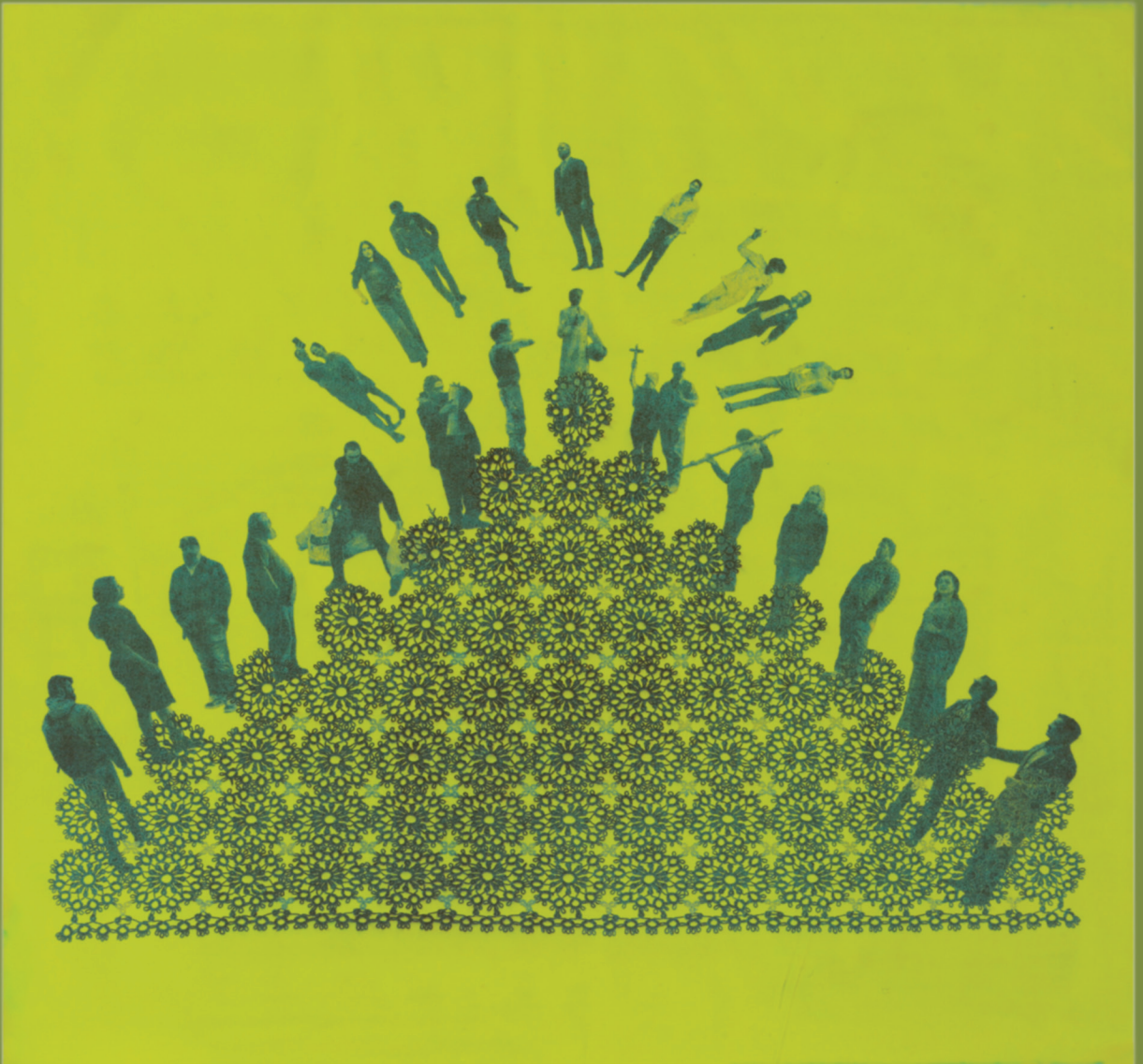


Letter & Line

WINTER 2023



LITERARY AND ART MAGAZINE

Letter & Line

Issue 13, Winter 2023

Front cover image:

Mark Smith, Stress Formations: Pyramid Assembly

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Waterfront
Josh Gilliam

Letter from the Editors:

Welcome to the Winter 2023 edition of *Letter & Line* literary magazine. In this short publication, we aim to specifically highlight the voices of the Pacific Northwest as represented by the Portland Community College community. The writing and art in this issue highlight our surroundings, from the city streets of downtown Portland to the “green, green, and green” motifs found throughout Forest Park. These pieces also speak to the value of appreciation for the small things, accessing our vulnerability, sharing our experiences, and ultimately, building and strengthening our community.

We are grateful for all who have submitted work to this year's publication. “Why do we publish in 2023?” – because art and literature build community by introducing unique perspectives. Without our community's hard work and support, we would not have been able to make this happen. So, again, thank you to those who have submitted, and to you, for reading our publication. We are grateful to share this experience with you and to journey together: escaping into our collective creativity, risking our truth, and grounding, together, in this dewy Pacific Northwest community. Enjoy!

