Exile

Denison University’s Literary and Art Magazine

48th Year
Fall Issue
You of the finer sense,

Broken against false knowledge,

You who can know at first hand,

Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought:

I have weathered the storm,

I have beaten out my exile.

-Ezra Pound
The Death of Phaethon

How does a god mourn: with fire, with falling
Leaves from the limbs of his daughters, all bark
Golden and ridden in lymph or amber
Which flows into the seas burned by his son.
The four horses scattered, chariot torn
To and fro. Clymene laved her breasts in the
Waters of the ocean by her son's grave.
Phoebus could not keep Jupiter from his
Striking, his bolts of fury, that would kill
Phoebus's son. The grieving of a god
Is silence, the sun not burning the earth
For one day, men lighting feeble fires,
None to rival the jeweled flames of heaven.
One tear for innocence, one for false pride

One tear for innocence, one for false pride,
*His strength too human, and too hot his pride.*
Torn from the skies, fearing the sting of the
Scorpion, the claws of the crab, he dropped
The reigns, let the horses take him away,
As so many of us have done, allowed
Life to lead us down limitless caverns
Of sorrow and joy. Many have been burned
As the sun grazing the earth, turning it
To desert. We dare not speak how or who
It was that scorched our skin, made us doubt. We
Know only what we tell ourselves, the lie
That grief has a limit, emotion a
Flat bottom, a shell's surface to be sought.

Sarah Bishop, '06

"Prelude to Keeping It Real" by John Buchanan, '05
Might as Well Have Been

I used to be interested in history until I found out the truth about history. That the Industrial Revolution did not come about when a man planted wires into the ground and grew computer-trees from which emanated computer plants. Bill Gates is not a robot. That the radio operators in the First World War did not sit on the top of radio towers and throw paper airplanes with messages written on them to other people sitting on radio towers. From one tower to another, all day long. When I got older, my grandfather said, “Well, that’s just about what happened.” Let me tell you this: There is a great difference between just and just about. Other things that are not true for those of you who have been misled: When Pearl Harbor was bombed is not when pearls became a valuable entity in the United States. When presidents’ wives wear pearls, it has nothing to do with the fact that they are mourning the loss of the harbor. Also, in Vietnam, Viet Cong had nothing to do with King Kong, and in fact, there were not gorillas in the war. It’s guerillas, and it’s guerilla warfare, and that’s another really big difference.

You know how I finally learned about history? It has everything to do with the Civil War. I had to give a presentation in fifth grade about the Civil War. I was thrilled to do it. We had to interview someone who knew a lot about it. My grandfather told me that because he had “been around since the dawn of man, you know that,” he was clearly more than qualified to talk about it. So I relied on him for the information. My dad gave me a Dictaphone so that I could record him talking. I still have it, the tape, it’s something else. My dad told me to take everything that grandpa says with a grain of salt. I told him I didn’t have one and my father gave me a Dictaphone so that I could record him talking. I still have it, the tape, it’s something else. My dad knew a lot about it. My grandfather told me that because he had “been around since the dawn of man, you know that,” he was clearly more than qualified to talk about it. So I relied on him for the information. My dad gave me a Dictaphone so that I could record him talking. I still have it, the tape, it’s something else. My dad told me to take everything that grandpa says with a grain of salt. I told him I didn’t have one and my father gave me a Dictaphone so that I could record him talking. I still have it, the tape, it’s something else. My dad knew a lot about it. My grandfather told me that because he had “been around since the dawn of man, you

Anyway, I had my pen and pencil in hand and I was up in the radio room, where we usually were if I

out. He’s humming a tune, they said in the news, an old tune that only big brass bands used to play. He was wearing a tweed coat that didn’t match his shoes and his pockets were laden with heavy bullets. He had a hat on his head and long hair. He just kept walking. The old woman in the store rejoiced because she hated the cashier, and the man started crying. He pushed the old lady and said, “How could you laugh at a time like this? I was going to ask her out on a date, I was.” And the lady replied, “All over the price of a gallon of milk,” and they got in a fight right there on the floor.

John kept walking and pretty soon, he was out of California. This was good, because by then there was a manhunt looking for him straight up north and south. The south was happy and the north was unhappy. He made it to Nebraska. And in Nebraska, he walked into a library about in the middle of the state and he shot the librarian straight through the head. And conveniently enough, the people on the south side of the library hated the librarian because she demanded books before they were due and charged people exorbitant rates in the instance that they became overdue, and the people on the north, being conservatives, liked the librarian for the very same reasons. So as soon as the librarian was shot up in the head, the two sides started fighting. You know what exorbitant means, yes?

I puffed on my cigar and made notes in my books, nodded. Cashier, librarian, these were the facts. “So, by this time, there’s another manhunt on the loose and the police in California hear about the incident in Nebraska and they realize that the only logical thing to do is what?”

My grandfather stopped and I stared. He always stopped in his stories at some point for me to jump in. “I guess. I guess they would probably take the criminal tape and expand it from California all the way to Nebraska and start to fence the area off?”

“That’s exactly what they did, you’re a smart kid, I’ll tell you what.” My grandfather took the time to light his cigar again. He got ash on his Notre Dame sweatshirt, and the ash floated down onto the floor, onto a wooden floor full of ashes and cracker crumbs. “So, what happens next. John keeps on walking with his gun. He’s got nine rounds left, and some extra ammo in his pocket. Do you know where he goes next? He’s humming his tune, they said in the news, an old tune that only big brass bands used to play. He was wearing a tweed coat that didn’t match his shoes and his pockets were laden with heavy bullets. He had a hat on his head and long hair. He just kept walking. The old woman in the store rejoiced because she hated the cashier, and the man started crying. He pushed the old lady and said, “How could you laugh at a time like this? I was going to ask her out on a date, I was.” And the lady replied, “All over the price of a gallon of milk,” and they got in a fight right there on the floor.

