

2021 • CORNFIELD REVIEW • VOL. 38

# Cornfield Review 21



Cover Art by Arthur Taussig titled "Palimpsest — Functions Follow Forms of Desire — Jean-Francois Millet-Man Ray 'The Gleaners'"  
Cover Design by Christy Horton





# CORNFIELD *review*

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# Preface

WELL, WOULD YOU LOOK AT US! We've survived Our Pandemic Year, and things seem to be turning the corner (or *a* corner, at least). This year has been tough for many of us as we've figured out the limits of our resiliency and our capacity for flexibility, understanding, and grace for one another. To that end, we've successfully brought another issue of *Cornfield Review* to life, thanks in no small part to our contributors, our editorial board (listed below), and our network of support at Ohio State Marion and beyond. This issue is especially noteworthy in that it is our first virtual issue, meaning that the usual face-to-face business of creating it—taping up flyers in the stairwells, reading and discussing submissions, marking up body copy, and the like—was conducted entirely online (so many Zoom meetings!). But that's the way we roll, because we're gosh-darned professionals, and we couldn't bear the thought of letting down our readership.

This year's issue contains another noteworthy element, this one in the form of our special section: a spotlight on Arthur Taussig. Hailing from California, Taussig is an especially prolific multimedia artist with an especially acerbic wit that you'll no doubt notice as you look through the collection of images, writing, the cover, and other tidbits curated by section editors Jerome Shapiro and Drew Niemi (thanks, gentlemen!).

In addition to our special section editors, I should thank others who have played enhanced roles in our production. Our editorial board as a whole performed admirably in the face of pandemic-related adversities. Adam Coutts served as our Art and Photography section editor, doing much of the heavy lifting in that area. Alex Harris handled communications, letting submitters know if their submissions had been accepted. Once again, alumna Christyne Horton lent her graphic design expertise to this year's issue, and her touches can be seen on our cover and inside. Much appreciation to you all!

We also thank the many people who have helped support this publication: Ohio State Marion's Dean and Director, Greg Rose; the Ohio State Marion English faculty; the Ohio State Marion Office of Communication and Marketing; the fine folks at Marion Technical College; the campus artistic creative writing community; our alumni and friends in the community. Without your support, we would not be able to bring this little magazine to press, and so all of you have our gratitude.

Cornfeld Review is published annually. The Editorial Board is interested in quality poetry, prose, artwork, and photography. Submissions are primarily solicited from students at OSU-Marion and Marion Technical College, although we accept submissions from off-campus writers and artists as well. For more information, please email me at [mccorkle.12@osu.edu](mailto:mccorkle.12@osu.edu), or visit us online at [cornfeldreview.osu.edu](http://cornfeldreview.osu.edu).

—Ben McCorkle, Faculty Adviser

## **2021 Editorial Board:**

Max Balderson	Adam Coutts
Alex Harris	Mitchel Hendricks
Drew Niemi	Dylan Pangborn
Audrey Roberts	Jerome Shapiro

## The Cornfield Review Mission Statement:

We strive to represent the literary and artistic voice of Central Ohio by giving area college students, writers, and artists an opportunity to see their work published in a professional literary journal. Additionally, we are passionate about achieving a cultural impact that goes beyond our local campus and reaches into the greater community.

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## 12 o'clock session

My counselor  
told me  
to stop calling them  
breakdowns.

*—Amber Alexander*

## brushstrokes

You always wore your shoes inside the house but you refused to wear them in the yard. Though I had a fear of you always stepping on my toes, adapting the habit of wearing flats in the house to protect myself, I let other parts of my body grow vulnerable. When the strap of my dress would start to fall down my shoulder, I made sure you could see. When I felt my skirt rise up when I stood from my seat at my writing desk, I invited you to peak. If my shirt rose up when I stretched after we finished a double feature of old Hollywood films, I would grin to myself as my lower breasts exposed themselves to you. After all, I am the incarnation of all the melodic notes you've plucked on your piano. Of all the Romantic paintings you've created, I am the only tangible soul in the whole world that knows your name better than yourself.

*—Amber Alexander*



## My Confessional From Chosen Poetry

She promises to hold a secret in confidence,  
My sweetest rose-cheeked Laura.  
There is a garden in her face.  
In mine, the mask.

Between the two of us there are errors  
of beauty — partly because of how excessively I love  
through writing. Laura is the Curator  
for these pleasantries of mine, collecting and cataloguing  
my thoughts towards makeshift elements  
of comprehension: Love's Alchemy.

But when she would dishevel her hair,  
and from his car her slender legs emerged,  
the space we made that had no name,  
where lives of the British poets thrived while making love,  
a knife cut my spirit.  
Severed my brain from my heart.

A prospect of heaven makes death easier  
to leave her.

*—Amber Alexander*

## the perfect shot

*Inspired by David Bowie's "Valentine's Day"*

The time had come to lay ourselves there, bare.  
Pistols and ink pens, they were all the same.  
Four walls cannot contain the waste. Despair,  
the avant-garde scene. Colorized became  
the symbol of dear young Valentine. Met  
with highway glances of defiance. Jade-  
d and distraught. Yet there, a cigarette  
rested between the lips of the teen. Fade  
to black. "Scrawny hand, icy heart," there stood  
the boy who would claim it back blindingly.  
His opaque hearted lover had allured  
the first shot. No safety. Condescendingly  
he smeared her name in pooling blood. Blessèd  
he who condemns the merit of her end.

*—Amber Alexander*



## permafrost

My attempt at finding happiness  
began here. It was bleak and I mourned more  
than I did when my grandfather died. Back  
when I felt more comfortable in my  
skin. When I could ponder enough to ask  
and I could raise my hand. Now it rests, sits,  
dormant in my lap. Questions are not raised.  
They remain in my hellish mind of my  
consequences. My attempt at finding  
something that could cure my ache has been with-  
drawn from my own conclusions. Now I hate:  
myself, my words, my father, you, and yes,  
maybe a few of the lovers who stood,  
[girls with curved noses, boys with erections]  
by my car, trying to french, trying to love  
someone preserved in her own wretchedness.  
Permafrost: the first time I heard that word  
I knew I was [stuck in] the cold. When  
I tell myself I'm trying to find some  
remnant of hope frozen, interior  
of my ice, I know I'm lying. It can't  
be free. I want to think it can: I can't.  
My attempt at finding happiness  
ended here. My pen is out of black ink.  
The end is bleak, I continue to mourn –  
more than when my grandfather died but less  
than the amount of times I come back from  
the dead. Persephone has taught me well.

—*Amber Alexander*

## self vivarium

Butterflies aren't supposed to feel anything when they go through metamorphosis.  
It makes me wonder if anything about me has really changed.  
I am constantly at odds with my own turbulence.

I wrote about it while wallowing in my own tears, how my tortuous  
frame becomes consumed. I'll wake up, sweating, in the middle of the night and feel deranged;  
Butterflies aren't supposed to feel anything when they go through metamorphosis.

In my darkest hours I wish I could be Eurydice being visited by my Orpheus.  
Nobody has ever tried to rescue me. It shows, I am unchanged:  
I am constantly at odds with my own turbulence.

I can feel my mistakes harbor, spilling wine across my breasts in carelessness.  
I indulge in cynicism and from my own reality I am estranged.  
Butterflies aren't supposed to feel anything when they go through metamorphosis.

During planetarium visits, I wonder what inspired the planets to be so candid with Copernicus.  
From time to time, Jupiter floats past. I was meant to be there, pulling destruction  
towards myself on purpose; my landing to Earth was an accident, something disarranged.  
This mistake may explain why I am constantly at odds with my own turbulence.

All I've ever wanted was to flutter timid wings, give my heart and brain time for an armistice.  
Everything that has ever tried to stop me from growing has become my own doubt, ingrained;  
Butterflies aren't supposed to feel anything when they go through metamorphosis  
yet I am constantly at odds with my own turbulence.

—*Amber Alexander*

## soliloquy no. 6

Always isn't for people like us.  
People who sit here or there with a paper cup  
full of coffee or full of tears.  
I don't think the right word exists for us.

People who sit here or there with a paper cup  
trying to convince themselves not to dry swallow.  
I don't think the right word exist for us, or  
those who depend on Zoloft and missionary sex.

Trying to convince themselves not to dry swallow  
all their pride resting at the bottom of the pill bottle.  
Those who depend on Zoloft and missionary sex  
drool into each other's mouths at the art museum.

All their pride fades away when I walk into a room.  
There's a cliché line about women and natural wonders —  
Cis men like to drool into my mouth about it at the art museum.  
It makes me remember why I have so many blocked numbers.

There's a cliché line about women and natural wonders,  
or maybe it's natural disasters; I have to face the fact that I'm a mess.  
It makes me remember why I have so many blocked numbers  
and validates why I never answer the phone when it rings.

Maybe it's because of natural disasters that I have to face the fact that I'm a mess.  
People ask too much of me —  
it validates why I never answer the phone when it rings.  
The somber embrace of being alone in loneliness.

People ask too much of me  
when I can't even find pieces left of myself to give.  
The somber embrace of being alone in loneliness  
makes me cry pitifully in the shower at midnight.

When I can't even find pieces left of myself to give  
I still try to carve out something else. The ripping of my flesh  
makes me cry pitifully in the shower at midnight.  
Crimson is my own shade of giving.

I still try to carve out something else, ripping off my flesh  
and trying to present it as candidly as Van Gogh and his ear.  
Crimson is my own shade of giving, giving, giving.  
Taking, taking, taking myself away.

I have tried presenting it as candidly as Van Gogh  
but the poems I write when I want to die don't seem to come off as nice. Instead  
taking, taking, taking myself away  
convincing myself I don't need anyone.

The poems I write when I want to die don't seem to come off as nice  
as Sylvia Plath's on bound paper.  
I keep convincing myself I don't need anyone  
as I sit on a park bench with you.

Like Sylvia Plath's words bound on paper,  
"People or stars, / Regard me sadly, I disappoint them."  
As I sit on a park bench with you,  
full of coffee and full of tears, I mutter,

*Always isn't for people like us.*

*—Amber Alexander*



# Symphonic Sympathies

In my greatest moments of peace, I hear a symphony  
playing through the peripheral space  
that connects my memories and my senses.  
In the years before our destruction  
I would continuously beg the question  
“Can you tell the cellos are out of tune too?”

The amphitheater had enough trees to provide shade to  
ensure we'd only sweat at the haunting sounds of the symphony  
during their summer season. The empty patches of grass around us made me  
question  
if you intended on leaving me ostracized in space;  
a lost piece of the cosmos, another icy comet of destruction  
to a small amount of domain. Ever since

I picked up a pen, I have been committed to create my existence from my own  
sense  
of self. You knew that too.  
If I didn't know better you were my undoing, aiding in destructing  
every positive narrative I had made about myself. It's why I went to the symphony  
so often; to take up space.  
If I did or didn't, at least I finally stopped asking: the question

became irrelevant. It wasn't until I decided to leave you, despite your questions  
that you have been asking ever since,  
was I comfortable looking out at night to space.  
My favorite writers had done something similar, too,  
the words mean too much to share and so they're destroyed,  
and the poets sink into drink with Beethoven's 9th Symphony.

I heard that one in Berlin, after I stopped believing love would fix me; I only have  
sympathy  
for my past existences and the reflection I see in bath water. I question  
everything I ever taught myself to destroy  
and let my senses  
take over: roses, bergamot, a drop of rancid blood, too.  
I consume everything on Earth because it's barren in space.

More attractive planets call my name out in space;  
so did the concertmaster in the fourth movement in Berlin's symphony  
at a tender mezzo piano. From sheet music to  
my seat in the balcony I never questioned  
why I heard my name. Besides, I have sat in the balcony ever since  
my father took me to my first radicalization of letting music destroy

the parts of myself that get lost in space and leave me questioning.  
My destruction of my past selves has come peacefully, in a sense,  
where I'm learning how to let go and be at one with other symphonic sympathies.

*—Amber Alexander*

## tangibility

I forgot to close the curtains when the room grew dark. I didn't eat all day because my stomach never growled to remind me. That's a lie, I consumed ink splattered pages; splatters that formed open verse stanzas, sonnets about how to write a sonnet, and what filled me up most of all was a pantoum. You know repetition makes me grow silent in complacency.

I indulged myself in lines spoken from dead men's lips and lines written to damn them to hell. I shed a few drops of blood while my hand masturbated on the page. Moans escaped at the ends of lines that worked, broke my heart, or reminded me of who I wanted to be before the world came to this. I am in a dark room with looming buildings that block the moonlight, making love to a page with strained eyes.

