

Fall 2019

Pathos, Fall 2019

Portland State University. Student Publications Board

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pathos



LITERARY MAGAZINE
FALL • 2019

FALL TERM
2019

Hello!

Before my mind decided to catalog memories, I was creating art. Poetry entered my life years later and ever since, these beautiful expressions of the human experience have traveled with me. I never expected poetry and art to lead me on such a profound journey, one where I now have the pleasure to help curate all of your breathtaking work, but I am so thankful. I am thankful to all of the talented staff members that help bring this magazine to life each quarter and, more than anything, I am thankful to you. Whether your art, poetry, prose, or photography is gracing these pages or not- you are truly what makes Pathos great.

I hope you enjoy. See you next time.

Yours sincerely,



Sadie Jordan
Editor-in-chief

SADIE JORDAN
Editor-in-Chief

HARRISON GERARD
Art Director

MOXXY ROGERS
Copy Editor

BROOKLYNNE WORTHINGTON
Social Media Manager

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FRONT COVER:

PEACHES

IZZY WATKINS

BACK COVER:

UNTITLED

BRITTNEY HABEL



*Gummo, the Movie Video
Game Level-One Boss*

Joseph Eichenlaub
Oil

THE BEARER OF MIDNIGHT*Jordan Marzka*

That churning power
in all its splendid form
struck down upon your head
and through your fingers,
wound its way into my back
and made a gentle course
to the lay-chambers of my chest

I find myself in embers
as is my heart each time the sweet force of slumber finds it
which openness dictates has happened before
and will happen again.

But your role as gentle courier
does not empty your pockets of coin,
it fills them
and your name.

for few find themselves worthy of such a role
as the bearer of midnight.

RECALL THE DESERT

Missi Jarrar

When Nadine was alive, the desert yawned against Reno and spread across the plateau like gripping roots. The casino lights flashed at dusk, but moving away from the city, the clank-clutter of slot machines faded and gave way to the silent wind of evening. It seemed the sun would forever set on the huge, flat sea of brown desert.

The trailer had two bedrooms, one on each end, and between lay a span of indoor/outdoor green carpet and a couple pieces of worn plaid furniture. The air inside was still and hot until the sun mercifully went down. In the winter an icy hand rested over the trailer constantly. Dinner was Top Ramen mixed with peas and ketchup. Groceries were met with the glee of Christmas day. Once a scorpion climbed up through the bathtub drain and stayed there all day. Nadine lived there with her mother and I lived with them for the four months before I left for San Francisco.

Pretty wasn't extraordinary enough to describe Nadine. She was stunning in the way that women pay plastic surgeons thousands just to achieve a weak semblance of nervous perfection. I often thought of her as a dark Marilyn Monroe with mysterious biracial roots that made her seem anything from Italian to a member of the local Pawnee tribes.

Back then, Nadine had no friends be-

cause kids are cruel. While I was staying there Nadine came home from school crying. At sixteen her mother had taken her out of high school and she was going to a secondary school in Sparks. The girls at school were calling her a crack whore and spreading rumors that she was sleeping with an old man for drugs. She was inconsolable and sat on the snagged plaid couch with her face in her hands sobbing for an hour. She begged her mother to take her out of school and, when she turned seventeen, she never went back again.

Her mother was always gone, quietly absent, or passed out in the far bedroom—I cannot recall where she was all the time; just that she was missing. Her mother had a soft, sweet voice that slurred in the heavy summer heat. The winter after I left she bought a gas heater, got drunk, and let the pilot go out. Nadine woke to the smell of gas and dragged her unconscious mother out of the back bedroom and into the yard. Her mother was life-flighted to Sacramento, but suffered permanent brain damage from the exposure. Later she said, ‘I feel drunk all the time now. It's what I've always wanted,’ to which no one had anything to say.

As the years passed we grew apart organically. I moved to Las Vegas, Dallas, Seattle, Portland, San Antonio, and Portland again. The years piled, one atop

another. When I told Nadine's story I told it with apprehension, about how she never had any father or mother and she was always alone with no one to take care of her. Her life—in her youth when I knew her—was as barren as the desert around her and the scars ran parallel, but hidden under her perfect skin so that later, when I found her, her many friends and loving husband saw someone I had never met. I could only ever know her fragility, the isolated girl crying on the edge of the desert.

