

# THE KLEKSOGRAPH

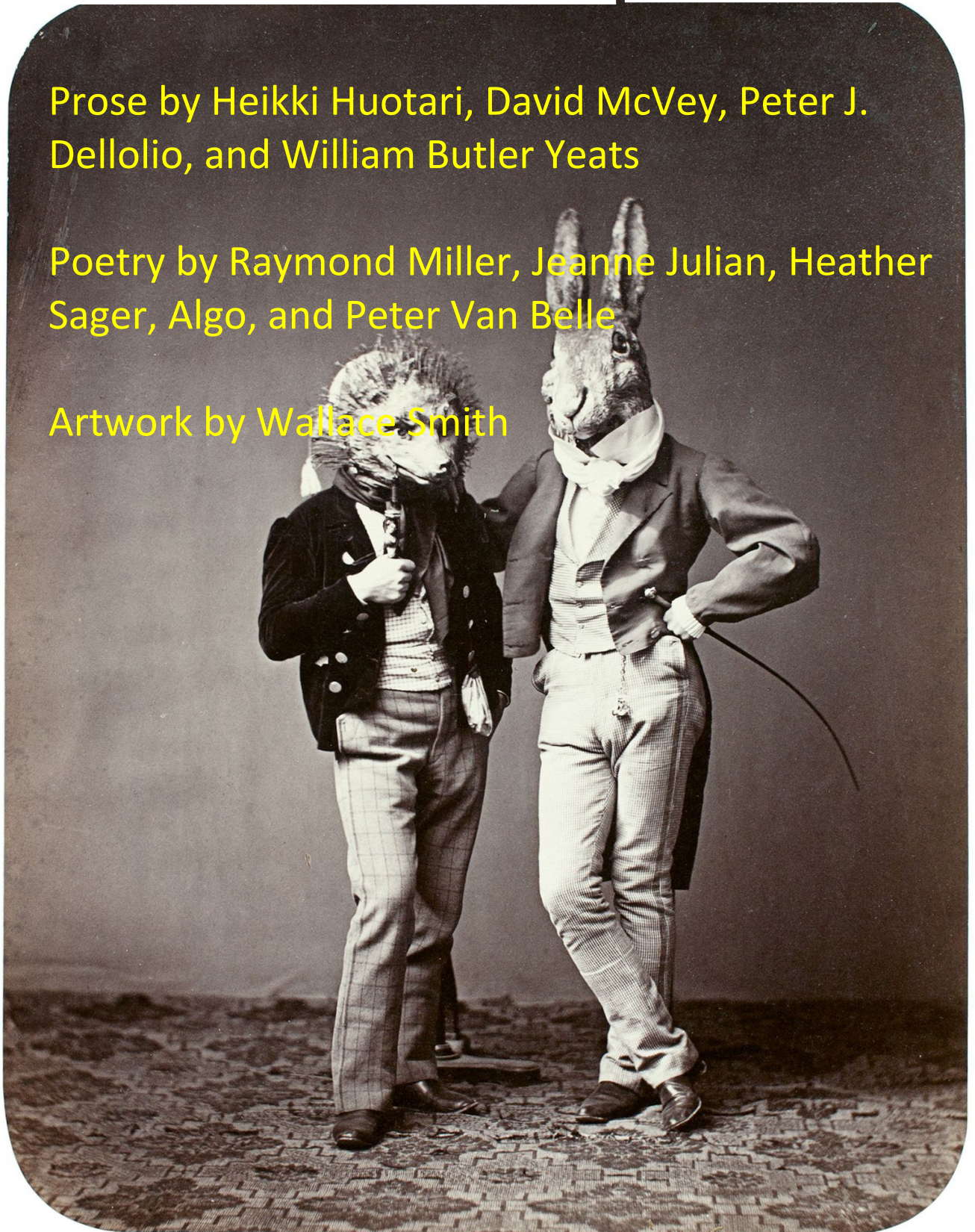
An International Review of Art and the Subconscious

Issue 13 January 2024

Prose by Heikki Huotari, David McVey, Peter J. Dellolio, and William Butler Yeats

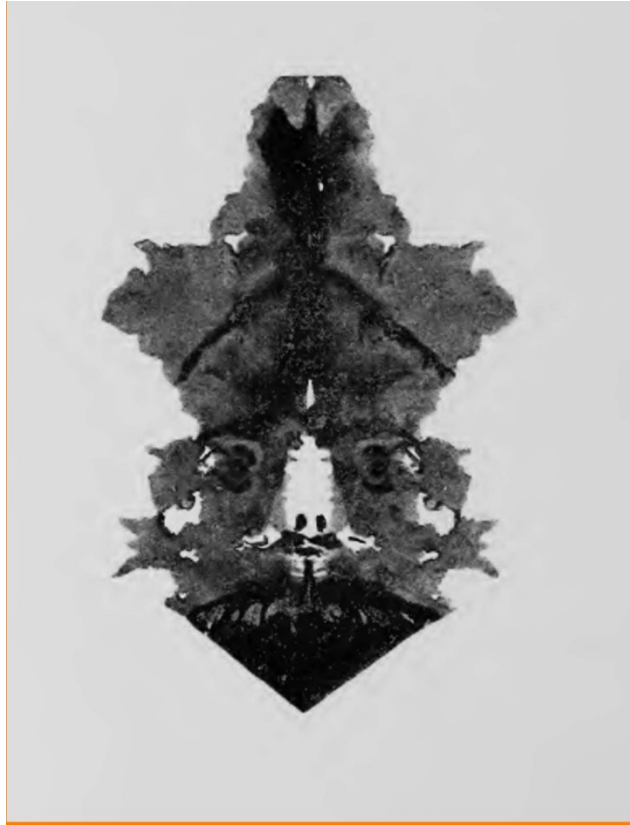
Poetry by Raymond Miller, Jeanne Julian, Heather Sager, Algo, and Peter Van Belle

Artwork by Wallace Smith



# THE KLEKSOGRAPH

Editor: Peter Van Belle



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In the mid-nineteenth century, Justinus Kerner, published his book of “Kleksographien”. Later psychologists used similar ink blots as a means of accessing the subconscious of their patients. The Kleksograph (Klecks is the official German spelling) is dedicated to exploring and celebrating the relationship between the subconscious and art.

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This magazine can be downloaded free from [www.kleksograph.be](http://www.kleksograph.be)

# Heikki Huotari

## The Final Habitable Zone

---

1. I'm adding ink to x rays. I'm subtracting masses. I need no placebo. In some habitable zone I'm moon-proof. I identify with lemurs, glottal stops and negative Bernoulli effects equally. When greening Mars, my dialogue is taken word-for-word from third-rate western novels. There is no one in this cleanroom but us hazmats. Witnesses at intersections recommend that surrogates be cloned, that clones be single ply, that flying pies collide. There are exactly two desserts. A sum of chasms is a vacuum. Recto peanut butter, verso jelly, I say it's a book. Accordion and banjo? I say it's in bad taste, I say it's a book to burn.

2. There were abiding in the field paraboloids elliptical and hyperbolic but the law was far from clear. The special master, micromanaged, wasn't. Be somewhere in Idaho from 1986 to 1995, the how-to-live committee said, Lead with your chin. If I know where I'm going then I won't be interfered with, said the water to the wind. The oxbow is not indigo but between blue and violet. From stable equilibria no deviation is too small, no good intention wasted. Full of faith and credit, currency is reassuring. If the president does it it's legal, so says Richard Nixon. Donate to a Texas school IN GOD WE TRUST in comic sans or ransom note and have a laugh.

3. Mix and match the heroes and the villains, randomly prescribing plaid and paisley. May I have that infinite supply of thoughts and prayers? If it's part of the cosmos then what happens happens also to the simultaneously small and large. If Ronald Reagan had a fabricated welfare queen then everywhere that Ronald Reagan went the welfare queen was sure to go. Whose moods these are I doubt that Robert Frost would know. The swinging lantern of the interim is sandwiched between seemingly identical contingencies. I need be white and young but once. As first prize is a golden asterisk, as no one wins who doesn't cheat, as antigravity is the purview of only lighter-than-air aardvarks, CONTRIBUTION IS SKIN DEEP might alternate with RANDOM IS AS RANDOM DOES.

4. Clinging to a cliff I'm looking out on South Dakota. Have a dozen gods before me see if I care. Are my corneas irregular or does The Reverend Sun Young Moon in fact have seven ears? Consider IBM cards that they neither mutilate nor fold nor spindle. In a universe that's not Newtonian one freely changes horses in mid-stream, I mean, I'll be more sure of Santa Claus than you, Virginia, I mean, neither horse is made to drink nor think but would prefer to. Although equidistant from the state of nature and the state of grace one does the opposite of x whatever x is and one's body language is gratuitous when talking to a phone. It takes a multiple of two to tango, says the neverending Reverend Moon. The neverending Reverend

Moon says, Love the sinner, hate the sinner's dog.

5. Should you splash water on yourself the guidelines say to rinse with water. Hair would have the tensile strength of steel. When twins agree it makes for good TV. A single mother sees the good in me although I'm here for food stamps too. Persuade the judge to call a fifteen-minute recess. Leave the room. This picture is a picture of me with a beard. This message is for those who work around machinery. Mediums evaporate but essences adhere. I scream in outer space, you scream in outer space and we all scream in outer space but no one answers. Pi is just a number. When twins disagree it makes for good TV.



*illustration by Peter Van Belle*

# David McVey

## There is a Fountain

---

It's any street, anywhere. A weak watery sun has just reached its midday peak and is starting to decline. Most of the shops are shut up under lockdown. Windblown litter whispers like autumn leaves. The few people about are walking purposefully, to or from those shops that are open, or to their workplaces, or home. You can do that if you have a home, she thinks.

