



## SELECTED EXCERPTS

Issue #1, Oct. 1, 2011

### THE PROBLEM OF FURNITURE RAY VUKCEVICH

Everyone in the room has mixed feelings. Jane and Marcie on the couch, David and Pablo at the door. The situation is a perfect introduction to the Problem of Furniture.

Some background first.

It's not entirely true that we are all multiple personalities. Oh, why beat around the bush with nuance? Actually, that is exactly the case. All of us house at least two and sometimes more than two people in our heads. We suppose it's possible there are people who only have one, rare cases, tragic cases, cases not covered in this report but only mentioned here to avoid confusion. Sometimes people do become aware of their neighbors, and this is thought to be a sad mental illness, but most people remain utterly unaware of their mental roommates. The sad cases can be tricky. If a person is suffering from a mental disorder, not all of the other people in the head are suffering from it, too. Generally speaking, a "person" in a given head is aware of only about 10 percent of what the brain is doing. Other people can be using some of the other parts, and there can be sharing. Being aware of a part of the brain does not mean being aware that someone else is also aware of that part.

Most often the people in a given head are very similar to one another, brothers and sisters, really. If you could meet the siblings in your head, you would probably not think they were much alike, because you would be noticing all the differences, but someone in an entirely different head would right away see how alike you all were. No two of us were raised by the same parents, however. Or at least, that is very rare. There is always room for strange occurrences like the unfortunate situation where a parent simply can't see the child or vice versa.

This similarity of personalities greatly simplifies the problem of stuff. It doesn't eliminate it altogether. If that were true, there would be no so-called "Problem of Furniture" and this report would be about something else.

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# GOOD MORNING

AARON ANSTETT

Fifty-some years after the war, a kamikaze lands in my yard,  
gently, like a sheet of newsprint.

“Ohayo gozaimasu,” I say, though it is evening, light grown ochre  
and pink, day disappearing across the Zero’s wings.

He shinnies from the cockpit, the thinnest man I’ve seen.  
He has evaded the radar. He’s fallen

for decades, believing he’ll attack  
the coast of America, setting all the pines in Oregon blazing.

I take him inside, where he drinks a glass of water.  
It is clear. It tastes nothing like the ocean.

(originally appeared in *No Accident*, Backwaters Press)

\* \* \*

# NO, REALLY

ELIOT FINTUSHEL

How’s everybody feeling tonight? Pretty good? Great! Great!

I want to thank each and every one of you for braving the lead rain and the gummyclouds to make it here tonight to Jake’s Yok Spot, the one and only boss-certified human rec facility in the city and county of 27-E3. I’m Jackie Jock the Joke Man. I love you to pieces, folks, and I’m here to make you laugh your teeth right back into your gums.

Any butlers in the audience? None of you had to bring your butlers, right? Because I have a little gripe with butlers, and I’d like to feel that I can speak freely here. Oh, I mean, it’s no big deal. I mean, hey, nobody loves butlers more than I do, loves the whole institution of butlers more than I do.

You hear that, boss? I LOVE ‘EM TO FRIGGING DEATH!

Just kidding there. No, really. Status quo is the way to go. I love everything nowadays. No, really.

But don't you just hate it when they make you take them along? Even if you love your butler to frigging death, which is exactly my mind state, believe you me, still, for us humans—no offence, boss—but, for us humans, it can cramp your style. Know what I'm talking about? I mean, love them as we do, butlers are not always perfectly sympatico.

Like, for example, you know how when you wake up in the morning and there's this, you know, this *thing* all over your tongue? And you, like, go to the bathroom to get the butler to hose it down—I mean, with his hose, right? Hey, don't laugh--you do it too. You have the frigging butler hose it down for you. What, am I being uncivilized to mention this? This is life in this day and age. Deal with it—am I right?

Okay, so you get him to hose it down—like I said. And the son of a bitch is gonna have an attitude. You know he's gonna have an attitude. Am I right? Are you with me? Because he's in with the bosses. All the damn butlers are in with the bosses. What are we to them, right? Like, “Maybe I'll hose it off of you and maybe I won't” kind of thing. You see what I'm saying?

*So you have to shoot him.*

No, really. Take it easy, folks. Thanks for the rim shot, Sal. Without the damn rim shot, who'd know when to laugh, am I right?

\* \* \*

## REALISM & OTHER ILLUSIONS

THOMAS E. KENNEDY

*“If you want to give a natural appearance to an imaginary creature, a dragon for example, use the head of a mastiff or a pointer, the eyes of a cat, the ears of a hedgehog, the snout of a hare, the smile of a lion, the temples of a cock, and the neck of a tortoise.”*

-Leonardo da Vinci

*“If people see a lion, they run away; if they only apprehend a deduction, they keep wandering round in an experimental humor. Now how is the poet to convince like nature, and not like books?”*

-Robert Louis Stevenson

When we read a piece of fiction, what is it about the work that inspires the “willing suspension of disbelief” that Coleridge identified as necessary to the experience of literature? What makes us willing, even eager to believe that the artificial world into which the writer invites us is a real one? The problem may not be so acute with realistic works — if we pick up a book and begin to read, for example,

*“The Jackman's marriage had been adulterous and violent, but in its last days, they*

*became a couple again, as they might have if one of them were slowly dying..”*

we accept the premise immediately. With this opening to his story, “The Winter Father,” Andre Dubus fills us in on the essence of a compelling situation which we automatically place in a setting in the real world, and he goes on to tell skillfully a moving story about the dissolution of family life which is or was so central to the short story of the eighties and nineties.

