

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLE



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The Martian Chronicle

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Letter From The Editor

Welcome to the sixth issue of The Martian Chronicle! We hope you enjoy this collection of brilliant, unique pieces of artistic craft. From poetry, prose, paintings, and photos, this edition features a great selection of artists from around the world.

At Paragon Press, we endeavor to publish captivating and thought-provoking craft. This edition of The Martian Chronicle has exceeded our standards, and we are proud to showcase these newly emerging, post-modern artists who redefine the field of art we know today.

As the newly instated Editor-in-Chief, I am grateful for all the support I got from our board of directors, staff, and community. This edition would not be possible without their guidance, patience, and support.

Thank you to our editing interns: Halli Powers, Emily Saldivar, and Brhea Washington. We are immensely proud of your work and everything you've achieved during your educational programs at Pharmacy Theatre and Paragon Press.

Special thanks to the former Editor-in-Chief and current Analytical/Ed. Director Josh Gerst for all your counsel and direction. I hope to continue to keep learning from you and one day become half the Editor-in-Chief you were!

Lastly, thank you to our community of readers who help keep this magazine going! Without further ado, we are excited to present you with The Martian Chronicle Issue006!

Immense thanks,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Milan Vu". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Milan Vu

Editor-in-Chief | MVu@pharmacytheatre.org

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Odyssey of a Willow in tears

by Kathleen Langston

The weeping willow
or the willow so willing to lose tear laden
branches and sing so softly
to make the wind—

The wind of my world was the willow tree
and the festering nature of a
termitted arm sank low to the horizon;
the breakage point of the
god-like chain-saw
then chained the wind tree
down to a world where the sound of wind was needed—

To hear the world spin through branches
and the catkin childish
seeds that dried to the cruelty of softness,
of pillowy dreams and the white that was
tender in opposition to the white tender of mold,
the seeds would fall
and arms would fall gently and thinly
like hairs shed to mark hours
but not to count up to something beyond, or
maybe arms of branches were shed as a promise
known by pure coincidence:
that the river carried
by the willow's wind
may one day carry
a basket, a baby, down to
foment a new way to make a tree,
root a fallen fragment to grow, to fruit a cancelling wave of wind.
Past against Child, until quiet—

So a willow tree
lifted wind by fingertips
of falling arms
(arms that attempted to divide the self
by falling and hoping for chance to be brilliant
and kind but not lucky)
and proper children
made to dream and made to lift
away in their lightness (likeness)
were seeds that needed to die
even more gruesome and quiet
ways in order to lift back
into the wind devised for all of us to hear,
devised so to be refracted
by all of the branches waiting to fall into chance—
The Chance of a Storm:
shook all limbs down in nettled ways
slapping against fingertips
until a tree rooted by misfortune
Went belly up
Watched the sun set in pure darkness
and waited for its body to dry
while branches should have been set to sail
on streams
that instead flooded basements
choked dishwashers
and swiftly ran to the gutter;
so That Storm
gave the willow a way to renounce the horizon
and to watch chance dripped from fingertips
do anything but flow away



'Green New Steel' by Nicholas Karavatos

Let Me Talk

by Halli Powers

Swiping on the finishing touches of mascara, I admire my appearance one last time before walking back to my bedroom, flopping on my bed and turning my phone on, seeing a handful of new text messages.

Anne: Molls, don't kill me.....

Anne: It'll be fine

Anne: Kyle was just at my house to help Dawson get ready for his show tonight

Mom: Don't forget to feed the dogs before you leave tonight!

Anne: He just told me he's coming to watch Dawson's show

Staring at the screen, I feel a heavy weight start pressing down on my chest, then my stomach drops. Tonight was supposed to be a fun night. It's the first night of our county fair, and my best friend and I were ready to spend it the way we always do: eating funnel cake, playing the carnival games, riding rides, and our favorite, watching Dawson, Anne's brother, and his band play to end the night. *It looks like that just went down the drain.*

Letting out a huff and picking myself up off my bed, I head toward my car to pick up Anne and get this show on the road – not without feeding the dogs first, of course. Shooting Anne a quick text to let her know I'm coming, I put on my music and back out of my driveway, hands shaking in anticipation of what's to come tonight.

