

PHILLOMEL

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Editor: David Nagdeman

Co-Editor: Thomas Radford

Cover: Robin McDowell

Selection Committee: Numerous Philos

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All correspondence regarding this volume, including submissions, should be directed to:

The Editors of *Philomel*
Philomathean Society
Box H, College Hall
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Or electronically to: philomel@philomathean.org

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Philomel is the literary journal of the Philomathean Society of the University of Pennsylvania. The Philomathean Society is the oldest, continuously existing literary society in the United States. The mission of the Philomathean Society since its inception in 1813 has been to promote the learning of its members and increase the intellectual prestige of the University of Pennsylvania. In bringing its mission to pass, the Society has played an integral role in the history of the University, founding departments, campus newspapers, and comedy troupes. Today's Philomathean Society commits itself to fomenting an intellectual hub at the University, bringing students and faculty together through weekly afternoon tea, a bi-monthly lecture series, and sporadic intellectual debates. Not to mention our recent publications—most notably, this one.

Find out more about the Philomathean Society on our website at <http://www.philomathean.org>.

If you were to consider the theme song of *The Life Aquatic* or any upbeat minimalist techno for that matter, you might be prepared to embark upon this adventure of mind and meter.

It's taken us many years to mid-wife this beast into perfection or even simple expression, but with fortitude worthy of a crustacean, we have succeeded. We ask for your company in this egalitarian encounter with the Other, though by no means expect you to pour your soul into a vacuum. Rather let us set out together towards vagina sunsets and samurai suicides. Perhaps time and its draining ilk may seek to spoil these treasures, but let us step outside the everyday dialogue for a moment and bask in the momentary shimmer of the silver moon. Modernity's mischief, I know, tempts us otherwise, to the ho-hum of piano lessons and the rumble-tum of industry, but let us be human and celebrate in costume, let our insides come to light.

The question of meaning inevitably surfaces, in one form or another, through the course of any sensible discussion of art. And in the realm of literary creations, primordially enveloped in the language we understand as Language, we often take meaning to derive from a generative recollection of previously concretized semantic elements. While that may be an acceptable method of tackling the foaming white spawned of a turbulent sea, it would be far too destructive when deconstructing the little space left for sacred life in a secular society whose maniacal nature runs amok. And so, rather, I plead with you, the reader, to enter this symphony of syncretic synergies with a mind towards eye and ear, tongue and teeth; feel the burn; disengage and ascend the heavens, where ambrosiatic balm ensures an ecstasy not soon forgotten.

As humankind continues its infatigable journey through the stars, riding spaceship earth pedal to the medal, it'll no doubt experience many weird and wonderful occurrences along the way, ranging from the most concrete physicalities to the deepest abstractions of sublimity. Through it all, humans will remain humans, transversing that infinitely contestable boundary between animal and god. Perspective may swing the pendulum of relativity, but the essential elements of human sensation, unchecked by a linguistic hierarchy of values, will remain, thanks to their chemical substrates virtually unaltered--given play only through the slow march of evolution and the occasional psychotropic substance. I encourage you to take your hopelessly human sensation for a swim.

Fundamental to a human understanding of art, that most glorious of all the sublimities, lies the question of identity, the realm of me, myself, and I. Where indeed does the first person nominative singular end and the object begin? Awash in the stream of existence, no satisfactory answer may ever be posed, but that does not forestall any energy unleashed in the heroic attempt. Nuclear fission gives us not just death and destruction, but an apt metaphor to grasp the effervescent emanation that sallies forth in each lungeing lust for meaning. A dream could provide no competition to these birthings of reality, unless perhaps brought to bear within.

Regardless of where you stand, sit, rest, or recline with this issue, please enjoy its contents.

Reality will have been only a fleeting solution then.

Indeed, it merely succeeded others, such as the religious illusion in all its forms. This truth, this rationality, this objective reality - which we took in exchange for religious values, imagining that we had moved definitively beyond them - is only the disenchanting heir to those same religious values. It does not seem ever genuinely to have gained the upper hand, as it happens, nor does it appear that the transcendent solution is entirely past and gone or that God is dead, even though we now deal only with his metastases.

Perhaps that solution was merely eclipsed and it is emerging from its eclipse in reaction to this very intensification of reality, to the weight of an ever more real, ever more secular world in which there is no possibility of redemption.

Reality too is a hinterworld and a substitutive illusion, and in fact we live in this 'real' world as in a hinterworld. It is merely that we have succeeded in negotiating it in a way that does without heaven and hell (though not without debt and guilt, for which we are now answerable to ourselves).

Have we gained or lost on the deal? There is no answer.

We have exchanged one illusion for another, and it turns out that the material, objective illusion, the illusion of reality, is as fragile as the illusion of God and no longer protects us, once the euphoria of science and the Enlightenment is past, from the fundamental illusion of the world and its absence of truth.

In fact, this secular, desacralized reality has slowly become a useless function, the fiction of which we are desperately attempting to rescue (as once we attempted to rescue the existence of God), but which, deep down, we do not know how to rid ourselves of.

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UNSTAKED TOMATOES
BY JENNIFER KIM

The white spider
comes closer, closer
to the canyon,
thirsting for its
lushness.
It has five legs – a curious spider;
with flat, shiny
white tips –
slender limbs, strong
back –
no eyes,
antennas only,
it knows only
by smell and heat.
The slope gently quivers,
and it retreats,
eager for more –
it knew better,
anticipation
always made the
juice sweeter.

He brought me the
 sweetest,
 tomato. It was fresh
off the vine,
 first
 fruit,
I thought it
 sweet of him;
 to think
 of me.

The white spider knew
 these things,
fruits. both vegetable and
 common.
 It knew of patience, of travels,
 of the
 oasis.
 It knew of arid terrains,
 traveled,
of sappy winters,
 unbearable summers.

I knew when I first
 put the
 knife in,
 the flesh would be
 perfect,
 as red juice
 ran
 rivulets
 down my fingers, dying
 my fingernails
 a color L'oreal would
 DIE
 for.
 Every wrinkle – subtle and
pronounced
 until summoning
 canyons between my
 bone white knuckles –
 a murderous white. (black
being
 the color
 of sleep.)

The seeds remained intact,
 even as my tongue brushed
 its innards,
 salt mingling w/flesh –
 god, it was good,
 licking my stained fingers
 sucking @ my knuckles.
They were right to say first
 fruit is always the sweetest.

The white spider
 stopped to rest by the bank –
 it had arrived,
 the scent of the oasis too strong
 to ignore –

I turned, wickedly satisfied,
 tilted the salt shaker
 and
 reached for another one.

“The impossibility of being able to assume a stable identity, even the color that one wears in his skin, can only be made right through the possibility of existing in ‘a certain kind of way’ in the midst of the sound and fury of chaos.”

