

S P I R E S

TWO THOUSAND THIRTEEN
AUTUMN





S P I R E S

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Critics, however, are welcome to quote brief passages by way of criticism and review.

Front cover: *Untitled* by Eliot Head (Webster University 2015)
Front inside cover: *911* by Steph Waldo (Washington University in St. Louis, 2016)

Back cover: *Untitled* by Rabid Arts Collective: Gregory Davis, Tyler Harris, Ethan Meyer, and Hannah Deitring (Webster University)

Back inside cover: TOP: *Untitled* by Gavin Schmitz (Washington University in St. Louis, 2016)
BOTTOM: *Untitled* by Eliot Head (Webster University, 2015)

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Love Poem: Keepsakes for VK

Rub me down with your honey-suckle scent so I don't forget what heaven smells like and pardon me while I bite your fucking lip so your smile will be bright red and numb for the next three days. The early bird-song banter outside your open window is white noise next to our purple pillow talk. Sun-kissed skin and black hair is all you wear as you whisper pluck out your blue-green eyeballs and give 'em to me: keepsakes in a mason jar, half-filled with orange peel potpourri.

Justin Kinnear
University of California, Los Angeles '13

on the way home

evidence of rain bursts
in the lights of a tunnel,
even white flashes

each drop shocked
and shining, crowding together
and shivering

a body of water meets another.
they feel for each other
and fall

weight multiplied
and pulled like
dead balloons

their legacies are the hands of monsters

their brothers glitter
in patterns of movement
like new york on the hudson

when fog smothers the yellow moon
and the sky grows soft,
plum and passive

the sky a quiet woman
to bear the city's
madness

her face washed,
starless,
a dead-lit wine

the hudson voices:
an even tapping
on its surface

the grip of current like a rushing fabric

a bed of mirrors
broken, rearranged
and glowing.

Zandra Ruiz
Rutgers University '13



“Untitled”
photograph

Dante Migone-Ojeda
Washington University in St. Louis '15

Sweet Tooth

Swirl to me how your day was, wafflecone,
I'm all banana split, chocolate quips.
Let's share spoonfuls and eat with toothpicks,
I'm listerine intently and pinky promise
I'm vanilla and coconut, not strawberry for you.

Thank you though, cupcake, for wondering why
I was eating only the small blueberries—the plump ones are princess food
for princess you. And another snickerdoodle thank you
for turning cherry when I said I was macarooning for you.

Amaretto you do, gummy bear, I don't care;
I'll fumble a thousand spoons and spill the coffee,
cream and all,
if it makes your mouth open like at the dentists'
and laugh like maraschino. But please, wafflecone,
do excuse my eyes for following your tongue,
I might be less strawberry and more red velvet for you.

*Eric Huang
Cornell University '14*

On the Nature of Fiction and My Demise

In approximately 1,800 words, you will be a murderer. In fact, by reading just those first eight words, you have knocked over the first of several dominoes in a complex Rube-Goldberg-esque sequence, which will ultimately lead to my demise. Even in glancing at the first word—whether by interest or obligation—you have begun to kill your emphatically unnamed narrator. By the end of this piece, I will be dead, and it will be entirely your fault.

The truck smelled of spilt booze and exhaust hiding in a thick haze of cheap cologne. The odor was undeniably masculine, even overpoweringly so. I still crinkled my nose every time as I sat in the tattered leather passenger seat. Cold night air poured in through the cracked windows and raised goose bumps on my thinly covered skin. He always kept it cold.

Now, that is not to say that you will physically take a knife to my heart or a gun to my head. Indeed, that is not even a possible outcome, as I am merely the sum of words on paper. However, as each of these words passes under your eye and is processed by your temporal lobe, I come one word closer to my death. So whether I go by vicious brutality or sly trickery, it is ultimately your fault for having read the words which kill me.

A vague sports announcement crackled through the ancient radio, more static than voice. I watched him passively as he drove, my head resting on my knees hugged to my chest. He drove with his left hand, his right draped across the bench seat. His arm wasn't necessarily around me, but as we hit potholes and patches of

otherwise torn road his fingertips grazed my shoulder. He didn't seem to notice. I pretended not to notice too. I pretended that it was an accident when I scooted closer as we rattled through a larger pavement defect.

Being that this is fiction and by the very laws of short fiction writing I must have a continuously flowing plot in the shape of a bell curve skewed left, I suppose I should do away with these philosophical interjections entirely. However, seeing as I have already broken the fourth wall and given away the surprise-twist ending, I will avoid such customs of English literature overused to the point of cliché. I will also avoid the tedious action of naming Me As The Narrator, because it doesn't matter if you know me. Though my tragic tale may jerk emotions or even tears from you, the deepest connection we may ever hold is that of a murderer and his victim, or, moreover, a reader and a doomed protagonist.

He was taking me home. We had been at a downtown restaurant. It was out of his way, but he told me he didn't mind. He laughed when he said it.

It doesn't matter if I have hair like yours or values like the ones you were taught, our connection lies in that you continue to read. You must trust me because you receive no other version of the truth. You must pity me because I tell you I am good, and I tell you I am suffering. You must reach out to me because I reach out to you, and in our mutual reaching, we touch one hand, shaking with a victim's fear, to another hand, shaking with a murderer's adrenaline, and we unify in my final fleeting words.

It was so late; we had been the last ones to leave the restaurant. My eyes struggled to process the image of him staring at the road

with a black blanket behind him filled with speeding, glowing eyes. I could only distinguish the windows from the opaque side of the truck by noting where the zooming eyes blinked. My own eyes blinked slowly, struggling each time to pry themselves back open. Inexplicably, I felt I needed to keep them open, but I was fighting a losing battle. We were still far from my house; I gave in to my stinging eyes.

