



Honors Literary Magazine
Spring 2014

Spiritus Mundi
A Collective Memory

Colorado
State
University

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Cover Art:

Jefferson Geiger

“Star Trails Above Horsetooth”

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Colleen Canty
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Jeff Geiger
Olivia Halboth
Nina Mascheroni
Krista Reuther
Matthew Ryder
Morgan Wade

Watch Your P's

Olivia Halboth

Life is P.
It's Palindrome and Paradigm.
When Poor Dan is in a droop
and $2 + 2 = 4$.
When you're not careful
life flies by like a racecar
and you don't realize what was done.
It's Perfection and Panjandrum.
Even a downward spiral is a
Pattern, structure, Pi
3.14159 on
and on and
on and –
Pause for effect.

Life is P.
It's Power and Progression
that falls back on itself – it's a P.
It's Paradox and Poetry.
Tongues splintered with questions
of the chickens and the eggs
in the Pursuit of
Pandora's box and Plato's cave.
So when you say Please
watch your P's and q's,
I smile and only
Promise
to watch my
P's.



No Place Like Home
Jessie Croteau

Constancy

Matthew Ryder

The alleyway is quiet. A slight breeze disturbs the trash piles that run the length of the brick and cement passage. They constrict what was once a wide alleyway with the refuse of life: grease-stained cardboard, bulging bags the color of tar, and discarded, barely touched meals under a patchwork pattern of flies. The alley is baking, even in the late day clouds. A band of alley cats spread out, hoping that the trash will attract vermin. The breeze tugs at the loose edges of tape that coat an enquiring poster.

Footsteps echo down the alley, growing closer. A pair of irrationally pink and glittery Velcro sneakers, small and slightly scuffed, stop below the poster. It is freshly printed, the title large and starkly red, plastered with quickly dirtying tape to the brick wall near the entrance. The young girl in the sneakers pauses and looks up at the sign with a contemplative hand on her chin. The effect is somewhat distorted by her wheat-blonde pigtails, orange sweater emblazoned with a fuzzy monkey face, and violently purple pants.

“Hmm,” she says, peering at the poster. A face exactly like hers stares back. The word MISSING stands out above her. Just under the word, a date only a day earlier declares her barely lost. Words below agree that, if not for her young age, she wouldn’t even be a Missing Person yet. She doesn’t feel like trying to read anything right now, however, and the grimy tape distorts the print.

Behind her in the alleyway, a shadow makes its way up the brick passageway. The girl casts no shadow herself. Slow footfalls follow the thin silhouette. They sound like dice being rolled for the highest stakes, like the clicking of branches in the dead of a grasping, icy winter. They sound, more than anything, like bone.

“Hey, mister?” the girl calls back, still regarding the missing child’s poster.

“Yes?” a large voice asks deeply, resounding like a crematorium closing, or the clangor of church bells.

“That’s me,” the girl declares, turning and pointing to the picture and smiling a gap-toothed child’s grin.

A resigned sigh hisses through clenched teeth, and feet shuffle forward as a skull presses itself close to the picture. “Well, I’ll be. It is you.”

“Yep.” The girl nods, her hair bouncing in the process. She turns to look at the figure looming over her. He is tall, thin, and a uniquely pale shade of white that is almost yellow. His finger bones scratch a bare skull. He wears a robe woven of some glossy black fabric, and the long wooden handle of a careworn tool could be seen protruding just over his thin shoulder, strapped between his shoulders like a traveler’s pack. The girl in the garish clothes looks up at him.

“Whatcha thinking ‘bout?” she asks.

“I’ve tried to explain this to you, Sophie,” Death says, pointing a calcareous digit at her. “You are dead.”

Sophie giggles and waves a hand dismissively. “Noooo, you’re silly.”

“I am not silly. I do not make mistakes,” Death says with some pride. “That man was angry, and full of drink that made him more so.”

“Yeah, Uncle Rick was no fun.” The girl nods, curling her small mouth into a frown. “Mommy an’ daddy are still away working, but I gotted away.”

“You don’t want to find your parents?” Death asks carefully. The last few days of Sophie’s life should not dictate what comes after, but this lost little girl had no future, and thus he is curious.

“I – I don’t wanna be with adults now.” Sophie wraps her arms around herself and looks down. She seems to grow pale, and the purple of her pants fade as she shudders once, but

then looks up. “And now that I’m away I can explore!” The frown unfurls into another bright smile.

