Portland is such a thriving community, with so much to offer its residents. I’ve often heard it called an unreality, which is to say that there is no place like it on Earth; it is its own kind of place.

I could not agree more. Portland is my utopia. Ever since I showed up here three years ago (after having traveled for ten years with a nearly insatiable wanderlust) Portland has exceeded my expectations in terms of quality of life, culture, opportunity, and community. I have never experienced such a uniquely thriving metropolis. I am still blown away.

When I began taking classes as a post-baccalaureate student in the English Department two years ago, I saw firsthand that Portland State University is a reflection of this city. It offers its students so much in the way of exposure. Like everything, however, it’s a matter of knowing where to look and who to ask. But people here are gracious with their information. There is a sense that this community wants its members to succeed.

Now, as a graduate student in the publishing program, I have an even greater sense of Portland and Portland State University as fertile grounds for collaboration, networking, and strong friendships. I owe so much to the community of artists and thinkers, doers and dreamers around me. They make every day an exquisite feast that I cannot wait to dig into.
FROM THE EDITOR

Speaking of community, I’d like to thank my Assistant Editors (and fellow publishing program students) Emily Gravlin and Drew Lazzara for helping to pull this issue together in such a proactive, productive way. It’s been a pleasure to work with such forward moving folks. I’m excited to put out two more issues this year with their continued support.

And a BIG thanks to all of you amazing, talented people who submitted your best work to Pathos this time around. It takes courage to be an artist, and even greater strength to be critiqued. I wish I had more time to write each individual and let them know how greatly appreciated their time and effort has been.

I’d also like to encourage the rest of you on Portland State University’s campus to submit your essays, poetry, prose, and art during our next Call For Submissions. Because, in the end, without the creative work of PSU’s students these issues wouldn’t be possible.

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All work included in each issue of Pathos is chosen from the student body at PSU
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LEARNING FEAR
CYRUS OSBORNS

There was a fight
among the dogs in the neighborhood.

One of them had been rabid
when it began,
and within days they were all
lumbering sleepily and
staring sidelong until
some living thing caught their eye.
Then, parts of them
would awaken,
the parts that
ran and snarled and shook
until whatever they had hold of
couldn’t move
unless shaken,
but not the part that sat next to you
and laid his head in your lap.

That part was already dead.

They had no choice but to
shoot them.
The children cried,
of course,
and thought their fathers terrible men,
except for a few
who’d seen their kittens murdered,
or a squirrel.
they could never imagine
doing any harm, tossed and torn.

Soon all the children heard
these stories,
and though it’s been a year and a season
since the last dog got a bullet
in its head,
there are no new puppies hopping
spryly in their yards.
IT'S LIKE SLEEPING IN DECEMBER
SARAH HOBERNICHET

It's like sleeping in December.
The whole world might up and stop.
There's no trusting clocks these days,
their hands are lying by the minute.
If you and I could leave this place, set out in a line
towards the mountains and the sea.
We would return to the city.
It calls our hearts like a broken pocket-watch.
We cannot get away.
But I digress, we would have left.
But duty called and the weather lingered
on that bright spot between the ties of beauty,
and the forgotten.
Tell me I'm the most beautiful thing you've ever seen. Tell me I'm amazing. Ask me to dance, and whisper something in my ear. Your breath in my ear means I'm yours.

Dance with me, dance the whole night until the lights go down and the music stops. Ask me if I need a ride. Of course I do. Drive me home. Put the top down so the wind rushes through my hair. Pull the car over a few houses early. Kiss me. Put your hands on me. Your lips on my everything means I'm yours.

Take me on a second date. Take me to a nice restaurant, take me to expensive Italian. Find the other end of the same spaghetti noodle as me, so that we kiss in the middle. Tell me romantic things. Tell me I'm attractive, in a roundabout way. I'm eighteen and beautiful, but I'll only believe it when you say it. I'm yours, baby.

Drive me around for a while. Take me to some nice views of the city at night. We can make out in front of the lights of a hundred thousand people. Then drive us back to your place. Your roommates aren't home, so we have the place to ourselves. But we don't need the whole place; we just need your bedroom. Offer me a drink or two. Then take me – in your sheets, on the floor, however you want me, take me. I'll do anything for you.

