

The Mockingbird

The Student Literary/Arts Magazine
of East Tennessee State University



2012

Volume 39

The Mockingbird 2012

The cover image is a detail from Kyle Blauw's *Body No. 1: I Simply Wanted the Physique of a Swimmer and Didn't Really Care for Swimming*.

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of East Tennessee State University

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Volume 39 edited by Sean I. Levenson

A project like *The Mockingbird* requires the support and cooperation of so many people that one hopes the production of the magazine itself serves as an expression of gratitude, but we would like to offer our thanks to Dr. Bert C. Bach, ETSU's Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs, who has authorized the magazine's production fund as part of the regular budget of the Department of Literature and Language. We thank also Dr. Gordon Anderson, Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences, Dr. Judy Slagle, Chair of the Department of Literature and Language, and Professor Catherine Murray, Chair of the Department of Art and Design, for their continued support and commitment to this project. We cannot overemphasize the creativity and patience of the ETSU Printing and Publications Office and, particularly, Ms. Jeanette Henry, our designer. Thank you all for sustaining this project.

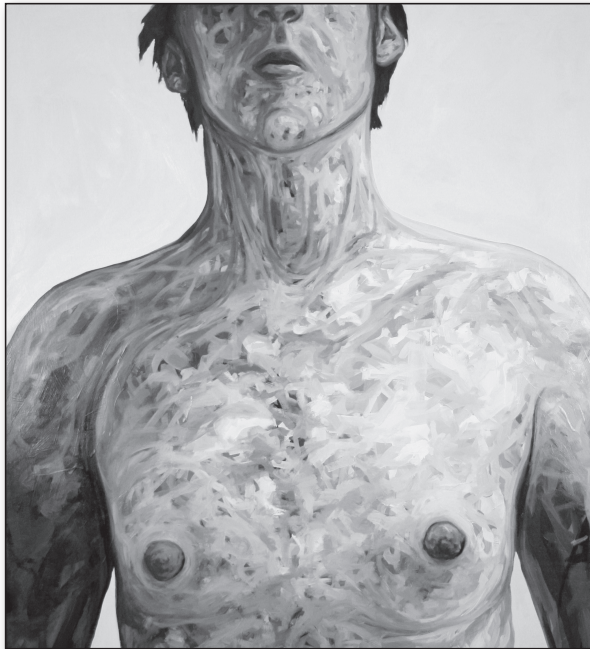
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A Note from the Editor

Sean I. Levenson

East Tennessee State University rests between the city and the Blue Ridge Mountains, the great spine of Appalachia. Cherokee National Forest begins on the far side of the little ridge that our campus sprawls along. The wide belt of the mountains to the south seems from a distance to be completely covered by wild, primeval forest. On the other side is Johnson City. Here the land has been reclaimed—first by the farmer, but then by the suburbanite. The area surrounding the small urban core, once the seat of rural vistas, today is a zone of strip malls and subdivisions fed by pulsing four-lane boulevards.

There is a friction on the boundary between town and country. The literature in this issue of *The Mockingbird* reflects some of the dissonance which people on the boundary feel. Much has been given up—or taken—but much, undeniably, has been gained. I hope this issue of *The Mockingbird* suggests a nexus of the vital consumer economy, the essence of the rustic places still extant, and the memory of those wild places lost.

This year readers from the M.A. program in English came together to help select finalists for the four submission categories. No reader sat on a board if they submitted work to that board's category. I want to thank my readers who include Tiffany Brown, Emily Smith, Natasha Snyder, Catherine Pritchard Childress, Josh Davis, Sara West, and Robert Kottage.

An accomplished judge for each category chose the winner of The Mockingbird Prize. I want to provide a special thanks to the judges who gladly volunteered their time and experience. The judges are M. M. Buckner for fiction, Scott Finn for non-fiction, David Wohl for drama, and Clay Matthews for poetry. Short biographies can be found on the last page of this issue.

I also want to extend thanks to Dr. Thomas Alan Holmes, Dr. Jesse Graves, and the Department of Literature and Language. Without their reliable support, this project would have been impossible.

Visual Flight Rules

Sara Sutterfield Winn

I saw it dart—a fat, brown arrow
the size of my palm—
out low over the asphalt, going in
for some landed insect or
on a dare—wind bright
and sharp through skin-pale
pines and skimming
the phlox, the wild parsnip,
the thundering race of steel wilderness
setting some sweet joy in its blood and
fueling the wings.

(Cultivating in partnership
the broken bellies of deer
and the cracked bones of night animals.)

Anyway, it died,
the sparrow.

Its still breast lifted
in the air current over the car
and dropped, like
a stone buffered,
feathers askew
and mouth open.

I heard it for miles,
the engine gunning beneath my feet,
wind through sunlight and straw grass:
The fall of that perfect craft—
sinew and air; the sound it made in my ribs
when it died, fever and wake
of its passing through me, the folding in—
mater dolorosa,
and hot gravel
beneath the tire.



Housewife's Howl

Catherine Pritchard Childress

I watched the strongest woman I'd known crumbled by convention. Exhausted cotton shift dragging down narrow, hardwood stairs at rooster-crow to satisfy a hungry family. Coal-eyed babies draining her clean as the patterned linoleum she mopped in the moonlight. Submitting, per the instruction of The Apostle Paul, to a head-of-household husband, whose heart was filled with love for her and with arteries wasted by the goldflake biscuits and sausage gravy he demanded, even when he knew it would kill him. Staggering her with the burden of children, checkbook, and chopped wood that wouldn't burn if it was too green, too wet, or from a locust tree. Lessons a city-coddled girl had no use for meant survival in the blue mountain home of a woman, who bared her soul to a long-haul trucker when she jumped from her Daddy's window, bound for York, South Carolina, and a marriage license, who poured powdered formula for the babies and poured pints of liquor down the drain every time he promised to quit, who praised the Lord when he found Jesus and faithfully followed, three babies in tow, to build a church and a life, to be a pastor's wife, who gave to the poorer, who fell on her knees to pray for the lost, witness to backsliders, visit the sick, who gave up her dream of healing animals only to lose the husband whose heart she couldn't heal. Spent her life serving others, serving meals, washing clothes and smart-mouths with soap, cleaning up our house and our acts. Teaching accidental lessons to a daughter bound to put right the heart of this woman she hoped never to become.



Order Up

Victoria L. Vanderveer

She moves slowly
around a bustling kitchen,
taking orders that spin around and around on a wheel.
“Order up!” she cries,
using a rag to wipe away
the sweat and dirt of the diner.

Her hair is up in a tight bun.
Her hands are chapped and burned from heat and oil.
She is decorated by golden pins,
praising her for a good work ethic,
happy customers,
five years of service.

She has served God knows how many people,
balancing steaks and potatoes and pancakes
like a tightrope walker spinning plates.

It is her secret,
a tiny one, hidden inside.
Every order these days becomes
more and more important.
Her boss praises her and says,
“If you keep this up, you’ll be a manager soon.”

She doesn’t want to be a manager.
She wants to sit.
Exhausted, she leans back against the counter,
one hand on her lower back,
another on her ever-growing stomach.

Her secret she hides

by tying her apron looser,
by saying that she gained weight over the holidays
and needs a different-sized skirt.

Her secret is a baby girl,
and silently she prays the girl-child will never
have to work in a grungy diner
to make a semi-decent life for herself.

“Order up!”
she will hear the doctor say soon.
And out will come the blessing
she has prayed for.

But for now, she must balance
like a tightrope walker
carrying plates of food
to customers who see her as a servant
and leave tiny tips
that couldn't feed a mouse,
let alone a woman carrying
a miracle.



Our Own

Ashley Fox

I grew up on a small farm on Buttermilk Road,
named for the hours, poured into days, thick but rich.
Our house, strong as my grandfather's hands,
stands on a hillside facing the lake, reflecting its warmth.

My father makes a daily sacrifice to the land,
tending the lawn with meticulous care,
leaving not a weed uncut that could scrape
the pale legs of the innocent children.

Cast outside in the evening,
while my Mamaw prepared each nourishing feast,
I turned the forest into my playground,
battling the creatures for control.

The trees were my jungle gym,
as I climbed, hand over hand,
as far as my childish arms could reach
before my father shouted, "Come down before you fall!"

I found my refuge while fleeing from the fire-red glow
of the sun, into the veil of pine trees surrounding sinking land.
Hidden in the shadows were trees, long dead and forgotten,
where the air is too damp for a spark to ignite.

The limbs reached toward me from every direction, inviting me inside.

I crawled into its depths and found a hollow paradise,
resonating with the song of the cicadas' breath,
and illuminating with fireflies not yet escaped.
I cut my knee on a jagged rock.

My blood mixed with the soil.



A Belizean Folktale: The Misery of Margarita

Therese L. Castaneda

In the 1900s, many strange happenings occurred in Orange Walk Town. The following story tells about one of these happenings.

Orange Walk was not developed as it is today. There were many thatched houses, and most of the people were very poor. However, poverty did not stop love.

It so happened that a young girl, Margarita, fell in love with a young man, Antonio. The couple got married after about a year and a half of courting.

Everything went well during their first year of marriage. Margarita gave birth to a pair of handsome twin boys. Antonio was the happiest man in Orange Walk. However, that happiness was short lived.

