

I SHALL REMEMBER DEATH

I shall drink my morning coffee, Lord,
In relation to death. The bubbles on
The black brim pile like spiders' eyes, and I am in them.
Death is like a fat spider, hiding.

I shall wipe my brow of sweat, my Abba,
With your Kingdom ever in my thoughts.
Death is like a frail man, his head hung,
Meekly tugging shirtsleeves, as for alms.

My Christ, it seems too hard to be a man.
I will lie down half forever when I'm done,
Or crawl about you, sobbing hallelujahs.
Death is like a dancer on a roof.

I shall not forget him. He is bright,
Like the sun. You make him bright for me.

THE MOUTH, THE HEART

If I read these scriptures rightly,
The heart gives nutrients, and the mind
gives daily sunlight to the tongue's soil
Which flowers and bears fruit in its time,
And lets fall blooms and leaves too, as it must—
And so this old room is filled with dried petals,
and desiccated fragments of past fragments.
Hence the madness in these icy drafts,
When late Novembers I surprise myself
With sudden starts of passion for the gales
Who long have buffeted the creaking panes,
And swing the windows open, letting in
A hundred eddies lifting sad and lame
Old syllables babbling themselves at once.
The babbling room! whom I suppose my heart
Alone may comprehend, of all hearts,
the babbling room! — the babbling room!

Eugene Kamensky is a divinity student at the Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. He has been long inspired by Gerard Manley Hopkins' masterful use of poetry to praise and exalt God in secular spaces, and he hopes to follow in those footsteps.

Eugene Kamensky

WHAT IS LEFT

Take them away, the redwoods with
the tiny blue flowers at their feet. Take them
away before we trample them at last.

The rivers: release them from their vows.
Let them know in secret they don't owe us
anything. They will find their own way.

And the forests, loyal to the end. They know
how to march, though it fills them with fear.
Perhaps this will be enough to get them moving.

The air, the wind, best when unseen. Let it
pass softly on its way, where the million
weights it carries can finally be dropped.

Leave us the stars, cold, remote, ancient of days.
They look down upon us silently, unafraid.
They know we cannot touch them.

Barry Casey has published in *Adventist Society for the Arts*, *Brevity*, *Faculty Focus*, *Lighthouse Weekly*, *Mountain Views*, *Patheos*, *Spectrum Magazine*, *The Dewdrop*, and *The Purpled Nail*. His collection of essays, *Wandering, Not Lost: Essays on Faith, Doubt, and Mystery*, was published by Wipf and Stock in November 2019. He writes from Burtonsville, Maryland.

SNOW LIGHT

Of course you can see it out of town
on an unpaved county road, but it's
obvious on Detroit side streets, too:

for a few minutes after sunset
on the first clear day after the first
significant winter storm when ice
crackles under foot or under tires,
and in that moment your whole world glows.

Keith Taylor's most recent full-length collection is *The Bird-while* (Wayne State University Press, 2017). After many years of teaching in the writing programs at the University of Michigan, he was able to quit a few years ago.

REGARDING THE CRANES

The cranes, knee-deep in ice water,
throw sticks and spread their wings
to frighten me. They call loudly:
in ropes of steam, they cry.
I would almost like to clutch them,
as I would like to clutch their necks,
or their frosty, thin legs. Beams,
they are composed of, beams compose.

Geese sleep on one leg, balancing.
Peacocks, they sleep up in the trees.
Cranes catch their rest in glimpses —
soar as high up as they can,
nap falling, and catch themselves in time.
It sounds unbelievable, I know —
but such are the oddities of Nature;
such are Science's discoveries.

Liam Gerhart is the author of one volume of poetry, *Yellow Rintelberg*, and has had his poems published in *Rattle*, *The Ilanot Review*, *Wild Roof Journal*, and *Detroit Lit Mag*.
He is an adjunct professor of English literature at the University of Virginia.

A LITTLE SPIDER THREAD

The red leaves that hang suspended in the woods
and tremble or turn or pivot at a breeze
always console me. I tiptoe and shift
to slide the little sunlight to and fro
adhering quietly to the spider thread,
no more than slips along a damp eyelid —
turning away, or rounds a drop of dew —
thin shuttles of the sun's fingers these
that ply so many and such perilous strings,
and sew so many unnecessary things.

Vincent Tice is a poet from northern California. He has been living out of a backpack for several years, and working on farms. He has been published in PANK, and Rattle Press.