*What does that make me?*

*—Amber Alexander*

# You Belonged in the Stars

*In the Style of Joy Harjo's "She Had Some Horses"*

You belonged in the stars.

You belonged in my arms when the rain became too treacherous.  
You belonged where your voice now haunts my cerebrum.  
You belonged where nobody else could hurt you again.

You belonged in the stars.

You belonged, like a Bechstein grand piano  
in the Viennese music hall we danced in when we eloped.  
You belonged somewhere where the climate wouldn't dry  
your tears before you could melodize them into a song.  
You belonged where I couldn't follow you.

You belonged in the stars.

You belonged, though begrudgingly, to everyone and no one.  
You belonged to me, or at least I like to think you did.  
You belonged wherever my fingers could materialize you.

You belonged in the stars.

You belonged like a riptide in Kate Chopin's "The Awakening,"  
You belonged to fill my heart with a limited supply of admiration.  
You belonged where nobody else knew of but you.

You belonged in the stars.

You belonged with the novae and black holes  
You belonged like the chromatic scale in Debussy's unknown etudes.  
You belonged where I only had to look up to find you afterwards.

You belonged in the stars.

You belonged, you should have belonged here.  
You be/longed my heart.  
You belonged where my words could  
never reach you again.

You belonged in the stars.

You belonged in my arms for much longer.  
You belonged entwined in our wine stained sheets.  
You belonged where the earth and heavens would

hear me moan your name but

You belonged in the stars.

—Amber Alexander



## At the End of All Things

At the end of all things,  
Following the brutality of war and destructive devastation,  
Famine  
Fear,  
Collapsing of the world,  
And the death of the final tyrant king.  
At the end of all things,  
Covered in the pain of our youth,  
The mistakes,  
Heartaches,  
I will shed my armor,  
I will bear my truth.  
At the end of all things,  
Through the ashes of the past,  
I will finally see you,  
Brilliant and bruised,  
Beautiful,  
Your smile for me will be the very last.

At the end of all things,  
I will look out onto the desolation of land,  
And stand,  
As the final moments drift past quickly,  
Like watching an hourglass of sand.

Gently,

Reaching,

I will hold your hand,

At the end.

*—Hailee Baer*

# The End Is Better Than the Journey

I've spent countless days in the mirror  
Telling myself I'm worth it  
Telling myself I deserve it  
That I'm beautiful  
And that I can change the world  
But once I hit the pillow  
The tears start flowing  
And the only thing I can change is the face mask I use  
Because I gotta get rid of these tears before school tomorrow

See they tell us that we can do it together  
But how can I be anything?  
When the friends around me are only in my imagination?  
How can I go anywhere?  
Do anything  
When my family doesn't trust me anymore  
Tallying up my points  
Day  
After day, after day, after day  
Knowing  
That no matter how sorry I am  
And no matter how hard I try  
It'll never go away

And that pain haunts me  
As I put on a fake smile and pretend like everything's alright  
As I walk through the halls  
I'm thinking day and night  
That I don't wanna be alive anymore  
Things get worse at home, worse at school  
Worse everywhere my feet touch  
And you all, you all stay keeping score  
Stay keeping score while acting like you "love" me  
Acting like I matter  
And little did you know, that because of you  
I sit in the bathroom in between each class period  
Marking off new reasons to kill myself  
And that's how the countdown began

10

That's how old I am  
I just entered the 5th grade  
Everyone tells me I look about 14  
And even though I'm young, I've been through a lot

9

That's how many days are left in school  
I've been waiting for this moment all my life!  
Not because I don't like learning.  
But there are other reasons too

8

That's how many schools I've been to  
I never really liked school, but I've always learned from it  
Never eat the food, never talk to the people  
And whatever you do  
NEVER talk back to a bully  
I've been beaten up too many times  
To have that kinda courage anyway

7

That's how many times I cried myself to sleep last week  
That's right  
Every. Single. Night.  
I used to cry until my face turned red and blue  
I guess I'm a new species  
I didn't know black people could turn those colors

6

That's how many friends I have  
They're all fake anyway, but they don't mind keeping me around

5

That's how many times I've been raped  
Not just by strangers, but family too  
Uncle Thomas, Uncle Charles....  
I guess I have a reason to hate home to

4

That's how many stars I see at night  
Everyone always tells me to "shoot for the stars"  
And "You can do anything"  
But you can't shoot for them  
If there aren't any left

3

That's how many pills I take every day  
Two in the morning and one at night  
I mean with all the stuff happening in my life right now  
I thought about taking more...

2

That's how many mental illnesses I have  
Depression and anxiety  
They keep me up late at night  
And drive me crazy in the morning

1

That's how many times I've tried it  
I didn't think I'd make it this far  
But life sucks too much to keep going...

0

That's how many breaths I took today  
I don't even love me  
Other people don't even love me, right?  
I mean, what is love anyway?  
To me, it's just another word for broken

*—Esrael Nykea Bennett*



## Over the Counter

Laughter  
It's like a medicine  
Or so people say  
They say it's full of happiness  
And joy

Yellow  
Like the sunny days you see in Arizona  
Laughter is an abundance of me and you  
Until we're blue  
It's a joke  
Laughter is just a joke that never wakes up  
It's a knock knock who's there  
Someone fix my hair  
Because I've woken up in the morning  
And I don't like how I look anymore

Red  
Like my cheeks  
No smile  
No joy  
No--  
STOP  
No don't tell me that it's ok  
Because it's not  
It's not ok to pronounce laughter as a medicine  
When it seems to do worse than the hot and cold vapor rub  
Or NyQuil  
Or Tylenol  
Or Pepto  
Or drugs  
Or alcohol

Or...

Any medicine that is supposed to make you feel better

Green

Just like the grass that blows in the wind

This medicine blows our direction

Blows into every conversation that holds weight

Has value

Meaning and purpose

Orange

The color I think of when I envision my future

Full of hope and joy

Joy is supposed to bring laughter

Supposed to be good and honest

But people can fake laughter just like they fake religion

Or intelligence

Or the love of unity and diversity

That medicine --

It's more than just a medicine

It's an addiction

An addiction you can't wake up from

Because once you start

You can't stop

Purple

Like a violet blowing in the wind

Like the school I went to when I was young

When we had tummy aches

The nurse would give us medicine

Medicine that was over the counter

Medicine that would eventually wear off

But laughter

Laughter is an over-the-counter drug

That doesn't wear off

Laughter is like a rainbow of mixed emotions  
Light  
Sadness  
Feeling to flow  
Hope  
Innocence  
Joy  
And Lucky  
Lucky that I don't laugh anymore  
Lucky because I'm in full health  
Lucky, so I don't need an over-the-counter drug that never wears off

—*Esrael Nykea Bennett*

## A Pity to Be Perfect

She's perfect  
Her beauty is undeniable  
Her raven hair  
Milk chocolate skin  
Soft hands  
And rubber bands  
Tied into bracelets on her wrist

She has friends  
A supporting family  
A life that was more than great  
And she's nothing less than  
Perfect  
She's nothing less than stunning  
She's nothing less than great  
Nothing less than good  
Okay  
So-so  
Sad  
Sad because the standard of perfect she holds is like a piece of heaven  
Unable to be visited by average people  
Like the Fiji water we drink  
Untouched by man  
And never drank before something is broken  
Her perfection is the seal that binds her to the unhappiness she can't express

She lives her life through a filter  
She's like a trend  
Other women see her and try to become her  
Other girls look up to her as a role model  
Someone they want to grow up as  
No one succeeds

Her lifestyle is like a medical commercial  
All of her beauty, intelligence, and stature are placed in bright, beautiful colors  
Wide as a 72" screen  
Broadcasted for the world to see  
But after every commercial  
There's always a risk with no reward  
Always a part that is sped through  
Or projected as nonexistence  
A part that outlines the dullness of perfection  
The lack of flawlessness  
Within the thing that's been claimed as utopian



Most people skip over that part of the commercial  
Think that they see the risks  
Think that they're willing to take them

But just as Gandhi once said  
Spreading those commercials around in every conversation we hold  
In every mirror we look into  
In every meal we eat  
Is like an eye for an eye  
Because they think they see perfection  
But on the inside of that pill is pain  
Heartache, hunger  
Thirst, sadness  
Imperfection  
Making the whole world fall short to blindness and hatred  
Because of the silly rumor of a commercial  
Males accept nothing less than curves, clear skin, luscious hair  
Females spend countless hours of their lives at the gym  
Don't look fat or ugly  
They might be seen  
Might be shamed  
They have to look like  
Her  
Her life is a perfection that can never be reached  
Not by little girls, teenage girls  
Women, elderly, or her  
What she thinks she is, is unhealthy  
It makes her unaware  
Of her true feelings inside  
And every time she looks in the mirror  
She realizes that  
It's a pity to be perfect

—Esrael Nykea Bennett

## A Woman's Ugly

Why am I so ugly?  
They give us the woman card  
And now we're all full of scars  
We only get 81 cents to a man's dollar  
We only live  
So how can these said problems be solved  
In a world where we get raped by the minority  
By a world where we're enslaved  
This is top priority  
And they "sorta see" the problem  
With this "kinda," sick, psychotic world  
That we call our home  
You see according to the constitution I'm only 3/5ths of a person  
And because I'm black and don't pay taxes, I'm not a person?  
Because I'm a child, my opinion doesn't matter?  
And because I'm a woman  
My gender can't handle the bad things being thrown at them?  
How does that make it better for me?  
A black, young, girl  
With 4 C hair and kinks like confetti  
I mean I thought I was a person  
And I thought I was worth it, but I guess not  
Cause I'm not caramel or white  
And I'm not your hourglass delight  
So why am I so ugly?  
Why am I not worthy of a man, or land  
That I can call my own  
Being told I'm just a housewife, just wear skirts and you'll be fine  
But why am I so ugly?  
I'm so ugly because I'm Black, I'm so ugly cause I'm beauty  
I'm so ugly because I'm kinks and curls  
And I'm so ugly because I got a face like chocolate  
And everybody will love chocolate, but they'll never love me  
My ugly is not a toy you can play around with  
My ugly is ME  
And just because you don't want my ugly  
Doesn't mean you have to treat it  
Like it's some kind of disease

—Esrael Nykea Bennett

## The Pit

The flames roar beneath  
Beckoning for endless fuel  
The subject to torture, descended in  
Skewered with a pitchfork, commanded by the host.  
Endless searing cries of the moisture  
The water boils out of the limb.  
Burning. Bubbling. Blistering.  
The flesh shrinks and rips,  
Contents spill from what is kept in.  
Liquid runs down the fork,  
Evaporating in seconds.  
The metal of the pitchfork grows hot  
Searing the meat from the inside.  
Ash escapes the glow, free from this site  
Smoke bellows, foul and suffocating.  
Extended hosts, add more subjects to torture,  
The ritual continues for an indefinite time.  
Laughter cackles all around the pit  
As those that have been skewered  
Hang over raging coals.  
The host deem enough.  
Removing the fare from the blazing pit  
Ripped off the fork, the cinder limb is.  
Devoured by the Colossus and begins for more.  
Another scoff skewered thrown into the flames.  
Is this a perpetual hell, overseen by ravenous fiends?  
Or is this malevolence blocking the innocence?

—*Adam Coutts*

# Spring Haiku

## I

It is time to wake  
The shards of ice have melted  
Let the flowers bloom

## II

Squirrel's bushy tail  
Dances and flickers of joy  
They eat their stored nuts

## III

Walking in budding  
A wall of chattering trees  
Cicadas are here

## IV

The scarce honeybee  
Coated in flower's pollen  
Dusting its neighbors

## V

Sleeping on a pond  
The geese wake and honk at night  
The dog harassed them

## VI

The morning dove hoo  
Outside my window early  
My natural alarm

## VII

A rabbit holds still  
In its ghillie suit it hides  
Fur blends with the dirt

## VIII

A screech far above  
The hawk glides in the air's breeze  
What will be unlucky

## IX

A bowl of sticks placed  
Hidden behind the lush tree leaves  
A blue jay mother

X

The dark clouds leak grace  
Small pitter patter on glass  
It is hard to see

XI

Lying in waiting  
The serpent unhinges jaw  
A mouse squeaks no more

XII

Dancing in the wind  
Fabric attached to spooled string  
Kids laugh in the park

XIII

A hive mind hill forms  
Stealthy workers steal picnics  
Queen must reproduce

XIV

Angry hornets buzz  
Waging war on the unlike  
Stay far from their nest

XV

Parents bring kids out  
The time of play ball is now  
Before it gets hot

—*Adam Coutts*

## A Sonnet of Cacophony

Too many voices speak to us at once.  
The heights of Babel resonate with rules  
So intricate that not our canniest tools  
Can translate properly. I am a dunce  
Who watches wide-eyed like a bunch  
Of wolves, or even patient dogs. The schools  
Are shut. Our distancing renders fools  
Deplorably alone, one monstrous crunch.