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Well, let me tell you what. The presentation didn’t go over so well. I failed it. My teacher gave me a book about the real Civil War, which wasn’t Civil, he had that much right, and I had to do a book report. She gave me a pitying look and said, “If only you knew the truth about the history of this great country. Really, Lauryn, where did you get this information?” I didn’t answer her. I left the classroom and went home and opened the book. I read it page by page. It was horrible, and then I had nightmares for a week. I lost my passion for history right then and there, and I’ve never seen the world like I used to again. I didn’t ever care to verify gorillas or the shit about the pearls. Aside from the nightmares, I went over to my grandfather’s house, which was right across the yard and threw my failed presentation at him. I gave him my two cents and told him that I would never take what he said again without first putting a grain of salt in the boiler. I would have given him a piece of my mind if that wasn’t such a bad idea. And then I stormed out, even though he and my father had warned me, and only spoke to him on holidays. I was only ten and I had driven the wedge, no room for lame attempts at reconciliation over cranberries and turkey. It must have been the shock of it all.

He died a little while ago, and by then I’d figured out that he wasn’t an ill-intentioned man. I figured it out the day he died, ironically enough, and I was finally old enough to understand the “might as well have been stuff. I went to the funeral. I mourned with the mourners and over his grave I took back my two cents and the grain of salt. I told him I had become and English major so that I could write stories, tell people the truth, his truths, ones that I’d make my own someday as well. He said back to me, because seriously he inclined his head upwards in the coffin when no one was looking, and said, “I’m glad that you took those two cents back. They were the heavy burden of silence, I’ll tell you what. Finally, can we agree, there might as well? There might well have been someone named John Doe?” Indeed.

Lauryn Dwyer, ’05
“What the hell was that?!” Shaw yelled, dropping his two playing cards on the poker table. Annoyingly enough he had a two of hearts and a three of clubs; his straight bluffing face would have won him some chips this hand. He picked them up hastily, but I was the only one who had seen them. Everyone else was looking around to see where the noise had come from.

Almost at the same time as the strange noise, which sounded like some sort of sci-fi ray gun, the lights went out. A half second later a pot fell, a woman screamed in pain, and hot water mixed with steamy rice dribbled into the living room. The night, it would seem, was officially over.

The night officially began around ten when I arrived at my friend Shaw’s house for his weekly poker night. Although these nights of cards and alcohol were frequent events, this would be my first appearance at one of them. To call Shaw my friend would be a bit exaggerated, although we’d known each other since college. He ran with the elite social circles in our New Haven school, a high life afforded by his rich family ties and astonishing passing record as starting quarterback on the football team. We had been roommates and he had been nice enough to let me tag along when he went out to selective parties and clubs, allowing me to bask in the limelight while he took center stage. These situations were always a bit odd; I always felt as if there were people looking at me and shaking their heads. Long stares and quiet whispers followed me at these places; my existence was only noticeable when I was near Shaw. I was a shadow, a figure that had just managed to sneak into places where the door was closing.

The front door opened only just enough to look outside and not let any of the snow in. I was greeted by Mary, Shaw’s wife of fourteen years. She kissed me on both cheeks and told me to come inside. The weather had been bad in northern Massachusetts, and the snow hadn’t let up in days. To make things worse, a lightning storm was passing through, making for an unusual combination of dark white and electric yellow nights.

“Come on in dear, the boys are just sitting down,” Mary told me, then went on into her usual gossip. “Did you hear what happened?”

I shook my head. I never kept up with the local hearsay, I was always buried at my typewriter trying to crank out something for the editors.
word as her husband berated the weather and her, but mostly her. The other card players just looked at their cards. In our junior year in college, Shaw got into a fight when he was drunk. I think it was cold and lightning that night too. The guy was spitting blood and teeth but Shaw just kept hitting away and it took three guys to pull him off. Images of that night flashed back as I listened to him go at his wife. I could see through the kitchen door that she was beginning to sob.

All of a sudden, thunder cackled again, this time followed by the sound of the electric wires outside snapping. The windows shuddered and the lights went out. Mary, who was moving a boiling pot of rice must have slipped and dropped the contents on her foot. She screamed in the darkness.

"Jesus Christ." Shaw stood up. In front of the dancing flames of the fireplace he looked pretty damn scary. He threw on a coat and hat and went outside to see what had happened. In his haste, he hit the corner of the poker table with his knee. In the dark I could see beer and poker chips swirling around on floor.

I pulled out my lighter and made my way to the kitchen. I helped move Mary to the sofa and wrapped up her foot. I thanked her, told her I was sorry for the evening and made my way for the door. I was putting on my coat and walking out when I passed Shaw stumbling in. He held the door open for me one last time as I left.

Julian Ybarra, '08

"Cogitating" by Adrienne Hunter, '07
Fall

During a solitary shuffle through mid-autumn,
I could feel the trees growing around me.
The shrubs stood on end. Greenery trembled at my footsteps.
Branches reached out, beckoning me to tend the forest which had sprouted.