Drive me home the next morning. I'll take care of my parents. "Where were you last night?" "You never came home, honey." I'll make something up. I'll tell them I was at a slumber party, at a friend's house, something. They'll believe it.
Take me on another date. Please, take me out again. You are all I can think about in class, at lunch, in track, at home, I'm yours all the time. I can't wait to see you again.

Take me to sushi this time. Show me how to use chopsticks. Dare me to taste a dab of wasabi. Give me a kiss to wash it down. Pay the bill and back to your car. I'll take you in my mouth in the front seat. We don't even need to drive anywhere; we'll do it in the parking lot. We won't use a condom this time. Tell me it feels better without one. And it does – it feels perfect.

Tell me to ignore what my friends are telling me. "He's too old for you.” Ignore it. Tell me I'm beautiful, and I'm yours. I'll be with you all the time. Fuck my friends. I'll fuck you instead.

Stop taking me out. We're not dating anymore. We're more than that. We can just go back to your place. We can watch a movie. I can cook you dinner, or you can cook for me. Your roommates can smirk and chortle all they want; we won't care, we'll be happy. At your place, I'll walk around in my underwear. You'll take me whenever we're alone. It doesn't matter what room, or what's on TV. Tell me we'd make a great couple. Tell me you want to give me everything. I'm yours, baby.

I'll get in fights with my parents over you. Huge fights. They'll find out about what I'm doing, this older guy I'm seeing. They've been talking to my friends. "He's only a few years older," I'll tell them. "Really, he's not that old."

"He's too old for you,” Mom will say.

And Dad will come in with, "You're too young to know what you're doing, honey."

That sends me running to you: Dad telling me I don't know what I'm doing. I know perfectly well – I know I'm yours.
I'll come to you in the middle of the night, and you'll take me in, like I'm a wounded bird. Tell me my parents don't matter. Tell me they don't understand. They don't understand us, you and me. We're something special. We're something amazing. Tell me I'm beautiful, and I'll fuck you, we'll do it all night. I'll fuck you hard, because it's better than screaming with my parents. Because you're the best thing about me.

When I miss my period, tell me it's nothing.

Don't worry about it. But all I'll do is worry about it. I'll try to talk to you about it, but you won't let me. Suddenly your roommates are never at your place when I come over. You'll barely say a word. You'll barely talk to me at all.

I'll try to talk to my parents about it, but they won't know how to handle it. We'll be too accustomed to screaming at each other. We won't know how to have any other kind of conversation. We won't know how to talk about something serious like this, really serious. They won't know how to handle it. How can anybody handle it?

I'll try to find you, but you'll start trying to escape me. Just when I need you most. I won't be able to talk to you, not like we used to. You won't have me over to your place anymore. (I'll never see the inside of your place again.) We'll be back to dates. Italian. Not as nice of a place this time. Sushi. Even worse. I'll try to talk to you about it, but you'll change the subject, or you'll find an excuse to leave. Tell me I'm too clingy. Tell me something that makes me feel like nothing. Suddenly I'm not beautiful. Suddenly I'll feel a lot younger than eighteen.
Once I haven't seen you for a few weeks, once my friends fled, once I don't know what the hell is going on between Mom and Dad and me, I'll go get the test on my own. I'll talk to a doctor. I'll cry. Mom will cry with me. I'll take Dad's silence for anger. I'll hate myself, more than anything. The doctor will tell me my options.

I'll show up at your door for the first time in a month. My parents will be waiting in the car. You'll act surprised to see me. Your surprise will quickly turn to frustration, as I begin speaking, saying what I have been practicing in my head over and over for days now. Your frustration will turn to exasperated rage. How could I do this to you? You'll tell me it's my fault. You'll tell me I'm an idiot. You'll tell me I don't know what I'm fucking talking about. You'll tell me I'm crazy. You'll tell me to get off your porch, to get the hell out of here. Tell me you want me gone. Tell me you don't want to see me again. Tell me I'm a whore, tell me to leave, leave right now and never come back.