Whether You As A Reader are comfortable with receiving such harsh allegations of murder is up to your discretion, but I As The Writer don't care. If I have made you offended, insulted, or in any way uncomfortable, then I have succeeded. What is fiction other than the manipulation of emotions through the use of words? These emotions you may or may not feel stem from a source not even in the same dimension as you. That small, black lines and curves can inspire such real sensations is unthinkable; it's beautiful.

The scene before me was no longer of the glowing, blinking, speeding eyes. The only eyes before me were his, twitching slightly in their sockets. I might not have seen them, had the whites not been so vivid in the reflected moonlight. My head throbbed as I lifted it from the window against which it had been leaning. I wondered what time it was; he had no clock on his dashboard. I tried to blink away the fogginess in my eyes, but the night was dark as slumber. I wondered briefly if I was dreaming, if I was even living.

Does a character live while his reader is not reading? I suppose to even approach this question one would have to first address the issue of whether a character does, indeed, live. Consider the following: there is a man named John T. Smith, but he's not the one you know. He has an average-paying job for a average company and every day at an average hour he drives an average distance in his average car to his aver-

age house in an average neighborhood and kisses his average-looking wife. You now may be at least somewhat convinced that this man could be living as you read this; he could be driving that average car through his average town to or from that average job now, depending on when you read this and the variability of time zone. To you, now, this average man is alive, but to Me As The Writer, he is only a character. The question now is whether or not John T. Smith still lives now that you know his true nature.

The truck was turned off, and it was cold. The rusted keys trembled slightly in his hands. He was sitting forward, but his eyes were on me. In the silent stillness I became acutely aware of him. He was drawing a shaky breath. He caught his own stare for a moment in the rearview mirror. His eyes dropped like boulders from their own reflection, then climbed slowly up my body. A chilling breeze whistled through the still-open windows. I shivered lightly against the cold and met his gaze, about to inquire, about to plead. I heard the coyotes wail in the distance; I wondered if they heard me scream.

Now that I As The Narrator have let you in on my fear and pain, you may feel that it is your duty to bring me salvation and to stop following the literary path leading to my demise. How dare you? How dare you leave me here, constantly awaiting and fearing my death? Before your commencement of this fiction, I did not exist, nor will I exist once your murderous deed is completed. But now I am in the prime of my existence, and you would leave me without an end. You would leave me in fictional character limbo, doomed to be in a constant state of fear evermore; a fate worse than death. I would advise you —nay, beg you —to carry on.

I shivered more and more violently as more of my flesh was bared to the unforgiving air. I tried to cover myself, to hide myself from the horror, from the cold, from him. I curled my legs to my naked chest. I was a fetus in a sliced womb, cowering from the foreign chill. He was a rusty coat hanger, jabbing blindly, maliciously, at my tender, unformed body. I wasn't a special and beautiful human life; I was unwanted, the unfortunate result of untamed lust.

It is inevitable. You can't stop it. Now that you are here, the only options for me are death and said worse-than-death. The only way to prevent it is to have never begun reading it. No, you may argue, a friend or a stranger may have read it and may tell you about it and then you and I will be thrust into the same situation. Hearing a story is the same as reading one. It is the entire experience of storytelling which must be stopped in order to save Me As The Narrator. But, you may argue, would that not defeat the purpose of Me As The Writer? Perhaps. But then, belligerent you may argue, why would I ever write such a thing. Reader, I had to. I had to force you to think. I had to force myself to think. To wrap one's head around fiction on the nature of fiction, fiction which transcends the bounds of fiction because the fiction about fiction is so true, is to reach a level of thought before unreached. And in reaching our collective brains stretch further, perhaps eventually to transcend the genre of genre, the necessity of necessity, the unpredictability of the unpredictable. And, I As The Writer ask You As The Reader, would that not make for a more interesting and beautifully-written world?

I am the shattered remains. When he was through with my vulnerable body, he seized my head by the hair and thrust my tear-streaked face into the dash. He was super-human in his

strength as he forced my head through the window. My fragile skin stretched and tore against the sharp remnants of glass still intact with the frame of the window as he shoved me through the small opening. Between my ragged breaths and his grunts of force I could hear my blood splattering on the ground. My skull cracked against the bloody pavement. I smelled my own metallic blood, heard the rumble of a truck's engine, felt the tire crush the bones of my right leg. I lay there, still somehow horribly alive hours later, as a trucker swerved to avoid me. To him I was a deer. To him it was an accident.

You know now what will happen. You still know nothing about me, only that I am dying. Whether or not you have felt something for me, for these formulated ink marks on paper, I am dying.

The gust from the truck rolled me into the drainage ditch. My final, shaking breath seemed to shatter my rib cage. I died a very painful death.

And it is entirely your fault.

Briana Forney
Ohio State University '14

broken feathers ruffled wrong

And before it I was the
Caged bird And after it
I was the c-
aged bird
my feathers ugly-dirty-bent
my song a little more melancholy
still a pretty bird

pretty bird
pretty stupid bird

coveted for beautiful
flutter-flight
Most people get bored
or find them too fickle
for flying
which they are

Never keep a pretty bird
i say
Go for a nasty pidgeon-rat or even
a handsome sparrow red-breast
They seem to have more sense
than a flutter-fake
pretty bird

A pretty bird
A sparrow

sparrows don't trust pretty birds
as they shouldn't
she flew away

and he never understood

a pretty bird

Julie Belle Webb
University of California, Davis, '13

Universe

for Lauren

It was calculated that the universe will end in some tens of billions of years when a tiny particle bubble pops and another universe from inside our own expands at the speed of light pushing out the old while birthing itself.

I said I'd like to think that prediction has already been made and come to pass in infinite universes that began and ended before our own, that we are an alternate universe not in a simultaneous sense but in continuation. I said that since matter can't really be destroyed it's possible that who we once were originally in an older ended universe is distributed throughout the entirety of our current reality in our natural world, in space, in the zero-field of thoughts.