Death sighs again, the hissing sound less frustrated this time, perhaps peppered with amused exasperation. This is the crux of the problem, he realizes. Most people, at some level, come to terms with their mortality, or at least its inevitability. Sophie’s end came so suddenly that she had no time to realize it, let alone make peace. Most people’s souls curdle with undirected anger, or petulant mischief in the case of other children, anchoring them to a world that is no longer theirs. But Sophie’s resiliency surprises him; it wasn’t stubbornness, but a fascination with a world she could no longer touch. Unsure how to handle this, Death resorts, like so many misguided adults, to reason.

He takes his scythe from his back and props it against the wall, bending to the girl’s height. His bones creak and joints pop, a body’s symphony sans flesh. “I am afraid not, Sophie. You did not make it out of that car’s trunk, just –” He takes her wrist and turns her hand over, palm up, and both Death and the girl can see through her hand to Death’s bony palm beneath it. “Just your spirit. One lost little ghost.” The little girl stares through her own hand, fascinated.

Death creaks up and off his knee bones quickly, taking a step back and picking up his scythe as he does. It has a solid and curved handle, a tool for heavy harvests, and the worn blade glints as Death inspects it. Then he draws it back, and – after a pause and a precise, exhaled breath – he swings.

There is a clatter and a muffled curse as the scythe hisses through the air and crashes into the alley’s wall, sending both the scythe and its wielder spinning to the ground.

“You’re not supposed to duck,” he grumbles, starting to push himself up.

The little lost girl looks up from where she had bent down to try to scratch the head of a curious alley tomcat. She sees him on the floor and giggles. “Silly.”

“Well don’t mind me,” Death mutters, half to himself. At his echoing voice, the cat looks up. With a horrified hiss the mangy tom leaps backwards and bounds away, Sophie reaching out sadly as its tail vanishes around a corner. Death watches, and his skull twitches with a sad shake. There would be no more cats for Sophie. Time is a finite resource given to others, with Death standing behind the last inevitably falling grain of sand. He has nowhere to be, no one waiting for him. This realization makes Death put his scythe away, uncertain of what to do next. “So...” He trails off, turning back to the little girl. He generally doesn’t have much need for extended conversation.

“Oh! I wanna go to the park! And swing on the swings!” the little girl says, bright and happy again. She skips to the mouth of the alleyway, where she turns and looks back at Death. “Come on, you slow bunny,” she shouts, dragging the ‘on’ out into a complaint. As she does, someone in a charcoal suit, leather business briefcase in hand, walks past the alley and straight through her. She doesn’t notice.

Thoughts fly through Death’s hollow head as he follows. He is used to the monotony of the job, enjoys it, even. So many people take issue with their end, be it where or why, who or how, and most often, when. So many souls so obsessed with time, its passing, running, and ending. Pleading, they try to hold onto each grain of sand in the hourglass. But Sophie hasn’t tried to beg, or even ask. That is important, maybe all that matters. Once every couple millennia perhaps, there could be time for the park.

“If we go to the park...” Death says, cautiously, “will you follow me later? There are places you need to go.”

“Places more important than the park?” Sophie replies, incredulous. Her companion nods. “Well...” She fidgets uncertainly. “Maybe. But I might want to adventure more.”

He sighs as she puts her small, pudgy hand in his bony one. “Alright. We might have time to adventure after that, unless you’re tired.”

Sophie shakes the statement off. “Nah, I don’t get tired yet. Too much day left.” As they pass the last row of grungy bricks, the sun’s light hits them both. Sophie does not fade or pale. She seems, Death reflects, full of life. That certainly counts, too.

He feels a pull on his hand and looks down. “If I am extra good, can we get ice-cream later?” Sophie asks seriously.

Although a skull must smile all the time, perhaps, for once, Death meant it. “Perhaps.”

“Yay!” Sophie jumps and skips, pigtails following suit. “I like vanilla or strawberry.”

“I have always been partial to dark chocolate myself,” Death muses. As they walk off, into the light, a last exchange drifts back to the alley:

“Could you push me on the swings when get to the park?”

“I think I can do that.”

“Good. And slides. You would like slides.”