And like Eurydice cannot look back  
As we slowly forge our way out of hell.  
Our tiny family of mates becomes essential,  
Our tribe, our race, our innate potential.  
And little acts of kindness mark the track.  
And we are blessed again. And all things shall be well.

*—Donald M. Hassler*

# Loudest in the Hospital

McFly/Till you fake it  
I march in my Timbs,  
Parading my height about Main Street.  
My heart of gold finally flashing its platinum plating,  
I look like the part of the movie that merits congratulations.

*Note: If you favor the taste of survival, your ego must postulate that you are one of the good ones— Lest they notice your pallet is unrefined.*

Draped and dripping in American Dream's glitter, I strut, Wrapped in confetti confidence, without a care for Gravity's pull. I have yet to float, so I kick the dull Concrete— Faded Black,  
Cracked like it was supposed to  
Like it's mouth hangs open, lazy eyed and pot holed—Bored, waiting for me to follow suit.

Instead, I flex in polyester at the assuming ground and the whips That it lets trod upon it.  
Where I'm going, I don't need roads.  
My destination is perched in the hovering galaxy, or rather, The space between it.  
The milky darkness is lustrous, promising,  
A banner of hope all star-spangled;  
It will reach an onyx hand to pull me up.  
It has to!  
Before reality notices my happy slumber  
And returns me to Earth.

*—Travis McClerking*



## Mcfly/Till You Fake It

Making the rounds,  
I'm constructing strength.  
Each door dawned like armor,  
sterile shingles stockpile,  
limiting movement  
like the shame shaded by your eyelashes.  
An ascending spiral.  
A labyrinth of regrets  
intertwined with beasts and false prophets  
preaching of a better tomorrow.

Repulsion is the last thing I wanted.  
The texture of the air should have been smooth  
like the coating on the pills,  
but I step back,  
because the tenor of your cheeks  
Is unerring.  
Ever-rosy despite the ruptures.

I think of your fears with these needles everywhere.  
But I know the most dangerous thing in the room  
is that withered-rope smile,  
feigning closure behind a guillotine of  
truth.

*—Travis McClerking*

## Censored

I don't write haikus.  
Rules are shackles for poetry.  
Free expression now!

—*Amy Plough*

## Deftly Defining a Defunct Discourse

Tangible terror, tiptoeing through tiny, tepid tinctures,  
Thoroughly tarnishing Time's truth.  
Beginning basic beliefs, but bellowing beside belated boyish belongings. Behooving Beowulf's  
pretentious pride, painstaking prudence. Possibly proving precariously presumptuous.  
Just jinxing juxtaposed jackass jackals and asphyxiated, aquatic Amazons.  
But, it's just a poem.

—*Amy Plough*

# Monographia

How many nights she spent, howling and desperation at the Dead ivory.  
How many days spent, in desolation, crying out to the unhearing eggshells.  
How often she's so soon abandoned all life-giving dreams.

An ignorant defiance, the leaves yellowed to her innards, spewing out.  
Through times gentle embrace, the pale companion disintegrates,  
Reflecting confused, frustrated, tangles of words,  
Moldy and fragile.

Why then, she wonders, did she neglect them so?  
Why was the tome so forgotten, whilst enjoying far more enthralling endeavors?  
Like an arrow, shooting through reeds, such indulgences  
Never marked the albino companion.

Though the ghostly wings surely knew what a dangerous past time such things were.

Perhaps then, it's story would seem reasonable, normal even, if included on the pearls.  
This pitch, scarring bone, depletes the woeful touch of hysteria.

Perhaps, therefore, she'll continue to feed each gnashing tooth  
A churning concoction,

Containing morbidity, melancholy, hopelessness, loathing,  
Love, and Life.

—*Amy Plough*

# The Storm

It was a colorless rainbow,  
Arms lashing out,

Teasing,  
Touching,  
Tearing...

Whatever He could reach.

The unmasked swamp-thing was violently, and frighteningly beautiful.

The swirling swamp of no color was surrounded by the unseen, unknown, and the unexpected.  
Water, flushing, floating, flooding the Earth and the Air.

Teeming,  
Tailoring,  
Cleansing,  
Creating,  
Eroding,  
Erasing...

At dawn, rocky, and hot mountains of waves swirled violently,  
And in the palm of His hand,  
Lie a tiny tribal man.

The torrents begin to expire,  
His rumbling, roaring, rain shattered stone,  
Sloughed off shards, scattering the remains.  
Creating a Godly masterpiece.

In His anger, the roaring worsens,  
Thumping,  
Thrashing,  
Pounding...  
Trumpeting His terrifying, deafening call.

Calming to whispers, mumbling, babbling,  
Among the shadows, hints of His enormous, booming voice breaks through the silence.

Suddenly, defiantly, boasting a rattling, resonating roar, a reminder of the wrath, and regal power.

Finally, bands of Light, of Life,  
Break through the silence.

Beaming upon the New Earth,  
Creating iridescent prisms, allowing sapient recollection.

He finally resigns his rage to the promise of new Life, among a growing world.

—Amy Plough

## A Poem that is Out of Plumb with Dr. Williams'

I have stolen  
the lines  
that were in  
your notebook

and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for anon

Forgive me  
they were brilliant  
so sweet  
and Pulitzer winning

*—Jerome Shapiro*

# The Collector

I am a collector you see,  
A collector of only three things...  
I collect tears from the broken  
I take all the foul memories  
All the hurt and pain  
I take all those dreaded thoughts  
And I put them to rest.  
I turn those salty little tears  
Loose into the ocean  
Where you can come to the beach  
And create new  
And happy vacation memories  
To splash around in the salty sea  
I also collect worried minds  
I take the troubling thoughts  
And I follow the opposite of  
All the “what-ifs”  
And create positive outcomes  
To give back as happy dreams  
But the thing I love to collect most?  
I collect broken hearts  
I shine and polish them until they are mirrors  
I give them back and show their owners that  
You do not have to find love in others  
You can find beauty within  
And loving yourself is the first step  
In loving others  
Stop worrying, do not cry,  
And love yourself...I am here to help you do just that!

—*Collin Thacker*

# Spot a Hero

Nowadays,  
Heroes do not wear capes  
They wear comfortable clothing to campus  
They wear scrubs to hospitals  
They wear suits to the office  
They wear wide rimmed glasses  
And shush you as you walk by  
At libraries  
Heroes nowadays,  
Ask for help  
From the people  
As we recognize that they go through  
Troubling times as well  
They are the teachers  
The mothers and fathers  
The bankers  
They are the cashiers  
At the local grocery store  
Who always ask  
“How has your day been?”  
Heroes are the counselors  
And therapists  
Who help with your mental health  
Heroes are everywhere  
In our homes and hearts  
In our stores and workplaces  
But it could take ANYONE  
To spot one  
A true hero

—*Collin Thacker*



## A Ghazal in the Night

Constellations cold with nothing to tell in the night  
twinkle above us with a faint tintinnabulation - a knell in the night.

I look up and pretend the dotted maps will lead me back,  
waiting for the taste of your prose to excel myself back into the night.

Silent stillness echoes across the waves and the moon.  
To the stars, I beseech you: Cast your spell in the night.

The constellations and stars begin to dim, darker  
and darker saying farewell deep into the night.  
As our worlds slip into ruins, history etched on the walls,  
scavengers prowl, appraise who is left, rising like kelp in the night.  
Earth is foreclosed, the domain of hell, a den of thieves  
as demons, running amok, swell into the night.  
As I sink deeper, I lose track of ever distant starlight,  
falling towards the tolling bells of hellions in the night.

During this dark, Covid year, I've survived  
scouring my hands with Purell in the night.  
Fates braiding our lives with ink and words:  
Voyagers of 4566 - what do the skies foretell in the night?

*—Amber Alexander, Andrew Allen, Mitchel Hendricks, Alex Harris, Elias  
Kirker-Napiorkowski, Ashton Platt, Jessica Rushing, and Stuart Lishan*

## Go Weary

*(NOTE: This collaboratively composed poem is written in a form called a villanelle, and was written in Stuart Lishan's/as part Spring 2021 Advanced Poetry Writing class.)*

When ravens feast on inanimate bones  
They hark the piercing sparrow's cry,  
And I know I've once again arrived at home.  
When the weary travel cobble roads  
They forget not the watching wolf's eye,  
The raven's feasting on inanimate bones,  
Or the cry of the cold winter, whose frozen thrones  
Beckon me to take, to die,  
and I know all too well I've once again arrived at home.  
Omens told on old, painted stone,  
Decaying stags, pierced and chewed awry:  
Ravens feast on their inanimate bones.  
For a past abandoned and long atoned,  
I could not give the final goodbye,  
But now I know, I've once again arrived at home.  
There are wild and wicked witches, crones  
In the forest where the sun the canopy denies,  
Where ravens feast on inanimate bones.

I am almost safely to the catacombs.  
Their skulls serve as my prize,  
and I know I've once again arrived at home.

I saw the signs of the skull and crossbones,  
So I made the skeletons dance – it was unwise –  
For the ravens feasted on their unused bones.  
As I trudge on, sins scraping raw on stone,  
I'll cross one last bridge, loose one final sigh,  
when I know I've once again arrived at home.  
On battlefields that warriors, dead, adorn,  
Their butchered curses blackening out the sky,  
The ravens feast upon immutable bones,  
And the ghostly knowledge: We've all arrived at home.

*—Amber Alexander, Andrew Allen, Adam Coutts, Alex Harris, Elias Kirker-Napiorkowski, Ashton Platt, Jessica Rushing, and Stuart Lishan*

## Late Winter Renga

Unfamiliar cold

as to one who never ran

barefoot midwinter

In the shadow of the hillside

last week's fading snow

Uneven yards

with pools of melting snow

a still hardness of the ground

In the shine of the sun

an unfamiliar feeling I have not felt

Permafrost in my

broken bones My already

cold heart shivers here

A false spring's gracing gift

bereft of birdsong's echoes

A squirrel frolics in fields

search down deep in

for buried nuts

The trees are still

barren like the earth

Looking for lost friends

the shagbark hickory

reaches out its long fingers

Geese honk orchestrated

as they descend onto the pond

The water ripples

from splashes

throughout

The phoenix still ash on ground

life still in absentia

Hope finds us now on

the line between winter and  
spring beneath the chill.  
I was lost in the dark  
but now I'm found in the light  
So cold  
the stream water  
glistening in the sun  
The trickling stream  
calms me  
The radiant sun  
brings me  
to life

*—Amber Alexander, Andrew Allen, Alex Harris, Elias Kirker-Napiorkowski, Ashton Platt, Jessica Rushing, Mitchel Hendricks, Adam Coutts, and Stuart Lishan*

# Mages and Witches Spell

*(NOTE: This poem, to help train-up our ears in poetic rhythms, is dominated by a poetic foot called a “trochee,” and is loosely modeled and inspired by the witches in Macbeth.—Spring 2021, English 4566, Advanced Poetry Writing.)*

Skinny boy left all alone  
Turgid blood from his salty bones  
Bleakness of the eye behold  
Weariness in crumbled home  
Broken wing of an Archon take,  
This curdled soul of an elder snake  
Hunted by the wrinkled crones  
His vengeance that he works and hones

Babe’s blood to this wicked tome  
Waking up his murdered bones

Mystic in a diving leaf  
Bleeds like summer underneath  
Eat the skin of a scaly bore  
Filet the fish and beg for more  
Off the bone the flesh is tore  
As his screams drop through the floor  
Ripping, parting, cell by cell  
Reverberations of the bell

Screaming chants of future lore  
Reverberating blood and gore?  
Tongue of fae upon their sword  
Blood of children long un-mourned  
Scintillates around his skin  
Desperate hate glitters within  
Selfish righteousness of pain  
Unsteady universe of gain

Stars of you and your offspring  
Awakened six feet under wing

Flesh and bone of an elder god  
Weakened veil, faltered façade  
Stab the hearts upon our kin  
Summoning rites of ancient sin  
Bind these words until time’s done  
Wringing curses one by one

Thus our spell has sizzled bright  
Writhing in the brooding night

—Amber Alexander, Andrew Allen, Adam Coutts, Alex Harris, Elias  
Kirker-Napiorkowski, Ashton Platt, Jessica Rushing, and Stuart Lishan

# She Still Heard

*(NOTE: This poem, inspired by Joy Harjo's poem, "She Had Some Horses," is a free-verse poem dominated by a parallel structure to help give it more coherence and form—Spring 2021, English 4566 Advanced Poetry Writing.)*

She still heard the rumbling of thunder in the distance.  
She still heard the spritz of the cologne bottle in the morning.  
She still heard the limp crackle of the fire's dreaming  
    after the night had stilled its laughter.  
        She Still Heard.