Caffeine Daydreams

CJ Maruyama

On a blueish white sky,
the sun beads brighter
and the short round glass
table posted outside gleans
its sparkle to my eye, reflecting
beyond a bridge so vast in its
rusted copper covered steel
beams that the envious river
below stews in silence.
I sit alone, next to the next
great American novelist,
catching the filtered rays and planning
my next foray amongst the rocks;
climbing, skipping, lying, clutching.
The Spring weather is improving,
but the desktop seats me from
moving.

Instead, I muse from soil,
to meadow, to sea,
hugging a balmy
Joshua Tree en route to Palm Springs,
or floating the tame flows of
Tenney Creek with a reddening
nose that holds a pair of
Clubmasters, or perhaps rolling in the
sandy shores of an unnamed island
of Lake Erie—
for how can I trespass a beach
that detests its private status?

Ever I circumvent back to the café bench,
leaving behind some tread from my boot,
a curled eyelash or two, and the humid
breath of my giant settling
upon the ivy leaves. Parked streetside,
a vintage black Ford Falcon van
starts up and chottles away,
beautiful sight of human ingenuity
and diligence.
A cloud then pillows
the sky above
as my cup reaches its end,
and with it, the haze.



Abashed
Sophia Sutherland

A Brief Observation of Paper

Jason Miller

In today's world, paper is everywhere. Pick up a piece. Is it smooth and white, like a piece of printer paper, or does it have a texture like recycled paper? What about that feeling of smoothness when you fold the paper and crease it with your finger just right? Can you catch the faintest whiff of vanilla or almonds? How about the sound it makes? Does it rustle poetically or warble when you shake it? What about the unmistakable sound when you crush it into a ball?

When was the last time you gave paper more than a passing thought? What is on the paper? A to-do list you have been ignoring? A doodle you drew while stuck on the phone and needed to fidget? A birth certificate? A child's drawing proudly displayed on the fridge? A diploma? A card with words of congratulations; or of condolences? A coroner's report on the circumstances of a loved one's death? We often place more importance on what goes on the paper, but when was the last time you held a piece of paper in your hand and considered the importance of pressed plant fibers?

Paper. On your desk, in your backpack, in your printer. Letters, cards, envelopes, journals, even as detritus on the ground. Paper is so common; many don't even impart importance to it anymore. It just is. Maybe that yellow sticky note isn't that important in the grand scheme of the Universe, but how it got there is. That 3x3 small square is a reminder that paper is the descendant of various attempts to create a portable way to publish information and disseminate it to the masses.

Humanity has always had a need to pass on its information. We started by applying pigments, charcoal, even blood to cave walls, and for a time this worked. As we moved out of the caves and ventured farther from our stone dwellings, we needed to find a way to transport our stories with us. We turned to using animal leathers, the underside of bark, planks of wood, and clay tablets. Some of these were easier to work with than others, but we still sought better. The early Egyptian dynasties would give us a precursor in the form of papyrus. Made by using thin strips of pith from the interior of the papyrus reed, one layer was created by laying the strips next to each other vertically. A second layer of strips was applied horizontally over it. The two layers were then pounded together and dried.

Today papyrus is considered a novelty, used by artists seeking a unique material to produce work on. Meanwhile, circa 2900 BCE, it was a very different

story. Papyrus was used for everything from illustrated stories, religious tenets, letters, administrative documents, contracts, and legal texts. All of these have been found scribed onto one of Egypt's answers to record their world. Papyrus was important enough to be have been given graded qualities based on smoothness, the whiteness of color, firmness, and even how fine they could make the sheet.

It wasn't until thousands of years later in China, during the Han dynasty, that we could view our first true ancestor of modern pulp-based paper. While there is the belief that pulp paper was around before this time, it has been attributed to a court official named Cai Lun, who, in 105, proposed he had invented a new form of paper. It was this new form of paper, using bamboo, the pulp of mulberry, bast fibers, old rags, and hemp waste, that proved to be the most effective and least costly.

From China, this new paper moved into the Islamic world and was greeted with immense popularity. Paper scholar Reid Mitenbuler stated, "How Paper Shaped Civilization," "Paper loving Muslims helped spread mathematics, astronomy, medicine, engineering, agriculture, and literature to other parts of the world, including the West. " As paper moved east to west, it hit its first real hurdle. Europe already had its own portable means of inscribing their thoughts, ideas, and notes: vellum and parchment. Made from animal skin, these smooth, durable sheets of membrane were the favored material of the time. Vellum was considered high quality, while parchment was less so. These materials were costly, and eventually, Europe succumbed to the inexpensiveness of pulp paper. What started with producing better and cheaper Bibles led to a proliferation of ideas and mentalities as Europe began to learn of the rest of the world.

While Europe is known for exploration and expansion into the rest of the world, and printed paper helped the flow of information, paper was also vastly important to the art world. Illustrators and painters began to rely on paper as a medium to render their art. Differing papers were chosen depending on the tools and supplies used. Whether transformed by paint, charcoal, ink, or even origami, paper's different functions were always needed in society.

In 1495, the first paper mill was established in England. In 1690, the first paper mill in America was established. The first newspapers were created, the first paper machine was invented, and in 1980 that small yellow square of paper would be introduced to the world. Egypt, China, the Islamic world, Europe, from 2900 BCE to modern day, paper has changed the world and how we communicate. From grand novels to paper cranes, even the smell of it, the importance of paper is just as palpable as the ideas and art we create with it.