"I just don't have a good feeling about tonight," I say to Anne, who turns down the radio from her position in the passenger seat. "I already know it won't be fun seeing Kyle, but something tells me something is about to go *terribly* wrong."

"Molly, it's fine. It's just your nerves talking since you haven't seen him in a few weeks. There's literally *nothing* to worry about."

Just as Anne gives me some reassurance that things will be okay, my steering wheel jerks away from my hands and I hear a loud pop. Pulling over, we jump out of my car, inspecting where the sound came from.

"...So maybe you were right," Anne mutters, looking down at my front right tire, which is now blown to shreds. *Great. Just great.*

"What do we do?" My parents are out of town, and Anne's family is already at the fair, helping Dawson set up.

“I know someone we can call, but you won’t be happy about it,” Anne looks over at me, her expression making me more scared than this blown tire did.

“Don’t even say it...”

“So, how have you been Molls?” Kyle looks at me through the rearview mirror, expecting a response. Of course, out of all the people we know going to the fair, Anne decided that he was our best choice to pick us up. Looking at him from my spot in the back, I cross my arms and roll my eyes, turning to look out the window. He’s saving us as a favor to Anne, not to me.

Trying to break some of the tension, Anne plugs in her phone and starts playing music. Of course, it’s my favorite song, and both her and Kyle know it and start singing along, hoping I join in. I resist the urge to sing and instead stay silent, determined to prove to both of them how angry I am.

This continues with every song Anne plays until we pull into the parking lot, and I can finally escape from Kyle’s presence. The fairgrounds are pretty big, so I think we’ll be able to avoid him for the rest of the night. *And hopefully the rest of my life.*

Filled up on funnel cake and French fries, Anne and I head toward the stage, ready to watch Dawson and his friends do what they love most, and put on a show for us. Anne’s family is basically my second family, so we make our way toward her parents to sit with them.

When we arrive, I see three empty chairs set up for us, and wonder who they were expecting. Did they think our other friend, Sarah, was coming with us? Before I can ask them, I hear a familiar voice coming from behind me, and my stomach drops once again. *This would be my luck.*

Left with no choice but to tolerate him for the rest of the night, I take a seat next to Kyle and wait for the show to start, anxiously wishing Dawson would just hurry up and start playing.

“Want some?” Kyle, with his mouth full of fries, pushes the tray toward me in an effort to share. *This is gonna be a longer night than I thought.*

As Dawson and the boys perform their last song of the night, the guests who stayed begin to pack up their blankets and chairs, creating a crowd heading toward the parking lot. Since my car had to be towed back home earlier, I wait with Anne’s family so I can hitch a ride with them. I’ll just spend the night there, then worry about my car in the morning.

Once the crowd clears up a bit, we all start walking to the lot together, which is when Anne's mom breaks the news to me.

"Since we have to haul all of Dawson's stuff back home tonight, I'm afraid we don't have room for you, Molly girl," she looks at me with a frown. "What if Kyle took you home?" Anne's parents weren't filled in on the breakup yet, so she thought this was a genius idea. I, however, did not, but my only other choice is to walk home, so I follow Kyle back to his car instead.

When we get to his car, Kyle comes over to the passenger side and tries opening my door for me.

"I got it," I snap at him, yanking the door open myself then slamming it shut once I get in. He gets in as well, then looks over at me with a soft expression.

"Look, Molly. I know I'm not your favorite person, and you'd rather be anywhere else but here right now. But can you at least hear me out?"

"I don't really have a choice, do I?" When the options are to sit in awkward silence or listen to him talk, I hate to say that I'd rather hear his voice.

"I know I hurt you, and there's no way I can take it back completely. But can I at least make it up to you somehow? I still care about you so much, and it's killing me to see how unhappy you are, especially knowing that I'm the reason for it. I haven't stopped thinking about the fight since it happened, but I had no clue how to talk to you about it without thinking you'd shut me out. All I'm asking is for one more shot to make things right."

Stunned by his confession, I sit in silence for a few seconds, taking in everything he just said to me. I still care about him, too, and my life has been a mess since we broke up. Right as I open my mouth to respond, he starts rambling again.

"Of course, I understand if you wouldn't want to since you're hurting and we leave for college soon, but I really care about you and I just want –"

"Kyle! Let me talk."



