

Scribbler

JANUARY 2014

ISSUE 78

Editor's Note:

I did not set out with a theme in mind, but as I look at the pieces selected, I can see one emerging. It could be named liminality, transition, even alienation. Some of the poems and prose speak to being on the brink, the dangerous moment when you realize you are out of place, a person unknown to those around them. Others authors praise the ever-changing nature of things, even celebrate the sweet sadness of what might have been and what might still be.

Maybe the theme I see coming through these works is simply a result of what I like to call *the writer's distance* - the space required to see the breathtaking details of our mundane and magical world: a strained smile, a falling leaf, the harmony of disparate events.

Enjoy their voices. I certainly have.

-Jade Raybin, December 2013

Lonely Airport

It's lonely at an airport restaurant...
 No eyes meet eyes while
 tables for two kiss each others edges.
 Traveling strangers faces
 set upward
 toward the shouting blur of
 clownish flat screen televisions
 or set downward
 toward the cheerful clink of
 ice swimming in a hi-ball.
 Unsteady with grief? she says
 (can't be right)
 I'm sorry? I say
 Ready for drinks? she says
 Her eyes on paper pencil poised.
 Gin and tonic, please. I say
 searching
 her downcast mask of stock politeness.
 Isn't it a shifty world, unknowable, she says
 (no)

What's that? I say
 One-fifty more to make it double, she says
 her voice overlarge in the cramped space.
 Sure, I say
 As she turns sharp across the floor
 her feet working as fast as her words.
 Ready for food?
 at another solitary diner.
 A smooth jazz mariachi remix
 bellows from a speaker overhead
 scoring the scene beyond my table
 in the huge airport esophagus.
 I see hurrying masses
 drag identical black cubes
 while squawking metal rectangles
 keep their palms fixed to their heads.
 no eyes look in my direction
 and I wonder
 how does the world go on
 when he is dead?

-- Gabriel Raffaelli

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SCHEDULE AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

POETRY SALOON (drunk on poetry!)

Meets at 472 44th Street, Oakland, the second Friday of the month. Potluck at 6pm, reading at 7:30pm. Bring poems or prose by you and others to share, or come just to enjoy. Hosted by Kayla Sussell and Jayne McPherson.

Jan. 10, Feb. 14, Mar. 14, Apr. 11

CRAZY CHILD WRITING WORKSHOPS (fee: \$80)

Saturdays, 10am - 5pm, generally once a month.

Jan. 11 in San Rafael

Mar. 8 in Middletown

Apr. 5 in Oakland

10-WEEK WORKSHOPS poetry, prose, plays, nonfiction (fee: \$400), Mondays and Wednesdays, 7pm - 10pm, Temescal District, Oakland. Current series end Mar. 3 and 5. Next series start Mar. 10 and 12.

NOVEL AND CREATIVE NONFICTION WORKSHOPS (fee: \$400 for ten sessions)

One ongoing, intensive workshop meet for three hours every other Monday in Marin. Writers bring ten pages to each session. Limited to five writers.

THE NOVEL'S ARC (fee: \$500 for four sessions)

In this workshop four novelists commit to reading each other's novels and examining how the novel works as a whole. We'll devote a two-hour session to each novel. Current sessions begin in November, next sessions start in March 2014, dates to be arranged.

HARBIN WRITING SEMINAR (fee: \$325, \$225 for Harbin residents; \$50 early registration discount, dormitory lodging and five catered meals) Fri., Jan. 24 at 6pm, to Sun., Jan. 26 at 4pm

Harbin Hot Springs, Middletown, CA 95461
(To register, contact Elaine Watt
707-987-2339x72 or accounting@harbin.org)

WRITING EXCURSIONS: SEE PAGE 8

For more information about any workshop, visit matsonpoet.com or phone 510-654-6495. To register (unless otherwise noted), phone 510-654-6495 or email clive@matsonpoet.com.

