestations of nature, and in absolute liberation of constructed fears.

I want to be naked in protest, and your eyes my witnesses of the irrelevance of a term like imperfection which foolishly implies the nonsense of perfection.

I want to be naked in deconstructive mode until we find ourselves outside of meaning and blending with all matter outside of time and infinite.

I want to be naked in honesty—observing the skin that will melt over bones, and both of us embracing within this present knowledge.

I want to be naked in observance of all fake and artificial, and smile at you in absolute compliance.

I want to be naked under the spectrum of natural light and eyes-closed, so you know I have trusted you.

I want to be naked in humanimal affirmation and in denial of dyads.

I want to be naked with someone.

Transient Stops

Maria Dussan

It ended
in a question mark
as it began

open to doubt:
no ends
and no means

only
an in-between
of absurdity

Mourning

Sarah Levita

A man whistles in the forest
shapeless morning runs past the green and brown
trees
mimicking the man's sounds
wind
so loud and sharp stretching out and out
no one hears

sun falls upon the man
drifting through each day he forgets the night
alone
sailing deep in black angst and brown bourbon
a slow tickle in his throat
delivers the cough

stinging and wet
violently projects his bourbon breakfast
fingers eight decades old curl and lock
grasping for a cloth or comfort
nothing
but morning

gargling thick poison
it's not yet
noon
the drowning bear
his death as forgotten as the forest.

what big eyes you have

Kassie Lukeman

digital photograph



sick

Charlotte Hobden

oil painting



Apostrophe No.1

Joshua Pittman

I saw the best minds of my generation;
Destroyed.

Not by madness, but by S-A-N-I-T-Y,
By an absence of ink and incredulity, by creased collars and decade day planners.

Where is the madness, Allen, old friend?
Where hides the hallway Howl, when HST rolls off the tongue with such
Terrific ease?

Where are the ones who sip Molotovs and preach flame-licked rhetoric?
Where are the ones who hide amongst the streetlight, the gutter, the alabaster alleyways?
Where are the ones who dance in fever-dream,
Who swim in pools of black coffee and honey-whiskey,
Who are desperate to remember yesterday and forget tomorrow?

I root amongst your headstone tonight, digging through broken spine and yellowed page,
combing depths of delusion;
searching for a crucible-verse to sing in the stairwell,

One to conjure rage and melancholia and sweet confusion,
One to galvanize tired minds to burn and raze and cry and fuck,
One to keep close to my breast, and remind me of the debt I owe,

To you, Allen, for taking my hand and leading me into the unfamiliar dark,
Where I might finally see.

Lost For Words

Jeremy Wills

ink on paper



Best Seat in The House

Joshua Pittman

Skinny, shadeless, stripped down,
standing stock still in the corner
with your cord ripped rudely out,
headless and blind, your eye pirated.

A single lonely bone in your body,
Five feet, tarnished, rusting, and a little crooked;
time has not been kind.

And yet you stand regal,
underneath the fragile, naked frame –
I wonder if they screwed your mind back in
and you woke up somewhere else
somewhere high and dark,
above a field of red plush seats and a place to dance.

I wonder,
when the curtains go up and the switch is flicked,
Do you smile?

A response to Leonard Cohen's Beautiful Losers

Julia Keeping

Lilly of the Mohawk

Virgin

Saint

Catherine Tekakwitha

history has not been gracious to you
mutilated by pimples and pocks,
reduced to the ability of raising a cock

plagued in a different way
he staggers among porcelain shadows,
desperately seeking

Kateri Tekakwitha,
Do you hear his pleas?

The Typist

Alyssa Leahy

acrylic painting



Freezing

Jessica Warford

The ice picks apart our skin with maddening patience,
like it has an eternity to destroy us – and it does –
but that's of no consequence now,
we are too far gone for worry.

Icicles are forming on my eyelids and my insides,
as you laugh and tell me you can't feel a thing.
There's no point in fighting this gentle demise any longer,
when it's as easy as falling asleep.

Together, we are a dark spot on this white horizon,
a smudge against the backdrop of a muted world.
I couldn't think of an easier end,
than lying here on this bed of glass shards.

