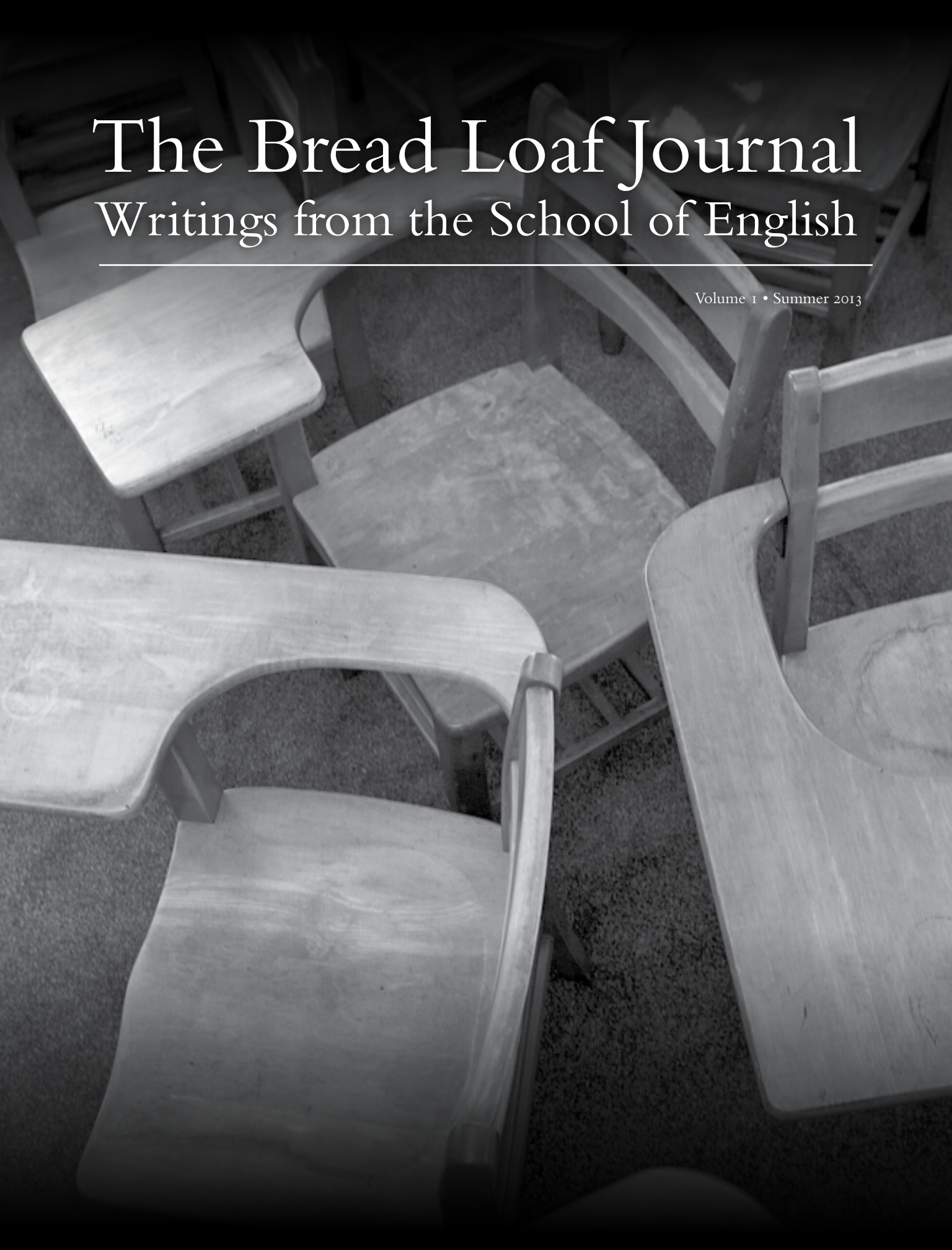




The Bread Loaf Journal

Writings from the School of English

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INTRODUCTION

The most valuable lesson I have learned as a student at the Bread Loaf School of English distills into a simple equation: Writing=Belief. Thoughts impact. Spoken words even more so. But writing strikes the pinnacle, forcing, by the fact of its precision, articulation. When done assiduously, writing defines what we *mean*. Writing holds us to what we express. Writing is responsibility, integrity. Perhaps it is different for others, but for me, only the process and practice of writing demand the rigor necessary to produce truth I can believe in, to create knowledge meriting faith. Writing is cleaner than we are.

Writings selected for the first *Bread Loaf Journal: Writing from the School of English* represent the chorus of our community. The work is lovely, vicious, bewildering. The words nurturing, harmful, healing. Above all, the writing here presented is true. It breathes. Each piece in this collection is a constructed act of knowing. The commonality is that every poem, essay, story contributes to the essential project of discovering who we are as human beings in relationship with each other, with ourselves, with the continuing fact of living.

Leaf through. Read aloud. Let your tongue draw unfamiliar circles you swear you have felt before. Lean in. Both good reading and good writing require engagement, submission, imagination. What glorious strictures. *Let be be finale of seem*, said the poet. This is what we mean.

—John Milton Oliver '13

APOTHEOPESIS

John Milton Oliver

Apotheosis n. the act of a human becoming a god
Aposiopesis n. a sudden breaking off of thought

By July the tadpoles are polliwogs,
Thumb-sized pondmuck green, mudbottom brown.
Kneeling naked on the dock I watch them
motionless, light passing still through fetal
limbs spread wide, drifting amphibian
lunar landers rising to the ceiling
of the sky. I bend discerning deeper,
seeking in the secret births of creatures
something mine. Rocking back in sudden frog-
like stance I launch unfolding into flight.
I alter the water twice. Reflected
silhouette stretching out into darkwhite line
defines within the womb-like depth a form
unrecognized, eye divined—

UNMOORED

Sarah Getchell

Alzheimer’s disease, noun, a progressive, degenerative disorder that attacks the brain’s
nerve cells, or neurons, resulting in loss of memory, thinking, and language skills,
and behavioral changes.

He is not amongst the living, not
entirely dead, his eyes flicker,
driven by random electrical impulses or
chasing flitting spirits and looming
angels. He doesn’t like burgers
anymore; he used to eat yams but now
only pudding, only food that’s as liquid,
as shapeless, as this world is becoming. Here

in this room, I can’t distinguish
the gardenias from the ghosts.
He blows and blows on a spoon and I’m
convinced that it’s hot, or it’s
a sail, and he’s nothing
but wind in wet darkness. Is it
hot like Hell or hot like

a fever of 104 measured
by a drugstore thermometer? Is the water
boiling behind the boat?
The best is when
he sleeps without convulsions.
It’s almost like death;
he can only be lured there by me. I take
his hand, and he closes
his eyes; he’s sure I’ll keep him
here, but I—his unreliable mooring—
let go like he will not. I blow
him toward the water,
but he floats, a ship untied, hovering
unnaturally above the bed,
miraculously impervious
to the tides.

LA CULEBRA

Lorena German

I remember once visiting DR and realizing that there was a whole army of women who had brown knees like me.

Traveling back and forth from DR to the US always carrying and guarding all types of proof of my goodytwoshoeness/niña
buena so customs would let me come back home.
Wishing customs agents would just understand and stop wasting my time.

I remember my mom and dad calling me culebra and palo de luz and it settling in the very back, dark areas of my mind.

A grown man asking me for a kiss when I was only twelve cause I had nice looking lips and I surely said no and walked off
with an attitude because he was an asqueroso.
That tall guy who wanted to play office with me and told me he would be the boss and I would be the secretary but to re-
member that usually secretaries and bosses had relationships.

I remember crying, crying like my mother died or I was getting deported forever or like I just been shot when I realized my
notebook in which all my stories were written, had been thrown away.

Sitting on my grandmother’s staircase, on the dirty frayed carpet wondering if my
notebook felt alone.

I remember administrators telling me to look to my left and look to my right on the
first day of high school and understand that some of these people wouldn’t be here at graduation.
I remember never writing again.

Worrying about racist teachers, picketing school, reporting inequities at city school committee meetings.

They invited me to a seat on the committee so I would stop complaining.

My teacher was disgusted by my protests, he would ignore me during Chemistry class and so I started logging his behavior in my notebook.

I remember graduation feeling like I had survived, I had made it, I wasn’t one of those statistics, thinking, “Now what?”

In college white students would deface the posters to the Latino campus events and my words would just spill out into thin air.

I remember smacking the customer representatives from Sallie Mae with my words on the phone every time they harassed me because of my immigration paperwork.
I remember knowing that one day my journal would pay off.

I write because I know these lines are my voice,
it lets me go to deep places I am sometimes afraid of.
It’s a place of healing and forgiveness and love,
because fear tried to muffle my voice once and I can’t let it happen again.

MILK

Lucas Gonzalez

Jaíme is sitting at the blank worksheet, struggling with the soft graphite of a blunt, yellow pencil. The sky is dark, and the snow comes on. The milk is gathering heavy cream at the top. It tastes of grass and of lonesome hooves, we remember when they fill jugs to thank us. A stark, black sheep and a dark, brown cow stand beneath the enormous haze of a frozen cloud.

Hair and Tooth, Breast and Nail. His memory scans the pale light and negotiates the Sky and Grass. The occluded sun of yesterday sinks low over Lake Champlain, as it does this time of year. As it will this time of day. Against the page, the wood splits. Graphite cracks.

Jaime is my age, and never made it past fifth grade. I look at him. He looks at me, as if asking what we should do next. He reads as though he were only five or six—family don’t need words from him, the head farmer said. Every month, he sends a check.