The setting sun drained my leisure to landscape.
The moon was waning inspiring a hearty lunacy in me.
I was a maverick in this land of park rangers and tree huggers, land-of-the-free-ers and mother natures.
I was a bastard, with no mother, no nature, no nurture.

Let the forest fall. Let it shrivel up.
Let it decay into brown and coarse dry paper leaves. Color them blood red, rancid orange, sick, weak yellow.
My rustling steps leave a path of grand silent collapse and I walk away to let the woods starve, smacking my lips on a crisp, ripe, green apple.

Jess Haberman, '06

"Milk Bucket" by Jen Keehner, '08
Jesus Christ Took My Baby Away

"The fuck is with all the flip-flops back there?"

"What?"

"Flip-flops. They were all over the place."

"I don’t know what you’re talking about."

"You know, flip-flops, the kind of sandals. Thongs, whatever you want to call them. The kind that go between your toes and flip and flop and shit. You know what I mean now? Flip-flops."

"I know what flip-flops are."

"So what’s with them? They’re all over the place."

"You mean in the stores or something?"

"No. At that school. Your friend’s school we stayed at last night. Everyone at that stupid preppy East Coast school was wearing them. It’s like they don’t own any fuckin’ shoes or something. It’s not even just those douches with their collars up, it’s everyone. Every student on that campus had a pair."

"Jerry. We were in Pennsylvania. That’s not the East Coast."

"Isn’t it?"

"No. In order to be on the East Coast I think you have to touch the coast."

"Screw that."

And our conversation ends there. I know if I argue with my brother anymore I’ll only encourage him, but there isn’t even anything to argue about. It’s not like he even has a good point. He does this all the time, finding any way to offend people and first offenders and then gets them to defend themselves, laughing the whole time because it’s not like he really can be offended by anything because he really has no real opinions. My brother is one of those people who you can say doesn’t care about anything. But then, when I think about it, I’m one of those people too.

Sometimes it’s fun, like when we tell liberals that the Patriot Act isn’t violating enough of our rights until everyone is yelling, or explaining to our conservatives that Saddam Hussein is our generation’s Che Guevara, a brave revolutionary who is unjustly imprisoned and needs to be freed and immortalized. However, when it’s just me and my brother he takes anything he can and twists it around and turns it into an argument that eventually ends in one of us yelling or laughing. I’m not in the mood for an argument now, so I just look out the window.

"Let’s put in a CD," I say, looking over at him.

"What are you in the mood for?"

"I don’t know. I know whatever I suggest will erupt into one of two things, either an argument or background information on whatever I choose. My brother has vast stores of knowledge and wisdom surrounding virtually every CD in his collection. Actually, what he considers to be knowledge and wisdom are the only conspiracies he’s read on the internet or heard from friends or made up himself.

"Ok. Shit. Let’s listen to… fuck…Tupac sound good?"

"No, not now. I’m not in a rap mood."

"I am, and I’m driving."

What do I say to that? He is driving. I realize I’ve failed, because I wanted music I could relax to and ignore, and music that would prevent conversation. Instead I’m trying to ignore and relax gangsta rap, which will naturally be accompanied by a lecture from my brother on the life and times of Tupac Shakur, specifically detailing the conspiracies surrounding his death.

I’m looking out the window at nothing. Nothing but night and darkness and occasional lights scattered around but not the pretty kind of lights or anything, just dim yellow ones scattered around in fields off in the distance and hiding behind hills or maybe in farmhouses on the side of the road. I think we might be somewhere in Maryland now. We’re going to one of the Carolinas, the one with all the hicks who fly their Confederate flags and hate black people and were the first to secede from the Union. That’s all I know, and all I know about North Carolina is that it’s the Carolina that’s North of South Carolina.

"So do you think he’s alive or not?"

"Who?"

"Tupac. Did he fake his death?"

"No. I don’t want to talk about it either."

"Yeah you do."

"No I don’t."

"You have to accept the fact that Tupac is alive."

"Ok. You’re right. Tupac is alive. He faked his own death so that he could sell more records. Now can we not talk about it?"

"No, because you don’t understand why he did it. Tupac wanted to escape from the limelight. It wasn’t about becoming popular. He didn’t want or need the money. He was inspired by Machiavelli when he was in prison…"

I don’t need to listen. I’ve heard most of it before. I look out the window again. I don’t think I’ve ever seen in Maryland before, but then I’m not sure if I’m even in it now. I don’t know if the darkness with its scattered lights is what I would be seeing if I was in Maryland. I know I haven’t been to either of the Carolinas.

"…always wore a bulletproof vest, every single night of his life. So where was the vest the night he got murdered? He was wearing it because he had planned the shooting. Suge Knight was driving the car and was the only witness to his supposed death but was never even questioned by the police because they were involved, they had been paid off and…"

No matter what we’re listening to, my brother will do this. Every time we listen to Bob Dylan he talks about Hibbing, the town in Minnesota where Bob Dylan was from. And how he was born as Bob Zimmerman. And that “Positively Fourth Street” is about Fourth Street in Minneapolis. The only reason we care about this because we’re from Minnesota. Everybody in Minnesota is obsessed with any “culture” that comes out of it.

Scott Fitzgerald, Garrison Keillor, Prince, Kirby Puckett, Josh Hartnett. . .

"…no autopsy and he was cremated the next day. The law requires an autopsy on all murder victims. Then you can’t ignore how often the number seven comes up in his death. And seven is the number of heaven…"

We’re from a town called Stillwater. It’s a pseudo-small town outside the Twin Cities, the only real cities in Minnesota. Stillwater is very confused over its image, which is why I call it a pseudo-small town. It used to be a rustic little town, the first one in Minnesota, but now it’s torn between staying small and cute or becoming commercial and all about fast food and corporations or becoming a suburb of the cities. It’s like a seventh grader deciding whether to be a goth or a prep or a nerd or a skater, et cetera.