JIMENA WASHES AN APPLE IN THE RAIN

The door flung open for excessive heat
between the yellow oilskin and wet boots
and the drowsy cat upon the windowsill
frames well the slouching barn across, and she
who stands within it in blue overalls
waiting for the shower to pass—remembering
the apple in the pocket of her chest
and holding it beyond the eave to rinse.
My sight empties torrential into her as hers
into the dripping apple as the rain—
as the rain grew infinite between us.

Vincent Tice

I DO NOT BELONG HERE (HIKING)

Well, sure. A host of pines, a fleeing doe,
A few frogs, mushrooms; all this bores me so.

I walked around the lake, clockwise and back,
And skipped rocks, and tasted tart sumac.

I even caught a frog, and caught another,
And laughed, pressing their lips as they were lovers,

And turned their bloaty bellies to the sun;
And still, of all thoughts, entertaining one.

Alas; this earth is not mine: nor lake, nor wood,
Nor any thing long promised to me good,

Nor work nor love nor friendship is a salve,
But every medicine effects by halves.

I threw my backpack at a fat last apple,
To find it was a soft, worm-eaten handful.

It is not mine. No, none of this is mine:
For I am either Nothing, or Divine.

Luca Gonçalves is a self-taught artist living and working in the Downriver area. He works primarily in stonecarving.

CIGARETTE/ APPLE

Now comes the temptation
to quest after essences,
to lift the veil and
uncover what is hidden—
puff : headrush ::
crunch : honeyed tongue
smoke and sweetness, I
manipulate them, combine
them, then place them
at odds with one

another puff, another crunch.
It becomes me, the way I talk
about such things, I am told—
“attractive” “penetrating” “poignant” —
I furrow my brow, I say something
about the nature of smoke and about
sweetness, this satisfied smile
as I puff on my cigarette
then crunch into my apple,
chew, savor, comment upon
the eye that has opened up, revealing
the core: a little black seed visible now.

O Vanity: I was lost before
I ever began. Butt : core ::
Self : object of contemplation

The velvet cloak has been folded
over upon itself, its span
unaltered, its magic immune
to such feeble incantations.

I huck the apple core out into
the tall grass, the cigarette butt
smush into the ashtray,
the smoke and the sweetness
dry on my tongue.

Shane Ingan is from Indiana and lives in Detroit. His first book of poetry, Lost Loves,
will be released early 2023, through Forsythia Press.

A SUNRISE POEM, OUTSIDE CHENNAI

நெருப்பிலிருந்து மேலே பார்க்கிறேன் /
பாதி உதயமான சூரியனுக்கும் பின்னும் /
மீண்டும் /

சூரியனின் குளோப்ஸ் என் பார்வையில்
ஒட்டிக்கொண்டது /
ஆரஞ்சு பழம் போல, /
வறுத்தவுடன் கொழுப்பு கொண்டது

- பெருஞ்சித்திரனார்

Looking up from the fire
to the globbed red sun and back,
and again, — and back —

with half-suns stuck to my vision
like tangerines
fat with roasting.

-Perunchithirananar

Madhan Raj lives and works in his native Chennai, after studying and working for
several years in Italy. Returning home this year, he has discovered again the great
cultural wealth of his home, and language, Tamil.

SHE IS LIKE THE SEA, THE MOONLIT, SHE IS LIKE
THE ROAD

I - The Sea

Like the sinking sense in vast and silent space—
Or stillness, not of cautious absence,
But centerless and universal motion—
Such is her gaze, which mine traces around,
Across, finding nowhere rim or rest.

II - The Moonlit

Like Inward's slow envelopment of All—
Or pure remoteness laid over the earth,
To make cold ancience of a sleeping house—
My eyes, pressed shut against her sunburned throat,
See most abundant distance, fadeless.

III - The Road

Like movement toward where one already is—
Or bound horizons for more dauntless feet,
And tension against a great unfurling—
There is a transport gathered on her skin
That spools my fingerprints more securely.

Robert Hunter is the founder and editor of Detroit Lit Mag. He was born in Ypsilanti,
and studied literature at Wayne State, before moving to Russia a while to teach
English, hitchhike, backpack, and sail a little.