And me? I’ve been teaching here three weeks. The only thing I’ve got is a clumsy blade I use to whittle away soft wood and nib. He looks at me with eyes that would have said I wish you wouldn’t, but thanks me anyway. It’s been 14 hours of milking—he has no desire to keep going. He sighs, and leans back over the table. I look around at the unfinished walls of the homestead. Demons wrestle quietly on the television, and a silent virgin croons above. The graphite getting dull again, the world around wraps with the tired weight of every word.

Madre mía, no me olvides reads the poster on the wall.
That evening, the men walk V and I out to the cows, where each wrangles the herd majestically into the insulated barn with a fluid, heroic language that they shout. We drive the men on our way out to the gas station on the edge of town that sells cheap beer to us.

That night, we boil the milk that tastes of grass in sugar, rice, cardamom, cinnamon, nuts and raisins. We make love two or three times around old books, blankets, candles and poems

And listen to the bells ring from atop the winter chapel.

Who knows where the tired road ends for us, or where it might begin—was it then or now?
And who knows who gives us the lives we live, or the tongues that lead us out.

RUBBLE

Paige Boncher

One night after thousands you made *cordon bleu* in my kitchen. The next morning before coffee you suggested we exchange our things. “Call when you’re ready,” you said as if the final day were a date, and I was already lingering too long before the mirror. On TV I watched Japan’s coastline crumble while an earthquake shifted the country one parking space to the east. You lived there briefly and so (like everything) the disaster reminded me of you, but you didn’t call so I stuffed your threadbare box-ers and lost single socks into a grocery bag in my closet. At night, haunted by your touch, I lay awake as birds caught between the walls fluttered frantically, thumping the wood with their wings. I banged on the pipe with your *Nietzsche Reader* then waited for them to escape or settle in. Two weeks have passed. The photos show survivors sifting through mountains of rubble, identifying bodies. I imagine that you, too, are dead, force myself to forget that you are just across the river drinking your green tea as usual. Then, in a selfish attempt to grasp grief’s degrees, I imagine that my whole family has drowned, and I am sitting by a pile of wood chips that used to be their home. Today, under my bed, I find a crimped paper covered in dust and remember the sweltering night you gave up on our language lesson, folding your Japanese characters into an accordion fan that you waved, wing-like, over my damp skin. I open the closet door. A bird cries and thumps the wall as I place another trace of you into your body bag.

MI RUBIA

Jessica Filion

We were tuning fork wishbone
curly haired, big-boobed
mangú flavored twins.
Us:

DC road-trip:
U Street cruising
park fountain gazing
crab cake lunching
dreams of moving.

Shakespeare in Central Park,
furtive kisses,
hand-holding,
star gazing from Riverside,
curried dinner,
laundry plans,

lounging on my beach blue rug,
reading you Cisneros.

You:
thoughtfully constructed housewarming gift:
recycled magazine picture frame,
red hand-woven basket,
chocolate cupcake oven timer,
block salt/pepper shakers,
black pine bonsai tree.
Always hoping
I could really see you.

Me:
Vodka-cranberry ass-grabbing confessions:
I love you but my family...
I just had a fantasy of you and me in the bathroom.
I couldn't have survived New York without you.

I clean up
drop you off
fuck some stranger
never remember.

You feed me
confessions in pieces,
omitting the I love you but.

I leave you to go with Him.
You haven't been blond since.

RIGHT SIDE UP
Himali Singh Soin

Once, the universe turned upside down. A woman laughed, she
roared her laughter rumbled, cracked and burst open, jumped
outside itself, and broke into the earth. The wind spun, bent.
So strong it turned the whole earth upside down inside in.
Tomorrow, the witches say the laughter will settle down
and things will be the way they always were, in the
way they longed to be, again. We will eat soup
with the convex turn of our spoons, walk on
the memory parts of our brains, stargaze
with our feet, eat breakfast at midnight
and read the beginning last. We will
listen with ears to the mouthpiece
and claim the other before they
are ours. We'll work after we
play, live after we die. We
will collect time, let it go
and do for others with
no desire for return.
So the witches say
things will make
sense again
and come
to rest
and come,
sense again
things will make
so the witches say
no. Desire for return
and do for others with
will. Collect time, let it. Go
play, live after. We die. We
are ours. We'll work after we,
and claim the other before they
listen, with ears to the mouthpiece
and read the beginning last. We will
with our feet. Eat breakfast at midnight.
The memory parts of our brains stargaze
with the convex turn of our spoons, walk on.
Way they longed to be, again. We will eat soup
and things will be the way they always were in the
tomorrow. The witches say the laughter will settle down
so strong. It turned the whole earth upside down inside in
outside itself, and broke into the earth. The wind spun, bent,
roared, her laughter rumbled, cracked and burst open, jumped
once. The universe turned upside down. A woman laughed, she.

CHILDHOOD IS LIKE A WEDDING RECEPTION DANCE FLOOR

Cathe Shubert

see the staccato elbows, the plunge
of knees that plummet and soar,

the rise and crest of hips fluttering like
a ruby maple leaf in a teasing wind,

the faces like scrunchies and books that dried after the rain,

swirling in and out, sweet and stout,
shouting

death to doubt! let bodies sprout and tickle
the thrum of strings and the rye dodah dangah

of drums. come, close your eyes now.
feel the tumbling
sound that unhinges limbs the way

rain makes the branches boogie,
pouncing after the fresh, bisecting beat.

hear the way fingers jangle like chimes and the heart hang

glides on a slow go crescendo that cascades over bones and
the bloodstream, falling and rising through
finger tips and tapping toes, unleashing prose.

and how do they do it? these marching
band captains, these dinosaur ballerinas,

these disobedient planets all careening
into one another’s sphere

without a stuttering sense of what it
should look like. these birds on the moon,

seeking to balance the branches,
and slide into the music the way cars slip across

state lines and are suddenly somewhere new.

if only we could always dance like this,

if only the bride’s father would not
turn on the light,

and our eyes stay this kid-wide and
exuberant, our bodies this unabashed—hearts this sprung.

IN THE DESTRUCTION, A RUMBLE

Bernice Mbadugha

In the destruction, a rumble of babies too young to remember a parentage almost erased by bible-carrying foreigners. In the destruction, a rumble of children whose cries found each other through piles of dirty rugs and loose plasterboard. In the destruction, a rumble of babies whose throats had to be unclogged of ants and spiders, mucus and muck. In the destruction, a rumble of a girl birthing a child that no one expected. In the destruction, a rumble of a girl whose entry into womanhood was met with bare legs crushed by ceiling beams and a falling roof. In the destruction, a rumble of a girl whose new tube of lipstick marked half an X from her lip to her forehead. In the destruction, a rumble of a girl about to tell a small lie when the earth and the heavens opened, at once, to swallow her for thirty-six hours In the destruction, a rumble of a boy who hid the best apple for himself. In the destruction, a rumble of a boy who tried on a tie for the first time and thought he looked like Obama of a boy who tried to wipe his pants clean before his mother found out. In the destruction, a rumble of a man who had good news to tell his woman of a man who had just lost a fight but found a twenty-dollar bill of a man who said, “I had a strange, strange feeling this morning, like something big was about to happen” of an old man who remembered many other storms but doubted he would live through this one of an old man who drank a little kleren to get up his courage of an old man who used to grow the prettiest mangos in his village In the destruction, a rumble of a woman who keeps three boyfriends in case one tries to boss her of a woman who divides her responsibilities as easily as her skirts of a woman who believes she has lived before but not as herself in the destruction, a rumble of a song that nobody used to sing that suddenly started itself. In the destruction, a rumble of a prayer that mumbled and forced its way through many mountains of debris in the destruction, a rumble of a baritone that echoed through the cracked sidewalks and cleared a path of a clarinet and a conga-drum that pulsated through the aftershock of a bantering and a persuading to push, push, push of a paint job and a highway that never happened of a world that rushed to help of a government that weeps for its history of a poem that struggles to connect itself and stay fastened to the matter at hand

EL MAPA DE UNA MIGRA LATINA

Jineyda Tapia

Abuela me dio la piel de color caramelo,
Como el café con leche que desayuno cada mañana
La piel que refleja tantas historias
Digo la India, la de España, la Africana, la Americana, la Mexicana, o la Dominicana
El conflicto de la historia que escribió una malla sobre mi piel
Enredándome simultáneamente como conquistadora o conquistada
Soy una mezcla que la historia rechaza.

Mi tierra de caña y plátano fortaleza mi cuero
Bajo el sol caribeño que ilumina mi rizos negros
Y besa las caderas con su ritmo de güira y tambora
Cuales se menean adentro el canto de trabajo de finca
La espalda mirando el sol y mis rodillas besando la tierra
Con el sudor del día lavo mi corazón y armo el sueño de mañana.
¡Yo soy mi tierra!

Tengo la mirada rebelde que desafían a los güeros
Aquí en América no sé lo que tengo.
Se me fue mi tierra y este invierno puya la piel morena.
Soy Nigga, Chonga, ¡ten cuidao gringa! ¡Se te va el idioma!
¡Se te va el tren! Aprende ese mapa
El outbound del sueño americano
El inbound de la Violencia, Racismo y Pobreza
La destinación del edificio Kennedy la mayor ironía
Sus pasillos modernos destacando la soledad y remordimiento que siente el corazón Latino
Hay que mandar los cheles-el capitalismo e idioma de los Maya encumbrando una palabra.
Hasta mis acciones son mestizas.
Las palabras de mi boca han sido mestizadas
Do you speak English?
Si pendejo, ¡pero se me va el idioma!
Se me fue la tierra-no la huelo, no la siento, nada más quedan los recuerdos
Y un español mestizado con inglés es censurado de lao a lao.
Aprendí un nuevo idioma...soy una mezcla nueva
El cual no reconoce mi abuela.

THE FEM-NARRATIVE: GENDERSIS (This ends in the beginning.)