In Case of Rain
Krista Reuther

humans grey as slate

complement the dull
sky, a murky pond
wrecked in the aftermath
of a pebble's plunge

murky

dark and cold
like the butcher's freezer
packed with quiet
cattle, a cowboy's nightmare
sold for three dollars per pound

what a muted world!

the rain embracing
cracked cement sidewalks
writing sonnets as it falls
lightly on your ruby windbreaker
slick and bright
as if no one told you

today was canceled.



Bike and Boat in Mallorca, Spain
Jefferson Geiger

American Angst
Colleen Canty

Third grade, once a day, I pledged allegiance to a flag

Twenty-one years later I pledge to daddy's gun in the closet and a
suicide by just another boy called fag

"Oh, you're American," they say

apathetically, apologetically, argumentatively

Their eyes flash with visions of plastic-imprisoned cashiers in
gas stations or robots stuffed in suits with too much gel in their
hair and I know they're wondering if when I get shot or stabbed
or hit with an expensively and intentionally, ignobly assembled
Chrysler

if I bleed red, white and blue

And I've pledged my allegiance to that flag so many times I'm
starting to wonder if it's true

But I'm a privileged white American – my collar may be blue, but
it's steam ironed by the caring hands of my tragically beautiful
mother right after she packs my brown sack lunch

And these emerald-fleshed, diamond-capped mountains which
were my cradle became my prison

in which these long-necked, esteemed old women gripped their
goblets of fine wine and sensibility in papery, veined hands

Curdling, churning contagion

I'm drowning in the only thing I've known,

but all I see when I look up is everything I believe, was told,
baring down

Blue sky, white cloud...

Red is the color of the rest of the world's blood

in which my hands were washed, even if I don't know the name,
the cause, the pain, the journey, the God of the one that spilt it

A story was written long before I became a character, but the
stage is set, the spotlight broiling and I have no choice but to
dodge the bullets, learn the dance

I was born in the land of opportunity, but – ha! – not a second
chance

And it's not an excuse to claim you're far removed

because then you're just another one of them:

Ignorant. Americans.

Ignorance is funny because by its definition it's the most univer-
sal trait

The only thing I know is that I don't know most things and now
that I've been bruised enough to bleed, I see ignorance runs in
my veins

And it's not just red, white and blue

But you spit this word out in my face, seething, sizzling from your
tongue

I've heard rumor of this opera, but this is the first time I've heard
it sung

And I may not know where I'm going, but I do know where I'm
from...

I'm from a land younger than its soil, but ancient in its wisdom

Sifted through hands of young and old, white and black, the free
and the broken

Ghostly voices stream from their dirt cavern graves

Humanity's symphony of struggle knit into the very ground

Pushing along those amber waves of grain to that Pacific Railroad
sound

I'm from the land of drooping front porches and skeletal rocking chairs,

lazy voices that mingle with tobacco smoke in the thickness of the summer air

Like worker ants swimming through the richest amber honey

Grandfather's voice is as rough as his hands and his knees gnarled like the carpenter's oak in the yard

The silver ringing of the ice cubes migrating against the walls of the lemonade jar remind us of a world away

One we'd see if we could just get the truck out of the driveway

I'm from the land of one town, red-necked, blue-collared hippies who know the names of every grocery store clerk that work at the local Safeway

And when the vastness of the sky punctured by the spearheads of the Rockies seems to suffocate

five old friends, one small bus, eternal highways, the road's our escape

The eternal highway – that cement serpent snaking up gorges, down canyons, round mountains, through valleys

When the windows sink to their graves in the door and the 80 mph wind through the car starts to pour

You can hear them, dancing with Sweeneys's banjo and Dylan's guitar –

Those ghosts telling stories of the people from before

I'm from the land of more stories than could ever be told.

One land, one state, one town, one chair, on what truly feeds the soul?

Because I could stand in one place one million years and still I
could feel full

The world is but a stepping stone

Because as much as I live in this world, the world lives in me
and I have a hunger and thirst to consume all the forests and
beaches and drink all the seas

But is it the places I've been or the people I've seen
that validate this body, heart and soul one Irish boy from Buffalo
named Colleen?