-Antonio Benitez-Rojo

Tassa drumming

booze infused

soca beat

the men

they wine up on her bump

as Alvin Ailey dances sexy

with no bone

Their feet don't trouble the water

Treading treading

Moby's singing

gonna tell that lonesome liar

while baby I'm thinkin about your face

and Calypso Rose is goin down with Lord Kitchen's

Suga Bum Bum

while oh baby I'm thinkin about your body

trying to get it right this time with

tamboo bamboo

keep foule from cutter and boom

makin santeemanitay

But all I want's a Rum and Coca Cola

careful that this skin don't burn

and listening close when they say One Hand

Don't Clap

Like a mimic man mango in a pot of

homemade chutney.

SEPPUKU
BY KARA LINDSTROM

He faced me kneeling, white on white,
ritual robe on blank canvas.
His tray held two cups; one of water one of tea,
and a plate full of pigments.
I feared for his life for he had the look of solemn honor
a samurai on his death mat.
In front of him lay his weapon
white paper around the middle.
I watched him as he dug into himself
his insides brought to light.
The colors bled across the canvas
frustration transformed to beauty.

lemme tell you bout in-duhs-
tree
look indistree

indistree
you do not see
machinery

indistree
you do not see
wage slavery

indistree
you do not see
buy 2 get 1 free

indistree
you see leaf
you see bark
you see the roots

dying indistree
I see a decree

swing low,
swing low.

*On the road of life, there are passengers and there are drivers: Drivers Wanted.
-Volkswagen slogan*

I.
humming explosions drag the car forward
trembling around dirt roads and high through town
traffic lights and coffee stains distract a brain that is just alive enough to write
hazelnut vapor moistens mouths of cottony blah
while burnt lips mumble of their hunger
the mystic sky billows past the edge of the world
with stars, orange moon, whisky schwaits and pot
showers fall one cloud at a time on to yellow dotted lines
while we search for the tireless midnight in Everywhere, Vermont

II.
young children throw tantrums in the corners of their rooms
huddled away, chatter-boxes for background music
they cry while their parents escape motionless lives
the echoes of melodic trailer-tones resound
of furballs that scramble in the all-concealing dark
cursed by insatiable desires for a late night snack
young eardrums memorialize the infestation at the sound of a trap
swaying reflections watch the minute hand tick-tock by
still counting, every second, every lie

III.
youthful castaway dreams down satired streets
to listen to the meditations of an obese man
ranting of alcohol, heroin, and the taxation of the sky
before handling the defenseless tire like his beat up wife
the man craves the warmth of beer smothered pretzels
with preservative drenched morsels of hot dog bits
another pinched off entrapment of blended animal intestines
washed down with gin and pepper jack cheese
to indulge his malcontented heart with the poisons it needs

IV.
frost crippled minds and nullified senses
taken hostage, and forgetting how to stop
alcoholic incantations of nights well spent
with sticky spit streaks dripping from slurred words
and blue-powdered noses keeping them awake
listening to those morning birds

V.

immersed in the tenderness of sedation
a straight faced liar posed naked as a moral man
fries under the heat of his own oily filth
drooling on Mickey Mouse sheets and hung over
with lust, fuck, intercourse of thoughtless beasts
memories now lurk beneath forgotten sheets
folded in the trunk of his Ford

VI.

G. Love wails about his baby's sauce
crackling with freedom through the Taurus speakers
vibrating loose the bonds and bolts and tricky magnet backs
with restraining wires of confusion
twisted and rigid as the holy pavement guiding them
through mistake and misery under peace less skies

VII.

shadowy signs lead to quick fixes gone awry
before boosting golf carts under an assumed disguise
smashing head to head through sand dunes, greens and hands
swelling hands and fat eyes envisioning jealousy
on their friend's face barreling in the black at them
floating feverishly at one another
smiling white teeth stuck on faces of anger driven men
with dirt lines on their backs
crashing now, and the pain ripples crisply through the air
mangled bumpers stuck in the mud divots under their tires
stuck in this mud of a town drenched with sweat

VIII.

they dribble sensational moments of ineptitude from their lips
while the nicotine whispers to them through slender cigarettes:
"I cry when blues is played for the mood,
I wish the vagina sunsets would forget to fade from the horizon,
So that I could soar through the late lonely hours of these crude camel nights
that you spend in the backs of cars, quietly exhaling the years from your lives."

POURING MY SOUL INTO A VACUUM
BY MIKE MCCULLOUGH

pouring my soul into a vacuum
unlucky psychic
highbrow pedestrian
and sociopathic heartbreak
a house of fools inside my heart
soulsucker suit wolves
in wolves' clothing
roam the aisles of
the grocery store of my mind
kleptomaniacly tucking
raisin bran
inside
their khaki colored trench coats
a plume of bright smoke
a pop in the night
stare up
slack-jawed in wonder
as six-syllable words fall deftly
from the mouths of silver tongued foxes
write between the lines
and fall with a plunk through the dome of an endless blue
sky
Santa Clause lives in Madrid with 6 to 8 black men
Martin Landau's testicles fall
as the oceans rise
and we eat mercury flavored tuna

I am tired of the incandescence of your smile. The air
near me is heavy, humid, wallpaper curling around

the edges and stones in the garden gleaming
wet. Six days of rain and I can feel my

humor wearing through with touch; my patience gumming
from the persistent fogging of your breath.

The sun is down for the count. I am riveted by your voice, the heat
of your hands, the new grass growing on the lawn.

Soft shoots of green. You brush my hair:
your clever fingers seeking out my knots.

A headache day: the rain returns. The blade
is sharp. I click my fingers. Step away.

Danny stood in the doorway, watching as she tucked her ponytail under a red wig.

"Hello," she said, catching his reflection in the mirror and turning to look at him, her face painted white with red around the mouth and eyes.

Danny was wearing the Winnie the Pooh mask she'd made, a rubber band pulling it tight against his face. When he blinked, he could feel his eyelashes grazing against the paper. At his side, he held a pickle jar that she'd transformed into a honey pot.

"Happy Halloween," he said.

She handed him a small pillow. "For your belly."

"Thanks, Mom."

Danny stuffed the pillow under his sweatshirt and then they stood looking at themselves in the mirror.

At McDonald's they both ordered the Big Breakfast while the guy behind the counter grinned really big. Danny was sure he had a few extra teeth, but he didn't have time to finish his count. "You're the prettiest Ronald McDonald I've ever seen," the guy said. He offered two extra hash browns but Danny's mom refused.

Before sitting down to eat, she wiped the crumbs off the table with one of her yellow gloves. Danny took off his mask and opened up the Styrofoam container. He traded the pancakes for her sausage and biscuit.

She walked him to school that morning and in the tunnel he pulled her by the hand, pointing out the spot where he'd found a dead bat the month before. When they reached the school playground, she stopped and placed her hands on his shoulders. "I'll see you at the parade," she said. "Don't walk too fast. I want a good picture."

Most of the boys dressed up as Michael Jordan and a lot of the girls were ballerinas. The girl in the desk next to Danny's wore a Piglet costume. She started to cry when he told her that Piglet was actually a boy.

After reading the class a story about the struggles of a young vampire allergic to blood, Mrs. Primo marched them out for the parade. Danny's mom was one of the few parents in a costume. She scowled at a mother who was wearing high-heels.