'Parabolic Expression' by Carter Boucher

The Contract

by Rebecca Pyle

I don't know whether he is in a man who likes to be in charge, my friend said. He likes to be looked at as if he is in charge. The way power companies like to be in charge of power but more than that to be looked on as a kindly super-power over small desperate, begging, powers. Of course since Prometheus and Edison and Tesla and Einstein we are, each and every one, all copy-cats of the original men of power.

Yes, I said. We were on the metro together in Paris. He is an idea man, my friend, and he keeps talking constantly, trying to foment more ideas, more powerful thoughts.

I am female, so it feels toxic, the subject of men and power, because the unspoken thing is that most men like to be in charge of women, women who serve them. Even my nodding makes me not a leading wheel, but a following wheel. So I keep to my magazine. It is about all the ways a cafe can lure a customer with various cups and trays and a new something called a cupola for your cup. The customer is given their cup full of steaming captured extracts from beans or leaves, something frothy is added, and then the cupola, made of china or porcelain, is placed atop, to hold in the steam-power of the beverage. More power goes to the cafe owner, also, as there is a fee for the cupola, which lets you linger longer over hot beverage. Only the dishwasher suffers, he who must handle all the delicate porcelain or china and ensure there is no breakage within the machine. Its domed shape also ensures there is less room within the dishwasher for other, more essential, things.

A wonderful name for a cafe someday would be Cupola, one of the men interviewed in the article says. Wearing a ruddy-colored pullover and corduroy trousers, he is in half of the photographs, some sort of coffee king. Corduroy means cloth of the king; accurate, as it looks like the plowed field, more work for the peasant, more riches for the king.

That article makes me want my latte, says my man. He is so much taller, as most men are; so he easily leans over me and the article I read.

Then let's go, I say. We get off at the next stop; we like to plunder unknown streets with our feet till we find a place we have never been in before.

Within two blocks we are in a small place framed with dark, dusty bricks. One glass window is the length of an automobile. We sit beneath its dim-but-brave slants of light. Someone fries something with garlic in it, and I smell fennel tea. The fun of cafes is to try to detect the aromas which are not coffee. To the east is a Scandinavian family studying the cafe's plain, bright silverware, looking for a word printed somewhere on it. They say a sound which makes some of them laugh. Their hair is a pale, pale yellow, except the father, whose hair dark as shadow, whose eyes too are sad and retiring as shadow.

In charge, I say, as we sit down with our cups, and I begin to feel myself sail off to the land of half-bitter, half-harrowing thoughts which coffee brings.

Till last week I had a firm tea habit, but leaves of tea never have the caramelized singe of good coffee beans, the loneliness and the clubbiness and the fierceness of coffee's taste. And its melodrama: I know too many of us believe the beans of coffee bushes give us insight. In fact, I believe it locks us out of whole rooms and realms of thought. But we are desperate to believe in something.

Phone calls, he says. Opening his phone, he says one is a man calling to ask whether he would sell his house to him fast, for cash. The other is a man calling wanting to offer much better auto insurance. *Poor fellows*, he says. *I wish I could give them a blast of pure and clarifying lightning, and I mean that in the kindest way. To root them out of these jobs and into something more idealistic. It is begging, what they are doing, and they know. They are suffering*

Not in charge, I say.

Not in charge, in need of power, he says.

We both nod, keeping our winter hands warm on white cups heated by hot liquid.

The man we were talking about, he says. I nod. He is nothing but a diverted deacon. He grew up, I believe, in a highly regimented church situation, nothing but little departments for that and this and that yonder on the horizon, false promises much like the glories of auto insurance, and cash for your house, no questions asked. Just politely agree. This one who wants to be your devoted creative overseer? I wouldn't let him near you.

Is he dangerous, I say, in voice of mockery.

Yes, he says. He leans back in his chair and looks at me but, yet, is not looking at me. He is thinking of something else. Then his eyes come back to brightness, focus. Wait until you do anything without his permission. Or anything which is in any way critical of him and his various clubs. He is what our mothers tell us: he has become, as most people have, what he once hated the most. In his case the bustling popular church deacon, a cheerful busybody who can do no wrong, who is never, ever, to be disagreed with. You are not ever to point out he is all about the look of power, instead of power. And if you are a woman: you don't know it but you are, very fully, most likely to be crucified.

I laugh. Women? We know better.