And I'll tell you it's yours.
TODAY
COURTNEY NYSETH-MURKIN

I will not argue with eyes
that hide behind heavy lids in the face
of mine: open, clean, blinkless.
I will not open my elbows toward one who kills
the space with blue blood. I will not cross my knees
and bite my tongue in the room of negativity.
Today, I will follow the ins and deeps of my belly
as it rises and falls. My lungs as they fill and fall.
My throat as it opens and closes. I will fold my lips
to smile as I relinquish the push back to gravity.
I will hug and grip with all my skin and toes,
all of my energy, for one who knows the same.
Today, I will pull my spine to the sky.
A cigarette burns out slowly on a windowsill. The smoke curling around the entrance of the local “hole in the wall” bar, of where I spend most of my time. A mere 13 figures occupy the alcoholic sanctuary at 1 A.M, a Sunday night. Glasses clink, darts hit cork, Passion Pit is being overplayed again. Who occupies this bar on a Sunday night?

A 29 year old tattoo apprentice, receives no pay, homeless for the last three weeks, pries conversation to uncover a place to stay for the night. The bearded factory worker is about to head in for the 3rd shift, buying me a shot before he walks out the door. Two young students tie tongues in the corner, knowing each other for a mere half hour. Little does the senior biology student realize she is 26, in the process of a divorce and bringing him home to a five year old child. The bartender mentions how her step father was in the band Cannibal Corpse, recalling his cameo in “Ace Ventura, Pet Detective.” I share a cigarette with Jay outside the bar. Three years out of high school he casually mentions the sniper round that ripped through his lower abdomen as he entered a humvee. Recalling how blood and shit can coalesce into one solid color as it soaks through 5 layers of military assigned apparel. I’m informed what it’s like to be proclaimed dead for 4 minutes. He then forgets what we were talking about.

As two girls in high heels walk by, I lift up Jay’s shirt, revealing the deep gouge and linear scar. We then bullshit the stupid whores into believing he got hit with a shopping cart, in a Wal-Mart parking lot on Black Friday.

They believed us.
FAMILY

Her heart only beat for the ears of the listener | With hands un-holding, like dried yellow parchment, her cares and worries written in hard lines across her face – a long story too difficult for a small boy to read | I called her Granny, watching her thin lips open and close around the words she spoke | They weren’t words, but magic incantations ancient beyond remembering – like her | The gifts, always the neatest part of the house, sat hunched beneath the fir, lost amongst the slipshod stacks of books – or perhaps taking shelter like travelers in a storm | I sat, cross-legged like a tiny American Indian,
REID TYLER

besieged on all sides by wrinkled wrapping paper soldiers
She would hand down each from atop the tumbledown armchair like spices and wines from a great creaking galleon – baubles, all | But when the sky grew still and dim, her eyelids would come together, sending creases across her temples – hands uncurling fingers “It’s time for grandma to rest, now,” they would whisper secretly | Now, dust sleeps atop a bed of ashes in the fireplace | The same dust we let slip from our fists I seem to remember | It fell in a stream – an hourglass with no more time to give, draping itself like a downy blanket across the polished oak to keep her warm, where her heart will only beat for the listener.
the CRAZIES of Errachidia

by

SAMUEL NICKILAUS MCLAIN-JESPERSEN

المنتحران

النجمة
Someone must take care of him, I was saying to Mr. Hanafi, he’s got nice jeans on and a clean jacket. Can he dress himself while he’s shaking like that? Does he always shake like that? What does his family think as he tremors out the door with a plastic bag and some rubber cement in the pocket of his new jacket? Can he talk? Is he begging, or just sputtering nonsense to those who pass by?

They all seem to ignore him. They don’t even move their eyes. We love to point out the importance of family here, you know, but it’s just the communal nature of your society, man. How many people here know him and his house and continue to ignore his problem because it’s the easiest thing to do? Do they just wait til he dies? Isn’t Islam supposed to help these people?

He’s just crazy, buddy, says Mr. Hanafi, and drops another sugar cube into his coffee.
LOSS
REID TYLER

Dear brother, hence;
With heart stripped bare,
I cannot but
my life forswear.