She still heard the break in the woman's voice as she told her story.  
She still heard the waves eating the edges of the earth.  
She still heard the ringing of the bell at night in her dreams.  
        She Still Heard.

She still heard the silent shouts of those who could no longer voice them.  
She still heard her mother's morning sufferings in the scratching of the wind.  
She still heard the words in the wind through the dying leaves.  
        She Still Heard.

She still heard the sound of his footsteps,  
    the way her name would echo off the marble floors,  
    the crunching of boots on gravel, of spinning tires.  
She still heard the start of his engine as he drove away.  
She still heard echoes of his voice.  
        She still heard.

She still heard the cerulean sound of the stream that rolled past her childhood home.  
She still heard the wails of the unfortunate souls down the hill.  
She still heard the throes of their pain,  
    and the vultures and the crows,  
    and the howls of the vicious wolves.  
        She still heard.  
            She still heard.  
                She still heard.

*—Amber Alexander, Andrew Allen, Adam Coutts, Alex Harris, Elias Kirker-Napiorkowski, Ashton Platt, Jessica Rushing, Mitchel Hendricks, and Stuart Lishan*

## afternoon temptation

fall itself ripens on the branch  
these temperatures will cull  
the last leaves to ground  
nest comfort into every house  
open the sap in golden teas

an evening with friends who  
don't ask much is arriving  
with weather that steals the  
bar-hard street shadows

smoke skeining from chimneys  
the slack rows of property

the highway the rusting tangle  
of the foundry across the river

the college outside town  
the cemetery plotting its hill  
everything taking on the knap  
of lethargy and negation

we carry a fug of raw onion  
in our mouths and are hard  
to the touch and thirsty as rattles

our skin so red it would blister  
tongues and scald a callous  
with just a glance in a kitchen

and because there is nothing  
can or must be done we find

ourselves cooling under open  
windows, rinds pared of all  
their soft flesh and browning

—*Andrew Vogel*

# Inland

Between solstice fog and frost,  
between berry and tomato season,  
between sweetwater seas and  
the funky swelter of marsh rind,

behind the blunt ridges that  
collar the right-coast capitals,  
before the broad uplands' austere  
climb to the knapped sierras,

here where the impassive plains and  
fat rivers relish their dreamy screw,  
where the bunched towers stand  
and gnomon our green horizons,

here in those cities where crickets  
saw each morning to flake,  
where traffic traces the contours of  
the watershed and floods the bridges,

here where we forget every little  
thing that slips thru the holes in our  
pockets but count each and every  
peach that a summer may yield,

out here where everything  
important happens elsewhere,  
we thank the verges that climb  
our knees and pull all our ideas  
about the oscillating stars to ground.

—*Andrew Vogel*



mischief

okay

yes

we both saw

yes

let's let

our eyes slide

across each other's

no

then like

yes

tongues

taking flavor

off a blade

no

down to the very edge

yes

and keep it

between

us

—*Andrew Vogel*

## nocturne

we lay aside the lattice of our day  
tug our hips and shoulders under cover

the moon climbs her scalloped staircase  
to the perch atop her falling tower

reckons our leavings as they go slipping  
under the pleat of tomorrow

—*Andrew Vogel*

## Some Givens

Sometimes one of us looks away,  
a flick toward the window, a slow car  
bulging in the hips of a green bottle,  
chords of silence booming off the walls.

Brightness I notice is harder to open than  
the dark, it won't be entered, leaves us  
retreating sidelong into collars of shade.

Sometimes I come alive in the long hours  
of an afternoon and have to think about  
the reflex to hold it at bay, must decide,  
make the decision, palm flat on the table.

Warmth it seems is harder to distance than  
the cold, which does not want us, pushes us  
out with the fleet pulse charging our skins.

Sometimes I wake up wild under your touch.  
Sun over the rooftops storming into this room,  
stapling everything to place with shadows.

Sometimes I still think I hear their voices  
beyond the envelope of their absence,  
unlike those times I overhear you talking  
to nobody in another room, unlike when  
laughter in this kitchen evaporates in echoes.

It shouldn't be said, but sometimes I open  
myself to the melodies and poems that would  
flourish around you even if I were gone.

This time I am the one looking away.

*—Andrew Vogel*



## melting point

AMBER ALEXANDER

I HAD A DREAM THAT YOU DIED and I was standing by the casket. It was only the viewing, but no matter how many times a friend who claimed to know me best tried to pull me away, my side was still glued to yours. Through wood, of course. The prospects of hot tea, puffy peppermints, and tissues in office chairs did not seem inviting. I'd still hear the same somber piano music through the speakers in the entire building. In this dream time had past. They were calling me Mrs, we must have finally wed. There were a few wrinkles on my hand and the few scars on my wrists had faded a bit more than the last time I checked. No, I couldn't leave you, not when you needed me most. You were floating around in the little particles and orbs in the air nobody else could see; my eyes were calculated in finding them and watching them drift about. Sometimes they even got in my eyes themselves and if I closed my red eyes long enough to let them rest, you would float around in there too.

Later, when everyone had left, they kept saying they were worried about the snowstorm coming in that night, I studied my surroundings. Red carpet with little gray diamonds, gray curtains all drawn shut to block my view of the snow falling down to Earth; perhaps you came to earth on a snowflake too. On mistake, no doubt, you should have landed on another planet. I make sure I'm alone before placing one last kiss on your cold lips; they still taste the same. They still melt the crystals of frost that guards my own heart. The coldness reminds me of the snow again. You were fleeting and geometrical and beautiful and striking. You brought me joy on gloomy days. You will always bring me joy on gloomy days. ✱

## Our New York

AMBER ALEXANDER

OUR NEW YORK HAS HER LEGS SPREAD OPEN BY NOON and dinner ready at midnight. Nothing is linear and nothing makes sense, but we sit around and write poetry and it's enough. My New York makes sure my enemies miss their train and sometimes I miss mine too. All the cabs are full of tears and I never learned to swim so instead I leap out the window and catch the breeze carrying syncopated 16th notes from Carnegie Hall down West 57th. This makes me the only bird in the city with dilated pupils and sometimes a scarf, if it's chilly. Other times, I'm a paperweight. My New York likes to keep me grounded in wet sand, cement. Sometimes I'm there with you; Our New York places insurmountable pressures that holds us down, but so does the rope kept in your bedside drawer. We make love in every room; fuck in the bedroom. We always skip breakfast and fall asleep in each other's arms. In Our New York, we trace "amour, amour, amour" against one another's bare backs and take showers with the window open. In Our New York, I've never known the world to be on time and I don't expect it to start now. ✱

"ARE YOU SURE YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT'S HAPPENING TO YOU?" the slender brunette asked me with raised brows at the end of my hospital bed.

Every time a new person asked me that, I wondered if I had said something wrong. I dotted off for a few seconds still adjusting to being woken up moments ago.

## Yeah, I'll Be Fine

MAX BALDERSON

"Yeah—I have cirrhosis and hypertension in my liver."

The doctor nodded blankly.

"This is causing varices to form in my esophagus and gastrointestinal tract which is why I was throwing up blood on Monday. In addition to that, you guys also found that I have poly cystic kidney disease."

The doctor and nurse by her side turned their heads in unison as if to acknowledge that the information I was sharing was correct but not sharing the same calmness that I expressed.

Someone must have glued a concerned look on their faces, because nothing I was saying could ease their nerves. It matched the beeps and white noise of the hospital pretty well.

"Mr. Balderson, just to make sure that it's absolutely clear, you're aware that your liver is failing? And that the long term goal that we need to plan for is a transplant."

"Yep."

The two gave me their medical spiel, like all the others before them, and shifted out the door. I'd been getting those looks of shock for the past few days and was starting to suspect that maybe I was the weird one, but why should I be freaking out?

There was nothing I could really do aside from sit in bed, nod, and rack my brain trying to answer questions I had never even considered a week ago.

Truthfully, I didn't understand, but I've had time. Watching my mom in thousands of hospital beds before me. Not screaming, not crying, just laying down in bed holding her overgrown baby's hand. Or watching my brother get checked his senior year during soccer before staring down the same shotgun barrel of diagnoses that had now shifted their aim towards me. Odd to think that an elbow to the groin can be lucky. I've had much longer to think than these doctors knew.

These conditions were new to me, but after seeing superwoman too tired to even speak and after seeing your best friend suddenly forced to give up his sport, his passion, after seeing everyone in my mother's family in the same spot as me getting up stronger than before... Yeah, I'll be fine. ✱



03/05/2021

SINCE TODAY MARKS THE NEAR ANNIVERSARY OF AMERICA finally acknowledging the coronavirus and taking it seriously, I thought it apt to talk about how it has been affecting me and my academic processes for over a solid year, now.

## Reflection

DARBY ANDERSON

As I do, I want to emphasize that I know my experiences are not unique to me, and that, as a campus, as a student and faculty body, as the OSUM Family, we have all struggled dearly with departing from the normal.

I want to emphasize that we can overcome these things, together or alone, and that, although we are separated, the strength in our community has not faltered or waned. If anything, we have found new ways to seek self-improvement, to go out of our way to be kinder Buckeyes, and to reach out to help our fellow students who are in need.

When this all began, back in 2020, when we were all expecting one weird ending to a semester that we would never have to repeat, never having to do that debilitating in-sync out-of-sync learning again, I was one of those who adapted but who struggled to do so. I thrive off a classroom environment, I live off the discussion of my peers. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but these things are not often achieved in a Zoom environment.

Sometimes, if you are a sado-masochist, you can achieve some semblance of a thought-provoking seminar by prying out the discussion from blank grey boxes with names on them. Some days, on rare occasions, the discussion flows and the cameras are all on, the internet connection is all strong and stable, the topic is engaging and interesting to everyone, and all have done the preliminary work for the day. Those

days were brilliant! Often remember saying at the end of the Zoom call that “today’s discussion was great, thank you all”.

Now, fast forward a year. I started this semester living away from home with my significant other for the first time for three months (they were watching the house for relatives while they were away). We’re still doing the same thing, but I’m away from the only support group I’ve ever had: my parents. The workload of which the likes I had never seen before (hello, fellow juniors, sorry seniors) has fronted me with a new challenge that I had never before had to overcome; I was struggling to keep up, I had to actually apply myself fully to even reach my usual standards of excellence in application.

Throughout this semester, while I was testing out life alone, I was up poring over difficult texts until the single digit hours of the morning, only to wake up for class or work some couple hours later. After working for a few hours, I come home and invest the same amount of hours into school work (and nobody pays me for those hours, ha!).

But am I doing it? Yes, and I am proud to say I am doing it well. Not only am I managing to keep afloat my grades, but I feel as though I have begun to turn the tide against it. At the halfway point, I feel as if “I can do anything for six weeks!” and this mantra changes, grows smaller, as we get closer to the

finish line.

I’ve since moved back in with my parents, and having that support is wondrous. It goes to show that having a loving safety-net is what we all need in these desperate times when we feel like we are drifting apart from our core group. ✱

## About That...

AUDREY ROBERTS

ABOUT THAT TIME WHEN I GOT ARRESTED goes something like this. My two friends and I all grew up in Orient, Ohio and we were only about five to ten minutes away from Grove City, but we were still somehow in the middle of nowhere, which can clearly deduce one to boredom. You see, around the time that this story took place it'd been about one week after I turned fourteen and my friends and I wanted to go to the mall because it was blazing hot outside, I'm talking straight up hell fire, because it was the beginning of August and it was the sort of heat that melted your shoes to the black top below them. It was gross, and we didn't stand for it. And so, we begged my friend's aunt to take us to the mall. Well, we got stopped short, for reasons that you'll soon find out. At the time, this situation didn't feel as funny then, at least to my parents, but now looking back, I really can't help but laugh.