So, darling, take my hand and we'll watch
as the stars flicker out like birthday candles,
we can sing a song to this wasteland,
as she smothers us with cold.

unafraid;

Jessica Warford

the bloodstains on your hands have been there for years
staying put like a guest you'll never be rid of
you grew up walking on eggshells
with a gasoline heart and sticky fingers
in a cruel world without constants
where it's all about sex and timing
and you never did figure out
how to be unafraid of your own body

Post-Mortem

Erika Stonehouse
serigraphy on paper



Aguathuna

Emily Critch
screenprint



Poppies

Jessie Donaldson

digitally edited acrylic painting



For the Seeds

Matt McCarthy

Report to the surface
It's nearing the time
For sprouts to emerge
And for tendrils to climb

All you peppers, oregano
Rosemary and chives
For the sun, soil and water
Have rendered you 'live

Maybe we'll use you and maybe we won't
But don't let that hinder your desire for growth
It's a marvelous realm in which to love and to breathe
From the moment you're planted
'Til you shed your last leaves

Mad

Ryan Duffy

It's eight minutes to midnight.
I'm reading the newspaper, curiously contemplating
The strange state of the world.
I'm laughing to myself, wondering
How we got to this point.
The last thing I read is an article about a funny-looking cat.

I'm not worried about anything.

It's seven minutes to midnight.
I see the shifting sands of machines
Shaving away layers of ancient lands.
The black blood of the earth bubbles through the
Continental vein, and is injected back into the machines.
The world is coughing, gurgling, grasping for air.

It's six minutes to midnight.
I see factories with suicide nets, strung and
Stitched with the silk of hope's pet worm.
I see the good of humanity, even though it's
Far away, obscured by smog and the shadows of
A false flag waving in front of the only remaining sunlight.

It's five minutes to midnight.
I see "To Protect and Serve" printed on the side
Of a flashing cop car parked recklessly on a lawn.
A Black mother is crying out for her son—

Murdered for reaching into his pocket for his phone.
The boys in blue applaud each other.

It's four minutes to midnight.
I remember that Matthew talked about the fires of Hell,
And how contempt towards your neighbor will
Send you There. He was right, except Hell's fires are a
Hellfire missile; fired and forgotten, as the nativity scene
Lays scorched and charred, soon to be drowned in Galilee.

It's three minutes to midnight.
I see a profiting prophet, screaming in the
Homes of every living creature on Earth.
The clock's hands are drawing lines in the sand
For the new gangs of the world,
Whose colours are black and white and pink and blue.

It's two minutes to midnight.
I don't know what to make out of what I'm seeing anymore.
Terracotta soldiers line the abandoned, littered streets
Where the citizens are inside, taking shelter from
A mutated government policy of duress and extermination,
Coupled with radical ideologues, ready to smash their win-
dows.

Lord, it's one minute to midnight, and
I'm getting real scared down here.
I've always thought that I was ready to see you,
But I just don't want it to be so soon.
I know you're not listening to me, but all I can hear is

The sound of your final trumpet's blare.

The clock's still ticking, Lord, and
I'm still reading the newspaper, frantically sifting
Through the words, trying to separate fact from fiction.
I'm choking on my tears, trying to find out
How we got to this point,
But the last thing I see is a bright flash

And then I can't see anything.

I don't know where I am right now.
I'm floating through stone-cold silent nothingness.
My watch is telling me that

It's midnight,

But I'm realizing now that

midnight was days ago.

Seeing Double

Olivia Wong

analogue



oneforty

Ryan Duffy

140 characters of falsehoods.

gouge out the public's eyes and feast on them in your castle.

we're living in an age of vitreous gallows humor.