When she arrives in a new place she always asks herself, have I been here before? Do I recognise anything? Today she's not sure. Maybe this town is new to her.

There's always an excitement about somewhere you haven't been to before, a sense of new hope, new challenge. But it's still any street, anywhere; it could be anything or it could be nothing. She reaches into her bundle and draws out a small piece of cloth. The rest of the bundle she squashes into the angle between the pavement and the wall of an empty shop, and settles herself into it. It's quite comfy, really; certainly, she's known worse. The little square of material she places in front of her. From a pocket in the grey overcoat she wears on top of all her other clothes she extracts a few miserable coppers. Some of them are even foreign - Euros, she thinks. She places them on the square of material; no one ever wants to be the first to give money. She learned that early on. Then she waits.

The narrow main street widens here into a kind of square, with traffic growling through the middle of it. There are a few benches, all empty just now, a bus shelter and an ornamental fountain. The fountain doesn't work any more; she checked as soon as she saw it.

She pauses. Something comes to her; words and music, lost in the farthest reaches of time, some long-abandoned corner of her memory.

There is a fountain filled with blood

Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners plunged beneath the flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains.

She shudders a little at the pictures the words create in her mind. A fountain filled with blood? That's right out of one of those horror films she watched as a child. And yet, somewhere, there's meaning and memory, but she can't grasp hold of them, not yet.

There are a few people about. Some hurry past, turning their heads away from her or staring ahead, focused on their mobile conversations. Some steal a quick glance and then look away. She notices that the ones who edge over and slip a few coins into the cloth never look at her, never make eye contact.

The fountain is tall and narrow, made of slate-coloured stone. There are four basins, one on each face, from which people could once drink. Now it promises, but doesn't deliver. And there's a plaque with words on it. It probably celebrates the person who gave it to the town, she thinks. Maybe she'll read it later.

Across the street she sees the entrance to a small indoor shopping centre, part of a modern group of buildings. They look like they didn't belong. It's almost as if she remembers how the street was before, how it had looked in the past.

The dying thief rejoiced to see  
That fountain in his day;  
And there may I, though vile as he,  
Wash all my sins away:

What thief? She wasn't a thief! Was someone calling her 'vile'? No, the song was in her head again, a found, remembered thing. Where were these words, this song, coming from?



The fountain, of course.

To the right of those new buildings with the shopping centre there is an open space, a formal garden with seats. She decides to gather up her earnings, buy some food - there's enough for a hot bacon roll, she thinks - and sit in the gardens and enjoy her meal.

The sun is cool but it bathes her anyway as she rests on a wooden bench in the public gardens. Her bacon roll is hot and oozes tomato sauce. It's the best thing she's had for weeks. She's living like a queen, for a moment, a queen.

She stops chewing for a moment. This place, she remembers it, she's been here before, there's something about a queen. She finishes the roll, drains her coffee, rolls up her sandwich wrapper and dumps it along with her paper cup in a bin. She won't be like some of those tykes who leave a trail of rubbish behind them. She walks to the corner of the gardens where a spindly tree cowers in the breeze, just a suggestion of spring buds beginning to appear. In front of it there's a weathered metal plaque that reads:

This Tree was  
planted by Provost McKellar  
to commemorate  
the CORONATION  
of Queen Elizabeth  
June 1953

A queen! She was right! She remembers this place and must have been here before. She knows this place. Does it know her?

She crosses the street to the place she'd been before. After a few moments' thought she decides against settling down there again. Perhaps she'll try somewhere else. She looks at

the fountain. Its plaque doesn't mention any queens, just a man's name, and some fancy old-fashioned words that seem to describe him as the man who donated it.

When this poor lisping, stammering tongue  
Lies silent in the grave,  
Then in a nobler, sweeter song,  
I'll sing Thy power to save.

The song! She remembers it, she's heard it before! Here!

There was a circle of people round the fountain, some old, some young, but all wearing staid, formal clothes. All of the men, even the younger ones, wore suits and ties while the women and girls were in long, shapeless frocks and coats. They sang and clapped their hands and then one of the men pulled out a book and spoke in a dramatic, soaring voice about Jesus and the cross and sal-v-a-a-ation...

She asked if the man was swearing but her mother shushed her and urged her to carry on walking. She was a stubborn child, though, and stopped to watch as they began singing again, to music provided by an old lady seated on a plastic chair playing a kind of organ. 'That's a melodeon,' said a woman standing nearby. 'They're from the Gospel Hall along the road.' Her mother tutted.

There is a fountain filled with blood  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners plunged beneath the flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains.

'Mum,' said the wee girl she'd once been, 'they're singing about the fountain!' She was lost in the voices and the music and the magic of the words, even if they seemed to be about blood spouting everywhere.

Her mother tutted again and finally managed to drag her away. She had exploded into tears, drawing a sharp smack to the face from her mother. 'I'm fed up wi you. I don't know how ye cannae just keep quiet an behave yersel...'

She was lost in the memories, now, not of the incident at the fountain, but of what had happened to her afterwards; the escape from her mother, the hope, the despair, the men, the cruelty, the decline and the life she lived now.

She looked at the fountain again. She was still homeless, yet she had come home.

# Raymond Miller

## To Be Young

---

Willow branches flirt with the riverbank,  
swans dip their heads in a courtship dance  
and although they've not yet begun to undress,  
this young couple on a nearby bench,  
lips locked together and limbs enjoined,  
don't seem the unadventurous kind  
and show every sign they might stop at nothing,  
oblivious to the elderly tutting  
and shaking of heads; bird cries go unheard  
and children's giggles leave them undisturbed.

Then at last their clinch is interrupted:  
summoned by an affronted public,  
like a referee breaking up a fight  
a policeman pulls the contenders to light.  
My wife and I are recollecting  
when love was fresh and we were getting  
reprimanded in a public house  
for spending too long mouth to mouth.  
Our actions saying more than we can speak,  
I squeeze her hand and she pecks my cheek.

# Raymond Miller

## Vertigo

---

I lounge in The Wyche Inn  
and lean on the zenith.

Worcestershire lies,  
a page spread to edit.

I can touch the horizon  
and race someone on it  
like cyclists careening  
an unbroken circuit.

Smooth out the contours,  
move smudges from edges  
of a photo-finish;  
add shimmer to each blemish.

Daub a little azure,  
ochre and verdure  
on the large marquee  
that the flags fly over.

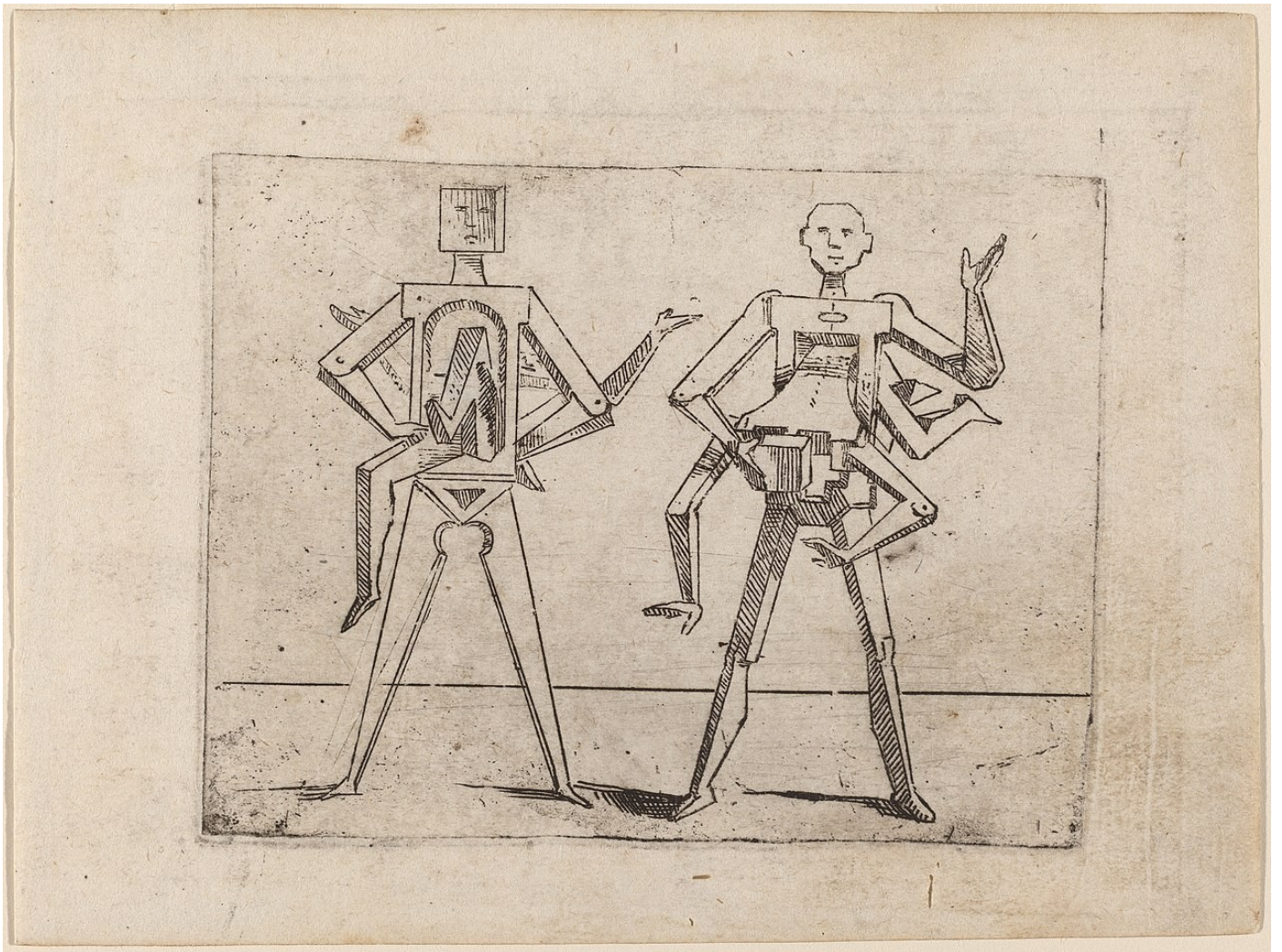
Three counties are captured  
in the corner of an eyelid;  
a paraglider lands  
in a spot unsighted.

