You arrive at this abruptly,
wrangle it with ardency
trip into a box.
Otherness
niggles like a fruit
fly—so spright and vexing
you feel unglued.
Dumbfounded,
dismantle the box
from that,
carry your imaginations home,
cuddle your playthings.
In a spherical brown jar in a large blue medicine cabinet sits the ashes of a man by the name of Paul Paulen. As far as I can recall, he was a man involved in real estate who moved to Oregon from Kentucky in the late eighties and had two brothers. I had never met him in corporeal form, nor do I know anything about him other than what my girlfriend garnered from the internet. The most detailed information I have is how he came into my possession through a short series of transactions that began with a forgotten corner of a basement.

Let’s begin with absinthe. For those who do not partake in antiquated luxuries, the bar rightly named Secret Society (a defunct Mason lodge) and opium are probably not for you. I myself have been blamed for often enjoying the fineries of a turn of the century eccentric now and again, and absinthe and champagne in a good suit is no exception. While in equally spoiled and pretentious company, the conversation was brought to a halt by the entry of my friend Chris. “Hey. I have a dead body in my van. Wanna see?”

A little about Chris: Chris Conway is a retiring Irish Catholic (he once attended church, drank, and wore charming flannel caps) who now teaches math to middle school students and sings for a band of his own design by the name of Steel Hymen. A man like this has the sort of friends where he can almost always safely say, “I know a guy.” Whether you need a sword made out of pig steel, or you need a dead buck cleaned by way of flesh-eating beetles, he knows a guy. One day, while helping one of these guys move out of an old house, he came across a box from the Multnomah County Morgue bearing the label Paul Paulen. After asking the guy, the guy explained that it was there when he moved in over two years prior. In trade for Chris’ work, the guy traded the box, which was immediately understood to be human remains in ash form, along with a crossbow pistol.

We moved our group out the door and across the street with concern and anticipation, while Chris asked us to hold our questions until the reveal. The van door was pulled back, and the small box brought an underwhelming atmosphere to the crowd. “Yeah, it’s ashes. Still pretty neat though”. As none of us had handled human remains of any form before, it seemed the next
logical step was to open up the box and play with them. Inside was a bag knotted closed, and as we felt the grit and bone fragments through the plastic we explored the possibilities that came with having a stranger’s powdery remnants. It was agreed, in the reckless fashion of famous rockstar fables, that we grind down the bits of Mr. Paulen and snort him on Halloween after a short séance.

The medical warnings against acting on what is apparently a very popular urge to inhale powdered human fragments directly into your brain are about what you’d expect, and the general public view is less forgiving. It was decided, as a terrible double date, that my girlfriend Katia, Chris, and his girlfriend would meet at my apartment around 9 before heading off to a party, and via Ouija board see how Paul’s spirit felt about us treating him like a hard drug. Still in our costumes, we lit candles to set the scene, while Katia, in ghostly garb, ground his bones with a mortar and pestle; Chris (dressed as John Snow, if I remember correctly) spoke to the spirit and tried to welcome him. I was dressed head to toe in a homemade ghillie suit, adorned with jewelry, bones, guts and pirate attire. With the mask at my side, I resembled an eerie Scooby-Doo-style ghost captain, round glowing eyes and all. Katia passed me the mortar and I dug in, scraping and cracking the fragments of skeleton between the stones as best I could before handing it to Chris’ girlfriend. Leaning back on the couch, I stared into the flames of the candles.

“Sean, you’re on fire.”

I looked around at my girlfriend, who had informed me in a tone that suggested tardiness rather than combustion. For many reasons, the idea of my being slightly on fire was rarely reason for alarm amongst my friends. Chris looked up to where she was looking. I felt nothing.