WHAT LIFE IS

Something there is in life detests the sun.
In deep womb-darkness woman bears her child—
Enveloping this darkness whence it comes,
Skin-fastened and bone-riveted, undefiled,

That child will grow, and pass it on the same,
By processes occurring in the dark.
The life is blind within us, without aim,
And is precisely that which moves the shark.

We have received it from our ancestors
Pre-human, pre-historic, pre-divine;
And life is, in a strange and simple word,
One darkness which has been kept from all time.

Kent Bramble is a Sci-fi writer (hobbyist), living in Indian Village, in Detroit.

AND YET SOMEWHERE THERE IS A FINAL SEA

Ten million times before we reach those seas
Which man does not yet know, that brim with fish
Unlike the strangest we have ever seen,
Ten million men, as if it were their wish,

"Now all is finished," will so calmly say,
"And we await destruction eagerly,
Which comes to close our drawn-out days.
The world is weary, weary as are we."

Their progeny will nonetheless wage war,
And love and injure one another there,
On distant planets, two and three and more,
And bathe in starlit rivers, shouting, bare –

Whose unimaginative kids will sigh:
The world is tired! Tired as am I.

Kent Bramble

DICKINSONISMS TWO, FOR THE PROLONGED AND
SORROWFUL ABSENCE OF MY BELOVED ONE

I

The Bat has turned his Hands to Wings –
of this, Science proclaims –
his Flight a Palping – Chaotical –
Chiropteran – his name –

But just as well, Dear, – by your Touch –
I have known such Delight –
Chiropteress – your hands bear, too,
Traces of Flight!

II

I once thought Love was dearly had –
I thought – I'd traded All –
The Ancient tale – when lived, forgot –
Of precipitous Fall –

But now I roam with empty Hands,
What magnitudes I hold!
This substance where all Voice resides –
That clouds and birds enfolds –

Then Love I traded – Burdens for –
And Cold – and Sorrow too –
And you gave Loneliness – and now –
We make a gladsome Two –

Let's seize this bargain – do not ask –
Whom did we swindle so, thereby? –
But take one more Crumb of Spaciousness –
A line of Poetry –

Alecia Sakharova is a resident of Rockwood, MI. She is a huge fan of her dogs,
gardening, and the work of Emily Dickinson.

CACTUSES IN HIGH WIND (TAGANGA)

We have been tossing rocks athwart the wind,
and crabwalking in the dust.
Oh baked and loose is the trail,
and the wind is forceful.

The cactuses tremble.
The sun was already enough,
in the mind, to snap them,
and we perish in one mass –

but we long have waited,
and even in this wind, they hold –
and here is once again the sunset,
molten in one steadfast nimbus.

Julian Tasso is a Colombian-American student of literature at U of M. Though born in
Adrian MI, the older he grows, the more he is drawn to Colombia, and the more his
work focuses upon it. His Spanish language works have been published in *El
Malpensante*.

PETOSKEY STONE

On the shores of North Point
a few arias of crosswind

hatch coils on the mute surf.
Last winter's undertow

wrenched a crop
from the lake's full-voiced gullet.

I lift from the clear jelly
a pale gray bud

and appraise the score
left in its frozen vessels:

that sometime verse of seaflesh,
a passacaglia of ancient

lips, ears, and genitals,
slowed by stone and floe

to the oceanic rhythm –
a tone we are deaf to.

Mitch VanAcker is a writer based in Detroit. His work examines "nature" and "the
self" – their seeming disharmonies and the structures we build to reconcile them. He
enjoys bonfires, kayaking, and impromptu visits to strange cities.

A POEM CONTAINING THE FINAL, FROSTY END OF MY
ALREADY NEEDLESSLY PROTRACTED LIFE, IN A SNOWY
WOOD, AS I WANDER DRUNKENLY HOME FROM A BAR

"Here lies Joseph Caruth, a 45-year-old cook in a lumber camp who got drunk one cold October night in 1902 and wandered into the woods, where he passed out and froze to death."

– John Carlisle, Detroit Free Press, "Forgotten mass grave in the U.P. finally gets recognition"

The sidewalk is lonely – I step twice to a section,
Though they vary and vary – and the wind is lonely.
Over half a frozen squirrel I drift this thought:
What has spilled me?
The ice is lonely, oh the snow!
I have crept along to four and twenty tonight.