I write to thee,
dear brother mine,
that ink to page
our souls entwine.

The winter cold
like gripping chill,
leaves empty thus
what love should fill.

And words of warmth
this heart benign,
to ashes turn
what should be thine.

So harken, kin,
through earth you must,
to mine own truth
presented thus.

Death’s claim lays
not in earth, you see,
For I am far more
dead than thee.
I am reaching up to hold his hand
When the camera shutter snaps.
We are looking out into the Past,
The Future
The View.
We are dressed in matching overalls:
His worn;
Mine crisp and new.

He was born in 1915
In the concussion of an explosion,
In the shadow of a war.
He learned about futility;
Learned what it meant to starve:
Lost years of his youth building the New Man
In the remote fishing villages of the USSR.

And I was born in 1981
In a City Upon a Hill.

Here we are together
We occupy the same ground,
A locus in space and time
Where two arrows meet,
Redirect,
And part,
At the point our two hands intertwine.

And from here we embark,
Bound by blood and hands
And overalls shielding us from autumn’s chill,
Never quite so much alike
As we are just now
Standing on my grandfather’s porch
In a moment captured.
Still.
My time spent as a student in Spain was divided by a ten day loll in the Canary Islands. I landed on the archipelago’s largest island, Tenerife, on a windy day, and let the gusts persuade me southward to my temporary home, a small harbor and tourist community called Los Cristianos.

The town is peculiar. Situated on the face of a promontory overlooking the ocean, the homes span upwards rapidly in unorganized fashion. Intermittent palm trees do their best to accent the homes nicely, softening the sight of their starch white paint against the blue skies and Teide, the volcanic peak that looms threateningly in the background. Stucco homes cling to the hillside too. They seem to brace themselves against the neighboring traditional apartment housing. Yellow-painted homes stand out stubbornly. Blue homes stand out curiously. Sidewalks are mostly tiled in the Arabian mode; whites juxtaposed by dark blues, and various sun-faded reds. Streets wind through the layout wherever they can, and that’s not in many places. They zigzag up the mountain precariously and web through the lower districts via one-way streets. Stop lights are nonexistent. Instead, during the rush hours, policemen dictate the busier intersections. It all culminates in a work of art, something abstract, nearly surreal.

Once a small fishing center, the town has boomed into a major tourist attraction within the last twenty years. Left over are weathered, beaten, and out of work fishermen. They combat to survive while they are forced to coexist with a flood of Northern Europeans making their ways via affordable air connections that reach from places like Germany, Holland, England, Italy, and France. In the restaurants, the miscellany of languages resembles something like a dozen priests mumbling in tongues. It’s a good bet Dutch and badly spoken English are more widely spoken than Spanish. Most of the transactions take place in English, as the patrons and clerks stammer through their exchanges, struggling to communicate with one another. Subsequently, walking into a bar and greeting the waiter in Spanish provokes a lull in the clamor amongst the customers, and the consequent turning of heads.

There’s a consensus I’ve found through conversations with some of the locals. Typically the dialogue commences with the question, “You speak Spanish?” I reply, “Yeah, I speak a little. We’re in Spain, you see. When we’re in Spain, let’s speak Spanish. When you come to America, we’ll speak English.” Surprised, they respond, “No. You see, we’re not in Spain. We’re in the Canary Islands.”

Obviously tourism has made itself part of the islands. It has been like the boat that hit the iceberg and is in the process of sinking to the bottom. On the boat are the islanders, the locals, the Spanish. The iceberg is the mass that is consumerist society. It is composed of the element that we represent: the ocean. The boat, marginalized,
had been making its way along the surface before it collided with the iceberg. We cascaded through the small aperture in the boat, aggrandized it, flooded the hull and pulled the vessel into the depths. If the locals don’t believe in their native language, in their own customs and traditions, we have effectively sunk their ship.

I don’t see a free community here. Beyond the tourist trapping avenues, where restaurant hosts pitch menus with forced smiles on their faces, people are depressed, morose, and impersonal. Locals comport themselves conceitedly, resorting to long gaits. They stride down to the beaches where the tourists are splashing about in the water, building sand castles, and playing volleyball. Never making eye contact, the locals traipse through the masses, their noses high, with their tanned skin and confident looks. They are scared to death. We are all invaders of their space, and within such a small circumference that is Tenerife I imagine it’s hard for them to have a place to call their own.