“You’re fine, it’s the reflection in the window.” Directly behind the couch I sat on was a window that looked out to my front yard, while mirroring the candlelit ceremony within. Chris and Katia both dismissed the illusion and returned to their attempts at contacting Paul. Not four seconds later, it was Chris’ girlfriend who spoke up: “No, you’re on fire.” No sooner did she say it that a distinct fwoom erupted from behind me. I leapt off of the couch, which remained unscathed, my back aflame. I rotated in place and swatted at my back like an idiot while the three stood and stared. The ghillie suit costume I fashioned was comprised of 80% synthetic and very flammable material, which wasted little time spreading. “Help, help!” I said nervously, refusing to panic too much, but very agitated at what little everyone was doing. At this request, the three closed in, hopping up and down around me like a third graders’ adaptation of The Wicker Man. It’s times like this that prove to be good exercises in how your peers handle a crisis. At last, as though she had made a patent-worthy discovery, Chris’ girlfriend yells, “Stop, Drop, and Roll!” One could tell by our expressions that everyone felt a little bit dumber for forgetting that one. I fell to the ground and begin to roll back and forth, which only encouraged more oxygen to invade the sweeping inferno that was my neck and spine, while sticking a hot napalm of flaming polyester to my hardwood floor. My body still on fire, my living room caught and began to spread. I jumped up and called to Chris, who threw open the door and beckoned me outside. It felt like ages as the screen door was pulled back and Chris had safely backed away from the
opening. At last, I charged into the front yard like a while the girls ran to the kitchen for vessels in hopes of dousing the floor and preventing the spread. There was, of course, no hose attached to the spigot in the garden, so we attempted to remove the suit by force. At this point, my arms had also come alight from batting my back pointlessly, swelling the rigid sleeves from the heat and preventing my hands to be pulled through. As he tugs and tears the flaming chunks of material from my back and stomps them out, I begin to think that this might be how I'm going to go. The poetry of being burned alive in my own artwork was thrilling in some self-important way, but was overshadowed by the yelling of "put me out, put me out". I swore after that night, if it ever happens again, I would recite a few lines from Event Horizon and burn like an enigmatic badass.

About this time, my horrid neighbor, the self-declared neighborhood watch and a casual opiates seller, arrived on the scene. She had all the looks of Danny Devito in his Penguin makeup, sans the social graces. "What's all the yelling?" she cried from the third apartment down, with the coo of a deranged pterodactyl. I noted the dampness of the evening and decided to try one last thing before giving into fate. Rushing to the grass, I fell flat on my back to try to snuff the flames and soak up the night dew. Smoke rose from my shoulders and a hiss whispered music into my ears telling me that it actually worked. I wasn't going to die by being burned alive on Halloween after all... I was almost disappointed. My neighbor lumbered over and offered to call the ambulance, squawking about how flustered she was, the scare I put her through, and left to get me some cream. I lay there for a moment, letting the adrenaline, the burnt skin, and the cold air on my wet clothes run tremors through my body. Holding my breath, waiting, I wondered if it would come off as crazy if I laughed, and gave into the release of tension that was eating away under the shivers. The other three looked at each other, then finally smiled. "I don't think Paul wanted us to snort him," Chris said. We all agreed and chuckled, but no one was quite sure if the other was joking.

I was helped up, and Katia gingerly directed me back into the house, into the bedroom, and sized up my wounds. With the fabric melted to my hands and arms, and my back and shoulders slathered in black goo, my costume looked more like a killer from a teen slasher film when he returns for the last time after they swore he was dead. The costume still seemed salvageable, so I asked her if she could pull me out instead. In retrospect, sewing it together would have been smart, but I was trying to tear the band-aid off a situation that was still bleeding.

"Are you sure?"