When her husband was killed in a car accident she sang a song beautifully at his funeral, they told me. Their two sons, one nine and the other six, were at her side. But the things she needed to survive the loss were never given to her and, in the end, she couldn't make it through the year because the inherent vulnerability of her heart couldn't bare even one more loss. The desert, to me, had swallowed her up into its dry, unforgiving throat and I recall—with no fondness—of what was innocent then, but monstrous now, the trailer on the edge of town, away from the garish lights, surrounded by the solitary desert wind through the sage.

(HIVE) COLLAPSE

Ruth Robertson

I wrote this poem to make you
fall in love with me.
But I am afraid
it will be like the time
a bee
landed on my lips
and when
she discovered they weren't petals,

she flew away.

TO THINE OWN SELF, BE TRUE

Destiny Spicer

you fell asleep —
in your clothes, on the couch
like you always do

the sun rose and you
stumbled
back to my faultless fingers

the aged corduroy couch
saturated
(whiskey, fine white)

in slurred speech you
pledged to be
anonymous

we grew
the three of us,
in the house, on the hill

in white trains
ran away,
I gave her
borrowed and blue

with two perfect legs
in unity and service
we departed

SMOKING RESTROOM POETRY*William Silage*

The shrine maiden of the smoking restroom
dressed in black and smoking rolled cigarettes
she drank alcohol from a stainless steel flask
while applying in the men's restroom mirror
shoplifted 99-cents black lipstick
with the sound of Fleetwood Mac echoing
I lit a cigarette with her lighter
and breathed in irresponsibly
to either impress or out of rebellion
I never really know with myself
the natural order of general decay
she told me she was writing poetry
I looked through the notebook
terrible puns in elaborate stanzas
debauchery on every line
allusions to human genitalia
the history of melancholia
that seem to joke and scream at the same time
The maiden asked, "What do you think?"
fucking plasma
I think my head is full of fucking plasma
I answered, "Run-on sentences are your bitch"
taking the cigarette from her mouth
She blew smoke in my face and laughed
"You're damn right."

TRYING (AND FAILING) TO ANSWER SOME OF POETRY'S QUESTIONS

Kurtis Matthew Russell

“And if the body were not the soul, what is the soul?”

I'm a nervous wreck. I was born with meningitis. I should be dead. I'm living with myself. I should be dead. When I was a boy in kindergarten, I wrote a big joke for an assignment—every student should be given a nuclear bomb and trained to use weapons to destroy the school. It would be a school for aliens and everyone would be free. The police were called, and worse, they came. I was put through rigorous psychological evaluation. My mother understood it all to be a joke, but the authorities didn't. I drew an accompanying picture of the school on fire. I thought it was hilarious. That year, in a Christmas card letter to our extended family, my mother said I was ‘capable of great feats of destruction.’ And here we are.

I'm a boy holding a cinder block above a window. It's a basement window — the kind that is buried in the earth and surrounded by dirt so it can only capture the light of day from a certain angle. I'm standing next to a childhood friend who still plays baseball to this day and he's telling me it's a bad idea. I think. I think it's a great idea. I'm curious about how gravity works and as a scientific experiment, I drop the cinder block and watch it

fall. Everything goes perfectly at first. It hits the ground in the little window alcove with a satisfying thud, and then in the same instant, it's lurching back from the ground, bouncing if you will, and arching inward, toward the window. And, as if by the will of God, there is no longer a window there. The cinder block has entered the basement and glass has been sent into the air around me. I am the definition of rock n' roll—dangerous white entitlement realized through unnecessary violence, the fertile starting grounds for a later-in-life drug problem and sex-dependency. Worse yet, at this age, I am proud of my great feats of destruction, and I am ready to see more chaos wrought upon all the giddy life force that gallivants around and through me.

A thousand hearts towards revolution, and in a tumultuous time, my lover told me she would never look at me the same if I developed affection for amphetamines, or other women for that matter. And I did both and here we are.

“In the room, the women come and go. Talking of Michelangelo.”

Who are the women who are coming and going in the room? Is it the ballerina in all her tightly wound and pained beauty? Is it the cigarette-smoking Cath-

olic statistician airing her infinite guilt? Is it the egotistical theater major with commitment issues? Is it the ratty some-day-mortician who keeps a crowd of musical cronies and one-time suitors? Is it the barista who isn't the ballerina? Is it the drug-dealing bad-movie-watcher with an obsession for the Norwegian language? Is it the zodiac-fanatic who continuously reminds me that I'm a Leo? Is it the distant horticulturist photographing plants, light, and shadows as a means of avoiding her emotional trauma?