Jamie Sweitzer Brandstadter

Woman, let me tell you how the princess sometimes had to save the knight,
Enide sacrificing when Eric was being a jackass,
telling a tale just as thrilling and probably more true.

Woman, let me tell you that that story is as good as any I have ever heard and the world has ever known

because it doesn’t take a dick to be a hero,
and you better tell your daughters that
before they buy into the Wonder-Woman-is-only-wonderful-because-of-her-booty-skirt-and-perfectly-toned-lower-ass-cheeks.
Woman, let me tell you that
you are beautiful, yeah, you.
You with the hair or with no hair,
with the shaved legs or hairy,
with the white or yellow smile,
with eyes that consciously witness, perceptive to the oppression that you yourself have withstood, perceptive to the inferiority complex we’ve erected in the middle of a once-lush field.

You with the tongue, not forked, not quenched, not spitting clichés, that speaks out in a raged whisper that is always bold and knows no fear, adheres to no restriction, definition, expectation, or design.

You with the dirt under your fingernails from digging into the soil of yourself and others,
with laugh lines forging pathways that prove you’ve lived fully, happily,
and with a brow line that’s known sweat, cheeks that have known lines of deep black mascaraed-tears.

Woman, you are beautiful. Yeah, you.
Woman, let me tell you that you
are not fat.
Your ass looks great in those jeans.

And, yes, that cover-girl has been photoshopped, primped, starved, and molested by the societal ideal beauty that lightened her skin, straightened her hair, whitened her teeth, injected formaldehyde into her flesh until she has, in fact, died a spiritual death brought on by sudden cardiac distress, unrest all dressed in Stellatos and Versace.

Let me tell you it’s okay to feed your soul because I’m sick of a starving gender,
kneeling to porcelain, Richard Simmons, bow flex, Zone, ephedrine,
low-carb, no-carb, fat-free, glutton-free that indicates the absence of freedom and the imprisonment in caloric slavery, derived from The Man’s new movement to keep women on their knees, mouths open or shut as He sees fit, and so His needs, His desires are met.
Hell yeah, I’m sick of a starving gender.

Woman, let me tell you it’s okay to love even if you’ve been hurt before.
Love women, forgetting the competitive nature of our cup-size and salary-drive,
and don’t be afraid to love men, even if your dad, uncle, ex-cetera left you with scabs that are still too new to be scars.
Woman, let me tell you that you are wise beyond your years and you were that way from birth, blessed to you through the umbilical cord, inherited from you mothers, and again shared with your daughters.

And if you and they listen to the instincts that throb somewhere within the chamber of your ribs, you’ll always get it right.

Woman, you can drive because you are mobile, capable, stable.

Woman, let me tell you that mankind has gotten it all wrong,
that you can be a being that sheds tears, leads countries, bears children, designs hydrogen-fueling stations, and gets pissed off and is loud about it!
Woman, let me tell you that I know I don’t need to tell you these things because if you listen to the instincts that throb somewhere within the chamber of your ribs, you’ll always get it right. Because they say we have one less, and if so, it only gives us easier access to the wisdom of our mothers and our daughters.

Woman, let me tell you that the true narrative goes something like this:
Once upon a time, there was a princess,
who got married, who didn’t get married,
who married a man, who married a woman,
who had children, who adopted, who had an abortion,
who had an education, who had a career,
who filled her time with self-reflection and self-acceptance,
who never needed to be rescued in the first place, just needed to find her Self.
who let down her hair to watch it flow,

and then shaved it off to feel the breeze on her scalp,
who ran home at midnight to embrace her past, both trauma and triumph,
who bit the apple, swallowed, and did not fall asleep or realize her nakedness and feel shame.

Woman, Once upon a time, there was a princess
who looked just like you.
And she was brilliant, gorgeous, phenomenal, and astounding,
and when she came to know this Truth,
she lived happily ever after.
The beginning.

THE BODY IS THE PROBLEM: ANXIETIES OF PHYSICALITY
AND PERFORMANCE IN HAMLET

Anna Steim

The physical body is to blame for the paroxysms of philosophical anxiety Hamlet experiences in Shakespeare’s play. Physicality is a problematic concept for Hamlet, but the play, as it progresses, further complicates the issue of bodies by commingling it with a separate but, to Hamlet, equally troubling issue of performing, of “seeming” to be one thing rather than conveying that which perhaps one more authentically “is.” This link is forged early in the play: Gertrude asks her son, “If it be [common that all lives must die], / Why seems it so particular with thee?,” to which he replies,

Seems, madam? nay, it is, I know not “seems.”
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, [good] mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forc’d breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,

Together with all forms, moods, [shapes] of grief,
That can [denote] me truly. These indeed seem,
For they are actions that a man might play,
But I have that within which passes show,
These but the trappings and the suits of woe.

(Shakespeare 1.2.74–86)

Here, Hamlet rejects the idea that his grief is merely a physical show; he posits that one may indeed appear to be woeful with “trappings and suits” such as black clothing, sighs, tears, and downcast looks, but this appearance neither denotes a person “truly,” nor is applicable to his specific state. He equates “actions that a man might play” to “seeming,” and then shows scorn for the idea by asserting that he possesses that which “passes” mere show. Physical actions—in their ability to be put on or taken off, like clothes—take on a decidedly negative quality here. For Hamlet, the realm of physicality is the realm of dissembling; it is an arena that allows for expressions of performance, and thus a highly suspect sphere. And the stakes are raised as the play goes on: as Hamlet embroils himself more deeply in questions surrounding the physicality of his parents and his uncle, he comes to an unnerving conclusion: that every man and woman is inherently physical (in Bakhtin’s conception, “grotesque”—language that I will define subsequently) but that no one can be both physical and “true” simultaneously. This logic effectively suggests that no one can be “true” at all, at least according to Hamlet’s conception of the term. The implications of this realization echo within Hamlet’s psyche and, consequently, throughout the play, inciting the anxieties that come to define Hamlet’s character and his story.

The notions of the body on which this argument is based are adopted from Mikhail Bakhtin. In his introduction to Rabelais and His World, Bakhtin enumerates two distinct conceptions of the body in Renaissance and post-Renaissance literature: the “classic” body and the “grotesque” body. He characterizes the former thus:

...the body was first of all a strictly completed, finished product. Furthermore, it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies... The ever unfinished nature of the body was hidden, kept secret; conception, pregnancy, childbirth, death throes, were almost never shown... The accent was placed on the completed, self-sufficient individuality of the given body. Corporal acts were shown only when the borderlines dividing the body from the outside world were sharply defined. The inner processes of absorbing and ejecting were not revealed.

(Bakhtin 29)

This “classic” (Bakhtin 30) body is marked by its boundaries, by the clearly delineated lines that separate it both from other individuals and from the outside world. The classic body does not reveal participation in any processes that imply a loosening of these boundaries to let in or expel foreign bodies or substances, such as lovers or babies, nourishment, fluids, or refuse. The classic body is entirely self-contained. Bakhtin sets this conception of the body against another, opposite conception: that of the “grotesque” (Bakhtin 30) body, which is

...not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. ...[such as] the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose.... This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body...

(Bakhtin 26)

The notion of the grotesque body depicts the less savory, though entirely necessary, functions of the human body: eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, copulating, giving birth, dying, and decomposing. In Bakhtin’s conception, this grotesque body is characterized by its incompleteness, by its inability to exist as a self-contained entity. Though in some ways these functions are “grotesque,” as the name aptly implies, interestingly Bakhtin points out that it is just this grotesque openness that allows for regeneration. Thus, some possession of grotesque elements is not only natural to every man and woman, but also necessary for the continuation of life.

These delineations of “classic” and “grotesque” are crucial to a reading of the issues of the body in Hamlet. Until he is forced by his father’s death and his mother’s second marriage to confront the existence of the grotesque body, Hamlet’s understanding of the physical body is much more in keeping with Bakhtin’s classic body. He, to begin with, is blind to his own physicality. When he first confronts the Ghost, he makes ready to follow its lead, saying, “what should be the fear? / I do not set my life at a pin’s fee, / And for my soul, what can it do to that, / Being a thing immortal as itself?” (1.4.64–7). Hamlet clearly separates his physical body from his soul, and professes that the former matters not to him. Horatio tries, in turn, to remind him of the physical danger of this course of action: “What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord, / Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff / That beetles o’er his base into the sea...?” (1.4.69–71). Similarly, just before Hamlet’s final duel with Laertes, Horatio again attempts to sway Hamlet from a course of action that endangers his life, saying, “You will lose, my lord. / ...If your mind dislike anything, obey it. I will forestall their repair hither, and say you are not fit” (5.2.192–201). Unlike Horatio, Hamlet does not factor potential physical limitations into his thinking; indeed, he is not thinking of his body at all when he contemplates these choices. He conceives of his body as an entity separate from and unaffected by the world around him. Though Hamlet does use markedly physical language in his letter to Ophelia – which might suggest that Hamlet possesses an awareness of his physicality that would problematize this argument – in fact, his descriptions still depict their bodies as individual and self-contained. He writes of her “excellent white bosom,” and that he is hers “evermore... whilst this machine is to him,” but both she and he are defined entities; he feels desire for her, “groans” for her, tells her “I love thee best,” but in his depictions there is no intimation of either an openness or a fusion of their bodies. He mentions her bosom, but he does not conceptualize this part of her body as an “aperture,” a part of the body that is “open to the outside world” (Bakhtin 29). Rather, her breasts are referenced poetically; they are “excellent” rather than grotesque. He also refers to his own body as a “machine,” which implies mechanized perfection rather than grotesque incompleteness. A machine does not eat, drink, or defecate; one might argue that neither does a machine feel the desire to copulate, which this letter seems to suggest Hamlet does. However, until it is acted upon, desire is a self-contained sensation, which is in keeping with the notion of the classic body. The way in which Hamlet depicts his and Ophelia’s bodies in this letter as self-contained units suggests that they have not had prior sexual relations; if they had, if desire had been able to come to fruition, the borders between them would have been blurred, and he would not have been able to so neatly define them as individuals.