The Philosopher

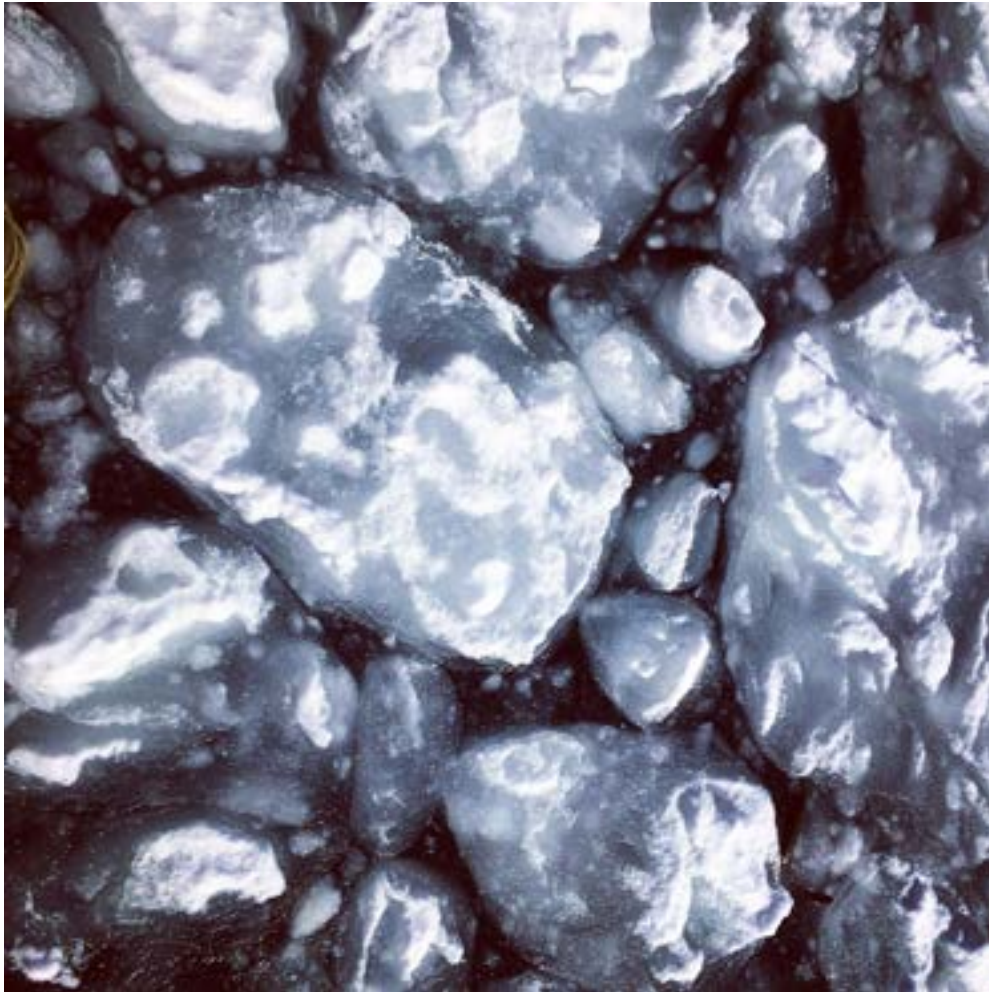
Melissa Taylor

graphite



untitled

Kassie Lukeman
digital photograph



An Ancient Lock

A.H. Robitschek

I was taught poetry in all its subtlety,
from poets more
shattered than I. Perhaps that is why I breathe
differently now, out
in the
Open.

Incubator

Quinton Colbourne
digital photograph



Part I: The Seer, Part II: The Abyss

Lucas Morneau
fire-charred oak and computerized LED sequence



Sheulogy

Quinton Colbourne

I was attracted to your traction
My feet hanging by your tread
I embed you in friendly fashion
Beneath soil you once wed
Terra firma to terra nova
Subtract the surface of the sun
Unearth a new utopia
Laces run undone
Tiptoe into Valhalla
Hearken to your own tongue
Heaven stands on a stairway
Each step and you are one

Sprig

Quinton Colbourne

under curtains, carpets and parapets
a floor of fauna engorged
in shroud of shadow and silhouette
the glory of forest forged
marrow and mirth of marionettes
bountiful and boundless
corrugated corsets wreathed in jackets of jade
abated beneath a thicket of palpable palisade
tendrils of sentinels, all tentative in vain
sapped of sapience, a terracotta terrain
shearing of sheaves in autumns rouse
division of visage devised
a boreal banquet, a bouquet of boughs
a feast of leaves and lives
a labyrinth embroidered in lattice and lace
bordered embracement of twine
amazed masquerade of tresses entranced
trespassing in turbulent time

High Definition Death

Hastings Gresser

It's there and it's not
and you don't think about it and you do
when it's not there you feel alone in the silence
when it's there you feel nothing

sitting in some corner, festering in black
drawing little attention, destroying you softly
with electric light and stereophonic sound
sitting on top a cabinet made of bone

the senses wage war, trying to understand
putting pixels together
looking at your uncle's body at the wake
wondering how something usually so animate
can lay so still
like a turned off television

change the channel
maybe there's something else on

To Be Forgotten

Olivia Parsons

Painted pictures of lovers,
landscapes,
of mighty mountains and trees.