Jesus has been done. Women are the high prey because they are making men feel very small. Of course, the moon is by all properties and theories female. But men like him will tell you men gave birth to the moon and all creation, and on which days, and that the moon is a male guarding the kingdom of churches against marauding women, he says.

You've gone sane, I say.

Madness always gathers in coffee houses, he says. Look at all the steam coming from cups, all the faces lulled into believing they've found a heavenly resting place here. Here, where they put away on faraway shelves all their helplessness and drear. A kingdom in a cup. And look, over there, a machine which distributes stories not from the bible. Your creative fellow, he, why, he would pretend to like it, the way he pretends to

like people who believe in crones and magic crystals. But he's a secret religious bigot: against coffee, crystals, women outdoing men. Stories not church-authorized. He'd tell you the moon's a boy growing up to be a big man. That the moon is a favorite disciple, not counted till now. A--latter-day businessman, and saint.

I do something I have not done for many, many years. I push away our careful cups with their careful silvery heavyweight spoons, our napkins. The table is clear. I lay my head down, as if child at school, to nap, on school desk. Through table I do feel the hum of life, through this building, its machines, its ceiling height, its drumming echoes; from outside I hear thrum of automobiles, can dizzily imagine the color and tumult of people walking by. All I want is sleep. The contract, folded in my tote bag, I don't know what to do with. I've asked my man: do I sign it? I've already filled in my address and the title of my work and my means of contact. He has been telling me, really, with all this conversation, why I shouldn't.

And to know, inside the box in the corner of the cafe, which story is waiting for me, as if my fortune, my direction, waiting for me. All my life I have been between one man and another, as all one's life one is between landlords and bankers, unless, as a novelist does, metaphorically, you live in a cave, or on a boat you have built yourself, or a house built from scraps in a place where no one can find it. Civilization marks most as found, claimed.

And thus, lost. Helpless.

which are the body's, that there are good measures of healthy sustaining things, and as little emotional friction as possible, because that friction could be damaging, confidence-shaking—thus, why bother?

Well, it's you, it's us, my husband will say. We'll have to imagine other dawns. Think of The Time Machine.

That poor fellow, I said. That time machine fellow. And Philby, who believed. With his red hair.

He was desperate, he said.

The author or Philby, I said.

He was desperate, both of them, he said.

But so are all the books with pale blue covers, I said.

He did not, of course, know what I was talking about, though my friend Amber had. He fell asleep. He likes to practice for death; he likes to sleep.

Night fell, and novel rose; and I began to wonder if pale blue cover was good enough. By midnight I was sailing past pages sixteen, twenty, thirty-four; all good novels go fast, as their theory, their cure, their abstract, are being constructed: the labors before the birth.

Summer Solstice

by Brhea Washington

Birds sing overhead
The rushing waterfall streams
Breeze gentle and light

No matter the hour, excitement erupts
Engrossed in a world of vibrant music and culture
World-renowned Mardi Gras and carnival celebration
Overflowing opportunities for adventure
Riverboat rides along the Mississippi River
Laissez les bon temps rouler
Enchanted mystery of voodoo
Atmosphere unique unlike any other
Nourishing gumbo, crawfish, and delicious cuisine
Streetcar rides to experience the wondrous atmosphere



'Untitled;' by Gullherme Bergamini

Experience Life

by Reynaldo Hinojosa

I joined the Experience Life Movement a few years ago, which started somewhere way out east, where the national pastime is making your own kombucha, because it gave me a sense of purpose, like I was part of something big and important. It involved digital minimalism, waste reduction, and a reliance on renewable sources of energy. It started out as a personal effort to counteract climate change and was quickly endorsed and popularized by celebrities like Leo, the Baldwins, and Cher, it became the new thing to do. But Karen...Karen hated all of those 'liberal bleeding-heart slugs'. 'Libtards' as she would call them. She'd scoff whenever someone even talked about Obama because she thought he was the root of the problem.