Hamlet’s lack of awareness of the physical nature of the body is also importantly manifested in his idealization of his parents and their bodies. Specifically, prior to his father’s death and his mother’s remarriage, he does not think of his parents as possessing physical humanity at all. He likens his “excellent” father to Hyperion, and his mother to Niobe, both characters from classical mythology (1.2.139–149). His conceptions of the mythological perfection of his parents are thrown into relief by the counterpoint provided by Claudius. While old Hamlet is Hyperion, his brother is a “satyr,” a mythical creature infamous for the physical vices of wine and women. Claudius is a “bloat king” (3.4.182), who “wakes [the night] and takes his rouse, / Keeps wassail... as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down” (1.4.8–10). Hamlet does not approve of this physicality in Claudius. He says such customs are “more honor’d in the breach than in the observance” (1.4.16); in his mind, such gross physicality needs to be restrained. Yet Claudius’s grotesqueness does not remain self-contained; its open, unrestrained boundaries allow it to bleed out and influence others, namely his mother (as well as the kingdom of Denmark, an idea to which we will return). Indeed it is Claudius whom we are made to understand is guilty for awakening the excess of sexuality in Gertrude which appears to be Hamlet’s primary complaint before his encounter with the Ghost: “Must I remember? Why, she should hang on him / As if increase of appetite had grown / By what it fed on, and yet, within a month—/ Let me think not on’t!” (1.2.143–6). Claudius’s grotesqueness has rendered Gertrude grotesque as well, an effect that repulses Hamlet to such a degree that he cannot “think on’t.”

Yet Claudius’s conspicuous physical presence serves to corrupt not only Hamlet’s current view of his mother—the idea that she has become physical as a result of her marriage to his uncle—but also to problematize his memories of his parents as existing above the realm of physicality. Claudius’s presence serves to continually remind Hamlet of his father’s death and his mother’s marriage, and his excessive physicality forces Hamlet to consider his parents in physical terms. What is most upsetting to Hamlet about his father’s death is the state in which old Hamlet was “dispatch’d” (1.5.75): “grossly, full of bread” (3.3.80). In this depiction, at the moment of his death, old Hamlet was very clearly in the middle of a physical process – he had opened an aperture in his body to take in bread but had not expelled it – which speaks to a troubling but undeniable grotesqueness in him. Similarly, though Hamlet is repulsed by the idea of his mother and Claudius making love—of him “pinch[ing] wanton on [her] cheek, call[ing] [her] his mouse... / [and with] a pair of reechy kisses, / ...paddling on [her] neck with his damn’d fingers” (3.4.183–5)—he cannot deny that his parents were sexual beings in their own right before the introduction of Claudius. His own existence speaks to the fact that his parents made love and that his mother gave birth, irrefutable facts that render them both grotesque.

Yet even more troubling to Hamlet than the fact that his parents were physical beings is the sneaking sense that the categorization of “grotesque” is in some way natural: eating, drinking, making love, dying, and decomposing are functions inherent to every human, and thus inescapable for anyone. He had found it easy to criticize his uncle for what he perceived to be Claudius’s gross physical excess, but over the course of the play, Hamlet comes to realize that, for better or worse, to be “grotesque” is the lot of mankind. His father’s death speaks to this fact, as does his parents’ shared sexuality, which is made manifest in Hamlet himself. However, it is two further things that ultimately convince Hamlet that grotesqueness is natural: his feelings for Ophelia and his encounter with Yorick’s skull. While desire may be a self-contained entity, its logical corollary—the playing out of desire with another—transgresses the neat boundaries of the classic self. Hamlet realizes that if he were to carry out the desire that he feels for Ophelia, the act would render both of them grotesque. The ease with which one may slip into this messy area jars Hamlet, but it also forces him to recognize the naturalness of the grotesque. Similarly, when Hamlet confronts Yorick’s skull in Act V, he exclaims, “To what base uses we may return, Horatio!... Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander was returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?” (5.1.189–98). He is forced to contemplate what happens not only to “poor Yorick” (5.1.172), but also to Alexander and to “Imperious Caesar” (5.1.199)—the common fate of death, burial, decomposition, and reconstitution—and realizes that these processes are natural and unavoidable for commoners, conquerors, and fools alike. Because of his relationships with Ophelia and the late Yorick, Hamlet is able to understand firsthand that all men and women are in some sense grotesque: not just his uncle, but also his parents, the object of his desire, his childhood companion, Caesar, and even himself.

The cognizance that every human possesses grotesque qualities is a blow to Hamlet, especially given his idealization of his parents. However, it is a realization with which Hamlet might be able to come to terms if not for a significant complicating factor. Given Hamlet’s idealization of his parents as well as the way in which he condemns Claudius for his overblown and shameless physicality, we must assume that his parents were in some sense ideal because they restrained or hid their innate grotesqueness. Indeed, Hamlet believes that grotesque physicality such as Claudius’s should be restrained. Yet he realizes that in exercising such restraint, one will be committing what is to him an equally, if not even more, grave offense than being grotesque: performing or “seeming” to be one thing while one is, in reality, something else. The Ghost accuses Gertrude of being “seeming virtuous” (1.5.46), but in light of the grotesque nature of bodies, anyone who restrains his or her grotesqueness—which, if we use the examples of his parents and, in contrast, his uncle, Hamlet believes one needs to do in order to be virtuous—is comparably guilty of this charge. The importance of not “seeming” is, from the very beginning of the play, one of Hamlet’s most fervently held beliefs; yet, likewise is his distaste for characters that lack restraint, as exhibited by his scorn for Claudius’s carousing in Act I. Because of the issue of bodies in the play, these two ideas become mutually exclusive: one cannot be both physical and “true” (that is, innocent of “seeming”).

The dissonance created by this conflict profoundly impacts Hamlet. Indeed, this conflict may be the reason that, as Maynard Mack puts it, “Hamlet’s world is pre-eminently in the interrogative mood. It reverberates with questions, anguished, medita-

tive, alarmed” (Mack 237). Hamlet does not know how to reconcile the opposing, but equally compelling, demands of physical “virtue” and of behavioral “truth.” Hamlet’s anguish in the face of this ideological crisis may in fact lend context to one of the more troubling lines in the play, his violent outburst toward Ophelia: “Get thee [to] a nunn’ry, why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners? . . . We are arrant knaves, believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunn’ry” (3.1.120–8). In some ways, his treatment of her may seem unwarranted, but in light of the increasing evidence that one may not be physically virtuous and innocent of performing at the same time, his exclamation that she “get to a nunnery” may be a desperate attempt to save her from what increasingly appears to him to be the fate of all men and women: the fate of choosing to be either grotesque or a dissembler. In attempting to relegate her to the asexual world of a nunnery, Hamlet cuts from her life the possibility of a physicality that will assuredly problematize her behavioral integrity. Though one may still argue that Hamlet is not justified in his treatment of Ophelia here, if he is indeed experiencing these anxieties and is motivated by a desire to in some way sweep the virgin Ophelia from the path of an imminent and potentially damning state of being, perhaps one may feel increased sympathy for him.

And indeed, this quandary that Hamlet has come to confront has not only profound but far-reaching implications. He realizes that every man and woman is guilty either of grotesqueness or of performing, but the corruption extends even beyond individual bodies: the state of Denmark itself is implicated. Ernst Kantorowicz quotes Edmund Plowden’s articulation of the political thought of the time, which held that the king possessed two bodies: the “Body natural” and the “Body politic.” According to Plowden, the king’s

Body natural . . . is a body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, to the Imbecility of Infancy or Old Age, and to the defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled. . . and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body.

(Kantorowicz 7)

In many ways, this notion of the King’s two bodies mirrors Bakhtin’s differentiation between the grotesque and classic bodies of individuals. A king’s “Body natural” is at the mercy of infirmity, imbecility, infancy, old age, and other defects, and is thus the grotesque equivalent of the king’s self. The more classic, completed “Body politic” is untouchable to such physical vulnerabilities. Though these bodies in theory “form one unit indivisible,” Kantorowicz goes on to point out that “doubt cannot arise concerning the superiority of the body politic over the body natural. . . . Not only is the body politic ‘more ample and large’ than the body natural, but there dwell in the former certain truly mysterious forces which reduce, or even remove, the imperfections of the fragile human nature” (Kantorowicz 9). Hamlet’s views of the integrity of people have been compromised, and as a result, he also begins to question the integrity of the kingship. Though the two bodies of the king are conflated, in theory, the grotesque physicality of his father and uncle should not extend to the state because the body politic is meant to envelop and thereby mitigate the imperfections of the king’s body natural. However, in folding the grotesque body natural into itself, the body politic is effectively guilty of performing as well; it actively hides its less savory side. Indeed, as we have seen in the examples of old Hamlet and Claudius, the body natural of the king is undeniably imperfect: both are physically grotesque, both are guilty of dissembling, and Claudius is guilty of the even worse offenses of murder and incest. Because of their physicality, old Hamlet and Claudius have become objects of suspicion for Hamlet; the bodies natural of both have been degraded by his recognition of their grotesque natures. And because he cannot trust the body natural of the king, by extension, the body politic also becomes suspect; the latter is implicated for its complicity in shrouding the imperfections of the former. As a result, Hamlet finds himself questioning the integrity of the state of Denmark itself: to him, his country has become an “unweeded garden / That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature / Possess it merely” (1.2.135–7). It is a place where the “The time is out of joint” (1.5.188). And there may be some grounds to Hamlet’s misgivings: even Marcellus alludes to a quality of off-ness about the body politic when he says, “Something is rotten in the state of Denmark” (1.4.90). The fact that no one – not even Denmark, not even he himself – is safe from a physicality that renders one either grotesque or a liar forces Hamlet to question the possibility of an unsullied, virtuous “truth” existing anywhere in his world. This anxiety consequently adds another layer of depth to his mandate

that Ophelia get herself to a nunnery. He seeks to remove her to a safe place, for it is not merely people, specifically men, who cannot be trusted; Denmark itself is rotten.