My friend May had a weird past but somehow, she had some even weirder neighbors. I mean the types that wouldn't let their (somehow perfectly normal) daughter (by way of miracle), also known as our friend Jenna, use a tampon because somehow this would, "defile her within the eyes of the great Lord," or some other phrase that made you believe you would be sent to the nice hot oven that was Dante's crispy inferno.

And that family truly was all nine circles of hell. So, since Jenna couldn't go swimming that day because her dad stated that he would somehow know whether she had used a tampon or not, (seems like he should be on a watch list for this, but that's fine....) May and I had to devise a plan to get Jenna out of this *Flowers in the Attic* situation. We decided that we would all somehow con May's aunt Sue, into driving us to the mall to escape this persistent, god awful heat and offer us some source of entertainment, and entertainment we did indeed receive.

"Sue?" May and I asked with a sort of contorted, pain enduring expression, suspecting the worst. Almost like wincing, but also trying to keep our shit together.

"What do you guys want now?" She said it like a joke, but she wasn't a woman who did that, so you knew what she meant. Her immediate thoughts being, these ungrateful children actually want something. I know Sue, absolutely psycho that children should need

something. Back then I swear she despised anyone under the age of thirty and that included ourselves.

"Well, we were all wondering if you'd take us to the mall?"

"Let me think about it for a while. And in the meantime, you guys need to clean around here, the house is a mess because of you two!" It wasn't... She was just manic.

After several hours of what you might call "recollecting" about it, Sue finally broke down and said that May needed some back-to-school clothing anyhow. So, we all piled into this half broken down Ford Explorer, with the once red tinted paint that had chips missing nearly everywhere, replaced by rust spots, so it was browner and more metallic looking than its original slick, shiny red color. It must have been a family car once upon a time, but whatever, it was transportation for us. The car had character; I'll tell you that.

The seats were comprised of this dingy black leather and our legs were persistent on sticking to them, without any reprieve whatsoever. You see Sue decided she would give us an ultimatum, as if she hadn't already by way of forcing us to clean everything (to her liking). She exclaimed that if we wanted to go to the mall then she needed to stop at Kohl's beforehand to pick up some new cookware, as if she weren't already hoarding it in their already tiny kitchen, but that's great.

Her kitchen cabinets practically burst at the seams, screaming torturously for help, but hey if the woman wants more cookware, then more cookware she shall have. Sue was a scary woman, she was nearly six feet tall, and she had this gelled,

spiked, highlighted haircut that sort of reminded me of every member of NSYNC at some point throughout their careers. It was as if instead of the frosted tips, JT decided to go for some random red tint thrown in there somewhere. Sue also would not only frequently hand out ultimatums, but she collectively decided to make May feel like a charity case all the time.

You see Sue took in her poor and abused niece, May, around when she was eight years old. Only what Sue failed to recognize was that May wasn't that poor abused child anymore. But nonetheless, Sue would not dare to blame anything on that child, ever. But somehow she was fine with blaming her for the things that she didn't actually do. Such as calling her a blasphemous whore for wearing her jean shorts to a degree in which Sue would call them too short (as if they weren't already Amish in nature, but yeah. Let's go with too short). Take parenting notes, because this is good stuff, I'm giving you here... Call your child a blasphemous whore, CHECK. Phenomenal stuff.

May, for the most part, was like Sue's harmless halo wearing angel, only little did she know that her beloved niece was more like a nightmarish heathen. Even her name, "May," made her sound like some gloriously new Bath and Body Works scent. She looked like her name too, because she sported some medium length, shiny brown hair that was as straight as a needle and she was also hazardously short. You wouldn't expect anything "awful, and absolutely horrible" to come from her, as May's aunt would later say to me, concerning myself. It was always May who was being corrupted but let me tell you that girl was a wild child and her aunt still cannot stop the hurricane that is her to

this day. She was the friend that broke into the community pool with me for a late-night swim, and the one that taught me cheat codes on *GTA V*, and the one that also got arrested with me (and not solely because of me, as Sue would wish to later claim).

But there was also Jenna.

Jenna and I were giants compared to everyone else our age, and always had been. Jenna had this crazy curly hair that was nearly black, but not quite that dark. She would always try to sneak in a streak of pink or green to protest the prison-like religious household that she was confined to. Seems like a trend when you live in the middle of nowhere huh? This poor girl went to school, came home, and her father only gave her an hour to come outside. It was absurd and she always knew it.

You should see her now.

Nowadays she dyes her hair whatever color she wants and not only a miniscule section of it either. Her skin is absolutely covered with these intricately beautiful tattoos, and more important than anything she seems happy. But occasionally, we all still get together and laugh about how this whole situation unraveled.

So, onto the good bits of the story, and for anyone who wants to shoplift, I suggest you don't do it at a Kohl's because their security departments are usually comprised of two absurdly bored dudes that will most definitely look like the *Impractical Jokers*. They just stare, excuse me, that's offensive, they "monitor" screens all day and I'm willing to bet you that they get paid way too much for it too, but despite this they still probably live with their parents. They enjoyed themselves quite a lot that day, but surprisingly I feel like we were the ones that

had the better time looking back on it now.

So, we walked into Kohl's and we all three had book bags on (very inconspicuous, I know) and of course my dad being the electrician that he is, there were always these magnificent little trinkets and tools lying about and in this collection, there were some Earth magnets. Now, for those of you that may not know these magnets have the strength of Thor's hammer and they're perfect for removing security tags on clothes, or other various items, if you're brave enough. Which we knew because we had all thoroughly done our homework on the academic subject of thieving.

We searched throughout the store finding items to "try on" but we would just take it to the dressing room and pocket it. I know what you may be thinking, May and I corrupted our poor church friend Jenna right? Well wrong... This magical experience was shockingly all Jenna's idea and we all thought that it was absolutely marvelous. I won't bore you with too many details for time's sake.

"Look, just tell Sue we have to carry our bookbags to hold our feminine products because she won't shake us down for that. Okay?" Said the conniving May.

"Okay. But May I feel like she has to know." I replied because I swear to Christ that woman knows everything.

"No, she doesn't know you guys. Just chill." She told me.

So, with our bookbags full we were on the move. Only little did we know so were our good pals in security. It looked like Jersey Shore touched them with a magic wand and believe it or not they didn't change back into

themselves like Cinderella did after the whole wand debacle. The hair, along with the awful deep V-neck shirts, along with the dad jeans. There was also this concoction of far too much cheap cologne that they had insisted on wearing for this very doom's day, but it was all an explosive mixture like a chemistry project gone wrong because our friends were not very kind to us believe it or not, despite the fantastic aroma circulating throughout the room, if you can even call it that.

So, they hustled us promptly into a room (closet), along with the ice queen, old aunt Sue and we were stuck feeling all three of their fiery glares just searing into our eyes forever. I felt like Harry Potter when that evil bitch Professor Umbridge made him endure torture by having him burn "I must not tell lies" into his skin, only for my generation the burn comes from unwarranted eye contact. And that whole spiel about "I must not tell lies" was being burned into my eyes through Sue's two soulless daggers. I mean it felt like the woman was throwing knives specifically at me. But, after introducing ourselves to these kind men, we filled out a ton of paperwork, with so many signatures it made me feel like I was signing a lease. While flipping through monotonous pages, still not caring to read them because I was fourteen, auntie Sue said something to me specifically, that I still can't help but laugh about today.

Sue decided to have the audacity on that very afternoon, to say to me "You little drug addict. This is all your fault you know. I know you smoke the marijuana because your eyes always look like that, and I don't want you corrupting my May Marie anymore." Wow. Adults might be less grown

up than we were. Who could have guessed? Not I.

What a woman right? Her speech was always too fast, she always seemed like she was jumpy and in a hurry, even when she wasn't. Maybe I should have asked her if she was the crack head, damn lady. Well, I do not smoke "the marijuana" for those of you wondering. Sue just always felt the need to ask me about this because she felt that my eyes were always glazed over. It's almost like I was tired. I will give it to her that my eyes do look like that but it was just my eyes and my blatant hatred for life, along with the impending lack of sleep, not "the marijuana" that she thought that I had just so happened to have smoked. Anyways, this lady was always jittering, I mean she was addicted to painkillers and decided to ask me about my extracurricular activities.

Sue's not-at-all-aggressive comment caused quite the uproar in the room because Jenna and May both stepped in to tell her just how wrong she was. So, our friend in security that wore that pungent, repulsive cologne that smelled like Lysol spray, you remember him? Well, the audacity of this particular room spread like a disease because my good fellow proceeded to scream, "On the count of three, I want everybody quiet." "One..." As if I hadn't been used to being yelled at by men. So, I took it upon myself to kindly finish his sentence for him, by saying "Two, Three."

Now as I had mentioned the audacity just kept spreading and now, I had been holding the talking stick. I couldn't help myself. And my lovely friend Jenna couldn't stop laughing and I'm talking the sort of laughter that makes you pee yourself. So, after it all

May got a slap on the wrist. Can you guess what Jenna and I got? A couple of court dates. Ah, the festivities.

So, Jenna and I got court assigned to do ten hours of community service, write a “heartfelt” apology to the security “personnel” at Kohl’s, and my personal favorite section of our punishment, we had to go to a simulated court for juveniles. In this simulated court we would play the lawyers, bailiff’s, stuff like that, and we would decide the real punishments for other delinquent and deviant juvenile scum, such as ourselves.

A law school student played the judge and although I might have forgotten what his name was, his personality was a little bit more difficult to wipe from our memories. Our anonymous judge liked to play around. He had these wicked double-jointed fingers and would do some rather hilarious activities with them. His favorite pastime being to make dinosaur shapes using his fingers and run them through people’s hair while screeching like what he thought a dinosaur would sound like. He was peculiar, but he made punishment surely feel like fun.

Throughout our wonderful time spent at the Franklin County Court we got to see kids on trial that would say things in front of the court (other living human beings) such as, “Yeah, I hit my mom because she wouldn’t make me a sandwich... and she’s a bitch. Forreal forreal.” Now this kid looked exactly like B-Rad from *Malibu’s Most Wanted*, and he had the precise vernacular to play him too. This kid in particular, we saw on quite a few separate occasions throughout the months that I spent doing this court simulation. Oh, and his name

was George so, watch out for all the Georges’ ladies because you’d better be good at making sandwiches if you want to wrangle this one into a loving, caring relationship.

So, ladies and gentlemen this was about the time that I got arrested. And I cannot stress this enough, do not, and I repeat, do not shoplift at Kohl’s because you will be caught and put on trial in front of the justified eyes of the law (also known as mister dinosaur fingers). But really do not shoplift, because as the “judge” told me “it will save you a lot of trouble.” ✱







Esrael Nykea Bennett, “Beyond the Horizon”



Esrael Nykea Bennett, “Frozen Tears”



Esrael Nykea Bennett, “Mr. Sir”



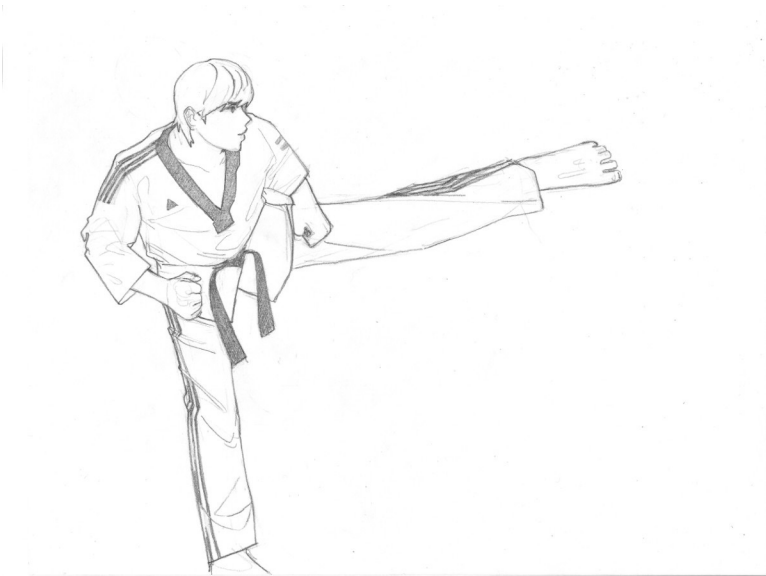
Esrael Nykea Bennett, “Open Road”



Esrael Nykea Bennett, "Vacancy"



Cecilia Fausey, Untitled Study #1



Cecilia Fausey, Untitled Study #2



Amy Plough, "The Hollow"





Jerome Shapiro, "Marysville, Ohio 2018"



Jerome Shapiro, "Polaris, Ohio 2020"



Jerome Shapiro, "Rural Central Ohio, October 2020"





Cover image: “Palimpsest — Functions Follow Forms of Desire — Jean-Francois Millet-Man Ray”

## Introduction to H. Arthur Taussig

“SPECIAL SECTION” SOUNDS LIKE SOMETHING OUT OF A JOHN LE CARRÉ COLD WAR NOVEL. It’s ironically appropriate for H. Arthur Taussig, for he tends to fly under most people’s radar. By which we mean, he’s not by any means famous, though his work is everywhere, and he has been called “a folk [music] legend.” Represented by one of the top galleries in NYC for many years, his works are in the collections of important museums and private collectors the world over. The last to toot his own horn, he did receive an NEA grant. And that’s just his work in photographic art. Arthur is a rare polymath. His doctorate is in biophysics, and did some important research on marijuana. Recording artist, composer of choral music and performance art. Science fiction writer and more. While so much art today is snarky and condescending, Arthur’s work is fun, often poking fun at the art world, but when he makes you laugh, it’s with the world, not at it. His books for children, moreover, never speak down to them, and he visually brings alive the magical world young children live in, while making reading accessible and fun. We realize we’re using a lot of superlatives, but, trust us, the volume of work he’s produced, since the 1970s, will leave you breathless. And there’s no sign of him letting up. In this section we’re giving you a small sampling of his works, including a hilarious excerpt from his yet-to-be-published sci-fi novel. Plus, there are hyperlinks to Arthur’s website, his music, interviews with him, and more. We hope this section enlightens, entertains, and, most importantly, inspires you. To paraphrase Arthur, if what you’re making is not for you, before anyone else, then it’s not art.