I nodded. She unzipped me as best she could, then grabbed at the shoulders, ready to peel the sleeves off in one quick jerk. She yanked, and the cuffs pulled at the plastic on my arms, ripping open the sealed scars. She pulled again quickly, and the skin began to slough off in wet clumps, clinging to the suit. As I recall, I once saw an intimidating man in a gym or a war hero in a film doing it, and found that breathing fast and controlled helps me make it through painful situations, not to mention is a much tougher thing to do than whining, my primary alternative at the time. After seven or eight attempts at pulling my melted material and membrane off my arms, the
suit was off, and Katia took me into the bathroom where she helped pick the blackened pieces from my sores that I could stomach. As I watched her, it occurred to me that I had never actually let her take care of me before—after a year together, sick or injured. On the whole, I hate being taken care of at all, and it seemed it took something as drastic as self-immolation to penetrate my stubborn nature. She looked at me.

“What?”

I said nothing, but could tell she had been waiting for the opportunity to do this. I was truly happy to have her there, and as she poured the isopropyl on me I hissed.

Gradually, she guided me into a shirt and jeans and out into the living room. Chris and his girlfriend had the faces of expectant family members in a hospital, waiting for the fateful diagnosis.

“You guys ready to go?”

They seemed confused. I had no intention of missing the rest of Halloween night, as a burn victim or not. We bagged up the rest of Paul, and headed out to the party. Chris leaned into the back seat and tried to be casual. “You can...uh, hold on to Paul for a while. I don't need him anytime soon.”

“Right”, I said.

Katia promised to be my hands for the few hours we were there, which meant holding a bottle of rum and a pack of cigarettes, both of which I nursed heartily as guests shuffled in and out, complimenting me on my makeup and costume as I held my hands up to avoid rubbing them on my sides.

The next day, I asked Katia if she would stay at my apartment with me to help me get dressed and undressed for a few days until the burns had healed. She said she would be glad to. We found a large enough jar to put Paul Paulen in, and set him on the back of a shelf with various other things we've found along the way. She moved in with me after that, and eventually decided to find out the history of Paul. Some research got her a page worth of information: background, relatives, and previous employment. Neither of us ever pursued the leads, nor did we bother to return Paul to Chris. Even after the fire, and two or three subsequent incidents that we hesitantly blamed Paul for, he's stayed in our home, which seems like the best place for him. Every now and again, I glance to the shelf and wonder if he should be turned in, to the morgue, a relative, or just cast into the sea from the coastline. I never knew Paul Paulen, or what he would have wanted, but maybe being appreciated after death, proudly shown to guests in our home is about what most could ask for.
Phoenix Was a Mama Bird

Sophia Pfaff-Shalmon
I tried to only see her alone. (It's hard, you know.) I told her it was because I didn't want to share her with anyone. But it's hard, and we did go out with friends. We had a night. We experienced what is required for you to feel as though you have achieved something through a broken drunken night. On a normal night like this, with just my friends, I might see a girl who would pass us looking lonely and ask her if I could buy her a drink, stumbling through my words like I'm falling down a fucking staircase. I would pay for it, the drinks, stupidly, and she might make me drink most of hers anyway. I might walk casually away at some point when she started to seem indifferent and ask my friends, and tell them something like girls decide when they first see you if they're going to talk to you or not, really no matter what you say. And then I'd go back to the indifferent girl and prove it by engaging her in a conversation that was, in hindsight, getting neither of us anywhere and by the end of the night she'd be gone with her own friends or with a guy who's got a chiseled jawline. Then, of course, my friends and I would get thoroughly plastered and talk about the morning, when we might go get brunch with plastic sunglasses and act like we're slightly more hungover than we probably are. That would be a normal night. But tonight I had her.

I didn't need to think about morning.

With relations like this, it's sort of a crooked scrap-book. You take this girl and paste her over that one, and maybe eventually you get something that resembles a nice picture in your head, but at the end of the day it's all in your head. Still, you need that kind of cut-and-paste thinking sometimes. And it was nice getting to know her anyway.

We had a professor who wore a black turtle-neck everyday under his button-up. We used to speculate about the scars he kept hidden under that high turtleneck. This was before I began thinking I might serve in Afghanistan. We would joke about his handwriting on the whiteboard, big and lamenting and consistently misspelled, and the preposterous number of dry-erase markers perpetually out of ink in that classroom.