At The Wedding

Lips tired from reminiscing,
the smile is becoming more sneer
but a red flood of wine makes our cheeks
into apples
and our tongues into ill behaved children.
“Why weren’t we ever lovers?”
you ask.
I have no good answer
except to stretch my face to its limit
and push out a chuckle
and snap a glance
at the disco ball in residence on your
finger.
“A good question”
falls from lips that can’t be mine
because I’m remembering a time
when I thought
you were beautiful
and I’m seeing
that you are still beautiful
which somehow stings
but I can’t say that
so instead I try:
“Well, I certainly fucked that up”
and you laugh just a little too loud.
I keep smiling but say nothing more
while I swallow more red wine
that has a taste like bittersweet nostalgia.

-- Gabriel Raffaelli

So Slowly On

The mountains dance to their own music
in glacial time across millennia

Our lives are much too brief to see
the pirouette, the graceful pas de deux

But we can sense if we are still
the resonance of their gentle foot falls

-- Sally Bolger

The Brightest Eclipse

Falling faster and faster like a leaf
Crawling from the top in disbelief
Sailing in a beam of light
Trailing behind me out of sight

Never floating yet always buoyant
Sinking, glowing, a dull glaze joined
Together as one and same in difference
We compliment each other for an instance

An intolerant breach offers air in a vacuum
When I take the sky I share no room
If we meet in the middle, deeper than the ocean
It’s too late and too simple - we’re already in motion

You will never completely stay hidden
So whenever I’m high in the sky you’re not smitten
I cannot nor will not vanquish you
Nay, you are my sibling, my lover, you are me too
As you run to catch me, I fall as I pique
Falling faster and faster like a leaf.

-- Ari B. Freedman

tbi

James woke up. He was always waking up. People asked him why he always felt like he was waking up. He would just shrug and say, “I don’t know.” Whenever he said this he would hear it in the back of his head: “Don’t tell the truth. Whatever you do don’t tell the truth.”

James knew what the truth was. But at the same time he was unable to believe the truth. He had tried everything he could think of. He had written on the wall. He had tattooed it on his back. He had alarms set to go off and remind him what the truth was every hour on the hour. But no matter how he tried, he was unable to say it out loud. The times he had tried he would suddenly break out in a stutter. Sometimes he would force himself to look in the mirror. But the mirror was not long enough for him to see who he really was.

It had been over seven years now. And he was still always just waking up. But the days at least were starting to come together. He at least was able to decipher time. It was different now. In some ways he had to learn it all over again.

Then one night in a cooking class, he followed the wrong directions. Each person brought in their dish. Each one was the same color of white. James looked at the food he brought in. It was a strange-looking orange color. People in the class were all looking at his dish. He heard someone say, "It looks like he forgot this was supposed to be an Italian entree, not orange sherbet from Baskin Robbins." "Don't be too generous. You don't want to give Baskin Robbins a bad name."

Later in the class when everyone had tasted each other's dish, the teacher left James' dish on the table. Only his dish. He looked around the room. It felt like everyone was looking at him -- with eyes that looked as if they were filled with flies.

The teacher stood up. "James, what is this?"

"It's what you asked us to make."

"I know that. But what did you do to it?"

"I don't know. I did what I thought I was supposed to do."

The teacher looked puzzled. The class looked uncomfortable. James wished he was just waking up again.

The teacher said: "James, how did you end up with this dish?" Then "No. Actually I don't want to know how you ended up with this dish. Does anyone have anything to say about what James brought in?"

There was a small girl in the back. She almost looked like a mouse with glasses. "I think it's wonderful."

Then another person said, "I think it's wonderful too."

Then the teacher said, "James, for several months you've been in this class. And everyone has said something about himself. You say nothing. Or let me rephrase that. You say something. But a few minutes later, I'll realize you've said nothing at all. Does anyone agree with me?"

Everyone nodded their head.

"I'm sorry," James said.

"About what?"

"The food."

"The food is wonderful, James. In fact, most of the things you bring in here are quite good and some better than this. But each week I sit here I stare out and see someone who doesn't seem to know they're here."

James felt like he was on a Reality TV show that took place in a second-hand analyst's office.

The class ended. James went over to pick up his orange dish. The small girl came over and said, "It's okay. You don't have to fight all the time."