Hamlet is haunted by his inability to reconcile the issues of physicality and performance; he believes the physical should be restrained, but he also believes that “be” that which one “seems.” Yet if the act of restraining one’s innate human grotesqueness is by nature an act of performance, what is one to do? How is one to deport oneself? And equally importantly: whom, of others, should one trust? Everyone, even the state, is incriminated. The anxiety that this quandary provokes in Hamlet is profound and contributes to the larger sense of philosophical anguish that both defines the play and leads Hamlet to his premature end. Interestingly though, while Hamlet is distressed by the grotesque body, it is this model of the body that allows for regeneration. In light of this fact, it is fitting that Horatio is the figure entrusted with the retelling of these events: the character who first sought to alert Hamlet to the physicality of the body. With his appreciation for corporality, Horatio has the capacity to continually regenerate Hamlet through story, and give him another life after death.

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BELLIES

Riddick Beebe

When I make a new slab of pancetta, I try to source the belly from the best possible producer. I want the belly of a pig that has to root and explore, that has had pasture space. This strengthens the long smooth fibers of the belly and also produces a firmer fat structure that takes to curing nicely. I pay much more for these bellies, but it is worth it. If I am going to love this meat, craft it, transform it into something that I will relish and enjoy for months, it is certainly worth the extra few dollars. I can get bellies at the Super K, the Korean grocery, for around \$1.80/lb, but these bellies are generally thinner, the fat is loose and the lean is streaky and flavorless. These bellies take well to braising, and I will buy them occasionally, if I am going to impress some friends at a dinner, or shred it and stuff it into ravioli with apples and castelvetrano olives. But the pancetta demands quality.

I do not love my students. They are not my friends, and I am not their mentor. They are at Marist because they are Catholic, they live in Dunwoody, Ga, their parents have spent over \$20,000 on travel baseball or soccer teams since they were nine years old, and dad wants him to start on the varsity team as a freshman. Mom wants her to play soccer at UNC. He’s going to go to Boston College because everyone in our family goes to BC, and as good Catholics, you know, we won’t settle for less than a catholic education. In the classroom, I challenge, I prod, and I question. I teach them how to read and think slightly more critically than they did as freshman. I teach my students how to craft a thesis and follow MLA guidelines. I teach how to follow deadlines, and I teach them the mechanics of operating within a system. My students want to know the answers, and they want

to know when the test is. They want to know why we have to read this. They want to know the point. Sometimes I tell them. Sometimes I do not. Three times each year, I receive a new cohort of students, four classes, twenty per class. I move through the same space with them for twelve weeks, and then they go away, and I get four new classes. Of course, some may remain, and few might even have me for a whole year. With these children, I do become familiar, and we joke and learn together.

I pay attention to the provenance of the bellies that I buy, and I do not rush it. I will go to the Morningside Farmers Market on a Saturday morning and see who is there. Maybe a farm will have a belly for sale, maybe not. What is tricky about getting good bellies is a pig only has one. They are at a premium. If I do not luck into one, I have a few farms that I call, and I can usually get my hands on a belly from a heritage breed, usually some form of Berkshire pig but not often certified. That’s ok with me.

I have only had one wrestler come to me fully formed, a tall, handsome, light-skinned, African American boy. The rest, I create. I am not the best technical coach. I know my style, but my style is fairly rough. I pound. I grind. I have heavy hands, meat-hooks, I use them. I teach my wrestlers to tuck their head, get inside the opponent’s defense. Get inside his head. Club his head. Push him, pull him. Force him to make a mistake, and when he makes that mistake, make him pay. Break his spirit. Your opponent should want to quit before you beat him. He should ask himself what the hell he is doing on this mat getting his face ripped off. I tell them I’ll never yell at them for getting a penalty point for unnecessary roughness. Unless that point loses the match. Then I laugh.

I love the feeling in the hand of freshly packaged butcher meat. The clean white paper, folded expertly haphazard and the heft is comforting, better by far than shrink wrap and styrofoam. I place the belly on the counter, beechwood that I sanded, stained, and finished myself before having a carpenter come to install it. The white paper on the dark wood gives me joy, and I tear the masking tape and unfold the crisp paper to reveal the thick belly. I always smell my meat before I do anything else with it. The pig smells clean and slightly sweet. A whole belly is roughly eleven pounds, but for my pancetta, I will only use half of that. I rinse the belly and pat it dry a few times then I sharpen my knife. I use a cheap Victorinox filet knife, and I love it. It does not hold an edge, but it takes to sharpening, and it is thin and maneuverable. I have other knives that are heavier, nicer, more expensive. Three were made in Seki City, Japan, and one is a Kershaw, Japanese design, American made. All are beautiful, hammered Damascus steel and feel like sex or death in your hand, but I keep coming back to the trusty Victorinox.

Not all boys are tough. This is the problem with my coaching. They have grown up on carpet being told to share and when to get dressed, but not to clean up after themselves or take responsibility for their actions. They have been told not to hit or get in fights. Their mothers fight their battles for them. Combat and adversity are alien. This is what I teach. Not all boys can pound, grind, and brawl, and so it is hard for me to coach them, but I have assistants who focus on these boys. They can teach a low single far better than I. They can teach to shoot from outside, take him down, let him up. That is good because my style is not for every wrestler. But the boys who take to me and learn my style and mimic my attitude, can be champions, and they get a reputation in the room.

Often the belly comes with the skin still on. I carefully remove it and save it for roasting. A long roast with a hot broil at the end will crisp the skin, burnished copper and bubbled, delicious fat. Once cleaned and peeled, the belly goes into the cure. Pink salt, saltpeter, is about six percent sodium nitrate and is dyed pink to differentiate it from regular salt. Pink salt is poisonous. You would not want to sprinkle it on your French fries. I mix my cure with a blend of aromatics, some sugar and salt. I like a highly flavored, slightly sweet pancetta. I like my pancetta to pop, and sing, and then linger like a love note to fat on the tongue. I mix in juniper, black pepper, torn bay leaves, fresh rosemary, thyme, and sage, nutmeg, and dried Calabrian chilies. I put this in a Ziploc bag with the belly, coat it all over, force the air out, and put it in the fridge, under a few bricks. For the next ten days, I will flip the belly daily, feeling it, testing it, until it is uniformly firm. When the belly, it is not yet pancetta, is cured, I rinse it and recoat with scant salt, sugar, much pepper, and more chilies. I tie a few sprigs of rosemary to it, like a blessing, thread it through a corner with butcher’s twine, and hang it in the basement to finish. My basement is cool and, with a dehumidifier, stays at about 65% humidity. I have thought about turning my downstairs fridge into a cure locker, but I do not think I need that sort of operation going yet.

What I do teach these boys, all my boys who let me, who buy in, who drink the Kool-Aid, is a love of hard work, the value of goals, and the importance of their word. I am not their cheerleader, I tell them. They have had far too many of those already. I do not care if they do not want to work, or if they had a bad day, or if they just got dumped or failed a test. Leave the trash in the trashcan, I say. We are here to work, and we are here to learn. We are here to make each other better, and maybe even hurt each other a little bit. If we are doing that, I tell them, I think we are doing all right. Our object is to win state championships. We do not want to be at the race. We want to be in race, at the head. You win state championships by winning matches. You win matches by working hard on the mat and on the weights, and I promise, I will work hard right beside, maybe a little in front, of you. And, boys, I ask them, what do you do when you piss on the seat? Wipe it up, they reply. Together.

For the first few days, the belly smells slightly sweet, savory. It is a smell that I can taste on the back of my tongue. It squirts saliva into my mouth and makes me see carbonara and pans of bubbling fat. After a few days it begins to dry and sag slightly. As the belly turns to pancetta over about fourteen days, it will lose some weight from moisture and may develop small patches of green or white fuzzy mold. I call it character. And when it is finished, firm all over, no soft or raw-feeling places, I take it down, rinse it with vinegar, dry it, wrap it, and put it in the fridge. I am childishly giddy. That night I will make my pasta dough and cut it into long broad strips of pappardelle. I will crack twenty eggs, separating the yolks, saving the whites. I will grind a small peak of black pepper and grate a mountain of pecorino romano. I will cut the pancetta into small lardons and fry them, inhaling two weeks of patience and care, smiling with a beer in my hand. I will eat my meal and breathe and share it all with those at my table.

I have headed my program for four years. And during those years, I have made some mistakes. I have broken a child’s arm. I have cursed at a child. I have made a few cry. I have made many vomit. But I have also changed the trajectory, by degrees or by miles, of lives. It takes about two years for a boy to realize the care that they receive from me is real and true and of some value. They begin in a place of fear. Many quit during this time, the first few weeks of freshman wrestling. Then they move toward pride. They have made it. Beebe said I was working hard. Some then move toward resentment as I ask increasingly demanding sacrifices of time and flesh. And then, when they begin to coalesce into the men they might become, they realize that I do care, and I do love, and they achieve some measure of success. Sometimes I hold them in defeat, or smack their hard hands in victory. They know how to work. They know how to win. They set goals and attain them, or if not, they move past them, knowing that they did not fail for lack of preparation or heart. And when they are seniors and the season is over and their boots are off, cauliflower ear is a memory, and my whistles and screams are echoes, and they look toward spring and college beyond, I bring them into my home and sit them at my table and cook a meal for them that we eat together.

