

PERSONA



2001

PERSONA

2001

Copyright ©*Persona* 2001. All Rights revert to authors and artists.

Persona is Southwest Texas State University's creative literary journal, published annually and compiled by student editors. Contributing authors and artists are students of Southwest Texas State University. *Persona* is funded by Student Service Fees, under the sponsorship of the English department.

Persona 2001 was printed by Aus-Tex Printing & Mailing.
The text was set using the font Bookman Old Style.

PERSONA STAFF

MANAGING EDITOR:

nancy mohn

ART DIRECTOR:

henry lyle iii

FICTION EDITORS:

anne-marie dewitt
katherine rosas
richard wright

FACULTY ADVISOR:

roger jones

POETRY EDITORS:

lisa mcbride
tomás morín
carter smith

PRINTER:

aus-tex printing & mailing

COVER ART:

meagan montgomery

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:

erika castaneda
julia drescher
bruce kalmick
elka karl
bob pomeroy
jennifer shaw

GATES-THOMAS COMMITTEE:

diane parkin-speer, chair
cyrus cassells
susan hanson
miles wilson

SPECIAL THANKS:

chris barnard
center for the study of the southwest
karen harrison
scott johnson
maria lombardo
felipa morris
michael painter

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ART

untitled

meagan montgomery** **cover**

house on the hill

daniel david tennant* **23**

eye of the soul

debra l. brooks **24**

africa mosaic

paul love-kretchmer **29**

untitled

daniel david tennant **30**

la guitarra

d. alejandro chapa **41**

don't cry

debra l. brooks **42**

used

agnes pennyweather **51**

hail mary

daniel david tennant **52**

FICTION

dust

scott mcpherson*** **9**

ned's chicken 'n waffles

trent smith **31**

all those things i forgot to say

a. wallace barker **43**

the villain

trent smith **53**

POETRY

i always wear a hat in babylon steve carlile***	20
a leaving julia drescher	22
drizzle bill gorton	25
iphegenia in the land of the external present chris martin	26
the song is silenced david vano	27
september rebecca reichardt	38
poem for skipping stones bill gorton	39
[untitled] david vano	40
mulching day in the yard, thanksgiving, 1989 chris martin	46
the blocks chris martin	47
the caretaker's tale chris martin	48
tepillah rebecca reichardt	49
untitled rob mccafferty	50
haiku cycle bill gorton	60
debra's child gopi kottoor	62

***winner of the gates-thomas award

**first place winner in the *persona 2001* art contest

*second place winner in the *persona 2001* art contest

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I cannot express how much I have truly enjoyed my tenure as editor of *Persona 2001*. This publication represents my first editing experience, and at the onset of this project I had no clue as to the amount of work required to put a successful journal together. Fortunately, my task was made easier by the exceptional *Persona 2001* staff, who willingly put in many long hours to ready *Persona 2001* for publication. In addition to reading through submissions, the staff assisted with publicity, and the process of gaining official student organization status for the journal.

One staff member in particular was especially helpful in readying the *Persona 2001* for publication; *Persona 2001* would not have been possible without my art director Henry Lyle III, or “Trey” as he is lovingly referred to by his close associates. Trey was instrumental in developing and perfecting the vision of *Persona 2001*. In addition to helping me achieve the “look” we sought after, Trey dealt closely with the printers and spent many hours studiously perfecting the layout. I am very happy with the presentation of this year’s *Persona*; Trey should be commended for doing such an excellent and professional job.

I would also like to thank the Center for the Study of the Southwest for allowing *Persona 2001* to use its facilities and equipment. Their generosity allowed *Persona 2001* to exist in a comfortable and supportive environment.

Finally, I would like to thank all of *Persona*’s contributors, because it is our contributors and their many creative talents that have made *Persona 2001* what it is. Beyond layout and design, a journal is only as good as its content and I’m especially proud of this year’s submissions.

With the completion of *Persona 2001*, I take my leave not only as editor but as a student of Southwest Texas State University as well. I exit this establishment proud to have worked with so many creative and talented individuals.

Nancy Mohn
Managing Editor

dust

scott mcpherson

A windmill stood silent in the wash of the moon as he passed under it. The night was shrouded in a mist peculiar to that time of year. A rare rain shadow had cascaded down from the distant Rockies early that morning. It carried with it the frigid mountain moisture that fought so much with the raging heat of the summer months that a mighty steam had spread throughout the land. The mist plastered Christopher's hair to his forehead as his damp clothes swished together with each steady step.

The air was cleansed of all the things of 1945, leaving only the crisp tang of a tradition that had lived deep in the land for more than a hundred years. His spirit grabbed these revived fragrances in fistfuls and pulled it back through his nostrils. The familiarity halted his walk across the field. He stood in the breeze for a moment savoring the sensual phantoms that now permeated his every sense. He tasted the melting, grainy juices of a fresh pear, the sound of cool water spluttering onto the hard-baked ground from a hand pump echoed in his ears, and in the place between his brain and skull he saw the image of a young girl in a faded sundress dancing barefoot in the thistle-down.

He blinked stupidly at the little yellow dog that wagged its tail impatiently at him. Christopher moved the green pack on his back to sit squarely in between his shoulders, and with an affirming breath continued his journey towards the distant halos of light. The dog trotted ahead at a tripod gait, its gimp leg never touching the ground. The lights became clearer in the fog and slowly they grew window frames, and the windows grew whitewash boards and the whitewash boards grew doors, shutters, and a porch with an aging man sitting in a wicker chair, a pipe protruding from his tightly sealed lips.

"Did they come for me?" Christopher rested his thumbs around the pack straps, and stood in the small yard of the house. The old man leaned back in his wicker chair. The night was bright enough to make out the familiar face.

"Most of us thought you'd show up."

"Did they come, Mr. Cheavers?"

"Bout two months back." The small dot of the pipe fire flared for a moment before the man continued. "Yeah, they came, some in Greens, some in suits. They must want you pretty bad. They looked everywhere, even searched a few houses, asked a lot of questions. Of course, no one knew where you were. They left numbers in case you came back."

The voice Christopher knew so well was hard to read. Christopher stood for a moment, deciding whether or not to go back to the train tracks and follow them right back out of the town.

"Still read?" Mr. Cheavers asked.

"Whenever I have the chance. Still write?"

"Gave it up. Read so much it seemed like there were no more words left. All those damn people greedily soaking up all the words like wine spilt in the streets. There's only so much raw material to work with."

Christopher smiled. "Still teach?"

"Closed the school down."

"It was bound to happen."

"Folks have to live."

"Yes, they do."

Christopher walked onto the porch, shrugging off the heavy pack and leaned up against the banner rail, lighting a cigarette. Both of them were silent for a moment, watching the mist rise like silk white sheets from a nearby watering hole, watching the smoke rise from their own mouths and tear apart into the night's sky. A dove cooed for the partner it had lost in the heat of the day.

"It's so quiet here. You used to be able to hear people chattering on their porches, laughing, singing."

"Most of the people around here moved on, like your parents. I half-thought you would have headed for them."

"I hopped a train in Santa Fe. It happened to be heading in this direction. I walked the rest of the way from Oklahoma City, working along the way. Besides, the men would be waiting for me in California."

"Hmmm."

"I just walked through the Ocean...sad."

"It's stopped being the Ocean before you left. The wheat just come in shriveled, little stalks. Land just doesn't give anymore; it's spent. Sally and I would have left if the people that still live

here didn't need her so bad."

Silence again.

"Where's May?"

There was a deep grunt followed by a hacking cough. Christopher turned to see Mr. Cheavers wiping some blackish liquid from the corner of his mouth with a handkerchief.

"She's here."

There was a doorknob in Christopher's throat. "Can I see her?"

"She isn't like you remember, Christopher."

And he remembered everything about her. Both of them five in the thistledown, throwing rotting mountain laurels at her at thirteen, sneaking out of church to kiss for the first time under an overgrowth of honeysuckle, professing their dreams to each other, she an artist, he simply following her. And he thought of his final image of her. He was in the back of his father's car, leaving Weaver's Row for the first time, the draft notice folded in his back pocket. It had been early morning, strange to see her shrinking in the back window as they drove away. So strange, she was crying, wrapped in the rising sun, burning in the dawn.

Mr. Cheavers spoke with measured words. "I want you to understand, New York did strange things to her."

Christopher wasn't listening. She had told him in the last letter he received that she was going to New York to paint. And now she had returned, returned as he had. Christopher felt his nose bridge tingle. Everything he sought after was here, and yet so many had left. So many were walking into the lion's den. But May was here. He and May were so close, safe from things bound to come.