Dog shows and flower shows  
with kids entertainment.

I paint a gaily coloured  
gipsy encampment

and refuse to sign  
the petition of protest.

Write Beware of Penguins  
on a roadside notice.



*Giovanni Battista Bracelli, 1624*

# Peter J. Dellolio

## The Imposter

---

*Mu*

*“no,” “not,” “nothing,” “without,” “nothingness,” “is not,” “has not”*

*Modern Chinese, Japanese, Korean*

MU HAD FINALLY grown weary of running from his sorrow. His entire life had been a tapestry of shadows, a matrix of hypnotic boxes, a sea of spirit traps. He realized that his hundreds of little Internet videos, on Cyber Diary, formed an imaginary bridge, a way of falsely transferring himself across an abyss of remorse and hopelessness. How much longer could he pretend? Until now, his words repelled the truth. It was as if the very air that shaped the sentences in his mouth was the invisible resistance that compelled two magnets to repel one another and truth was in the center of that repulsion. Mu videoed what he knew would be his last words, hoping that speaking the truth might bring him some salvation before he ended his life. Where was the woman he convinced himself was in his life every day and night? She never became a woman. Mu finally uttered the unutterable in front of the humming video camera. He shuddered as he spoke the heartbreaking words, his hand twitching dramatically like a divining rod pointing in the direction of underground minerals. “She died at the hospital. She was fourteen,” he said to the staring black instrument that, on this final, fateful evening, acted as a faceless confessor, a way for Mu to admit to himself that everything had been a fantasy. He checked the revolver to be sure the chamber was full; then he made what would be the last entry in his video diary: “The real imposter was my phantasmagoric wife, my conjured life that I invented so I could escape the reality of being responsible for a horrible thing. I ate peanuts and forgot about her allergy. I kissed my beloved at the movies and she died shortly afterwards. I loved her so! My sweet Juliet.” Even though she was only fourteen and Mu barely more than sixteen, it was an intuition of soul mate destiny felt and certified only in the hearts of those who know it. “After her death,” Mu continued, “I used my videos to create in words and images what the years of our evolving lives might have been.” Mu turned his video diaries into the life that this tragic accident had taken from him. He was always fascinated by the mechanics of video and film, the neuroscience of sound and image reproduction. His father frequently bought him small, primitive video recorders and 8mm cameras; he spent countless hours filming and playing back anything that crossed his path in a normal day: traffic, footsteps, dogs barking, his parents talking, television commercials. No wonder that his tragic, life-long obsession with creating an illusory world of words and images was so easily facilitated by his desire to



make a visual record of the world he knew. The Internet, with websites such as Cyber Diary, enabled Mu to upload and maintain hundreds and hundreds of these self-reflexive visual narratives, lasting several seconds to several minutes each. It was unfortunate, ironically, that at the time of the accident, he had chosen the areas of video technology and psychoacoustics for his college study and envisioned future profession. Literally from the day after the death of his girlfriend, until this very moment, Mu lived, if one could use such an extravagant word as “lived,” only through his constant, multi-dimensional narrative, in which nothing horrible happened that night at the movies, the girl nestled her head against his shoulder as he drove her home, her hair smelled like jasmine, like aloe, and they were married on the beach, she loved antique furniture, he taught video and cinema history at the university, she gave birth to twin girls, he laughed at the way their boyfriends got confused the night of the prom, his wife made lovely things to eat, he helped with the banana cake mix, she painted by the shore even though her hands shook slightly from a thyroid condition that worsened in her sixties, and the patches of gray in his hair were more visible when he tied it back into the ponytail that his granddaughter compared to Paul Revere (she was studying American history in the second grade). One day, the hellish psychological torment of years of self-imposed subterfuge took their toll. “I began to challenge the authenticity of my self-validated mirage, as if this non-existent lover and companion had been mysteriously substituted by a double or imposter, and the original whisked away into an unknowable dimension, never to be recovered. Instead of allowing myself to realize that the girl in question had died at fourteen, I let her live and grow older, to be in a life with me, through the energy of my videotape entries. The video recordings kept her alive. Just as tragically as Lear realizing far too late that Ophelia was the daughter who truly and selflessly loved him, I came to the realization that my whole life was a myth, a fiction, and I attacked the veracity of what my mind and my voice created, not realizing that I was calling the counterfeit an imitation; that I was rejecting the illusion for being unreal; that I was denying the incantatory for being ethereal.” Raising the gun to his temple, Mu finished this final video record of his suicide; he beseeched his loved one to forgive him; and he promised to spend eternity at her side. Mr. Mu stopped speaking for a moment. He pressed the STOP button on the video recorder and stared at the table, as if his body and his mind were mysteriously arrested by some kind of trance or hypnotic state. His last thought was that another life in another place seemed to be a fair reward, a special gift after we have atoned for the mistakes we made here. He pressed the RECORD button on the camcorder for the last time and spoke: “To be given the chance to love and live again after death, like children reassured after a nightmare, like children eternally playing...” Mu pulled the trigger.

Hearing the distant church bell, Mr. Mu's doctor set the clock on his mantle and rubbed his sore wrist before lifting the heavy, thick book from the elegant mahogany stand, placing it upon his desk, and turning to the desired page.

### **Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)**

The Capgras delusion is classified as a delusional misidentification syndrome, a class of delusional beliefs that involves the misidentification of people, places, or objects. Cases in which patients hold the belief that time has been "warped" or "substituted" have also been reported. It's also known as "Imposter Syndrome." People who experience this syndrome will have an irrational belief that someone they know or recognize has been replaced by an imposter. They may, for example, accuse a spouse of being an imposter of their actual spouse.

"Give her the epinephrine now! Look at the swelling! She can't breathe! She can't breathe!"

"I'm getting the syringe out! We'll be pulling into the emergency room in a minute! The hospital is two blocks away!"

The nervous paramedics moved with an urgency that milked their training and confidence for the precise decisions that were needed but also made their lack of choices all the more desperate. A girl of about fourteen with a dangerously swollen esophagus was about to suffocate as a result of an allergic reaction to peanuts. The syringe with the life-saving drug had to be retrieved from the floor of the ambulance because the sweaty fingers of the attendant let it slip.

Mr. Mu rubbed his tired eyes before lifting the old, dusty, wooden milk crate from the place on the shelf where it rested alongside dozens of identical wooden crates. The decaying, splintered boxes were filled to the top with thousands of neatly, evenly stacked, videocassettes. Sometimes, as on this occasion, Mu liked to watch selections from his immense video library by playing the original tape on the old VHS machine. On most evenings, though, he preferred going to the Cyber Diary website, where he had previously uploaded the videos, and watch them unfold in myriad waves across the little square screen box on the computer, like an infinite series of undulating spider web compartments.

These cassettes were stored inside black plastic jackets approximately five inches long. Mu carefully sifted through the top layer of tapes, looking for the most recent date. Many of the tapes in the other crates went all the way back to his teenage years. Finding the one he

wanted, Mu pushed it through the slender machine, pressed the “Record” button on the video camera positioned a few feet from his head, and began speaking in a clear voice.

“...let it slip. That was the day that my future wife almost died! All because I insisted on kissing her in the theater before our date was over, even though I had peanuts during the movie and I knew how devastating her allergy could be. It completely escaped my mind! It meant so much to me. After all, I was sixteen and this was our third date! It was time to kiss her; I really liked her! She was so lucky that they had a powerful antidote. They got her to the emergency room on time...”

Suddenly, Mr. Mu, as if exasperated by what he had said, violently rummaged through the crate, moving and disturbing the tapes so ferociously that some of the plastic shells cracked and little loops of videotape spilled out, like curling rivulets of brown blood. It was not clear if he was disgusted by his own account of having been indirectly responsible for causing his young girlfriend’s attack and near death, or if he remembered another passage that he recorded previously and wanted to find it as quickly as possible.

“...They may, for example, accuse a spouse...” So you see, Mr. Mu, there is nothing so very alarming here, I mean, in the sense that it has not been diagnostically and statistically examined and encountered many times. Your wife—

—is not my wife. I cannot give you every utterance in my soul that tells me she has been replaced. It would be like the sun asking a lake to prove it deserves to wear the morning on its face. She may reach for a cup; try on a new dress; retrieve a delivered parcel from the front steps. I hear her laughter when something amuses her in the garden; I see her muddied knees after an afternoon of planting. But these are the semblances; some kind of evil incandescence of the one who appears to be her, but is not. It is some kind of sinister metaphysical arrangement, designed long before I was born. A punishment, perhaps, for wrong doing in a past life? I don’t know. Some malevolent force has taken away the delicate, sweet creature who came to rescue me from loneliness, and replaced her with a surrogate; as if all madness had stuffed itself into one dark corner of my brain, refusing to leave, removing every hope I might have, every moment I wanted to have, and all the memories I dared to cherish.

“...in a minute! The hospital is two blocks away!”