THE DEATH OF SIMBA

Chris Mixon

The black cats had refused to enter the living room since Thursday afternoon. A fog of death pooled along the ceiling, and its miasma spoke to the cats; they knew that Simba was dying. They knew he had been dying, and in whatever might pass as language between cats, farewells had been mewed. It is even possible, however unlikely, that Simba had bid them stay away and reluctantly, now they listened.

Simba lay on the heating pad in the living room, sometimes on the couch, sometimes on the floor. The heating pad had the freedom to rest just on the edge of the couch, and to stretch out in front of the, now enormous—though once fashionable, entertainment center. As old as Simba, the pad’s cover was worn, faded and now strewn with orange and white hairs.

Simba curled further into himself, his tail covering his nose and eyes. His spine poked boney and ridged, each gnarled knot ratcheted up his side. The hairs defied gravity, and insisted upon standing up despite repeated attempts to allay the standing hair. Always, the hair remained in the almost-caricature of an electric shock.

This is how Simba laid, eyes closed as he wheezed. He had been lying there since sometime in the early afternoon when he had been turned over. The family turned him periodically so no one side would roast. Simba never objected to being turned. He had also stopped objecting to them administering fluids with the long needle in the bathroom. There was no longer much that Simba objected to; though he still did flinch as members of the family roughly pet his bones.

★

“Where’s Timmy?”
“Timmy’s in the back with his magazines.”

Timmy was not in the back with his magazines. This had been true when Susan had gone to check on him, and he had slammed the door in her face, but it was no longer the case. He had gotten up from his magazines and waited for several minutes until he was sure that she was not waiting outside his room as she often did—hoping to catch him kissing his magazines. He listened carefully and peered around the corner. The door to the main apartment was slightly closed. Timmy ignored it and went in to the room across from his that at one point had been a walk-in closet with a bathroom, had later been a bed room for his sister who had been a crazy lady in 1998 and was even now an office for Rex that was rarely used. Timmy walked into the room that had the fluorescent light still on and he closed the bathroom door. He turned off the humming fluorescent light, and moved the American Picture Dictionary back to where it belonged. He straightened the decaying Shakespeare books and moved the Disney Sword in the Stone tape from the second shelf (he counted from eye level) to the third. After he had closed the door to the room that had once been his sister’s when she was a crazy lady in 1998, he walked to the door his Mom had left slightly closed. It was here he was standing at this moment, listening to his parents. They were talking about Simba. Simba was his cat, not like the black and white ones. Smokey peed on his bags, and Stormy ran away and growled. Simba loved him. Simba was his cat.

“Are you sure you don’t want to go check on him again?”
“I just checked on him, Rex. If you want to check on him, you can go back there.”
“Does he still think Simba is going to get better?”

Simba was his cat.

“We went on a walk last weekend after brunch and had a long talk. I think he understands. It’s hard to know what he understands. Death is hard for normal people, those with Downs? Granddad was really the only person he remembers dying, and that wasn’t even in front of him.”

“Well, I don’t think we should take him to the Vet tonight. I know you thought we should ...”
“We thought. We talked last night and you agreed—don’t make it seem like...”
They were fighting again.
“Do you want me to finish?”

Silence.

“I came home and he picked his head up and greeted me. He knew I had come in. He isn’t ready to go.”

“But he hasn’t eaten...”
“He’s better! He picked his head up when I came in! I know it’s easy for you to just say take him to the vet, but...”
“Easy? Easy for me? Christine thinks that...”
“She isn’t here!”
Christine was his sister. She was a crazy lady in 1998. But now she lived in Tahoe with Will.

“But he hasn’t eaten since Tuesday, Rex—don’t you think...”
“You tell Timmy you’re going to kill his cat.”

“Stop it! Stop it! You never even liked that cat until we found out it was dying.”

This was true. Dad did not like the cat. One time when Simba had eaten his sandwich and he had thrown himself on the sofa (it was in a different position than it was now), Dad had beat Simba with a newspaper.

“We are not going to the vet tonight unless you want to take him.”
“He’s such a sweet cat. I just don’t want him to suffer.”
“Well, at least he’s stopped walking.”
“That was so hard watching him struggle to walk. His back legs hardly knew how to work.”
“Have you turned him recently?”
“Timmy helped me turn him and then he lay down and held him. These last few weeks Timmy has been so sweet to Simba, and not as rough as he used to be. He’s been really good about saying goodbye.”

Simba was his cat.

★

There is no one in the living room the first time Simba moans. His small cat paws shake slightly and his body contorts, opening from his previous tight ball. To an outside observer he may even be stretching. He is not stretching though, Simba is dying.

Susan has left the kitchen, and Rex too has been drawn to the living room. Simba moans again, and in the sudden quiet of what is normally a rather noisy apartment, as many too small for big family New York apartments are, the two adults hurry to the heating pad to see if it is happening. There is another plaintive moan, the noise barely escaping the cat’s throat. Rex bends down and picks the cat up, lifting it into his arms to cradle it in its final moments. Simba’s head droops onto his shoulder, and Rex turns the cat so he can look into the cat’s small dulling green eyes.

And then Timmy is in the hallway, having just left his room. Susan turns and she sees him. Guilty, the two adults look at each other. Panic builds. They linger in inaction as Timmy comes closer, now sensing their emotional terror. Perhaps like the cats, Timmy too feels the death in the room.

“Get him out of here,” Rex moans.
Susan meets his eyes before crossing to Timmy.
“Timmy, please go back to your room.”
“I want to see Simba.”
“Timmy, please, just go in the back and...”
“Mommy, Simba...”
“Timmy, please!”

She is almost pushing him as she guides him back towards his room. He must feel her despair, for he cooperates as he never does. The door closes, and then she is back with the father and the cat.

Simba convulses from his chest, mouth open in that familiar manner of hairballs they had all come to hate. Tiny cat coughs tremble out his hanging jaw, and there seems to be genuine pain in their eyes as they watch his frail fur shudder. There is a low moan, or it might be a gasp, and the cat settles. It takes Rex several moments before he realizes that the cat no longer moves. His body, so worn and emaciated, does not feel any lighter.

Rex looks at Susan, now in tears and sobbing softly so that Timmy will not hear her. He steps forward to comfort and hold her, knowing this is his role.

The dead cat falls from his reaching arms. He clutches at it, catching it, his grip just before its back legs. The torso hangs upside down, and the head lolls to each side. Rex looks up, and the animal is still upside down. He is bent at the knees and waist, his whole body stooped and looking like it might tumble to the floor too. Susan cries too hard to meet his eyes.

Rex lowers the cat, and for a moment it appears as if it will remain on its feet. And both think for that second, that maybe they were wrong, and maybe, probably, Simba just might shake himself and walk away. The cat stays up for the longest second. Then it teeters and collapses, while sobs wrack Susan’s frame. Rex bends down and tries to arrange the cat on the floor.

When it almost looks like Simba is sleeping, Rex stands up, walks to his wife and they collapse into each other. She cries into his shoulder and he whimpers over her head. Simba lies on the carpet in front of the still too large entertainment center. The heating pad lies next to him; on.

★

On Sunday morning Simba still lay on the carpeted floor. He had lain there all Saturday night. The heating pad radiated heat; no one had thought to unplug it. At some point it could be considered a fire hazard. Simba still lay on the same side that he had been on when he was arranged. No one had come to turn him, and now it seemed like no one ever would.

The family wanted to cremate the body. They wanted to bring him out to California and leave him with their daughter. Susan had arranged with the vet, upon their last visit, to have him cremated when he eventually did die. Simba would not be going to the vet that Sunday, though; it was closed. Simba’s body had lain in the living room all Saturday night, and now all Sunday morning. It did not move when the other cats were fed, and it did not move when the family ate breakfast. It stayed in the same place on the rug, next to the still radiating heating pad even as the family watched basketball and ate dinner.

On Monday morning, when the dead cat was finally to be moved from the living room, Timmy and Rex said good bye to Simba. Rex was the first to pet the dead cat, and Timmy, taking his cue from his Dad as he so often did, replicated the gesture.

“I love you, Simba.”

Simba remained on the floor until after Timmy had left for work at his non-profit Young Adult Assistance Center. Rex had left before him to go prepare to teach his afternoon class. Susan, who worked at the bank, was in charge of removing the dead cat from the living room.

The first thing she did when she was alone that morning was to bring out several towels and a canvas bag. She didn’t want the neighbors, or anyone she knew to see her carrying a dead cat out of the apartment. It would give the wrong impression. Families that lived in New York apartments were not supposed to let dead cats lie on their carpeted living room floors as if in some shiva-like vigil. After removing Simba from the floor and placing him in the bag, Susan prepared to go to the vet and then work. The last thing she did before she left the apartment was to unplug the heating pad and place it on the couch.

The door closed to the apartment and she waited for the elevator. When the elevator opened she stepped on and rode to the lobby, grateful no one was aboard to ask her what was in the canvas bag, or what that strange almost cloying smell was. When she reached the lobby she walked past the doormen the way she did every morning. And unlike most mornings, she hailed a cab and rode silently to the veterinarian’s office.

In the silence of the apartment, Smokey, the female black and white cat, padded out of the parent’s bedroom and sniffed the air. The death was gone. She moved towards the living room and stopped about where Timmy had. Then, she entered the living room for the first time since the death had come, and stretched her paws forward. She hopped up on the couch, and curled up on the still warm heating pad. She was soon asleep.

MAKING FRIENDS

David Wandera

Baobab hated being ignored. Everything seemed to happen around him, under him or even right next to him but he was never involved or invited. He stood alone at the edge of the playground at Mlimani Academy. Every day during recess, excited children would play under the tree. They would talk, joke and laugh. ‘If only I could talk and joke with them’ thought the tree to itself. A magic butterfly was fluttering her wings on a twig.