You said maybe that's why we feel inexplicably attached to some things because they used to be parts of us and other beings we cared about and, anyway, matter is formed from the brain indefinably and if all these random circuits we are can make a person with feelings the possibility must be there for matter to combine and recombine in ways that allow for consciousness elsewhere. We're not only bits of dinosaurs and trees but also everything that has been in those other universes, things we don't even know about, that existed and have since coalesced to become things we connect with. And though neither of us were or are scientists, we both knew this felt right and that it was unlikely we would be together to see our hypothesis tested anyway but, at least, it was something promising. And we loved the finality of our universe, and how death is a coy gift which it holds for us.

And I felt as if I understood the pleasure of a metal bat
smashing a wooden mailbox and splintering it
into the air,
that of the bat
and of the box.

Adam Martin
Rutgers University, '13



“List”

Steph Waldo

Washington University in St. Louis '16

La Bibliothèque Nationale de France

In Winter a trio of elderly men gathers to wait on the deck at sunset,

between the four towers at the new library in Paris.

My aunt the artist asked in learned French what was coming, and they answered with an invitation to wait.

Then, magnificently, the starlings swept in to remind her the sky goes just as low as one's eyes,

And that this place was not yet theirs despite the indelible sky-frame of steel.

Now the late-Summer still is pregnant with the memory of those black calligraphy strokes through the bare air,

And my footsteps are fluttering pages above a city rendered bonsai by dusk.

Lexi Cary

University of California, Los Angeles '13

The Librarians of West Bucket

“I want to read Harry Potter,” said Ann. “My American pen pal says it is so famous that even a library in Taiwan would have it.” She placed a letter on the counter as proof. Shifting between feet, Ann waited as the librarian peered at the letter.

“Fiction, huh?” The elderly librarian shook her head. “We do not carry it.”

“Harry Potter is world famous.”

“We do not have it,” said the librarian.

Ann frowned. “You have Journey to the West. That’s fiction.”

“It was written long ago, ah, it might have been true.”

“Fine!” said Ann. Sidestepping a clump of children clustered around a dinosaur book, Ann stomped away towards the exit.

“Lee Ann,” the librarian shouted after Ann. “Do not back talk me – when I see your mother tomorrow, I will tell her.”

Lee Ann slammed the door behind her.

So small was the town of West Bucket that, for many decades, it possessed neither a park nor a library. After the 921 Earthquake in 1999, the town had a library built on the ruins of the city hall. It was a point of civic pride: West Bucket, its citizens bragged to their relatives, valued knowledge over bureaucracy. This was a sign of true progress.

As a rule, the library of West Bucket did not carry fiction. It was not a matter of content – any sort of content, no matter how vulgar or outrageous, was fine as long as it was true. But, the elderly librarians of West Bucket did not hold with fiction. They’d drawn the line between fiction and non fiction reading – and it was a boundary the old librarians simply could not cross. To facilitate the reading of things patently untrue was unthinkable.

Parents either agreed with the policy or did

not care enough to argue. After all, elders were to be obeyed or, at the very least, humored. If their children grew up reading non-fiction, what harm was there?

The library was run by three old ladies: Ah Lai, Ah Be, Ah Lian. All had grown up and grown old in the small town of West Bucket. They had raised their children, their children’s children, and even other people’s children. Families had come and gone in their lifetimes. Everyone in West Bucket was connected to the librarians in some way or other.

In their old age, they served as West Bucket’s first and only librarians. Each had their reasons for marking fiction as off-limits:

“You want to know why I do not like fiction? I tell you, if you always look at clouds, you will trip over stones in your path,” Ah Lai said one day to her grandson as he sat on her knee.

“Why use library money to buy lies, eh?” Ah Be said to a cousin visiting West Bucket on holiday. “Isn’t it better to fix the benches outside?”

In an attempt to dissuade her daughter from majoring in literature, Ah Lian told her daughter, “When I was a child, all my friends read novels. I said to my father, ‘When you go to Taipei, bring me back some novels.’ You know what? He pretended to mishear me and brought back classical poetry. He was a good father to me,” she said. “I have never read a single novel.” To Ah Lian, that fact alone was responsible for her faultless character and strong constitution.

So, the local library carried plenty of classical poetry, art books, philosophical tracts, reference books, and biographies, but no novels—nothing the librarians deemed fictional. They felt it was their civic duty to protect the children of West Bucket from the corrupting influence of fiction.

A few days later, Ann came marching into the small library, cup in one hand and paper bag in the other.

“Lee Ann, no drinks in the library,” scolded Ah Lai from behind the check out counter. “How many times do I have to tell you?”

“It’s covered,” said Ann. “See, amah?”

Ah Lai sniffed. “What drink is it?”

“Papaya milk. Second Aunt gave it to me,” said Ann.

“Who?”

“Aunt Mei, you know her.”

“Ice?”

“Only a little.” Ann held her cup away from Ah Lai. “It’s summer. Ice should be okay.”

“I always tell Mei that ice is bad for the humors,” said Ah Lai, radiating disapproval.

“There’s no such thing as humors,” Ann said. She sipped her drink, glaring at Ah Lai.

Ah Lai laughed. “You don’t like things that are not true, but you want to read fiction.”

“What?” Ah Be sidled over, shelving cart in tow. “Did I miss something?”

Ann took the opportunity to escape. “Let me shelve that, Ah Be.”

“Oh? Suddenly you want to be good?” Ah Be tilted her head at Ann. “I thought you were in teenage rebellion.”

“You think all teenagers are in rebellion,” said Ann.

“It’s true,” said Ah Lai. “I raised so many children—not even mine. I would know.”