Photographs of accomplishments,
family,
brilliant sights of astonishment.

Sculptures of gods,
exceptional leaders,
of righteous Kings and Queens.

But yet,
nothing of Me.

Recoil Escapement

Myron King

Signed up on arrival, enlisted for life.
No choice given me, presumptuous delight.
Control or guidance? –the line rashly blurred,
an exacted proxy from unfounded concern.

Knowledge and reason – allies to the score.
His torpor and silence affirms even more.
With innate courage, a new path is graced
but chagrin and reproach painted their face.

Novation of mind, and onward we tread,
dishonor proclaimed, dissidence is said.
Lonely is this – the road less taken,
but worthwhile the resolve, my freedom awakened.

Old Country Blues

Bernard Wills

Well first you need to find the place.

Old Country is hard to find...
seems it buggered off somewhere

perhaps in in 1982...I don't remember...but

suppose your expedition found the very last bit left

swaying atop the dizzy tip
of one of those tall eight-thousand-footer peaks
only the hardcore climbers ache for;

or lost up north perhaps,
forsaken on the bleak forbidding tundra
behind the abandoned DEW line stations;

or maybe you just stumbled on it
in the old growth boreal forest
where bigfoot and the shy eastern panther dwell;

you might just find that Old Country
is sealed up like a tomb, crawling

with its legions of seraphic bouncers

lucent in their blazing metal links

all hot and heaven-forged.

They may not let you in.
They may just toss you out on your behind.

It's fifty/fifty if they do or don't.

But, say you wormed your way inside-
a little sneak thief, Gollum like-
what do you suppose you'd see?

Not much. Old Country is a matter
of hearing, taste and smell mostly.

It isn't for the visually acute.

It leaves its trace however, faint but clear—
here are some things I've noted about it.

It is not forgiving as you can well imagine.
It is always the near kin of darkness.

You can hear the ocean there as well
no matter how far off it lies.

Old Country has the dark smell of pine,
the heavy crunch
of dense-packed snow about it.

Its theme song might be something like Dark Island

or, alternatively, those last-
death-rattle tracks
laid down by the late Hank Williams

for it is dust-devil dry as well.

Love is tragic in Old Country:
its silent lovers slip below the sea,
their soft hands parted,

to only modest protest
from the high-shrilling birds, the terns and gannets.

In the Old Country
there are no bloodless tales.

In the Old Country there are troubadours, duduks and an-
tique folkways...

Other than that I'm spitting blanks.
I speak in evocations, sure, but I've lost the thread.

Still, those Old Country blues go walking like a man.
I've got 'em bad
and them modern bar-room blues don't cut it friends—

not like Short Stuff Macon
or Blind Mamie Forehand

not like Ishman Bracey
or Shortbuckle Rourke,

Rube Lacey, Ed Bell Junior
or Texas Alexander-

nor like that sweet, sweet honey
slicked in heavy clots over barren, jag-toothed rocks.

Ark Alternatives

Bernard Wills

Got me a ticket first thing... cashed in my RRSPs to do it.

The Ark cast off a week ago... from jolly Amsterdam
but of course I had to make some changes.

I've packed two of every author.
By special request there are no animals.

It's my ark damn it. I've picked out a nice deck chair,

laid in a good supply of Cutty Sark blended scotch
and Old Pusser's rum
to suit the nautical theme.

I have nowhere to go so I just let her drift.

I am well caulked against storms.

That wide beam makes for a good sea boat.
She rides the slow Atlantic swells as a stately matron should.

Below she is dry, my bunk a kindly, rocking cradle.
Nothing like an ark for riding out the weather!

But today is gorgeous. I'm somewhere, maybe,
near the Azores. I have my deck chair and my parasol.

I'm halfway through Ulysses.
I've got "Poimandres," The Red Book too, the Duino Elegies.

I've packed the entire collection of Roderick Usher:

Campanella's City of the Sun,
the Chiromancer Fludd,

a Loeb edition of Pomponius Mela
and even the ghastly romance of Lancelot Channing.

I can read them all. There is no time.

My glass is full for the third time.

Mrs. Noah still fixes lunch, same time every day...
Would you believe it's chowder day?

Ham is fishing off the stern, Noah lost with nothing left to do.
Hell, he can go below and fetch me slippers
and another bottle.

I lay aside the intro to the Rilke.
I'm dozing from the rum, the soft salt breeze, the tar fumes ...
I ...