“Is that what you really want?” she asked him.

“Yes! Of course yes.” he cried. “You understand me so you must be magic. Please make me talk.”

Butterfly granted the wish. “Remember Baobab, things are always as they are for a reason. I will come back tomorrow and if you still want the talking ability, you will have it for the rest of your life.” Baobab tried out his new-found voice, first muttering to himself, then whispering, then singing, and eventually talking to himself. He held this conversation with his imagined self for the whole night for he had much to say. He was bursting with anticipation, as he waited for the night to pass so that he could talk to the children. He decided that he would not wait for recess when the children would be under his shed, Early the next day, just as the children had arrived and were about to go to class, he called out to a group of boys who were by the garden.

“Hey guys! Good morning.”

He could not understand their puzzled looks, but the boys came towards him...talking among themselves, as they looked around curiously.

“There is nobody there,” said one of them.

“No. There is me. Your new friend...the tree,” he said cheerfully. They looked up into his branches and all about. Then something very strange happened. They all screamed and ran off. Moments later they came with a teacher talking animatedly about a voodoo tree, danger and witchcraft.

“Mrs. Kigen, it can talk” said Dan and he threw a stone at the tree. “What nonsense, Dan...” said Mrs. Kigen but just then the tree said “Hi Dan, Hi Mrs. Kigen,” and the boys ran off screaming, leaving the teacher to venture closer to investigate.

They saw her look around, look up, say something...and then she walked off to the Principal’s office. Baobab’s keen ears heard the whole conversation. The principal had said that there would be no witchcraft at the school, and added that he would have the tree cut down that same day! ‘Oh no!’ sobbed poor Baobab. Just then Butterfly appeared on a twig.

“Please take the talking ability away...they don’t like trees that talk...all I wanted...was to make friends...” he managed amidst sobs. Butterfly smiled.

“It is wise to be contented with what you already have,” she said and waved a little wand before she flew off. Before recess, the principal and Mrs. Kigen came to the tree. She tried to talk to the tree. There was no response.

“Put those boys on detention. They played a trick on you,” said the principal firmly.

THE HAMMER

Sungbae Park

As a fiction writer, Odie never stopped thinking up characters and scenarios, even in the act of sweet, sweaty lovemaking, as was the case now. Nausicaa sat on top of him, her sweaty back towards the door. She liked feeling as if she were in control, and he liked to have her think it. He placed his hands around her gently, as if she were fresh off the printing press, her ink not yet dry. Nausicaa still felt new, still fresh, which inspired him in ways that his wife no longer could. She leaned her frame closer to him and whispered horny nothings in his ear, but he heard nothing. His focus had shifted to the figure standing in the bedroom doorway. A hollow silhouette, he thought. An empty outline. So, here he was, a shadow of a husband, a glimpse of a father, in his King size, memory-foam mattress bed, banging away at Nausicaa, whom he considered to be a rough draft of a mistress, when Penny, his wife of a dozen years, entered through the doorway of their master bedroom with a hammer in her hand.

Odie had imagined the scenario a hundred times before, but even the imagination of a so-called bestselling author wasn’t enough to give a clue as to how the action would rise next. He had written about infidelity, and specifically, the undoing of one by its discovery, in short stories, novels, one act plays, and even some poetry. But as worldly children come to understand, to know something (even to write about it in minute detail) is one thing, and living it is entirely another. He knew he should stop. For all he knew, he could be in genuine mortal danger, and a second misspent could give way to a premature conclusion. He knew deep in the crevices of his heart and mind that despite her cherry-sweet outer appearances, Penny was more than capable of using that hammer. Angelic as she could be at times, she was more human than the lovely thing on top of him now. Ten years ago, he would’ve stopped dead. Even two, three years ago, he would’ve pushed off his lover Nausicaa in shock, rolled off the bed in shame, and jumped into his jeans, all the while spitting out clichés like “Baby, she means nothing to me,” or “Honey, I can explain,” or even “Sweetie, it’s not what it looks like.” But he uttered no such rubble now. The years between Penny and him had piled on, like brick on brick of a house built on sand, and now their time blurred together like the pages of a rain-soaked book. Half-baked ideas and works in progress not good enough to be seen. And the weight of it all had suffocated him. Their story had never really gotten started, but ironically, it could never be finished. The unbearable mass of their half-decent time together kept him from shoving away his lover Nausicaa, who now in a solitary revelry and ritual all her own, hadn’t even noticed this gross intrusion of their privacy. Oddly conflicted as to whether he should alert her or not, he could do nothing but sit there and let the events unfold as they may. Even in the whirlwind of this moment, he wondered what the scene would look like in fictional form. He imagined that it’d make for a good story.

Despite Nausicaa’s efforts, he felt himself sagging now, in mind and body. As the distance between him and Penny slowly closed, it was almost as if Nausicaa wasn’t even there. He imagined himself lying naked alone on the bed, legs spread like an open book. He wanted—no needed—to be seen like this: as is. Penny moved towards him with hammer in hand. It was a perfectly natural picture, actually, for Penny. She was always fixing up one thing or another around the house. The only daughter of a carpenter, Penny was the handyman of the house. In fact, she had practically built—and rebuilt—their house over the past dozen years, tearing down the single-stud walls and putting up double-stud ones, ripping out the plush carpet and putting down hardwood, remodeling the kitchen with custom-built cabinets and black walnut finish countertops, and so on and so on and so on. To him, a house was a house was a house, and it seemed as if she were constantly unraveling a perfectly fine piece of work just to rebuild it from scratch all over again ad nauseum ad nauseum. Just what kind of a finished product was she waiting for anyway? So, it was within the realm of plausibility, he told himself, that she’d come home early from work, picked up the hammer to get working on yet another project, when she happened to hear a noise that didn’t fit with the rest of the beautifully remodeled home, the sound of an intruder perhaps into their perfect-seeming house of their perfect-seeming lives, the sound of walls falling, the sound of glass breaking, the sound of a house undone.

In that moment, he felt limp inside, lying there in bed with his mistress all over him while his faithful wife Penny watched, hammer in hand. Nausicaa’s eyes remained closed; she was in and of another world. A world, probably, without him in it. At this moment, his eyes locked with Penny’s. Her gaze, like Medusa’s, froze him. There was something in her eyes that he didn’t recognize; he was no longer the author of her actions. She took a step towards the bed, and the cold glint in her eyes made him feel even more naked than he already was. As he closed his eyes, he thought he saw her slightly raise the hammer. Or was that just his imagination? He wondered what he would do as the author of this story. He felt that the climax of both the story and Nausicaa was close at hand and questioned his own connection to the denouement. Would Penny actually use the hammer? It seemed to him that since the hammer was introduced in the opening scene, it would almost be unconscionable to leave it unused. So, he saw her in his mind, more clearly than he had ever seen her in real life, bending over him to gauge what was inherently wrong with him, and to find out just where she needed to apply her masterful handiwork. To give him one final finishing touch that would make him whole and beautiful again. All things considered, he was glad that the story of his life would end, not with a pedestrian period or an open-ended question mark, but with the definitive exclamation point of the hammer.

MANGO JUICE

Simon Phillip Brown

When someone dies on Millwood Street, a crowd swarms around the body asking questions, usually asking how he died. On the day TJ died it was different. There was a dry silence in the air, especially from the ones who could see his body.

Desmond watched from his window four floors above. He watched as people pushed through the crowd to catch a glimpse. From his view the crowd’s shifting and scattering looked like someone had kicked an ant hill. There was no crying, no screaming, no hands in the air and shouts of “Lawd Jesus, why?” No one had words for what they saw. Some say nobody cared about TJ, so nobody reacted, but that was not the case. The silence was a result of shock. These residents have seen gunshot killings and bodies sliced and mangled in car accidents. They have witnessed stab victims and the final seconds of dying men crying for the mothers they never listened to.

For TJ there were no words, only the occasional ‘bomboclaaaat’ which stretched for however long the person was looking at his body. It was hard to describe what they saw. The best description came from a seven-year-old named Carl. He ran back to his friends around the corner who were playing football. When they asked Carl what TJ looked like he replied, “You ever see when ripe mango drop pon hot concrete?”

Jeffrey Thomas was eleven years old when students started calling him TJ. There were many assumptions why his nickname was TJ and not JT. Some assumed it was a resu’lt of how Miss Davis called each child by their last names first as if her brain was subconsciously alphabetized.

“Mr. Thomas, Jeffrey if you touch Miss Smith, Kimberly one more time I am going to call the headmaster.”

Miss Davis went to England for eight days for a wedding and had acted like a “farina” since then. It was not Miss Davis’ backwards speaking that gave Jeffery Thomas the nickname TJ. Every student at school knew what his name stood for. At lunch time you could hear the whispers when he walked through the canteen. Boys would check their pockets when he walked by and send messages to others “Teefing Jeffery a come!” Jeffery Thomas was a crook, pick-pocket, or as Mr. Murphy would say “a dutty likkle teef.”

TJ started stealing at nine years old. He would sneak into Mr. Murphy’s yard, climb the tree and pick as many mangoes as he could fit in his younger sister’s school bag. He and Alisha would steal mangoes, oranges, and limes, which they sold on corners or at stoplights. Alisha was three years younger than TJ and trusted her brother enough to do whatever he told her. Alisha had a portable FM radio that she carried with her all the time. She was always seen with the grey headphones on her head, blocking the outside world with her music.

TJ and Alisha lived with their mother and had no recollection of a father living with them. TJ was never convinced his mother knew who his father was either, so he never asked. The older he got the more men he saw coming in and out of the house. His mother was slim, with full breasts and smooth lips. She wore little clothing at home and even less when she went out. The older TJ got, the more his mother seemed to scorn him. Most of the arguments were about food.