There is a Kriol saying: “*Di devl no di sleep.*”¹ And so it was. Ill fortune came to the couple in the form they least expected—friendship.

The area where they lived was some distance away from the center of town. Their house was near the New River. During the day, the house was very quiet. Although Margarita had two sons to take care of, she felt lonely. She lacked female company. Loneliness engulfed her especially when Antonio went to work at his *milpa*² for the entire day.

It so happened that two women came to live next door. No one in Orange Walk knew who they were or where they had come from. Margarita immediately made friends with them. She was eager for female company and chatter. Alas! These women were bad beings to call friends.

They were ‘*Oal Hags*’³ who practiced obeah and had dealings with the devil. Their main delight was to corrupt. They cast a spell on Margarita.

¹ “The devil is not sleeping.”

² A small field where crops for personal use are grown.

³ Old hags or witches.

When Antonio arrived home late from his *milpa*, Margarita would shower him with kisses. Now, she became cold and withdrawn. Antonio noticed that his wife looked extremely pale. Fearing for her health, he consulted with some of the elders. They stated that it was probably fatigue from taking care of their two boys. Antonio calmed down a bit. Margarita, on the other hand, got thinner and paler. Antonio consulted with some of his relatives again. Not one of them could name her illness.

One day, Antonio went for a walk with his wife and children. An elderly woman noticed Margarita and wisdom gleamed in her eyes.

As Antonio was going to his *milpa* the next day, the elderly woman approached him.

*“Senor, su esposa esta en peligro. Algo malo esta pasando. Si quieres salvar a su esposa, vas a hacer lo que te digo.”*⁴

The woman told Antonio to spy on his wife. She advised him not to drink anything that Margarita mixed for him at teatime. Antonio was worried as he planted and chopped at his *milpa*. Time definitely went by too slowly for him.

Antonio went home. Margarita gave him his supper. *“Amor aqui esta su café.”*

*“Gracias esposa,”*⁵ replied Antonio.

As soon as Margarita’s back was turned, he threw the coffee out of the window.

Pretending to be sleepy, Antonio yawned loudly and went to bed. He lay still as if he was asleep. Margarita climbed into bed. Antonio lay awake for a long while. He was on the verge of dozing off when his wife moved.

Margarita got up and glanced quickly at her husband. Assuring herself that he was asleep, she hurriedly dressed. Antonio half opened his eyes and saw his wife slipping out of the room. To his amazement, she wore a black dress, black shoes, and a black veil that covered her head.

Antonio jumped out of bed. After dressing quickly, he flew outside. He was just in time to see his wife and her two new friends disappearing down the road. From Riverside Street, they turned into Cemetery Street. Antonio followed at safe distance wondering where on earth his wife could be going.

The women walked quickly. Arriving at the cemetery, they glanced around furtively and slipped through the entrance. Antonio followed. He hid behind a tombstone.

The three women formed a circle and began chanting. Antonio heard something

⁴ *“Sir, your wife is in danger. Something bad is happening. If you want to save your wife, you’ve got to do what I tell you.”*

⁵ *“Here is your coffee my love.” “Thank you, wife.”*

like: “*Skinny, skinny kom off fram mee!*”⁶

There was a clap of thunder. Antonio blinked his eyes. No! It could not be! But it was.

His wife and the two other women were transformed into three black horses. They snorted and pawed the ground crazily. Then, as if by signal, they rushed to a newly covered grave. Earth flew as the horses dug. Finally, reaching a coffin, they broke it open with their hooves.

“*Dios mio!*”⁷ was all that Antonio could say. The horses gobbled up the corpse.

After satisfying their stomachs, they dashed maddeningly from the cemetery. Galloping fiercely up and down the streets in town, they destroyed anything in their path. Some people inside their homes heard them. “*Son los caballos del Diablo!*”⁸ they proclaimed. No one was inquisitive to go outside.

At the cemetery, Antonio was a wreck. He threw up until he was weak. Trembling all over, he hurried home as quickly as his legs could carry him. He crawled into bed and waited fearfully for his wife. Brave men would have probably disappeared in a situation like this. But not Antonio. He thought of his children. On the other hand, perhaps he was a man of faith and did not give up easily. Antonio thought that he had had a nightmare. But no. Margarita arrived home at the first stir of dawn. She went to sleep with their children.

Later in the morning, Antonio took one look at his wife’s pale face and knew that it was trouble. He decided to seek help immediately. Antonio visited the elderly woman who had advised him to spy on Margarita. She told him what to do.

The following evening, Margarita again gave her husband his coffee. He threw it away and pretended to be sleepy. Antonio went to bed. Around 11:30, he heard his wife dressing. She left. Antonio got out of bed. He went into the kitchen and took a bag before following her.

At the cemetery, he hid behind a tombstone. The women performed a ritual similar to the one the night before. Once transformed into horses, they galloped away. They left something behind. Antonio knew what it was. He came out of his hiding place and went toward three heaps lying on the ground. Stooping to inspect them, he stared spellbound. They were human skins of the women. He stared and stared. Remembering what he had to do, Antonio removed his wife’s skin from the heap.

⁶ “*Skinny, skinny come off me.*”

⁷ “*My God!*”

⁸ “*They are the horses of the devil!*”

Opening the bag he had brought, he emptied a white substance on the skin. It was salt. Antonio rubbed it on the skin carefully. He then hid behind the tombstone again. It was not long before the three black horses galloped back. They rushed to the heap of skins.

One by one they donned their skins. Two changed back into women. The third one pulled on her skin. She snorted with pain. The skin slipped off. It was that of Antonio's wife. Salt on her human skin burnt her to the core of her soul. She could not change her horse form back to human.

The other two women chanted: "*Skinny, skinny Ai waahnt mi skin.*"⁹ To no avail. Margarita could not change form.

As if by a sign, the sky began to clear. Dawn was approaching. The other two women saw this. They panicked and hurried from the cemetery. No one has seen them again to this day.

As for Margarita, a horse she remained. Street boys saw a beautiful, strong black horse the next day. They chased and caught her. The horse was cruelly beaten and forced to carry loads of firewood. This was her punishment.

Antonio returned home a sad, sad man. He took his wife's skin and stored it in a safe place. As time went by, his wound healed. He remarried and his second wife brought up his children. People asked about his first wife. Antonio told them that she eloped with another man. They accepted this, and Orange Walk forgot about Margarita.

Years went by. One day, an old woman noticed a strange looking black nag. She looked into the horse's eyes. The old woman was a *curandera*.¹⁰ She realized that the horse was a human. After making inquiries around town, she put the pieces of the puzzle together. The horse was the missing Margarita.

The woman went to speak with Antonio. She pleaded for the skin. Antonio gave it to her but said that he did not want to set eyes on Margarita again.

The old woman went home. She cured the skin. After buying the old horse for fifty cents, she took it home. There, with the help of her herbs and magic, the horse was transformed.

Margarita was a pitiful sight. She was an old, old woman. Her hair was white and her skin was very wrinkled. She was hunched over due to the many beatings she had received as a horse. After leaving the *curandera's* house, she wandered around the town.

⁹ "*Skinny, skinny, I want my skin.*"

¹⁰ *A bush doctor who practices white magic.*

Without realizing it, she arrived at the house where she had lived with Antonio. The desire to see her sons was very strong, so she went to ask for food.

The door was opened by no other than Antonio. However, he did not recognize the woman. Being a kind person, he gave her food and offered her a job as a babysitter for his grandchildren.

Margarita accepted the offer. She was content to be there. After years of torture, she was finally able to be near her sons and grandchildren.

She remained silent about her life until the day she died. She took her dark secret to the tomb with her.



Interview with Rita Sims Quillen

Sam Campbell

Johnson City, Tennessee, Summer 2011 via email

SC: Ms. Quillen, first of all I would sincerely like to thank you for allowing me this opportunity to talk with you. I heard you read at ETSU back in April and have loved your poems ever since, so I'm glad I got your autograph when I had the chance. I've recently been reading your critical essays as well—thanks to Dr. Graves for providing the book—and I would like to ask you a few questions about your work.

RSQ: Sam—I'm so glad to meet you and I'm grateful and pleased that you're interested in my work. And I'd prefer you just call me Rita.

SC: At what age did you start writing poetry?

RSQ: I can't remember if I played around writing poetry as a child; I do remember writing funny new lyrics for a song for our glee club concert when I was in about 6th grade maybe and everyone was very impressed. I was proud! I had always wanted to be a writer but I meant only prose. Poets were some type of rare mythical creatures—not something I could possibly be.

SC: What initially led you to express yourself through poetry?

RSQ: I sent some fiction off to the Virginia Highlands writing contest in Abingdon one year and Lee Smith was the judge. She took the time to write on my story about how talented I was, what a gift I had with language; she said that my “story” wasn't really a story; it was just a vivid vignette and that I was obviously a poet. I stared at that forever. I had never even considered such a possibility, but it did explain the struggle I had with trying to write fiction. So after that I began to really study poetry and try to write it. After my fellow students at ETSU heard me read some of it, they really, really encouraged me and as they say, the rest is history. I was fortunate to begin to get published and place in contests almost right away—so I was hooked.

SC: What force keeps you writing now?