James looked at her. Her face was soft, fat and beautiful. He wanted to tell her. But still was unable to. That week he spent everyday saying it over and over again. He wrote it down over and over again. Until he found he was only able to say it if he kept his eyes closed. He already was aware that with his eyes closed, his body worked more properly. He could hold his balance and walk closer to a straight line. Then he remembered the word "gait." His gait was always better with his eyes closed. He had a better sense of what his core was. With his eyes closed he was even able to see better. As strange as that sounds.

In the next class they were supposed to bring in the same dish as the time before. He woke up each day until he looked at the clock and saw that it was again Wednesday. The night of his cooking class.

When he walked in he saw all the dishes from the other students. Their dishes were again all white. He looked at his dish and it was still orange. Before the class started, James interrupted. He wanted to apologize to everyone now. As if he was prepared for the mistake before it happened.

"Yes, what is it, James?" the teacher asked.

"I wanted to say why my dish is orange."

"Did anyone ask if they cared why it was orange?"

"No."

"Then why are you telling us?"

"I don't know."

"Good."

James found a chair and sat down. His back hurt. So did his shoulder. And his legs and his neck. He wanted nothing more than to tell them why. In fact that's all he wanted. Was to say why. But he was never able to. Finally he stood up in the middle of the class and said, "I have brain damage. I was hit by a car."

Everyone stopped and looked at him.

The teacher stopped speaking, looked over at him and said, "We don't name our dishes here."

James wanted to say it wasn't the name of his dish. But he realized it didn't matter. He had at least said it out loud. Maybe now he would be able to stop feeling like he was just waking up.

--Doug Friedman

Song

When you've been moving for so long
East and West don't mean a thing
And your senses lose direction
Your ears can't help but ring

Everything you look at vibrates
And the mystery shows through
Those old dreams seem even further
And it's fuzzy now who's who

Don't get lost or sentimental
It's just another dose of space
The dissolving act of being
In the memory of our race

Don't you know you came from nowhere?
Can't you tell you're going back?
When eternity breaks open
There's no need to paint it black

And the mind will conjure rainbows
Dazzling visions to the eye
Which glow burning clear through shapes and forms
And need to question why...

-- Alex Raybin



Brighton

The whole of this twinkling, vomiting city is out tonight. It's like one giant 21st birthday party for all the most fucked up people, complete with unique fireworks and bespoke party bags and jelly vodka. It is the same now as it was then. The repetitive, brain gratingly stupid series of events that occurred like clockwork every Saturday night. Along the rain lashed sea front, the houses like tall wedding cakes made of sponge and cream, stretching their marzipan brick layers up to the tattered clouds raging across the sky in tears.

Young girls are skipping, tottering and dodging through the crowds in high heels, ridiculous miniskirts and freezing legs with goosebumps. It still smells like cheap fish and chips and rain. Vinegar and old newspapers mixed with filthy puddle water and putrid seagull shit. I'm trying to light a cigarette on the corner by a souvenir shop near a rusting, shrieking postcard stand. It's already half damp with a soggy filter, and the relentless south coast wind refuses to cooperate. The Palace Pier shifts and whistles at a high pitch under the weight of a thousand stoic tourists and teenagers seeking joy, escape, cheap thrills and candyfloss.

There is a sudden rumble of thunder like an ominous cello warming up for orchestra, and for a minute the whole Earth seems to rattle and shake. I think of God in his playroom like a giant toddler walking away from his collection of plastic toys and treading carelessly on top of them all. I think of the glinting wet street with all its frivolous party makers slipping nonchalantly into the spewing contaminated seaweed tangled waves like a dollop of ice cream sliding down the cone. The young girls continue treading over cracks in the pavement slabs so their heels don't stick in, leaving them rendered paralyzed and weak with limbs akimbo. I think of being six years old and the smacking sound of sandals on concrete, jumping across each square so as not to fall into the monster's lair. The street monster with crinkly, wintery eyes and nails like daggers.

The girls hover and shiver together along the pebbled beachfront, cowering from the cold. The clapboard hut that sells cockles and mussels,

jellied eels and clams straight from the crunchy shell in polystyrene cups with toothpicks is closed for the night. The wooden fish-shaped sign bangs with revenge against the side of the hut. Now the girls are waiting impatiently to be let through by angry overweight bouncers into the sweat box of multicoloured lights and crappy, poppy dance tunes and people heaving in the shadows.