"I suppose you will need a job?" Mr. Cheavers asked through another hacking cough.

"I'd be much obliged, thought I might help you at the school house, but I could go to work pushing the plow." Christopher was caught off guard by the subject change.

"There isn't much reason to plow."

Mr. Cheavers stood and walked off the porch with shoulders that had become even more hunched over the years, the pipe dangling from his mouth. Christopher followed him behind the two-story house out to the barn. Mr. Cheavers pulled the doors open. There was the sound of things scurrying for cover. He banged around for a moment before finding a lantern, lighting the flue with a single match from his shirt pocket.

"You can sleep here, I'll have work for you tomorrow."

"Would it be all right if I came and met May tomorrow?"

Mr. Cheavers brought the lantern to his face, the red setting fire to the membranes in his transparent nostrils. "She isn't like you remember. I'm trying to warn you. She's sick. Sally isn't doing well, watches over her, gives 'er honey with sawdust to coat, to soothe the shakes, but it doesn't help. Most of the time she shakes, moans, screams, says crazy things. Her forehead is so hot at times that water dries out of the washcloths Sally tries to wash her head with. May got so sick she lost her baby a few weeks back, passed it dead from her body."

Christopher staggered, the little yellow dog yelping as he stepped on it.

"Baby? Who is the father?"

"Mmmm...New York...it changed her. She keeps talking, begs us to give her things we haven't heard of. Sally found an old bottle of laudanum at the bottom of her medicine chest, seems to stop May's shaking for a while. It's something she caught in New York, forced her to come home with no money, hungry."

Christopher felt like there was a loose shot rattling around under his sternum.

There was the distant call of a train whistle, and Mr. Cheavers became more hunched, and the light danced around the rotting wooden plank of the barn as the lantern sat in his slightly trembling hand. No more whistles followed.

"I want you to know I don't blame you for what you've done. You were the first to go, but Weaver's Row lost five strong hands to the war. I don't get along so well, and Sally's been preoccupied, so you can work and pick up the slack. We'll pay you, and you'll get room and board. Breakfast is at sun-up."

Mr. Cheavers handed him the lantern, turned, and stopped in the frame of the doorway, staring at nothing and something all at once. He walked out, his head craned at one of the windows on the top story. Christopher knew it was May's room. The crippled dog lunged onto the feather mattress lying on the ground, and Christopher extinguished the lantern. His joints cracked as he eased down next to the dog. He lay with his arms under his head, staring up into the darkness, feeling lost. His mind made up scenarios as to why Mr. Cheavers might lie to him about May. He felt scared. Several times he wanted to relight the lantern. He swore a large, inky black creature was easing down from the loft for him. But there was nothing, and in

his dreams he saw the same ominous cloud that he always saw and awoke with that same pang of guilt.

The little yellow dog stood as a cowering sentry, whimpering at the open door. Somewhere, lurking in the air, there were screams, but they ceased so quickly that they seemed to only be remnants of his nightmare. It was still dark outside, and Christopher lay there, covered in a nervous sweat. And just as the door had been empty, there was now a figure standing there. It was a being with arms that dangled from a skinny torso that was wrapped in a white cotton nightgown: a woman. Her feet were caked with mud, and in her hands was a clump of something wrapped in a blanket.

Christopher propped himself up on his elbows, careful to be still so as not to scare off the fragile creature.

“May?”

She turned and walked slowly back to the house, her stride far more confident than her appearance. Christopher thought to follow her, but instead watched her disappear around the house. No more sleep came that night.

Time passed. Outside there was an early blue haze, but the sun hadn't yet risen. He took a Bible from his bag and buried himself.

“What're you reading that for? There is so much else to read.”

Mr. Cheavers stood before him, having walked in while Christopher was lost in the reader's trance.

“Just thinking, looking.”

The two of them walked up to the whitewashed house.

“About?”

“About man and God, and which one will win the race to Rapture.”

“Hmmm...hell of a thing to think to about in the morning. Seems man needs God for Rapture.”

“Not anymore.”

The screen door thwacked behind them as they padded into the kitchen. Christopher glanced back to see the little yellow dog pacing at the screen, its tongue lolling. There was bacon cooking. Sally stood at the stove. A sundress was stretched around her; its floral pattern pulled to ridiculous caricature. She didn't speak but set two plates on the table with two slices of bacon each.

“Sally got a pig haunch from a family she helped out. Whole family down with the flu, the mean flu, the one that kills. She

saved them all; they insisted we take the haunch as payment.”

Sally looked at both of them for a moment. Her face was strained. Christopher thought that it wasn't so much that she was fat, but that her skin had given up on her and hung sulking around her body. She walked out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. Christopher heard her footsteps on the floor above as he and Mr. Cheavers sat down. Mr. Cheavers folded the bacon strips in half and stuck them in his mouth. He sucked on them while he read from a book with a gray cover. Christopher ate one slice of bacon, the fat bubbles bursting between his teeth, and palmed the other piece.

“Got to get the pests out of the crops today. Everybody gets together this time a month to take out the damn things. They eat the wheat stubs.” Mr. Cheavers spoke without looking up from his book.

“Okay,” Christopher said.

“Did you hear her last night?”

“Didn't hear anything, slept most of the night.”

“Hmmm...she screams at night when the laudanum wears off, sometimes she wanders.” Mr. Cheavers let the statement hang in the air. “Well, let's go.”

Mr. Cheavers stood up, a piece of bacon dangling from his mouth, and shut the book. He pulled his suspenders up around his shoulders and walked out of the house with Christopher following behind. The dog nearly bit off Christopher's hand as he surreptitiously gave it the last piece of bacon. They walked to the old rusted Ford that stood behind the barn. Christopher opened the door. It squealed on its hinges. The dog jumped in before Christopher could stop him. Mr. Cheavers smiled absently as Christopher climbed in, embarrassed. The motor turned, coughed, sputtered and came to a knocking start. The gears lurched into one another and they drove from the house, onto the dirt road that led to what used to be the Ocean.

“Where did you get the dog?”

“Found him on the tracks. Think he got hit. The back leg won't heal.”

Mr. Cheavers shook his head. “Damn trains.”

The dirt road took them far into the stubbled fields, and occasionally they would stop at a house or a shack, and a man or two men or a man and his sons would hop into the high-planked walls of the truck bed. Most carried logs or steel pipes. Some had rifles.

Mr. Cheavers cut off from the dirt road and drove right into the wheat field. The dirt had no roots to anchor it. It flew up around them. Christopher felt the truck go over a rise. The dust engulfed them, blinded them, but Mr. Cheavers shifted to fourth gear, building speed. Slight bumps. Christopher wondered what they were driving over. There were a few rifle shots. The dust cleared for only a moment, but it was enough for Christopher to see the ground moving. The truck stopped.

"I'll round as many as I can back to you."

Christopher realized this was his cue to get out. He opened the door, placed a foot down. There were several muffled squeals. He looked down, and a never-ending swarm of jackrabbits was herding under his feet. The little yellow dog, anxious to be out of the truck, scrambled out of the door and was carried away with yelps and barks by the swarm.

Christopher leapt from the truck, his boots crushing the necks of whatever jackrabbits scurried beneath him. The men had unloaded from the truck and were clubbing the ground furiously. One man grabbed the animals by whatever body part, lifted them, hacked them with a long knife and threw them down again. His work was quick, methodical, like pulling weeds. Christopher searched for the dog; saw it covered in dust, lying motionless as rabbit after rabbit clawed over it. Christopher sloshed over, purposefully kicking through the swarm, picked up his dog, and continued to kick. The dog was shaking, and Christopher wished he had a weapon, instead he was forced to content his anger by kicking every animal backwards. He kicked so hard that some rabbits' heads flew from their bodies.

For the rest of the day, Mr. Cheavers drove the truck around in a huge circle, forcing hundreds of rabbits to double back on themselves and head back for the group of men. The rabbits cried. Screamed. The fur flew in the air like daffodil seeds. It stuck to the sweat that lathered through the men's clothes in the waving heat. As the sun sank, Christopher's legs could no longer lift his boots; his trousers were covered in blood. The truck pulled to a stop, and the dust cleared. What had been teeming with life earlier that day was now a landscape shaped by the contours of the mounds of dead.

Was this what it would be like? Christopher thought.

His boots sucked, sucked, sucked through the split bodies and things that would never be again. The men were loading into the truck, and Christopher realized they hadn't said a word

all day. It wasn't sport for them; it was survival, they were preserving their way of life.