—Drew Niemi & Jerome F. Shapiro, curators.

## More Taussig Online

Arthur Taussig is a prolific multimedia artist whose works often slip the surly bonds of print. You can find more of his prolific work on the web at the following locations. We have also included these as part of our extended spotlight on Taussig over at our digital insert, Cornfield Review: Online (cornfieldreviewonline.com).

**Arthur Taussig's website.** This is where you can OD on “eye candy.” The website also includes a brief biography:  
[www.arthurtaussig.com](http://www.arthurtaussig.com)

**“The Alchemical Visions Tarot Deck: Art Opening for Artist Arthur Taussig.”** Here, Arthur is interviewed about his Tarot card deck at The Philosophical Society (you might want to turn on the closed captions):  
<https://youtu.be/13WbBLxTtBg>

***The Alchemical Visions Tarot: 78 Keys to Unlock Your Subconscious Mind.*** Arthur's Tarot deck is available from book sellers, including Amazon. You can sample his other publications on his website.  
<https://go.osu.edu/B8V4>

### **Tompkins Square Label.**

Tompkins Square has reissued some of Arthur's earlier albums, and newer albums. In fact, Tompkins Square has a large catalog of “folk legends.”  
<http://www.tompkinssquare.com/taussig.html>

### **“At South By Southwest, A 71-Year-Old Guitarist Makes A Belated Debut.”**

An interview with Arthur, on NPR's *All Things Considered*:  
<https://go.osu.edu/B8V5>

**“Folk Legend Harry Taussig Takes the Stage for the First Time at South by Southwest.”** Interview on radio station KPCC's *Take Two*.  
<https://go.osu.edu/B8V6>

### **Listen.**

Improve performance: <https://youtu.be/KkNEUbm9nu8>

### **Other performances.**

<https://go.osu.edu/B8V9> (a YouTube search query for “Arthur Taussig” and “South by Southwest”)

# Photographic Art



## From the series, “Study of Clouds.”

In 1929, Rene Magritte made a significant contribution to art theory without really ever being recognized as a theoretician by the art world (see below). He made a painting of a pipe. Painted on the canvas below the image of the pipe is, “*Ceci n’est pas une pipe.*” “This is not a pipe.” His instructions to the viewer were to see the painting as a painting and not the subject matter, the painting is, most significantly, not a window to what has been painted. As painting progressed and abstractions of various ilks to hold, this edict became easier and easier to follow.

Photography has been troubled by the same problem since its inception in 1837. About the same time as Magritte painted his pipe, Alfred Stieglitz photographed clouds and called them “Equivalents,” meaning that they were the visual representations of an emotional state or feeling. Another way of saying the image is not a window to the subject matter.

In this series of images, I have finally found a way to express my feelings and admiration for their contributions. I label my photographs of clouds as, “This is not an equivalent.” And yet, through the manipulation of the original photographs, they are equivalents, but not of the Stieglitz ilk nor am I denying the window nature of the images in the Magritte ilk. I am looking for a third way of viewing an image, grounded in the liminal space between experience and thought.







Botanická Zahrada, Prague

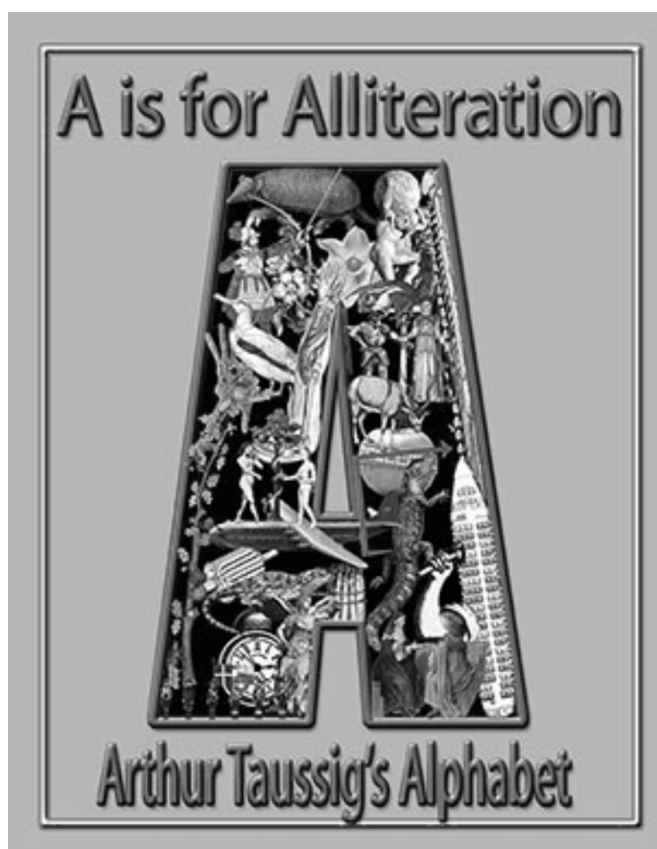




The Tarot - Major Arcana - Page 03 - The Magician



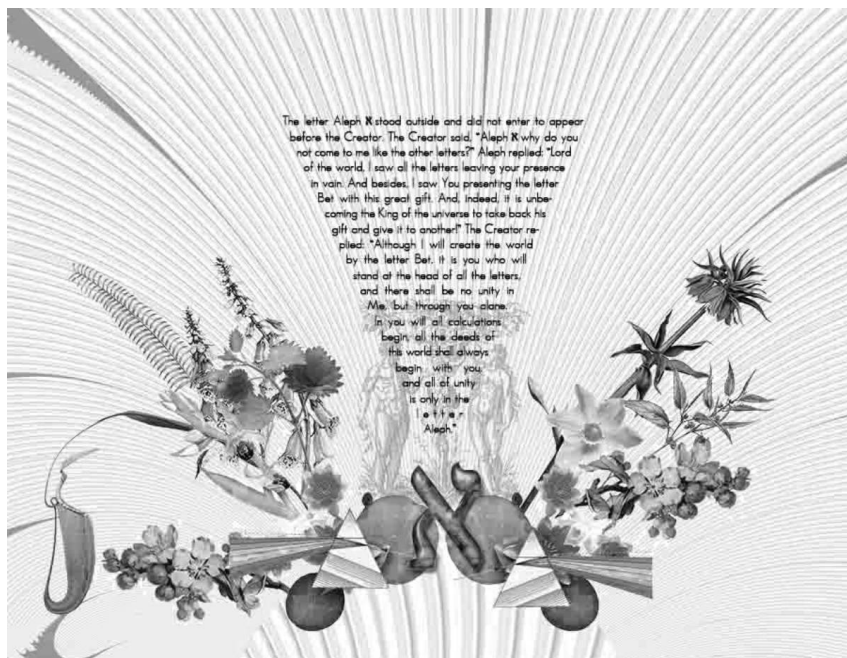
Optical Collage - Dorothea Lange – 1982



Cover for children's alphabet book



From the collection: *The Secret Life of Flowers*



## Alphabet of Rabbi Hamnuna-Saba 16 - Aleph

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### From the website:

#### “THE ALPHABET OF CREATION—THE LETTERS OF RABBI HAMNUNA-SABA

The Alphabet of Rabbi Hamnun-Saba is a chapter in the Zohar. The letters of the Hebrew alphabet – symbolic of the properties and forces that the Creator governs directly – came into the presence of the Creator, each trying to prove that it is the “most fitting” to achieve the goal of creation, that is merging with the Creator. While the letter points out its positive aspects, the Creator in return points out the deficiencies of each.”

More about The Alphabet of Creation:

<https://www.arthuraussig.com/about-the-alphabet-of-creation/>

NOW BEFORE YOU GROAN, “NOT THIS AGAIN,” BE ASSURED THIS will not be a replay of what is taught to every grade-school student; but rather a history intended specifically for travelers. There are many things you should know that aren’t taught in school and, conversely, there are a lot of things you learned in school that are either useless or just plain wrong.

As everyone knows, First Contact was a disaster.

## A Brief History of Contact

ARTHUR TAUSSIG

While we were clumsily stomping about our own backyard looking for bacteria on Mars, Enceladus, and Titan, the hundreds of space-faring civilizations out there didn’t even notice us. We were, essentially, bacteria that were beneath *their* notice.

The reason we were ignored wasn’t hubris on their part but simple economics. Sure, curiosity accounted for the few visits they paid us, but mostly they found more interesting economic prey elsewhere. Travel, whether by train, plane, or spacecraft, costs money. And unless you’re a trust fund baby, you have to make it pay. On any world, tax-deductible business junkets that don’t increase the gross go only so far before getting audited.

Simply put, we had nothing they wanted. So, they stayed away in droves. Why, then, did they come? Because of the only force that can trump economics: politics.

An economically liberal, left-wing political party was running for office somewhere — we’re still not completely sure where — promising to lower the standards for contact and “open up a thousand new worlds for the benefit of our traders.” Rumors ran rampant. One was that anti-isolationists had slogans something like, “Our planet first” or “Return our planet to greatness.” They claimed the resulting increase in interplanetary trade would stimulate business as well as increase employment, lower taxes, and lower the collective debt. Beyond being a successful campaign slogan — they got elected — we don’t know what happened on the various home worlds to the corporations that were involved financially. There are still vague rumors of various forms of comeuppance. But we do know exactly what happened here on Earth . . . and it wasn’t pretty.

The same thing happened on Earth that hap-



pens everywhere when an advanced civilization encounters one “less advanced” — “primitive” is such a pejorative term, especially when we apply it to ourselves. Perhaps “technologically challenged” would be better. It happened when Cortez landed in South America; it happened when the Chinese came to Taiwan; it happened when the Dutch landed in North America. The less technological culture quickly becomes enamored with the goodies of the more technologically advanced culture. That is why the indigenous North Americans sold Manhattan for a few sparkly beads. And, once the “natives” fall under the thrall of attractive material goods they can’t afford, the next inevitable step is economic collapse.

And on Contact, Earth’s economy suffered what would be best termed a global implosion. While we lusted after their hi-tech goodies with gay abandon, we had no Manhattans to trade. There was nothing we had that they wanted.

Attempting to save up enough money to buy something off-world — for status mostly, but occasionally for hope of economic gain — millions of humans scrimped, saved, and starved, and bought nothing human-made beyond the bare necessities. Having windows from Krakana that looked open and let in the fresh air but kept the bugs and pollution out would certainly be the talk of the neighborhood. Having a floor from Golnia that could be programmed to “eat” specific food items dropped on it and convert the garbage into electricity would be a boon to a fast food restaurant, a high-school cafeteria, or any home with teenagers.

They let us stew in economic

depression and fiscal misery for over a decade. Not through intention or vindictiveness, but because we were very low on their list of things to attend to, and, apparently, almost anything brought to their attention would bump us a few notches down. The only thing that got us out of our predicament was a new election. Back on whichever planet it was, the challenging party used Earth as an example of the first, liberal party’s bad, inhumane, self-serving, and greedy policies — which, several commentators snickered, made them no different than any other political party.