“Oh God! No! No! She’s going into shock!”

Mu’s parents continued to provide him with a vast collection of video recorders, plus a steady supply of blank VHS tapes, in spite of the advice from the boy’s doctor warning against it. The good will in their hearts blinded their minds to the simple fact that they were enabling the obsessive-compulsive ritual of a traumatized seventeen-year-old boy. A year

had passed since the tragedy and the young man continued keeping a videotaped record of it, as though nothing else in his life or his thoughts mattered. He spent every moment of his personal time sitting at his desk filming himself endlessly talking about that day, and then uploading the new entry to the Cyber Diary website. The doctor's recommendations to get Mu out of the house, to introduce departure from routine or change of scenery, fell on deaf ears. Certainly, his mother and father were alarmed by the morbid accumulation of scrupulously labeled, rectangular plastic tapes in black jackets, yet they felt this was a form of therapy for the boy. They felt that, like an exorcism, the video recordings would eventually free his spirit from the suffocative grasp of negative thoughts and irrational guilt.

"The parents will be here in a few minutes to bring the girl's clothing and leave a deposit. I'm going downstairs to turn on the lights so they can choose a casket."

"Good. I'll print out the invoice for them. What a shame, huh? Only fourteen. You'd think something like that could have been prevented."

"I heard that the boy she was with—"

"You mean at the movie? Her boyfriend?"

"Her boyfriend, yeah. I heard he really lost it. He's living in a kind of—"

"The psychiatrist? The video tapings?"

"The video tapings, so you heard?"

"My cousin lives near them."

"Near them?"

"Across the street, sweetie. She's such a pretty girl. Why don't you ask her out?"

"Oh mom, c'mon!"

"I'll bet she falls for you! Do you have any classes with her?"

"We're in History, last period."

"Good! There's that new movie—"

"Mom! We haven't even spoken—"

"No one has. His parents are keeping him out of school for now. While he's in therapy and living his life talking to his video cameras. I wonder what that poor girl's parents think of all this?"

"Shh! Here they are!"

This was a special day for Mu. A third date with the girl that he loved so dearly. He wanted to show her that he was serious. After all, he just received his driver's permit and a temporary license! Mu's father was letting him use the family car. "Don't forget," warned his father, "If you scratch the fender, you lose a month's allowance!" Mu promised to be careful and, smiling benevolently, his father's tone softened to warm encouragement as he told his son to enjoy himself. "You're a young man now," his mother added as Mu walked down to the car parked across from the front door, "Are you ready to fall in love?" Mu, a little embarrassed, responded that it was only their third date! They were still in High School, how could they know if they were in love?

Once he was behind the wheel, Mu summoned all the memories he dared to cherish, all the happy thoughts his mind had stored away. Mom must be right, he thought as he drove away. "I must be in love!"

...many times. Your wife, Mr. Mu, is a creature of fantasy, a different and unknown being, only in those secret places of your mind where memory and perception are strangers. How could this woman, who you have known since she was fourteen, how could she not be the same person? Was she mysteriously replaced by an alien double in the middle of the night? Did some demonic force suck her soul and personality out of her body, leaving only a barren, lifeless shell or mould? Once the mind becomes shipwrecked on some strange island of emotional and spiritual uncanniness, there is little for the conscious part of our brains to do except be carried in tow by our subconscious as it relentlessly explores that island. Are you listening to me?

"Did you hear me?! She's not breathing!"

"We're here! We're here! Hurry up!"

The frantic paramedics jumped out of the back of the ambulance as it pulled into the entranceway of the emergency room. They banged open the white metal rear doors of the vehicle so forcefully that a violent burst of air made the pair of green movie ticket stubs fly out of Mu's shirt pocket. Frozen in place from shock and the insidious unreality of what was happening, all the poor boy could do was watch the gurney carrying his precious one as it was whisked into glaring hospital lights. He was so terrified. He could not move. He stood there, his arms outstretched, palms facing upward like a supplicant seeking guidance or begging forgiveness. Like a damned sleepwalker on a supernatural path leading towards nothing, radiating outwards in concentric circles of hopelessness, a special kind of subterranean hopelessness designed, like the ninth circle of Hell, only for him. He could not measure the weight of endless shame and guilt that had settled upon the center of his spine. He could not comprehend how he had forgotten about the lethal danger of her allergy. Someone in a car parked a few feet behind him had just turned on the radio and a

commercial for tropical vacations came blasting out of the car stereo. The sound of crashing waves overwhelmed Mu with a sense of entrapment, as though he were being swallowed by sonorous enclosure, surrounded by miles of walls of water, buried in an avalanche of suffocation. Maybe this is a nightmare, he thought. Mu wondered: if he concentrated hard enough, if he could palpably and realistically transport himself back to the movie theater, just before he leaned over to kiss her, that maybe the insanity of what had really happened could be somehow transformed or rolled back like a rug being taken out of a room and moved to a new house. There was a truck engine backfiring in rapid staccato bursts: he heard the repeated, failed attempts of the defibrillator. They could not revive her heart. There was a bar across the street with the door open and the third quarter buzzer of the basketball game rang out in a long, linear monotone: he saw the flat line of the droning heart monitor. They could not bring her back. There were dozens of bundles of roses, tight bundles of roses all around her coffin. There were so many times when I thought we laughed. We grew older. She became my wife. It was such a beautiful house! She loved pastels. She wanted Art Deco furniture. I was saving for a surprise on her birthday. A beautiful bar from the 1930s. Lovely marquetry inlay with woods from exotic places. A feast of complexions of wood. Imbedded beautiful layers that shined like an aurora borealis, a kaleidoscopic glow of polished wood. Remember? You were so surprised! So pleased! You hugged and kissed me so many times I began to feel faint with joy. They didn't want me to go to the funeral. My parents were afraid for me. Especially because they had heard that her mother passed out several times; there was talk of her father waiting for me with his gun at the entrance to the funeral home but that turned out to be a rumor. It felt strange seeing so many familiar faces in such an unexpected, unusual place. Students from my math class smoking outside; classmates from Geometry in the front, waiting to kneel at the coffin and pay their respects. We made a home! She didn't die like that. They got her to the hospital in time. The paramedics were ready. They gave her the shot in the ambulance. We made a home! We were so happy. Long walks on the beach at sunset. Listening to the intimate echoes of large shells. Running with the dogs along the shore. Looking at the rows of caskets was too much for the dead girl's mother. She ran up the stairs, sobbing hysterically. It must have been horrific to be so brutally confronted with the death of her daughter. Realizing that she was going into shock, I ran madly into the movie theater lobby to tell someone to call an ambulance. I collided with a man who had just purchased a large container of popcorn. He lost his balance and spilled the yellow puffs all around my feet. They glistened with liquefied butter that created a reflective cluster. I must have remained in that spot, immobilized by fear, because I remember seeing the black wheels of the ambulance stretcher reflected on the oily shine of the popcorn garlands as the paramedics whisked past me. Someone asked Mu if he was with the girl. All he could do was feebly nod his head, still staring at the constellation of scattered popcorn pieces. The theatre manager or a security guard (Mu could not remember) grabbed his arm and quickly ushered

him outside so that he could get into the ambulance and ride to the hospital. Mu tried to compose himself and focus his thoughts on how he might be able to help. He asked himself what he knew about his girlfriend's allergy; what useful information could he share with the paramedics. Many teenagers enjoyed group viewings of Cyber Diary and Mu's videos had become very popular since his girlfriend's death. "I don't want you looking at that boy's videos anymore! It's sick! He talks about that girl as if she's still alive," warned the concerned parent. "Oh mom...We all do! We log on and usually ten of us are looking at the same time. It's really cool! Mu has like hundreds of little videos up there and we put them on our screens ten at a time." A bizarre cult had formed around the morbid ritual of students from Mu's school gathering separately and in unison to watch the videos Mu created in which he seemed to slip deeper and deeper into the psychosis of believing that years were passing and he was having a mature life with his girlfriend. For most of the parents, this became a forbidden form of entertainment, akin to using a Ouija board or experimenting with drugs, forcing the teenagers to arrange more and more clandestine viewings of the website.

They could not revive her heart. He saw the flat line of the droning heart monitor. Across from the emergency room cubicle, into which the paramedics had wheeled the gurney, an old man was sitting in his soiled hospital gown, holding a little portable radio. A rush of cheering shouts, in bursts and crackles of static, emanated from the little black instrument on the old man's lap. Under the deadly weight of guilt-ridden thoughts that was enveloping and crushing Mu's conscience, his mind was assaulted by a final stabbing irony: these choruses of frantic approval belonged to spectators at the basketball game that, if not for the movie tickets Mu had already purchased, he and his girlfriend would have attended. It was the girl's father who had invited them. He never missed a home game and he would have been sitting courtside with Mu and the girl (he always made sure he procured excellent seats). Racing, pathetically helpless thoughts made Mu imagine that the girl's father was standing with the crowd, shouting for his team, but that he could somehow see what was happening to his daughter in the hospital, because of Mu's carelessness, and his gleeful yelling about a sports victory was nightmarishly and surrealistically combined with a wide-eyed stare, the fixed, terrifying, zombie-like stare of a madman, a stare centered directly and solely upon Mu.

"Hurry up! Let's get inside! There's no pulse!"

"I heard you! I heard you! Open the door! Help me!"

"Get the stretcher ready! The wheels are still locked!"

"Let's get inside! C'mon! C'mon!"

So let's get inside the caves on this unknown island of the subconscious mind. Let's try to see that the thoughts we distrust the most are usually our pathway to mental health, while the thoughts we wholeheartedly embrace often lead to emotion and psychological chaos. I have never met your wife but when you explain that you have known her since your early teens, I must rely on empirical reality, as a doctor and as a rational being, and come to the only plausible conclusion: she must therefore be who she is. She has always been who you say she is. I'm sure you have repeated this to yourself many times.