Danny started to practice posing for the camera, smiling as big as he could and then a bit smaller, until he remembered he was wearing a mask. As his class neared her, he could hear her voice above the chatter of all the other kids.

"Excuse me," she said, pushing her way through a group of parents. "Excuse me."

"Hey, watch it." One of the mothers was glaring at her.

"Fuck you, lady, you and your fancy camera."

Parents and kids alike were staring at her. Danny started running.

By the time she caught up with him, he was already halfway home.

"I'm sorry," she said.

Danny stared down at the moss in the cracks of the sidewalk.

"Come on," she said, adjusting one of her red and white striped sleeves, "let me make it up to you."

He took off his mask, stretching the rubber band as far as it would go, then letting it snap back against the paper.

“Please, Danny. Tell me what I can do.”

“Well,” he said, “you could stay home tonight and take me trick-or-treating.”

“I have to work, Danny. You know that.”

“Then take me with you.”

“But wouldn’t you rather go trick-or-treating with Ethan?”

He shook his head. “He can’t. His mom says Halloween’s for sinners.”

Plastic ghosts and goblins hung from the Applebee’s ceiling, swaying back and forth as waiters and waitresses rushed beneath them. Danny followed his mom into the rear of the kitchen where she put on her Applebee’s shirt, green with a red apple above the nametag. The face paint was gone and so was the wig.

“I liked you better as Ronald,” he said.

They passed by the cooks on their way out, fajitas sizzling and the smell of onions wafting about.

“I need you to sit in that booth by the TV,” she said. “No following me around tonight.”

“But I like being your helper.”

“Sorry,” she said. “Mr. Deans won’t allow it.”

She walked him to the booth and motioned for him to sit. He took off his mask and set it down next to him along with the honey pot.

“Now what would you like to eat?”

“Those onion rings smelled good. And some chicken fingers too. And some milk.”

“Okay,” she said. “I’ll be right back.”

He looked around the restaurant for a while. It was pretty crowded, a few families and lots of older kids. He stood up on the vinyl cushion to peer into the booth behind him. An old man was sitting there alone, folding and unfolding a laminated menu.

“Hi,” Danny said.

“Hello there. Happy Halloween.”

Danny felt a tap on his shoulder. “No feet on the seats,” she said, handing him a glass of milk and a straw. She turned to the old man. “Sorry about that.”

“It’s no bother,” he said.

Danny sat back down in the booth. His mom stared at him for a moment and then she walked across the room to wait on one of the tables of older boys. He turned his attention to the TV. America’s Funniest Home Videos was on. He watched as a boy hit a wiffle-ball into a man’s crotch. The man doubled over coughing and then the station cut away to a commercial.

He glanced at his mom as she disappeared into the kitchen, and then at the older boys. They were giggling and pointing, slapping each other high-fives. Danny started blowing milk bubbles through the straw, popping them with his fingers as they peeked above the rim of the glass.

He stood up again in the booth, watching the old man twirl a frosted mug by the handle, the beer almost spilling. “How old are you?” Danny asked.

The old man smiled. “I’ll be seventy in November.”

Danny spotted his mom out of the corner of his eye, a plate in each hand. Waving goodbye to the old man, he slid back down into the booth.

“Hi, Mom,” he said, as she set the plates down.

She threw a few extra napkins onto the table. She was chewing the inside of her cheek.

"Is something wrong?" he asked.

"Don't worry about it."

"Okay," he said, staring at the chicken fingers piled on his plate. "Mom?"

"Yes, Danny?"

"Could you bring some honey mustard?"

She nodded and hurried away.

Danny looked across the room at the older boys. One of them snuck a handful of french-fries off the plate of another. When the boy realized his french-fries were missing, he dipped a napkin in ketchup and tossed it at the culprit.

Still watching them, Danny broke an onion ring apart, sucking the inside from its fried encasing. The tallest boy, his face narrow and freckled, raised his hand, beckoning Danny's mother to the table.

"I'd like a re-fill, please," he said to her. One of his friends nudged him with his elbow. "And I have a, um, question." He looked down at the half-eaten burger in front of him. "See, I, uh, I think you're hot, and I was wondering if, well, if you'd ever, like, have sex with a younger guy, like say sixteen or so?" The other boys started to laugh.

"You've got some real fucking nerve," she snapped at him. "You think you can talk to me like that?"

Voices went quiet. Knives and forks clinked against ceramic plates. Tortilla chips were crunched.

"We-we were just trying to have some fun with you," the boy explained.

"Fun," she repeated, resting her hands against the table and leaning into the boy's face. "You were having fun with me."

"Please," the boy said. "I'm sorry."

Then Mr. Deans was beside her, clearing his throat. "Allison," he said, "that's enough. I want you out of here right now."

"I don't need this shit-job anyway," she said, storming off toward the kitchen. Danny dropped the hollowed onion ring on his plate, slowly picked up his mask and honey pot, and trudged after her.

"Did you get a chance to eat," she asked, one hand on the wheel and the other playing with the radio stations.

"I had an onion ring."

"Well, I'll make you a turkey sandwich when we get home."

"It's okay. I'm not hungry anymore."

She found a song she liked and turned up the volume, the coins in the ash-tray rattling with the bass. She glanced at him and turned it back down.

At a red light, she put down the vanity mirror, wiping her lipstick away with the collar of her shirt. "People keep pushing me," she whispered.

When they got home, she took off the shirt and crumpled it into a ball, tossing it in dumpster behind the house. Danny went inside and closed the door to his room. He put the mask and the honey pot in the closet and changed into his pajamas. When she came in to kiss him goodnight, he pretended to be asleep. She sat there on the bed, listening to his uneven breaths. After a while, she laid down next to him, promising herself she wouldn't fall asleep unless he did first.

He smelled like a mixture of natural oats and crunchy bran. Incurably so. He did not work on a horse farm, nor did he tend to sheep of any sort. Naked, his body was visibly cloaked with scruffy fur as dark and wooly as the black goat's hide. He despised food-stuffs that contained the slightest amounts of fiber and cellulose and scorned Mother daily for her relentless servings of "healthy" oaty cereals and such. He feasted instead on slabs of red meat, lightly seared to raw perfection, and was easily delighted when chefs served this succulent platter with small toasted buns that decorated the sides of his dish. Despite all this, people of all ages incessantly referred to him as "Mr. Oats", and although he would scowl grouchyly upon each reminder, he was quite popular for his inescapable scent.

Rain: rain: rain.
There was wet, boring, dark sky.
And I couldn't see stars OR the moon.
It'd all been blocked by rain, and
clouds.

It was the slowly breathing clouds:
Like -- a thick, flowing curtain.
"I'm turning this show off,"
He thundered.

Fuck you, Man.
I thought you were supposed to be
'all-loving,' too...
"Noah."

They could only ever know one thing
having never learned to juggle
three jobs and eight ways of seeing
into the future, or a family and drug
experimentation, platonic relationships
with birds and secretaries from other
planets, where on the agenda. Not a peep
from the killing fields disturbed them
while they surveyed their bounty,
or locked themselves in the parlor
during the handful of one day holidays,
the money was good there seemed no end,
there was no need that could effect
a change of heart: nothing has its privileges.