Inside, they drink sickly sweet concoctions for one pound fifty a shot out of plastic cups that they then crush and throw onto the floor, laughing. The floor is like an ice rink when you're not wearing any skates. It's an ice rink of slipping vodka, whisky, Red Bull®, Coca-Cola® and cigarette butt cocktail surprise.

The same drunken conversation is being had in every ladies bathroom all over town, it's like an assembly line of girls in toilet cubicles magnified a thousand times over in an identical scene. Girls crying, smeared mascara running down cheeks, girls throwing up, girls bitching, girls cackling that high pitched laugh of fleeting drunken camaraderie. Overflowing packets of Marlboro Lights offered around, regardless, to grabbing hands. It won't last, they'll all hate each other in the morning.

I don't want any part of it. I don't recognize myself here anymore. Like a long-forgotten twisted nightmare that you can't remember if you dreamed it already or not. Like a horrible court jester playing tricks and telling riddles to a confused chamber of portly Kings and jealous Queens. All the dreamstealers are lying in wait, standing straight and silent behind the trees with dark black pointed hoods with horns and gaping holes where there should be eyes. They dig their holes as fast as you can dream your dream and they snarl as each shovelful of cold dirt lands in crumbling heaps at their toeless feet. That is how dreams get buried alive when you're not looking after them properly.

-- Georgina Hutchinson

Haight Street Hippies, 2013

There ain't no
hippies no more,
here in the middle
of the city
of the summer
of love,
on Haight Street,
San Francisco.
Their leases ran out
or they had kids,
who had kids
Or they had a bum trip,
ODed once or twice
and bought a Volvo.

Tourist hippies at
Ben and Jerry's
sell ice cream
with the rainbow
wigs, overalls,
bubble blowing
clowns on stilts.

THEY
moved to
Mendocino
to grow pot
in the forest
And bought a
big house in
the middle of
no where off
the distant dark
highway
And cut off
their hair, because
they don't live
here no more.

They couldn't pay
the rent after they
tuned in and
dropped out,
After it started to
rain and was a
foggy blur for a
couple of years.

They moved to
Humboldt or Oregon
on a ranch
where world peace
starts with a quiet
place under the
stars.

Tour busses
drive by as
old guys on
SSI wear
tie dyes and
pretend to be
Jesus hippies,
selling peace
and love
for a dollar
for a photograph.

Or giving some
sagely advice
to runaways
or French tourists,
college kids
in search of the
Great American
Highway.

No, the hippies
are dead or
gone away
as their children
pass ordinances
to keep the
sidewalks safe

And the city's
urban revival
yuppie heaven
has become a
great investment
for an old
hippie in a
suit and a
Jerry Garcia
designer tie.

- Elliott Rodgers
July 28, 2013

WRITING EXCURSIONS 2014

February 2 - 12

"**Writing Costa Rica**," Nosara Retreat Center, Guanacaste, Costa Rica. Fee: tbd

June 15 - 22

"**Feather River Art Camp**"

Oakland Feather River Camp

Quincy, California, fee: tbd

<http://www.featherriverartcamp.com>

June 24 - 29

"**Writing Your Way In**"

Lendrick Lodge in Scotland

Fee: £425 if booked before Jan. 30th (early bird); £450 if booked after
+ food and accommodations £275

(approx. \$681.80 early bird, \$721.90 later; \$441.17 for food, accommodations)

August 6 - 15

"**Writing Highway 395**" at Pine Cliff Resort, June Lake at Lee Vining, California, fee: tbd

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Closer to home: MIND/BODY WRITING WORKSHOP

(fee: \$85) with Tressa Berman and Clive Matson

Saturday, February 1, 10am - 5pm in Oakland

DID YOU READ THE SCRIBBLER FINANCIAL REPORT?

Total expenses: \$353.58. Total income (from donors): \$150.

Will Clive have to plant his own cacao tree in the backyard? Please help him pay for this journal!

THE SCRIBBLER
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