*

The railroad is sad. I tread every tie
Though my legs hate the constriction, though
The urge to sprint inflates my bundled chest.
But here, a blue jay's severed wing,
I kick it, and it scrapes sadly along.
He must have been hit by the train.
I honor his passing with this utterance:
The world has come unhinged.
I have grown and given nothing of myself at all,
Sought nothing, done ever so little.
I keep to myself, and sleep ever so much.

*

Bunny bunny bunny bunny rabbit.
Your ears are pretty, and your eyes are large.
I wish that I were you, because you seem
So happy when you hop along so fast.
But I certainly am no one else tonight,
And I am full of strange compulsions:
Human being being being being.
I feel the infinite desire to walk...
so I shall go into the forest wide
And importune the third of three birds,
Who will tell me where I must go next.

*

O these old snowclad, leafless lonelies –
O this primeval whistle of the wind –
Ain't these the reapings of eternity!
I lean into the hollow of an oak,

And whisper, as if to leave something I had held in my mouth:
A great black beard, to tinkle, rimed and iced.

*

Then I run! I run, and leap!
And breathe hard, laughing as I fly along,
Forcing the ice wind into my cheeks.
I shall gather all wind to my flesh,
And blast the cities to dust with a breath –
I leap, and trip over a buried, broken tree.
The snow goes in my coat and mouth.
Oh I have drunk up loneliness tonight,
But I shall mingle with it in my guts
What moonlight I may glean from off the snow.

*

I think I won't come back, it feels so good to go, and go!
Oh this thin birch! I grip it with a hand and spin about,
The tilted world feels so familiar, so good and free.
They say that if you spin around a birch some thirteen times
Like this and then merely let go, you'll disappear, but where,
Nobody knows, as no one has come back, but here I go:
Or was that fourteen that I spun? Or fifteen? Or another –
But let me try again. Some thirteen times, the magic then –

*

Well. Let me lie here, anyway;
I don't feel so good after that.
I am tired, and very drunk,
So let me lie, and soon I'll rise,
And try again, perhaps, or not,
Perhaps I will just go home.

Charlie Dunn lived in Ypsilanti, and never succeeded in publishing his work. His father and friends are doing their best to get his writing into publication.

MYTH-CELLANY

I

The Wandering Christmas Hag of Austria

Long ago, on Christmas Eve, a poor old woman stole the Christmas presents from under the tree of a wealthier family, in order to supply her own grandchildren with lovely gifts. For every gift she stole, she was cursed with another pair of hands. Now she wanders around, centipede-like, hoping merely to spend Christmas with a happy family, just watching them open up their presents. Sadly, she but frightens them away, and is left all alone, to stare at the glittering giftwrap and the sparkling bows all alone, with eyes which are yellow like the Christmas lights. But she never dares to touch the gifts.

II

Balalleño, with the Fasciating Goat-Heads

Balalleño lives in a cabin in a wide valley-meadow. His telescoping goat heads—surely his most wondrous feature—are typically collapsed into one, except in order to look closely at something, or to crop a flower which he cannot reach, or which he would otherwise prefer not to stoop to get at, in which cases he simply enumerates his head with perfectly little effort. Of the heads, there is no certain number.

It is said that he is extremely protective of his cabin, his land thereabout, and his deformed pet hare, from whom he almost cannot bear to be long out of physical contact. Apparently, also, he cultivates several strains of gigantic flora, which he not only does not eat, but prevents others from eating in this way: he approaches the potential threat very slowly, as though but curious, and then suddenly unsheathes his many necks one from the other, biting the ear firmly until the mischief-maker is subdued, and then, forcibly opening their mouth, bites the tongue away also, and sets them free to spread the word. Likely one interfering with his hare would receive far worse treatment.

III

Judgment Deferred; or, A Devil Blinds Abaddon

There is a medieval folk tale which seems an attempt to explain the inexplicable delay of God's judgment, seeing the evil state of the world. It describes a great giant in the mountains, named Abaddon, who lies prone and sleeps – and only if one were to sit long, and watch very carefully, would one take note of the slight rise and fall of the whole snow-clad body of this Abaddon, which looks simply like the mountains roundabout him. Well, they say that a devil made his way up those mountains thanks to some secret intelligence, bringing with him a great bouquet of poison flowers, and dusted Abaddon's sleeping eyes with their injurious pollen, effectively blinding this giant, this instrument of the judgment and apocalypse, in the devilish effort to defer the Last Day, or at the very least to generalize Abaddon's destruction, to include those innocent as well as evil.