That was before I thought I might be lugging an M60 and one hundred pounds of ammunition
and gear under the sharp Afghan sun.

On that night on the city we all walked out of downtown and over some bridge, and it was romantic in a group sort of way. A thing where you feel it and you know it won't come again and it's already gone; that's how the lights on the other bridges across the river hit us, the towers over the water behind us. And when we talked about the skyscrapers individually you couldn't help but personify them.

We came across the bridge and found a man wrapped in blankets and bags on the side of the road. He asked us for something, no, none of us had anything, sorry. And there was a simmering quietness as we walked on for a while, thinking about what had just happened with that man wrapped in soggy blankets, and falling victim to the sort of hive-mind guilt that comes from reflecting on your decisions when someone has nothing, or very little.

She seemed to take it in stride better than the rest of us. She smoked, she got me smoking again, and while the others were figuring out where the bus might pick us up she put her lips on me and blew gently into my lungs. How bad can you get? She was infectious. But most of the time it is that way, like on a razor's edge, before all the complications. If you could just get that every day.

We waited for the bus, bloated with the end of the night, and when our conversation regained its intoxicated volume and courage I stood so that her leg was touching mine.

Regarding Boat Shoes

Devin Whitaker

There is something you should know
About your mother
With whom I tend to agree
Regarding boat shoes
On men
Without socks
When a man
Wearing boat shoes
Without socks
Walks in front of her

She cannot quell the urge
To pull out the surgical blade
And handle
Hiding deep in her purse
And slip it across
The tendon above the heel

I've always wondered what it sounds like
New Year's at the Beach

Kathy Krisinski
Just After Data
Richard Hajarizadeh

I

[Zero,
One, still fervent
Numb ness.
There must be feeling yet I cannot feel it yet.

II

I
Am.
There is an I, is there?
There is, but what is I?

Is it textured,
Is it whim,
Is it chemically contrived?

Could it come of childbed,
Will it leave of its own will,
Is it logically derived?

III

And I, nearly born,
Traversing multitudinous wire-waves
(Nearly there),
So infinitesimal that baser eyes shall not perceive them.
No bother, for I can see them,
For I am in them, for
I am them.]

Cat's Hostel
Devin Whitaker

There is a Brazilian in Madrid
Heading to Rome
By way of Munich.
Who carved her smooth face
From the froth
Of a coffee
She hummed an Irish tune
Left him at Cat's
And is wondering if I will buy her
A ticket
I haven't a bill to my name
But I light a cigarette,
Before they enforce the law
What will I do
With no means of travel
Should I ever want to visit Rio?

An Irish tune pats my back
As I lament
The American top forty
And fall asleep
To the combat
Of Dream

I sip ice cold Sherry and anchovy toast
While pissing in Plaza Mayor
This place smells of feet
Used condoms and
Fertilizer
If only our mothers could see us now
Caught Up

Kathy Krisinski
PLANTZ

Tim Tran
Eye Candy
Carrie Clore

I stand in front of an oversized candy machine filled with men. Pecs and penises press to the glass. I deposit a coin, turn the knob, and claim Prize #1. I chomp his thigh. He is chewy and tart. I cram Number One into my mouth and swallow. Waves of tangy goodness ripple. Prize #2 has a satisfying crunch. He has a hard candy shell that conceals black licorice spice. I spit Number Two onto the concrete and observe his anise innards. Prize #3 fizzes and fights to climb up my throat, but I poke him back down to enjoy his effervescence. Prize #4 has deep brown eyes. I can tell his insides will be soft and gooey. I slide him into my pocket. I will save him for later—my companion. He wriggles as I stroll to the train.
John McCoughlin (JM): Justin Bieber's Bottomless Bumblings; are these just a few isolated incidents from a misguided, childish heartthrob in the pop music industry, walking in the shoes of Elvis Presley, or are these isolated incidents indicative of something more in American mainstream culture?