"…so think about that. Who is the other celebrity to fake his death and then come back, bigger than ever and with the greatest following in history?"

I really wish it wasn’t night, so I could actually see the goddamn window.

"Francis?"

Shit, apparently he actually wants a response out of me.

"What?"

"Did you hear my question?"

"No."

"I was asking if you realize the connection between Tupac and the other historical figure who faked his death?"

"You mean Machiavelli again?"

"No. Jesus, man. Tupac is the Jesus of our generation. Look at it, a hero who inspires the poor and oppressed and changes the world through his words. And then things get rough, he gets executed but he’s not really gone. It explains the significance of seven in his music, it explains why he refers to Suge as Simon, it makes sense. Totally makes sense. I mean, he had an album called Resurrection?"
"You know, I don't think Jesus really faked his death. The story goes more like that he was executed and then he rose again on the third day."
"Yeah, he tricked everyone into thinking he was dead."
"God damn, Jesus wasn't tricking people. He was actually murdered by the Romans."
"What the fuck? Aren't you an atheist anymore?"
"Yeah, but what's that got to do with it? The Bible doesn't say that Jesus faked his death. It's totally different."
"No, it's exactly the same. The hero. The villains. The oppressed. All the same characters. And after he dies his voice lives on, while he is also secretly alive and in hiding."
"Jesus didn't rise from the grave and just hide for a while. He walked around performing goddamn miracles!"
"Dude, Francis, do you believe in him or not? Make up your mind."

For the record, both my brother and I are Lutheran-raised atheists. Our town is pretty much all Lutheran, but with a good smattering of kids like us, coping with our disillusionment and searching for a more satisfying religion. The only other options in the town are Catholicism and that New Wave Non-Denominational Born-Again Jesus-Loves-You-Accept-Him-Into-Your-Heart-And-Give-Us-Money Christianity that does well with people who want some sort of insurance for the afterlife but aren't satisfied with what they've got so far. Jerry and I are both sick of what we've been raised with, but he tries to find new forms of "spirituality" while I don't really care as much. My brother has experimented with Buddhism, Taoism, Shintoism, Transcendentalism, the Church of Scientology, and so on. He tries new religions the way the other kids in our town go through drugs.

On the other hand, I'm satisfied with disillusionment.

"It doesn't matter whether or not I believe in him. You're changing the entire story of the New Testament just to prove whatever your point is. What the hell if your point? That Tupac is God?"
"No. I never said Tupac is God. I'm saying he just as important as Jesus for our modern society. And since we're on the same topic, what do you believe in?"

When I think about his poetry, I doubt that I could have ever liked Merle. This wedding is going to suck. And I can't even remember if I like Merle. I remember that he wrote poetry. My brother would make fun of Merle would write it and email it out to people, and somehow I got on the list. It would always involve brokenthreaded dreams or torn ideas or fallen aspirations. Either that or oxymorons like "abstract concrete" or "organized chaos" or "a broken perfection." He also didn't use capitalization and avoided punctuation.

When I think about his poetry, I doubt that I could have ever liked Merle. This wedding is going to suck...
"You wrote a song called 'Jesus Christ Took My Baby Away'? I thought you weren't religious? Aren't you a Taoist right now?"

"No. I'm looking into Jainism. But that doesn't matter. It's not a Christian song. But it could be. That's the point. Just think about the name. What's the first thing you think it's about?"

"Um... The Ramones. Because you clearly stole the name from the song 'The KKK Took My Baby Away'."

"Exactly. So what's it about then?"

"Lack of originality?"

"Don't piss me off here," he says with a joking tone and a very passive-aggressive gleam in his eyes. I figure I should humor him, I don't think we need this argument to escalate into yelling. Not in a diner somewhere in Delaware.

"Ok. You want me to guess what your song is about. Is it about Jesus? Taking your baby away? As in, your baby died and went to heaven and it was Jesus' doing?"

"Perfect. But that doesn't have to be what it's about. It could be about anything."

"Like Tupac, or what?"

"No. Well, maybe. Just think about it. What else could those six words mean?"

"I don't know."

"Ok. I'll give you one. What if it's from the perspective of an old Jewish woman whose child just converted to Christianity. Or a Muslim whose child was just murdered by crusaders in the Middle Ages. How awesome is that?"

"Beyond words."

"Or maybe baby doesn't mean child, it means girlfriend, or lover, or whatever."

"I'm not sure if this is as genius as you seem to think."

"You have to open your mind, Francis. You aren't evaluating it correctly. This song will be a hit. It will blow people's minds. Because it works on so many levels. Every word in the song could have multiple meanings. There are so many stories this song tells. Everyone hears a different one. You heard one about a baby dying. Someone else hears one about The Crusades, someone else hears about Jesus dying for our sins, someone else hears one about Tupac. Maybe it's about a guy who's girlfriend left him because she became a born-again Christian or about a girl who chose a Jesus-guy over him or maybe his friend became a Christian. It changed her personality and she was never the same, like that Ben Folds song about acid, or it's about what you said, Jesus taking someone through death. Or it's about someone who's baby was killed in a gang fight with Tupac fans. Mystery. Various interpretations. It's what makes music. It's what makes art."