Christ almighty what's that speck? Another ship...adrift...in
parallel.

It inches closer...I doze...wake up again...there it is...
Shit, it's big,
it's squat, it's wood...it's...the other Ark!

I didn't tell you there's another ark.
This one was customized for no surprises.

Just the things I like...time, scotch and a fine sound system

looping endless ricercares
from nasal stops
of a wheezing baroque organ.

Well Savannah and I split over the animals.

She wanted an ark with animals and I said no way.

She wanted tequila too...clearly not a favorite of mine.

There she is on deck all young and trippy
horsing around with zebras and giraffes

(that happy squad of mated friendly brutes)

her hair dyed every color of Old Noah's shining bow,
Her face tattooed with stars.

She is naked, twirling in a dance,
oblivious of the melting sun on her pale white skin
as baboons sway in time

to Ariana Grande

and the children,
naked too,
race up and down the deck...

It's golden-grove,
the Garden of frigging Eden in all that riot...I sing out

Ah Worldes Blis ne last no throwe
it wend and wit away anon!

Thu likest hony of thorn iwis!

Could you hear me over the gruff baboons? Who knows?

Yet I don't begrudge you child...you've earned it...
gather ye rosebuds in Beulah Land....

simply, inevitably...like the rhyme of womb with tomb.

Mine is the ark of stale and bitter wisdom and you had best
sail on.

Montagne

Emily Wells

digital photograph



Untitled

Kyle Au

35mm photography



Misty Falls

Myron King

photography



Informing the Bees

Connor MacNeil

“Bees were once often referred to as ‘little servants of God’ or ‘small messengers of God,’ names which meant they had to be accorded due respect.... If someone died, the bees had to be told ... If you failed to tell the bees about a death, the penalties could be severe.”

- Jane Struthers, *Red Sky at Night: The Book of Lost Country Wisdom*

Once there was a small village tucked deep in the Forest of Ornwood. The name of the village itself is not important. What is important is the people within, and the events that transpired here in a time of superstition. A time where people’s beliefs equaled their reality, and vice versa.

Everyone in the small country village agreed that the honey found on their doorsteps was the best anyone had ever tasted. Nobody knew where it came from, who made it, or why it was delivered every Sunday morning without fail. Not a single person in the village was concerned with such things. The honey was perfectly sweet, so satisfying, addictive even, that they were scared investigating would mean an end to their mysterious delicious treat. It was that precarious situation of miracles where if one were to delve too deeply, the charm would be spoiled and no more honey would come, like seeing something out of the corner of your eye and choosing to look directly at it only to see that it was nothing at all. And so nobody questioned it.

That is until one autumn Sunday when the last leaves had left their branches, little Annabelle, the local butcher’s daughter, professed to have seen the Bee Man. It was early morning

and Annabelle lay sleeping when a noise stirred her from her dreams. The noise sounded familiar in a way that should have been soothing but wasn’t. As she climbed out of bed, the feeling of cold floor against her toes jolted her awake enough to realize it sounded like how her mother would hum her to sleep. The only difference here was its aggressive tone and lack of a melody.

The noise came from outside. She stepped nimbly past her three sisters’ beds, tiptoeing so as to not squeak one floor-board, to the window. It was difficult to see much of anything in the dark grey-blue of the pre-dawn twilight but to her right she could just distinguish a figure coming around the corner of their barn toward her house. There was something odd about the silhouette, something insubstantial. It moved through the air as if parts of it were struggling to keep up, struggling to maintain form. As the shape approached her house the buzzing grew louder. She watched, frozen in place, as it climbed the steps of her porch and placed yet another jar down beside the door, replacing the empty one her mother had put out the day before. It descended the steps and headed in the direction from which it had come. And then, as if nothing had happened, it was gone. The silhouette, the hum. It was as though it had never happened. As if a switch had been turned from on to off, things were suddenly normal again. As the sun crested the distant hillside beyond their field, Annabelle regained control of her senses and ran around the house screaming that she’d seen the Bee Man.

Her parents didn’t believe her, nor did her sisters. But it was not just that they did not believe her. It was as if they were making a conscious effort not to believe her, which made it

all the worse. They didn't want the mystery found out and extinguished through its discovery, didn't want it ruined for them. Her parents warned her not to tell any of the villagers what she thought she saw but she was so convinced and angry, so confused at being doubted, that she simply needed to find someone who would believe her. She went around, stopping people on the road to tell them what she had seen. Each villager had the same reaction as her parents, however, with a few warning her not to go around telling people about this. Annabelle walked home, defeated and feeling utterly alone.