Ah Lian appeared at Ann’s elbow and said, “Listen to Ah Lai.”

Ann squeaked in surprise. “Amah! Don’t do that—oh, I almost forgot.” Ann thrust the paper bag in her arms at them. “This is from my mother. She said I should help out since I back talked yesterday.”

Ah Lian’s hand snaked out to grab the paper bag. Peering into the paper bag, Ah Lian said, “Egg tarts from Yi Zhen? We can eat now. Tea is ready.”

The three librarians retreated with murmurs of satisfaction, leaving Ann to shelve.

Along with shunning fiction, the librarians of West Bucket did not hold with conventional shelving systems. They shelved according to category – philosophy, biography, science, poetry, classics, history, cooking and miscellany. Within categories, books were shelved by importance in the eyes of the librarians:

Confucius came before Chiang Kai-Shek, but after Oprah.

Lee Ann, grumbling all the while, shelved by spine color – light to dark – and so disturbed the universe.

To her dismay, Ah Be found that the classical poetry section had grown overnight.

Poetry books spilled from the shelves onto the ground in piles that came up to Ah Be’s nose. Half of them were copies of the same book of poetry – classical Chinese poetry by a Japanese writer.

“Look, Ah Lai,” Ah Be crouched to pick up a book and waved it in Ah Lai’s face.

Ah Lai stepped around the stacks of books to join Ah Be in speculation. Resting against the window, she said, “Someone forgot we have a donation box, maybe?”

“No, I locked up yesterday,” said Ah Be. “No way to get in.”

After several minutes of furious shelving – leaving books on the floor was disrespectful – Ah Be and Ah Lai came to the bottom of the pile.

“Aiya!” Ah Be leapt back. Ah Lai peeked over Ah Be’s shoulder. Ah Be said, “Your grandchild left his lizard toys all over the place again.”

Ah Lai poked at it with a book. “No toy. I think this is real.”

They called Ah Lian over to confirm.

“This is a salamander,” said Ah Lian. “So it was under a pile of books?”

“Huh, for sure,” said Ah Be. “But, see, not squashed flat at all.”

Ah Lai added, “Ah Be jumped like a young rabbit when she saw it.”

“My daughter-in-law fed me tonic chicken yesterday, no wonder,” said Ah Be. The librarians took a moment to appreciate the invigorating wonders of tonic chicken.

“Since you have tonic chicken in you, you can get the salamander,” said Ah Lian. “Lately, my back has been so sore—”

“Ah, don’t throw it out,” said Ah Lai. “My grand-

son collects bugs. Salamander is just a bigger bug.”

The salamander hissed.

“Oh, it’s alive?” Ah Lai shifted away from the window to look closer.

A beam of sunlight fell on the salamander as its skin shone blue. Glowing in the light, the salamander expanded to the size of a cat and slithered back into the shadows.

Directing its beady eyes at the old women congregated by the window, it said, “When the size of a finger, it is difficult to be heard. This is much better.”

“It talks,” said Ah Lian. “Maybe it’s not so good to kill a talking one for collection.”

“I am not a salamander,” it said, voice like rustling paper. “I am a dragon and this is my nest.”

Ah Be leaned closer, squinting. “You can’t be—you are too slimy to be a dragon.”

The dragon said in a low grumble, “My nest was disturbed for the first time in the eleven years. I was not prepared for company.”

Ah Be narrowed her eyes. “Overnight visitors are prohibited. You must leave.”

“But,” said Ah Lian, “if it’s a dragon, then it might be good to keep around, eh?”

“Further: I can bring you much prosperity,” said the dragon. It turned its head to regard the newly shelved poetry books. “It is known that this is what dragons do.”

“The poetry section got bigger,” acknowledged Ah Lian. “There’s more of it than before.”

“See?” said the dragon. “I am far too grand for your grandchild’s bug collection.”

“Too big now, anyway,” muttered Ah Lai. “Can’t fit you in a scrapbook now.”

“The size change is only temporary,” said the dragon. “But I trust you will understand my dependence on your mercy. For eleven years, no one reorganized the classical poetry and I found peace. If you would just undo young Lee Ann’s shelving, I can go back to sleep and we can all forget this happened.”

“More classical poetry to shelve isn’t prosperity,” Ah Be said. “Just more trouble.”

“Ah, you have caught me out. I tried to put my nest back to rights and ended up with more books.” The dragon swished its tail. “I’m a dragon, not a librarian. But, I’m sure we can work out some sort of deal.”

The librarians huddled beside the window to confer.

“No overnight visitors,” said Ah Be. “This is policy.”

“No, it might be good luck,” Ah Lian insisted.

“Get a promise—it can’t stay for free,” said Ah Lai. She turned to the dragon. “Give the library good luck.”

“Easily accomplished,” said the dragon. “Will that be all?”

“How do we know?” said Ah Be. “Give us proof.”

“Humans are so hard to please,” hissed the dragon. It shuttered one eye, and then the other. “The library will be showered with prosperity for a week. That is proof enough.”

“Wait,” said Ah Lai. “Make sure there is no rain tomorrow? Tomorrow is my grandson’s field trip.”

“Is it the one to the glass museum? Good place to visit,” said Ah Lian.

“Sunny it will be,” the dragon said. “In return, I expect my home to be restored by evening.” It oozed into a crack in the wall beside the shelves and disappeared.

“No humility,” observed Ah Be. “Must be a young dragon.”

The following day, cicadas boiled out of the vegetable garden behind the library, flew into the library, molted all over the periodicals, and flew back out. The shells they left behind were solid gold.

While neighboring towns were hit by typhoons, West Bucket stayed sunny throughout. Ann left West Bucket to go on a weeklong shopping trip in neighboring Puli with her friends.

For the rest of the week, prosperity rained down on the library.