Charlie Dunn

CARTER & CLAIRE

They were yelling at a man to come down from the tree, Carter and Claire were. The autumn was not yet fully realized, but this tree had spent itself out already, perhaps years ago. They were beginning to grow frustrated with him in equal measure as they understood what serious danger he was in, because they felt responsible for him, being the only ones around; but he would not listen, and he was apparently quite drunk up there. He'd climbed up with a bottle of wine and a pack of cigarettes, and every now and then – after every few drags of a cigarette, it seemed like – he took a drink and went up a little bit higher. Now he was so high up that the branches had gotten thin, and he was shifting often to find a sturdier way to sit but swaying nonetheless; and nonetheless he continued drinking the wine and smoking the cigarettes. He'd even begun pretending he could not hear Carter or Claire shouting down there, in the park by the river. Well, one nasty gust of wind finally panicked the man – who was wearing jeans, and an olive jacket, and who had not shaved for some time – and he abandoned his bottle of wine keeping his balance. It fell for a long time, so that he looked down at the two standing there, with their hands cupped around their mouths shouting, with a bit of fear in his face all of a sudden, maybe realizing at last how high up he was. Another strong wind (the sky had begun to turn dark purple) shook the tree as he was beginning to make his way down, and his hand slipped just a little, and a branch under his right foot cracked, and he fell fifty or sixty feet, cracking a couple more dead branches on the way down. He did not shout or even groan as he plummeted. He hit the ground hard with his back and a lit cigarette bounced off his ear. Claire had screamed, and was prematurely anxious with the thought that the scene might leave her scarred, that the image would adhere to her skull forever – but Carter felt oddly dull. It was not funny enough to laugh about, nor sad enough, tragic enough, or scary enough to be otherwise affected by. He felt very little, but in such a cumbersome manner that he did not wish to pretend otherwise, even at the cost of appearing heartless. As they waited for the police, Claire was silent, praying and trying to make sense of the event, and Carter was silent. After the police arrived, the couple went back to their apartment, and they lay together on the couch and talked about the young man who had fallen from the tree.

"Maybe he had an emotional disorder," Carter said, unable to prevent Claire's long hair from tickling his nose, despite repeated attempts to flatten it before again resting his cheek upon her head.

"Maybe he was so lonely," Claire said, beginning to cry. "Maybe there was nobody there for him, and he lost his mind." She was thinking of the expression stuck on his face after he had fallen, which was one of drunken stupidity. It was the face of one in the act of desperately trying to understand. His death was vulgar, idiotic, and laughable, none of which things death ought to be; or so we tell ourselves. She cried more, crying under the imagined weight of twenty or twenty-two years of utter loneliness. She imagined that the man had no family; he'd grown up in an orphanage, and, though he had been adopted twice, he was also abandoned twice.

"Maybe," said Carter, already knowing that he should not have, "if he didn't have an audience, he would not have gone up so high." Claire's eyes got wide, and her breath stopped. "I just mean, sometimes it's about the attention." And then, when Claire still said nothing, he began to backpedal. "But maybe I'm exactly wrong. Because God put us in the park today at just the right time to see him go up the tree, right? And anyway, it went just as it went, and there's no changing it now. It was God's will."

In fact, one thing that baffled them both, though neither was aware of it sufficiently to consciously call it into conversation, was why God had put them there to see it. When Carter got a phone call letting him know that he did not get a job he'd interviewed for, that he'd desired with all his heart, he was hurt – yet it was easy for him to suspend his longing into God, and trust that there were better things waiting. But what is one to do with such an experience as this? Failure is for learning, suffering deepens one, and makes one more empathetic, a deficit in natural ability breeds a good work ethic, etc. Watching a man fall from a tree did not seem to serve any pragmatic or spiritual purpose whatsoever.

But what was most stunning, for Claire and Carter both, was that life could be so strange. Things like this didn't happen frequently; and maybe part of the strangeness of it was that, afterwards, it suddenly seems like the sort of thing that *should* happen frequently, given the pure chaos of life, and the further, and exponentially worse, chaos of the human heart.

One expects far more murder than there is, more drunken men climbing trees, and, come to think of it, folks just dropping to hands and knees and screaming until their throats are broken. It is so rare that men live in caves, and howl, and cut themselves with stones. How strange, that none of this ever seemed to happen!

But they sat together, holding one another and thinking quietly to themselves, almost unaware that they had not shared audible words for quite a long time, until they fell asleep on the couch.