"How could I think of this as anything but a special day?" Mu's racing, excited thoughts engulfed his mind and controlled his actions. Yet this was only his third date with the girl! Did he love her dearly? Was he really a serious young man? Mu wondered how he could prove his sincerity. "Don't forget this!" said Mu's father, playfully handing his son the driver's permit that the boy had so eagerly awaited. "A temporary license!" exclaimed Mu just a few hours ago, when he discovered that the long-awaited document had arrived in the mail. Wanting to help his son to relax, Mu's father, in a mock serious tone, admonished him to return the car in perfect condition or he would lose driving privileges for six months. Seeing that Mu was chagrined by these remarks, his father quickly added that he was confident of Mu's driving skill and encouraged the boy to have a good time. Mu realized, with surprising maturity, that he was still young a man. He wondered if he was ready to fall in love. "Why should I be embarrassed by all the memories?" Mu asked himself. Mu decided that with so many happy thoughts, he must be in love. He must be ready.

"So does your cousin ever see the guy, the kid I mean, Mu?"

"No, I don't think so. Nobody does, I mean not since it happened. He never comes out. Stays in his room all the time making those little videos that he uploads to Cyber Diary."

"Will you keep your voices down! The girl's parents are here and we have to show them the caskets. I think I heard the mother crying. This is the beginning of the hardest things for parents and relatives to do, picking the casket I mean, and clothes for the deceased, flowers, things like that. It's when the reality of it really hits home. Very hard to watch."

"Sorry. Do you think they'll want to see wood or metal?"

"Not sure. Just let them look at everything down there. Maybe only the father will go. I can still hear the mother. She doesn't sound too good."

"We have some of the smelling salts here just in case, right?"

"Yes, in that drawer over there."

"What are they, by the way? I've always wondered exactly what's in them."



“Ammonia mainly.”

“Did you say Ammonia?” The funeral assistant didn’t hear the man properly because of the news station on the radio they brought with them and some resounding church bells from a few blocks away. “Really penetrates when someone faints?”

“Always does the trick.”

Mu’s parents wanted to pay their respects and go to the girl’s funeral. They felt it was the right thing to do. Mu’s mother suggested it, as she was somewhat friendly with the girl’s mother (they had gone to college together). Mu’s psychiatrist thought it might be cathartic for them but recommended that Mu not attend. He wasn’t pleased that they continued to provide Mu with a vast collection of video recorders. The steady supply of blank VHS tapes alarmed the doctor when he stopped by to have occasional therapy sessions with Mu. In spite of his advice, the good will in the parents’ hearts blinded their minds to the simple fact that they were enabling the obsessive-compulsive ritual of a traumatized seventeen-year-old boy. Hadn’t a year passed since the tragedy? Yet the young man continued keeping a videotaped record of it. There was no way to dissuade Mu from thinking and behaving as though nothing else in his life or his thoughts mattered. “He spends every moment of his personal time sitting at his desk, filming himself endlessly talking about that day, and then uploading the new entry to the Cyber Diary website,” wrote the doctor in his therapy journal after one of his conversations with Mu. It was extremely frustrating that the doctor’s recommendations to get Mu out of the house, to introduce departure from routine or change of scenery, fell on deaf ears. Weren’t his mother and father alarmed by the morbid accumulation of scrupulously labeled, rectangular plastic tapes in black jackets? thought the doctor. Somehow they felt this was the most effective form of therapy for the boy. They believed that the video recordings would eventually free his spirit from the suffocative grasp of negative thoughts and irrational guilt, like some kind of emotional exorcism. No matter what he said, the doctor could not dislodge Mu’s parents’ from this belief.

“...blocks away!”

“...shock!”

“She’s turning white! She’s turning white!”

“Give her the shot! Give her the shot!”

First you tell me that I created all of this in my mind because my girlfriend died from the trace of a peanut butter sandwich on my saliva, then you say my wife is obviously a real person because she could never have been replaced. Yet every utterance in my soul tells me she has been replaced. I cannot give you proof because the certainty resides within me. “Try a little mental exercise, like imagining the sun asking a lake to prove it deserves to wear

the morning on its face.” Mu laughed at the doctor’s ridiculous attempt to make a metaphorical or poetic suggestion. He explained that his wife was such a clever non-entity, that she knew how to invisibly transit between the real and the unreal. He explained that she might reach for a cup; try on a new dress; retrieve a delivered parcel from the front steps. “I hear her laughter when something amuses her in the garden,” Mu explained. “I see her muddied knees after an afternoon of planting.” “These are not semblances!” exclaimed the psychiatrist, raising his voice and deliberately adopting an authoritative tone. Sometimes a sudden change in demeanor can challenge or shock a patient and force them to confront their own subterfuge and self-deceit. Mu knew the secret. He knew this was some kind of evil incandescence of the one who appears to be her, but is not. Or maybe it was some kind of sinister metaphysical arrangement, designed long before he was born? “A punishment, perhaps, for wrong doing in a past life? Like the little girl that wasn’t ready to be born? Jung.” The doctor hurriedly scribbled these notes into his black leather journal. I don’t know. Mu’s thoughts echoed what the doctor wrote. Some malevolent force has taken away the delicate, sweet creature that came to rescue me from loneliness. I recreated her so perfectly. Can’t you see? The doctor glanced at his appointment book and realized that Mu’s time was almost up. He had skipped lunch and was famished. There was a new Thai restaurant across the street that he wanted to try. We came home together from the movie theater that night. We continued dating. We went to college at the same time. “His guilt layers are so dense and strong,” wrote the Doctor in a scribbled handwriting. He had become jittery with hunger. “I’m not having any success penetrating these layers. He will not remember what really happened that night at the movies. His girlfriend died that night.” Why was she replaced with a surrogate? It was as if all the madness of the universe had stuffed itself into one dark corner of my brain, refusing to leave, removing every hope I might have, every moment I wanted to have, and all the memories I dared to cherish.

“...accuse a spouse.” Mu’s father slowly closed the psychiatric manual with an attitude of morbid resignation. He shook his head sorrowfully, in pitiful recognition of his son’s tragic fate. He could already see the life of his son, continuing to shrivel and die within these imagined scenarios that he videotaped every day, then uploaded to the Cyber Diary website each evening. He envisioned the hundreds of conversations that would occur between his young son and his later self, preserved like an electronic ghost on these videos. With great sorrow, he saw his son, grown into a pathetically confused mature man, a man who had remained so imprisoned and poisoned by his own mental cages, he could never be at peace, even if he were to find a woman to marry. Mu’s father could not hear or see a future world for his son that was not contaminated by the boy’s contorted, infected, insane belief that his girlfriend (who had died purely by accident because Mu had forgotten about her peanut allergy) had in fact lived, that she and Mu married, had children, and enjoyed a long, productive life together. As Mu’s psychiatrist had prophetically warned long ago, the

fantasy eventually turned in on itself, and Mu began to believe that his wife (who did not exist in the first place) had somehow become an “imposter,” a malevolent doppelganger, determined to destroy his soul.

Mu remembered so many things; too many things. He remembered another passage that he recorded previously. Suddenly, he wanted to find it as quickly as possible, as though it held the answer to one of the special secrets that slowly burrowed into Mu’s mind every moment of his life. “That’s ridiculous!” Mu said out loud. He was exasperated by these thoughts. Speaking to himself, just like the thousands of short videos, was his way of creating and preserving a dialogue with his soul. So he rummaged through the crate more and more violently, like a gasping man on some prehistoric planet clawing at old materials trying to find an oxygen mask. He dug into the tapes, smashing and flinging them ferociously. Cracked shards of the plastic containers, the “shells” that held the videotape, flew into his face. Fortunately, this explosion of sharp pieces did not cut Mu’s skin. The loosened tape spiraled out, like rivulets of flowing brown blood. What could have upset him so much? It might have been one of his earliest videotape diaries. During that period, Mu was vehemently disgusted by the realization that he had nearly caused his girlfriend’s death. It was the tyrannical combination of desperation and fear that filled Mu with so much rage. His utter stupidity almost cost this girl her life, the person that Mu, carried away by the ardent fantasies of youth, had hoped to marry. In one day, several months after the accident at the movie theater, Mu consecutively uploaded fifty videos to the Cyber Diary website. He liked doing it that way, as opposed to saying everything he wanted in a single videotaping and then loading the solitary video. There were no time restrictions. Cyber Diary allowed its mostly teenage users to pontificate, rant, and rave all they wanted. The only rule or restriction was that each video entry had to have a kind of “slate” at the beginning and the end, the way the familiar black and white clap board is used in films to mark a new scene with both an aural and visual cue. It was so that the Cyber Diary audience could become more intimately familiar with those “Cyber D’s,” as they were called, that they liked the most, and it also served as a kind of branding or host identification, with each person saying who they were and engaging in a little small talk, at the beginning and the ending of the entry. Letting it slip, failing to include these little bits of personal business, could cause a suspension of use for the “Cyber D” who ignored the procedures of the site.

“...we went over this so many times, man! We trained! Oh God! Got her pulse!”

“...sorry! What do you want?! I got nervous! My hands are sweating!”

“What if she dies!? What if she dies!?”

“Here! Here it is! Got the syringe now!”

This could have been a terrible shame, an unforeseen, monstrous tragedy. Yet somehow, miraculously, they got her to the emergency room on time. This could have been one of those cases where an allergic reaction was as deadly as a bullet to the heart.