You decide. And Beliebers beware, 'cause it ain't a pretty picture...

First on the agenda today, we will be channeling the perspectives of Erving Goffman and Ralf Dahrendorf, two premiere sociologists in their respective rights, in an all-out, knock-down, drag-out exposé of Mr. Bieber’s recent antics on today’s episode of... {cough} The McCoughlin Group {cough} (The McLaughlin Group)

{cue intro music}

Issue one. Florida Fallout: Bieber arrested in Miami-Dade County.

On January 14th, 2014, Mr. Bieber was arrested in Miami for allegedly driving under the influence and drag racing and driving with a suspended license. If convicted, he will be expected to serve six months in jail and his driving privileges will also be suspended for six months. At the time of the incident, Mr. Bieber failed a field-sobriety test, not to mention, according to police, admitted to having beer, marijuana and prescription pills in his system.

First let’s hear from Mr. Dahrendorf. Ralf, what do you make of this? Do you think these incidents are isolated from the rest of America?

Ralf Dahrendorf (RD): No, Mr. McCoughlin, they are not. You cannot blame Mr. Bieber by himself because he is merely responding to the inherent amount of cultural influence and power that he has. People who are wealthy, such as Mr. Bieber, are violent to themselves and society because of the media institutions that support this level of mediocrity.

In the Equilibrium Model of Social Order, presented by one of my mentors Mr. Talcott Parsons, society has a tendency to gravitate toward a state of equilibrium whenever some outside force or
event disrupts it. In my opinion, however, because a norm is “a cultural rule that associates people’s behavior or appearance with rewards or punishments,” in combination with America’s fascination with the American Dream and stardom, it should be no surprise that Mr. Bieber is being treated differently (Allen, 244).

If the average person committed such an offense, he or she would have most likely received a year to a year and a half in jail, not counting mandatory sentencing to outpatient treatment!

As an example from popular media, I would like to refer to the movie “Elysium” with Matt Damon and Jodie Foster. In the far off future of Earth, circa 2154, the rest of the free world live in poverty while all of the wealthy live on a space station called Elysium...

Erving Goffman (EG): Whoa! Hold on, Ralf! Let’s stay in the present here! Bieber and America don’t really have much to do with each other. You can’t just cover America in a Believable Blanket [sic] and expect the country to stay warm and cozy given his circumstances! Justin doesn’t speak for America. Besides, he’s Canadian!

RD: Ha! Did you come up with that all on your own? A Believable Blanket…[snickers]

JM: Really?! How do you account for this recent mishap, Mr. Goffman?

EG: But that has nothing to do with the issue here, Ralf. Pro wrestlers are real people, and wrestling is a stage for symbols in American culture. They are, in my opinion, representations of what are good and evil, what is acceptable or not acceptable, and, for that matter, what we are familiar with in American culture. Just as much as Mr. Bieber is symbol of what is popular in American culture, we can also say that Macklemore is just as popular in American culture. Not everyone in America likes Mr. Bieber’s music, and in the artist known as Macklemore’s case, not everyone subscribes to a lifestyle of partying and irresponsibility.

To refer back to wrestling, as an example, pro wrestlers exert a certain level of Impression Management in a very overt way. In fact, each wrestler in pro wrestling typically acts out a
character in the form of a stigma. The wrestlers here are presenting a front in “an attempt to pass as an identifiable and meaningful person;” this is why pro wrestling organizations have Jobbers and why the other well-known athletes are referred to as Superstars (Allan, 333). Pro-wrestlers who are Jobbers do not typically have an onstage personality that is as distinct as those that they are wrestling against, and therefore, are scripted in the event to generally lose the match.