So I started with a modest neighborhood recycling program, and trust me when I say no one gave a shit, but getting people to collect their Polyethylene Terephthalates, High-Density Polyethylenes, PVCs, LDPEs, PPs – the 6 Ps as I called them – their cardboard, papers, cans, I mean anything made of synthetic material, was a pain in the ass. Those first few weeks were rough, no one, I mean no one wanted to sort the different plastics. I had to go through people's garbage and call them out on their bullshit. I mean, a few weeks into the program, Gerald at 20132 had five boxes from Amazon in the garbage. What the hell does he need that he creates so much waste? Or Michele down at 20135 used to water her lawn in the middle of the day, like why would anyone think that is ok? Or Harriet at 20128 never picked up her dog's shit from her yard, or anyone's yard for that matter, especially when it managed to escape from the backyard. Now she's in charge of the block compost pile, occasionally chasing after the dog to put it back. It took work, a lot of nagging, a few times in which I had the cops called on me, but eventually the neighborhood recycling program took on a larger role and everyone chilled out with the complaining and minor death threats.

Everyone but Karen joined the communal recycle-a-thon, the weekly compost gathering, or the take-a-flower-plant-a-flower-bi-weekly excursion. She'd sit on her patio, iced lemonade in hand, and scroll through her phone and laugh at memes while we did our weekly beautification patrol, the American Flag flapping majestically on the pole she'd recently installed. She'd throw out food scraps in front of everyone as we collected ours for the compost pile. She once looked me in the eyes right as she placed a type-2 plastic in the garbage can, and watched me from inside, the shades pushed aside by a single finger, as I dug through the trash to pull it out. She even buried it underneath used coffee grounds, week old banana peels and half eaten pizza!

Needless to say, everyone, even Jim at 20125, came around and started enjoying the possibilities of Community Thursdays. But Karen would have a beer alone, that cheap beer college kids still in that high school mentality would drink, a six pack, laughing alone with her phone, on her patio, while the whole neighborhood would make vegan tacos or impossible burgers with sweet fries, served with homemade kombucha. Sarah at 20136 made the best.

But then one day, Karen brought home a 'friend', a young woman by the name of Lise. At first we thought she was Karen's sister or cousin, but she ended up staying longer than any family visit would permit. No one in the neighborhood knew who she was or where she came from, but she started spending the night more and more frequently, and soon enough, joined the Tuesday night scrap team. After a few weeks, to the surprise of everyone, Karen started attending.

After a few months, Karen became more vocal and started the No Phone Wednesday, the monthly Book Club – followed by the obligatory bi-monthly book sale/donation – the Non Dairy Soft Serve Sunday, and the Rain Collection Committee. She had solar panels installed, bought an electric car and still biked to work! She also started the Bike-to-Work Mondays.

And then Karen did it. I didn't think she would. She got rid of the energy efficient washer and dryer combo, broke it down, and paid some down-and-out artist to sculpt something from its remains. For all her initial resistance, she shrugged the act off as something easy, like brushing your teeth or walking the dog.

All of sudden, she started taking over the Experience Life Movement in our neighborhood. With that, I could see that little smirk Karen would give when she knew she was right. Eventually, she started the Hand Wash Saturday committee. We could all see her out in the back yard scrubbing her clothes with a wash board and hanging them on her fancy made-from-recycled-materials clothes line. She had a landscape artist come in and make her mini Zen garden complete with fountains and koi pond. She was a riot at our Community Thursdays, Lise right beside her, both the center of attention. Karen even stopped wearing the silver cross necklace that was her mothers. She never took it off when she passed away a few years ago. Now that I think about it, Karen was never quite the same after that. But when Lise moved in, Karen removed the crosses from her home. I know this because on one of my nightly excursions for the whole neighborhood, checking trash cans for plastics or cardboard or any recyclables, I found the little wooden arms, nailed feet, and crown of thorns sticking out from her trash lid.

One night, Karen complained about how we weren't digressive enough, how we still relied so heavily on fancy machines to do our work for us, even though she'd just installed a solar powered wind mill – don't ask me how or what for – just last month. She gave an impassioned speech that left everyone awestruck. Even I felt guilty for not doing enough. Everyone ate it up though, most of all, Lise, with those big hazel eyes, angelic crown of azaleas, nose piercing and colorful hemp dress.

The following week, two small children showed up at Karen's house. She introduced them that Thursday as Martha and Julio, brother and sister, whose parents died trying to cross the border. She joined the Adoption Across Borders Initiative and because of her prime membership status was able to expedite the process and adopt the two orphans.