Who is Michelangelo? Is he really just Michelangelo? Is he, for the purposes of this piece, me? Is he a metaphor that man be, in the way Dylan Thomas might remark? Or is he a symbol for the entirety of art, and artists, meant to embody an identity that goes far beyond the limits of individual recognition? What is talk?

And here we are.

I am aware of unawareness. That's a blessing. And, in the dark, I've just been scratching out words on concrete walls — words I've heard before, words that do not belong to me, and I have forgotten the world. I have become another unwittingly fostered and thoroughly unarticulated fetus.

“A man and a woman are one. A man

and a woman and a blackbird are one.”

Wallace Stevens said that in a poem called “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” and I don't know much about Wallace Stevens, but I like to think about that line. According to him, it's the 4th way to look at a blackbird. I personally think it should be higher on the list. It is, in fact, a statement of oneness. Yet here, oneness takes fourth place. And this man won the Pulitzer Prize.

I remember hearing the military jets fly overhead in Japan. One day on the way to school there was a nonviolent protest being held by some of the Japanese people living nearby. I couldn't read their signs and banners, but it was clear enough that, in their way, they were asking the American military if they wouldn't mind leaving too much. I'm positive there was a “please” implied by their expressions too. I was very much a boy at the time, angry and preoccupied. I still only speak English fluently. Someone ought to pour a bucket of ice water on my head.

I look at Yorick as I write and ask him if he thought he knew me well. T.S Eliot might not have been Prince Hamlet, but plenty of other fellas seem to be trying their best.

SONGS FROM BEFORE THE WAR: AN EXERCISE IN STYLE

Van Vanderwall

In the late summer of that year we put up a musical theatre show in a town outside the city. The theatre was near the main road, but separated by trees and an open field. There was a school next to the theatre and its windows were dark and its doors were closed because the children were not there.

The road leading to the town wound through low hills, but always seemed straight when you drove on it. This was when you could listen to the radio station that played American jazz before the signal cut out. At a numbered fork, there was a side road to the town's main street, which ran straight and descended to the bottom of a valley, where you would turn for the theatre.

In the theatre the men and women of the company occupied different areas which were separated by a narrow lit hallway, a small set of stairs, and a long dark corridor behind the scaffolding, and under the heavy rigging in which you couldn't see the other members of the company as they passed. Some wore headsets and in this way passed orders through the company's ranks.

The band was posted on two sets of connected scaffolding that shook during the show. Each member of the band wore a headset over which we took our orders for that night's work. We were permitted to perform our duties without ties and jackets and with the sleeves rolled up for the harder work. This was a good thing.

Reports of the war came over the wire, but the war was not at the theatre. We checked and serviced our instruments each night before our duties began. Sometimes we stood outside in the loading zone and talked after preparing our instruments for the show. After our duties were discharged we put away the instruments for the next night.

It was a new show, but the songs were from before the war. It drew a crowd every night and they always gave a big hand for the songs from before the war. After the show we would leave the theatre and walk in the shadows of trees that broke the light of street lamps.

We had each made our separate peace with the war.

* * *



Untitled

Adam Martinez
35mm film

FROM BARAKA TO MOTHER EVE!

Amirah Al Wassif

Dear and poor Eve,

I am writing to you now without putting my right hand over my chest, quivering from cold and grief.

I don't cry anymore, I just hide under our destroyed table, and count my breath. I spend a very long time, humbling my dirty rag doll, watching the footsteps of hurrying down the crowded road.

As usual, I am peering with mad eyes through the wide opening of our ragged tent, waiting to catch someone else's eyes, perhaps allowing those eyes convince me that I am still alive.

I am still your sweet daughter, your lovely baby, crawl on the sharp platforms every midnight. I am still your patient girl walking behind your shadow, looking for the warmth of your heart and the smell of your skin.

Last night I dreamed about you. I was showering by the honeydew vine, and you appeared in front of me and tried your best to Tickle my belly with your warm fingers. Fidgeting her fingers on her baby's belly to make her laugh, but in spite of her great effort, her baby is still crying.

I am writing to you with a flushed dirty face and a unique kind of delicious confusion which makes me whisper through the long hours of the day and night. I whisper like an immigrant bird which may dissolve because of the thrill of meeting.

I am most confused by the decision I made as a grown woman to write with my foot for a long time.

Everybody here in my world still wonders how a woman could dare to write with her foot.

Everybody here in my small third world whispers from the first light of day until the last light of twilight. My people want to pick my inner secret. They are addicted to asking each other about my upturned situation.

'How dare you write with your foot?!"