The week went by with an air of fragility as if something the villagers all cherished was in danger of breaking – if it hadn't done so already. Each day everyone went about their normal business plowing their fields, peddling their wares, but despite efforts to silence Annabelle, whispers had arisen in the village of “the little girl who had seen The Bee Man.” It made everyone nervous. And for the whole week the village felt as if they were simply doing things mechanically, automatically, while they anticipated the coming Sunday when the honey would come again. Annabelle was scared. She hadn't realized what she had started.

When Saturday night came, everyone was on edge, trying to muster as much luck as they could in the hopes that the honey would come again tomorrow morning. They used up every superstition – knocking on wood, crossing their fingers, shifting their bed so that they would lie facing south and even sleeping with horseshoes under their pillows. Each had their own boon.

But it was all for naught. When the morning came there was no honey. The villagers formed a mob with unsettling rapidity,

as if they had their pitchforks and lengths of rope ready by their bedsides just in case. In fact, they probably did. Forming one large cluster they marched to the butcher's house and demanded Annabelle.

She had locked herself in her room, terrified and shaking uncontrollably. Annabelle hadn't meant for this to happen. All she wanted was to let people know what she had seen, for people to believe her. Now she couldn't even be sure her parents would protect her from the hellish masses outside. These were people she had once considered friends, the happy faces she once knew as the local tailor, the storekeeper who would always sneak her a sweet for free, even the once-friendly faces of some of her school friends, now contorted into the very picture of rage, hatred, even bloodthirst. There came a knock on the bedroom door and the sound of her mother's voice.

“It's time to come out, Annabelle.” The voice was cold and unfeeling. Annabelle would never hear this voice hum her to sleep again.

The front door smashed open in a flurry of splinters and their home was filled with rabid villagers. Annabelle's bedroom door was next and tore like paper as the mob's intensity grew even more. The villagers grabbed Annabelle and took her to the village outskirts, toward the tree they had designated for that gruesome activity on which they agreed without needing words. The rope went up, caught the jutting limb, and fell back down.

Soon it was taut with the weight it was bearing below.

After it was over, the mob returned to their village. Shame began to grow in the hearts of them all. Nobody had the courage to look in the direction of the outskirts toward the gnarled

oak, whose branches bore but a single bitter fruit. It wasn't until the next morning the butcher and his wife had realized the full extent of what they had done. Guilt seeped into their minds and now they were shaking uncontrollably with the shock of their unspeakable act. They walked toward the tree to cut down their daughter and give her a proper burial, to face their act as a kind of penance.

When they got within sight of the tree, however, it was not the morbid silhouette of a tree and dangling body they saw, but that of the tree and an empty rope. It took all the strength they had left to keep advancing, terrified by what they might find. Who would have taken their child's body? They considered the question without finding an answer. Too tired: decrepit husks of their former selves in mind, body, and spirit.

That seemed to matter less and less however, as when they got closer they noticed the frayed end of the rope was dripping with honey. It was all they could do to resist catching a drop in their mouths.

Streetlight

Robynn Hoskins

It's late. I walk briskly down the lonely city street. My heels make a steady click-clack sound on the pavement with each step. I wish I had worn more comfortable shoes to work. The business district is always dead at night, everything in this area closes at 10:00 p.m. and the only sounds are the ruffling of tarps in the alleyways from the homeless. I turn my head away from the sound of the tarps as the sharp wind ruffles them and gnaws at my cheek. The temperature tonight makes it clear that winter is fast approaching and I am poorly dressed for it. I repress a shiver and draw my useless autumn jacket tighter around my shoulders.

I turn onto a dimly lit street. There is only one working streetlight on this road, and it makes the distance all the more daunting. Sky-high apartment buildings blot out the moon and loom over me with their many sets of glaring eyes. I unravel my arms where they had crossed over my chest from the cold and begin to wish again for more comfortable shoes. A loud noise from the side of one building. I turn and I stare hard at the spot the noise came from. I don't turn around—not daring to turn my back on the sound. I stare and I stare and I stare. An alley cat appears from the side of the building where the sound came from and I realize it must have gotten into someone's garbage. I steady my breath and turn around to continue my way home.