A month later, she took on the compost pile because, as she said, 'nobody is capable'. A few weeks later I caught her going through my garbage for plastics! She came storming up to my door, hand dripping and smelling of filth, demanding to know why I threw away a coffee filter. 'It can go to the compost pile!', she said, shaking coffee grounds all over my porch.

That week, at Community Thursday, was a witch hunt. Karen had everyone gang up and shame me! They all criticized me for not being digressive enough. Gerald at 20132 called out my old Chevy pickup that I used for gathering scrap wood, saying it was not under the new Co2 emission standards all the while passing out the homemade wooden straws he spent the last month making. Doris and Bill, wearing their latest Indigenous made moccasins, from 20134 noticed, from the previous week's book club, that my lightbulbs were not LED. Michele at 20135, and her eco-friendly nail polish, called out my lack of recycling lawn trimmings. I countered that I was working longer hours and that I couldn't keep up with the Experience Life Movement to its fullest. It was true, it was getting harder to keep up with all the different parts, and sometimes, I really just wanted to be alone. And finally, Karen, the one who used to let her car leak oil onto the driveway and not even put kitty litter to soak it up, the one who would let perfectly good compost go to waste, the one who would scoff at our weekly Fun Runs at five in the morning, the one who used to pray the rosary every night and tell us that she prayed for us, saying that we had lost our way with the Lord, that we were un-American, called out my missing the previous three Community Thursdays and everyone, including Lise, waited for me to leave. Martha and Julio looked at me with disgust, too young to recognize the meaning of the word 'outcast'. As I walked through the house, all eyes to the floor,

Karen growled, ‘and don’t forget to separate your compost from the communal pile.’ As I walked home, a faint burst of laughter echoed through the empty streets. With all the Christmas lights on blinding me, eating up the power grid, Thanksgiving still a week away, I couldn’t even see my own shadow. With all that transpired, I couldn’t help but feel despondent, lost, and empty. I had devoted so much into the Experience Life Movement, but in the end was left wondering if it was even worth it. In keeping together such a tight knit plan of eco-conscientious action, I couldn’t help but look to the moon, staring down like a massive white eye. Its stoic glare and thin halo gathered a deep well of loneliness. Surrounded by stars I couldn’t see because of the light pollution, the moon just hung there, pock-marked face and motionless. It would still be here, long after I was gone, with or without my recycling plans and compost pile.

The entire neighborhood’s garbage was out for pick up the next morning, a neat line of plastic bins side by side, mirroring one another. I saw Karen measuring the distance between them and the curb earlier in the day, ‘for efficiency’ she argued, against the wishes of everyone. After everything I worked for, Karen just came through and shit on everything. Well, that smug bitch will have to take this shit. I poured trash from the bins into the recycling, so none of it would be accepted, kicked over a few trash cans, and for the coup de grace, Karen would get a fat log on her front porch. With steel logic and determination, I would push out a force so powerful and heated, Karen would have to recognize who she was messing with.

I reached her porch, pulled my pants down, and shivering in the cold air, tried to squat but fell over. After a few unsuccessful attempts, I stood and pressed my hands against the front door to balance myself, but realized that I couldn’t get my legs wide enough with my pants still on, so I took my shoes off one by one, and began pulling one leg out when Harriet from 20128’s dog came trotting up. It stopped to look at me, my naked ass shivering in the breeze, all the Christmas lights brighter than ever, and the dog just stood there whimpering, waiting for me to do what needed to be done. So I squatted, my back to the door, and gave Karen something to add to the compost pile.

Stabilization

by Emily Saldivar

Lying in bed staring up at the wall
Orange bottles take up room on the vanity
Terrified to answer even your call
Slowly inching my way toward insanity

Tuesdays are nice, always bright and cheerful
Cinnamon, vanilla, caffeine galore
Deadlines have been met, no longer fearful
Cozy dinners with friends, never a chore

Feelings: a myth, the Numbness: a reprieve
Gray everywhere, even outside these walls
It's days like this that make me feel naïve
Ghosts of Real people seem to haunt these halls

When will I stop needing assistance
Can it really occur out in nature
Never ending, unproven existence
In religious texts, born in a manger