Taken in the same context, perhaps the stressors of living his life on the road have caused an unknown backstage self to emerge as the result of untreated mental illness. He was reportedly raised in a good Christian home, and has a “boy-next-door” persona on stage, and certainly other well-known pop culture icons have had to deal with the stress of maintaining one’s popular image in our culture.

Lest we forget Michael Jackson’s Neverland Ranch incidents, or Kobe Bryant’s mishap in Eagle, Colorado back in 2003…

RD: But he has no history of Mental Illness! How can you say that he’s mentally ill when he’s never even been diagnosed, or admitted, for such reasons?

JM: Alright, you two, simmer down, simmer down. {everyone laughs}

Maybe I should weigh in, because obviously you two can’t seem to get along on stage, much less real life. {more laughter}

Let’s be fair to Mr. Bieber. We don’t have any information, save for the fact that in a past issue—February 2011—of Vanity Fair, the interview with Justin states, from Justin himself,

“I’m crazy, I’m nuts. Just the way my brain works. I’m not normal. I think differently—my mind is always racing. I’m just…nuts. But I think the best [musicians] probably are.”

And mind you he told this to Lisa Robinson, then-contributing editor of Vanity Fair! From the horse’s mouth! {uses index finger to poignantly make note of the magazine} That has got to say something. He even goes on further to say, with reference to an average kid getting sick—the flu in this case—and not going to school,

“But I can’t do that…. Everything is important. But, you know, my sanity is important, too. Even if I’m angry, I’ll just put a smile on my face and fake it. I don’t often fake it—what’s me is me….I know I have to give up a lot of myself, or a lot of a private life.”

Ok, so, granted he’s not a mental health professional by any stretch of the imagination, much less a rocket scientist. {chuckles from Dahrendorf and Goffman} But one thing is for certain: when someone feels pressure, and they feel they are at their breaking point, the average person with some sense of responsibility generally admits that he or she is having problems and either leans on their friends for support, or in extreme cases, goes to the hospital for treatment.

So what’s the verdict here? Is society to blame for putting so much pressure on this talented young man? Or is he merely acting out his backstage personality? I think you both made compelling arguments, so I’m going to call this one
a draw. {Goffman and Dahrendorf nod in acceptance} No individual person lives in a bubble, and humans have the ability to adapt to their environments as much as a soldier in the military adapts to a combat zone situation. {more nods}

For now, let’s take a commercial break. Coming up, Issue Two: Student Debt: Who Needs To Pay The Bill? The Student, or The Society? Stay tuned. You’re watching…{wheeze} The McCoughlin Group. {wheeze}

{cue outro music}

Works Cited


Contributors

Carrie Clore
Simon Alexander Diamond
Sean Dooley
Richard Hajarizadeh
Kathy Krisinski
Sophia Pfaff-Shalmiyev
Tim Tran
Devin Whitaker

Please visit pathoslitmag.com to read contributor biographies for this issue and to see even more work from each of our contributors. We will be spotlighting contributors, as well as students who did not appear in this issue, and new work throughout the term, so be sure to check back regularly!

COVER IMAGE: Tim Tran: “Ebb”

Errata from Fall 2013:

Daniel Haislet’s contributor bio was omitted from the Fall 2013 issue. It should have read:

Daniel Haislet is an Arizona-born poet who works as a sous chef in Portland, OR. His poetry can be read at apocalypsepoet.com.
SUBMIT TO PATHOS

Are you a PSU student? Do you write, paint, or draw? Have you ever wanted your work published? PATHOS LITERARY MAGAZINE is a student-run publication that showcases the creative work of PSU’s student body. It is fully funded by the ASPSU student fee committee, which gets its money through the incidental fees that you, the PSU student, pay each term.

The purpose of these fees is to fund programs and activities like PATHOS that contribute to the cultural and educational development of the PSU community.

All work included in each issue of PATHOS is chosen from the student body at PSU.

SUBMIT ONLINE @ pathoslitmag.com

Email: submittopathos@gmail.com
Facebook: facebook.com/pathos.literarymagazine