Carter wrote about it before Claire, who always slept too much, had woken up. At some point, Carter did not remember, they had gotten up and gone to bed. Sitting in the living room, he wrote first in his journal: "Watched a man fall from a tree to his death." However, not knowing what to write beyond this one sentence, he then labored over a separate scrap of paper:

This shall be my home. It shall be dead here.
I shall carve out the trunk of this dead tree,
And sleep, among the sleepy centipedes.
I shall make of it a barren place, and sere.
I too was with the fallen host, and fell,
But neither have I fealty to hell;
All I desire is stillness without sound;
Therefore shall I this little dwelling found.
Should any man or any beast come near,
I'll put it in his mind to climb this tree;
I'll fill his little head with centipedes,
And he shall climb up high, and without fear.
My house, be like a taper, burning tall;
Let rise your flame, the soot let fall.
I do not long to kill, but quietly sleep;
But times it's needed, for this quiet to keep.
This has been my home. It is dead here.
I live inside the trunk of this dead tree,
And sleep, among the sleepy centipedes;
So I have lived a thousand thousand years.

Then Carter wrote something in his journal again. He quickly finished up, when he heard Claire moving around in their room. Claire watched him shut his journal and put it in a drawer, exchanging it for his Bible. He looked up at her and, with a strange, almost electric impulse, almost giddily, he said: "We saw a man die!"

She had briefly forgotten; but now she made a serious face: her mouth moved toward her left cheek, and with contracted brow and distant, thoughtful eyes, she watched the floor. "I wonder if they will do a news story about it," she said, and then laid across Carter in a slump.

"Want to read a poem about it?" he said.

"When did you get up?" she said, taking the paper from his hand.

"Maybe at 5. It was dark still. You slept a lot."

He waited for her to read the poem. She always did the same thing when she read a poem: she said something like, "wow, that's very beautiful." And then she quickly spoke of some other thing. She was never ashamed of this disingenuous reply, and Carter liked that she invariably pretended. It was nice to share regardless.

"Carter, it's such a nice poem. Maybe I can paint something, too." She slumped further, her legs on Carter's lap, and gave him back the paper. She did not spend enough time reading it, he thought, to have enjoyed it.

"It would be good for you to do so," Carter said, fondling a sock. "How do you feel?"

"Alright. It is just so strange. I feel curious—I want to know about him."

"Me too. But, for now, let's read."

Carter began reading the Book of Jeremiah aloud, and Claire listened. Later, Claire read Jeremiah aloud, while Carter listened.

Carter had once, last year, asked Claire to paint a boy, laughing so hard that he could not throw the rotten peach that he was attempting to throw; his face had to be contorted with laughter that approached suffering. She first objected that it was not possible, but nonetheless did it marvelously well. It was his favorite painting in the world, and he hung it in their room. He wrote a poem about it, and explained to Claire what ekphrasis was; and so she stuck the poem on the wall beside the painting.

As she painted this afternoon, a great dead tree under a sky half grey, and the man from yesterday, tiny all the way up in the tree, with his head bent toward the earth, Carter asked her to split the trunk of the tree somewhat, and put a barely visible toe sticking out of it, so that only they would even understand what it was. In the end, they were quite happy with the painting. The positioning of the man, and the somehow wind-tormented branches made one feel what the man in the

tree must certainly have felt, for a moment: that he had been conned; that there would be no climb down. He had gone too high. Perhaps it was like the feeling of one who, having already taken measures to end his or her life, remembers that life is sweet—though it was only by virtue of being already too late that the realization came at all.

It is a superficial view of things, to aver that life is mostly suffering, and that suffering is bad, and so life is bad. Suffering does not infinitely endure, and the return from it can be so much more wonderful than anything else in life. A plunge into icy water is exhilarating, for instance. And so are those sublime moments, wherein the burdens of life weigh with such excessive, unbearable weight upon us, that we suddenly laugh in a way that may frighten others; as if we had glimpsed ourselves from aside, and from a thousand years away. While Claire painted and chattered, Carter, not listening, agreed with himself that, though our selfsame troubles return to us again and again, the same old sufferings, the same aches of the heart,—that at least this meant they were *our own* sufferings, destined for us in particular, and that, anyway, nothing is sweeter than casting it all off now and then. Who would have a life without trouble? What short-sightedness, to contend that life is not worthwhile. I spoke to a man once who, having been set ablaze in an apartment fire and had his face scorched and mangled by it, wallowed in an all-swallowing depression for months, looking in the mirror only to torture himself. Then, he said, at last, and for no reason at all, he laughed until it ached; and he bought a paper bag of plums; and he sat on a great big stone and laughed and ate his plums, one by one, throwing them away half-eaten or a quarter-eaten, or with only a single bite taken out of them, if he felt like it, babbling at the squirrels and chipmunks and insects. He thanked God for scorching his face. That is the profoundest sweetness of life! Give me months of wretched wallowing, and a single afternoon free of it; and then give it to me again! You will understand me when I say that I have often wrestled with the reckless urge to be scorched in an apartment fire.