"Shame we can't eat them." Mr. Cheavers shook his head as Christopher climbed into the car, the dog still shocked and trembling in his arms. "All this rabbit could feed Weaver's Row for months, but there just isn't any meat on them. Just ears, fur, and a stomach."

Christopher felt the stiffness for the first time in his biceps and forearms. He hadn't realized how tightly he had been clutching the dog throughout the day. The truck tires slipped in the rabbit muck. They dropped off each man and were home well past dark. Mr. Cheavers brought Christopher his dinner in the barn; he also had a pig's hoof and a bowl of water.

"Sally told me to tell you that this is for your dog." Mr. Cheavers left him alone.

Christopher munched on the biscuits smothered in gravy, and tried to coax the dog to nibble on the hoof. But the dog's eyes were shut tight. The dog had survived the slaughter, survived the masses screaming over him. He lay there tired and shaking. Christopher stroked the dog and perused Revelations for a while. His mind was on May. He climbed the ladder to the loft and stared out the barn window. He had a sense she would be there, and she was. Naked, she sat at a desk by the window, naked, painting directly onto the desktop; her head propped on one arm, oblivious to the world.

May suddenly stood up, completely revealed; her chin thrust outward, a finger beckoning him. He had never seen this, never seen her, all of her, and he didn't know how he got from the barn to her room without waking anyone in the dark house. But he was standing in the middle of her room, the same room they had played in as children. And yet it was different. A row of ten paintbrushes hung upside down from a coat hanger on the doorknob like a wind chime. There were paintings of bizarre, colorful abstractions painted directly on the wall plaster. There wasn't an inch of white left in the room.

She moved towards him, her arms swaying like thin reeds in a shallow pond. She was still beautiful, her pale skin almost iridescent, her nudity natural and powerful.

As she reached for his suspenders and pulled them down, he noticed the small, red ant-bite like dots that ran up and down her veins. He recognized it from the men he had fought with. The soldiers used it to escape the pain and the killing. He

wondered what she had used it for in New York.

He held her arm. It was light as cork. "Who did this to you?"

Her lips parted and the words were wraiths in the air. "Nothing was done to me. I discovered. I learned. I needed. I filled. There were lumps, Christopher. Lumps under the carpet that I wanted to get at, to paint, but the damn carpet was nailed down. But I met a man. He showed me, gave to me..."

"Left you."

"I'll wait. My soul belongs to him; it isn't mine anymore."

"What happened? I came for you, came here. Thought maybe we'd be safe here."

She hiccupped a laugh, and poured a teaspoon from the bottle of laudanum on the desk. The relish on her face as her mouth closed over the spoon disgusted him.

She set the bottle and spoon back down. "You didn't run from something, you expected to run to something. But there isn't anything here anymore. But it was luck, luck that we would both fail in the world at the same time. You'll have to leave after this, but leave after..."

In the space of a few seconds, Christopher felt jealousy expand inside of him, a black, lumpy cancer spreading throughout his stomach, its tendrils latched onto his ribs, its large, clawed hand swirling around his lungs, shinnying up his throat, and nestling in his head. It scratched and knocked at his skull.

"That son of a bitch."

She simply smiled and pulled him close to her. "After tonight, just for the way things were supposed to be. Then you have to go."

Her eyes were milky, bloodshot like red cracks in a windshield. May popped his trousers open between her thumb and forefinger. As she pulled his pants down, the crusted, rabbit blood sprinkled the floor. She unraveled him, removing every layer of anything that wasn't his body. And he let her, let her wispy fingertips dance around him, draw him to the bed, lure him on top of her.

As he rocked inside of her he felt a pop in his nose bridge. He felt warm, shadowed liquid drop from him onto her face. It came in splatters, like liquid cow shit, hitting her cheeks, her lips, hammering her left eye shut. He snorted deeply; the blood was pulled back but came again. He made a movement to slip off her, but her hands grasped his buttocks and slammed him back in. She gasped and tilted her head back, catching a stream

of red in her mouth. She controlled him, bringing him so far in that he felt only a warm, liquid space. He let out an awkward, staccato grunt, and he was finished. Instantly, there was regret, shame, guilt, but only for him. May merely brushed her thumb across his blood-wet nose and painted a stripe across his forehead. He got up, got dressed, and stared at her a moment expectantly. She didn't pay him any attention, just gazed at her painting on the wall. For her, he had gone before he had left the bed.

He noticed the clump in the corner wrapped in a sheet. It was a familiar shape. He stared at May coolly; she had retrieved from the soil the only token of her love, her only love. Christopher opened the window, and scrunched through it. He dropped from the window and collapsed at the ground, needing to feel the pain that shot through his legs. He left her lying there in his burgundy blood; a harsh contrast on her cold, alabaster face.

He went to the barn, holding a handkerchief to his nose, to collect his things. He slung the bag around his shoulder and walked out, leaving the little yellow dog. It was dead. He walked onto the dirt road, towards the distant railroad tracks. Ten minutes later the old truck pulled up next to him. Mr. Cheavers motioned at him. He climbed in warily.

"The men pulled up to the house ten minutes ago. They said someone called you in earlier today. Sally's trying to keep them busy, but they saw me leave. They'll head down this road any minute."

Christopher knew who had called him in. He supposed he should feel betrayed, but he was spent. The one place in the world that he thought would be safe was polluted, tainted, dead. There was a train whistle. Christopher turned to Mr. Cheavers.

"I didn't run because I was scared, though I think I'm a coward. I been in it five years, went all over the world. Saw bad things. Eventually, I got shot, was reassigned stateside, New Mexico. I saw the land melt. It's going to change everything, going to destroy the world. I thought I'd be safe here, with May, but there isn't any safe place you can go. I just thought I should tell you."

"Hmmm." The truck stopped at the tracks, the trains slithered by like a great snake in the dark. Mr. Cheavers hacked out a cough.

"The trains slow down near towns, hunting. You know what's in those stomachs don't you?" he said, pointing to the boxcars.

Christopher knew.

"Men, thousands of men. Sounds strange, 'cause these tracks only have freights," Mr. Cheavers stared out the windshield. The sound of the train's cadence on the tracks surrounded them.

"But they aren't alive. They're dead, dead from fighting, dead from the war."

"I know."

"It ain't a war they wanted to fight, but they ain't the brains, they're the meat."

"True."

"I remember when the trains were sweet, happy, filled with wheat, grain, linens and crates full of peaches. Now they got the taste for blood, got the blood lust." He talked so fast that spit shot out onto his hands and the steering wheel. "The country's filled with 'em, moving graveyards criss-crossing the country, steel beasts that are always hungry."

Christopher stepped out of the truck, shut the door, and it drove away. He began running alongside the beast, zigging up the rock embankment of the tracks, falling, zagging back down, the rocks kissing away the skin on his palms. Several railcars passed him by before he was running again, his legs flying in wild tantrums. He laced a finger around a low ladder rung, two fingers, a hand. He hoisted himself, careful to avoid the intake of the wheels. A man could be sucked under if he wasn't careful. Christopher looked around, the world grabbed at him. Simple from here, up the ladder, clamber hand-and-nail across the roof, open the grain hatch and fall inside. But he didn't move. He closed his eyes, he didn't want to go inside the stomach, listen to the accusations of a hundred dead soldiers stacked in pine boxes. He caught the smell of thistledown in the roaring wind. His hands let go of the ladder.

Winner of the Gates-Thomas Award for poetry

i always wear a hat in babylon

steve carlile

Car-driven predators stalk
night-gray streets, searching sidewalks.
I feel their eyes behind tinted glass.
The diluted muck mist spray
of their wheels, settles
on my face and lip. It
tastes like contamination.
Walking, I pass
crumbling, graffitied storefronts with black windows.
Out through an open door, rhythmic noise
layered with masquerade laughter
drifts on blue neon. A woman,
all legs, solicits
used coffins for sexual favors. Ahead,
a bruised silhouette in a darkened doorway,
the red glow of his cigarette, like a Cyclops winking,
calls out to me—*Hey you*—
Look forward.
Keep moving.
Make no eye contact.
Ignore the shouts.
It's not the shouts,
it's the whispers—
those floating, invisible whispers,
thought mines
hanging in the air.
They're everywhere.
Digital reflections
on a gray-green screen, singing
sadly invasive love songs, with
words as big as walls, and a

message as subtle as the yellow
flashing LED readout, there
in your entertainment center,
remaining long
after the images
are gone.
Whispers have no fear of us—
cleverly
they disguise themselves
as original conception,
internalized.
I think.
I feel.
I want.
I need. Need. Need!
—that was a close one,
very close. For a moment there
I almost believed. Surely,
the seduction of a man's soul, that
eternal record of his being,
is treacherous business.
Thank god for those homeless angels,
sitting on street corners,
eating whispers
with unwashed hands.

a leaving

julia drescher

His smell
still in the sheets,
a jungle of his shoes to wade through,

and I,
the embittered blue widow,
contemplate the fingers.