Jade carp flopped out of the pond next to the flower bed. They lay in the vegetable plot for several minutes, gills flapping uselessly, before Ah Lian rushed out and poured a kettle of tea over them. Then, they lay still. An entire row of bok choy had been destroyed by their flopping.

The lone lotus floating in the pond shed its petals. The petals dried up, transforming into delicately polished miniature boats. Children spent hours playing with the tiny boats in the pond until Ah Lian chased them away, scolding them for dirtying their clothes. The mayor’s distant relative, a museum curator, offered to buy the boats for an exhibit.

A legion of stray cats jumped off the roof of the library and hacked out silken hairballs all over the check-out counter. They took up residence on the roof and yowled at lunchtime.

The water fountain spewed steaming oolong tea. After tasting the tea, Ah Lian declared it the rare Lishan variety.

Ah Lai arrived at the library one morning to find a trio of stone guardian lions panting at the entrance. When she tried to shoo them away from the doors, they dropped pearls at her feet. The pearls were the size of her grandson’s palm and made for good bookends – for some reason, they did not roll.

The librarians were relieved when the dragon’s prosperity stopped flowing – diamond cockroaches, while valuable, were unpleasant to come across in the holds section.

Ah Lian’s daughter gathered up the curious treasures and sold them to a pawn shop in a neighboring town. The profits were put into the library fund.

With the sort of tidy thinking that gives rise to librarians, the librarians decided to record an account of all that had happened after their encounter with the dragon. It would serve as a historical record of local events, a testament to the power of dragons and a warning against haphazard shelving.

When the librarians finished, Ah Lai bound the booklet together and placed it on display near the returns bin for all to see.

A few days after her trip to Puli, Ann visited the library with a plate of sliced dragon fruit in hand. “Aunt Mei sent these,” she announced. Slumping over the counter, Ann toyed with the check-out stamp.

“Don’t slouch,” Ah Be said. She prodded Ann’s shoulders with a pencil.

“Amah,” said Ann.

“Yes, Lee Ann?” said Ah Be.

“I thought the library didn’t carry fiction.”

“Why spend money on lies, huh?” said Ah Be. “Of course we don’t. Fiction is off-limits, ah, you know that.”

“What’s that, then?” Ann pointed at the book near the returns bin. “I read that one yesterday. It’s all about dragons and magic.”

“That’s different,” said Ah Be. “It happened.”

“Is that so?” Ann snapped. “Little Yi Xian told me the other day that there were dragons in our library – he believed that book! Everyone knows there’s no such thing. Why is that book okay, but not other novels, huh?”

“This and that are not the same thing,” said Ah Be.

“At least with fiction, you know it’s fiction—much more honest.” Ann stamped off in a huff and attempted to slam the library doors. They swung shut with a light puff of air.

Over sticky rice cakes – courtesy of Ah Lian’s daughter – and tea, the librarians of West Bucket discussed budget.

“We have too much money after the cicada shells,” said Ah Lai.

“Replace the couch in the children’s corner,” suggested Ah Be. “The middle cushion swallows you up—could get dangerous.”

“But even after that there’s still too much money left,” said Ah Lai.

“A lot of the little ones are going into middle

school,” said Ah Be. “Get some new books for them.”

They sat in silence as they considered the prospect of new books.

Ah Lian poured herself another cup of tea. Sipping at her tea, she gestured in the direction of the bound record on display. The others turned to look.

“You know,” she said after setting her cup down, “maybe we should look into some other kinds of books.”

Ah Be pursed her lips. “What’s this now?”

“I was thinking,” murmured Ah Lian, “of Buddha’s story about the man who used toy carts to lead his children out of a burning house. Even the stories without literal truth had some bead of truth in them that led people to enlightenment.”

Ah Lai nodded. “Expedient means, huh?”

Ah Lai and Ah Lian glanced at each other and then at Ah Be, who frowned at them.

“I don’t like that Lee Ann and her attitude,” said Ah Be. “How could she say that the dragon was not true?”

“The young ones are like that,” Ah Lai said.

“They only believe in what is right before their eyes. No faith in anything.”

“Maybe we need to put some more things in front of their eyes, eh?” hinted Ah Lian. Ah Lai and Ah Lian looked at Ah Be expectantly.

“I suppose,” Ah Be grumbled, “we could buy some of the fiction, ah, it might be true.

*Jessica Yang
University of California, Davis ‘13*

Blood Brothers

for Jesse

We are barefoot boys with knives
and potatoes in our hands with a bowl
of water at our side. As skins fall
you study my practiced movements
and ask *how’d you get so fast?*

The smell of supper slips like summer
through the screen door, our mother
hums a song and stirs as our sisters
help her. The blade cuts your finger
and blood drips to the skins below
and you ask *why do they call us half-
brothers?* —questions our absent fathers
should have answered. Quietly I prick
my finger to show how we are the same.

*Justin Kinnear
University of California, Los Angeles ‘13*

Sisters

for Jennifer, Valerie, and Lindsay

Growing up in the bottoms, we watched
the river rise to doorsteps of mobile homes,
homes that never went anywhere, hoping flood-
waters would move us to the faraway reveries
where all our bottled messages had landed.
Our hands made a human chain (blood
is thicker than water) and we crossed flooded
streets toward the tree house. I helped all three
of you and then you helped me. Soaked cutoff
jeans dripped slow like mother’s milk
and down below ripples in the water lived
before dying to become the blue. *What if the
water doesn’t stop rising* one of you said, *how will we
get home?* I will carry all of you on my back.