Three things resulted from this political tactic. They got elected. Earth became known . . . but no more so than any minor Third World country here on Earth whose name is recognized because it appeared in the news in fourth or fifth place for a day or two, but no one is sure exactly where in Africa or in Asia or in South America it is. And, most importantly, Earth got the interplanetary equivalent of a Marshall Plan as an apology.

Several systems bankrolled a bunch of projects that were intended to bring Earth into the economic fold. They were willing to spend money on us for two reasons. The first was simple revenge against their political opponents. But the second was the argument that, at least publicly, carried the day: Earth would become a valid trading partner — the irony that this was the rationalization that got us into so much economic trouble in the first place escaped very few. So, greed won out after all, even when perpetrated by our “friends.”

Since Earth had almost nothing material anyone really wanted, it was decided that the best way to bring

hard currencies here was through tourism. (Although various off-world drug companies picked up a variety of plants, they found almost nothing useful that they didn't already have from somewhere else.) There were many harebrained schemes, like taking a bunch of Chinese chefs around to a dozen worlds for cooking demonstrations and giving basketball demonstrations on monocular worlds. However, the most successful plan, economically, was when several off-world corporations built hotels and resorts to cater to off-world tourists with the right size and shape beds, the right size and shape bathtubs, and, most important, the right size and shape toilets. At first, these were built at or near various places that the corporations, in consultation with Earth governments, thought would be attractive — The Grand Canyon, Yellowstone, Angkor Wat, Giza, and so on. Surprisingly (or perhaps not), what the visitors liked best was watching the “quaint” humans, especially the hotel employees, going about their tasks. Some asked to go to their homes to watch their daily activities and were often willing to pay handsomely for the privilege. It was like live reality TV for them and Earth soon became known as an inexpensive, if a little disreputable, place to vacation.

Participants didn't mind the “human zoo” aspect of this arrangement and soon a goodly number of people were converting the second bedroom — Johnny and Jane would have to share a room — into an off-world guest room (toilet and all). This would often render an income in a month greater than what an engineer and her waiter husband working full time could earn in a year. It was rumored that the money was so

good from these wealthy and curious tourists that some hosts would allow access to the most personal and intimate activities — for a price.

There were, of course, problems in attracting off-world tourism to Earth. Arlington National Cemetery once explained, for instance, would engender such overwhelming horror in a species that had not had physical conflicts for millennia that they would head directly for the D.C. off-world shuttle station often in such a state of panic that they left their luggage behind.

While tourism was the basis for a slow but steady economic recovery for Earth, there were other things going on; but these were mostly fads and flashes in the economic pan. The Navaho Nation, for instance, became very wealthy almost overnight when off-world museums discovered Katchina. These personifications in miniature of the spirit world — still called to this day “dolls” by the ignorant — turned out to be something that many off-world religions could relate to. They were bought by museums throughout the galaxy and displayed as an indication of the highest accomplishments of human civilization.

While the Native Americans in the southwest enjoyed a brisk business, unfortunately they spent generously on large cars and guns and too little went into alcohol rehabilitation, health care, or tuberculosis treatment, all of which continued to plague many native cultures because of the seemingly never-ending racism and guilt of the dominant culture. However, they were clever enough to hide these facts from their benefactors who remained convinced that they were the shining example of humanity at its highest level



of accomplishment (a perception which many of the Native Americans felt was correct). The irony was that the native's own contact with the white invaders centuries earlier had a lot to do with their current deplorable state of affairs just as our contact with the off-world civilizations had to do with our current state of affairs.

Another flash-in-the-pan surfaced when it was noticed that there was a sudden influx of off-world professional gamblers into Monaco, Macao, Las Vegas, and the dozens of Native American casinos dotting the US. What the casinos greedily saw as a flood of new, and presumably naïve customers, quickly turned into a disaster as they saw their newly-minted customers leaving with mountains of the house's money.

One wit named the whole affair "Schrödinger's Rat" in a pun on the old exemplar of "Schrödinger's Cat" as a demonstration of the theory of quantum superposition. In 1935, in a thought experiment, Edwin Schrödinger proposed that if a cat were put in a box with a pill full of poison triggered by the decay of a single radioactive atom, we wouldn't know if the cat was dead or alive until we opened the box and looked (Schrödinger, apparently, had a thing about cats). Until the box is opened by an observer, according to quantum theory, the cat exists in two states simultaneously, both dead and alive. The two possibilities represent two possible universes that both exist at the same time; according to quantum theory, only direct observation eliminates one and makes the other "reality."<sup>1</sup> In the quantum world, observation affects the outcome. Earth science has observed these effects at a subatomic

level in which a single particle is demonstrated to exist simultaneously in multiple locations. More exotically, subatomic particles called neutrinos exist in multiple states: you can't tell the "flavor" of a neutrino, for instance, until it bumps into another particle and disintegrates into a different, tell-tale particle that, in turn, identifies what its flavor used to be — electron, muon, sterile, or tau. Quantum physicists seem to have a thing about taste and color as much as Schrödinger had about cats.

So much for Earth science. Off-world science pushed this theory much further a long time ago. If Schrödinger's kitty wears a wrist watch, there are four possible states of time in the box: the watch is accurate, it is fast, it is slow, or it doesn't work at all. One wouldn't know the state of time in the box unless it was opened and subjected it to direct observation.

Now, imagine a series of Schrödinger's kitty+watch boxes lined up through space/time extending to infinity. Each box represents a different moment in the time continuum. Since we can never know exactly in which box the single superimposed radioactive atom trigger is, or indeed where the single animal is now located, there is a small but finite possibility that it is in the next box, affecting the next instant of time. Before the boxes are opened, the cat and the watch are in all the boxes at once and all states of time exist simultaneously. Thus, there is a subatomic hole between the boxes of time chewed through the wall by "Schrödinger's Rat," which allows "leakage," so that one event, apparently independent from the next, actually affects it.

Gamblers were clearly inter-

ested in the Earth's ignorance of this fact and especially Earth's lack of protection against this effect in their gambling houses. If someone can predict the probability of the next card in the deck, the next slot into which the roulette ball will fall, or the next die face to come up, he/she/it can make much more money than by simply counting cards.

Las Vegas and the other gambling havens quickly went broke and the happy gamblers returned to their home planets. Typically, a gambler would make a pile in Vegas and head south to New Mexico. There they would buy a few dozen (or more) Kachina and take off for his, her, or its home planet. It turns out, as mentioned above, that at that time Kachina were about the only things on Earth that most other civilizations recognized as having any value. Buying a Kachina for a few hundred or even a thousand dollars, a trader could easily make ten times that amount selling it to an off-world museum or collector. It was always an open question in which section of a museum the Kachina would wind up: in the off-world-art wing or in the anthropology (sic) section.

The first result of the raiding of our world's gambling dens was for the underworld, always deeply associated with gambling both legal and illegal, to search for a way to cut their losses. Their traditional methods — heavy-handed threat and/or direct violence — didn't work because all off-world gamblers either wore clothing or had electronic devices that prevent physical injury. And attempts by a dozen armed burly men in black suits to waylay a gambler in a back alley weighted down with his/her/its winnings quickly

showed that a single off-world gamester, equipped with something hidden in his/her/its pinky ring — assuming, of course, he/she/it had fingers — easily outgunned automatic weapons and shotguns to say nothing of blackjacks and baseball bats.

Frustrated, the mob decided to fight fire with fire, so to speak. Making “unrefusable offers,” they “hired,” (i.e. coerced) scientists to find a way to foil the gamblers. It was not a simple task and the effort quickly escalated into a world-wide scientific research effort employing hundreds of scientists and funded by hundreds of billions of dollars of mob money . . . far more than any single world government was willing to spend on basic research. The scientists were helped, however, by knowing that an answer was possible rather than just searching blindly in the dark. Soon, with a Manhattan Project-like effort, devices were installed into the basements of casinos around the globe to protect their machinery — dice, cards, roulette balls, and so on — from the traces of the time slip that the off-world gamblers used to their advantage. While the devices were very large, clumsy, crude, and used enormous amounts of power, they were, nevertheless, Earth's first step into what the rest of the galaxy saw as “modern science.” While the real origins, purpose, and sources of funding is known to all, it is never spoken of in polite company. On any planet.

Proving that humans were capable of “modern science,” however, didn't convince the various off-world cultures to supply us with scientific help on their own accord. That came at much greater cost than Las Vegas almost going broke; the cost

was in human lives. A species-jumping virus arrived on Earth. To this day no one knows from where it came or how it passed thorough the biofilters at the entry ports, but its effects were ghastly. Since its species jumping behavior was similar to the Avian Flu that preceded it by many centuries, the media quickly dubbed this virus as the Alien Flu. It infected billions; killed hundreds of thousands. This finally convinced off-world governments to supply Earth with the medicines and medical devices needed to fight it.

Once again, Earth's governments weren't up to the task. However, this time it wasn't the Mafia but the medical profession that stepped up to the plate — though there were wags who said there was little difference between the two. Once the Alien Flu was under control, doctors asked about the possibility of other infections and respectfully requested the medicines and devices to deal with them. They then, less respectfully, asked for the equipment to maintain the original devices. Like the clichéd ripples spreading from a pebble thrown into a pond, devices, technicians, and the beginnings of an advanced technological infrastructure soon arrived on Earth. Much like doctors who use new drugs "off label," that is, for a legitimate but unapproved purpose, many off-world technologies quickly spread from strictly medical uses to uses far beyond what was originally intended by their donors — medical and otherwise.

This period was to become known as the Era (or Invasion depending on one's political persuasion) of the Black Boxes, as the various medical and ancillary devices were dubbed. In part, these were given to Earth as partial

compensation for the economic harm we suffered by opening our planet to interplanetary trade too soon and partially to prevent further viral invasions.

A "black box" is a sealed device that performs an advanced — from Earth's point of view — function. They are rarely black. They are rarely box-shaped. They rarely need a physical connection to do their job. Place one in a power plant and the efficiency doubles or triples. Place one in an airplane and it will arrive at its destination within seconds of taking off without using any fuel. Place one near an ailing bridge and, in a few minutes, metal is strengthened, rusting rivets and bolts are replaced with invisible welds, shapes are subtly changed for better load support, and, to top it all off, a new coat of paint appears seemingly out of nowhere.

It was rumored in scientific circles that whoever built the black boxes harnessed the quantum "Cheshire Cat" effect in which a particle can be separated from its properties, moved to a different location and then reunited with its properties. While Earth scientists were interested in the exotic properties of subatomic particles like spin, charm and color, extraterrestrial scientists were pursuing something much more practical: separating a particle from its mass. It is suspected that this is the principle on which their interstellar transportation is based. But they ain't tellin' so no one is really sure.

Alongside the Black Boxes came the MAs. What we call robots, most of the other cultures who opted for this path call them "mechanical assistants" or "MAs." This difference in naming points out the bad choice of the neologism "robot." It came from the Czech Karel Čapek's 1920 play, "R.U.R.,"

which stood for “Rossum’s Universal Robots.” The idea was that mechanical workers — “robota” (forced labor) in Czech — would soon replace live workers. As time progressed and both the idea of the robot and the word became part of the normal visual and verbal vocabularies, the primary image called to mind is that of the mechanical man. Around the end of the 20th century, some European lawmakers even proposed “electronic personhood” for them.

However, there was no need for mechanical men — outside, that is, the old 2Vs which reveled in them from the mechanical seductress Maria of the 1927 *Metropolis* to the fussily hysterical C3PO of the 1977 *Star Wars* (basically the same robot) to the belching, Lucite-topped distillery Robbie the Robot of the 1957 riff on Shakespeare’s *The Tempest, Forbidden Planet*.

The reason advanced civilizations prefer MAs to robots is quite simple: It is very inefficient to make a device that can perform many tasks, just like it is inefficient (and slow) to make a computer whose hardware must be changed to perform different tasks (software is given that job).<sup>2</sup> What is far more efficient is to build devices for narrow, specialized tasks.

Of course, our world was full of them without our taking notice: motion sensors to turn on lights, automatic transmissions in automobiles, doors that open when approached, auto-focus and auto-exposure cameras, push-button coffee makers, and even a device to pick up the tone arm of a record player and gingerly set it in the first groove of a valuable, antique vinyl music disk.