OFF-STAGE DISCUSSION
BY LAUREN RILE SMITH

The story has to stop one day: and we'll hang there, no dialogue, no plot. After the
Ending, our bodies new and heavy, I won't speak-- with words gone, there'll be
No words between us, just fields of movement, thought and touch. Sweet,

Unnecessary sighs. You won't need to know about the spotlights
Or the searches, painted posters, broken china. My fingers meeting nothing
Under your bed's empty sheets. What you'll need to know: I'm peeling away the

Sharp edge of my skin. Open for later, near you, waiting, clean.

Because of your form
you, the skeletoned shrimp,
took the long way around the world.
Your bashful blushes were ballet,
the brush of your tail on the ocean floor
signaled your impending quest.
So you went in search of
flesh for your bones,
red for your fins and rose for your
scimitar legs. What a day
when you claimed to miss us already,
and next the universe
swallowed you up, lapping up your
scent from salt and sand.
I might miss your bones when they
return you, but rose can be a
fighting color, red can coat your eyes
with courage. You fear not
your own ghost.

How will you find me

when all is lost

When such time has passed
the highest cost

And should you see me
how will you know

All that we have shared
not long ago?

Time wrought death but not our end

Our paths may cross yet again.

But there are times when clouds of doubt
shall mask the silver moon

And I'll look to stars strewn about
cast high above the dune.

The winds will brush the shore grass briskly

And fog will cloak the landscape thickly

Sweet visions clouded across the sea...

How will you find me?

Laughs Allen: "Fooley and patrooned!"
Sitting down to dinner here is not as expected.
Ha-ha is an element that exists briefly
And with an exactitude, "poof", is gone
Brilliantly like a train you could have caught but didn't.
"In the middle of the night" sounds indefinite
in the way that returning is still an option.
You see, I had been searching for the "public"
All along only to realize it was me.
The heat of the day hid all my projects:
That wooden helicopter
Made of functional promises—clouds
So forced they are penetrable.
The autumn, as they say, puts in
The extra ten percent, and so the homeless
Often carol—drool, if you will—at our festivities.
What I'm making is big enough for two,
Though it has no more function than one wing.
I only wish it was you that could see all this—
Audit me somehow in your absence.
Send me, as the song goes, into break-even country.
The public—my collection:
Existing only from time to time as good objects.
Are you still not safe but as safe?
I'm sorry for asking.
During dinner, Allen laughs at my car:
"It's the first time I've spotted a real whale!"
Later, we clip and drag across these woods, our woods I say,
Into the den, then mouths, of liars.

As I write, the United States is on orange alert, which doesn't bother me because I write on the flight across the Atlantic headed for Transylvania, where I will be spending my winter break in the snowbound Carpathian mountains, about as far as one can imagine from the worries of U.S. life and policy. What does bother me is the increasing inaccuracy of the tense I write, since although I write now with pen and notebook, I will sometime in the next weeks transcribe this into electronic format, by which time the presentness of writing will have become a past action.

Orange also is the hair of the teenage girl in the seat next to me on the airplane, and when about two hours into this flight (that flight), after the first movie was over (will I even remember what the film had been, when I come to repeat these words?), we hit a more than ordinarily bad bit of North Atlantic turbulence, because her dad was sitting (is sitting) across the aisle and I was (had been) right by her, she clutched at my shoulder for comfort. She probably didn't expect me to put my hand over hers and give it a very quick reassuring squeeze. I can just about get away with this sort of behaviour because I am visibly far from teenage myself, and speak with a British accent that makes most folk assume that there can never be sexual intent behind my actions.

One feature about being British and a child of the Seventies is that we never had guarantees that we would not be blown up at any given street-corner by the IRA. I don't well remember that the UK government of the time issued colour-coded safety warnings, or indulged in any such overt forms of hand-holding. My words to the people of America are the words of Beregon of Gondor to Pippin on the walls of Minas Tirith: "We seldom name it, but we have dwelt ever in sight of that shadow: sometimes it seems fainter and more distant; sometimes darker and nearer." I just checked that in a copy of *The Return of the King* sitting in an airport bookstore as I change flights, but by now it's two weeks later and I've been absolutely cut off from the world and its worries, at the hidden end away from the highway of a valley that boasts two frozen waterfalls, one-horse open sleighs and four square meals a day. Even here, though, internationalisation is catching up with the Romanian people and this year was the last in which the pigs were slaughtered in the traditional way on Saint Ignacius' day, dragged out into the muddy back yard and dispatched with a sharp knife to the throat. The parliament in Bucharest is busily passing rafts of legislation which will bring the country into line with European Union food safety and animal cruelty regulations, just in case we feel like offering them membership in a few, or several, years. Myself, as a connoisseur of raw milk cheeses and well-killed meat, I think that such regulation simply represent more damned hand-holding. The dangers of contracting listeria from an unpasteurised cheese are negligible set against the dangers of living a life which does not include good cheese. Statistically, a European citizen is indeed as likely to contract listeria as to be blown to pieces by a terrorist bomb.

What code is America showing right now? I hadn't the faintest idea, as I sat in the train speeding past Kronstadt practically slap in the centre of the Transylvanian plateau. The dining wagon was frosty cold, the windows looked out onto a landscape yards deeps in snow and the bars of the electric heater balanced (no doubt in breach of some piddling regulation, but warmingly) on the back of the bench behind me glow orange and red. Red also is the label of the Budweiser beer bottle on the table - the real Budweiser Budvar, brewed by the Czechs, and not from rice.

If you asked me today, I couldn't
tell you why I followed her.
She said "Get in" and I said "OK"
as if she was mom and I was
late for my piano lesson.

There was something glamorous
about how she held the gun
firmly yet carelessly,
her other hand still grasping
a lit Camel ultra light.

My boss stood behind the register
arms in the air and motionless,
but I didn't mind because I needed
a raise and he said I just wanted one.

So I got in her car, delicate red
to match the lip print on my cheek.
The cursive on her California plates
seemed promising.

That day was the same day I turned
twenty, but the bridge of her nose
was far more exciting than any
birthday party I could imagine.

If you asked me today
what I remember most,
it wouldn't be the gun, her
cigarette, or the distant flashing
of red-blue, red-blue,
but the look on her face
when she wanted to pull over
and I said, "No, keep driving."

Between the Stillness and the Grove
Erika de Vasconcelos
(Knopf Canada)

Caught Between the *Stillness and the Grove*, Dzovig often finds herself drifting back to a different time and place, uninhabited by the thick bread, black onions and tumblers of dark Portuguese wine that she serves at the restaurant where she has begun her new life.

Again, she is with her beloved Tomas, exploring old churches. These chiseled stone ruins, stretched between rock and sky, are all that remain of Armenia from before the genocide, before communism. The Armenia she will lose him to, one day, when he puts a gun to the roof of his mouth.