Summer nights

I watch the snow drift slowly down like the beautiful ashes of a thousand burning dreams In the muffled dusk of indigent living sirens sing their vibrato duet to the bass of a lone dog's bark and the *pop-pop-pop* of staccato gunfire dabs night's black canvas with distant circles of light soft to the touch I watch a man drift slowly down a street with one light his hollow eyes are high and weeping as he sits on the broken stair of a sleeping house its door splashed with orange EVICTION made muddy by shadow In the silence I hear the faint bellow and howl of a late night scene whose muddled language is only perforated by *fucking asshole* and *goddamn bitch* while the last scraps of voice are flung out of the tenement window with the chocolate-brown glass of empty bottles that flee into one hundred thousand pieces of something as they meet the concrete I watch a twenty-something gangster write his message on the side of a house the word CRIME climbs out of a can escaping from some purgatory to tape itself against corrugated sheet metal while s hushing as if to soothe a sleeping

child I watch as the sounds of city drift over our night
Though the day's sun will rise
Ginsberg's starry dynamo in the machinery of our night keeps us swathed in blankets of chain links and barbed wires and the tense tinkling crackle of shattering windows I watch the snow drift slowly down like the sunlight of summer that does not fall for us.

Brian Baker
Washington University in St. Louis '14



“Untitled”
charcoal drawing

Rachel Hrobon
Washington University in St. Louis '16

THE RECOLLECTED BODY OF SAARTJE BAARTMAN

CUVIER (1825)

*Science, science, science!
Everything is beautiful
blown up beneath my glass.
Colors dazzle insect wings.
A drop of water swirls
like marble. Ordinary
crumbs become stalactites
set in perfect angles
of geometry I'd thought
impossible. Few will
ever see what I see
through this microscope.*
—"The Venus Hottentot,"
Elizabeth Alexander

Since the late seventeenth century, the Khoi had been regarded as "the missing link between human and ape species." Theories that ranked ethnic groups consistently placed Baartman's Khoi people... at the bottom of the evolutionary scale. On the basis of their supposedly overdeveloped genitals, Linnaeus classified the Khoi as a divergent branch of humanity, one that he named Homo monstrosus monorchidei, relegating them to the back alleys of evolution. In 1839, Samuel Morton described the Hottentot as "the nearest approximation to the lower animals." Buffon classed them with the monkeys.
—"Circus Africanus," Harriet A. Washington

TWO EYES, PICKLED; 5 OZ. SALINE SOLVENT; MASON JAR. JARDIN DES PLANTES, PARIS.

Saartje Baartman peered beyond the hull of the ship: beyond the rippled waters, beyond the bloody horizon, towards home, towards Capetown, towards flaxseed and indigo, towards no more mother and no more father and no more lover. They were all gone, like the small farm on which she had grown, all consumed by flames. Saartje shaded her gaze and held the arm of the man who stood beside her, Master's brother, Henri Cezar. She peered beyond the sunset and into the future: with half of the profits this man had promised, she would surely return a duchess, adorned in watered-silk gowns, eating damask plums, brown eyes lit cerulean blue from within.

SKIN, AUTOPSIED AND SAMPLED, BUT N.F. ("NOT FOUND"); ORIG. AT JARDIN DES PLANTES, PARIS.

Before landing in Piccadilly, Henri wrapped her in a giraffe's pelt. He kept her close until he attempted to sell her to a man who dealt in skins and creatures. The man bought the pelt, but not Saartje. She looked questioningly at Henri, who did not know that she spoke in tongues beyond Dutch and Afrikaans. Henri looked at the man, pointedly, as he grazed his hand along her thigh. He gave it a firm slap. A sharp pain. Saartje gasped. The man shook his head. Henri's glare was a cage.

TONGUE, PICKLED; 5 OZ. SALINE SOLVENT; MASON JAR. MUSEE DE L'HOMME, PARIS.

London tasted of cabbage and soot. Piccadilly tasted of stale sweat. The circus tasted of old men and swine. When she could not speak, beneath the shadow of Henri's bamboo switch, she swayed, the world

blurry, and tasted. The cage tasted of gin, hot on the back of her

THROAT, AUTOPSIED AND SAMPLED, BUT N.F. ("NOT FOUND"); ORIG. AT JARDIN DES PLANTES, PARIS.

First, the stage of 8825 Piccadilly St. three feet from the floor, chained to the back of the cage, not her voice, but Henri's, ringing, HOTTENTOT VENUS, HOTTENTOT VENUS. From his throat, rough words tumbled, casting her body in plaster-gaze before science ever would. LOOK AT HER, he said, SHE IS DARKNESS. SHE IS LUST. SHE IS AFRICA. Saartje learned to lean and sway, lean and sway to the music of jeers and noses whisked into the air. When vertigo overtook her or the scent of the Sapien Pig in the cage adjacent to her cage overcame her, she clasped her thumb and forefinger around a shard of tortoiseshell that swung from twine at her collarbone and looked to the heavens, even if she could not see them.

BRAIN, SEGMENTED AND PRESERVED IN A GLASS JAR; 20 OZ. SALINE SOLVENT. MUSEE DE L'HOMME, PARIS.

Then, a baptism. Cool waters between London and Paris as Saartje recalled the warm waters of the Cape, the curve of the hill on which her home rested, comforting like a mother; sadza, maize porridge, as the sun rose above the horizon, home, home, home. Surface. Emergence. Then, soon, another boat. Henri said, voice low, "We are going to France." He did not say, "I am going to sell you," but upon arrival to Paris, he sold her, to an animal trainer named Réaux.

GLUTUS MAXIMUS, CAST IN PLASTER, JARDIN DES PLANTES, PARIS.

In London, in Paris: the masses were enthralled by Saartje's buttocks. Sketches of her, gluteus maximus expanded from life to paper by three-to-five sizes, plastered newsstands and street-corners in London. She arrived to Paris a celebrity in chains, her buttocks barely concealed beneath a thin apron with which she was depicted in all cartoons.

SKELETON, BOILED AND PRESERVED IN OPEN AIR, MUSEE DE L'HOMME, PARIS.