Reasons I Have Been to BJ's Restaurant & Brewhouse

M. Jacobs

1. Freshman year on family weekend, college roommate's rich parents pay visitation to spoil their dear daughter... and me, the friend she tries to adopt but only succeeds in alienating.

2. Sophomore year for the same reason, college ex-roommate's rich parents are back in town and for a free dinner I, age 19 and nearly broke, still accept their invitation.

3. Senior year, just weeks from graduation, priding myself on functioning in new social situations, following an unexpected interview with my future employer, seated next to a brash guy I instinctively dislike, no surprise he'll two years later screw me over.

4. Finishing a painfully real summer, my manager can't understand the significance of my choice in restaurant before departure, and rather than get sentimental, I insist I really want a pizookie before I head out, now 22, on a cross-country adventure.

5. Three years in the future, friend's parents buy lunch to mark the start of a new chapter, one a past self would have died for and a present self dreads in denial, because I don't know what to expect out of friendship anymore.

6. Some months later, to celebrate a former coworker's rehire; to send off a former manager to retire; to hug a mentor and pray I don't have to mourn her; to remind myself, age 26, I walked away and came out stronger; to catch the virus I spent the past three years avoiding, until I couldn't any longer.



Liminal Space
Josh Gilliam

Pieces of Me

Sharon Texta

I do not remember his name or face. Partly because I was so young when it happened. Partly because my mind wanted to forget what he took away from me. After experiencing sexual abuse at a young age, one tends to rid themselves of anything that pertains to the perpetrator. I can only recall him as a shadow; a now-distant memory of someone who exists in the darkest corners of my psyche, always tempting to break me.

His tallness was intimidating, as I could only see him with my chin pointing at the sky. But then again, to a five-year-old, every person comes across as a giant. The lankiness of his frame was shrouded in a light copper tone. He often sported red or blue basketball shorts and an oversized sweater or T-shirt. Maybe that is not what he looked like at all. I had never confronted his image before. Not once in the last fifteen years did I face the truth, look for answers, or even understand the effects it had on me. I said nothing; I told no one.

“Ven, ven aquí.” I heard his voice from across the small living room of my babysitter's apartment. He stood by his bedroom door with one hand on the frame, while the other signaled me to go inside. Surrounded by plastic toys, two other children, and a boxy television, I was unaware that danger could be looming. However, a hesitancy within the pit of my stomach told me to look away, to not go. I can still feel the tsunami of stillness traveling down my spine. Each look he gave me and every inch he stepped closer filled me with anxiety. I'd never felt this before. This wasn't the same anxiety I would get when I approached a dentist's chair, knowing the anesthesia would puncture me with pain. No, this was crude, raw, and terribly frightening.

He made his way towards me, crouched beside me on the staleness of the floor, clasped his hand on one of my wrists, and insisted that I come with him. My confusion grew. With an atmosphere of hesitancy permeating through the apartment, I stood up and proceeded to do as told.

I had been sitting with two other kids watching cartoons, but at that moment, I felt isolated. A division formed as I looked back at them; staring at the television, mesmerized by the images on-screen. The sight murmured an inaudible plea for me to stay — I wish it would have yelled.

I Am Changing & Growing

ShawNee J. Fields

What kept me sane was knowing that things would change, and it was a question of keeping myself together until they did.

— Nina Simone

Limitless to what's already been said, what's already been done.

A survivor.

A voice that can be heard.

A victory that has no song.

I Am Changing & Growing from concrete ceilings,
with transparent steps to imprint my healing.

An awareness of a reset empowered by my higher self –

Symbolize clarity from the best parts of me.

That was meant to deteriorate my health, freedom, & peace.

Well, then, father of time—

reaching through your rocky core—

To be a survivor of sexual abuse authenticates the concrete seedling –
limitless to what's already been

Said – what's already been done – before.

I Am the Author of My Reality

Whenever you are creating beauty around you, you are restoring
your own soul.

— Alice Walker

I Am The Author of My Reality.

The chapters of my life are beginning to tie back into choices once made –
yet, the destinations remain unpaved to develop newer terrain
for the panoramic view of my story again.

In revision, I illustrate the subtext that gave rise to clarity,
authoring my presence, its depths, heights, horizontal transparency.
The lengthy chapters are where I go to find acts of personal growth –
and in this Reality, is where I submit this letter & line
as the chapters write itself.

Ode to a Lemon

Hannah Rae Whittle

You, lovely lemon
born from honest seed and soil,
to be crowned by chaplets
of pure white blossoms.
In soundness you bide
between evergreen leaves,
your bright bellied beauty
sodden with sunbeams.

Some disregard you
as pungent and sour.
They wrinkle their eyes
and they stiffen their lips.
But, with a succulent tongue
they can not have forgotten
each time they were met
with your bitter-sweet kiss.

That wistful feeling
of a warm summer breeze
blowing through clotheslines
in grandma's backyard.
It is you, lovely lemon,
the centerpiece of connection,
mixed with water and sugar
in an old mason jar.

In the zest of your skin
lays bountiful bouquets
of lilac, pine, lavender, and rose.
So precious, like memories,
 enclosed within
 the lustrous rind
 of you, lovely lemon.