Good prose, like good poetry, draws its power from its ability to synthesis experience – to plunge readers into new worlds previously unknown, unfathomable. The best literature, however, is that which takes readers into places coloured with their own more-than-familiar experiences, sensations, memories, and makes them see parts of themselves for what seems the first – and, perhaps, last – time.

Or at least that's what I think. But Nurit Zarchi writes that "people always hear a story as if it is about them, whereas in truth the dreamer only dreams of himself." That could also be true. At the time, when I first started on her novel, I didn't know what Erika de Vasconcelos had been through in her life, what experiences she drew upon to tell her tale. I wasn't aware of the Armenian genocide of 1915, of the one and a half million expunged from Asia Minor.

I still don't know much about the author. She writes, she teaches, she used to live in Toronto, where I live, and now she lives in Montreal, where I visit my friends and walk on les piétons and enjoy the vibrant night (and day) life. Nor can I discuss the details of the Armenian Genocide, though that is true of most people, of nearly everyone. After all, as the Armenian National Institute explains, "as a matter of policy, the present-day Republic of Turkey adamantly denies that a genocide was committed against the Armenians during W.W.I. Moreover, Turkey dismisses the evidence about the atrocities as mere allegations and regularly obstructs efforts for acknowledgement."

So all I know, or think I know, is that at the time, the novel was a new one; it had just come out. It would've been around the year 2000. I read it twice, once then, and once again when I wrote a book review that became something else. I was sixteen. I am eighteen now when I read my words again.

It's funny how I can define parts of my life with scenes from a book. I still read about how Dzovig sat in Tomas's lap, how he looked at her with what seemed to be happiness, and I ache.

I can't help it. Even now, I find myself meandering under the leafy canopies shading Philosopher's Walk, lingering half-longingly in front of Greg's ice cream, peering at the diners testing the strength of their wasabi at Sushi Time. I scorn myself for acting like a wrung-out dishrag, but I can only think of the boy that I loved, his hands and his laughter, resonating where I rested my head on his chest. Some memories are like this, sharp as new burns.

The first time my heart broke, I found to my dismay that life hadn't changed much. I went to school. I stood in line. I sat on the couch in the library, Erika de Vasconcelos' book in hand, watching my best friend of three years glide by without meeting my eye.

I stood by my locker, words drying up in the corners of my mouth, as she slid away, unapologetic, from my contrite attempts at conversation in the halls.

I did not understand it. I did not want to. I kept to myself until the ground split open beneath my feet and then I needed her again. And what I needed was for her to speak.

It was the stillness that bothered me most. It occupied the space between us when we saw each other at school, always in each other's peripheral vision, shrieking with deliberate laughter with the new friends we gathered around us, as if to dispel the heavy silence. She wouldn't return my calls. I left her a despairing note that fluttered, moth-like, from her hand, to settle in a brimming trash can. What more could I do? How much has our silence cost us.

I was sure that if only I'd said something sooner or caught on to her wistful half-hints before, we wouldn't be trying now to pretend that everything was alright.

"Try not to dwell on it," Andrew said, sitting me on his knee. "Honey, I'll never stop talking to you." I retreated into his arms as if into a fortress, knowing that in time, I would learn to forget, to let go. That in time this pain of ours would become like an old wound covered in new skin, a skin that held only the faint outline of our suffering.

And so I traded my laughing, confiding school chum for a friend of another sort. When we sat and laughed together with what seemed to be happiness I could almost imagine that the silence wasn't there,

I recall my time with him now in blurred snatches and sensations: snowflakes on my nose, Greg's roasted marshmallow ice cream in a crisp waffle cone, streetlight-coloured puddles at the Spadina doors, cool air after basketball games. We tripped along Bloor Street, breaking into a giddy chorus of Hakuna Matata, our linked hands slicing through the gritty night moisture.

Memories are heavy. Lifting and sifting through them, after all this time, still sends up bittersweet dust. For Arzas, Dzovig's father, memory has an icon: Mount Ararat, standing distantly within the Turkish border.

"That mountain," Arzas says, "that mountain will never be theirs."

"It is theirs," Dzovig responds, knowing that she can throw her father's soul against the twin peaks and watch it fall, like a marble rolling down a slope. Ararat: a persistent reminder of all that had been taken. Dzovig's sister Anahid is frightened of this country where such mountains stand sentry, ready to crush her at any moment.

Ararat, a mountain of silenced memory, looms overhead. Its people are caught in its shadow. They go to work and stand in line and chat over dinner, without ever mentioning the millions that disappeared down history's rocky abyss.

They were heavy, those mountains.

They loom over me still, laden with emotion, bubbling with wordless sensuality. Occasionally Andrew and I pass each other in the stairwells and surreptitiously avert our eyes. The dust moles, limning in the streaming sunlight, fall over us as we turn away, and then I think of wet lips, secret smiles, arms tightening around my waist. I put that craving away so carefully, for so long, like a vow a nun would make, give up the incalculable.

Vecihe gives up her painting after her son's death. Dzovig escapes, through prostitution, to Portugal, where she plunges her head into the sea, not feeling the thousand needles of cold water on her skin. There is a silence there, a silence she would keep, if she didn't have to breathe. As their crumbling country tries to forget its past, the two women who loved Tomas try to forget him, giving up, like nuns, the incalculable. Their dreams are coloured with the images of unspoken longing.

You wake from them with a vague memory of what it feels like to be truly alive.

But of course, Erika de Vasconcelos did not let me forget. While polishing off litres of Breyer's extra-rich ice cream, I followed Dzovig to Portugal, land of black-and-white mosaics and running fountains, where she learned to laugh back at the laughing sea. I flew with Vecihe on her set of artist's wings: painting, writing, singing, healing. In the travels of Dzovig and Vecihe, de Vasconcelos wove an expansive saga of history, families, love and land. Her novel allowed me to drift far away, between the stillness and the grove, and pulled me back with the smell of chopped onions and chorizo, and the taste of sea on my lips.

And so, through the two heartbreaks of my expansive sixteen years of life, I finished the novel. I caught the train, I waited in line, I ate my lunch, and the present diluted the past.

I still have the book on my bookshelf, and there it remains, a piece of a time in my life still pressed between its pages. For all intents and purposes I've moved beyond the place *Between the Stillness and the Grove*. Trains will always have to be caught, lunches eaten, new books read, silence broken by new voices.

I could always open the book and re-enter de Vasconcelos' hushed, heavy world. Somewhere across the country is a boy I no longer know, and somewhere across the border is a girl with friends who never knew how much I valued her friendship. But the people we were are fading memories, flirtatious notes and birthday cards crumpled at the bottom of a drawer. The reader I am will no longer find phrases that give words to my own teenage heartbreak. It really was no heartache a little Scotch tape could not fix. I find it hard to believe I ever blew kisses to a boy over the phone, or that he carefully tucked my hastily scrawled notes into his wallet. Hakuna Matata? Really, who does that? The girl I apparently once was seems just another person in a rather mediocre story I've finished reading.