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ON STARING – AN ESSAY

How is it, that when in public I make eye contact with a pretty girl, I must inevitably stumble? What curse has been laid upon my head, what powers have I profaned, that this is so reliably my lot? Who or what struck a pothole into the sidewalk precisely where, yesterday, my foot was to descend – just as my whole body received a great jolt of self-consciousness, as my eyes met another pair of dark and pleasant eyes? I hope you girls are getting a good laugh out of it, at the very least, but I am tormented.

The reflexive suggestion, reasonable of you to propose (and I hide myself with it also following every incident of the kind), is to “Keep your eyes to yourself.” Very well then, but are you being just? Are we not both seeing creatures, in a bright world? I like to think that I gawk respectfully, which I must insist is even quite noble, given the odd point in world history at which we now exist. The masks are coming off at last; the populace, grown weary of plague restrictions, has ceased troubling – they keep their masks upon their wrists, to show they have them, and *could* wear them, if asked to; but so rarely, even indoors, does anyone care any longer. Now cheeks, chins, lips and noses are emerging once more, and it is a Spring of human faces in the city, as exhilaratingly novel and longed-for as any spring I have previously had the pleasure of meeting, and therefore just as challenging to avert my eyes from. Indeed it seems inhumane (see, the act of justifying myself even emboldens me), inhumane, following that awful social winter of Covid-19, to deprive me of its spring, for propriety’s sake. Only, true, the daffodils do not cause me to stumble, for the deciding factor in *that* is the meeting of eyes, and therefore of consciousnesses, therefore of judgments. And yet, nor do the men with whom I occasionally engage in staring matches stumble me, despite that, in this, there is always a perceived hostility, which ought *moreso* to unsteady me than beauty, than femininity. But this is not the case. When I walk about the city, headed this place or that merely as an excuse to walk, and among the hordes at Monastiraki my brain picks up from the periphery a certain warm glow – when I slow my pace admiring the splendor of this or that face, the lines of it, the soft slope of the nose or its charming bump of cartilage, the shoulders drenched with profusions of curls or the hair falling straight down the back or ponytailed high, the neck exposed or not exposed, the chin dimpled or jutting, the jaw set narrowly or Slavically-wide – mesmerized by the cohesive or pleasantly incohesive elements of a given facial structure, I do indeed seek to avert my gaze in time, but am ineffective; and when suddenly the eyes are given me also to apprehend, such a thrill

electrocutes me that I become conscious of each of my toes, of my weight shifting now from the ball of my left foot to the heel of my right, and again to the ball of it, propelling me – this single step becomes a process of twelve hundred discrete moments, each of which must be managed precisely – which is, in a word, impossible – and so I stumble.

I envision the girl’s face which stumbled me yesterday, and see very clearly all her facial structure, except the blank where her eyes must go; for just as her face turned to me there came the shock, and a step which seemed for a flash to be the infinite step at last, the final plunge into the underworld unwarned. Adieu, thought I, and I do not care. Alas, there came the earth again to meet my stride, quite too late, and which, in that imperceptible space of time, I had already decided I did not want or need any longer.