Earth to Earth

C.M. Eden

Round and smooth, the perfect stone sat fitted in his palm in its dull gray silence. Its rise and descent, each part an equal contributor in its suspenseful flight, a one time occurrence as it belly flops past the cattail stems and into the murky green blanket. "Stones are supposed to skip," she would have told him, "you're bad at this."

The breeze carries her, and within its gentle whipping he can feel her. In the scent of the heavy air, in its stank of wet dog and pine and her lavender ghost; in the sanctuary's touch of tadpole kisses in the drizzly wind and its heat like a tight sarcophagus of condensed milk, the Florida in her backyard. In its song, the chorus of croaks, of which she cries out one must be her prince, and all present give their best ribbit or smooch or bust a gut at the performance.

Her hair wisping on his cheek as she points; her index finger an exclamation point that never stops, her voice so overwhelmed she blubbers between her speech. "Frogs on frogs on frogs. This is why we don't get mosquitos out here! They're rabbits this time of the year." She had loved to point them out. Over the murky, overused paint-cup body of water were spots of green. Green on green on green. Green that camouflaged itself amongst the lily pad seats, the algae muck, the willowy canopies, the peeping reeds and their puffy hotdog ornaments.

In his plastic bag seat he can hear her laughter, a feint on his dampened psyche, and he wonders: will the Cheval Blanc he'd taken from her cellar lead her specter presence to lucidity? The sight of tangled string and tire hung taut from a low hanging branch, an old white T-shirt hung loose and filthy on its inner curve, leads the bottle to his lips, but the liquor—salty and sobering—dripping past his cheeks meets them first.

Vermillion pours onto the mossy earth in heaping gulps. Wine to dirt. Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.

Things We Are Allowed to Possess

Catriona Setliffe

On my eighth birthday, my family arrived in Portland, Oregon; we had moved from Washington, DC, because even in the late 1980s, DC was too expensive for regular people. Unfortunately, the money we would have saved on cheaper rent vanished when my uninsured mother badly injured herself in the process of packing up the van, eventually requiring multiple surgeries and rendering her incapable of working at her preferred profession, and so the move instead plunged us even deeper into the poverty we had attempted to flee.

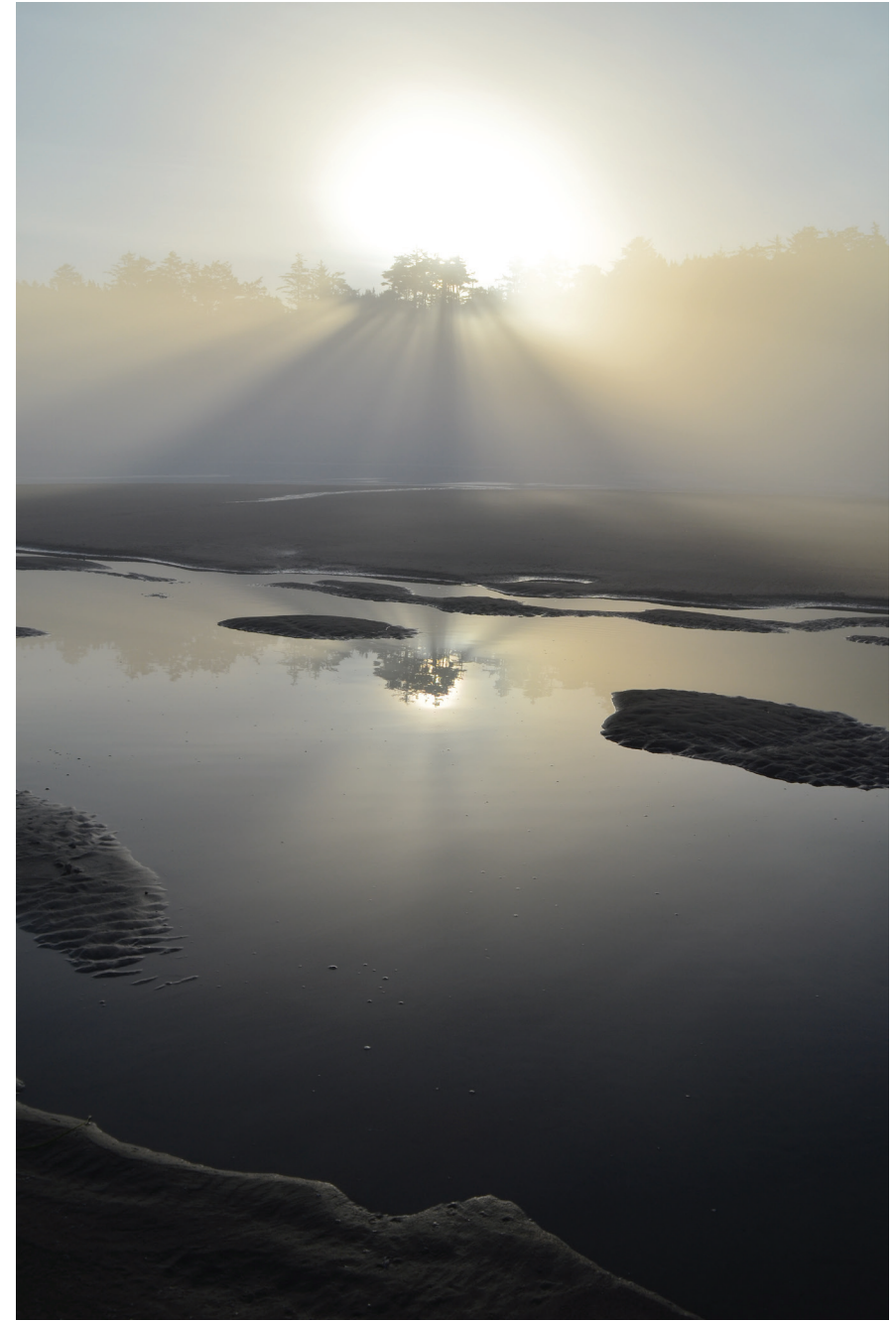
We were abruptly destitute, but had no way yet to receive government assistance, so my atheist mother took us to church. The Gleaners were there, offering bread on the verge of spoiling and suspiciously sticky donut holes, and it was on this we lived even before our haphazard front-yard garden came in, much less food stamps and welfare checks. To this day, I tend to associate donut holes with “less than,” as being the food no one else wanted and that I could therefore have. The scraps. The leavings. For me.