RSQ: Unfortunately, I'm not writing at all right now—you ask what “force” keeps me writing—the answer is nothing, I guess. If you read back through the biographies of many writers, you often find that they “write themselves out” and their later years become creatively sterile. In other cases, they only get more productive as their lives go on. So who knows—it's possible I'll never write again. It's also possible I have my best work ahead of me, but for now—I'm done. The things I want to write about would be painful and/or hurtful to some folks, or might be misunderstood, so until I get motivated toward something positive I'd just as soon be quiet.

SC: Finding information about you is difficult, but what little information is available usually speaks along the same lines: “Rita Sims Quillen is a fifth generation native of Scott County Virginia, in southwest Virginia, and is currently an assistant professor at Mountain Empire Community College.” If you don't mind, could you elaborate? What events led you to where you are now?

RSQ: Oh my—well, I grew up the oldest of four in a world that was much more free than today—I could ride my bike for miles, especially up to the Holston River to swim with a bunch of friends. Parents would never let their kids do that nowadays! We'd hike for miles up in the woods by ourselves, too. I was a very good student and loved to read and write, even then. I asked for, and got, a typewriter for Christmas when I was in elementary school and taught myself to type. Even then I told people I was going to be a writer when I grew up, and people believed me, especially my teachers. I read almost every book in the little one-room library at Hiltons Elementary school before I left there in 8th grade; biographies and histories were my favorite. By the time I was grown and graduated from high school, writing seemed like a silly childhood dream. I enrolled in secretarial classes and left college at Clinch Valley College (now UVA Wise) after only one year, got married and got a job at “the Eastman.” After three miserable years there and with the encouragement of my husband, who knew I wasn't doing what I was meant to do, I returned to college – first at Mountain Empire Community College and then ETSU, and finished and wound up with a degree in English and some publications before I finished my undergrad degree.

SC: You said you didn't always see yourself as a poet, but always saw yourself as a writer. As a child, what did you want to write when you grew up?

RSQ: I remember telling people in elementary school that I was going to be a writer when I grew up, but never a poet. I didn't read that much poetry. I

liked history and biographies. I thought I would be a journalist. I worked for a newspaper while I was in college and found out I hated it—the deadlines, banal topics, short sentences. I'm so thankful I figured that out and changed direction into teaching and writing creatively.

SC: Most writers have a writing ritual—something they do each time they write. I know that you aren't writing anything at the moment, but when you do write, do you have a specific set of things that you do to be able to write your best?

RSQ: When I'm writing I always write first thing in the morning. That's about my only ritual. I find that if I let my day start out in any other direction, I usually fail to get any writing done at all.

SC: What style of poetry do you prefer, and why?

RSQ: You'll notice that most of my work is free verse. I have occasionally used blank verse and tried forms such as the pantoum and sonnet. But the key word is 'free' in free verse, and I need that flexibility in order to be myself when I'm on the page.

SC: What kind of work do you find yourself drawn to reading?

RSQ: I love to read poetry—there's so much wonderful poetry out now just from right here in the Appalachian Region I can't even get time to read it all. Some of my favorite poets are Michael Chitwood, Robert Morgan, Ron Rash, Leatha Kendrick, Linda Parsons Marion and Jeff Daniel Marion, Dana Wildsmith, Fred Chappell, Maurice Manning, Michael McFee, Kathryn Stripling Byer, and Jane Hicks, to just name a very few.

SC: I think the titles of your books of poetry are intriguing, especially *October Dusk* and *Her Secret Dream*. Are there any stories behind the titles or why you chose them?

RSQ: The titles of my books are from poems obviously. "October Dusk" is a love poem and a nature poem and it just suited the tone and subject of that book perfectly. "Her Secret Dream" was a poem about one of my grandmothers, but I thought the title was just perfect given the wonderful cover art by D. R. Mullins—the woman, her heart, and the tree all intertwined with the very impressionistic rendering of country life—just perfect for a book bringing together poems from across my entire writing life.

SC: You're really interesting to learn about. I'm still reading your essays and I'm trying to find more of your poems to read. I found one online called "What Probably Made Me a Writer," and I really enjoyed that one. Do you have any favorites of the poems that you have written? I read an interview you had

with Don Johnson that's in the book *Her Words*, and you said that "Deathbed Dreams" always sends chills down your spine. Would you say it's one of your favorites?

RSQ: I always say picking a favorite poem is like picking a favorite child – it's hard!! There are poems I'm more proud of, I guess, because they said something new for me or broke new ground in some way. I'm very proud of "Deathbed Dreams"—the first pantoum I ever wrote. I love the imagery of that poem. And "Sunday School Lesson" was an epiphany for me in the miraculous way it came and also in the insight into how my son was going to be different from my daughter in so many ways.

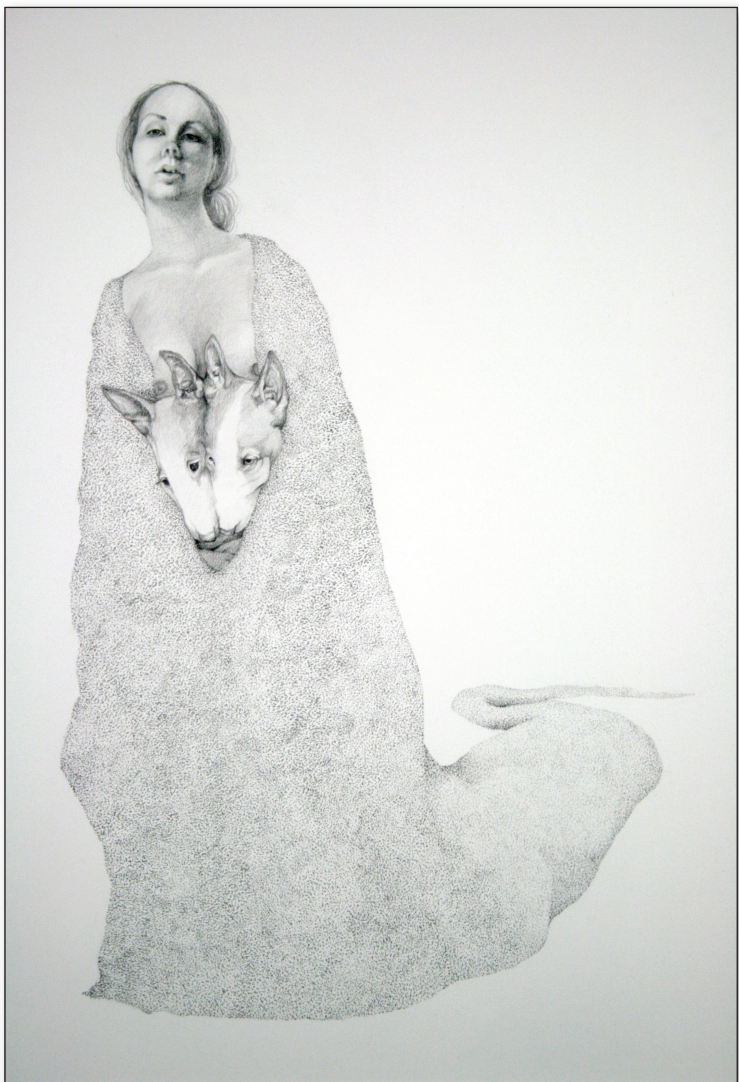
SC: Speaking of your children, what are they doing now?

RSQ: My son is a student at ETSU in Theater (if you saw *Dirty Disney* or any of the other plays by the Patchwork players this spring, he's the good-looking tall redheaded kid). He still loves video games, but I can't remember the names—I'm sorry—I'm not into that stuff at all. My daughter is the director of the Student Center at Washington and Lee University at Lexington, Virginia. Her husband is a graphic designer there. She doesn't write anymore—she went totally away from all that and wound up doing her master's work in art curatorship and museum management—a strange leap for English major!