Near the nightstand
my uterus lies unused,
a raisin.
The hunger spreads,

a thorn between my breasts
is planted.
I lie down

naked and pearled.

Second Place Winner in the *Persona 2001* Art Contest

house on the hill

daniel david tennant



eye of the soul

debra l. brooks



Art

drizzle

bill gorton

Stop sign is a fish
hooked, glistening with sweat
across the black street

iphegenia in the land of the external present

chris martin

The days are gone when your father's ceiling topped you off.
You will not replace the spoils of war.
One will speak no more of the you that you know,
some will carry you to other lands, but now
step forward, he calls: *go gently*.
You come to break
the squalid nightly hands which game the hours by,
beat one another in tents, claw a man to quick relenting.
These folds, this singular brow.
You are stone, child. These men have grown
up from the soil armed, and too will soon die.
Will soon fix your neck, upend you,
as they themselves choke.
You will not wipe the spit from your
cheek or straighten your robes.
Fold your hands, daughter.
Bring libations for those who fled anarchy to build it anew.

the song is silenced

—*Apollo mourns the death of Orpheus*

david vano

I.

Hands, I have my grief.
Deep edges of a face and a shadow.
That other self will not do. The hours
of looking at the instruments

of lavender, bitterness, red oak.
Roses that mourn from the thought
of darkness within the face.
Not surprising the invention of a tree

and a dulcimer the poet mirrors. The earth.
The earth. Three times, the face colorless
then darker, then lavender. The tongue
quiet inside.

II.

The hand also has its dream.
Women who upon raising their arms
weep from the harmony of their hatred
and the poet's misfortune. A hollow

voluted body and two curved arms joined
by a yoke now marred at the river's edge
of darkness. No echo in the man. No longer
a voice or euphony serving to avoid a lapse

in the desire for the lover. The dream
is for the hand to raise the dead. The tongue.
The dream is for a song to reach further,
the ear to murmur departure of point
which lies motionless in the riverbed.
The dream is in the severed hand.

III.

Sweet torso in ruins. No one comes near the river
 to wash the blood and hatred from their bodies.
 The poet's tongue murmuring, *It is grief. It is grief.*
 The feet that had stepped into song now mulched

by the plow of madness. A severed hand left to dissolve
 into the earth. The whole forest resounds the bitterness,
 the snake striking the dulcimer strings, the stones moving
 like swans in red currents. That I would become the god

of unbounded grief in this dark song. That I would call
 from the shadows of the river a breath of stone to embrace
 the tongue and the face. *It is a dream. It is a dream.*
I must dream on.

IV.

A thousand eager wings I hear beating
 from a deep shelter of light on the river.
 Silence. And then the trickle of water.

A swan's torso ascends from the red ruins
 like the mute joy of a man assuming to be a god.
 O, dull rose bill, be the poet's tongue

illuminated by the wingbeat hum in the distance,
 and perhaps, I will be a child again
 listening for the webbed feet forming out of the mulch.

A feathered body dreams of light lavender
 on oak and water lapping on the bank.
 The S-curved neck passing through light,
 whitening the river, dripping.

africa mosaic

paul love-kretchmer



untitled

daniel david tennant



ned's chicken 'n waffles

trent smith

When she thought that I wasn't looking, she'd sing. Her face contorting and her voice lifting and dipping at the peaks and valleys of the artist's voice sliding through the car stereo. She wasn't driving the car anymore. She was somewhere else, gliding on a tire swing, leaning back, eyes closed, trying to touch the sky with her toes.

I watched. She noticed. A little bit of color splashed onto her cheeks. She looked at the dashed yellow line zipping underneath the left side of the car, then back at me, with her flashlight smile. I blushed, too, and pretended that my shoelaces needed straightening, if only to misdirect her attention from the fever melting my forehead and my beating heart, which could surely be seen pulsing beneath my thin part-cotton-part-polyester shirt.

Because of the awkward silence, we welcomed the sound of an already-dead squirrel or cat or rock that acted as a speed bump to one of the tires. We both laughed and took abbreviated glances across the console. Her hand slipped into my side of the car and reached to the glove box for a new CD, the pinky finger of her hand grazing my denim knee slightly on the way back. She was graceful; I felt stupid.

While the prospect of sixteen hours of car travel with a total stranger should have awakened my dormant sense of adventure and lust for life, it did not. I opposed the trip from the beginning. I've never been too comfortable with people that I haven't known for a few months, least of all women. Yet, my friend, who in one afternoon managed to both wreck my car and arrange a ride for me to Chicago, informed me that my chauffeur was a woman. I've never been too swift with the opposite sex. I get clumsy. My wit escapes me. So, like I already mentioned, I opposed the trip.

My pal chided me for several hours, maybe just to keep me from stewing about my car. He promised to take care of the damage two paychecks after next and bring it to me a week before the first firework popped. For lack of a better excuse than that I was afraid I wouldn't be able to fill the sixteen hours with anything but silence, I finally agreed. Sixteen hours with a

strange girl. Sure, I had some material—some likes, dislikes, and views, but sixteen hours was a lot to fill. I just hoped she'd sleep, take a handful of sleeping pills, and pass them to me when she revived, ready to take the wheel.

I first met Marla the day of the trip—sixteen hours in the car, sixteen hours of awkward moments, sixteen hours home. My friend had told me her name was Kimberly. But when I introduced myself to her, greeting her by name, she crossed her eyes in a funny way, furrowed her brow, and looked behind her to find the phantom Kimberly miming her expressions. I scolded my good buddy regardless, but I knew why he didn't tell me her name. Marla, the name, when you say it, comes out a little like cottage cheese. It sounds butch, rough, or manly in a way. His quick-working little brain must have figured that I might balk at such an unpleasant name; I might imagine her as the only female linebacker on the college football team and decide to crash at his apartment all summer rather than spend sixteen hours with Marla Hulga Brown.

Of course, her name wasn't Marla Hulga Brown, but Marla Simmons, and she was anything but unpleasant. Unimposing was the word that kept coming to mind during the first few minutes of our trip. After the name mix-up, she shook my hand casually, not with her knuckles pointing skyward like so many of the dainties that I'd shaken hands with before. She gripped, pumped, and released.

Her dress was casual, too. Jeans (I never saw a brand), one of those two-toned (green and white) dugout baseball tees, and a pair of old white-turned-gray tennis shoes. Her shirt read "whimsy" in a familiar baseball-style cursive font across a nice-sized pair of breasts. I tried not to read her shirt, but I did, over and over. Whimsy. Whimsy. Whimsy.

The short trip to the freeway was awkward. I fiddled with the seat, the seatbelt, glanced at the digital clock on the dash, saw the time change from 6:59 to 7:00, looked away, looked at my feet, glanced at Marla, looked out the window.

"So, tell me about yourself, sonny." She took the tone of a beauty-parlor granny. She grinned.

"What's to tell?"

"C'mon. You've got a clean slate here. I don't know anything about you except what your buddy told me, which isn't much. He tried to convince me that your name was Gaylord Sneed, but I knew better. So, go on. Give me some insight into all that is

you, mysterious car companion.”

“I’m, uh, studying—” I tried.

“Hang on. Let me rephrase.” She was studying me between checking the rearview and the road. “You get one sentence. Put it in a nutshell for me. Not that I’m not interested, but let’s buy a frame before we hang your picture on the wall.”

“One sentence?” I questioned, doubting her intent.

“One sentence.” She was laughing behind her smile, not in an insulting way. She was just pleased with herself, I guessed. “Two sentences, and I’ll push the Passenger Eject button.”

I thought while a song whined to an end. Another song started, played, ended.

“C’m on.” She was still in a light mood, but I feared her patience would wear thin. I imagined my dusty seat jetting above the clouds, releasing a moth-eaten parachute, and falling to the ground like a chicken waking from a magnificent dream.

“It’s not so easy, you know, to try to sum up one’s entire existence with a subject and a verb.” I offered.

“Well, you should already know the subject, and you can use conjunctions if need be.” Her smile was threatening to explode into little bursts of light.

“Funny.” I shook my head. “Why don’t you try it?”