We still needed money, whatever we could get our hands on, so we got most of it by collecting cans. Bottles and cans were worth a nickel each in Oregon then, and my mother would pluck them from gutters and trash cans, glistening prizes. My little brother and I would venture out by ourselves to go door to door through the neighborhood with a rickety shopping cart, asking perfect strangers for their dripping charity.

My mother wasn’t interested enough in our comings and goings to feel the need to know exactly how much we’d made, so, after taking what we’d amassed to the store, we would buy ourselves a treat and gather under an abandoned old truck canopy in the parking lot of the Food-Valu where some kids from the neighborhood liked to hang out. When we had a really good day, and they were on sale, we would spend a bit of the extra on little hard-iced fruit hand pies, ten for a dollar, torn in half and shared around the circle, eaten with hands unwashed, still sticky from leaked stale beer and soda.

In a way it was my childhood in a nutshell: dirty, uncomfortable, lacking adult supervision, compelled to share any good thing I had until there was barely a crumb left for myself.

Everything tasted so sweet.



Morning Reflection
Joshua Gilliam

The Stars Path
Wenyan Yu Zhen



Corazón

Ariel Atsatt

I wonder if I could learn
To fall in love
With my own heart

Grizzled and scarred
Though she is.

Saffron seas
Swimming with sorrow,
Deep blue oceans
Stormy with pain —
Eternally longing.

She is an infinite wanderer;
Wisened by years
She still has more to give.

I hope to learn
To fall —
To fall in love
With my own heart
Splayed open
For others to see

Her beauty still unknown to me.

Game of Masters

Oscar Nieves Lira

Naive child of shining brown eyes, staring
long and attentively;
long enough for his memory to take a picture,
a portrait
aged through the sepia clothes of its protagonists.

Vintage humans, close to a century in age,
masters surrounding masters, among them
two playing a game for which no longer needed was their sight,
The child wondered, as he came closer and
heard the command of his father:
Pay attention.

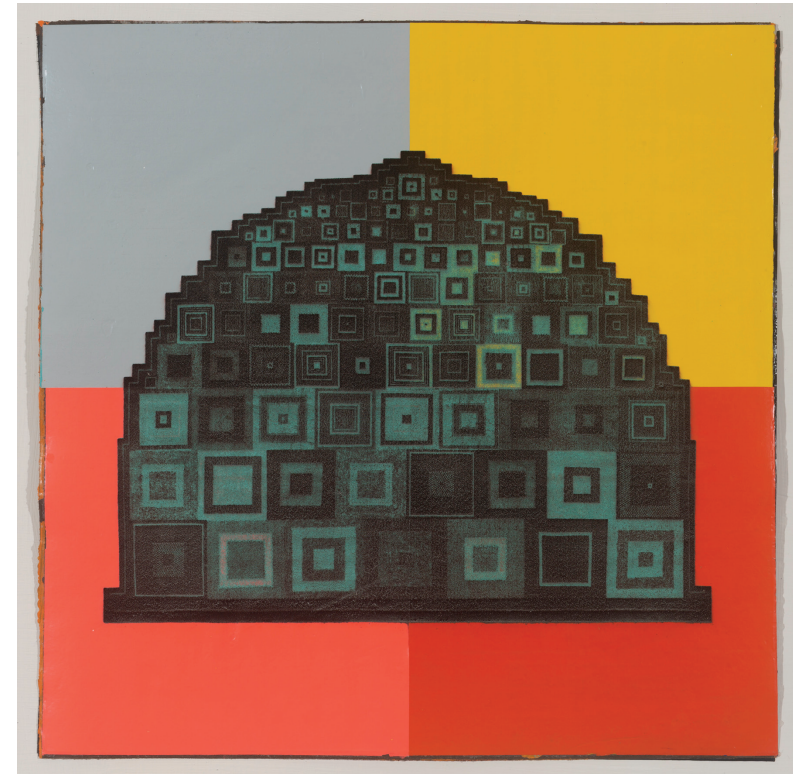
He still wondered,
it smelled of men: the scent of respect, wisdom, and cigars.
The older masters, surrounded by old misters, played
a game of textures,
one the child had never seen before.

Now closer to the board, he saw
something familiar...
two friends playing with their plastic toys,
each one, touching the pieces of the other:
soldiers and queens, knights and kings,
black and white toys at war.