Fever Dream, Or Carrying the Twins

Best of Show



Stephanie Streeter • Graphite on arches

What Are You Serving For

Faculty Choice Award / Merit Awards: Sculpture



*Mary Molony • Gas mask, clay,
illustration board, paper, acrylic paint*

Uncle Sam

Foundations Award 2D



Spenser Brenner • Mixed media

Bartonian Wormhole

Foundations Award 3D



Chris Witkowski, Kesha Miller & Hannah Irvin • Cardboard

Stoneware Ash Bowl

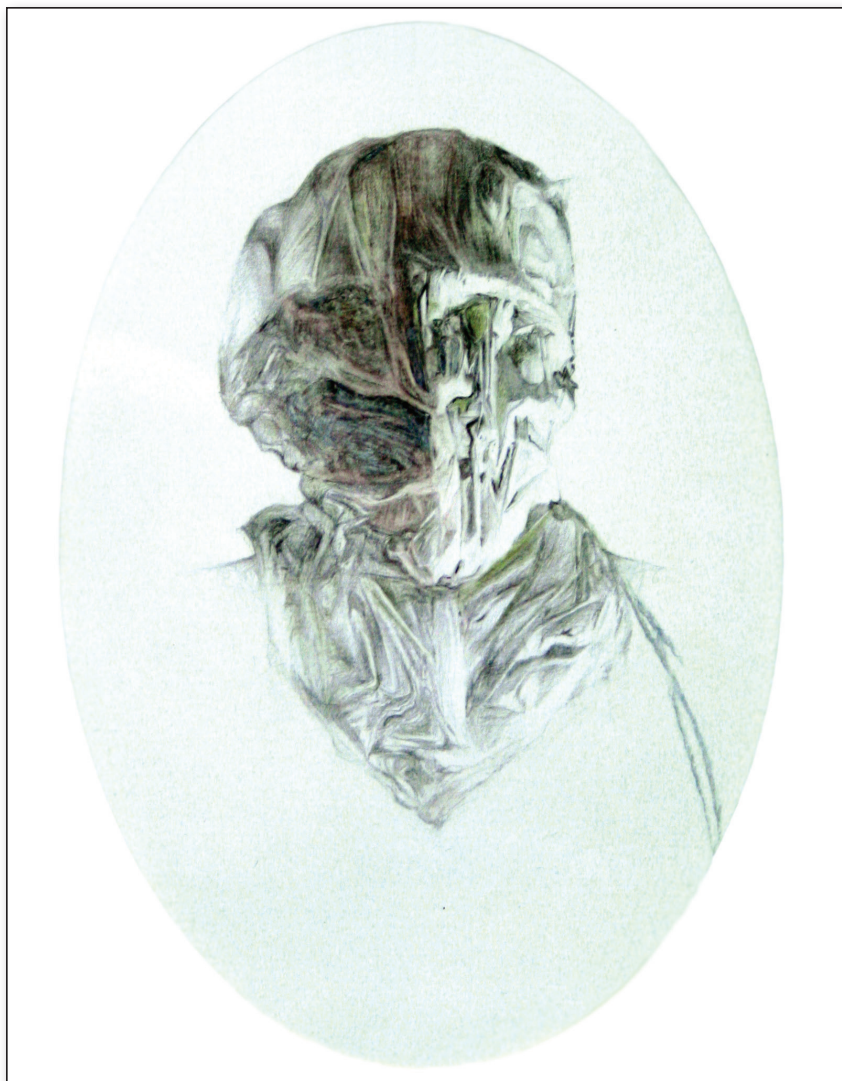
Merit Awards: Ceramics



*Becca Irvin • Soda-fired stoneware
with porcelain slip trailing, wheel thrown*

Hang Me, Oh Hang Me

Merit Awards: Drawing



Storm Ketron • Silverpoint

Untitled (Series)