Found in bars are the jubilados, meaning the retired, or unfortunate out of work middle-aged. They straddle the counters, leaning densely over their drinks. They are stout, and strong, with fishermen’s hands that could crush rock. Their demeanor is brute, their alcoholism indicative of the hardships brought on by a society that has changed extensively from wealth to vapidity. Their eyes have seen the past of Los Cristianos, and the present, and they show it in their squinted expressions.

Above, in the neighborhoods along the hillside, the elderly have been washed up, brought in by the tide and stranded in the block apartments and tenement housing. The poverty is in the streets. Beyond the well kempt commercial districts, garbage is dumped on the sidewalks. Vomit collects in the corners and alleys, testament of those left behind from the fast moving, omnipresent nightlife.

On maybe my second or third night in Los Cristianos, I was sitting on a bench overlooking the Playa de los Americanos. The lights from the boardwalk run along behind it distinctively, and the waves roll into their glow. I heard a voice in English behind me, and turned my head to see a young man, about my age, waving a fishing rod about in the air.

"Not a bad stick," he said. He declared he had just found it on top of one the nearby garbage bins.

"Not a bad stick," I replied, "It’s yours now."

He pondered its worth to him, acknowledged with a thoughtful crook of his head that he wasn’t a grand fisherman, and that it might be more appreciated by some other wanderer. We started talking like this, and ended up having a good conversation.

He was 25 years old, a Romanian, and had been on the road for over a year. He’d been in Italy for a while, in France, and spent two months in Portugal. He had been working in Tenerife for four months, trying to save money to either continue his trip, or to return home. He struck me as an intelligent chap. His English was nearly flawless, and he spoke Spanish, obviously second and third languages beyond his native tongue. He had earned a degree in computer science and worked in the field unhappily before embarking on his sojourn.
We talked about traveling, about journaling, and most importantly, about Tenerife.

“This can be a lonely place for people our age,” he said. I found myself relating bizarrely to this statement, and waited for him to continue.

“The people here are mostly older, are here with family, and are on their way home within a couple of weeks.”

He affirmed this with a wry smile, acknowledging our misplacement as young tourists on the island. We talked like this for a while, two solteros, or solo goers, and after some time we ironically went our separate ways without exchanging phone numbers or allowing means for ourselves to meet up another time. It’s funny how vagabonds gripe about alienation, yet do nothing to cure it.

Trailing the tacky restaurants that are spread out along the beach, on backstreets where rent is cheaper, there are several family owned bars that are still truly Spanish. I have found one or two I’m particularly drawn to, having become a regular in places called Nuestro Bar and Morales II.

The locals are abundant in these dives, their nature seeped deeply enough in the Spanish vibe to keep most tourists away. Italians would be the one exception. Morales II is my breakfast joint; an egg over easy and french fries. Roberto - the owner, cook, and bartender - doesn’t talk much, but I like him.

In Nuestro Bar there is Alexi, the 20-year-old-yet-veteran-bartender son of the owner. Alexi is overweight soft on the edges, but he is hardened by the tough crowd he tends to day in and out. The bar straddlers will taunt him with imputations about his age, but he reciprocates equally as brash, throwing elbows as caveats in their general directions. Mari Carmen is an elderly waitress with Scheuermann’s Disease. She is a delight, always checking on my condition, and dancing stiffly here and there to the flamenco music. Pilar is the last of the crew. She is middle-aged, and an absolute charmer. If I am at the bar, stirring the ice in my drink for an elongated period, she will ask, “Are you going to eat something tonight, hombre?”

Here, I’ve found myself in the night times picking at my steak and salad. It’s a good cut. It’s cheap. The environment has allowed me to keep practicing my Spanish, and to have a few interesting encounters.