“Why you so hungry belly? When you eat off the food the man buy what him going eat? You think I can keep man when I have greedy pickney in my house?”

She gave most of the food she cooked to whichever male companion she entertained that night. TJ figured that these men were the ones paying for the food, so he could not argue. Whenever he had food he gave it to his sister. At first he ate mangoes all the time until it made him sick. The teachers had witnessed TJ vomiting stringy yellow slime on his desk.

When TJ turned twelve he made a business out of mangoes. He carefully chose his mangoes based on type, size, and aroma. Blackie mangoes he sold to be eaten. The thin skin and medium size of that mango made it easier to handle for a quick sale. Bombay mangoes were large and thick. He ate them fiercely, enjoying the warm juice as it slid down to his chin and how easily the flesh is removed from the seed. This mango he would use to make juices. He mixed his juices with oranges and limes. He made enough money to purchase small plastic bags. He poured the juice into bags and tied the ends and sold Mango Bag Juice. His sister loved Stringy Mangoes that she called “the hairy one dem.” This annoyed TJ because Alisha would beg for him to pick Stringy mangoes even though they made no money and were hard to juice. She would also spend the entire walk home picking the flesh from her teeth while making an annoying sucking noise.

The older TJ got the harder it was to sell mango juice. The person that seemed to always love it was his sister, who always wanted a bottle. She drank it quicker than fresh water, gulping the thick orange liquid as if she was dehydrated. When she was finished she looked at TJ and smiled, juice stains covered her cheeks and chin.

He decided to start picking pockets at school. He became hated and scorned. He eventually had only one friend at school. Her name was Julie. This was the name of his favorite mango. He was comfortable around her. What he loved most was her honesty, which he encountered the day he tried to pick her pocket. He always remembered that day when Julie attacked him after he tried to steal from her:

“My yute! Wah yuh a do?”
She ran after TJ who was slipping her lunch money into his pocket. Before he could turn around he felt a hard slap on his right ear.
“Yuh tink me a eediat?” Another slap echoed on his jaw bone. He tried to apologize but she kept slapping him, and the students were laughing uncontrollably.
“Gimme back ma money.”
“Sorry my girl! Mi jus’ hungry and looking money fi’ a patty.”
“So yuh cyan ask? Someting wrong with yuh mouth?”
“No, but.... Mi nuh know yo. Si yuh money here.”

She looked at the dried spit in the corner of his mouth and the uniform with the ink stain she saw three times a week. It was obvious he had only two sets of uniforms. She masked her feeling of sorrow with disgust and said, “Yuh stink a shit!” She walked away and left the money.

Ever since that day he wanted her for himself; no one ever showed him kindness. Usually when he picked the Julie mangoes he never sold them or juiced them; he kept them for himself. The day after the incident he brought the two largest Julie mangoes he could find. She ate by herself so this made her easier to approach.

“What yuh want, TJ?”
“Jus wah give yuh these two mangoes fi’ say sorry.”

“Yuh stop sell mango? You know mi always wanted to buy one from yuh but you never sell my favorite one.” He showed her the Julie mangoes, she smiled, and he smiled knowing that he found a friend.

His feelings for Julie grew. Over the next year they became closer and his situation at home got worse. His mother went out more and was in a relationship with one of the drug dealers on the street. They had sex frequently and she walked around the house naked. His mother grew colder and treated him like a stray dog. They lived in a very small house with two rooms, thin walls, and minimal running water.

TJ was fourteen when his mother kicked him out of the house. The older he grew the more TJ became curious of his body. He was very confused with his feelings. Though he knew it was wrong, he could not control the erections he got hearing his mother having sex. Alisha would turn her headphones as loud as she could and turn in the bed facing the wall on the other side of the room, away from the disturbance. It was wild and loud and he would visualize making love to Julie or that hot Social Studies teacher he saw in the fifth Form classes. His curiosity grew; he started peeking at his mother while she had sex, masturbating quietly outside the door. The more aggressive the sex was the more he enjoyed it.

Eventually he was caught in the act. His mother dragged him outside and beat him profusely in the middle of the street. While bleeding and walking away from the house he wasn’t sure what was more embarrassing, the beating or the fact that his mother was naked in the middle of the street while she did this. Julie saw him the next day outside the school and tried to console him.

“TJ you alright? I hearing a lot of rumors but I wanted to hear from you. Where are you going to sleep?”
“What difference it make anyway? I will take care of myself. Where you did deh last night?”
“At mi yard. Sleeping. Like you shoulda been. Don’t blame me for what happen to you.”
“Me nah blame you. Me just a show yuh. I don’t need anybody.”

TJ grew distant and spoke to Julie less, despite her obvious sadness. He stopped going to his classes but went to school solely to steal money. He started stealing from stores and selling the items to people at bus stations and downtown on the busy streets. He slept on the couch of an old lady’s apartment at the corner of Millwood Street. She felt sorry for him, but he also brought heavy quantities of fruits and vegetables as his rent. She was unaware of his stealing habits. Her grandson Desmond went to TJ’s school and was not fond of his acts. TJ visited his sister once a week to give her large jugs of mango juice and bags of Stringy mangoes. She was not being under-fed because there was one less person in the house. TJ missed her but he knew she could take care of herself well enough.

TJ was infamous as a pick-pocket so it became difficult for him to be successful. People took all precautions whenever he came around. Desmond tried to give him money at times but it never changed the situation. TJ was a thief. He eventually upgraded to armed robbery. He bought a Three-Star Ratchet and robbed people at knife-point downtown. This upgrade was becoming risky for TJ because he was robbing people in unknown territories. He was a loner and did not have anyone to support him in a fight. His community despised him; he had robbed everyone that would have come to his defense. Desmond tried to warn TJ about his habits.

“So my yute, that’s all you plan fi do? Teef people money? You nah try fi earn it?” Desmond’s tone was one of concern.
“So wah? Mi haffi do wah me haffi do. Yeh you gimmi likkle money but that nah do nuttin really. Maybe buy me a one food but what happen to clothes and shoes?”

“So why yuh can’t try to sell something or do something? Remember when you used to sell mango? Dat was much better than being a thief.”
“Desmond, when I sell mango, I might as well be a beggar. Cause that is what I am doing, begging people fi buy mango.”
“But at least you earn it?”
“Earn wah? One time a man buy a mango from me. And when I go fi give him the mango. Him look pon me like him wah vomit. The same face mi mother have when she look pon mi. And then him jus tell me to keep the money.”
“Wah yuh a watch face for?”
“Di other day me see that same man and when me hol’ my knife to him chest. Me see fear not disgust.”
“And then where that take yuh? Think yuh going get big and rich?”

TJ was upset by this conversation and left the apartment to walk and think. He was fifteen now and had no friends or family except Alisha. He thought maybe he should buy a gun. He had somewhere to sleep and was not usually that hungry, so he thought of working or going back to classes, but he did not know where to get advice. After he calmed down he walked back to the old lady’s apartment. Before he got through the entrance he heard someone calling his name.

“Yo TJ!” TJ turned around and saw a boy with a cut by his left ear. He remembered him; he robbed him last week of his chain and watch, right after a party. He didn’t want to cut him but the boy wouldn’t give up his chain.

“Mi wah back mi chain yuh know.”

“Dat sell long time yute, me never even like yuh chain.” TJ slid his hand in his pocket for his knife. The boy had a cricket bat and his two friends were standing behind him with rocks in their hands.

“So gimmi back the watch den and some money.”
“Yuh think is so dis thing work?”
“Well maybe I should just get some pussy from yuh sketel mother!”
“So gwain nuh. Dat woman dead to me. ,,
“Me hear say all you likkle sister start grow breast now. Future sketel dat. Just like her mother”

TJ was filled with rage and opened his knife. The sound of the rachet clicking open was drowned by the sound of the stone cracking his shoulder blade. The other stone hit him in the chest and the last thing he saw was the flat side of the cricket bat.

From his window Desmond was still staring down at the crowd when he noticed an opening at one end. Someone was walking through and everyone looked to see who it was. Some tried to stop this person from going towards the body as protection against what could be seen. After a few seconds Desmond saw that it was Alisha. She walked up to TJ’s body as the tears leaked into her mouth. She took a good look at him. Then she bent down and poured her bottle of mango juice on her rag and wiped the blood away from his lips.

The Bread Loaf Journal

Writings from the School of English

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When John and I were asked to be editors of the *Bread Loaf Journal*, we had no idea what we were signing up for. At first we thought we were going to do a blog of the events that took place on the mountain. What we were given was a chance to take part in history. The Bread Loaf School of English is a community of words. From Asheville, to Santa Fe, across the seas to Oxford and back to the Bread Loaf Mountain itself, we leave a trail of art. These writings are usually engraved in the minds and hearts of students, professors or anyone who takes a moment to hear what has been created. It is therefore our utmost pleasure to be the first co-editors of a journal that will document such writings.

We have to first of all thank all our contributors who have taken time off from papers they will never be satisfied with, readings that will never end, classes, and limitless discussions, to submit a fraction of their writing talent. John and I received about a hundred submissions of poetry, fiction and essays that were so forthright and challenging that the hardest part wasn’t reading, but saying no to pieces that we loved. We would also like to thank Edward Brown for his photo contributions. We would like to thank Dana Olsen for overseeing this project and handling all the necessary components. Without her this Journal could not happen. We would also like to thank Valerie Costello for putting together the work and getting it printed. She has been the one delivering the goods, literally. We would also like to thank Bread Loaf Director Emily Bartels for giving us this timeless opportunity. Lastly, I would like to thank you, the reader, because you are the paper that these writings will be written on forever.

—Simon Phillip Brown ’13



Middlebury