Likewise, we react with belief when we read the opening of Raymond Carver’s “Collectors.”

*“I was out of work. But any day I expected to hear from up north. I lay on the sofa and listened to the rain. Now and then I’d lift up and look through the curtain for the mailman.”*

The scene is not unfamiliar. It is set with objects familiar to us, simple actions that we know from our own experience, charged subtly with emotions that we ourselves have experienced or could easily imagine experiencing.

Gladys Swan opens her novel *Carnival for the Gods* like this:

*“It was the first time Dusty had ever backhanded her, and it was not just the blow, the pain, the blood from her lip flowing saltily into her mouth that gave Alta the shock: it was the sense that something fatal had struck at the roots of her life.”*

Again, a situation sufficiently grounded in recognizably real detail to be accepted without trouble as reality, as is this opening of Francois Camoin’s story, “Lieberman’s Father”:

*“Lieberman had his eyes on his chicken salad and so at first didn’t see the woman. She stopped short at his table and stood swaying a little this way and that, looking like a person who has just bumped into something and is wondering if she’s hurt herself.”*

Such openings seem immediately real enough, “normal” enough not to raise questions in our minds about where they are happening. They seem to be happening in the same world we occupy, and we accept them as such. But sometimes they seem to nudge toward the border of another dimension. Here’s how Gordon Weaver’s “The Interpreter” starts:

*“It is as if... It is as if I cannot remember the things I must say to myself. It is as if all the words I know in both English and my native Mandarin have fled from me, evaporated into the cold, misty air of this wretched place, into the wet fogs that greet us each morning... It is as if each bitter day is the first and I wake chilled...knowing nothing until I can remember some words, something to say to myself that will allow me to rise.”*

Not *unrealistic*, yet there is an edge of the other there that makes us a little unsure just where we are.

And what is one to make of a short story from *Leaf Storm* by Gabriel Garcia Márquez that opens with a character named Palayo walking home from the beach, entering his courtyard to find “a very old man, lying face down in the mud” and unable to rise because “his enormous wings” are in the way? How are we to suspend our disbelief and enter Márquez’s world — even if we desperately want to?

\* \* \*

# COUCH

JOSHUA MCKINNEY

I wish I had never fallen asleep on the couch. Defenseless there, with a beer and a book, I was consumed. Sometime later I awoke on my back inside it, cramped, arms crossed over my chest and unable to move. I've shouted myself mute, but the stuffing muffles my cries. Occasionally some crumbs sift down through the cushions. Maybe a peanut, a kernel of popcorn. Two coins tumbled down and landed over my eyes. The worst part is when people use it—the pressure on my chest, the lack of air. Like last night when the detective dropped by again and he and my wife whispered into the wee hours. Or this morning when the kids jumped up and down on my balls playing trampoline, no one to stop them now.

\* \* \*

# THE ORNITHOLOGIST'S LAST WISH

DAVIC ERIC TOMLINSON

The geese are winging in from the north. First a hairline thread in the muted horizon, then a cross-stitch in the sky over Portaferry, in County Down, Northern Ireland. Soon a dark and honking seam gliding in against the ebbing tidal narrows, breaking rank at last to alight in ungainly spray atop the waters of Strangford Lough, an inlet sheltered from the Irish sea by the crooked finger of the Ards Peninsula.

A couple walks along the rocky mudflats edging the shoreline, waiting for the birds. The man moves with purpose, always several steps ahead of his wife, skipping across minor tide pools with a grace belying his age. She is easily distracted, and the man often finds himself waiting, neck craned past his shoulder, as the woman bends to examine some newly discovered piece of the landscape. Garbage fascinates her: cigarette butts, discarded beer bottles, bits of plastic packaging tumbling in the surf. A half-buried Styrofoam cup can elicit soft murmurs of wonder.

The woman is an ornithologist, and calls herself Newt. Newt cups caramel fingers around thin lips and a sequence of modulated honks trumpets from her throat, the practiced performance pitching across seething whitecaps. The birds are intrigued. A white-faced gander rises from the water to investigate, dark neck pumping under a gray, feathered flurry. Newt's braying intensifies, and for a moment it appears woman and bird might embrace, an absurd marriage of heaven and earth, until the approaching goose banks widely away, complaining loudly at the ruse. The bird glides a graceful arc back to the gaggle, silver tail feathers flashing in the gray morning light.

Newt has lured her husband here to overwinter with a flock of barnacle geese she's studying,

something about the dialect of bird calls in rural areas as compared to urban centers. They've rented the top floor of a bed and breakfast in Strangford proper. The village is much changed since their last visit together, in the early seventeenth century, when Newt was working as scribe to an Anglican churchman intent on translating *The Book of Common Prayer* into the Goidelic languages. Back then, they sailed for Dublin in a passenger galley stinking of stale bilge water. Newt remembers wooden bouts with boredom, a stiffness settling into her calves, hurly-burly debarkations into lurching, beast-drawn vehicles.