I am a little upset to realize that I like his point. I hate it when he has an idea that I like. Although I don't know that this song really sounds too good, he has a good point about mystery being the key to music, to art. But he's forgetting a huge element of it.

"Aren't you forgetting something? Something Tupac had and Jesus had and everyone who hits it big has have?"

"What?"

"Mystery isn't enough, Jerry. You need tragedy. You need an early death, shrouded in confusion and... you know, all that. Ambiguosity, or whatever."

"My song's got tragedy. It's about someone's baby being taken away."

"No, I mean you personally need tragedy. That's why Tupac is huge. He's got the good music and the mystery, but there's the tragic aspect to it. He never knew his father and he went to prison and he got in gang fights. It's why Jesus hit it so big, because he got nailed to a cross. Tragedy is the reason anyone cares about Jeff Buckley and Kurt Cobain and Buddy Holly and Jimi Hendrix and Biggy Smalls and Elliott Smith... and... and fucking Mozart! And Abraham Lincoln. And Ghandi, and JFK! If you want to be a hit you have to die young and suddenly and mysteriously."

"That's not true. Look at all the musicians who never died. Or the ones who did die and it killed their careers. Like John Denver, he hasn't become more successful since he died! And the Beatles, John Lennon died years after they broke up and they're still considered one of the greatest bands ever!"

"Unless you die, or at least pretend to, in a mysterious manner, you'll never make it big."

"Not all those people you named are really that big. And not all of them died in mysterious ways. And Abraham Lincoln wasn't even a musician."

"Yeah, but he's on the five. I was proving the point that no matter what your field is, you will be better remembered if you die tragically and before your time."

"He sips his coffee. I don't think he even likes coffee, he just drinks it because it fits his image."

"So what is your song about?" I ask him. "You have to have written it about something before you came up with all these theories on what else it could mean. And you have to secretly have an answer to it. What else are you going to say in interviews when you're a big star and your fans want to know the secret?"

"I'm gonna say fuck you and ask you if you're going to finish your hash browns."

I hand him the hash browns and lean back in my chair, full from my omelet. Neither of us says anything more. He's got me thinking about art and inspiration and fame. But then he looks up from his food, and in the look in his eyes isn't joking at all. I can tell I'm about to get the real Jerry; this is going to be what he really thinks about music and art and inspiration and what his stupid song is about.

"When I was younger..." he says, talking slowly. I can tell he's talking slow so he can decide on his words and sound profound and make me really think.

"When I was younger, and disillusioned with being a Lutheran and a Minnesotan and all that, and having nothing more to our state than Bob Dylan and Jesse Ventura... well, that has nothing to do with it, not the Minnesota part. Well, I would think about religion and I thought that I didn't believe Jesus was God, but he was still, you know, a smart guy and wise and a good philosopher. But then I thought about it more. And I realized that yeah, it's a nice idea that the meek will inherit the Earth, but... Jesus is an asshole. He's egotistical, he's self-centered... he said he's the Son of fucking God. So you know what? I take Tupac over Jesus. Because I am the baby, that song is about my innocence. It's... okay maybe it isn't about that. Maybe it's about... I don't know where I'm going with this."

And then he laughs and takes another bite of my hash browns and I look out the window of the diner, at another boring state and decide it doesn't matter. None of it matters. Neither of us cares who is right and who is wrong and what makes good music.

I think about what it all means and what the this trip means and why we're in this diner and why this was created and for what purpose and who did what and how we don't even understand our own symbolism and metaphors because no one understands symbolism and nothing matters.

Fuck that. Fuck all of that. Metaphors are bullshit.

David Lovett, 08
Sonnets for the Musician that I Loved

I.

I met you of a Sunday, all roving aside, your brown-eyed hush, insistent touch cluttered in my hands, an odor: clove fling because “it was French.” Only I thought much of them at this point. You joked freedom fries and I smiled. You made the lusty clear day an enjoyable one. You hint brown eyes have turned you on, and this I note away. You kissed my hand without permission there in the park, doves gray as suet and street ash. You kissed each finger as if then aware of my piano playing, your one splash with guitar lessons a funny story for me to repeat that night, not sorry.

II. Apology

I love you, and I am sorry for this. I do not know you, one who have sent me to the heights and the lowness in a kiss. You light up, sip deep that cigarette, free from the worry that some silly thing might want you more than the stars want gravity. But I do, and I am sorry for sight now. I can see you there, proclivity to you a curse. You lean, and I lean, know-ing it is time to leave. Our heat enclosed in the shaking of the windows, pillow of grass afterward. And your eyes are closed, I think that the sky is too much to miss: the heights and lows contained within a kiss.

III.

We have finished before we had begun. Alone I stand in this room, breath baited through. I build a house of cards, hearts for fun. It was the lack of calls that I hated, and I admit the lack of courtship. Wound, I stay in the corner, cheap lights blow up the stage, I sip up the foam off blank sound, a beer, cool, in the mouth, not a tune-up session alone in pink light. You, single beautiful disaster, are all I hate and all I need, a repair shot shingle
IV.
Smoke from the grates rises slowly in streams on empty street corners turning like thoughts. Early morning shafts of light, sliced in beams, feel golden as apples gathered in clots. A young boy sits beheading bright flowers, estimating the time it takes to bleed. Each color, patient, waits out the hours to cause wrinkled brows that then quickly plead: “nothing is lifeless. Blood, like a river, flows by on an inner canvas of quiet.” And the cold yawning ground brings a shiver beneath my feet, the seasons in riot. I see so much more loneliness in me, yet the world goes on breathing tree to tree.