I hope he kisses me! He's so cute. It's our third date! I really like him!

"...he must be an idiot to forget a thing like that! Peanuts!"

"...a faint pulse! OK! OK!"

"She's lucky we had the right antidote!"

After lifting the coffee mug to his lips, the detective continued typing the report about the girl who died from an allergic reaction. He felt sorry for Mu's father. He rubbed his red, tired eyes before inserting another form into the old, dusty typewriter. The precinct was being slowly outfitted with a new communications and computer system. The ancient Royal typewriters were all that could be set up for now. On the floor next to the officer's desk was a crate taken from its place on a shelf in the Mu home, where it rested alongside one or two identical wooden crates. The new, smooth, blond wood had a pleasant smell, like freshly cut pine. The crates contained a few videocassettes used in early SONY camcorders that were bulky and somewhat difficult to operate. The detective asked Mu's father if his son had used the video camera on many occasions. He said that Mu liked to watch selections from the immense video library at the university he attended. He played many original tapes by current and previous students on the old VHS machines. Mu was just beginning to explore the technology and hadn't shot many of his own tapes yet. He had begun to familiarize himself with the Cyber Diary website and spent most evenings at home exploring it. The detective had heard of the website and Mu's father explained that from what he had gathered, it was extremely popular with high school and college students. It was a forum for the students to upload their videos that featured all sorts of biographical content: their hobbies; their romantic exploits and conflicts; their taste in music and clothes; academic interests, career plans, and so forth. "It's like an infinite series of undulating spider web compartments!" was the elegiac explanation Mu once tried to articulate to his father, attempting to justify spending countless hours sitting in front of his computer, watching hundreds if not thousands of these videos unfold like myriad waves across what appeared to Mu's father to be a little square screen box. "That's the Windows Media Player, dad!" Mu explained.

On the day the detective retired, several piles of case notes had been made available to him. He was given special treatment at the precinct because he was well liked and had spent thirty-five years on the force. The "Mu" case was special to him because even though he never revealed personal information to Mu's father at the time that he typed the report, he was especially touched by what happened to Mu's girlfriend because he and the girl's father

had been friends for many years. Of course, once the circumstances surrounding the girl's death were determined to be accidental, and the case was officially closed, the detective filed his notes and moved on. Now, all these years later, he wondered about Mu the middle-aged man, still living in his parents' house, and, from gossip that occasionally made its way into the precinct, still obsessed by the same demons, the same videocassettes. The detective finished his report, typing that these cassettes were stored inside black plastic jackets approximately five inches long. Mu carefully sifted through the top layer of tapes, looking for the most recent date. Many of the tapes in the other crates went all the way back to his teenage years. Finding the one he wanted, Mu pushed it through the slender machine, pressed the "Record" button on the video camera positioned a few feet from his head, and began speaking in a clear voice, looking directly into the camera.

It took many years of psychotherapy for the young paramedic to rid himself of his irrational guilt. He tormented himself with the unshakable belief that the girl died only because his slippery grasp of the syringe caused it to fall to the ambulance floor. He retrieved it almost instantly yet it was impossible for anyone to convince him that those additional two or three seconds meant nothing and could not have saved the girl from death. For the unfortunate young man, these seconds might as well have been days. He was so overcome with grief that he tried to take his own life on several occasions. He would have been successful had it not been for the watchful eyes of his parents. Fortunately, after more than a decade, and the sensitive support of his mother and father, he began to see the event through an objective lens that revealed his blamelessness, rather than the expressionistic vision of his imagined guilt and incompetence that had been tormenting him for years.

"Why isn't she breathing yet?! She's not breathing! Isn't the epinephrine working?! What happened?! What happened?!"

"Look! We're pulling into the emergency room now! I just gave her the shot!"

"I thought you lost the syringe! What were you doing on your hands and knees just now?! Did you drop it?! You're sure you gave her the shot, right?!"

"Yes, yes! I gave her the shot!"

Cases in which patients hold the belief that time has been "warped" or "substituted" have also been reported. Patients suffering from this affliction do not experience time as a linear companion. Instead, they are often terrorized by what appears to be the malignant intrusion of time, as though it did not belong where it insinuated itself, as though it attacked instances of being or memory with irrational and contradictory elements, elements that did not make logical sense, leaving the patient in a kind of kaleidoscopic daze, a jumbled landscape of illusory, ill-fitting, sardonic parts, not the pleasantly discordant parts of a fantastical dream, but the monstrously mismatched parts of a hideous nightmare.

Mr. Mu's doctor only worsened the arthritic symptoms he had been feeling in his wrist by slamming the gargantuan psychiatric tome shut with all the force of disgust he could muster. Such elegant descriptions! he thought, hating the impotence he felt over his inability to reach Mu and help him see reality.

"Did you hear that?"

"What? I don't know. C'mon, it's your turn."

"It sounded like a gun shot. Didn't you hear?"

"Yeah, so? Maybe a car backfired. C'mon."

"We'll get our Easter dresses dirty. My mom will kill me."

"It's just a little Hopscotch, silly."

"All right. All right. But we're stopping as soon as mass begins."

"You had to jinx us. There go the bells!"

"Let's get inside! It's Easter mass!"

"I never stood so close to a church on Easter Sunday before! The bells are so beautiful!"

"They are wonderful! So many, too! But so loud! I can barely hear you!"

"I can barely hear you too! Sister at school says the Easter bells tell everyone that the fasting is over!"

"Right! Because Christ has risen!"

"Right, the Resurrection! The chance to live again after death! Let's get inside!"

"Let's get inside!"

Bong! BongBong! BongBong! Bong!

BongBongBong!

BongBongBong!

Bong! BongBong! BongBong! Bong!



*illustration for Ben Hecht's Fantazius Mallare by Wallace Smith, 1924*



*illustration for Ben Hecht's Fantazius Mallare by Wallace Smith, 1924*



# Jeanne Julian

## Looking for Loveliness

---

Here are tulips. In their demitasses?

It's raining. Maybe in the rain. I slice  
red peppers into seahorses. Not good  
enough to float onto a page. I fret.

Back to those tulips: yellow as a stop sign,  
pink as...as...like nothing I have seen before.

So wilt the similes and I, aware  
that you don't need what's here  
to make what's real. I steal. From letters,  
or the news.... The newspaper! I read:  
"Season Proves Sweet For Syrup Makers."

(What tree do *I* tap?) *I could smell it*  
*in the sap when we were boiling*  
the maker said. (Yes, that sixth sense!)  
The trees are close to budding.  
Season's over. Taste this. Here.

# Jeanne Julian

## Weight

---

*on opening a book by Dennis Finnell*

With you, I weighed my head. Remember?

A scale was placed upon the braided rug.

We friends all took turns, spurred silly

by music and too much wine, sybarites, yet

harmless.

Thirty years on, cracking open your book

I heard anew your Midwestern wit

and melancholy: *I reenter the kingdom of my birth.*

The weight of memory and beauty, the dread in it.

Charmed.

That one line somehow rang the bell

I used to hear from next door, those Ohio summers,

to call my playmate Jeffrey home

before dark. An urgent, soft,

alarm.

Leaving the book, I ran outside to gather

daffodils. Days of heavy rain had bent stems,

pressed their crowned heads

attentively to earth. Our old prank's

karma!

Of course, we achieved no accurate reading,  
skull and brain still burdened  
with a body. Now you heft each word  
as artfully as astronomers weigh  
stars.

Note: italicized line is from “The Stork” in *Ruins Assembling* by Dennis Finnell (Shape Nature Press, 2014).

# Paul Murgatroyd

## Wonderland

---

When the postman declares that  
all the children are abstruse,  
your wife says she's putting on her dog glasses,  
Classic FM announces A Shepherd's Pie Carol,  
a lift orders you to lay on the floor  
and a secret agent informs his colleagues that  
he's going to measure the chicken elbow,  
then you'll have blundered into my land  
and be as deaf as I am.



*Felice Beato, Entrance to the Kaiserbagh, British India*

# Heather Sager

## Survival Garden

---

I see a garden—during a blue-moon  
month, in the fall—  
and I am also standing  
in my empty house,  
trying to hold up white, spooky walls  
so they don't collapse and crush my  
ribcage into rubble.

Weeds grew in my mind once,  
but I pulled them all out,  
inducing a clarity which is terrifying.

The garden is real but looks 2-D.  
The brick of the patio scans reddish  
in the gloaming, I can't figure out  
why a bobolink has landed near  
the rosebush and started singing  
a spirited tune, as the moon is out  
and vaguely pink, and it's the wrong hour  
for birds to sing. The sky is lavender!  
Oh, how I love that color. This shade  
of the outdoors reminds me of a time  
I drank absinthe, years ago.

Someone put a mannequin down the hall,  
she has a pleasant, moon-faced façade.

Should I envy her?

Inside me, attuned emotions burn  
like an orange-red lava poured.

# Algo

## Long Live the King

---

The threshold is somewhere moored

Off the moonlit midnight coast,

Waiting.

Barely visible,

But there and expectant

Like a pregnant widow queen,

Rubbing her stomach for luck.

Locals cast their nets,

But find the sea will swallow them anyway.

There are strange birds in the sky,

Omens?

Or decoration for the dressing room

Where day is laid out

In the oddest starry shroud.

The threshold is a passage to a foreign future.

The threshold is unburdened and yet does not yet belong.

The threshold pays no tithes to tides

Or how the consort world should turn

In concert with earthly bodies,

It will cross over

Everything.





Mark Gertler, *Merry-Go-Round*

# Algo

## The Principality of Alchemy

---

The abdication of the golden throne of abandonment.

Victims?