In the spring of 1815, Saartje posed as a live model for a three-day 'Enlightenment panel' at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle. Léon de Wailly, Nicolas Huet and Jean-Baptiste Berré composed watercolors of her figure, while Georges Cuvier, Henri de Blainville and Étienne Saint-Hilaire led a team of scientists. Léon De Wailly depicted Saartje as Cnidian Venus in repose. As he painted her contours, she imagined her body covered in gold leaf, her hair entwined in flowers; not exposed, bare, barren.

HEART, SURGICALLY INSPECTED AT AUTOPSY BUT NOT PRESERVED. MUSÉUM NATIONAL D'HISTOIRE NATURELLE, PARIS.

Long before Saartje's death, her body was signed away to scientists, her organs parceled to surgeons, the drums of Progress beating in their skulls. Forty-eight hours after her death, Saartje's body was cast in plaster, her bones were boiled and her genitals and brain were bottled. The surface of her plaster mold was coated in turpentine, and then covered with false skin, onto which blood vessels were painted. Saartje's plaster body was glazed in clear, tough varnish.

*Sarah Roth
Washington University in St. Louis '13*



“Untitled”

Gavin Schmitz

Washington University in St. Louis '16

The Hand You're Dealt

*Let the blinds fall, lay the chips to rest.
You've gone back to the alley off Westlake Avenue
where the rats tread to and from tires
of getaway limousines and yellow ambulances
idling on their way to the trauma center,
to the barroom where public angels give the devil's
sign to the bouncer and the tight-pursed sing
all the way to the hole! Where every game ends
in a recession and every round of empty glasses
is a crisis. Divine intervention is the number
twenty-one. The man in horned rim glasses
keeps a humming bird on his tie for good luck
and orders gin and juice of nectarine, saying
the only way to gamble is with your heart
up your sleeve and an ace on the table. With the double
bypass scars, Bill raises his ale to the dealer
and asks the standard icebreaker *What are you
drinking?* the tv ticker cannot drown the clinking
as the chips are laid to rest and the blinds fall.
Bill's hopes are sinking because his credit score is black
and jack shit is what he's got, but better risk all
than risk not. He's a courageous bluffer
so he puts another payment down, the broker
bawls because his stock prices are dripping
down his throat and the banker calls, they're out
of caviar so he orders beefheart. *Papa needs
a new muffler!* He baits Bill and the other pockets
into bleeding cash until the bank is rupt
as the arteries are broken, and all the bets
are off. The suits return to the deck.
Bill's scars are open as he stumbles out
of the cab door and into his bed, holding
his wife's heart hum under the sheets
and his mouth bleeds to sleep, *I've lost you.*
As mumbles dry she murmurs *I won't let you go,*
until the morning when you can bet
*I'll keep the blinds raised while you're gone.**

Daniel Chi Cook

University of Washington '13

At the Door

At seven p.m. I take my post at the large glass panels in the marble lobby on Central Park West and wait to fulfill the observably useful part of my job. I open the door, carry their grocery bags and hand them their dry-cleaning. I smile while protecting them from the things they decidedly imagine don't exist, and I keep the secrets they would rather forget.

I watch at eight thirty as those working in the financial district get home from their leather-chaired, cigar-smoked, mahogany bars, dragging with them the scent of single malt scotch and the feeling of imminent artery blockades. The younger ones still look neat and healthy as the burden of a high-pressure career lingers just above them, ready to collapse in an instant. Their older counterparts make up the tail end of the crowd, slouching under the weight of hedge funds and infidelity. I watch the procession like its a flip book animating the gradual decay of a man and his virility.

At ten, the few babysitters and housekeepers who don't live in the customary closet-turned-bedroom leave for residents on Jamaica Avenue in Queens: apartments one-tenth the size of the ones they clean. By eleven-thirty, most of those who are still able bodied enough to shove their way through a crowded bar, or attractive enough to gain access to a club after shamelessly flirting with the gate-keeping bouncer, have been drawn to the neon of the city.

The next few hours continue to be defined by that sticky air, with the occasional swift breeze carrying in those who have admitted defeat and called it a night. And as four a.m. approaches I acknowledge the ephemeral shift it brings. Identities are lost to the ambiguity that accompanies these sixty minutes and everything melts, combining to form a vulnerable and gelatinous city ready to split open with the slightest application of pressure. Before four, anyone who I see staggering down the streetlamp-bronzed concrete can be designated by a general lack of inhibition or the scent of gin and vodka that lingers behind them like exhaust from a tailpipe. At five, the sounds of garbage trucks squeezing their way between the narrow side streets of Manhattan provide a soundtrack for the early morning ambition of those who get to the office before the promotion-givers do. But in between these time slots when the city lets down its guard for the deepness of sleep, the most happens and so does the least.

I glance at the large clock behind the marble counter. It tells me I'm an hour and twenty-two minutes from being replaced at the door and getting on the six fifteen train to Brooklyn. I'll sift upstream against the current of people heading towards Manhattan to sit at their desks and stare at their computer screens for the next eight hours. They'll be the same ones I pass on my way to work later today, after I've crawled into bed with Dara who's still asleep when I get home at seven a.m. She'll be wearing her worn cotton nightgown with faded pink flowers and she'll smell like laundry and Pond's cold cream. We'll exchange our respective states of consciousness, appearing as if our bedroom adheres to a law of conservation of sleep. She'll stir and blink as I yawn and let my eyelids droop. Then she'll shower and eat two eggs on toast and go to work while I sleep in the artificial dark of our black-out window shades. I'll see her later when she gets home and we'll eat dinner while I'm dressed in my Maroon uniform, Central Park West in my immediate future. And

I'll stare at her, beautiful, and wonder how two people can still love so deeply from memories; ones they flash onto the other like a projector of slides on a plain white screen. I'll think about how we'll make new ones eventually, when my day doesn't start as everyone else's ends.