They are crying in front of my face and behind my back. They never stop asking and asking and asking, and I conceal my heart very well because if they really saw it, they would discover my secret. If it happened, they would know the only answer to how a woman dares to write with her foot. My days act out their last dance with shaking fingers and bare feet, surrounded by walls, only walls around me, watching me, touching my pain, only walls listening to my forbidden song, only walls witnessing my writing fever, only these inanimate objects feeling more deeply than living people.

If you are a writer, a weird rumor will never leave you. A rumor based on some heavenly stories of when you use the stars as punctuation and the blue of the skies as your immortal ink that never runs dry, and you have a deal with angels and devils so you can spy on every insect that crawls on earth.

If you are a writer, you see the shadow of William Shakespeare floating above your head every midnight, his shadowy lips explaining to you how to eat time, how to

dissolve yourself between the letters, how to put your heart on paper without pretending.

As a woman decided to write with your womanly foot, asking how to think differently, how to play with your imagination ball like a professional player.

My name is Baraka, one of those homeless women who spend their spring age on the cold sidewalks, eating nothing, feeling nothing, who try their best to tame their neediness.

I have no idea about rosy dreams. All I know is scratching the trash cans every night, my pillow a haystack.

When honeydew roots watered my hair, I figured that I am in the middle of nowhere.

When the headlights blocked my sight, I touched my darkness.

Who am I? I am a very patient crawler on the rough edges of life. I am a naked woman because of the conspiracy of poverty, my lean body stretched on torn papers that cover the pavement.

I am here in my mind, writing in my own blood, creating my own imaginary world.

My whole life I have bathed in the ecstasy of writing. I fed my poor flesh made out of clay with this weird stuff--not my choice at all.

Dear Eve, I am dissolving under the furious sky, and I need your help to clean my dirty body.

I am here on a street corner recalling your great spirit. Help me push away the

men who chased me, threw mud at me, beat me. I couldn't run from their harsh punches, so I sought refuge here, in my imaginary world.

Under this old tree, I sat and shed tears, touching my ribs with a fluttering of fingers.

I am not blind, I am just a half-educated woman who lives in a separate tent on one side of our hungry street. A half-educated woman who still desperately dreams to finish her school, but how can an orphan stuck in the third world dare to dream?

I am crawling on the floor trying to catch my breath. I am stitching my poetry piece to this moment. For the very last time, I imagine myself a baby with a wide mouth and curious eyes.

And the hours pass heavily. And my poor heart cannot bear any more. Yes, it is me, the funniest creature you'll see ever, the ocean walking on two feet, the idiot elephant bitterly wishing to fit this crazy fashion.

A mysterious voice escapes from the ticking of my watch, the voice haunts me, but my soul fights it with a harsh weapon. Here in the heart of my ears, all these secrets obscured by night, all these secrets scream in the silence of the space, "Who am I?" and I join in their mourning now repeating,

"Who am I?"

Your daughter,
Baraka



It's Sometime Sunny in Milan

Jacob Johnson
Acrylic and Mixed Media

**CORBETT AND COURTNEY
BEFORE THE KINETOGRAPH**

Ian Sutherland

Swinging and blinding
The clumsy unwinding
One in a struggle, one in a laugh
Diabolically captured,
Mechanically fractured
Are Corbett and Courtney before the kinetograph

The silence precludes
the mood of the room
Was it sweltering jeering?
Laughter or gloom?
Was it men in their dozens? Their hundreds? Or ten?
The ref and nine watchers, a few black-and-white grins

Forever in lens
Trend among trends
An artform newborn or a technical gaffe?
An eternal thing
Two men in the ring
Are Corbett and Courtney before the kinetograph

SAFE

Missi Jarrar

When I was a child, a baby really, I went to a tiny school in the woods. The classroom smelled like the seasons. It was heating vent elements and moist wood in the winter, and a hint of cleaning supplies and cut grass in the spring. One side was windows from mid-wall to the ceiling with glass slats that cut open toward the ceiling and hung in rectangular panes inward. There was a lone tree there, just outside the window, the tips of which swayed in a promising breeze in spring and dripped emerald rain in the winter.

A map of the United States hung on the opposite wall, its ridges lifted for the Rocky Mountains in a feature that made little fingers fond of running their ridges so that they were worn. A large framed space beside the map hosted seasonal projects, paper plates cut into skeletons or hand drawings made into turkeys that tiny hands had crafted with huge crayons or safety scissors and edible glue. The outer halls were filled with laughter and delighted screams that filtered through the closed door. The chanting voice of the teacher echoed over fidgeting students as, with a wooden pointer, she sang the letters of the alphabet over the sounds of chiming birds beyond the open window.