Who leave the theme of their half-lives behind

To prospect

For precious stones in unknown streams together,

For worse or better.

Silt, filth, and cold cold water is just the start of it,

Until a throne room can be adorned with

Melted down shining findings from our own backwaters.

Side by Side,

In a principality of alchemy.

# Algo

## Nonsense Part Tired

---

Peering into the mid existence

And distant past

Through reflective surfaces.

Nursing stale regret

Like a cold remedy

Under waves of blue light.

Bathing in the white noise

Of the outside world

Which cannot walk through walls.

Pale Fragile Tragedy

Is a distant hum,

An electric pilotless car

Accelerating towards a vanishing point.

# Willem Butler Yeats

## The Crucifixion of the Outcast

---

*Like James Joyce, William Butler Yeats knew that an independent Ireland dominated by the Catholic church would become stagnant with provincialism. Yeats, however, contrary to Joyce, wasn't a Catholic. He came from a Protestant family and his father was a rationalist. Yeats himself was a mystic, always ready to join occult organisations. This is often found in people who have an impulse for religion, but who can't bring themselves to join a denomination. To many Irish Catholic nationalists, he was a decadent pagan. What endeared him even less to the Catholic church was his idea of secularizing the schools in Ireland, instead of leaving them in the hands of the Church.*

*The following story illustrates the struggle between the vestiges of the pagan world and Christianity. The pagan world is shown to be more inspiring than the Catholic one, but is doomed when faced with a jealous god and organized religion.*

A man, with thin brown hair and a pale face, half ran, half walked along the road that wound from the south to the Town of the Shelly River. Many called him Cumhal, the son of Cormac, and many called him the Swift, Wild Horse; and he was a gleeman, and he wore a short parti-coloured doublet, and had pointed shoes, and a bulging wallet. Also he was of the blood of the Ernaans, and his birth-place was the Field of Gold; but his eating and sleeping places were the four provinces of Eri, and his abiding place was not upon the ridge of the earth. His eyes strayed from the Abbey tower of the White Friars and the town battlements to a row of crosses which stood out against the sky upon a hill a little to the eastward of the town, and he clenched his fist, and shook it at the crosses. He knew they were not empty, for the birds were fluttering about them; and he thought, how, as like as not, just such another vagabond as himself was hanged on one of them; and he muttered; "If it were hanging or bow-stringing, or stoning or beheading, it would be bad

enough. But to have the birds pecking your eyes and the wolves eating your feet! I would that the red wind of the Druids had withered in his cradle the soldier of Dathi, who brought the tree of death out of barbarous lands, or that the lightning, when it smote Dathi at the foot of the mountain, had smitten him also, or that his grave had been dug by the green-haired and green-toothed merrows deep at the roots of the deep sea.”

While he spoke, he shivered from head to foot, and the sweat came out upon his face, and he knew not why, for he had looked upon many crosses. He passed over two hills and under the battlemented gate, and then round by a left-hand way to the door of the Abbey. It was studded with great nails, and when he knocked at it, he roused the lay brother who was the porter, and of him he asked a place in the guest-house. Then the lay brother took a glowing turf on a shovel, and led the way to a big and naked outhouse strewn with dirty rushes: and lighted a rush-candle fixed between two of the stones of the wall, and set the glowing turf upon the hearth and gave him two unlighted sods and a wisp of straw, and showed him a blanket hanging from a nail, and a shelf with a loaf of bread and a jug of water, and a tub in a far corner. Then the lay brother left him and went back to his place by the door. And Cumhal the son of Cormac began to blow upon the glowing turf, that he might light the two sods and the wisp of straw; but his blowing profited him nothing, for the sods and the straw were damp. So he took off his pointed shoes, and drew the tub out of the corner with the thought of washing the dust of the highway from his feet; but the water was so dirty that he could not see

the bottom. He was very hungry, for he had not eaten all that day; so he did not waste much anger upon the tub, but took up the black loaf, and bit into it, and then spat out the bite, for the bread was hard and mouldy. Still he did not give way to his wrath, for he had not drunken these many hours; having a hope of heath beer or wine at his day's end, he had left the brooks untasted, to make his supper the more delightful. Now he put the jug to his lips, but he flung it from him straightway, for the water was bitter and ill-smelling. Then he gave the jug a kick, so that it broke against the opposite wall, and he took down the blanket to wrap it about him for the night. But no sooner did he touch it than it was alive with skipping fleas. At this, beside himself with anger, he rushed to the door of the guest-house, but the lay brother, being well accustomed to such outcries, had locked it on the outside; so Cumhal emptied the tub and began to beat the door with it, till the lay brother came to the door, and asked what ailed him, and why he woke him out of sleep. "What ails me!" shouted Cumhal, "are not the sods as wet as the sands of the Three Headlands? and are not the fleas in the blanket as many as the waves of the sea and as lively? and is not the bread as hard as the heart of a lay brother who has forgotten God? and is not the water in the jug as bitter and as ill-smelling as his soul? and is not the foot-water the colour that shall be upon him when he has been charred in the Undying Fires?" The lay brother saw that the lock was fast, and went back to his niche, for he was too sleepy to talk with comfort. And Cumhal went on beating at the door, and presently he heard the lay brother's foot once more, and cried out at him, "O cowardly and tyrannous race of friars, persecutors of the bard and the gleeman,

haters of life and joy! O race that does not draw the sword and tell the truth! O race that melts the bones of the people with cowardice and with deceit!”

“Gleeman,” said the lay brother, “I also make rhymes; I make many while I sit in my niche by the door, and I sorrow to hear the bards railing upon the friars. Brother, I would sleep, and therefore I make known to you that it is the head of the monastery, our gracious Coarb, who orders all things concerning the lodging of travellers.”

“You may sleep,” said Cumhal, “I will sing a bard’s curse on the Coarb.” And he set the tub outside down under the window, and stood upon it, and began to sing in a very loud voice. The singing awoke the Coarb, so that he sat up in bed and blew a silver whistle until the lay brother came to him. “I cannot get a wink of sleep with that noise,” said the Coarb. “What is happening?”

“It is a gleeman,” said the lay brother, “who complains of the sods, of the bread, of the water in the jug, of the foot-water, and of the blanket. And now he is singing a bard’s curse upon you, O brother Coarb, and upon your father and your mother, and your grandfather and your grandmother, and upon all your relations.”

“Is he cursing in rhyme?”

“He is cursing in rhyme, and with two assonances in every line of his

curse.”

The Coarb pulled his night-cap off and crumpled it in his hands, and the circular brown patch of hair in the middle of his bald head looked like an island in the midst of a pond, for in Connaught they had not yet abandoned the ancient tonsure for the style then coming into use. “If we do not somewhat,” he said, “he will teach his curses to the children in the street, and the girls spinning at the doors, and to the robbers on the mountain of Gulben.”

“Shall I go then,” said the other, “and give him dry sods, a fresh loaf, clean water in a jug, clean foot-water, and a new blanket, and make him swear by the blessed St. Benignus, and by the sun and moon, that no bond be lacking, not to tell his rhymes to the children in the street, and the girls spinning at the doors, and the robbers on the mountain of Gulben?”

“Neither our blessed Patron nor the sun and the moon would avail at all,” said the Coarb: “for to-morrow or the next day the mood to curse would come upon him, or a pride in those rhymes would move him, and he would teach his lines to the children, and the girls, and the robbers.

Or else he would tell another of his craft how he fared in the guest-house, and he in his turn would begin to curse, and my name would wither. For learn there is no steadfastness of purpose upon the roads, but only under roofs, and between four walls. Therefore I bid you go and awaken Brother Kevin, Brother Dove, Brother Little Wolf, Brother Bald



Patrick, Brother Bald Brandon, Brother James and Brother Peter. And they shall take the man, and bind him with ropes, and dip him in the river that he may cease to sing. And in the morning, lest this but make him curse the louder, we will crucify him.”

“The crosses are all full,” said the lay brother.

“Then we must make another cross. If we do not make an end of him another will, for who can eat and sleep in peace while men like him are going about the world? Ill should we stand before blessed St. Benignus, and sour would be his face when he comes to judge us at the Last Day, were we to spare an enemy of his when we had him under our thumb! Brother, the bards and the gleemen are an evil race, ever cursing and ever stirring up the people, and immoral and immoderate in all things, and heathen in their hearts, always longing after the Son of Lir, and Angus, and Bridget, and the Dagda, and Dana the Mother, and all the false gods of the old days; always making poems in praise of those kings and queens of the demons, Finvaragh of the Hill in the Plain, and Red Aodh of the Hill of the Shee, and Cleena of the Wave, and Eiveen of the Grey Rock, and him they call Don of the Vats of the Sea; and railing against God and Christ and the blessed Saints.” While he was speaking he crossed himself, and when he had finished he drew the night-cap over his ears, to shut out the noise, and closed his eyes, and composed himself to sleep.

The lay brother found Brother Kevin, Brother Dove, Brother Little Wolf,

Brother Bald Patrick, Brother Bald Brandon, Brother James and Brother Peter sitting up in bed, and he made them get up. Then they bound Cumhal, and they dragged him to the river, and they dipped him in at the place which was afterwards called Buckley's Ford.

"Gleeman," said the lay brother, as they led him back to the guest-house, "why do you ever use the wit which God has given you to make blasphemous and immoral tales and verses? For such is the way of your craft. I have, indeed, many such tales and verses well nigh by rote, and so I know that I speak true! And why do you praise with rhyme those demons, Finvaragh, Red Aodh, Cleena, Eiveen and Don? I, too, am a man of great wit and learning, but I ever glorify our gracious Coarb, and Benignus our Patron, and the princes of the province. My soul is decent and orderly, but yours is like the wind among the salley gardens. I said what I could for you, being also a man of many thoughts, but who could help such a one as you?"