Hard to find and impossible to keep
"Tomorrow will be better", talk is cheap



'Sugar Economy' by Jeff Hersch

Voyage

by Alicia Garrett

Inspired by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*



A Hellish Thing

Like lead into the sea of grass, I watched the ladybug descend below the curling citrus. The wind rolling each blade into sinuous waves, which to most only appear as ripples from our place above its stemmed waters. And I wonder how we fail to notice the ocean at our feet. Or whether we ought to think of such things at these late hours. The sun had not yet shown, and again I found my sleep interrupted, staring out from the window in suspended disbelief. For all forms of thought seemed wholly othered from the mind. Body adrift in the indefinable inbetween of time and space, enveloped by that which is devoid of rapture; for I believed I was more of that darkness than myself. Many nights went on like this. And many more nights were plagued by voices unlike mine, wishing to convince me of faults I would not otherwise believe present. Until I, too, sank within the fog that curled around me.



The Mariner

A rapt at the window was the last sound I had come to remember. The only memory I can place with clarity, for it is now that I wish its melody in this place where no noise may be perceived. I had been locked within my quarters, a forsaken soul cast into the depths of my own imagination. Though no more the dreamer than any other sleeper that walked with wide eyes in the daytime. Surely that much is true? If any traces of truth may be found among myths. Still the window rattled, and from it came the sullen reflection of a figure I hardly recognized or scarcely wished to. For a hunger lay in its eyes, each staring back with fevered want and empty stomach, mimicking my voiceless prayers with horror-stricken empathy.

The weight of this fall was hung about my neck and the world encircling fell silent. Of all its horrid majesty, none could compare with that stillness. Not a breath of life or whisper of breeze was heard, as the place I knew gave way to a scene unfamiliar. Metallic rays of gold, and white-hot anger poured forth from the ether, as the walls of that room melted from its frame. This grim visage infected the senses until my optics

blurred and bled and begged to wake from what must surely be a dream. But I did not wake. My body wavering in a soundless medium of color for a time where time was without presence. Here I recognized nothing but myself, and even then I was not as I remembered. Though this place felt as if it were a foreign home. Perhaps it was, or perhaps the answers lay amid the canopies of this nameless jungle, on this isle about the sea.



An Orphan's Curse

I had been reduced to a single particle of conscious matter when paired with its vast geometry. And when I sought to venture beneath its arch, it were as though a veil had been lifted. Cataclysmic thunder erupted from its center and all the many voices, who had since been absent, returned. Screaming in rising decibels, until I too, had sought to meet their pitch. Yelling louder still, my throat roughened with each exclamation, beseeching the recovery of that long endured silence for which I had hoped to be accustomed. Further on they sang till I felt myself nearly deafened and defeated, curled upon my belly atop the shimmering pool...

To mind came only this, the words of some long dead cynic; “... *that which is rooted in explicit obliviousness, are those induced sensations of existence [a secular instance abstracted by routine, and stolen amid circumstance] ...without which our perceptions of reality are lost.*”

This situation has surpassed my own dimensions of philosophy, for I have traveled beyond the precipice of reach or reason; enthralled in empty care for my life, as its loss would quiet this compendium of sound. I was no longer with voice, but still my throat ached to tell of such pain. The embers of thought brimming beneath this sulfured tongue, body chilled by conversation. Though I knew not to who I spoke.

"Please I ask of you, be you a listening presence, to pity this wretched state, no longer can I take this torment! Gift me but this single solace, for I have suffered and wish it ended. Or condemn me not for the means or time by which I leave, for if I may be denied such kindness, whose embrace remains unfamiliar, then will I take the task upon mine own hands and be of this place never more!"

Summoned by my prayer came an unholy image, as if some horrid fragment of my soul were made alive, for I beheld the figure once again. But now when I met with it, no longer did its eyes crave, for they were bewitched by hollow sight. Dead shriveled

leaves crunching like bones beneath the weight of its planet, whose sound was a deafening quiet compared to the loud of the environment before me. No more did the figure mimic my words, but rather smiled in hideous amusement from its place in that crystaled pool. And I felt my face expand with teeth, until I too were possessed by spurious pleasure, the crescendo of syllables racking my body in their terrible vibration...