“I wish I could fly.”

I saw her without her clothes that night at the hotel—we had decided to share a double. That morning in the car, watching her sing to herself, to the radio, to no one, I had seen her naked for the first time—defenseless, unguarded. She didn’t strike me as the kind of girl that blushes often, but she blushed when she saw me staring at her singing, mid-chorus, brows lifted.

Not a trace of even the pinkest shade of red reached her cheeks when I walked into the room and saw her undressed for the shower. She stopped at the sound of the door swinging free, turned, and looked me in the eyes.

She had asked me to leave while she showered, to give her at least thirty minutes. She likes to unwind, she had explained. I should have at least knocked. I didn’t.

I walked to the office, bought a soda, and walked right back up the stairs to the room. She didn’t blush, but what blushing had escaped her had made up for itself on my face. She continued to look me in the eyes for the seconds that stretched into an

unrecognizable unit of time. I took one step in, looking down. The soda can felt heavy in my hand, like a grenade. Maybe I could have thrown the can down and made the whole thing disappear. She didn't seem mad, though. While my eyes wandered, her eyes stayed fixed on mine.

On her side, just above where her hand swung next to her pale hip, a pink ribbon scar tore across her otherwise flawless skin. I traced the scar with my eyes. Very aware of my body, I had to physically check to see that I wasn't tracing the scar in the air with my finger—one eye closed like one might do to crush the moon with a thumb and finger.

A pang of Protestant guilt stung my side as if her healed wound had become a fresh cut on mine.

"Sorry, I was just going to see if you wanted some waffles." I paused and swallowed, trying to sound casual. "There is this all-night place around the other side of the building, and I could bring you back some if you want."

She clicked on a smile that forced me to squint and turn away.

"No, I'm okay." She looked down and then back at me, a strand of her brown hair falling over her eye. "But you get some if you want."

Waffles. I was lucky she didn't sneak to the car in the middle of the night and leave me halfway between school and home. Sadly, approaching a stark naked woman with a proposition of waffles wasn't the stupidest thing I'd ever done. Sometimes I tell myself that it was.

Lying in bed that night, it occurred to me that I had nothing to offer this woman, yet I ached for her affection—even the slightest sign. I looked across the wide aisle of carpet separating our two beds, wishing the space would shrink and shrink and shrink until we were lying next to each other, face up, staring at the ceiling. I'd turn over on my side, running my finger over and down her scar, touching her little imperfect perfection. We'd wake at noon, dance bare-chested to "Blue Suede Shoes," shake our hips like Elvis, run from the hotel room, and run bare-footed across soft grass.

In the morning, Marla woke me up with a flying elbow drop from her not-quite-queen-sized bed to mine. I hadn't heard her getting ready, probably because she traded in her blow dryer and makeup for a frayed and faded orange baseball hat and movie-star sunglasses.

“Get up. I’m hungry.” She shook the bed with her knees and hands.

I pulled the covers over my head, shielding my eyes from the bright sun and her chest. Bent over the bed, her shirt did little to conceal her shape. I took one more peak, though, before she rolled off the bed feigning a severe case of hunger pains.

“Must...have...waffles. Can’t...last...much...longer. Must...” She made a gurgling sound and a bit of drool slid from the side of her mouth. The drool must have been an accident because she was laughing herself to tears.

I hated that she mentioned waffles. I wondered if she meant to belittle me with some sort of sick sarcasm or simply put the incident aside with casual joking. I tried to think of another place to eat. There was a Pizza Hut inside the gas station across the street, but that hardly seemed appropriate.

After a couple more minutes of prodding and poking she managed to drag me out of bed like a mother might do to her stubborn high schooler. I showered, leaving the door unlocked. Water running over me, I wished she’d come in. Even if only to play a prank on me, I wanted her to come in. Flush the toilet, kiss me. She didn’t.

We took the short stroll to Ned’s Chicken ‘n Waffles mid morning. While I showered, Marla fashioned a “Yell at a homeless person—\$1” sign she had made with the help of a piece of cardboard and a permanent marker. She held it up to passing cars as we walked; people honked and laughed. Marla laughed. I looked down, hoping we wouldn’t get in trouble.

Ned’s was the sort of swanky place where truck drivers and Jaguar motorists alike could slather their faces with grease and syrup. In the front of the restaurant/rest stop, t-shirts and postcards featured a cartoon chicken holding a plate of waffles dripping with syrup. The head of the chicken was a caricature of who I assumed was Ned, the portly guy behind the cash register. From the look of his immodest shirt and stained apron, which I couldn’t quite decide the color of (it had patches of red sprinkled with browns and yellows and steaming greens), Ned looked like he’d been wrestling a sweat monster back in the kitchen and managed to get the beast in a head lock. I thought I could see the stink rising off his back.

A nice looking girl no older than Marla showed us to a booth by the window; she informed us that Ned would be with us shortly.

"Ah, the Ned. We're getting the royal treatment, huh?" Marla said playfully.

I pointed out a rather large woman in the corner who was eyeing her tall plate of waffles like it was a Picasso—afraid to get too close, afraid to spoil the art.

After a few more minutes of awkward joking, Ned waddled to our table. I thought that I smelled him before I saw him. Marla leaned forward on her elbows and welcomed Ned with that same smile that I wanted to wake up to every morning.

"Welcome to Ned's. I'm Ned," Ned said. He talked slowly but kindly. The sweat in his shirt could have extinguished a small fire or drowned a small animal.

"It is truly an honor, sir," Marla beamed. Ned chuckled. Obviously, Ned was a stranger to many things, including fame and reverence. He took our orders and waddled away. My nose was glad to smell him go. I had lost my appetite for breakfast. Marla raised her eyebrows and rubbed her hands together in anticipation.

"So, fellow road warrior, what *shall* we talk about while we are waiting for Ned to return?"

"We could talk about a certain someone's morning manners."

"I was hungry." She grumped her lip. "How about you tell me a secret."

"What kind of secret?"

"Tell me something scary, man. Something you've never ever told anybody else before like how your uncle used to try to get you to play horsy or how you stuffed socks in your jeans during middle school."

I laughed.

"Can't do it, can you, punk?" She placed her palms flat on the table and did what was a recognizable, but poor Dirty Harry impression. I gave her points for effort, though. "Well, write me a poem on your napkin. Spell out the words with that lady's hash browns." She gestured to the woman at the table next to ours who had eaten around her potatoes.

"I like you."

"You're not so bad your—" She tried.

"No, I like you. I can't imagine being with anybody else that makes me feel as good as you make me feel." I let out a big breath.

She didn't answer right away. I was wishing that Ned would

come back, wishing I'd have never agreed to this trip, wishing my damn friend knew how to drive. I just wanted to be back in the car watching her sing, admiring her from the long distance across the armrest. Ned finally arrived with two plates.

"Which one of you young'uns had the Ned's Chicken Sandwich?" I nodded my head slightly. "And your waffles, little lady." He set our plates down. I looked down at my sandwich. Marla flashed him a grateful smile. He smiled back and retreated to fight the kitchen monsters.

"Listen, I think you are a decent guy. And, please, don't take this the wrong way." She looked me in the eye, unmoved.

I already had taken her the wrong way. I wished she would stop but didn't have the guts to stop her.

"But we don't have any business being together. We're different, you know, I'm looking for something else." She continued still looking me in the eye. "Don't take that bad. I just want to be honest here. Okay?"

The rickety blue car, Elvis stickers bringing up the rear, pulled up in front of my house, one wheel on the curb. The last half of the trip was not spent in silence, as I feared it might. We talked. I told her about school, my plans, and even some secrets. She did the same. At a point, I thought maybe she had changed her mind. She didn't.

"Thanks for the company." She got out of the car to shake my hand. Knuckles down, she gripped, pumped, and released.

"Thanks for the ride. Maybe, I'll see you around," I said. She just smiled.

I stood on the sidewalk and watched the car plunk off the curb and roll away. I turned and made the short walk home.

september

rebecca reichardt

You would have to watch him all morning.
The way he trembles with a pecan in his mouth, afraid
to condemn the ground too quickly, and those
tentative steps, full of desire. The burial by instinct.
You would have to ask the tree how each
nut was pulled, hulled and taken from the branch.
And again. You would have to learn ritual. Loss.
In the winter, under leafless skies, you would
have to dig yourself. Remember where those seeds
have been stored, the paper skins, the cold earth. At
any moment, you must know, a cat could
be watching, skulking behind stumps and in shadows.
Unmoving long enough to become a nothing. You
would have to know, many will never be found
by anyone. You would have to learn to give. To forget
the burial and begin again.

poem for skipping stones

bill gorton

flat like
cold water
not

blue or cream
or black
but, round

like a fish
eye, flatter
than god

[untitled]

david vano

The branch weakens in endlessness for the leaf
not for the lyre nor for the stone in the wind.
I weaken the self in endlessness for the gardener.
And tho a torrent of a hundred sparrows huddle from juniper
to juniper, and below, in the garden, a thin line
of boneless carrots bend like a row of comely animals for what
I will not see, she moves
to water the tired hollyhocks.