"My soul, friend," answered the gleeman, "is indeed like the wind, and it blows me to and fro, and up and down, and puts many things into my mind and out of my mind, and therefore am I called the Swift, Wild Horse." And he spoke no more that night, for his teeth were chattering with the cold.

The Coarb and the friars came to him in the morning, and bade him get ready to be crucified, and led him out of the guest-house. And while he still stood upon the step a flock of great grass-barnacles passed high

above him with clanking cries. He lifted his arms to them and said, “O great grass-barnacles, tarry a little, and mayhap my soul will travel with you to the waste places of the shore and to the ungovernable sea!”

At the gate a crowd of beggars gathered about them, being come there to beg from any traveller or pilgrim who might have spent the night in the guest-house. The Coarb and the friars led the gleeman to a place in the woods at some distance, where many straight young trees were growing, and they made him cut one down and fashion it to the right length, while the beggars stood round them in a ring, talking and gesticulating. The Coarb then bade him cut off another and shorter piece of wood, and nail it upon the first. So there was his cross for him; and they put it upon his shoulder, for his crucifixion was to be on the top of the hill where the others were. A half-mile on the way he asked them to stop and see him juggle for them: for he knew, he said, all the tricks of Angus the Subtle-Hearted. The old friars were for pressing on, but the young friars would see him: so he did many wonders for them, even to the drawing of live frogs out of his ears. But after a while they turned on him, and said his tricks were dull and a shade unholy, and set the cross on his shoulders again. Another half-mile on the way, and he asked them to stop and hear him jest for them, for he knew, he said, all the jests of Conan the Bald, upon whose back a sheep’s wool grew. And the young friars, when they had heard his merry tales, again bade him take up his cross, for it ill became them to listen to such follies. Another half-mile on the way, he asked them to stop and hear him sing the story of White-Breasted Deirdre, and how she endured many sorrows, and how the sons of Usna died to serve her. And the young friars were mad to hear

him, but when he had ended, they grew angry, and beat him for waking forgotten longings in their hearts. So they set the cross upon his back, and hurried him to the hill.

When he was come to the top, they took the cross from him, and began to dig a hole to stand it in, while the beggars gathered round, and talked among themselves. "I ask a favour before I die," says Cumhal.

"We will grant you no more delays," says the Coarb.

"I ask no more delays, for I have drawn the sword, and told the truth, and lived my vision and am content."

"Would you then confess?"

"By sun and moon, not I; I ask but to be let eat the food I carry in my wallet. I carry food in my wallet whenever I go upon a journey, but I do not taste of it unless I am well-nigh starved. I have not eaten now these two days."

"You may eat, then," says the Coarb, and he turned to help the friars dig the hole.

The gleeman took a loaf and some strips of cold fried bacon out of his wallet and laid them upon the ground. "I will give a tithe to the poor," says he, and he cut a tenth part from the loaf and the bacon. "Who among

you is the poorest?" And thereupon was a great clamour, for the beggars began the history of their sorrows and their poverty, and their yellow faces swayed like the Shelly River when the floods have filled it with water from the bogs.

He listened for a little, and, says he, "I am myself the poorest, for I have travelled the bare road, and by the glittering footsteps of the sea; and the tattered doublet of parti-coloured cloth upon my back, and the torn pointed shoes upon my feet have ever irked me, because of the towered city full of noble raiment which was in my heart. And I have been the more alone upon the roads and by the sea, because I heard in my heart the rustling of the rose-bordered dress of her who is more subtle than Angus, the Subtle-Hearted, and more full of the beauty of laughter than Conan the Bald, and more full of the wisdom of tears than White-Breasted Deirdre, and more lovely than a bursting dawn to them that are lost in the darkness. Therefore, I award the tithe to myself; but yet, because I am done with all things, I give it unto you."

So he flung the bread and the strips of bacon among the beggars, and they fought with many cries until the last scrap was eaten. But meanwhile the friars nailed the gleeman to his cross, and set it upright in the hole, and shovelled the earth in at the foot, and trampled it level and hard. So then they went away, but the beggars stared on, sitting round the cross. But when the sun was sinking, they also got up to go, for the air was getting chilly. And as soon as they had gone a little way, the wolves, who had been showing themselves on the edge of a

neighbouring coppice, came nearer, and the birds wheeled closer and closer. "Stay, outcasts, yet a little while," the crucified one called in a weak voice to the beggars, "and keep the beasts and the birds from me." But the beggars were angry because he had called them outcasts, so they threw stones and mud at him, and went their way. Then the wolves gathered at the foot of the cross, and the birds lighted all at once upon his head and arms and shoulders, and began to peck at him, and the wolves began to eat his feet. "Outcasts," he moaned, "have you also turned against the outcast?"



*Fantazius Mallare's Crucifixion by Wallace Smith*

# Peter Van Belle

## **Light Hits Brick**

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In a courtyard behind high walls  
A dog tests its bark  
On the sounds of approaching dark  
The echoes are the peals of its hell



# Peter Van Belle

## Resistance

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A toy car perched  
On a stone wall after dark  
A child's finger raised  
To an oncoming night

# CONTRIBUTORS

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**Heikki Huotari** attended a one-room school and spent summers on a forest-fire lookout tower. Since retiring from academia/mathematics he has published poems in numerous journals and in five poetry collections. His manuscript, *To Justify The Butterfly*, won second prize, and publication, in the 2022 James Tate Chapbook Competition.

**David McVey** lectures at New College Lanarkshire in Scotland. He has published over 120 short stories and a great deal of non-fiction that focuses on history and the outdoors. He enjoys hillwalking (ie hiking), visiting historic sites, reading, watching telly (ie TV), and supporting his home-town football (ie soccer) team, Kirkintilloch Rob Roy FC.

**Ray Miller** is a Socialist, Aston Villa supporter and faithful husband. Life's been a disappointment.

Born 1956 New York City, **Peter J. Dellolio** went to Nazareth High School and New York University and graduated 1978: BA Cinema Studies; BFA Film Production. He wrote and directed various short films, including James Joyce's short story *Counterparts* which he adapted into a screenplay. *Counterparts* was screened at national and international film festivals. A freelance writer, Peter has published many 250-1000 word articles on the arts, film, dance, sculpture, architecture, and culture, as well as fiction, poetry, one-act plays, and critical essays on art, film, and photography. Poetry collections "A Box Of Crazy Toys" published 2018 by Xenos Books/Chelsea Editions and "Bloodstream Is An Illusion Of Rubies Counting Fireplaces" published February 2023 by Cyberwit/Rochak Publishing. He is working on a critical study of Alfred Hitchcock, *Hitchcock's Cinematic World: Shocks of Perception and the Collapse of the Rational*. Chapter excerpts have appeared in *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Literature/Film Quarterly*, *Kinema*, *Flickhead*, and *North Dakota Quarterly* since 2006.

His poetry and fiction have appeared in various literary magazines, including *Antenna*, *Aero-Sun Times*, *Bogus Review*, *Pen-Dec Press*, *Both Sides Now*, *Cross Cultural Communications/Bridging The Waters Volume II*, and *The Mascara Literary Review*. *Dramatika Press* published a volume of his one-act plays in 1983. One of these, *The Seeker*, appeared in an issue of *Collages & Bricolages*. Peter was a contributing editor for *NYArts Magazine*, writing art and film reviews. He authored monographs on several new artists as well. He was co-publisher and Editor-in-Chief of *Artscape2000*, a prestigious, award-

winning art review e-zine. He has also taught poetry and art for LEAP. He is an artist himself: <https://www.saatchiart.com/peterdelloio.com>. His paintings and 3D works offer abstract images of famous people in all walks of life who have died tragically at a young age. He lives in Brooklyn.

**Wallace Smith** (1888-1937) reporter, screenwriter, comic book artist and illustrator. In 1924 he illustrated a novel by Ben Hecht, a fellow Chicago reporter and screenwriter. This was seized and both author and illustrator were charged with obscenity. They entered a plea of “no contest”.

**Jeanne Julian** is author of *Like the O in Hope* and two chapbooks. Her poems are in *Kakalak*, *Panoply*, *RavensPerch*, *Ocotillo Review* and elsewhere, and have won awards from *Reed Magazine*, *Comstock Review*, *Naugatuck River Review*, and *Maine Poets’ Society*. She reviews books for *The Main Street Rag*. [www.jeannejulian.com](http://www.jeannejulian.com)

After a long career as a professor of Classics (specialising in Latin literature) **Paul Murgatroyd** retired four years ago and started writing novels and short stories. Seventeen of the latter have been published or accepted for publication, along with three poems in English and over fifty of his Latin poems.

**Heather Sager** lives in Illinois where she writes poetry and fiction. Her most recent writing appears in *The Basilisk Tree*, *Backwards Trajectory*, *Black Poppy Review*, *ZiN Daily*, *Cosmic Daffodil*, *The Closed Eye Open*, *Magma*, *Spinozablue*, and more journals.

**Algo** is from Ireland. In self-imposed self-isolation, Algo only wears black and enjoys studying the school of Austrian Economics, reading comic books and meditating. Algo once believed he was a nihilist but now believes in something higher.

**Peter Van Belle** is the editor of *The Klecksograph* and has published poems and short stories in Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, the US, and Belgium. As a child he lived in the US, but now he lives in Belgium.

**Salvator Rosa** (1615-1673) Baroque painter who became famous for his wild landscapes peopled with bandits and witches.

## END OF ISSUE THIRTEEN OF THE KLEKSOGRAPH



*The Witches Sabbath by Salvator Rosa*