V.
Although words leave me then tease me later I will live through this pause, shuffle to you, a stone unturned, and a love far greater lies in me than what lies dormant in you. One day you will fall, and not be able to lead a day without tripping up, this I am sure of. Everyone does, stable as you seem in being alone. Remiss it would be in calling you cold, for your hot kisses linger still, but I am warm like a fire in the heart. In secret for you I longed, now for myself I do form a strength to be a light on you. Slip through love, trip down words, I am fine without you.

Sarah Bishop '06
exile


Hard to imagine?

"Untitled" by Madeline Mohre, '08 and David Savoie, '08

"Untitled" by Katherine G. Armbrust, '06
Little Pieces of a Mind I Once Owned

It's 2:17 AM. High on speed, I sit hunched over examining a loaf of bread in a half-lit convenience store aisle. The whole row feels warm and inviting, with a comforting smell that takes me back to my childhood for a few seconds. My mind stops buzzing and images slowly begin to form in each other. I can see my mother, a picture-perfect June Cleaver replica, baking and cooking and cleaning in order to stay far, far away from the problems of the rest of the world. I can remember the sweet smells of fresh food waiting for me when I came home. Dammit, I love bread.

***

In all, we were five. Individually, we were Marshall, Brandon, Ronnie, Jason and Andrew. Marshall was the true punk (piercings and all), Brandon was the goodball, Jason hated authority more than I did but rarely said a word about it, and Ronnie was the guy who was the smartest out of all of us. Even though all it seemed like we did together was party, get drunk, etc., we actually knew each other really well. We were like brothers who cared for each other, but never really wanted to show it. I remember back when Brandon's girlfriend got into a car accident and she was paralyzed or something (it's all kinda foggy) and he was ready to kill himself but we helped him through. We were like The Ramones from the cover of Rocket to Russia, standing together, all wanting to be sedated, but still hoping to make something out of ourselves nonetheless. We had potential. But then again, everyone has potential.

***

It's Friday night all over again and I'm sitting at a party wondering how my life ended up as it is today. My old friend named Marshall brings over me a beer and it feels cold, crisp and familiar to my tongue. It's the fourth of July and all is well. I get invited to a party at Jane Kaczynski's place and of course, accept the invitation. I promise my mother no drinking. I lied. What a stupid thing for her to ask of a fifteen-year-old boy. And how stupid of her to believe my promise, or how stupid of her to hopefully believe it. Of course, I lied. I go to the party and get drunk so bad I can barely stand, much less talk like a normal human being. I spew ethnic slurs with relative ease until I got knocked onto my ass by the one person at the party who actually knew where Estonia was.

For the first time in a long time, I feel a sense of freedom. I've had an identity crisis over and with the realization that your life is going nowhere. Then, I found out Brandon killed himself. Overdose. It stung beyond belief inside, but I couldn't even bear to go to his funeral. That leads me to today, as I am sitting at home, thinking about all of the others. I know Marshall works a corner near our old street). I feel bad about my broken promise but I never told her that. All the flowers in the world on her grave won't send away the lies I told.

***

Eventually, we managed to come to the crossroads of high school life at senior year where we all had horrible grades and records, and only one of us could graduate (it was Ronnie). We all dropped out together on the same day, fueled by the desire of youth to spill our angst over and crush all beneath us. Turns out, we were all just young and stupid. We went back to living with our parents, but we all got jobs here and there. Some weren't always the most politically correct, like the ones that involved drugs and guns. A couple of us got jail-time along the way. About five years later, we had all but split apart. We lost touch and began to sink in the depression that comes with the realization that your life is going nowhere. Then, I found out Brandon killed himself. Overdose. I feel bad about my broken promise but I never told her that. All the flowers in the world on her grave won't send away the lies I told.

***

That'll be $9.53.
The clerk, a Latino guy whose accent has almost been completely covered by the veil of Americana, rings me up. I hand him a ten dollar bill.

"Forty-seven cents change."

I get tired of staring at the chewing gum rack and make the mistake of talking.

"Have you ever had a really bad dream, where you don’t know where you are and you’re lost in a hazy mist and you really can’t comprehend the effects of your actions and how the words you say slowly drip from your mouth sound like nothing to you but make perfect sense to someone else, and then you wake up and it’s the same way?"

He stops counting change and looks up at me.

"Are you high, man?"

I whisper my reply.

"Not anymore. Heh."

He hands me the paper bag with beer, potato chips, bread in it.

"Go home. It’s not worth it. I should know. I did jail time for something like that. Look at me, thirty-five, working the grave shift in a middle of nowhere store."

I don’t like being told what to do.

"Thanks for the advice. Next time I’ll ask for it."

***

Speed is a killer. No, I’m serious, it turns out that if you do enough crystal meth you can die. I was reading an article in the newspaper this morning about a study. It talked about most always using it leads up to some sort of sexual disease because people tend not to care enough about what they are doing when they are high. Wow, I didn’t know that. Honest to goodness, I knew about a lot of things but I didn’t know that. I should probably lay off of it for a few days, anyways. My head is killing me.

I think about things like that while I walk home from the store. My daily walks home from the convenience store five minutes down the way from my home allow me some fresh air and a chance to contemplate the deeper meaning of things. Funny enough, I have whole days free seeing as I have no job, but I only actually put myself to good use for five minutes.