Only the characters of a story are frozen in time, dappled by its chiaroscuro, closed between the covers of a book. Only in the pages of a novel – a good novel – do memories remain as pungent as the smell of sea salt and as heavy as the snow-capped peaks of a stolen mountain. The world outside is too noisy for silence to be sustained for long.

Creepy little wing-ed children
watch us as we sleep.
Their eyes pierce our dreams,
they know our futures and weep.

But as we wake up,
they scatter and sing,
except for the one with
a freshly broken wing.

He shakes like a rattle snake,
so you'll know he's not dead.
Wrap him in blankets,
And lay him on your bed.

He won't be
an angel anymore,
you need to make him
one better than before:

The bath tub is to be filled
with cell phones and property deeds.
He's baptized again
born of want not need.

Now he's chained down,
like everyone else.
And he cries for his god,
he says he's lost himself.

AENEID: DIDO QUEEN OF CARTHAGE
BY SAMANTHA HILL

If Aeneas calls, tell him he forgot some things.

I've left them in a pile atop the pyre (with perhaps my body and) a post-it note,

"Goodbye, asshole. Didn't mean to distract you from your journey. D."

Tell him I'm glad he found it fitting to set sail in the night like a frightened deer

sticking me with the bill for his last lavish meal.

(Well then, I shall make it my last meal, as well.)

For ten years he fondled me in the dark quiet cave

sharing my queenliness

creating his kingliness from the city I built and welcomed him

Into my life and my cave and my city he came

and left at a pop-up reminder:

"Doing your duty? Don't let them down: Found a New Troy!"

A calling, he called it.

AENEAS: This city is yours. I need my space-my own new city. Room to breathe.

We'll call it a break. And we'll see where it goes.

DIDO: And this break you are referring to-will this break be exclusive or is this break a break-up. I don't do open relationships and-

you walk out this door it's over!

AEN: Darling, darling, don't make this difficult. We were never exclusive,

in the sense of the word. It is only like it always was-I was always on my way to other things, besides. Don't get me wrong, I love our Carthage and that gold frock you wear in Spring, your eyes so lovely against the jade jeweled brooch...

DID: Our Carthage? My Carthage! I sheltered you from a storm and you remained of your own volition in matrimony, unless you want to get new-age technical about the informality of sex-

We ruled together, yes, for ten long years, if by ruling together you mean you dressed Valentino drinking Pol Roger Cuvee with foie gras and venison steak cranberry compote and warm volcano chocolate torte reclining in the chariot

while I devised laws, negotiated treaties and spoke to the citizens

giving aid to the elderly and healing the sick.

Yes, we ruled if you want to say that, but don't pull the sentimental crap

as you float off to sea with your army of men and your beer chants

clinking your glass and rooting for the home-team like it's all that ever mattered.

AEN: It didn't have to be like this, dear. And now it does. I thought that you would understand, and I never made a promise-in all ten years, I never said-

well anyway, they need me. So goodbye, my love, goodbye.

The idiot forgot his sword.

Now that is something that can take my body to another world...



DARK SKIN PART 1
BY MODUPEOLA SONUYI

Ooh she dark-skinned
Blacker than black
I bet she ain't got no guys askin' bout that
She got a big butt though
Look how it jiggle
But that's about it,
her ass and her giggle
she ain't pretty
she can't be
Girl, she ain't got that good shit like you and me
Her hair is course and roots a mess
Ours is tame, it gives no stress
Look at our hips and light brown eyes
Girl, you know we light-skin girls, we hypnotize
But she,
Oh no, she can never be
'Cause girl, this is all that they ever see

in giving to those crucial factors
a Slave to the outs and abouts
fishing lines and despicable things
a willing participant in the great put-on

nipping at the bits and morsels
trailing from the back of a suburban
lifestyle unforgiving others about
Kings and Queens of the underground republic

tripping up on mischeivous details and delays
hopping and sliding between checks and clerks
can I take your name, Please?
your application will be processed shortly. 4MD.

manufactured blinders by the millions
bought and sold, sold and bought
from dupe to dupe, enforced to chosen
chosen en force, society of Slavery dancing Free

condition upon condition upon condition
reason's arrogance and soul's damnation
mystified hedonism's unrealized escapism
great thought crumbling by its own accord

one too many left turns at albuquerque
even poison has its virtue

poetry is dead:
just another hit and run,
drive-by shooting
armed robbery,
cop chase gone wrong,
in Dorchester.
nothing to worry about.

and so the headline read
in the second to last page of the metro section.
nothing to worry about.
just another freak accident of
breathing in the wrong neighborhood at the wrong time.

but we all know that's not the truth,
poetry passed away last night and it wasn't no accident.

poetry died because
the poor work three jobs to make ends meet and have no time to sleep
never mind dream.
because the rich can afford to dream but they would rather
spend their time on luxurious distractions than actually think about the plight of
the world.
because the middle class worries too much about which way they are heading:
up or down

poetry died of neglect.

with no one paying it any attention,
poetry sank into a deep depression,
watched tv, played x box for five days straight,
and began to feel the early signs of bedsores.
this wasn't the way poetry wanted to go out.

so the next day poetry took a walk,
and got some energy from the beatboxers and freestylers
on the stoops of Dot ave,
even felt a little spiritual uplifting from the speeches of the homeless man
on Washington street trying to convert anybody and anything walking by.

life wasn't so bad.
maybe those bedsores would go away.
maybe poetry could get out of its depression.
maybe things could be right again.
not that they had even been in the first place.

but poetry lived in Dorchester,
and not the nice part either,
so just when poetry thought things were looking up,
it turned on the daily news:

3-year-old Kai Leigh Harriot paralyzed for life
15-year-old Germaine I. Rucker killed on his bike
27-year-old Karim Harris shot on Ashmont Street
45-year-old Ildebrando Correia gunned down
61-year-old Richard A. Miller dragged to death on Talbot Ave

poetry was pissed. poetry was so fucking heated it punched the tv and let the
blood drip down its knuckles.

poetry knew what it had to do:
it needed to pour the blood of the dead and wounded
the tears of the mourning of the convicted
all over the page
fill books and slams and radios with the voices of the unjustly murdered.
but nobody was listening.
nobody was reading.
nobody picked up a pen.
nobody could even look poetry in the eye.

so it was only a matter of time before
poetry breathed its last breath
on the street corner
on the subway platform
on the 3rd floor porch
on the playground
on the basketball court
on its walk to work

poetry was killed in Dorchester.
in Dorchester.
in Dorchester.

just another murder to be read in between sips of coffee

BLACKBERRY MAIL FROM WILLIAM BURROUGHS
BY MIKE MCCOLLOUGH

Like a diamond shot through
the center of your forehead
if only to make you see the truth
between sitting and standing
where the head-rush
sucks the logic from your brain
the cold calculating truth
in madness
the mystic center around
which all human math
orbits

The casting voice of the aged poet all told
but most of something shifting inside
the walls where he reads aloud, no matter
how august or solid, shall fall down.

The heart's sense of time is different than
the head, too busy choking on its own phlegm
so is convenience, a disease, big mouthed
products are each and everything chains
no craft but craftiness in good stead rent in
halves on killing floors where once livers wept.
Convenience is a plague upon the homely land
here fear has become the engine upstood
on its haunches rampant like a jackal snapping
at the spotted dove, instead of the lion.