Witness their lack
of simplicity and wholeness, the petals
contracting like small unripe pears.

She does not reflect what parched earth means
tho the lamp black sky feigns today. It will not rain.

la guitarra

d. alejandro chapa



don't cry

debra l. brooks



Art

all those things i forgot to say

a. wallace barker

The first thing you have to understand, if you're gonna understand all this, is you have to understand how I am. It sounds real typical, I know, but this is how it is. I guess I'm a little crazy because I can't talk to girls. It really isn't that I can't talk to them; I got plenty of girls who are my friends, but I'm real shy. When I'm with a girl I like and we're trying to talk, I get all goofy and fake sounding. People tell me "Just be yourself." But that IS myself. I'm all tongue-tied and boring when I gotta talk to a girl I might like, and then I start thinking, "Oh well I guess this just ain't the one for me." And, I'll admit it, I start to blame it on the girl. So sometimes I get to feeling lonely 'cause I realize it's just impossible for me to ever have someone special. I can't do it.

Of course there's this one girl, though. It's crazy, because she's the most country girl you ever seen. Picks at her toenails in front of company, never wears nice clothes or even really clean clothes, talks trashy, the whole package. But I can't help it, I just love her. When we talk everything is so easy, it all comes so natural. Things are just rolling, and I'm laughing. Can you imagine a guy like me getting along with a girl he really likes? It's the weirdest thing, especially since I can see exactly how she is, but I just love her more and more for it.

She's got this brown hair just about shoulder length, all split ends at the tips. Man, but she's beautiful. How could I possibly tell you about it? She's just overwhelming and comfortable, and what I been missing. So one day, me and some friends are hanging around her house just bullshitting and smoking pot or something. We're all laughing, and, as usual, I'm loving every word she says. Well, now I'm getting ahead of myself, because I still need to tell you how I first started talking to this girl to begin with.

This is also kinda typical. It starts when I'm chili-doggin' her roommate. I met them at a concert where I'm tripping like crazy on a handful of mushrooms, and, somehow, this gives me the wild courage to ask her out. The roommate I mean. Well, I spend some time with the roommate, and I can damn well tell it ain't meant to be, but she's not stopping me, and I figure "what

the hell.” So it gets to be where I’m giving it to her pretty regular and spending the night over at her house. And every morning when I wake up there’s this girl, Ruby, waking up in the same house. It gets to be when I wake up, first thing I do is run over to her bedroom. Just to see her because we’re both morning people, and, also, she don’t wear a bra when she sleeps so there’s her perfect nipples just standing like soldiers, little bayonets poking right through her night shirt.

Well, eventually things cool off with me and her roommate because it’s obvious I’m really not paying any attention to her. She throws me over for some old redneck she used to date back in her hometown, and I can’t say I’m too broken up over the whole thing. But still, I keep coming over even though my old girl is hanging out with her new man. And I guess it seems weird, but I’m so addicted to seeing Ruby I can’t help it. Meanwhile she has started dating the best friend of the redneck who took my old girl. It tears me up because every night after it’s late and we been hanging out too long, I gotta go home, and this cocksucker ends up sleeping in her bed. But like I said, I can’t help it. I’m going over to their place almost every night.

That about brings you up to speed. So here I am, hanging out with a couple of friends over at the girls’ place like usual. Pretty soon someone decides we need beer, and I volunteer to go get it. I stand up to gather money from everyone, then I look around for my coat, and there it is right behind Ruby. She’s kinda leaning back on it. Well, I stoop over and reach for it, start tugging on it, but she’s got all her weight on it and won’t let it go. I turn to her and say, “Hey, quit...,” but right then she kisses me square on the lips. It shuts me up quick because all the good things I know—the smear of light from a neon sign reflected on wet pavement, the first sigh from a girl when my cock slides in just right, the smell of burning bacon—are jumbled in my head at once, and it’s her lips, man, her lips right against mine as soft as silk, smooth and moist. It’s a kind of perfect feeling, better than what you’re thinking. I promise it was better than what you’re thinking. There’s so much I could tell you. My arm starts creeping up around her shoulder. I wanna hold her, but I’m thinking, “this can’t be right in front of all these people.” And my mind is just turning the whole thing over and over, and then she pulls away and tells me “I like Miller Lite.” And I grab my jacket, and I’m out the door so fucking quick, and I get that beer, a whole twelve pack. But I can’t bring my-

self to go back there. So I take it home and drink the whole thing and soon I'm passed out with nothing but quiet blackness to think about. And I ain't been able to go over there since, man, I just can't bring myself to do it. I'm not scared of anything or anybody. I never been scared of nothing, but I can't go back over there. Why is that? Why the fuck is that? I'm almost in tears most nights over this stupid country girl who don't give a shit and I can still feel the goddamn imprint of her lips against mine it's all so clear and perfect, the waxy lip gloss feels like it's smudged on my lips forever and her hands against my cheeks were so warm and the smile on her face afterwards was like love, like love. Am I crazy just tell me am I crazy, or what the hell is wrong with me.... So if you ever see Ruby on the street or whatever just tell her, please tell her...ahhhhhh shit, don't tell her nothing 'cause I just miss her too damn much is all. I just miss her too fucking much.

mulching day in the yard, thanksgiving, 1989

chris martin

“Thence on this Atreid palace the triumphant fire
flashed, lineal descendant of the flame of Ida.”

—Clytemnestra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*

Lawns burn for the winter
freeze. All around, yellow to coal; the grasses
retreat to the flank of soiled edges. Leaves
rise, skip on currents of flame.
The burn is all, only, and we drift.
No herald, but we know what comes:
the line extends through smoke, returns to
hold our arms, to shout words.
A will that will not go up—
only include—and no inheritance
snakes out from the space between
the fire and the blades, to shake roots and
reveal hangings-on more fervent than
our stalks can shoot.
Eyes, lips even,
grow out, resolve to fuller forms: a woman
long dead, moderating, two sisters who speak in verse,
words which light and consume themselves,
shouts guttering, more faces.
The faucet runs on. Horses drop to the fire.
We are unable to move.

the blocks

chris martin

“Man’s happiest hours are pictures drawn in shadow.”

—Cassandra in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*

The yoke stirs and we stir
in our shackles. To think of return
desperately as something lodged in the throat
commands air and lets none pass,
the past overcoming us.
The walls here sweat the days through
and we count off in our minds,
hashes the bricks can’t keep, the past
wedging into the bottom of all our words and
our crippled feet.

Today passed a man by the slit
door’s eye, drain for all our longing.
He hummed, passing, and the notes
insinuated brevity, flitted through
to us in corners, not allowing time
for coming to attention, and again we curled away.
The yoke stirs and we stir.
Each day’s chalk-moments fall to the tray.

the caretaker's tale

chris martin

“...if fate spares the child, she keeps it, as one might
keep for some friend a growing plan.”

—Apollo in Aeschylus' *The Eumenides*

Trees block the altar. A whirl, a cry, and the rains come.
Debris surges inland, pushing
shores back to break onto porch-swings,
litters backyards with fishbone,
hangs kelp from a streetlight and casts
a net to the bottom of a bathtub.
The men will return, having slipped this flood,
and so we are culled and tripped to the blocks.
We entreat the soil as it rushes beneath us; we find
limbs and pull them near.
The undertow loosens our grip, *steady*,
and we find place in the mind, an agreeable climate,
soils moist enough for gardening, but stronger,
more solid. Somewhere something falls,
rattles down. A beach, the tide.
Sky blackens; return. No longer
of mind, of the same mind remembering.
Levels engulf and breath, breath.
All is clip and clipping reigns. The new ocean
floor finds these names, flowerings;
the shelf is trenched, the forest marshed,
but the shoots stay on.

tepillah*

rebecca reichardt

We have to learn to weep again, to see
again the inability of our bodies to flee
like a bird to the mountains, or even to
force ourselves into one body. It is as if
I were to place my hand on your side and say
Here. Here I will reach inside your ribcage
and take what is mine. It is the desire

that a sparrow would raise his wings and
the fear that he will disappear. For the moment
he is on the ground, picking apart small seeds.
It would be good to wish for flight. What small
pleasures we find in seeking refuge. Here in the city
street lights are quietly flickering on, a woman
is turning from the stove to a weeping child.
She draws him to her, remembering the weight
of her own breasts and her clumsiness
before the milk dried.