***

My house looks so beautiful from the outside, just the way my mother would have wanted it. She was a such sweet lady and I loved her so much. The paint hasn’t slipped through the cracks of time quite yet and it still looks pristine. The garden has miraculously not been ruined either. "Hey Andy," Mrs. Murphy calls out. She smiles so perfectly that her teeth align just right and the world makes sense for a few moments. Then, she sees the yellow seeping through my skin, my bloodshot, sleepless eyes which makes me realize just how sick I’ve become. My euphoria trip has finally worn off almost completely and I’m beginning to regain some semblance of reality. Too bad reality and I don’t get along very well.

***

I remember the first time it really hit home, when strangers noticed it most because I’m human and I care what strangers think. It wasn’t the best of evenings: I didn’t even notice the sun set that day because it wouldn’t stop raining. It was just dreary, dull, ugly. I hadn’t slept for a day and skipped school, and was running on adrenaline and crystals. I was doing homework and kept trying to figure out this math problem, but I couldn’t concentrate. The numbers didn’t fit right, like just the world seemed at the time: hazy, out of frame, drifting. The stress was heavy on my head, so I went for a short walk. I passed a small restaurant, one of those places that calls itself a “cafe” when it’s just a diner. People were sitting at a few tables outside because the rain was beginning to stop. Still, the puddles got on my nerves and I kept circling around them. I noticed the strange
By the time I made my way up, I knew it was coming from my mother’s room. Holding my breath as well as I could and stepping along silently, I tip-toed towards the noise, with every bone in my body shivering. For a second, I thought I’d fall to pieces.

The door was open and I could see someone’s back. He was rummaging through a set of drawers filled with her clothes. He didn’t seem like very big but it’s never good to underestimate a potential threat. Dante Carlow taught me that.

I came to the conclusion that it was either do or die. Either I’d take this person out from my vantage point, or I’d just stand there like a lamb to slaughter. I couldn’t walk back downstairs because the stairs creaked heavily when you move down, it’s a wonder the whole neighborhood doesn’t hear it. So I did it. I went inside the room, with no hope or prayer in the entire world, and decided I’d have to cut this guy open somewhere; probably his throat. The idea terrified me because as much as I was inclined to violence, I had a weak stomach and an even weaker heart. Even if the man mass-murdered my family, I’d have trouble killing him. I didn’t want the guilt nor did I want dead body nor did I want to have to do something so deplorable.

Lucky for me and my conscience, I didn’t have to make the decision. Why? Well, he turned around just as I was walking in. He pulled out a gun, too. Lucky me.

He stood there for a moment, his hands shaking holding a small Beretta. His breathing was soft and tempered yet growing heavier as time went on.

He was quite a sight. He looked to be about in his late twenties with a lanky frame covered by an oversized old Chicago Blackhawks hockey jersey and a ski mask that didn’t help hide his beard. His jeans looked either acid washed or so ancient they had faded. You could easily tell he had no idea what he was doing.

After we stood there for what seemed like an eternity but was probably forty-five seconds, he spoke. “Drop the knife.” His voice seemed so awkward uttering those words that it almost cracked. I did as he told, j

I paused and waited for an explanation but when it didn’t come I asked him just why he was robbing. “Well... I know I graduated from high school and ended up going to a community college and it all seemed to be coming up in roses... but when that ended, I was stuck with a job at a factory that really wasn’t anything that appealed to me. I was treated horribly and my boss was the most ignorant man you’ve ever met. I took a lot of verbal abuse from that son of a bitch, so I decided to tell him off one day. He fired me right on the spot and wouldn’t recommend me for anything else because of what I said to him.”

“What’d you say?”

“Well...” he thought aloud, “your wife is a whore, your mother is a whore, your sister is a whore, your aunt is a—”

“I get the point.”

“Yeah, and that’s not all. I basically ripped into every aspect of his professional and personal life, including the fact that he had a mistress, who was actually the only one who was really a whore. I wasn’t left with much when he refused to pay me my last check, and it wasn’t much anyways, so I thought I’d get a new job. Turns out, no one wants a guy who spent most of his high school career getting C’s, D’s and drunk.”

“But you were the smartest one of out all of us! I mean, come on! You went to college, for Pete’s sake!”

“You were the one that cared about studying for the semester exams, you were the one that knew stuff about history and science—”

“I know, I know!”

“...you were the one that abandoned us senior year.”

Silence.

“You don’t need to be all quiet about it now. I mean, I can’t say it really bothers me too much anymore. That was then, this is now. Maybe you’ve changed. What do I know?”

He remained silent. He tried not to look at my face when I said those words, but he couldn’t help himself. “I’m sorry, Andy, but it’s just that... you guys took all you had and threw it away... and I didn’t want that to happen to me... and now... look at me now. I’m a complete failure.” He almost began to cry, but he couldn’t bring himself to it. He knew it was his fault.

“Don’t worry about it,” I consoled. “I don’t blame you. If I had been smarter, I would have left us behind too.”