I can't resist saying something, is that a problem?
If so, take it up with head manager
if you can actually pin-point him, her, or it.
Meaning, a tone, significance, you may want
to know, is feeling-sensation above and below,
in bed with the whole in other words what survives
you, both sides of the coin present Otherwise.

But picked clean these other bones load the finish
lines you've been feeding us, feed yourselves
sick and fever-pitched deep down within, a thick
soot glitzes and coats the aforementioned moat,
no matter, no waxed paper, can substitute
for the truth we're all wet and liable to drown,
set fast in concrete, we'll do anything for food.

Scientists assert that time is the fourth dimension. We learn early on that there is a flat second dimension and a more robust third dimension, over which hovers this ethereal fourth dimension. Maps, flat representations of the textured world, assert that the world itself is only a patchwork quilt of distances. Tokyo is simply so many kilometers from Bombay, which is itself a few more from Tel Aviv. What maps forget is that the world is not three dimensional, but four.

To travel across Eastern Europe is to time travel, and not in that mundane fashion of existing from one moment to the next. While we here in America seem to work as hard as possible to skip into the future and forget our past, the countries of the old Hapsburg Empire remind one that the weight of history is heavy, and that the world is not simply the composite of different measurements of distance.

I'd recommend traveling via national airlines, if only to be reminded that humans aren't all that removed from the animal kingdom. The background murmur of people speaking their home tongue in a foreign airport seemed to prove that national airlines (from the Israeli El-Al, to the Polish Lot) are nothing more than national tools for vast winged migrations across the sea, the human equivalent to the flock. The state of the herd, and foreignness, becomes ever more apparent when, squashed onto the plane, it's barely possible to politely nod thank you, say "excuse me", or , "that is ok" when some one bumps into you in the crowded isles. Having seen the proliferation of McDonalds across the world, and the comforting spread of American culture, I almost expected that every country would be able and willing to greet the American tourist in fluent English. But the Poles themselves, quite rightly, behave as if the whole world speaks only Polish. However it wasn't the language barrier which made me feel the foreigner. It was the realization that home, like Mecca or Jerusalem, was "That-a-way" and that I could feel its tug like a lodestone.

Travel on Polish trains is a haphazard experience and depends on the size of the city from which you are traveling. From and between the larger cities the mild dilapidation is nothing to be shocked about. The green and red cars, second and first class respectively, are both of the same quality, and both of much better condition than common cars which make the smaller trips between towns.

Aside from being late, the *modus operandi* for these former communists, these trains are often ablaze in colorful graffiti. Boarding from a little station outside of Krakow, in what looked like the depths of post industrial hell, I'd see trains resting on some tracks a good ten meters up from the station. The tracks themselves were overgrown. I was often unsure if these trains could move forward, though their lurching hesitant attempts proved me wrong. The innards of the trains were littered in black scrawls and the dirt had the patina of paleolithic ages.

The countryside is gorgeous, and there was a distinct pleasure of riding the rails with my head leaning out the open window watching the fields and hills roll by. It was not hard to be reminded of Horatio's line in Hamlet where he recounts the elder Hamlet "When he the ambitious Norway combated / So frown'd he once , when, in an angry parle , / He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice." (I:I) The rhythmic chug of the train recalled the beating war drums of the sleds, careening over the hills driven forward by angry Danes. The old barns, geese and cows,

however reminded me that not much has necessarily changed since then, and the decaying buildings beneath a warm sun, are timeless.

Leaving Poland I was reminded that warriors still patrol these parts, though their uniforms are mundane, and they are generally armed with nothing more threatening than a stamp. Thank G-d my passport (taken years and pounds ago) read "The Secretary of State of the United States of America hereby request all whom it may concern to permit the citizen/national of the United States named herein to pass without delay or hindrance and in case of need to give all lawful aid and protection." Who knew that Colin Powell (or Madeline Albright) cared so much about me?

It wasn't just slips of paper, or inked stamps that denoted a change in sovereignty, which signaled our arrival in a new state. The Czech country side was markedly different from the Polish variant, and while I at first thought it was my imagination, somehow influenced by the conception of the globe as a compilation of little colored pieces jammed together, I quickly realized that there was indeed a difference. Larger fields, stretching long and wide, were sure signs of wealth. Grand castles of manufacturing would rear up along the train tracks and speak to the regions historical industrial importance to the late Hapsburg Empire. Leaving Poland for Prague wasn't simply about changing one incomprehensible language for another. Rather, heralded by shiny train stations and golden public infrastructure, it was a jump into a future imagined by 60s futurist Art Radebaugh.¹

While the path into Prague was straight and narrow, and made one think only of the future, the city itself proved to be anything but. There are few straight roads in Prague, which means that buildings have no choice but to pop up in front of you in surprising colors and forms at every bend. Huge towers stand in the middle of intersections dark and menacing, surrounded by pleasant soft-hued baroque blocks of flats. And while there is an unhealthy, almost cancerous infusion of tourists here, there is also steady urban growth. Postmodern buildings blend in with gorgeous Art Nouveau masterpieces and the city, with newly painted pastel walls, seems anxious to enter a soft and frilly future.

An idea now passe, the nineties found Prague to be the undiscovered center of a pristine, dark, and glorious Europe. A growing expatriate community of Americans flocked to the city and presaged a new Europe long before Donald Rumsfeld opened his big fat mouth. Up and coming writers wrote strange novels here, the latest and wittiest being -The Russian Debutantes Handbook-, by Gary Shteyngart who chronicles the comic fictional fleecing of said expats by opportunistic locals. Travel writers dredged up the invented memory of the Golem, and the whispers of alchemists snaked through the winding streets. The heroes of the modern imagination often come to the streets of Prague, wrap themselves in old myths, and attempt to relive the lives of Americans in Paris in the 1900s, desperate to become the next wave of intellectuals. This is all a load of manure. It rests on a variety of forced imaginings which require you to look at Prague as far

¹ [A note to the reader. Far be it for me to seem to slander fair Poland, but to include all the wonderful experiences, both mundane and spectacular, would be unfairly cumbersome. As we leave Poland, let me tell you that it is only in Poland that one can get a hot dog toasted on a sesame bun, loaded with shredded cucumbers, tomatoes and dark mustard, all for less than a dollar. Proof that while we Americans may claim sovereignty over the humble dog, we have yet to exploit its potential.]

darker than it is and to ignore the fact that life often continues even after one puts down the pen.

This does not mean there is no magic here. Prague is a peacock city with eyes following you everywhere. Statues hold up the portals of buildings and sculpted heads emerge at odd angles from walls to stare, ever silent. And in the basement of a small bar, women dress like men and lip-synch the tunes of Tina Turner and those Russian lesbian pop stars Tattoo.