One night I was at the bar enjoying a Johnnie Walker. A small, tanned, and sharp featured man came in briskly. His baby blue beach sweater was tangled about his collar, his outfit loudly defining him as an outsider. With a purposeful march he came up to the counter. It was wide open but he sat down next to me, and before he ordered, he started up a conversation in broken English, obviously not his best language. I could tell he was having a hard time voicing his greeting, and on a helpful sentiment I said, “Buenas noches.”

“Yes, yes, and how are you doing tonight?” he replied. Before I had time to respond he continued, “Me, I, I’m looking for something to do, you see.”

“Well…” I said, drawing it out. I was short on advice, but it didn’t matter because he was the one who had the intention of advising me.

“Sex,” he said, with a face as serious as a judge dictating the death penalty. “Yes,” he continued, “I like sex, both women and men.”
And like this I realized that I was being given a proposition. He let down a bit after his declaration, and gave me time to respond.

“Well, I'm straight,” I said, “But this town is crazy. I'm sure it wouldn't be hard for you to find something.”

He was a nice guy, Swedish, and shortly after my decline I learned his name was Odven. He persisted in lecturing me on the benefits of homosexuality. When Alexi asked him what he was drinking, he ignored the query and continued stuttering through his pep talk. A while later, after which the nape of my neck was beginning to get sore from all the head nodding, he bid me farewell, and just as pointedly as he came in he went out, intent on finding love in Los Cristianos.

I also had a chance meeting with a Spanish gal from Madrid. Nuestro Bar is not exactly the place people go to meet women. Men with their sailor tattooed forearms brace the counter, talk loudly, and guffaw at one another's stories. Some drink beer, the more Mafioso looking sip on red wine. A punished salsa mix CD skips along as the groaning disc player labors to read it. That's about all there is there; not a whole lot of variety.

So, when this foxy lady came in and seated herself at the bar, it immediately incited a slew of comments from the bar goers.

“¡Mama mía! Que guapa!”
I did my best to break the ice with something more casual.

“Tenemos una camarera bastante joven esta noche,” I said, “We have a young waitress tonight.”

There happened to be a girl of maybe 10 or 12 years old behind the counter, the daughter of Pilar, I believe, who was being indoctrinated in the art of the restaurant industry.

The gal at the bar introduced herself as María. She had just spent two weeks on La Gomera, a neighboring island of Tenerife that is much smaller. From there, we ended up talking for a few hours. Again, I found myself relating to someone who was roughly my age, who also was not a fanatic of tourism, and who came to Nuestro Bar recognizing it as a refuge.

***

Not all of my time on Tenerife has been spent at the bar and on the beach. I was wandering the dock one morning and happened upon a kiosk advertising deep sea fishing trips. It caught my eye, a plethora of sharks' jaws lining the walls on the inside, knotted lures, lines and nets scattered about the floor. I greeted the burly man behind the easel in Spanish, and he responded in a thick English accent, announcing himself as Mick. From London, a former butcher, he had spent the past 15 years on Tenerife hosting fishing adventures. I paid the man (too much probably) and made the appointment for a shark fishing trip set to embark a few days later.

The crew was an international bunch, some from England, others from Holland, and two Cubans as boatswain. We lured from the harbor until we got to the channel that runs between Tenerife and La Gomera. Bait was set out for the
tuna that hang out deep down, beyond the sunlight dispersed through the first 50 meters. They feed on schools of smaller fish, scaring them up towards the surface. The schools form dense and chaotic spheres, molding themselves this way in a defensive effort. The birds recognize the commotion and flock in great numbers to where the schools are tossing about below the immediate surface. Thus, where there are birds there are fish. Unfortunately, the day of our excursion not many flocks were to be seen. We patrolled eagerly around the few that we could find, but no tuna.

A few hours of this was enough, and Mick declared it was time to jib and chum for sharks. The Cubans threw the fetid chum buckets over the side of the boat and proceeded to pull them up and down, slowly and steadily agitating the ground-up mackerel from the buckets. The chum trails are sent out in great distances, reaching for hundreds of meters. The aroma is impassable for the sharks. If they are in the water they will come to the boat. While we waited we jibbed off the side of the boat, dropping lures down to depths of about 75 meters.