He took one last sip of beer, put the bottle down and opened up the yearbook. “Wonder whatever happened to those people.”
"Like who?" I asked.
"Like him." He pointed to Franklin Mazuchelli, a tubby, smiling teenager with blonde hair. "I used to sit with him at lunch."
I stared at his face for a few moments, then looked at his name, and back at his face. "Owens a restaurant."
"What? How do you know?"
"He always told us he would someday, and I never believed him, so we made a bet over it. Three years after graduation, I got a call from him and he wanted his $15."
"Heh."
"Yeah."
"What about her?"
He pointed to his ex-girlfriend, his only one in high school, Maria Randalls.
"I don’t know. I haven’t heard or seen from most of these people in ages."
"Why don’t you get a job?" Ronnie asked in an effort to change the subject.
I replied succinctly: "No experience. Where would I work?"
"Start from the bottom and work your way up just like any other American."
"You’re one to speak."
His expression didn’t change but I could see a subtle grin poking through his hazy eyes. "I know, I know, but hey, it’s never too late. Not even for me. We all make mistakes. But we learn, right?"
"I guess."
"I mean, even I’m not so bad anymore. I used to steal from houses and then tear them up just out of the sheer frustration that I didn’t end up being able to live a happy life like they did. But last time..."
He smiled. "I left out vandalizing everything..."
He glanced at the yearbook laying open and empty, filled with faces of the past that were forever immortalized on those black and white pages.
"Man, everything’s gone away now. So many chances down the drain. I miss school sometimes. Everything was simple and defined. But not anymore. Nothing’s easy, nothing’s given to us."

***

And so Ronnie and I talked for hours on end, until our throats were dry. Reminiscing was a chore for me, but not for him. It was like free therapy, like he’d waited all those years just to spill his guts to someone. He kept on telling me about his life until I finally got him to go home, but not without trading numbers just in case I recover from the echoes of his voice in my ears for the next twenty-three years.

When you think about it, what happened with Ronnie was an incredible coincidence; him robbing my house and all. But that’s what life is made up of... coincidences that change you forever. If I hadn’t shared that one class in fifth grade with Brandon Peters O’Neill, then I might have never ended up as how I am today. If I hadn’t ever left that house that one warm May evening to go bowling and then get high with some friends, I may have been able to say goodbye to my mother and told her how much I loved her. Maybe she wouldn’t have suffered that stroke that evening. Maybe if I hadn’t let go of Natalie, I’d be married right now with a bunch of children, all there to listen to me. Maybe to learn from me.

That’s all life is. A bunch of regrets. Regrets are useless things that hold you down because tomorrow has enough problems of its own that you needn’t waste time crying over the past. You just have to accept the cards you’ve been dealt, read ‘em and weep, and move on. But not all coincidences are regrets, so good things can come from karma.

For example, if it hadn’t been for Ronnie breaking into my house and sitting there complaining about his life to me for hours on end and wondering where the possibilities went, I might not be trying to get into college now.

Reyan Ali, ’08
Tainted Memories of June

The Sacré Coeur was bleeding the night we stood on the steps among the litter of drunks. I declared my love for Mark as I let you pull his kiss from me, inhaling guilt with your breath.

I will remember you like the artificial peach of that summer in Germany: walking barefoot over the warm half square patterns of sun on the wood floor.

In a breeze of cigarette smoke mixed with alcohol, one seventy degree night, you will be an image of red paint splashed across the left tower of a white church.

Melissa Holm, '05
Contributors' Notes

Reyan Ali is a first year student.

Kimberly Archibald is a senior who considers herself to be an amateur photographer and enjoys traveling worldwide for shots of the sublime. She's an English Literature major currently focused on a research project about Victorian women, madness, and desperation in marriage.

Kate Armbrust is a junior from Warwick, Rhode Island working toward her BFA.

Sarah Bishop is a junior double major in English, with a concentration in creative writing, and Theatre. She hails from Nashville, TN and can be found most often in the costume shop making corsets or sewing pants, or reading/writing at her computer. She loves the finer things in life like puppies, kittens and short walks on the beach, and is excited to be featured in this literary magazine.

John Buchanon is senior from Michigan.

Laurren Dwyer is a senior Cinema and English-Writing double major from the Chicagoland area. In a surprising turn of events, she is planning on attending law school next year.

Jed Finley is a 5th year senior communications major from Rumson, NJ. He is a DJ and a member of the executive board at WDUB. Other than drawing, Jed also spends his creative time writing short stories and is about to start work on the soon to be famous play "The Testicle Dialogs." He dedicates his drawing to his friend Liz, who he drew it for to wish her a bright future at Denison.

Jess Haberman is a junior English literature major. She is a member of Ladies' Night Out and works at the Writing Center. Jess has been published in three International Library of Poetry anthologies and at poetry.com

Meredith Helfrich is a senior from Saint Louis, Missouri, majoring in Environmental Studies with a concentration in Education.

Melissa Holm a senior Creative Writing and French double major from Worthington, Ohio who hopes to continue her studies after Denison and earn an M.F.A. in Creative Writing.

Adrienne Hunter is a sophomore who "...shoots everything in sight. watch out, you may be next." She would like to thank her grandparents for coming up with the titles for these photos.

Jen Kehner is a first year potential Studio Art major from Plymouth, Michigan. In addition to photography, which she has been studying for the past three years, she also enjoys writing, being outdoors and waffle parties.

David Lovett is a first year student.

Maddie Mohre is a first year student from DeWitt, Michigan who intends on double majoring in Women's Studies and Studio Art. She likes running in her free time as well as playing soccer and the violin, reading and traveling.

David Savoie is a first year studio art/photo major who has been homeschooled since 2nd grade. He is a self-taught photographer who started working freelance in Columbus, shooting sports, portraits, and fine art prints. He says that his work, "changes drastically from time to time, sometimes focusing on current events, but often reflecting a more personal side."

Dylan Seuss is a sophomore.

Alice Sommer is a senior Art History major and Religion minor who is currently doing her senior research on the contemporary photographer Sally Mann.

Julian Ybarra is a first year student from San Antonio Texas, majoring in Communications.
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