There was little doubt that Mrs. Lee

loved us. Her voice cherished each vowel as she read books to a quiet and still group of rapt children. Her long black hair, often left hanging down to the bottom of her back, was a silken sheath she often flipped behind her while humming her lessons. She was a young teacher who, halfway through the year, began to swell with pregnancy. Mrs. Lee taught us about the baby, its increasing size and various stages, as the seasons changed and the flies began to sneak in through the open windows. We all wanted to hug her because she was getting so round and she was fun to hug and we weren't yet afraid to love or touch people. When you hugged her you would lose yourself in the folds of her pregnancy and long black hair and the smell of soap with a hint of floral perfume.

We didn't want to lend her to any baby because who, then, would read our stories; the stories of Middle Earth, and a magic wardrobe, and a warren of rabbits in search of a new home. Who would console us when rabbits died, or hobbits were in peril, or the kids—kids just like us—understood the loss of an old yellow dog and why a red fern was growing somewhere? We only cared about these things and the long, main hall lined with waxed, green tile where we ran from end to end at the

onset of recess.

At the other end of the long green hall was a gymnasium crowned, on one end, with a stage where many a play, Christmas gala, choir concert, or cake walk took place. At the other end of the hall, beyond the creaking door with the worn bar handles, was asphalt seared with the lines of a four-square court and two tetherball poles. Beyond a span of green were swing chains and plastic seats hanging over puddles—the remnants of spring rains—awaiting little bodies.

These are the places where we would jump and squeal and dance without the persecution of self awareness, where we would make capes out of coats and crowns out of paper without judgement and proclaim ourselves cowgirls, or super heroes, queens, or cats without thinking ourselves strange or odd under the encouraging gaze of Mrs. Lee. Outstretched arms made us aeroplanes and balancing on one leg made us tightroped walkers. Twirling made us ballet dancers or wind and falling down only made us giggle. Here magic was real. And we? We were all things imagined.

DEAR LADY OF TROY

Javier Rivera

Dear lady of Troy,

Please, please tell me.

Where have You been?

We come from different seas;

Make it to the end.

Oh, miss Robinson.

Find the reason

In this cold wintery season

As am left in the field end,

after our lovely weekend.

If you find the reason.

It is only the beginning

of this warm sensory feeling.

Warm wishes,

I WANT TO LIVE THERE

A. Stircu

Snow feigned permanence on the windshield, crumpling out of the sky unfettered. No winds this day, a particular kind of rarity. In the car elevator jazz played, an umbrage of virile notes flung from the staff. Both Mother and Daughter were related. You could tell from their cold eyes and shrunken bodies; from the way their silence sat better than a tired shephard.

The cordial relationship between her Mother and her relied on vernacular language--her Mother's twisted tongue couldn't straighten out english syllables. Couldn't compute what the daughter meant when she began speaking from the academic word list.

Soft hands gripped the steering wheel. Callused hands rested on second-hand jeans.

It was still afternoon, but the collusion of their existence loomed overhead. All they could see was a dusked city. Hand gripping the steering wheel harder, the Daughter accelerated and felt her Mother exhale a larger breath. This was their primordial form of communication.

One estranged tear bloomed beneath the Mother's eyes now. The city view they wanted to see becoming blur. She was speeding through a patch of uncomfortable sanitation within her mind. Immigrant dreams after the fall of communism replaced with the working-class struggle. No blame to be exonerated when the truth remains empty weight on the brain. On the passenger side of the car yawned manicured lawns, the lives of the wealthy.

And onwards rumbled the car, circling up the mountain where people in big houses become vexed by the broken english of their housekeepers. On they drove, to a destination realized unrealistic when the daughter was eight years old.



The Night the Storm Hit Us & Barren

Will Boechler
Photograph

ETERNAL SPOTLIGHT OF A DIRTY LIGHTHOUSE

Sabrina Maria

If I could remove the part of me
that helps me feel,
I wouldn't even bother to argue.
I'd sign the papers,
strap myself to whatever table
I need to
and say a little prayer.

I would live my life so free
untangled from love and emotions.
I wouldn't see your face and
have my chest swell up like
the rising tide on a stormy night.
If anything,
I would be the lighthouse.
Tall,
solid,
unwavering by the
cold, cold
wind.

I would be just that,
a force to be reckoned with
not reckoned by the
force of my emotions.



March of the Departed

Katie Costa
Acrylic



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WRITERS, ARTISTS AND THINKERS!

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