Whenever a revealing *hum* from the crowd
entered the silent affair of their ferocious tactile bout
the father repeated:
Pay attention.

So, he stared long again
with innocent curiosity at the white milky curtains
coating their eyes,

the child wondered...
the two older masters saw everything and then nothing,
the child wondered...
what their blind game looked like?



Stress Formations: Small Tent, Beating Heart
Mark Smith

Passing Nights

Oscar Nieves Lira

The night before was the first time we slept together. Technically we just slept on the same bed—there was no clear desire for us to do anything else. I was prepared to sleep with the stone floor and a worn blanket the receptionist found, but she welcomed me onto the bed, perhaps out of some newly-found compassion. I could not tell. The drive was a little long; we left her father's ranch late in the afternoon at her request. The moon was out when we arrived at the village of Bernal, and the brightly painted houses were letting the light of their kitchens spill through their windows as the families got ready for dinner. We are staying at an inn I discovered as a child. It used to be an old limekiln, but the owners transformed it into a medieval castle-like guesthouse after the Bernal monolith began to attract tourism to the village. Old unusable armors lined up sporadically on the sides of the thick dark purple stone walls which make up the little rooms. These tin men towered over me when I was a child. Now, I cannot wear the rusted knightly uniform. It is so small. She kept trying to make me put a helmet on.

It does me good to go for a run and clear my head in the mornings, especially ever since she has been under my care. Especially after last night. Her name? Salome. I work for her father, Ignacio Cabrera Montes, one of the most acclaimed lawyers in the country and the man who has been my patron for several years now. I believe she also enjoys my stories. She comes to her father's "vacation house" every couple of months. Always accompanied by some friends of hers and one new boyfriend, all relieved to get away from the city and the "demanding duties of university" as they like to call their time partying with the rich, entitled kids of politicians and businessmen who go to the same universities in Mexico City. Every time, she expects a new draft of whatever story I am working on. Every time, I grant her request, and her hands, the color of the paper, merge with the perfumed pages as she takes them with her. We never have time to talk about the stories.

This time, however, she came to the ranch by herself, a very rare sight. I found out from the ladies at the kitchen, that her friends had all gone to Europe for the summer. Apparently, she would join them a few weeks later. Mr. Cabrera spent a couple days with her, but he would also be traveling outside the state for business matters and could not take his precious child along. In his place, I was appointed to be her chaperone and take her to whatever place she desired. I had been hoping to be undisturbed this summer to better concentrate on my work. I have been stuck in the middle of my novel for quite some time. Nevertheless,

it is the least I can do for the family that has treated me so well. Normally, I participate at their dinner parties with poems and songs of my authorship. Other times, I provide them with stories, some true, some slightly less so, of my travels to America or Europe. I do help with administrative matters here and there, and recently Mr. Cabrera has been instructing me in the field of law.

Her evergreen lavender scent pulls me out of these worn memories, returning me to the steps of the stone room we shared last night. Her perfume announces her presence. My breath is trying to simmer down after the run. After last night too. After she took my arms with the same enigmatic disposition with which she always takes my stories and wrapped them around herself. No words preceded her actions. I gave her my arms. I questioned nothing and she offered no explanation. The frenetic beat of my heart filled the silence of the night until we fell asleep. I do not know how to enter the room again. She has opened the window but left the curtains down. I can see her shadow walk about with her nightgown still on. Salome's way of walking reminds me of that of a traveling actress who once played the role of Empress Charlotte, wife to Maximilian of Austria. I was seven and I could not take my eyes off the woman. Her attained posture, her internalized royal stature, and her elegant features, entirely divorced from her luscious attire, made her walk unlike any other woman I had ever seen. It did not help that the adults around convinced me that she was the rightful monarch of the time. The last memory I have of her is the crowd obscuring her silhouette as she walked away forever.

I met Salome two years ago when her father agreed to sponsor my novels. After we established our little ritual, when her walking away became familiar, I learned to recognize her from behind. I learned to see Salome Cabrera with the same eyes as I once saw the fake Charlotte. I have no idea how she feels about me, but if last night revealed anything then I believe she tolerates me enough to not let me sleep on the cold stone floor. I am still waiting outside for her when the door opens for me. "Come in," she said, looking directly at me. Her nightgown, gone. Her body, naked. I can't blink, and she does not give me the satisfaction of doing so. It's infuriating looking into her eyes, I can't trust them. Whatever they reveal to me are not her true intentions; I can only see my delusion. Although, this time I hope it's true. I cross the stone porch, push the door a little further. It doesn't feel as heavy as last night. She waits for me inside.



Teddy
Sophia Sutherland

Double Vodkas at The Columns

Amanda Sheppard

In another life, in a simpler time – the tacky 2000s, to be exact – I was a young wife to an even younger husband. When it was good, it was good; when it was bad, it was god- awful. Now that I’m older and wiser, I’ve reached a certain level of detachment that allows me to mine this part of my life for fun and artistic license. So, here goes!

It was a balmy southern night in the city of New Orleans. I was uptown with my then-husband of two years at a historic mansion turned-hotel bar called The Columns, a famous shooting location for the Louis Malle child-prostitute flick *Pretty Baby* starring Brooke Shields. That’s about the only thing that made this bar remotely interesting, unless you count Chappelle’s *Show* playing on the bar’s TV. I was twenty-three and bored out of my mind.