Into the Silent Sea

For what seemed an eternity was that torrid wind, who brushed against the skeleton of this house with rattled breath. The voices still sounded but seemed further from me than before. As though they came not from the same space, but existed outside of it, drifting about within the gloom of a thousand timelines, beyond the veil of the door. I watched the vastness of the nothingness before me, in mute awareness of this place and my size within it; pressed between the folds of cosmic definition. And I begin to wonder if a slimy thing such as myself, deserved to be blessed. Whether the desperate beating of tired limbs against this current, made ripples along this sea face, or if my efforts made me appear as an insect to the one placed high above the water.

The Writers

KATHLEEN LANGSTON

Langston lives and attends school in Brooklyn, New York.

HALLI POWERS

Powers is a college student from Baltimore, MD currently obtaining her Bachelor's Degree in English. Powers aims to work in the publishing field after graduation and spends her free time reading, as well as experimenting with writing.

REBECCA PYLE

Pyle is both artist and writer. Her paintings are on covers of Oxford Magazine and Raven Chronicles Journal, and also her poetry chapbook *The Underwater American Songbook* (Underwater New York, 2018). More poetry and fiction and essays appear in journals such as Penn Review, Cobalt Review, Muse/A Journal, Belletrist Magazine, and Chattahoochee Review. See rebeccapyleartist.com.

BRHEA WASHINGTON

Washington was born and raised in Louisiana, graduating with their Bachelor of Arts in English from Louisiana State University. With a passionate about writing and editing, they've worked as a writer, researcher, and editor, creating content for online publications. They've most recently worked in higher education as a communications specialist, writing and editing for university publication. with aspirations to work in the publishing industry.

REYNALDO HINOJOSA

Hinojosa is a Tejano born writer and musician. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Texas at El Paso. He currently lives in Hamtramck, MI with his son.

EMILY SALDIVAR

Saldivar is a writer in the way a tomato is a fruit; not everybody knows, but those that do are pretty surprised. She's a Houston-based Chicana who is applying to graduate school, has an interest in perfecting her Spotify playlist curation skills, and hopes to one day have a longer bio.

ALICE GARRETT

Garret is currently a graduate of Bowling Green State University, working towards a career in Creative Writing.

The Artists

GUILHERME BERGAMINI

Reporter photographic and visual artist, Bergamini is Brazilian and graduated in Journalism. For more than two decades, he has developed projects with photography and the various narrative possibilities that art offers. The works of the artist dialogue between memory and social political criticism. He believes in photography as the aesthetic potential and transforming agent of society. Awarded in national and international competitions, Guilherme Bergamini participated in collective exhibitions in 30 countries.

NICHOLAS KARAVATOS

Until recently, Karavatos was an assistant professor of poetics at the Arab American University of Palestine near Jenin in The West Bank. He was a U.S. Ambassador's Distinguished Scholar to Ethiopia in 2018 at Bahir Dar University, and from 2006 through 2017, an assistant professor of creative writing at The American University of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates. At the Modern College of Business and Science in Muscat, Sultanate of Oman from 2001 through 2006, he was a senior lecturer in humanities. His first year as an expat worker was on the faculty of the Fujairah Technical School in the UAE from 2000 to 2001. Karavatos is a graduate of Humboldt State University in Arcata and New College of California in San Francisco.

CARTER BOUCHER

Boucher is a Master Teaching Artist for ARTS ACCESS SOUTH CAROLINA. They are a South Carolina Arts Commission Directory Artist. Their work has been in books and magazines including The New York Art Review, American Artist Magazine's Annual Watercolor edition, Who's Who in Art and About the Author. Richard C. Owen publishes my children's books. Boucher's poetry has been published in magazines and anthologies. They have won the International Golden poet award. My art has won awards, been featured in magazines and on Public Television.

JEFF HERSCH

Hersch provides analog collages for the modern being. Like his thoughts, these pieces are often constructed in short, frantic spurts of energy, with bursts of self-doubt, though calm and subtle. Also like his thoughts, these pieces represent everyday observations and conclusions about the vast world that erratically suffocates us, with little time for a quick escape or chance to relax, as we are currently inhabiting an advanced state of infinite stimulus. His works lend themselves to your own interpretation of meaning – if any – but should also serve as inspiration and demonstrate the simple notion that you too can and should create something/anything on a regular basis. When he's not hunched over his desk cutting and gluing clippings, Hersch finds the time to play in bands and volunteer as the executive director Flemington DIY, a non-profit community art space in the town he grew up in. Visit www.infinite-stimulus.com for more.