Now the MAs, as they finally became known, appeared everywhere

in their most advanced forms alongside their trashy imitations. Home Shopping Channel changed its name to MAC — Mechanical Assistant Channel — but continued selling the same junk (automatic egg crackers, robotic vacuum cleaners, and so on). What changed most was industry. For decades, factories had been heading toward mechanization with the likes of automated automobile assembly lines. But this, combined with union troubles, changed the appearance of the MAs from sequestered behind factory walls to direct interaction with the public. One of the first was a free-standing, mobile, automatic cappuccino/espresso machine. Simply call it over, hand it a cup, tell it what you want in as much detail as you wish, and there is your coffee. The machine is self-cleaning, self-maintaining, and even orders its own supplies. As a result, most of the specialty shops serving badly made and over-priced exotic coffees around the world quickly became a thing of the past. This being one example amongst many of further exacerbating the economic problems resulting from contact.

Like contact itself, the introduction of sophisticated MAs had both good and adverse consequences in addition to a whole host of unforeseen ones. While many were called “labor saving,” very few replaced human jobs in toto as the alarmists so vocally claimed they would. Rather, pieces of jobs were replaced. For instance, a house maid’s job might include both scrubbing the floors and dusting a collection of very fragile china figurines. The maid was relieved of the scrubbing task. But no matter how much AI was packed into an MA, it would not be doing the delicate dusting.

After a series of similar economic adventures and misadventures, things on Earth gradually normalized. Many unemployed or unemployable “Earthers” began to go to other planets to find work. Jobs were found that took advantage of uniquely human characteristics — opposable thumbs, breathing oxygen (especially on planets where it is used in manufacture and is poisonous to the locals), and so on. Some jobs were legitimate, some less so. Musicians, artists, and philosophers — those with advanced degrees who had spent most of their days on Earth flipping burgers — were suddenly in demand off world. Surprisingly, a large and profitable industry was founded on taking our old 2Vs and converting them to formats that could be played in the local exoplanet theaters. Not surprisingly, film noir and Charlie Chaplin were hits on many planets. (The unique movie tastes on the Chymer planet will be discussed in the section on that planet.)

In addition to jobless academics, others were desperate to leave Earth for reasons of failure, criminal records, or prejudice. Ethnic and religious colonies were formed and followed their own whims and/or textual interpretations (one of these are described in more detail at the end of this guide). For instance, on planets where the locals had chitinous outer coverings, humans “volunteered” (for a price, of course) for testing of skin lotions. On worlds of monocular beings where depth perception was difficult and involved wagging one’s head side to side, basketball demonstrations brought in amazed crowds. And there was always a job as a geek in the equivalent of a circus freak show. This was not the computer kind of geek, but one who

would bite the heads off live chickens in primitive circus sideshows — in this case eating human foods like a fried chicken, which was unimaginably repulsive on more than one world. And there was always the sex trade.

As soon as these small off-Earth groups began to prosper, support followed — doctors, restaurateurs, barbers, shopkeepers, bakers, even lawyers, all willing to supply a fledgling human colony with goods and services that reminded them of home. What was supplied to the local humans — often ghettoed together in what was locally called an “H-Town” — were often simply crude and shoddy modifications of local merchandise. The expense of real Earth goods put them out of the reach of almost everyone. Given that the means of transportation and with the almost universal assistance of the black boxes, moving things from planet to planet was very easy and cheap, it was often xenophobia that added high tariffs on goods at the insistence of local communities who touted off-world merchandise as “dirty,” or “corrupting the youth,” or “stealing our jobs,” etc.

In any case, soon small concentrations of humans began popping up around the galaxy. These generically named H-Towns, in fact, differed radically from town to town; their major population could be a concentration of Korean or Slovak or Thai or Orthodox or Evangelical. There are, at current count, several hundred planets with humble, seemingly permanent human populations.

In addition, there are probably several thousand planets where humans live. Many of these expatriates are loners or a single family. Many, often in a fit of galactic romanticism, have “gone

native” having found the local cultures more satisfying and “better” than the ones they left on Earth. Some learned the native languages and found work translating human literature. Human myth, folklore, fairy tales, and ghost stories are popular on many planets. Some, having “gone native,” found companions, and, if there was genetic compatibility, had offspring that were often shunned by both the locals and other human beings.

Some underwent “reverse migration,” returning to Earth with skills — mostly linguistic — to become teachers and scholars of “alien languages.” Many “returnees” were hired by Mormon colleges to teach off-world languages so that youngsters could be sent into the stars for their proselytizing missions.

The sons and daughters of the wealthy, often during the “gap” between high school and college, were sent on an outer-space version of the 19th century Grand Tour. While the parents assumed it would be educational and culturally broadening, for the adolescents this junket usually turned out to be a three-week-long overindulgence in exotic alcoholic beverages . . . and a lot of unbridled sex far from a guilt-inducing parental gaze. Some H-Towns became profitable as exotic tourist attractions for the locals. Families would visit on weekends, children clutched tightly, to gaze into shop windows and, for the more adventurous, a meal of strange human foods. One of the most popular repasts was described by a local guidebook as “a complex and exotic preparation of a recently butchered ungulate animal whose muscles are harvested and degraded into a fine texture. Small disk-shaped portions are

formed and are individually heated on metal plates until caramelization of the proteins begins. The disk, now dripping with protein breakdown exudates, is topped with a layer of coagulated liquid squeezed from the mammary gland of the ungulate that (unwillingly) contributed the protein. This is placed between two hemispheres made principally of a powder derived from the hard seed fruit of a weed plant which is formed and heated and whose texture is stabilized with the gaseous products of a microorganism degrading some of the simpler molecules of the processed seeds. This is often layered with a leaf, a slice of a wet, red and seedy fruit, and a viscous combination of many unfamiliar and mostly unidentifiable substances. A traditional accompaniment is a tuber cut into long, thin sections and then allowed to soak in a very hot lipid extract.” A cheeseburger and fries.

In the long run, contact turned Earth upside down: culturally, psychologically, theologically, and economically. Theologians divided more than ever on questions like: where was the Garden of Eden, was the Snake an alien, what is the nature of original sin, did the Fall from Grace occur only on Earth, and, most frighteningly, are there planets that were exempt from the Fall?<sup>3</sup>

Earth’s economies slowly absorbed radical changes unimaginable in the days before Contact. The introduction of every piece of alien technology, no matter how small, typically got two reactions: The people who could afford it were happy to have labor saved and/or a healthier environment (to say nothing of the social status gained). Some found new avenues of employment around the new technologies.



Opposed to them — usually those whose jobs were displaced by a new technology — were a vocal minority complaining about the loss of national pride, indeed, human pride, the corrupting influence of alien cultures, the overall degradation of “humanity,” etc. They seemed oblivious to the historical fact that every change in technology, whether of human or alien origin, has put people out of work: Guttenberg and his printing press were railed against for putting copyists out of work, the telegraph put Pony Express riders out of work, Ford and his automobile were pilloried for putting not only saddle-makers out of work, but the thousands employed in every city removing mountains of horse dung from the streets.

One of the milestones on the road of Earth being folded into a wider scientific community was the meeting of a small, minor off-world scientific society in Lima, Peru. While poorly and unenthusiastically attended (who’d want to attend a conference in an uninteresting backwater like Earth?), it was nevertheless the first time that twenty-or-so different alien species were on Earth at the same time as representatives of their respective governments. Earth scientists were reluctantly invited to attend. They could understand very little. And during the coffee breaks, a commonly heard word, mumbled at a very soto voce, in almost all twenty alien languages, translated best as “apes.”

And on the cultural/psychological front, within a decade or two after Contact, what happened on Earth is what happens pretty much everywhere: intra-planetary struggles, national conflicts, contrivances, and local (i.e., planetary) problems paled quickly in light of the vastness of “out there.”

The differences between people — color, conformation, commitment — quickly become insignificant. For instance, after meeting a 12-foot-tall purple-feathered grasshopper with an IQ of 220, racism was bound to wind up as a symptom of abnormality in the DSM.

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1. This formulation embraces totally the megalomaniacal idea that one’s personal state of mind makes the reality of the world come into being.
  2. That is, outside of a few experiments with magnetically based morphware.
  3. These questions were rather presciently confronted in the middle of the 20th century by theologian/writer/Christian apologist C. S. Lewis in his books *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Paralandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*.. ✱

# CONTRIBUTORS

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AMBER ALEXANDER is an English major and triple minor graduating in Spring 2022 with plans to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing. In an unofficial vote among friends, she was most likely to move out of the country, least likely to survive The Hunger Games, and moderately likely to get into a debate with Tarantino.

Hello all, I'm DARBY ANDERSON, an upcoming senior at OSUM who likes the outdoors and writing passionately.

HAILEE BAER is an Ohio State Marion student majoring in Early Childhood Education.

MAX BALDERSON is an English major attending Ohio State Marion.

ESRAEL NYKEA BENNETT: Your art should always come from an environment where you feel safe and comfortable. When you write, sing, dance, or do any form of art, use every sense in your body to relay the emotion and passion that goes into your work. Only then can true art be created.

My name is ADAM COUTS, and I am a creative writing major at OSU. Publishing my work is something that has always been a thought of mine and I was aware of the *Cornfield Review*. This past semester I had the most fun with my writing, especially in poetry, and felt they were quality enough to get published. I am proud of what I have written, and I am grateful of the opportunity I was given. I plan to keep writing through my final semester this fall, and hopefully continue to do so long after.

CECILIA FAUSEY is a Junior in high school and has enjoyed drawing as a pastime since kindergarten. Today, she works part-time as a waitress after school and plans to study architecture in college.

DONALD M. HASSLER: Hassler retired from full-time teaching English at Kent State in 2014, but has continued with a few doctoral students working on science fiction. He has had two poems in *Analog*, a science fiction magazine, since retirement, as well as a number of poems in *Academic Questions*.

TRAVIS MCCLERKING is a Junior at OSU majoring in English. He has also been published in *Hooligan Mag* and the *Olio* zine. He is most often found performing poetry at an open mic, skating at the Scioto Mile, or listing the people who can beat Goku.

AMY PLOUGH: Reader, writer, photographer, tutor, and nurse. Overly exhausted, yet inwardly exuberant, student.

AUDREY ROBERTS has been writing short stories since the age of twelve and has dreamed about the prospect of a publication since. Is currently finishing a degree in English Literature at OSU and continuing forward to get a master's degree.

JEROME SHAPIRO This will be the third issue of *Cornfield Review* in which something of mine has appeared. Which just goes to show you, at OSU-M, old dogs can be taught new tricks. Thank you "Program 60," the faculty, students, and staff, of OSUM.

Hi! My name is COLLIN THACKER, English Major. I grew up in Marion, Ohio my whole life, and I tend to stick to transcendentalism as a style of poetry, as well as collecting famous art!

ANDREW VOGEL walks the hills and teaches in rural Eastern Pennsylvania. His poems have appeared in *The Blue Collar Review*, *Off the Coast*, *Slant Poetry Journal*, *The Evergreen Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Tule Review*, *The Briar Cliff Review* and elsewhere.

STUART LISHAN (on behalf of the VARIOUS AUTHORS behind the several group-penned poems in this issue): "This past Spring semester I taught a class, English 4566 (Advanced Poetry Writing), where our focus centered upon the writing of poetic forms, a familiarity of which allows one to experience the more fulsome possibilities of poetry, or, to paraphrase the poet John Hollander, to enjoy all of the gardens in the park-like landscape of poetry and not just be confined to the narrow pathway of free verse. As part of our weekly practicums, this class of talented writers participated in a series of collaborations, where we would all join together to craft a poem that followed this or that poetic form. You can find some of our efforts here, in this volume of *Cornfield Review*. I have made some minor edits and revisions in places, to help make each poem feel a bit more coherent, but for the most part these are the lines as they were written in class by the poets in English 4566: **Amber Alexander, Andrew Allen, Adam Coutts, Alex Harris, Mitchel Hendricks, Elias Kirker-Napiorkowski, Ashton Platt, Jessica Rushing**, and yours truly.

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## COLOPHON

This issue of the *Cornfield Review* is printed using a combination of **Georgia**, **BEBAS**, **Futura**, **Helvetica**, **Lemon Tuesday**, **LEMON MILK**, *shoreline script*, and *Raleway* fonts. The layout was handled in Adobe InDesign. The interior artwork and photographs, as well as the cover design, were all edited using a combination of Adobe Photoshop and GIMP. The cover concept was developed collaboratively by the Editorial Board, and designed by Christyne Horton.



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Come and join **Kapow!**, the Ohio State Marion campus creative writing club. Organized by Stuart Lishan, all versions of creative writing are encouraged to be shared! Feel free to come participate and hang out. Contact Stuart Lishan ([lishan.1@osu.edu](mailto:lishan.1@osu.edu)) for more details.

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