After the initial charm of his blonde good looks and his London-by-way-of-Kent accent wore off, I realized my ex was a budding sociopath, with shitty taste in music and an all-consuming need to climb the social ladder. He read Robert Greene and Machiavelli and conned his way both into a golf scholarship at Nicholl’s State and into my bed on Halloween night. I didn’t know much of anything, and I didn’t know much about him, since we had only dated three months. I also didn’t realize that marriage to him would end my social life.

He was my English husband who always knew how to work the accent and charm for the Americans, except at the drive-thru window, where I helplessly endured heated exchanges between him and some hapless southerner on the other end of the drive-thru speaker.

“I’d like to order frree cheeseburgers, please.”

“Sir, we don’t have free cheeseburgers here.”

“No! Not free! Frree!”

“He means three!”

“Shut up, ya dozy cow!”

“Prick!”

“Sir, you’re holding up the line.”

“FRRREEEE!!!”

And I was his trashy American rocker wife who played guitar and drank Maker’s Mark. His marriage to me was an easy escape from school and a way to rebel against his miserable mum and dad back in England.

We were two years into wedded bliss, the hubby was working at a retail golf store, and I was running food orders at a certain New Orleans fine-dining

golf store, and I was running food orders at a certain New Orleans fine-dining steakhouse franchise. He wore Brooks Brothers shirts and sold rich people nine-irons while I slung sizzling steaks and creamed spinach at bougie assholes on the Atkins diet. He smelled like Cuban cigars and \$20 hamburgers from Oak Harbor Golf Club, and I reeked of stale butter and Benson & Hedges.

This was my night off which somehow meant we were out with his friends from the golf shop. The only nice thing about a night out with his friends was that in their company, he tolerated my drunken shenanigans better. Much to my dismay, this would not be a night of slumming it in dives with his rowdy rich-kid work-bestie who always had blow. No, I was spending my night off from work with soft-spoken, sorta-handsy law student Jay (who never had blow) and his random grad student friends from Tulane at a fancy-schmancy uptown bar with my cheapskate golf zombie husband.

Despite being DINKS (dual income, no kids), the hubby was constantly nagging me about my spending no matter how hard I worked and paid everything on time. So, I decided I would not spend this evening under that boring social climber's thumb. Why were we hanging out with these people in the first place? And why here? There was no live music, dance floor, pool tables, or jukebox, and I doubt they had cheese fries.

So I took matters into my own hands and blazed a trail for the bar to order doubles as a cost-cutting measure. I promptly began drinking them at the same rate as singles.

Jay's school chums were a bland amorphous blob of WASPy pastels and pinstripes, and they just talked about—hell, who am I kidding? I don't remember. Whatever it was, it wasn't that interesting. And I know that deep down, the hubby wasn't captivated, either. He just nursed his beer and pretended to listen in his stupid TaylorMade golf cap and his shiny, double-mercerized for-a-night-on-the-town polo shirt. So, I kept drinking double Stoli and Sevens and let the magic of vodka and sugary fizzy goodness make my awkward small talk charming and our new friends interesting. Mostly, I hung out at the bar watching Chappelle's Show and likely annoyed people near me with my drunken cackles—Konnichiwa, bitches!

The night grew longer and darker. Chappelle's Show was over, and people were starting to leave, so I wandered out of the bar to explore my surroundings unencumbered by my empty golf-douche husband and his new preppy entourage. I followed a white light from the ornate turn-of-the-century hotel lobby past a heavy wooden staircase, and the ambient bar chatter faded into the distance. I continued through a darkened hallway. It led me down an ancient corridor in what appeared to be a monastery. Maybe that's why this place was such a drag. My t-shirt and jeans were now a long hooded gown made of heavy fabric. It was very monastic. I continued my descent into the dimly torchlit catacombs when I felt

the urge to pee.

So, I lifted my heavy, mysterious, hooded monastic gown and began to pee, as you do. I was peeing on a hard concrete floor beneath my bare feet, trying to avoid splashing myself for what must've been an eternity, when I heard a familiar angry voice yell, "Awe, for fuck's sake, stop that! You're in the hallway!" I woke up, and sure enough, I was, in fact, in our carpeted hallway, peeing. And that, kids, was my first blackout!



Blue
Sophia Sutherland

Two Sides

C.M. Eden

I see God in you,
but can you see the Devil in me?
It seethes,
a hungry beast set on
devouring
every virtuous inch of you.

If I asked nicely,
would you play the part?
I am sure,
I would bet my life on it,
that you would.
If you are anything, then
you are generous.

Yet, all you do to me is
take.
You prepare your supper's
cleaver and trident,
and dig in,
gorging upon me.
I am your Christmas
ham which you cleave
with neat strokes.

I give myself
unto you, for my
ravaging heart to be kept
at bay.

Devotion is loving
with no expectation
for loving's return.
Innocent as a mother,
I will hen you,
but just the same
I might nip at my egg.

I wonder, for our
last supper,
who will taste
the body and blood.



Stress Formations: Spherical Grouping
Mark Smith

Mentor

Natasha Vartanian

A mentor needs no throne. Still,
I decorate our palace walls with transcripts crafted from golden fingertips,
with branches fallen from firs that smell like home,
with building blocks of hand-crafted wood painted in shades
of blue and yellow and pink,
each hue a muddy memory in a rainbow of nostalgia.