But this is no easy alchemy, effortlessly conjured up by learned cabalists. Accompanied by gesticulating homosexuals who insisted upon climbing up on tables and thrusting both drunkenly and lasciviously along with our drag queen impresarios, letting loose sloppy howls, one can not help but get caught up in the excitement. Smog machines pumped furiously and filled the room, allowing one to ignore the fact that no one was there.

I had been dragged to the Tingl-Tangl club rather against my will. My friend an avowed "homosexualist" had insisted on going, and as if to prove myself a liberated 21st century male, I had no choice but to accompany him. I was pouting, and the basement which had been refurbished after the recent flooding was empty, meager, flesh colored and dull. Two men sat in the corner next to me, and another couple, far away, held hands. The stage was a raised corner of the room, painted black, with triangle swaths of cloth strewn about as if gigantic panties had been flung and clung to the walls. One poor child had been brought there by his family and faced a barrage of mockery from a large Czech drag queen who many times during the night changed costumes, while keeping the same broad face and large false bosom. The other ladies were much more impressive, but in various different ways.

"Tina Turner" appeared, her legs riding an invisible saddle, her arms not quite akimbo, jerking about the stage like some cocaine laden wind up toy. That this was some how appealing to the shrieking thin wasted, literally limp-wristed effeminate walking stereotypes was undeniable. I was convinced that this was some sort of strange bacchanalian rite. Everybody danced atop benches along with the performers who were some sort of sacrificial and vicarious vessels for the other men's sexuality. All ten of them. It was bizarrely anticlimactic to see how empty the room was and yet the dancing was incredibly engrossing, it was true magic, drawing one in past the threshold of disbelief, and the orgiastic thrashings of drunken gay men merely confirmed the power of the ritual.

In the midst of all this I sat next to an American young man. Mournful and dull, he bitterly gazed up at one of those frenzied dancers, who it turned out was his ex. Having come to Prague over four years ago from Austin, he managed to fall in and out of love with the boy who danced across from him. Still he seemed irresistibly drawn to his former mate, seemingly unable to break away from the one last vestige of familiarity in this place where he still did not speak the language. Here he sat a gay man in a gay bar where queer culture was celebrated, and he was deathly alone. Having stubbed out his cigarette, the man whispered that he had lung cancer and was bound to die. Perhaps it was a relief for him to be able to tell this to some one in English. As if saying it in his own mother tongue was a substitute for telling his family back home.

An odd anti hero for a story. He had left his country in a fit of supposed

glory, only to find himself in this country still unable to adapt. While he had found love, he was unable to tear himself away from its remnants. Free to be gay here in Prague, he was unable to be free from emotional abuse, or it would seem, death.

Prague is haunted, not by the ghosts of its past, but by the stories we tell of it and their disastrous consequences.

Not all cities cultivate stories in the same way. Budapest is a city with its charms, but it plays them close to its vest, lest another troop of invaders tries to steal them as did the Turks, Hapsburgs, and Communists. It hides its best parts away, like the serpentine path to The Shrine/Tomb of Baba Gul (Uncle Rose) the Islamic Warrior Poet, which is a place of soft blue and white Mediterranean calm respite from the dark browns and black smudges of the city. It takes work to understand and appreciate Budapest. Simply because the wave of tourists has yet to invade in the same numbers as in Prague does not mean that there is nothing there to visit. Those atheists who have yet to avow the existence of a higher power, and who mock Augustine's *City of God* existing on earth, have yet to visit one of the Hungarian thermal baths which dot the city. I count the minutes since I left the Garden of Eden, not guarded as scripture would have us believe, by angels with fiery swords, but by grumpy Hungarians and brass turnstiles. The doors to the Gellert baths are meek compared to the large Romanesque arches which rise above them. The worn statuary which adorns the arches appears to be growing stalactites. The nineteenth century Gellert Hotel, a massive towered mixture of neo classical aggrandizement and art nouveau elegance, stands down hill from the particularly dark green Gellert Hill. For those new to the baths, the entrance to the changing room is a labyrinthal pilgrimage, being shuttled back and forth through rooms, which gives fleeting glimpses of what is to come. It was disconcerting to walk the moist tiled and concrete floors barefoot, and visions of athletes foot fairies danced through my head. The disinfectant powder which I sprinkled on my foot via a pump was barely reassuring, but by the time I had come across it I was in the main bath and my mouth had dropped and I had forgotten to pay attention to my nagging hypochondria. One of the multitude of guidebooks I consulted had called the baths an experience akin to "swimming in a cathedral", but that doesn't do it justice. A massive barrel vaulted ceiling, arched over the completely blue tiled room which was separated into two bathing areas by a walkway. Grave and grotesque faces lined the top of the walls, and at the "nave" of each pool was a small statue. Low stairs lead in to the baths, and the moment of lowering myself into the water was of the most sacrilegious ecstasy. The pools were divided into two; one was 36 degrees Celsius and the other is 38 degrees. Both had three headed fountains at their nave which you could sit under as they slowly drizzled water into the low and shimmering pools. The waters were womb like and sitting in them was utterly relaxing. Leaving these waters and wandering back into Budapest with its grimy faded glory stretched across its wide avenues was a cruel rebirth.

Lest I give the impression that Eastern Europe forever stands in the shadow of the Warsaw pact, I must mention Vienna. With the Hapsburgs lavishing the city long before the official start of their empire in 1809, it is a city, home as much to an entire empire as it is for those who walk its streets daily.

It is a city which was home to one of the most impressive complex bureaucracies of the 19th century. Administering an Empire meant the city was graced with a fleet of proper men, who only by the grace of Franz Joseph II braved the red-tape jungle. Here bureaucracy is no mean occupation, and the Coffee Houses named after these workers bears testimony to the heroism of the functionary. Here being an assimilated Jew is no sad state, and for this Urban Planner wannabe and self hating Jew with proud bourgeois pretensions, the coffee house culture of the Vienna is my spiritual home. This is the homeland of the *Kaffehausjuden*.

It is the little things which prove the mark of civilization, and the coffee house, long derided as the filthy breeding ground for pretension and frivolity, is the touchstone for civility. Espresso here is not simply a small shot of dark bitter coffee to be gulped quickly and dispatched, but is itself a ritual. Served on a silver plate, one's espresso is accompanied by a cold glass of water as a chaser, a bowl with three cubes of sugar, a serving of milk and a wafer thin piece of chocolate. This ladies and gentlemen, is the culmination of 4,000 years of human civilization.

New York City's Empire State Building was designed so as to accommodate dirigibles which in the future might dock at its upper floors. The future imagined there is still present in its design, though dirigibles will never park at its peak. Having returned to this land which forever gazes forward, where coffee is served in paper cups (lest we get too attached to porcelain) the weight of the fourth dimension has slipped off.

The first thing you miss when returning states is not the coffee, the beer or the Vodka, but rather the warm silence of incomprehension. The inability to understand a word one says, is as freeing as the lack of subtext which accompanies it. When you are deaf to the language, each city is free to open itself to you, with no crutch of cultural short hand. Returning to the center of your world deprives one of the ability, reading the news across the ocean, to realize how petty and small it is. Being in the center of the world, racing towards the future, is as much a burden, as history is.