I could cast blame upon the city of Athens itself, for failing to maintain its walkways, or for building them of such a material as becomes as slick as ice after a faintest drizzle of rain. But there need not be any pothole, nor any slippery tiles. I am well-known among friends and family for clumsiness. Meeting a pair of lovely eyes, I have stumbled over my own feet, shouldered streetlamps which were by no means camouflaged or obscured, butted signposts with the tip of my forehead, or simply buckled noticeably at the knees between strides. It is as though, in the depths of cognition, my consciousness had begun to disperse; but just as, when daydreaming, you foolishly begin to cross a street at a red light and are roused by the screech of brakes and the long honk of a horn, likewise the gaze required jars me back into my head too forcefully. I think that this to some extent explains the *lack* of a jolt, when my eyes meet others’ upon whom my sight finds less to linger over, my mind less to cogitate upon. The homeless, the physically anomalous, or the merely strange, I also permit myself the gratification of staring at, but when I receive their eyes in response, though I turn away in shame, there is nothing of the “jolt of returning” in it, as I don’t go deeply enough into my mind.

This could be attested to by the jolt which today I *did* receive from a young, possibly central-Asian man, on whom my distant gaze fell only incidentally, for he by sheer chance wandered into it, while I was deeply dreaming, and there stopped. I did not even really notice him, until he, noticing me, gave a wild contortion of his face, which was as much as to say: “Stop staring,” if in a much cruder language of expression, as it seemed to me. I experienced an almost audible shattering of thought, much stronger than yesterday’s incident with the girl, for I had been much deeper within myself when the call to the

surface came. (Yes, such is life in the city! You can't even daydream here for free, someone will walk into your line of sight and startle you out of it, as though it were inappropriate to publicly indulge the imagination. No, you must fork it over for bare walls to stare into).

Well, following these incidents, frustrated immensely by the apparent necessity of shepherding my eyes, considering it unjust that I should be tacitly forbidden to gawk in this realm of visual stimuli belonging to me as good as anyone – muttering that it was a very stupid man who invented the propriety of keeping the eyes to oneself, a man with stony eyes needing no nourishment, an uncurious man desiring to leave alone and be left alone, and a bloodless, decayed mode of existence for all – frustrated so that my bones almost rang within me, just two hours ago, I decided, once and for all: Not me! I will stare unabashed, now and forever, prepared and eager to accept the consequences! If I find reason to stare, I shall henceforth cease perambulating, in order more entirely to stare, even to leave my body behind me!

Yet I am not so brash or dishonest as to deny the colossal power of sight, not merely as an inward stream of information, for it is not merely that, but also as a consistent, communicative outwardness. The met gaze, for the parties involved or for observers of those parties, may signify grave truths – may invert the meaning of a statement, reveal disgust or amorousness, initiate an affair or trumpet the end of one, start fights, start wars perhaps. After all, eye contact cannot be held by three. It is the most intimate thing. Surely, therefore, sooner or later someone will take offense, shout, throw a punch, a slap, spit – so be it. I have made my choice. That is life, and I invite life, I invite it with my stare. I accept as my own all the shapes and colors of the world, and all the turns of life, for better or worse, that my insubstantial stare may set into motion.

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ABOUT DETROIT LIT MAG

Often in the course of history, when the shameful dust of decay settles thickly over all Culture, it becomes imperative for free and intelligent individuals to act, and to recreate all things.

We have therefore founded this literary magazine. It is a new publication, with decidedly classical tastes. We are *anti-innovative*; we are exhausted of the dead, estranging, indecipherable poetries. Nor do we accept this Poetry of Infinite Selves going around, our most implausible 21st century; we do not wish, reading a poem aloud, to taste the very tongue of the poet who penned it. Let us read with our own tongues, and we will be grateful.

Rather, we want a *new, old poetry*. We like the naïve, and that which is "on fire" for Life itself; we like the old forms, rhymed sonnets, exquisite ideas exquisitely phrased: "*Not meters, but a meter-making argument.*" Our aim is to present Beautiful, Human, Refining, and otherwise pleasurable work, for the *upbuilding of the human spirit*, not for its perplexity or alienation.

As there seems yet little space in the world for such a project, our publication method is somewhat homely. We print the lit mags, doodle the covers, and then hide them in the Classics sections of used bookstores. This way, our poems sit among their spiritual brothers, until discovered and resituated by irritated bookstore owners or employees, to whom I sincerely apologize. (Dandelions are just such a nuisance to homeowners; but the Dandelions must survive!)

If you write in the established forms, thank God. If you write in blank verse, Thank God; Please Send Us Your Poems. If your poetry rhymes and doesn't cloy – if you rework old themes – if you are interested in what is Beautiful and True, as any of the great poets were, and are, and shall be, world without end – please send us your work, at detroitlitmag@gmail.com, and visit the web-page, detroitlitmag.com.

With my whole heart,
Robert Hunter