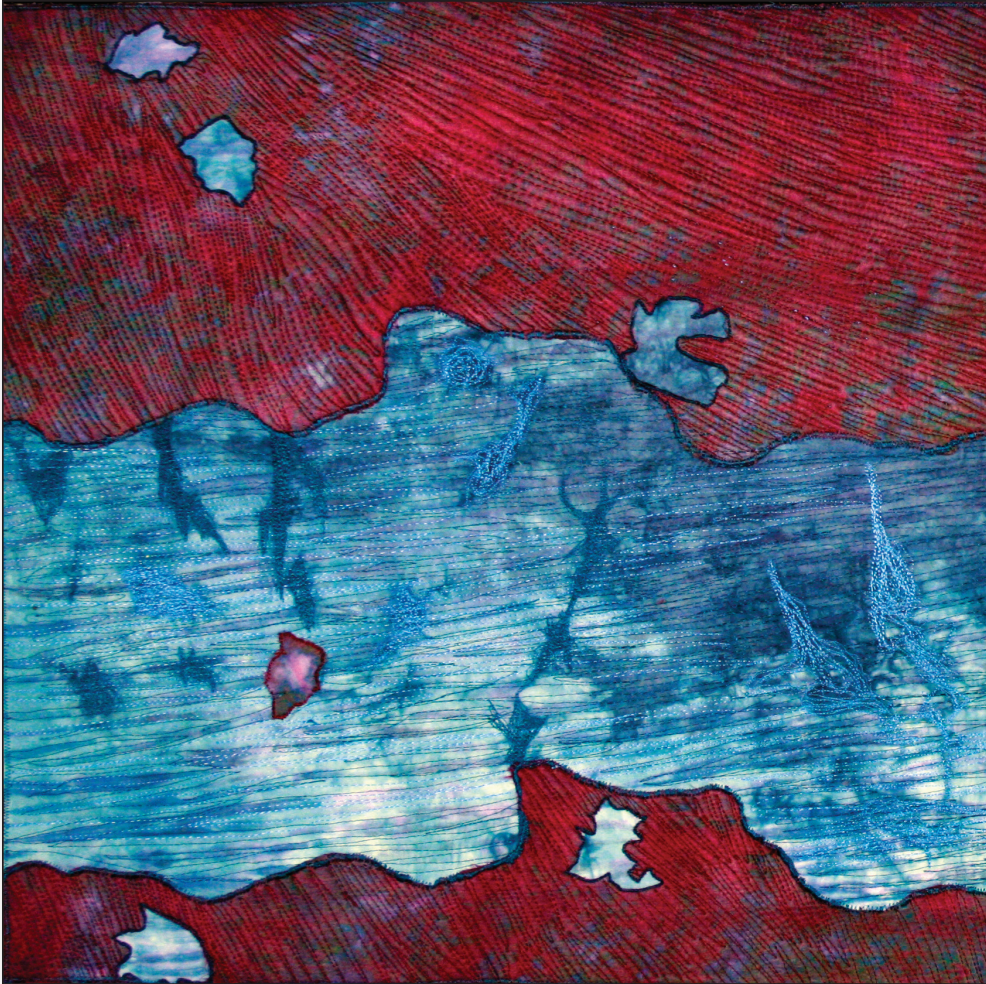
Merit Awards: Graphic Design

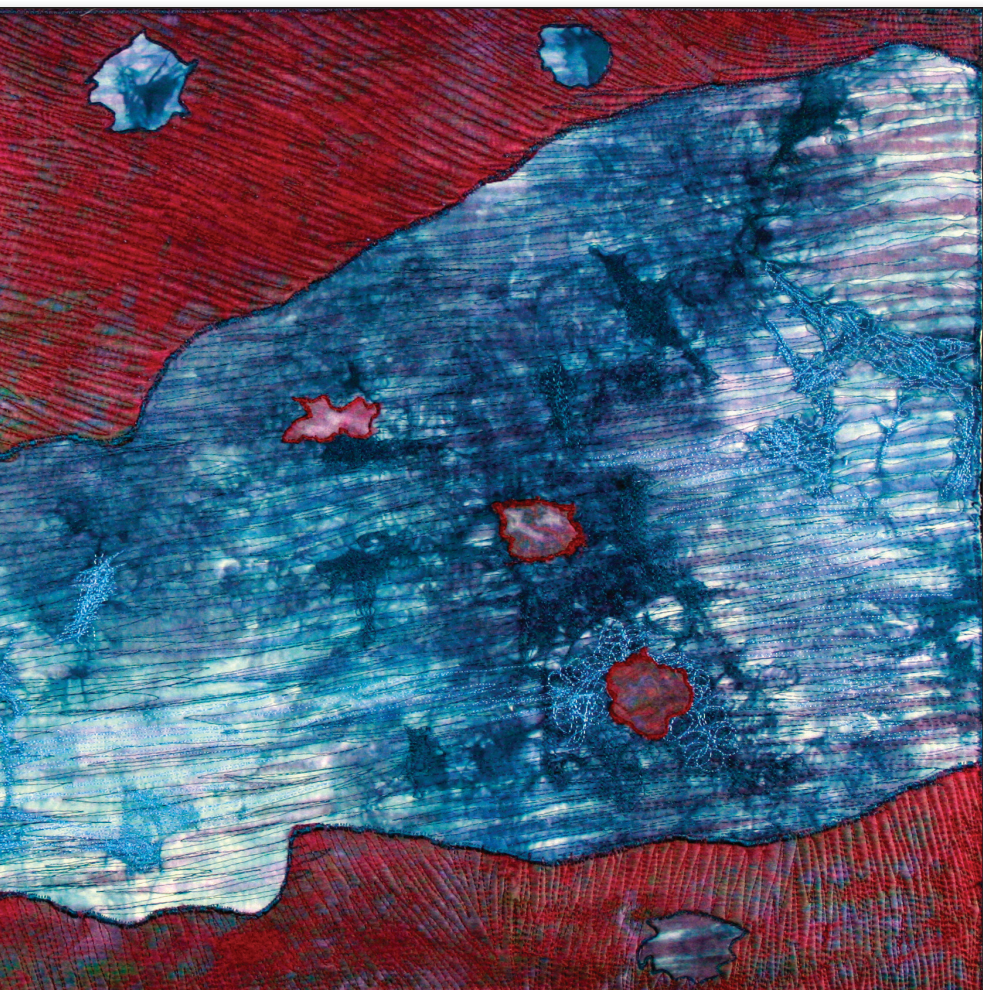


Joseph Riner • Print

Waterway

Merit Awards: Fibers

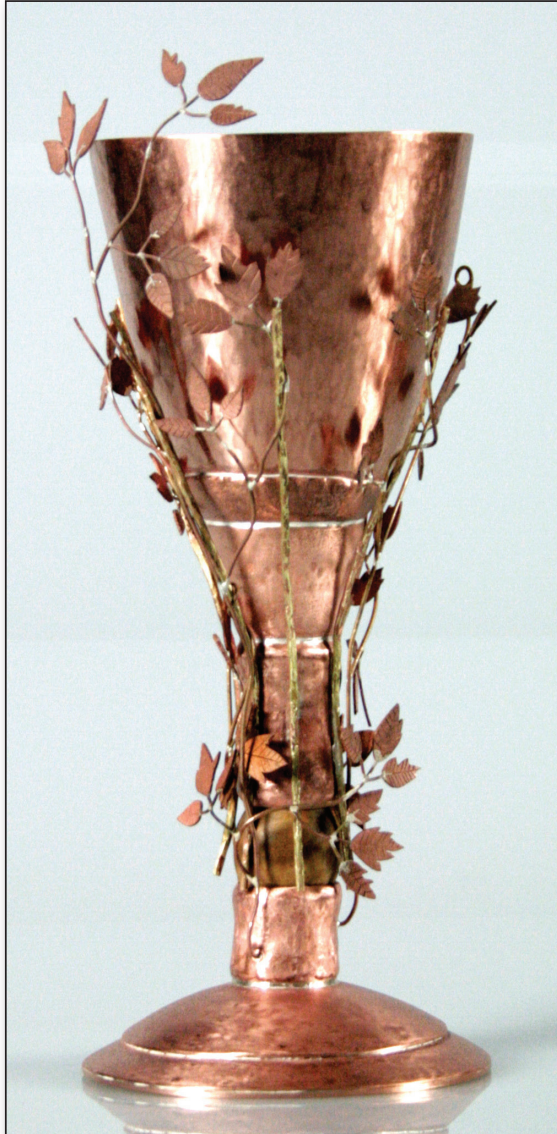




Kimberley Leland • Silk, rayon, dyes, cotton, cotton batting, thread

Rappacini's Goblet

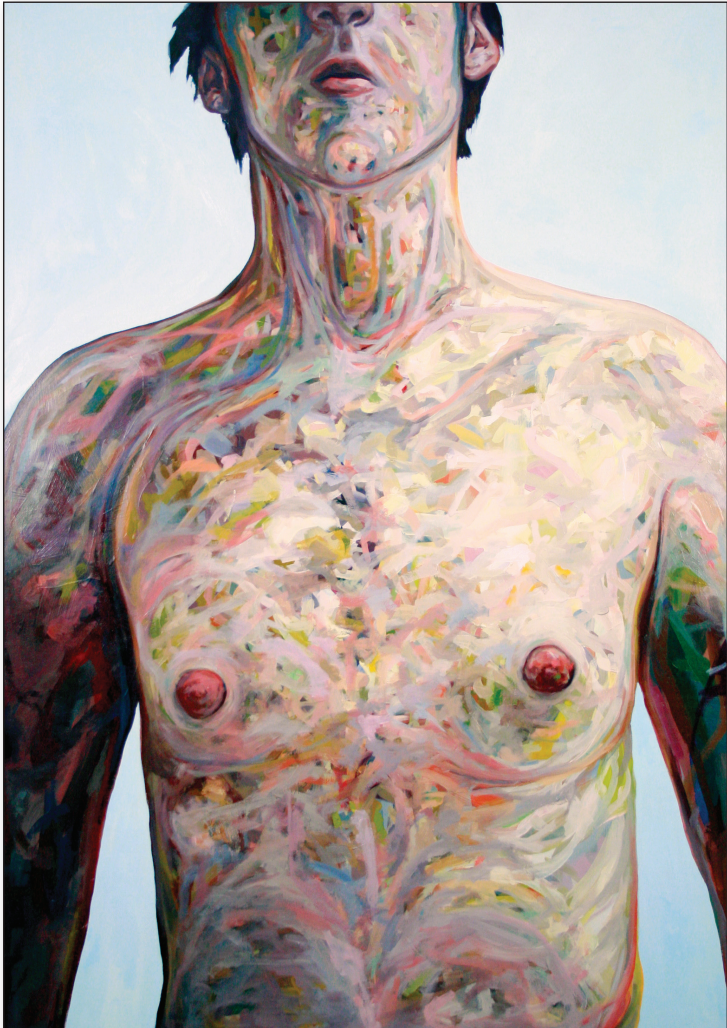
Merit Awards: Jewelry and Metalsmith



Frances A. Borgers • Metal, copper, brass with myrtle wood bead

Body No. 1: I Simply Wanted the Physique of a Swimmer and Didn't Really Care for Swimming

Merit Awards: Painting



Kyle Blauw • Oil on panel

Sunset

Merit Awards: Photography



Ashley Hagy • Cyanotype

Juggling

Merit Awards: Printmaking



Jody Mitchell • Litography

A Dance of Cultures: Working with Desert Flowers at the Shakespeare and Friends Renaissance Faire

Charles Hagy

In June of 2010, I spent a weekend working with two belly dancers at a local Renaissance Faire. You may think this sounds fun. I can assure you, it was.

I am a sucker for a pretty face. Add to that face a smooth body sculpted by sensuous undulations, and I will pretty much do anything asked of me. That is how I found myself barreling down US 11 between Kingsport and Rogersville, Tennessee. Beside me was the driver, Alythia Ki, a tall, black-haired woman with a classically beautiful face. Behind me was Indra, an American woman of Middle Eastern descent, with a slim build and exotic features. These two women formed the belly dance troupe Desert Flowers. I was along as part of one act, as well as their strong man (because I carried all of their stuff) and contortionist (because I bent over backwards for them).

Earlier in the year of our Lord, 2010, Indra had approached Alythia and me with an idea. She asked if we wanted to perform as a group at the Shakespeare and Friends Renaissance Festival in Rogersville, Tennessee. Alythia agreed because she loved belly dance, and I agreed because it is hard to say no to two beautiful, scantily clad women.

The Shakespeare and Friends Renaissance Faire started as a way of bringing Shakespeare to the local schools. Since its inception at the dawn of the 21st century, it had blossomed and now attracted performers and vendors from all across the southeast. Many of the street performers had been there since the beginning in the year 2000. Its goal was to create an immersive atmosphere of 16th-Century Britain through its actors, vendors, and performances.

The three of us had experience working at that faire as street-performers who were hired to create the ambience, interact with the patrons, and maintain the faire grounds. However, this year we were hired as a dance troupe, which was an entirely new experience for us. As street-performers, we were responsible for helping the faire in every way we could. As a troupe, we were only responsible for our show.

We were excited. We would receive better pay than we had and were not subject to the tyrannical rules that the street-performers must abide, such as never breaking character, always speaking with a British accent, being nice to the patrons, and so on. Also, we would receive tips and did not have to wear the sixteenth-century British clothing required of the street-performers. Indeed, Alythia and Indra were encouraged to wear far less.

Our Arrival

We arrived Friday afternoon and checked into the local Holiday Inn. Alythia and Indra went to the room to practice while I unpacked the car. I finished, except for one box. Inside it slept the one thing in this world that truly terrifies me. Part of Alythia's performance was to dance with Sa-hai-ee, a two-and-a-half foot long, brown and black spotted Python regius, or Ball Python. Ever since I was a child, I have had a terrible phobia of snakes. I don't even like to see pictures or film of them, let alone be eye-to-eye with one.

His aquarium was the only thing left to bring. The heat and excitement had aroused him, so, rather than resting quietly, he was up and searching about. Three times I tried to steel my nerves to grab the cage, but each time the feeling of "OH MY GOD IT'S A FREAKING SNAKE!" rose up in me. Finally, I swallowed my pride and had to get Alythia to come down and bring the snake to the room.

We spent the rest of Friday checking costumes, making repairs, trying out makeup designs, and doing a frantic search through Wal-Mart for glitter. We were fortunate, as the fairies had not ransacked the glitter aisle completely. To ensure the spray glitter worked, the women doused me in it. After stocking up and my nearly constant complaining, we were prepared for the next day.

And So It Begins!

Saturday morning dawned too early for us. We awoke at seven in the morning and by eight-thirty were finally ready to begin our first day at the faire. We left the Holiday Inn a little before nine.

The air was already steamy hot when we arrived at Crockett Springs Park, where the faire is held annually. The dew on the ground mixed with the moisture in the

air to create a stifling, humid mixture that stole one's breath and covered everything with a greasy sheen. The smell of coffee from every tent on the grounds was overpowering. People who had chosen to camp at the faire site were in various stages of dress. There was a veritable sea of people wearing Black Sabbath t-shirts mixed with woolen breeches and sword belts, Elizabethan courtiers wearing trucker caps labeled with lewd jokes, and self-conscious teenagers in ill-fitting rayon costumes. There were arguments, jokes, and cries of "My sword! Who has seen my sword?"

Somehow, precisely at 9:30 AM, the chaos magically stopped, and Queen Elizabeth I paraded through the grounds, accompanied by her entourage and followed by musicians playing drums, bagpipes, flutes, and lutes. Merchants in period clothing bowed, servants averted their eyes, and a family of trolls began screaming, "God Shave the Queen!"