**Tepillah* is a kind of a psalm that is also a prayer

untitled

rob mccafferty

Utter Silence, Far from the city—
with its wires and pavement,
permeates the Redwoods.
This Silence feeds within its environment,
humidifying the kind green moss,
echoing off acoustical red bark,
dancing the film of a week old puddle,
and yes—pounding within my mind.

I brought this Silence back to the city—
with all its human living arrangements,
hoping—Oh No! *Expecting* peace of mind.
And this Silence has become burdensome,
questioning man's paraphernalia, distantly,
and with that,
deeming my surroundings incompatible.

How can such a Redemptive state
err my being?
A feeling unsenseable,
a perception one cannot see?
Perhaps only to patronize
the volume of concrete accomplishments
and their inevitable crashing fall.

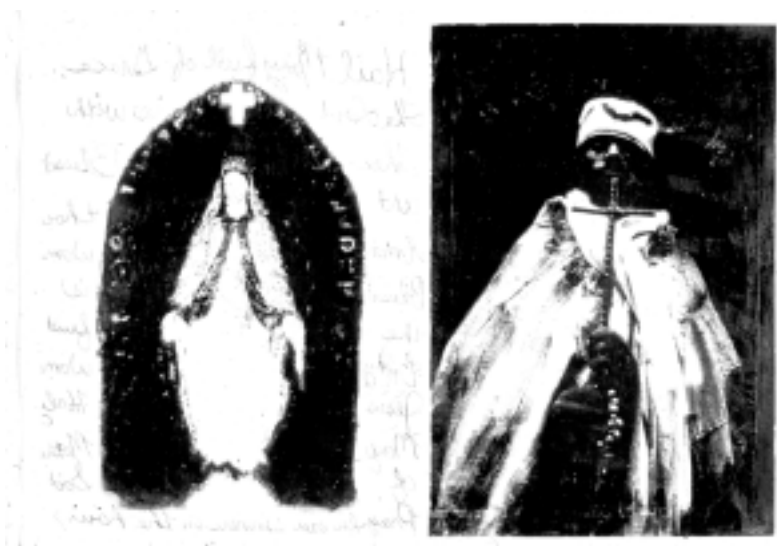
used

agnes pennyweather



hail mary

daniel david tennant



the villain

trent smith

At his throne, Terry was frozen, the tall bottle of whiskey mimicking his blank stare. Chin rested on the desk, his arms dangled, knuckles grazing the top of the lush, green carpet. He felt like a cartoon—something other than himself, but enough like himself to notice the similarities. Comfort eluded him. Leather chairs with fiery oak appendages, green-shaded lamps, green plastic plants, brass coat rack, brass doorstops, brass bookends, ceiling-high shelves of books, and a three-foot-tall globe encased in cherry oak and illuminated by a dim, yellow spotlight all meant to make the office as pleasing as the womb but as intimidating as the oval office. The oak-framed globe centered the room, demanding the attention of every other piece of furniture. Even Terry's desk held in the orbit—a matching oak command center curved around the artificial planet as if being sucked into its atmosphere. The globe's light was the only one on. Through the brown liquid that filled the liquor bottle a finger short of half, golden brown glints streaked through the sinful water and into Terry's eye. Leaning back against the chair, he analyzed the light and, for an instant, allowed himself to appreciate its beauty—maybe not beautiful in the conventional sense, but beautiful just the same. A hair of a second later, Terry was thinking about his wife. He imagined her reading in the bedroom while he studied for the next week's sermon. Maybe it isn't fair to her, he questioned. Other husbands accompany their wives to shopping malls, afternoon matinees, walks in the park, and weekends in Vermont. All those books on the shelves. Maybe it isn't fair to other wives. She gets a backseat ride into Heaven, for God's sake, her husband talks with God. Who do those other husbands' wives talk with besides the three-second chat with the postman and the shirt-and-tie two cubicles down? What more could she want? Still, guilt came in on tippy-toes when Terry would flip the flimsy, yellow pages of the legal pad, stretch tired arms, and wipe sleepy eyes to outline Revelations, chapter 12.

The devil was to blame. Terry saw him plucking the strings of his mind with his grubby, red hands like a rusty banjo. As Terry's pen stopped and his mind wandered, the devil laughed,

his portly, red belly shaking and spilling out of a white, “Kiss the Cook” t-shirt, speared tail wagging back and forth like an anxious puppy.

Outside his office, the drum of Sunday chatter beat faster and louder. The deacons would be in soon for prayer. Terry feared that his mood floated above his head like a thought balloon waiting to pop and stain the carpet. Not a far distance outside the office door, two faithful, church-going men clamored on about the potency of one football team or another’s offense and the sting of their opposition’s defense.

“It should be a classic battle,” Terry whispered to the globe. The 3-D representation of Earth did not answer back but stayed constant in its pose—no orbiting, no revolutions, no movement at all.

For years, seventeen to be exact, his wife found a place near the front row during nearly every sermon. Terry knew she would be missing from the service today. She’s been gone before—a Wednesday night Ladies Devotional, a weekend trip to Wales to encourage the missionaries, or a Sunday night encounter with food poisoning. While fists pounded the pulpit, sinners issued their fate, and tithers given praise, the first lady of the church prayed to be sick from only one end. Today was different. She chose to be gone. She told Terry ahead of time.

“I’m tired of the lying and the crap. These are people, Terry, and you just parade around on that holy stage and tell them—”

“What the hell do you expect me to do? Where do you want me to tell them you are, huh?” Terry screamed.

“Listen to me.”

“What...are you on sabbatical? Do you understand what this does? Are you in Wales again—twice in a month, c’mon?” The janitors could have peeled the sarcasm off the walls.

“I don’t care anymore, Terry. Tell them whatever you want. Save your church. Put me in whatever country you want, but I’m gone.”

The football fans made another pass in front of the pastor’s office. Instead of NFL playbooks and the intricacies of the hurry-up offense, the men marveled at someone’s “tight ass.” Terry snickered and hoped they weren’t looking at one of the deacons. His laughter somehow brought his attention to the awkward pose with which he filled his chair—chin pressed firmly enough into the desk to leave grainy impressions in his skin, torso lurched forward, and knuckles rubbed red from dragging back

and forth over the carpet. Righting himself from his comical position in the dark leather chair, Terry slid the whiskey bottle behind some ancient texts in the bookcase behind him.

"What would the deacons think?" He mocked, accenting "would" with a higher pitch than his usual thunderous voice. Walking the carpet track around the globe, Terry glanced at his watch.

"Twenty minutes." The deacons would be coming soon. Terry was ready. He had a sermon. He had a prayer. He had some inspirational words for the deacons. But he also had a truant wife who joined a line of people waiting to see him fail. Sorrow had a place in his race around the globe, guilt too, but pride was winning. With each labored revolution, affirmations and epiphanies twinkled in his head. I am a messenger of God. The devil will not hinder His work. I will not fail.

A few years before his wife left him, Terry's niece came for a visit from Boston. She was a typical teenager going through typical teenager tragedies. In her youth, they had been close. On occasion, Terry would pick her up from school to spend the day seeing movies and playing in the toy store. The time was special to his niece but also to Terry. The chances to feel and act young were misplaced between graduate seminary and doctorate degrees and were lost in sermon preparations and budget conferences.

When his niece arrived at the house, Terry was shocked. She wasn't the same innocent, God-fearing girl in a flower-print dress or Lion King t-shirt. Whatever interests steered her new course involved dyed black hair and piercings wherever a loose piece of skin could be found to stick a needle through. Terry held his tongue for the moment, knowing that any authority he tried to enforce would be deftly challenged with his wife shuffling the princess-turned-hooligan off to the kitchen for fresh baked banana bread.

With his wife asleep under the covers of a new novel, he slid his notes and King James Bible into his leather tote and crept into the living room where his niece was watching a movie on the big screen TV. His intentions were fair. He wanted to know what kind of people or things had put the carrot in front of her nose and led her to sin. His wife's sleep was interrupted by loud voices, and by the time she entered the living room there was screaming.

"Do you think the Lord can even look at you like that? You're

hideous. What kind of parent lets his child behave this way?"

"Parents? I still go to—" She tried to rebut.