I become aware of him then. He is walking several feet behind me. His tread is heavy. I can tell he is large without even glancing back at him. Anxiously I pick up my pace and

I look ahead to the streetlight which is just metres away. I take my keys out of my pocket and I grasp two of the keys on the chain. One between the middle finger and the index. The other between the middle and the ring. I clutch them in my left fist, knowing that I throw a much stronger hook with my right. The right is already closed in a fist, thumb spread over my fingers so that I will not break them.

I have reached the streetlight. The heat of it pulsates down on me and I clench my teeth, dreading his approach. He brushes past me, no glance, no hesitation, no terrorizing anxiety. I envy him. I keep my keys in my fist, grasping them so tightly that it looks as though my hand is all flesh and no blood. I keep walking.

Death (Among Other Things)

Hastings Gresser

Two times I've met someone who told me they were dying of cancer. The first was when I was twelve and still messing around with Jordan. My mom was in the hospital at the time because she hit her head on a big flower pot, and I was living at Jordan's place because my father and I don't mix well if we spend more than a day around each other. Jordan and I were down at Wilke's Dam. It was around midnight. There's this hill that runs down to the water, and we had found some broken office chairs in someone's garbage and were racing them down the hill. That was about all we did back then, stuff to which attentive parents would have said no that's dangerous why would you do something stupid like that? We were kind of like free range chickens running around with our heads chopped off, banging into things.

Usually there's no one down there at night so you can yell and run around and be free like kids like to do. Around three in the morning the night fishers would sometimes show up, but they'd just get their gear and get into the dark water and lose themselves in their own form of freedom. Back then we spent a lot of time at Wilke's Dam and had a general acquaintanceship with most of the regulars, day or night. During the day it was populated with Asians fishing for dinner, and other young boys and girls being idiots. At night the old, retired fishermen came in pairs and groups of not usually more than three. Weekends were the most boring, since it would fill up with families and couples on nice leisure nature walks. Those kind of people don't like to see dirty kids swearing and break-

ing things and racing broken office chairs.

That particular night a new thing showed up. There was this man looking out onto the water, not moving. It was just us two and him and the sound of the water dropping from one elevation to another. It doesn't drown out other sounds, it becomes like air and you forget that it's there. The man paid no attention to us at first and we paid a little to him since it was a strange thing to see at that time of night. Just standing there. Staring. Not moving. Stillness in the dark. I don't remember why but we came kind of close to him and he started talking to us. I don't even really remember what we talked about at first. He commented on what we were doing and told us that he approved and to just enjoy life and not care about anything. We agreed with him. What twelve-year-old wouldn't? We asked what he was doing down there so late, and he said he was just trying to enjoy the little time that was left. Terminal cancer. Not much time. We told him we were sorry. What else was there to say? We were twelve. Cancer didn't matter to us. What even was cancer? We just kind of stood there, not making eye contact with him, unsure what to do.

Usually I don't hear it, but at that time I focused my attention on the water. I stood there and listened to the water and it became so loud that I thought my ears weren't working properly. I realized later in life that the man was probably doing the same thing, letting the sound remove the awkwardness of knowing you're going to die. He seemed cheerful, though, and that confused me. I'm not one to ask the hard questions, but if I was I would have asked him how he could smile in that situation. A guillotine blade dropping down on you in slow motion, so you can see and feel it slice through the flesh and

bone and whatever else is in your neck.

We stood there some more in silence, Jordan and I exchanging glances that both of us understood as uneasy and unsure and maybe a little scared but not really sure as to why. Things don't register in your head properly when you're young. The signal gets distorted. We inched away in the dark and went back to the office chairs. The man stared at the water a little while longer and then turned to leave, up the hill and into the night. As he walked away he shouted back at us to enjoy life. Jordan and I went on living and the sound of the dam became like air again.

After that cancer didn't come around for a few years. I was seventeen I think when it decided to give me a call again. My mom's head healed and the flower pot had been glued back together. I had given up my childhood freedom and was on course to becoming your typical anti-social narcissist who didn't care about anyone or anything and was sure that I had all the answers and everyone else was wrong, cruel, and just generally worthless. It was when Dylan, Garrick, Andre and I were hanging out a lot at McDonald's. Four or five times a week back then. Shaman came out that night too. He would always want to go up to the Subway that was half Subway half generic Pizza n' Chicken joint. It was up Colborne Street near Colby's Billiards, which was less of a pool hall and more of an AA meeting without the group circle or the anonymity. I think the Pizza n' Chicken half has closed down now and become a telephone company office or something. Anyways, we go up there and Shaman gets his sub and we sit around in the uncomfortable chairs and do whatever we did back then.