Desert Flowers was scheduled for 10 AM. In the thirty minutes between opening and performance, we warmed up—the women through dancing and I through practicing my snappy one-liners. When I was finished, I left to procure water for the group. When I returned, I found a crowd around the dancers. The women had been warming up for less than twenty minutes and had already made ten dollars in tips. I told the crowd that I would dance for them. Someone gave me fifty cents to keep my shirt on.

The first performance went well. I was their announcer, sound-man, 2nd drummer, generally in charge of carousing. Alythia's snake dance was a big hit with the audience. Sa-hai-ee danced well with her, and I could see that her performance had aroused the curiosity of many of the bystanders. Their performance consisted of three choreographed dances and a section to teach a few belly dance movements. The whole performance was about forty minutes.

We had two more performances that day and three the next, mixed in with impromptu performances wherever a crowd gathered. We shared the stage with a fire-eater who wore a codpiece of an unusually large size, a storyteller, a Celtic string band, and a magician. In addition to these acts were the street performers who created original characters or acted like someone who actually lived during this time period (such as Sir Francis Drake and Queen Elizabeth I). This, however, is not theater on the stage. This is fully immersive and interactive.

As beautiful and fair as the weather was on Saturday, Sunday proved the opposite. The day was cooler, and the wind began blowing dark clouds in from the west. The talk of the faire was whether it would rain or pass. Would the faire finish at six, or would a sudden tempest sweep away the tents, performers,

and patrons? Desert Flowers managed to go through two performances, but an hour before their finale the first drops of rain began. We hid Sa-hai-ee's cage in a vendor's booth (with the vendor's permission, of course), and watched as the droplets grew in size and quantity. In the next moment, the heavens opened, and a torrent drenched the faire.

Sa-hai-ee's cage had been moved to a precarious perch in a rush to save merchandise. The tent cover began to swell inwards from the water it had collected. A person of questionable intellectual prowess in the booth unleashed the water and the torrent fell towards the snake. I grabbed the aquarium, covered the top, and took the brunt of the water. After a thorough addressing of the stupidity of the person's actions, I gave the glass case to Alythia, who was happy that her friend was safe.

The patrons took refuge in the King's Tent. The pavilion could hold fifty people comfortably. There were probably about eighty bedraggled people or so, trying to get warm. The Celtic band that had played through the weekend hid in there as well, protecting their instruments. At one point, someone in the crowd shouted, "We have a band and dancers, how about some entertainment?"

The impromptu weaving of Celtic and Middle Eastern culture in a small town in East Tennessee was spectacular. Alythia and Indra suited their moves to the music, while the musicians smoothed their melodies from jaunty Irish jigs to a slow and sensual mixture. Alythia and Sa-hai-ee did a dance dedicated "to the spirits of the water and the air."

When the rain finally stopped and the sky cleared, we packed up our gear and prepared to return to the workaday world outside. Alythia asked me to move Sa-hai-ee from the tent to the car. I responded, "Not bloody likely! I saved his life once today, he can move himself to the car!"

Her response: "Yes, and he appreciates you for it. Now get the snake, and let's get out of here."



Traps

Rachel Bates

Our summer.
A million people think it was their summer.
Really it was just one summer.
The one that crosses our minds and makes our brains
sticky with the sappy romance that wasn't sappy
and sticky with the memories we can't remember fully
or forget completely.
Like flies stuck to sugar paper
on top of the mess hall at camp,
 unwanted
 blemishes.



Bobbi Rai's Concrete Sculptures

Katherine D. Zimmerman

Tires crunching on gravel break
the silence of the still, still garden.

Tucked beneath drooping hyacinths,
Persian Kitten (\$8.99) stares up at Nothing (free)
hidden in motionless blossoms.
Shorthair Cat (\$13.99), mildewed gray,
crouches, stony attention fixed
across the pebbled path on
reclining Lazy Rabbit (\$9.99).
Indifferent, its ears droop at half-mast,
left paw arrested mid-swipe
across a gray nose.

Caught mid scamper, Cute Squirrel (\$12.99)
balances on the rounded rim
of Fine Grecian Urn (\$49.99), curved tail
complementing fern-like scrollwork
below. Nearby, Large Butterfly's (\$10.99),
oversized wings sprawl over
Small Butterfly (\$7.99) with primly
folded wings, both resting and resting
on Tall Roman Column (\$34.99).

Littered with silent Songbirds (\$3.99),
Standing Doe (\$39.99), and Standing Buck (\$44.99)
loom over the central figures,
painted black eyes staring and staring at
a toad-less Pink Mushroom Toad House (\$11.99)
tucked against Kneeling Jesus' knee (Close-Out Sale \$19.99).
His steadfast gaze lifts heavenward,
weathered and worn hands
clasped in endless supplication
to Large Purple Gazing Sphere (\$55.99).

From his station near the gate,
Happy Garden Gnome (\$29.99) surveys
toad house, birds, urns
columns, cats, and Jesus...
and tires crunching, crunching
on the gray gravel parking lot.



Bob and Carson on a Couch

Josh Holley

Lights Up

Silence.

A man, Bob, is sitting on his couch staring straight into the audience. After roughly twenty seconds another man, Carson, enters and sits next to him. Carson exchanges glances at Bob and what he is staring at. This goes on for roughly a minute.

Bob: I can't believe you just didn't pay the cable bill. I gave you the money, didn't I?

Carson: Yeah...

Bob: And...? What did you do with it?

(Silence)

Bob: Carson...What did you do with my money?

(Silence)

Bob: CARSON!

Carson: Okay, okay. I, uh, invested it.

Bob: You invested it? Invested it in what?

Carson: Promise me you won't get mad at me and fly off the handle.

Bob: No. I most certainly will not promise that because I'm 99,999% sure that I am going to get mad at you!

(Pause)

Carson: Fair enough.

Bob: TELL ME!

Carson: Okay. Well, it's kinda a long story.

Bob: Considering the fact that all I had planned today was sitting on my ass watching T.V. and YOU decided to invest my money instead of paying the cable bill, I now have a pretty clear schedule. I have nothing but time for a story.

Carson: Oh! Well, okay! I know this guy, and if I can be blunt with you, he's kind of a moron...

Bob: *(Stare)*

Carson: But he's got great ideas! Like this one time we were—*(cut off by Bob)*

Bob: Just skip to the part where you lose my money!

Carson: Okay, okay, okay. Geez! He got an offer to help start up a brand-new product.

Bob: I know I'm going to regret this, but what is this new product?

Carson: Okay, bear with me. So imagine you wake up late and now you're going to be running late for work. . . BUT! You don't have coffee yet. So you have to go to Starbucks and it takes forever and then you're late for work, boss gets pissed, BOOM! You're fired! Never again! Now, coming soon, coffee at your house!

Bob: What?

Carson: Coffee at your house!

Bob: What about it?

Carson: That's the product! It's a machine that makes coffee at your house!

Bob: You mean a coffee pot?

Carson: Uh. What?

(Bob gets up and exits SL. Disgruntled noises are heard off stage. Bob re-enters holding a coffee pot.)

Bob: This!

Carson: Wait—that thing makes coffee?

Bob: Yes! What the hell did you think it did?!

Carson: Honestly, I can say that I never gave it a thought.

Bob: You're an idiot.

Carson: Wait—so you're saying that the product already exists?

(Bob shoves coffee pot into Carson's lap.)

Carson: Shit! Poor Jake, he's been bamboozled.

Bob: You fucking idiot! He tricked you! He tricked you out of your money. No—no—correction. He tricked you out of MY money!

Carson: How was I supposed to know? He seemed like a real go-getter! He had honest eyes.

Bob: Honest eyes? What the fuck does that even mean?

(Bob and Carson sit without speaking for a moment.)

Carson: I'm sorry, Bob. Really, I am.

Bob: I know you are, Carson.

Carson: Are you pissed at me?

Bob: No, I'm not pissed at you. I'm a little annoyed, disgruntled, and disappointed.

Carson: But not pissed?

Bob: No.

Carson: Great!

(Another long moment of silence.)

Carson: So what do you want to do?

Bob: I don't know. I really just wanted to relax today and watch TV.

Carson: Wanna rent a movie?

Bob: I hate movies, Carson. You know that. The movie industry isn't worth a damn anymore. If I see one more romantic comedy, I might shoot myself. *(Changes to his idea of a movie voice)* This spring. Experience love. A chance at redemption. Find your soul mate—in the most unlikely of places. It may have been right under your nose all along. *Lovey Dovey Bullshit 2: A Second Chance at Love*. For fuck's sake! It's going to be some stupid-ass attractive male that lives next to some incredibly attractive woman, but for some stupid-ass reason he doesn't realize it, so he treats her like one of the guys. But then she'll start dating some guy, and she'll go to the stupid asshole's apartment and ask him how she looks, and he'll realize he loves her. Then a whole bunch of shit will happen, and then the neighbors will get married. *(Bob makes vomit noise)* Why can't they just make good movies anymore. Like *My Cousin Vinny*. Or *Uncle Buck*.

Carson: I think somebody might be bitter.

Bob: You bet your ass I'm bitter. I want to see good movies, damnit!

Carson: I wasn't talking about the movies, Bob, I was talking about what they represent.

Bob: What the hell are you babbling about?

Carson: You want to be the stupid-ass guy that falls in love with the hott neighbor.