Hours passed. At the peak of boredom a voice echoed across the vessel, “Fish on!” One of the Englishmen had hooked something big. Everyone dropped their rods on the deck and clamored towards the bow to get a look at the action. The fish was off the starboard side, flexing the rod violently. When it started to go under the boat, amidst the ramble of profanities, the angler strafed along the sides to reposition himself appropriately. It wasn’t a long fight. The fish was beaten, and in the last minutes it was brought up into view exhausted and lifeless. The light emitting through the surface water reflected off its body, its yellow spine fins illuminating brilliantly. The Englishman reeled it up to the shallow, and the Cubans gaffed it. It came onto the boat a bloody mess. Mick knocked it on the head while the boatswain threw buckets of water on the deck to keep it clean. It was a yellow-finned tuna, about 100 pounds, a massive thing, yet relatively small in comparison to other ocean fish in the area. It would be the boat’s only catch of the day. We never saw a shark.

I ventured to the northern end of the island to see Santa Cruz, and the most historical city in the Canary Islands, La Laguna. Carnivals were over for the rest of Spain two weeks prior, but in Santa Cruz - a place renowned for the best carnival in Europe - the party was still raging. I got there in the early morning, and was forced to cope with crazed, drunken, and costumed people still wandering the streets, still going strong on their all-nighters.

I didn’t like Santa Cruz. It’s a big city of about one million people that sprawls up the backbone of Teide. It is loud, busy, and the dirtiest city I’ve ever seen. All of the architecture is modern. An auditorium resembling the Sydney Opera House sits on a platform overhanging the sea. Office buildings cramp the downtown area, and the pestering circus attractions (constituents of the carnival) sprawl through the streets.

I promptly took a bus up the hill in route to La Laguna. Costumed and burned out partiers braced themselves on the railing in the bus as I sat easily, sober, and patiently in the midst of them.
La Laguna is marvelous. It's perched on the crest of the mountains, balancing on the elbow of the northern end of the island. To the east is the spread of Santa Cruz, and to the west is a valley that funnels beach homes and condominiums out towards the ocean. The historical district is in the Spanish mode. A large cathedral with high cupolas on its towers is situated in the center. Its stucco walls are painted white, but the brick towers are left bare. They sweat in the humid, sub-Saharan climate. Within its vicinity are several museums, but the most important edifice, a church, is the Iglesia de la Concepción. A clock tower extends upwards from its whole, and bells dong in its crown every half hour. I happened to be there on a Sunday, and sitting on a veranda of a café adjacent to the church's plaza I watched Spanish mass goers trickle in as the clock struck 11:00 a.m. Palm trees border the church, providing an image of island Catholicism. As the Arabian architecture is mixed with the Christian in the mosque of Córdoba, I found an equally symbolic semblance here in La Laguna. Evidence of Spain's colonizing is vast, encountered in many distinct corners of the world.

As I said, the carnival was still progressing in Tenerife. Masked masses roamed the streets at night, and the intermittent allurements were plotted all about the island. Having left Nuestro Bar after finishing my dinner one evening, I noticed a congregation of people encircling a large band of folk performers. Dancers stepped about in time to the music in an elegant style. They were dressed in clothes of the 19th century, black and white dresses for the women, while the men donned flat brimmed hats, and high pants cinched up by belts around their stomachs.

They treaded slowly, pointing their toes out before each move, their arms akimbo. The music was full of treble; crescendos followed by diminuendos. The bassist plucked the strings heavily, carrying the rhythm deliberately. He bellowed heartily into the microphone, strong lyrics of love on the Canary Islands. The final song came and the crowd was invited to join on the dance floor. Wives and children rushed to participate. The men, bashful, remained skeptical, and stood watching with arms crossed on their chests. The beat this time was faster. The entrants laughed as they attempted to keep up, and the virtuoso dancers cohered with smiles and encouraging gestures. With a sharp crescendo, the song reached its climax and moments later ended with the audience cheering. They were awarded with a brief, awkward encore.

Los Cristianos may be changing - it may be sinking - but there's still plenty of enjoyment and peace to be found. While Los Cristianos is a cobweb of strangeness (a wasteland of sorts) my time there was well spent.

I'd go again.
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