No, I think there's more than that – than first world, third world;
Iraqi, American; French, English; you and me

There's a house in which we're all invited to truly be set free

You can keep your eccentricities and passions, your favorite
branch on the family tree,

but don't declare or assert or divide; in this house you can merely
be

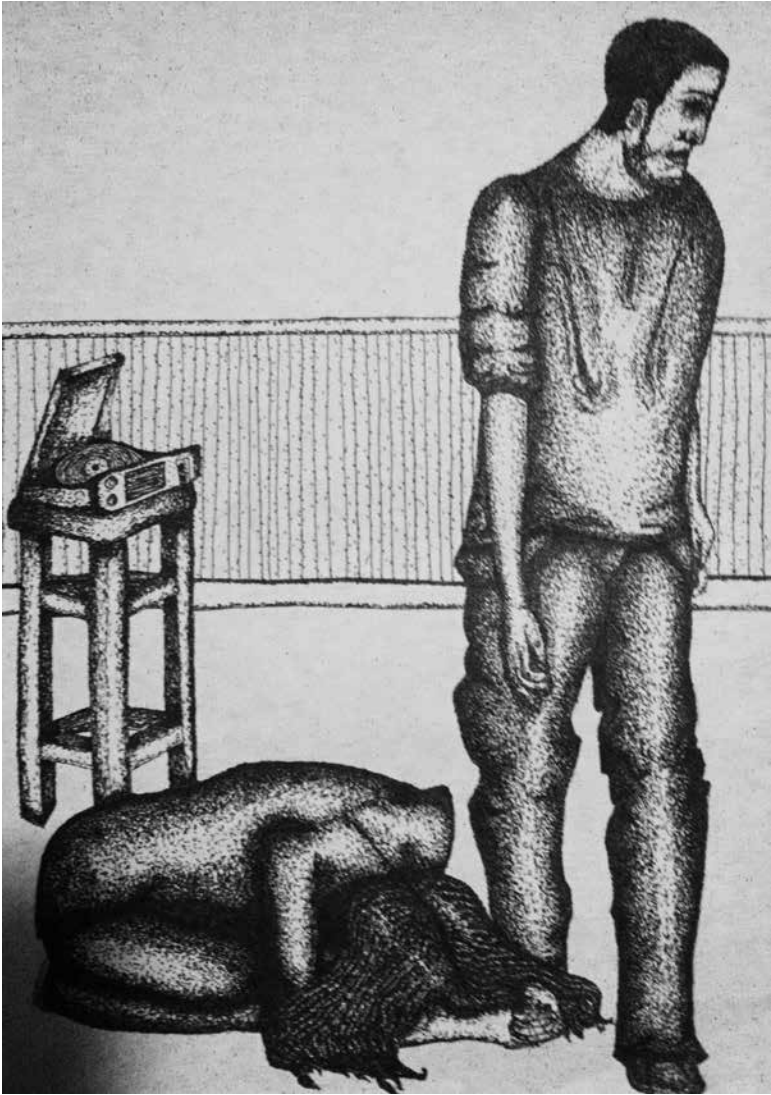
And now I pledge allegiance to a flag that makes the blind man
see

That red and white and blue are essential –

but they are only three

This streaming flag slaps the air and announces my Father's
coming country

It beckons the brave home at last, to the true land of the free



Pointlessism
Nina Mascheroni

While she might organize band picnics and complain politely to you about working from home at odd hours, she grips the steering wheel too tightly as she mentions the prognosis

and her knuckles stand out white like the tremor in her voice.

It is a quarter past one, and you are reminded that space is as cold as it is empty.

In the stillness of a winter – barely morning – with the streetlights dipping the snow-caked roads in iodine you can almost feel a void slowly pull each breath from the base of your throat.

Sleep is for those whose mind isn't reaching for that cold pane of glass.

It doesn't feel like you inhale.

It is twenty after one, and you remind yourself that caring takes effort.

It is twenty-one after, and you wonder how the snow looks, and if dying of cold is as peaceful as they say.

You shake the thought off – the feel of solid ice, slick with water – a moment too real on your palms. You push back from the window and stand unsteadily

in front of your bed.

Every winter you would open a package, and every year you would have to smile over a holiday pillowcase. Your grandmother got the fabric and sewed the edges, patterns awkward – unasked, you never liked sports. Teddy bears for a twelve year old?

The fan pushes air around, dull roar a bid to keep the night's own silence from pouring in your ears. Its breeze wraps ribbons around your calves that spreads shivering

ripples you feel in the muscles of your chest.



August
Morgan Wade

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