Bob: Have you seen our neighbor? Aside from the fact that she was around before the automobile, she also reeks of cat piss and mothballs.

Carson: I didn't mean, literally, our neighbor. I just meant you want a girl, preferably one born closer to the turn of the century, hott, and with a fairly neutral to sweet smell. Am I right?

Bob: Well—

Carson: I knew it! You are in need of a lady friend! How long has it been, Bob?

Bob: Psht!

Carson: How long, Bob? A month?

(Bob gets very quiet)

Carson: Two?

(Bob shakes head, as to say no, and points up.)

Carson: Three? Four? Five?

(Bob shakes head yes.)

Carson: FIVE MONTHS? JESUS!

Bob: Shut up! Will you be quiet please? I don't think my prospect next door heard you!

Carson: I'm sorry, I just never thought I'd see the day that YOU, of all people, would be on a five-month dry spell!

Bob: What do you mean of all people, ME?

Carson: Are you kidding? We've been friends since the fourth grade! You were the first boy in our class to kiss a girl. In middle school you were the first boy to touch a boob. Ninth grade, first to get to third base, and by the time we graduated you'd slept with or at least fooled around with over half of the female graduating class. College was just a continuation of your hot streak. What happened?

Bob: Do you think if I knew, I'd be in a five-month relationship with my right

hand and a box of Kleenex?

(Carson laughs)

Bob: Don't laugh...

(Carson stops immediately)

Bob: I guess its just—I mean—I'm a grown-ass man, I can't go slumming around in clubs looking for drunk women with vomit in their hair. I just can't. I would like to meet a woman in a quiet place where I can talk to her, get to know her, maybe ask her to dinner. But where in the hell do you even do that?

Carson: You want me to set you up with one of my friends?

Bob: Are you kidding me?

Carson: What?

Bob: I shudder at the thought of the sub-humanoid creature from the mall that you might try to set me up with.

Carson: Oh, come on!

(Bob stops, gives Carson a good look, and contemplates his offer)

Bob: Okay. All right. Think of your top five women.

(Carson takes his time and computes his list of women)

Carson: Okay.

Bob: Okay. Now I'm going to start listing what I consider unsuitable characteristics in a woman. If any of these women possess any of these qualities eliminate them. Deal?

Carson: Deal.

Bob: Okay. Here we go. More than six ear piercings, lip piercings, eye brow piercings, below the belt piercings, if for some reason you know about them, unnatural hair color, abnormally pale skin, adult braces, hairy anything, man hands, adult acne, webbed toes, eating disorders, unusual sleeping patterns, Forrest Whittaker eye, moles, greasy hair, criminal records, lives with mom, sleeps with dad, crazy religion, believes in Santa, or unemployed.

(Carson thinks hard and appears to come to a conclusion)

Bob: Now, do we have a winner?

Carson: What is a Forrest Whitaker eye?

Bob: Are you serious? Have you seen that—Carson! Do we have a reasonable prospect or not?

Carson: I think so, yes.

Bob: Really?

Carson: Yes.

Bob: Do you need the list again?

Carson: No, I think I got it.

Bob: All right! So what's her name? What is she like?

Carson: Her name is Amy. I really think you'll like her. She's about five-foot-five, short blonde hair, really cute face, skinny but in an athletic way, and she's really nice.

Bob: How do you know her?

Carson: Remember when I worked at the bank for like a week, until they fired me over that stupid bullshit?

Bob: You pretended to hold up the bank! But yes, I remember.

Carson: Well, she worked there.

Bob: Steady job. That's a plus.

Carson: You want me to call her up?

Bob: Would you?

Carson: Of course!

(Carson gets out phone and makes phone call)

Carson: Amy? Hey! It's Carson...I'm fine... Listen, you're not seeing anyone are you?... Great! What are you doing later?... Well, would you want to meet up with a friend of mine for dinner? Excellent! Where? Bob, where do you want to take her?

Bob: Schlotzkey's?

Carson: *(to Amy)* Schlotzkey's? Well, who doesn't love Schlotzkey's?... Okay, so eight o'clock? Great! Thanks Amy. Okay, buh-bye.

Bob: So...?

Carson: You've got a date at eight my man!

Bob: Carson, Thank you so much, man!

Carson: So does this make up for that whole coffee pot fiasco?

Bob: Yes! All is forgiven. Shit. What time is it?

Carson: Six-thirty.

Bob: I better get ready. I have to shower and shave and find clean clothes.

Carson: Well hop to it, man!

(Bob gets up and exits SR)

Bob: *(From off-stage)* Uh, what the fuck?! Carson! Why do we not have any water?

Carson: Uh, hmm. Well, it's kinda a long story.

(Black Out)



siren

Sara Sutterfield Winn

do not neglect the ocean floor
with its meaty glowing underbelly
and its unusual fish

down the rock wall, the cliff
crushed with saltwater
the dark and the dark door
alive with radiant fingers,
the worms in the beating mother's
shock-drop-deep heart

the lanternfish, the brilliant
krill – they open their invisible
mouths and choke light up
towards the moon

come with me, fisher's son,
lamp and fine skin, your hands
will make beautiful sounds
against the drum of the cold seeps
and the benthic mud

come come
the sea
the sea

is full of light
and pearls
and mouths



To a friend, who yawned in fall

Maggie Colvett

It was a little airy gasp, a thoughtless yawn,
too quick and sharp to even cross your voice.
You didn't notice, or forgot, and kept on talking.

But the suck of your lungs had siphoned out
the lingering dregs of summer, and I noticed my throat
and the air, which was new and apple-cold.

I saw the edges of your nostrils and your ears
becoming pink, and their pinkness
reddened the reds of the world:

leaves and the bare ground
and that nimbus scarf
assumed their particular reds,

and where you sat
the jacket folded twice against your hips
told me about your body.

I realized then the place between your shoulders
holds all places, and the brackets of your ribs
instruct all things to be so held.

I saw it in the skin around your eyes
and by your mouth, in the creases there,
which are the hems of light.



The Red Skylark

Robert Kottage

In 1980, my father bought a brand new Buick Skylark, red and shiny as a wet lollipop. The interior was all white leather, with bucket seats up front for the adults. Its space-age features included GM's striking, angular X-body architecture; in-glass radio antenna and rear-window defrosters; horizontal sliding locks, rather than vertical button locks, to inhibit burglary; a transversely-mounted engine with front-wheel drive; and a new technology borrowed from the world of auto racing: multi-point fuel injection.

By any age's standards, the Skylark was an unmitigated piece of crap. Do a web search on the phrase "worst cars of all time" and you'll find it—get an image for the full effect. The engine ran loud, the front disc brakes and suspension colluded in the creation of a lunging, bouncing effect on the road. The body looked horrible enough to make the voluptuously-curved convertible Buick Roadmasters of the 1950s roll over in their rusty graveyards. By 1986, GM abandoned its boxlike X-bodies and began drifting back toward the blunted edges of the 70s' Gran Sport, never looking back.

"I'm glad we joined the Buick family," my father used to say, back in 1980. I thought at the time he was quoting from a commercial accidentally, or purposely, but I've since discovered that line originated with him. I've often thought about those words since, the pathos of them—the notion that buying a car could make one a member of some sort of family. The real Buick family—that of David Dunbar Buick—would perhaps have been entertained to drive over our family if they'd encountered us all lying on some desolate Massachusetts back road (and if such an act would not have utterly screwed their already hideous suspensions). And yet the ancient crest of Scotland's Bewick or Buik

clan—the apocryphal red, white and blue triple shield of their coat of arms—rode around everywhere my family went that year, in the form of a hood ornament.

We were a one-car family in the early 1980s, and my father drove the Buick to work. My mother could always tell when the Skylark had not flown straight home at the end of the day—when my father had stopped at The Lighthouse, a place he romantically referred to as a “gin mill.” It amazes me that my father never wrecked that Buick driving drunk, or any other car we owned over the years; in this department I have an edge on him, as the Frederick County Sheriff’s Office in Maryland can attest.

My mother, in a pantomime gesture that meant, “Your father’s been drinking,” would tip an imaginary glass to her mouth for my little sister and me to see. The expression on her face when she would do this meant, “Your father’s been drinking, and I’m pissed,” which in turn meant there was going to be a fight.

One day I was sitting down to a plate of spaghetti and meatballs in the kitchen when my father came home plastered and, for a lark, walked up and began washing his hands with my dinner. This was nothing but drunken miscalculation—I was a fan of my father, and a fan of peace. I was an ally. If anyone was ready to swallow the family chaos and smile, it was me. I was the one who, within a couple of years, would be stealing Lucky Strikes from his open packs in the cigarette drawer in the kitchen (the one just left of the candy drawer) to smoke them in the bathroom mirror, sleeves rolled up on my scrawny arms, wondering if I could someday look like him without doing the work of lifting weights. These furtive smoking sessions also taught me that cigarettes were not all for show once you accidentally inhaled—my blithe spirit would soar (up with me into the clouds!) and wheel, piping, far above the dreary daytime suburbs where sunlight wasted its time in empty backyards, breathlessly high for a minute, only to plunge back to the very spot of my nest on the ground. I would cough. And so I discovered that smoking—and later drinking—were not just masculine mating rituals but sublime acts, hidden from the uninitiated by a taste like carbon deposits and fuel additive.