Probably banter on about how we're all right and everyone else was stupid for being normal. The usual conversation. No one liked going up there except Shaman. The place was tiny and the employees could always see you and hear what you talk about. It must have been around midnight again, because we always stayed at the McDonald's until the lobby closed at eleven-thirty.

We were talking and this guy walked in and he was piss drunk, fresh from the AA meeting. He comes in and starts talking to us about whatever and we just do that thing that you do when drunk people talk to you and you're not drunk so it becomes annoying instead of entertaining. The laugh and the oh yeah, yup, mmmm. And in all our minds we're just like "look at this fucking guy, what a terrible excuse for a human" cause that's how we all were. Back then I hated drinking. I thought it was only for the popular people that I thought were stupid and would eventually lose their popularity and end up as the guy slurring his speech in front of us. Out of nowhere he announced that he's going to buy us a pizza. We declined. I don't know why. I always decline things when people offer me them. I just assume they're doing it because they want something from me. The drunk didn't take no for an answer. He pushes and pushes and one of us just ended up saying sure okay whatever. Medium pizza extra cheese pepperoni and bacon. That'll be fifteen to twenty minutes. So we're sitting around waiting and this drunk guy's waiting too and he starts telling us all these stories about working far up north, how he had to fight off a polar bear without any weapons, and how he's lived this fantastical life. I thought about telling him that polar bears don't live up north, but I just did the half laugh

yup mmmm. The problem with people who talk to us is they can tell that we don't want to talk, but since it's always lonely people desperate for any attention they don't care. I wondered what made him want to talk us so badly. Some lowlife teenagers. The bottom of the rung. What could we offer him that he needed? People like that always find the one of us who will just sit there and listen without ignoring them, it happened all the time at McDonalds. Dylan got picked a lot, because he looks so docile and is so docile.

So there we were cramped into this four-person booth with five plus one big drunk man probably pushing three hundred pounds, and he's directing all his slurred speech at Dylan and the rest of us just sit there and laugh at his misfortune cause we all know the situation and Dylan looks at us and he knows it's the usual situation. The guy got right up in Dylan's face and I imagined the alcohol smell that must have been exploding out of his mouth and directly into my friend's nostrils. He switches from talking about his bear fighting to pointing out Dylan's acne, calling him "pizza face." He kept going on, like he had something to prove by doing it. Shaman Garrick Andrew and I just sat there with hands over mouths trying not to burst out laughing. Dylan hated whenever you pointed anything out about him. It was a thing for us to always point out the colour of his shirts or whenever he bought new shoes and he'd take a swing at us for it. He didn't take a swing at the drunk guy, though. Just let him continue on and about whatever it was he was continuing on about. The pizza came in the generic white square box that pizzas come in. Pizzas are always different depending on where you get them from, even if you get the same toppings, but the box it comes in never changes.

It reminds me of a coffin. He paid for it and we thanked him, and that's when he kinda got sombre and told us he was dying of cancer.

We didn't say anything. It was probably only a short moment, but there was this silence, which was weird since the guy had not stopped running his mouth since he came in. One of us said, "Oh, that sucks." I don't know who said it, it might have been me. I didn't think about the man at the dam Jordan and I met. They were different experiences, different times, different people. But in both cases I felt the need to remove myself from the situation. I just stuffed my mouth full of pizza, eating away at maybe the last kind gesture the drunk guy might have ever made. Not as poetic as listening to the water, but it got the job done. He started crying a little bit, and then, like it was nothing, bounced back and said goodbye with a big smile and a wave and out the door he walked, alone in the dark.

We agreed that the pizza was better than expected, and worth the annoying drunk cancer guy. We wondered if he even had cancer. Maybe it was just something he made up to get some sort of compassion from us. Either way, we didn't really feel much. We never really felt much back then. Walls of resentment and arrogance built up around us so we didn't have to deal with anything that we didn't want to deal with.

After the pizza was gone and out of our minds (even though our guts would spend some time digesting it) we walked home and whether the guy had cancer or not didn't matter. We had already forced it out of our heads.

bench

Kristen Thornhill
film photograph