As I get older my hair turns from brown to gray to a whiter gray and I'll get more irritable. The babies I saw as newborns, brought home to apartments that overlook the park, will grow into teenagers and then older teenagers and go to college. The parents will move to smaller apartments or out of the city entirely and a tall, thin couple will be the first of many to replace them. They'll wear nothing but black and have friends who have similarly chosen to withhold their genetic material from the future of our species, which I'll appreciate. They'll gather where the families used to have dinner and they'll drink red wine and smoke the expensive version of what teenagers hide from their parents. They'll be encouraged to emphasize their intellect by discussing current events and engaging in philosophical debates. They'll have a particularly offensive sphinx cat that will manage to escape their apartment and somehow appear in the lobby at least once a month. It will solidify like a hairless, bony hallucination and its translucent ears will look like lanterns. I'll bring the alien pet back to their smoky hallway and I'll ring the doorbell and wait for one of the turtlenecks inside to appear in dilated-pupil confusion.

The memories of Dara will become progressively unfocused as the years go by without new ones to take their place and when they start to fade entirely, I'll retire from the building on Central Park West. It will also start to become something I don't recognize anymore and I'll leave, in an attempt to regain the feeling that I'm part of something again. The night before I go the cat will appear in the lobby and I'll see how its furless skin and colorless eyes might have faded from richer counterparts and instead of taking it back upstairs I'll open the doors and I'll watch as its spiny tail disappears into the silence of a four am city.

Claire Eden

Washington University in St. Louis '13

riot

faces with maws
red and fresh;
roiling bodies curled,
wet with the hiss of a
broken fire hydrant.

in their eyes the rage
of cracked forefathers
once beaten with canes
now bowed by the blast
of guns

a perfect stranger
with a black hole
in his cupid's heart seeping
shards of metal
& the glass that kept
his hopes encased

the neighbors skinned
their knuckles on flesh,
peeling back to the bone
to try to make justice
of chaos and order by destruction

the boy whose life
crept into the
pavement; quiet
white eye rolling heaven-ward
mercy, mercy

(the shatter of cracked windows)

engulfed in flames
melting like sugar,
so sweet the smoke made
their corneas ebb in a
tide of salt

how coy and sharp
the taste of retribution
under searching, pink
tongues swept over teeth,
sharper even than the
shape of a perfect
bullet piercing a dreamy
boy's pacifist mouth

there is order in
how one human kills another
in the dark and acrid corners
of the night and
in the morning,
the streets always soft and
barely broken,
ghosts of a previous and violent life

*Roxy Harrison
Rutgers University '14*

“Funeral Games I, or Fur is Dead”

photo lithograph, Charlotte Greenbaum, Washington University in St. Louis '14



Forming Memories

Papa built a tree house
in the tallest oak,
Carved windows and a door,
a wraparound balcony,
and wooden table for us
to sit around and play cards.

I remember us,
all fifteen grandkids,
playing year round
up in that house,
sleeping on summer nights,
pretending to be adults,
playing go fish or uno,
and papa down at the bottom,
smoking Marlboro reds
and drinking a Budweiser.

He would sit there all day,
smiling up at us,
telling us stories of his childhood.

I don't remember how my
mother told me that he committed
suicide in the garage,
his skin melting off
and his lungs exploding--

*Summer Stewart
University of California, Davis '13*

The Eighth Continent

It is vast
and as heavy
as all weightless things we
bear are—evaporated
mother's tears, the musk of a beloved house
abandoned, and every syllable we lost or never shed
but disintegrating in our purgatory
bodies—a rich land
as real as
as any memory.

The color of the people there
is earth—
burnt meat ebony, the crumbly olive
of matter trapped beneath fingernails, baked red clay,
pale moon crater rims, stump-umber—mixed. But I
see some of my people arriving
with smooth rice husk skin,
with strong hair in only sooty shades,
with seed eyes long and
liquid, and bones narrowed
from straining.

My people all know the
same crooning noises our
steadfast mothers make; how
our stark fathers flush when
drinking; the two words for heart: one
for the heart pumping
plasma and one for
the heart pumping
passions and pains; the different
depths of bowing; the ancient tang of
fermented cabbage; and finally
we all know slowly the
lotus-eaters' dreams.

Our first homeland, our first mother
was a she-bear who ate
only mugwort and garlic cloves

in cave darkness for weeks until she
she shed her bear skin to
become a beautiful smooth skin woman—
then wed heaven's prince. She
bore him a son, our first king who
became a mountain god. We
all spoke the same tongue
then—gods,
humans, dreams, and beasts alike. The only
two alphabets we had were
of a single tongue and
of the body.

Then this new land began
borrowing blood from every tribe with
no intention of returning its people—at least
not as aboriginal
as before. Plucking
persons as loan words from other
languages—painfully
and permanently.

We are left here with only echoes
of vague music, and smells replicated only
in our memories. Our ancestors must sorrow in
their sleep as we undream homelands. We
shoulder legacies
of loss.

Now, on this final
continent any one may enter and speak
to any stranger and be
understood—
our skin shades and hair hues
smearing indistinctly—while
any one's own people become
stranded.

*Michelle Turgeon
Washington University in St. Louis '13*

LET'S GET COFFEE SOMETIME

*There is a certain sadness to you, he muses,
tracing his fingertips in delicate circles
around the coffee rings
stained in interlocking patterns
on our rickety table.*

*Yes, I reply inwardly, with the tilt of my head,
studying the slow movements
and hesitancy of his hands—
yes, there is, and you're not the one
to understand it.*

*Claire Salcedo
University of Washington '14*

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*R.I.P. Bob Reuter
1951 - 2013
Thanks for sharing the scratchy records!*

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