My father’s hands were in my spaghetti, and he was laughing at his wit. And then I refused to eat. I could swallow chaos, but I couldn’t eat that spaghetti.

“Whassa matter?” he slurred afterwards, washing Ragu from his fingers under the tap.

“It’s too gross.”

“Aw, shit. My hands are clean. Go ahead and eat it.”

I shook my head, smiling so as not to offend.

And so began one of the most furious family blowups I can remember. My father had a habit of lumbering into the kitchen and screaming threats and sarcastic remarks at my mother while she tried to pacify him, her ingratiating chuckle coaxing him to calm down. Then he would wheel around and lumber back down the hall to the living room to ruminate before the next round. This was the day he put his fist through the drywall beside the bathroom door, leaving a crumbling hole and a ridiculous flap of wallpaper in his wake. This was the day he beat the woodwork in the kitchen doorway methodically, like someone working a punching bag, fist over fist, shouting, "Some men come home and beat their families," his voice cracking with emotion or pain, his knuckles bleeding, and the wedding ring carving permanent scars in the wood. This was the day he broke an unbreakable Corningware plate over my mother's head.

After one of his fits in the kitchen, as he stormed away down the hall, my mother said to my sister and me: "We're leaving. Get in the car."

"We'll never make it," I whispered. "He'll catch us and kill us."

"We'll make it," my little sister said, already up.

In a moment, we were out in the carport, then in the Skylark. My mother fumbled frantically with the keys while we watched the kitchen curtains and back door for movement. I imagine my father wobbling in the living room and elaborating on his latest drunken point, surging down the hall to make sure we all heard what he said, and finding the kitchen abandoned, the back door locked. And I imagine the extra moment it took for that to register, in an afternoon measured in milliseconds. In nightmares thirty years later I see the back door swing open, inevitably, my father scrambling barefoot down the cement steps, glowering at my mother with murderous porcine eyes, sprinting toward the driver's side while my sister in the passenger seat manages to say, "Lock, Ma, lock, Ma, door door LOCK THE DOOR MA."

Perhaps my mother, in her panic, momentarily forgot that the 1980 Buick Skylark had horizontal sliding locks, rather than vertical button locks, to inhibit burglary. Perhaps she reached over her shoulder to press down the button, found it missing, and reached for the mechanism above the window crank handle, with the orange paper backing that demonstrated it to be unlocked. Whatever the delay, the lock clicked shut just before my father lifted the door handle.

He first tried his fist on the windshield, foolishly, and then on the window next to my mother's head. My mother yelped and started that monstrous engine. Then, my father had an idea: He would sit on the hood, and my mother would never dare to back up. He appeared dainty in his avoidance of the Bewick family crest

jutting at the center, where his ass belonged. He sat carefully, the shocks buckling under the burden, and folded his arms, ready to wait it out. My mother threw it in reverse, and he prudently jumped down and stood in the driveway, dumbfounded and dumb. Dumb. Scowling and calculating, peering through his drunkenness to see if he could see any sort of hope from that distance. Helpless.

And just like that, we were gone. We drove through the neighborhood and out of town, exhilarated, my mother thinking aloud on a variety of subjects—thoughts that often ended with the words “that son of a bitch.” She made sensible plans about a hotel room. But there wasn’t enough money. My sister and I recounted the way Dad had stood scowling with that simian expression as the car backed away. We bled the scene for every detail, made every joke we could think of, crying with laughter and relief, imagining the afternoon hungrily from all possible angles—a ritual of memorization in the face of facts that had already begun receding into myth. Later, over a dinner of ice cream, we engaged in wild fantasies—we would take off, live in the woods, live in the Skylark. All three of us would get jobs. My mother could type, couldn’t she? We would buy books about what sort of bark and berries wouldn’t poison you. Every night, I would wash our dishes outdoors after dinner. I remember the black shapes of the trees in twilight outside the ice cream shop, my mind searching joyfully for an imaginary stream.

“We have to go back,” my mother said after a few hours.

My father had left the house dark. He’d begun a note and left it on the kitchen table, with only a single word at the top: “I.” Was it the beginning of an apology? An abandoned explanation of where he’d gone? A suicide note? Perhaps he had written that word, “I,” and then realized he was completely ignorant as to what he could possibly say about himself, or about what he’d done, or about anything.

I see that word, “I,” and I see all the loaded silence behind it. I see him standing barefoot in the driveway.

Years later, after everything had blown over and erupted and blown over again so many times that I refused to be hopeful or surprised, I destroyed that Skylark. An accident, of course. I’d only had my license for one month. Driving home from UMass, staring at some coed as she entered a grocery store, I turned back to the road just in time to see the line of traffic stopped at a red light while I drove into them at 25 miles per hour. The dogshit-colored AMC in front of me bent in half on impact, the creased body shutting both doors forever. My face slammed into the Skylark’s steering wheel, and afterwards, when I dragged on my cigarette in the confusion, I pulled it from my mouth and saw bright blood on the filter. Shortly

there were drips and smears of blood all over that frosting-white upholstery. In the rearview mirror, I saw my lip had swollen as though I'd been punched.

Totaled. The word makes it sound like there were flames, explosions, carnage. But in the junkyard, it still looked drivable. Something in the steering column had broken, that was all, and it wasn't deemed worthy of repair.

"I was going to kick your ass if I saw that car and it was like an accordion," my father said.

This might have been a story to tell one's sons, if one had sons. The story about their grandfather, so mellow and myopic and gray now they can't imagine a time when he could flare up in rage. But it might not even be a story about a grandfather: it might be a story about a car. One car taking its place in a long list. Along with it would be the silver Ventura whose alternator died in the liquor store parking lot when one was underage; the blue Chevette that got stuck in the woods in a wintertime stoner spot, wheels spinning on ice while one's drunken friends pushed in vain; and the white Civic in which one got the DWI charge after smashing into a van in front of the courthouse in Frederick, Maryland, on an autumn afternoon in 1998.

Today, Dad's Skylark cannot be a single "pinch of priceless dust," as Hardy described Shelley's. Being relatively undamaged, it must have been scrapped out and served to the world in the form of parts. I imagine the slow, quiet explosion of its dismantling. I see it losing a quarter panel here, a starter there, a radiator, a radio. On and on, the whole continues to disintegrate and radiate, the metal travelling that occult network of routine which, necessarily, renders all origins unknown and unknowable.



Fearless

Mollie Horney

The vulture hunched his heavy shoulders
And turned to face the east,
His back to the setting of a breathtaking sun.

Picking the remains of a squirrel
Run into the pavement via rubber,
He keeps a wary eye on the burning asphalt ahead.

A truck with a load
Of corn makes its way,
Diesel whining as gears are grinding,
Barreling down on the vulture
At break-neck speed.

An oblivious driver
Does not slow, his foot
Glued to the accelerator.

The vulture sees.
He does not move.

The speedometer flicks past 55
In a 35 zone,
And the vulture stands still.

The driver taps his fingers
And feels the wheel,
Letting it slide smooth
Across his rough palms.

As he comes upon the bird
He quickly slows
And lays on the horn,
Hoping to frighten the bird away.

The vulture moves slowly
To the right and watches the
Diesel pass. The driver recalls
Hitting the squirrel last week.

The vulture returns to the pan-caked fur
And is believed by the driver
To be dangerously
Fearless.



City Wind

Alex Dykes

The heat is oppressive and polluted.
The wind carries stories of decay and phantom clouds of gasoline,
floating through the artless branches of wire trees,
who beckon death and cloth crosses to their bottoms, late at night.
Murder looks like some huge red coal truck
or a bottle of Kentucky bourbon
and especially both at the same time.



Judges' Biographies

Clay Matthews — Poetry

Clay Matthews has published poetry in journals such as *The American Poetry Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Gulf Coast*, and elsewhere. His most recent book, *Pretty, Rooster*, is a collection of sonnets written in syllabics and is available from Cooper Dillon Books. He teaches at Tusculum College in Greeneville, TN, and edits poetry for the *Tusculum Review*.

Mary M. Buckner — Fiction

M. M. Buckner is winner of the Phillip K. Dick Award and author of five critically acclaimed novels: *Hyperthought*, *Neurolink*, *War Surf*, *Watermind*, and *The Gravity Pilot*. Her work has been published in five languages, and Barnes & Nobel ranked *Watermind* in the Top Ten in its category for 2009. Mary holds a Master's in Creative Writing from Boston University. Her fifth novel, *The Gravity Pilot*, comes out in paperback this March.

Scott Finn — Non-fiction

Scott Finn is news director at WUSF Public Media in Tampa, Florida. He earned a master's degree from the University of Missouri School of Journalism and spent a decade covering state politics, education and business for *The Charleston Gazette*. He's a former journalism instructor at West Virginia State University.

David Wohl — Drama

David Wohl is currently Dean of the College of Visual and Performing Arts and Professor of Theater at Winthrop University. He has directed over one hundred plays for professional, community, and academic theaters across the country. He has received numerous awards for his work including the Suzanne W. Davis award for distinguished service to theater in the South and the Governor's Arts Award of West Virginia for Lifetime Achievement in the Arts.

<http://www.etsu.edu/cas/litlang/mockingbird/>



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