"My ignorant brother. That's who. 'Rear up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will follow the path' — God's path, the path I preach about. Who do you follow, huh?"

"I—" She could only cry. Her knees curled into her chest, she stained her torn sweat pants with tears.

"I'll tell you who you follow, and if you don't quit this—"

"Terry!" His wife broke in with a fury he had rarely seen. "You go ahead and say whatever you want to your blessed congregation, but this is your God-damned family."

"Watch your mouth, heathen." And Terry retreated to his study, leaving his wife to console what was left of his niece.

Terry was still making his slow orbit around the world. The whiskey was back on his desk. The yellow light shone off the globe, the bottle, and Terry's dyed black hair. Guilt creeps in sometimes, he remembered, but he quickly attributed the sin to the instrumentation of the devil, holding his red-hot pitchfork with his oven mitt, directing an evil choir.

The affirmations faded, and Terry felt sad. Sad for the things he had done and the things he had not done. But there was always good reason. Terry finished another lap. I never do anything without just cause, just like Jesus, he thought. Sometimes, he had to do some things people thought weren't right, but it all worked out.

"Eight minutes." Terry peeked at his watch again. His cheeks were bright red and moisture had collected on his forehead. For a few minutes, the slow revolution stopped. Terry made a quick trip to the desk and then over to the door where he placed his ear against the slick wood. He hoped to catch a few words from anyone hanging around, see if any rumor roulette was circulating through the building. Nothing. He tried to listen harder, but no one was there. The football fans had left maybe to catch a few seconds of the pre-game from the TV in the recreation center; or maybe they followed the ass into the fellowship hall.

Giving up, Terry moved over to the curtains and opened them. The window was covered in a dark tint that allowed him to see out but kept others from seeing in. Still, the light that managed to penetrate the window was enough to make Terry squint. It was a ritual. Almost every Sunday after his wife had left him, to prepare spiritually for the upcoming service, he would draw back the curtains and watch the members file in from the parking

lot. Sometimes, the church tithe records would accompany him at the window, so he could compare certain families' givings against the automobiles they drove and the new outfits they wore. This Sunday he closed the curtains immediately after opening them and returned to his orbit.

Six months prior, Terry flew to a small country in Africa to spiritually revive one of the church's missionaries. Usually, missing a weekend and a pair of sermons was not of much importance, but the weekend in question was also the weekend his only daughter was to be married. He swore to his wife that the trip was too important to miss or trust to another servant of God. To him it was, but his wife knew better. The secret behind the curtain was that Terry disapproved of the man his daughter chose for a husband.

While they were dating, Terry and his daughter sparred in what seemed like weekly shouting matches not dissimilar from the bout with his niece. The man his daughter claimed to have fallen in love with was a practicing Catholic. Terry disapproved.

"Do you not listen to a word I say?"

"I love him. Why does anything else matter?"

"You and your mother have no idea what it is like to be the laughing stock of the church. I hear what they say outside my doors. 'Did you hear the pastor's daughter is dating a Catholic? Doesn't he preach against that?' Do you care, you little Jezebel? No, of course not. Let your father's work go crashing—"

"I love him. I love him. I love him. What are you going to do?"

She said contentedly. Luckily, she inherited her father's strong will and her mother's heart, but she was not so strong on her wedding day.

Terry refused to go. To just not go, though, would have been very awkward and possibly dangerous to his ministry. Instead, he created an emergency relief situation and even encouraged a special offering for the missionaries in Africa. In reality, Terry did not cross the ocean to Africa, but instead, he drove a twenty-five mile ride south to the nearest city where he would not be recognized, special offering in his back pocket.

The next day, Terry's daughter and her mother sat outside on the porch steps of the wedding chapel. The garter thrown, the cake devoured, and the guests gone, his daughter crunched her beautiful white dress between her bosom and her knees and cried.

"He loves you. You know that. He really does."

She didn't answer. She just watched as her new husband removed the inflated condoms from the white limousine.

"He just had an important..." Her mother paused. "God is his main priority, and I suppose He should be. I don't know." She could empathize, but she could never repair the hurt.

Terry turned at the knock on his office door. He froze. The carpet where he had been walking for the past twenty minutes was obviously worn. What will they think, he thought with a trace of fear in his voice, the bottle of whiskey still on the table.

"Brother Terry," said a voice.

He dared not let them in for prayer. The devil was too close. He might as well have me rotating like a pig over an open flame, he thought. Maybe they will go away.

"Brother Terry?" came the voice again but this time with a little concern.

"Go the hell away." Terry shouted. He wasn't sure why he said it. He was thinking it, but he should never have spoken that way to a deacon not to mention all the deacons. More fear.

"Pastor, we've come for prayer. The congregation has gathered," said an older, sterner voice than the first.

Terry bolted to the door, not answering their previous call. He pressed his ear to the door again and thought he heard one of the men say something about getting some keys. As a reflex, he darted behind the globe, crouching behind it.

"Pastor, we're coming in," said the older voice again.

As the door opened and let a splinter of light hit the floor, Terry pushed with all his weight on the globe and slid it slamming into the entrance. He heard thuds of men hitting the floor and cries of disbelief. The surprise kept the deacons from coming through the door, but a corner of the globe did become lodged halfway into the wall and halfway into the door. The impact of the oak casing against the door sent a crack through the middle of the orb, separating it into two hemispheres. The size and weight of the globe gave Terry at least a few more moments of solitude.

At his throne, the villain cried. Surrounded by brass and leather and splintered wood, the villain pulled his knees to his chest and cried. The bottle of whiskey on the desk in front of him was silent. His wife wasn't there to hate him. His daughter hated him from the other side of the country. His brother and niece have tried to stop hating him, but they were glad when

they heard the news. They all waited to see him fail, and they continued to wait and turned like pigs over an open flame.

haiku cycle

bill gorton

I.

orange house in white snow
on highway twenty burning
eyes, cornfields, car horns

leaves tuning in key
of wind symphony, descend,
hair blowing applause

street smells gray, pewter
soldiers marching single file
exhaust, a beige car

II.

sheet metal skin splinters
steel breath into scrap, down
drips slate solid sky

sprung with silver nail,
arm hangs in reflex, worms run
thin excuse of skin

thin black sticks, black dot
for empty head, eyes, nose, mouth,
all this snow white space

III.

carps brown head asleep
beneath an underwater
rock, shadow passes

frogs legs stretch, a hole
is born leaping blackbird red
from river cattails

catfish diving in
and over my toes, my hands
trying to catch rain

IV.

old man stands in green
rows, gravel roads, gray highway,
yellow farmhouse wind

swim over ourselves,
your skin for my skin, breast for
bone, brain for body

grind words to gravel
or mulch. every poem is an
ashtray or apple

debra's child

gopi kottoor

Black child, she stands
against the glass and the falling rain.
A few feet away the mother is white light
falling through the sudden dusk trees.
There is one language,
the language of loss,
hidden in the snake-pit of this earth
trying hard to uncover the wisdom of light.
Look at the wild rain. Hear the cry of the child
for the mother, that rents the air,
cuts a wound just deep enough for the blood to flow
together, and be lost in the canyon where the wide river is.
Tall as lit candle grace she moves closer,
picks the tainted sun that rides another womb,
sending her soft white roots deep in. She curls upon her breast
with her baby-bat wings, stops crying.
The cold winds whistle in the gray vine of her hair
as upon the hard stone glass, bright
winter thaws quiet ferns of breaking
between mother and child
and the pouring rain.

ATTENTION WRITERS AND ARTISTS

Would you like to see your short stories, poetry, and artwork published in the next *Persona*?

Submission guidelines:

- ◆ Please submit your work on 8 1/2 x 11 inch white paper, typed on one side only, and double-space the lines. Also, submit your work on a 3 1/2 inch Macintosh formatted disk.
- ◆ Please include a title page with your REAL name (*Persona* will honor pseudonyms if the piece is published), telephone number, major and minor fields, and classification.
- ◆ Submit copies of your original work. Work submitted to the *Persona* will not be returned. For artwork, submit a print copy or slide.
- ◆ Do not submit material that has been published elsewhere.
- ◆ *Persona* accepts submissions during the first half of fall and spring semesters.

Want to join the *Persona* staff? *Persona* invites any interested students to join our staff. Write down your name, current address, and telephone number and submit your information to the *Persona* mailbox in Flowers Hall, room #365.

Visit *Persona* online:

**[http://www.English.SWT.edu/Persona/
index/html](http://www.English.SWT.edu/Persona/index/html)**