My mentor leads with logic and love
Malleable and fixed, somehow,
and ever-growing.
The subject of my inspiration to Become, to Learn, to Teach;
to practice patience and laugh the whipping wind away from my cheeks.

On clear nights he wears the royal sky like a robe,
draped in sweet, soft blue and flecked with silver stars that reflect the
moon's glow.
He paces slowly and intently, magic dripping from his sleeves
and pooling beneath him in puddles I can only gaze into,
softly touching my features that mirror his own:
gentle curls the color of midnight
and deerlike eyes that sponge the beauty of the world.

In wild adventure I hear him,
in warm, acoustic guitar I feel his embrace;
in savory delicacies I taste my childhood,
and in the muddied Pacific forests I smell deep green flannel.

But my favorite sense
is to witness the mentor among his craft —
all-encompassed and steaming with ideation —
with my own two eyes, gifted by him,
searching and searching for meaning.
He is Me.

Contributor Notes

Ariel Atsatt

Ariel is a human & artist originally from San Francisco, CA now living in Portland, OR with her wife and extraordinarily fluffy cat. Her artistic expression is inspired not only by her natural surroundings, but also by the depth and complexity of emotion we all experience as humans navigating this strange world.

ShawNee J. Fields

ShawNee enjoys writing Self-Help and Words to Empower All. She grew up in Akron, OH, and is currently attending Portland Community College. A certified Holistic Health Practitioner, ShawNee transfigures the art of spirit, health, and wellness into her writing. She’s developed 52 Affirmations for a SA Survivor and wrote “The Traditional Modalities for Healing” manual.

Josh Gilliam

Josh Gilliam is a photographer with an interest in capturing everyday moments and the beauty all around us.

M. Jacobs

M. Jacobs is a PCC community education student and writer of poetry and flash prose.

Oscar Nieves Lira

Oscar Nieves Lira is a young Mexican short fiction writer, poet, and freestyle rapper. Born and raised in the magic village of Tequisquiapan, Querétaro, now based in the city of Tigard, Oregon. He is an undergrad student at PCC seeking to earn a degree in Literature and Philosophy.

C.M. Eden

C.M. Eden is a writer of poetry and fiction with a passion for the thrilling, the fantastical, and the fear-inducing.

CJ Maruyama

CJ Maruyama is an emerging writer from Portland, Oregon. He writes poetry and short stories, ranging from stoic to humorous to transcendentalist. CJ graduated from Occidental College and is currently enrolled in the creative writing program at PCC. In his free time, CJ hikes, snowboards, and explores breweries with his partner, Erin, and their Siberian Husky, Kira.

Jason Miller

Jason Miller is a born and raised Pacific Northwesterner who loves to write and wants to write to live. At forty-seven, he enjoys the minor anarchies, contemplating the life of being a gunrunner when the apocalypse comes, and other peoples’ cats. Jason is a true child of the Northwest, loving the trees, the fresh air, and the rain. All while complaining about it at the same time.

Sharon Texta

Sharon Texta is a non-artist. One with ideas but is still figuring out what they will hold for her. She is an avid adventurer, passionate about anything art, music, or food related. Born in the warm climate of Zihuatanejo, Guerrero, and raised in the coolness of Tigard, Oregon, Sharon happily awaits the start of a new day.

Catriona Setliffe

Catriona Setliffe has lived in Portland for most of her life. She graduated from PCC in 2010.

Amanda Sheppard

Amanda Sheppard is a Portland, Oregon-based writer and music journalist enrolled in the Creative Writing program at Portland Community College. She has also written as a contributor for *Please Kill Me* and *Legsville*.

Mark R. Smith

Mark R. Smith’s work explores pattern and recycled textiles, creating unconventional objects based on a conceptual framework, and transforming everyday materials into dynamic, thoughtful paintings. Smith received his BFA from The Cooper Union (New York, NY) and his MFA from Portland State University (Portland, OR). This is from a series of laser engravings which addresses how people have been coping with stress privately at home through the years of the pandemic (crochet, crafts and other repetitive work) and how those same stresses have played out in public settings through mass public demonstrations.

Natasha Vartanian

Natasha Vartanian is a writer (and cat lover) from Portland, Oregon. Her personal writing most often consists of poetry inspired by her personal relationships, emotions, and love for animals. Natasha is drawn to poetry for its creative vocabulary and intimate connection to the writer, evoking a unique message in each piece. Former PCC student, she found her passion in studying Communication at Portland State University and continued on to become an educational writer. Natasha loves oddities, chaotic conversation, and music that makes the soul want to dance.

Hannah Rae Whittle

Hannah Rae Whittle is a California-born, Colorado-raised, Oregon-thriving mixed media creative who has recently found a love for poetry and the literary field. Since her first poetry class, when Professor Allison Apotheker stated, “poetry [and literature] tells the story of what it means to be human,” she has found healing and connection through literary works. She is currently a student at PCC in pursuit of a BFA to boost her resume for the publishing and editing industry.

Wenyan Yu Zhen

Wenyan Yu Zhen is an art student at PCC.

Front cover image:

Mark Smith, Stress Formations: Pyramid Assembly

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