This year the trip was more pleasant; they flew *Aer Lingus* to Dublin, rented a car, and arrived in less than a day.

The man goes by Gage, and he is over seven thousand years old, only a handful of years older than Newt. He's drawn to more exotic destinations, cities where every leaf and pavestone still resonates with the great and terrible vanity of man: Cairo, Saint Petersburg, Hiroshima, Los Angeles. But Newt has hinted that Strangford holds a surprise, knowing full well that after seven millennia of watching history chase its tail, her husband places a premium on the unknown.

It's been almost a century since their last reunion, in Rome. They were picnicking near the worn cobblestones of the Appian Way, remembering the stately spectacle of the Roman army marching south to war, when Nait (for this is her real name) announced that, heretofore, she would only answer to the name *Newt*.

"Newt?" Gage asked. "Like the salamander?"

In answer to her husband's question, Newt had covered her lips with a hand, leaned back, and laughed into the high, bright air.

Perched upon a mossy boulder, Gage watches Newt try to lure the birds nearer to shore, her voice mimicking the cacophony coming from the water. Her beauty has compounded through the years; what was once a shiny trinket is now a hypnotic, lustrous intricacy that leaves him puzzled. There is something almost cinematic in her gestures. A kind of nostalgic undertow, always pulling him back. They have walked together upon too many beaches to count, seen flocks of birds teeming so thickly up from the earth that the sun looked veiled. But today they are walking on *this* beach, and Newt is singing to *this* flock of birds. And it reminds Gage of how simple life was before they met the magician.

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EXCERPTS CONTINUE ON NEXT PAGE

# HARMONY AND THE IMAGINATION:

*A Conversation with Jessica Plattner*

JODI VARON

*“Poets and beggars, musicians and prophets, warriors and scoundrels, all creatures of that unbridled reality, we have had to ask but little of imagination, for our crucial problem has been a lack of conventional means to render our lives believable.”*

*—Gabriel García Márquez, from “The Nobel Lecture.”*

Jessica Plattner embraces both the worrisome and celebratory unknown with playful fecundity. The future may hold menace, but it also offers sustenance and joy. Consider as example St. Christopher Carrying His Child-Self Across the River, Jessica Plattner’s cover painting for the inaugural issue of Phantom Drift. The subject, a monkish St. Christopher waist deep in water, ferries a child across a stream, the child an infant with the wizened head of a man complete with five o’clock shadow.

Plattner’s work invites us to read surface and symbols. Each canvas is a complex story, a chapter, a narrative, a resonance within a long and rich mythopoetic tradition of story-telling and painting. Working with an eclectic primary palette and rich patterns reminiscent of Renaissance textiles and tapestries, Plattner’s use of divided space and multiple perspectives allows the serious and sublime elbow room for humor and dreams that augment the complex narratives in her work. How would Plattner describe the balance of conception and completion in her painting, and how might the moniker “new fabulist” or the phrase “elements of the fantastic” describe the work included in her most recent portfolio, Fact and Fancy: Narrative Portraits 2009-10, of which St. Christopher Carrying His Child-Self Across the River is a part? The portfolio was unveiled as a solo exhibition at the Common Sense Gallery, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada September 10-October 8, 2010.

Cradling her infant daughter, Sofie, the rich essence of Indian curry permeated Plattner’s kitchen as we spoke. A Gibson guitar was close at hand, flanked by packing boxes as Plattner and her partner, Canadian painter and musician, Dean Smale, prepared for Plattner’s 2011-12 sabbatical from Eastern Oregon University, where she teaches painting and drawing. Her sabbatical will include studio work in Medicine Hat, Alberta, Canada, and an artist-in-residency in Florence, Italy.

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# WHAT THE BILLY GOAT SAID

PETER GRANDBOIS

*I On the Relative Uncertainty of Possible Worlds,  
or How to Remember the Future.*

The Billy Goat stands beside your bed, resting his head in the crook of your neck. His dirty brown fur is matted; his golden eyes dull. Those sideways slits staring.

You notice one horn is longer than the other and think how odd. But odder still is the green garter around the Billy Goat's neck with a bell attached to it and the ace bandage on his left front leg, where, you suppose, his knee would be.

You roll over and try to go back to sleep, to forget about his horns poking into the back of your neck. You don't like goat eyes, never have. It's not that they're demonic. Rather, it's like staring into holes in your own imperturbable reality. You pull the sheets over your head. You pray he's gone, hoping he went in search of oats or ivy, whatever it is goats eat. His warm breath caresses your back. He's under there with you. You're sure of it.

What if you knew? the Billy Goat asks, kicking you in the shin with his hoof. Would you still wear those white shirts each and every day? Would you still fight to keep them clean?

Before you know it, you're dressed in your finest black suit, the one in the back of the closet you save for weddings and funerals. He's prodding you with his horns, shoving you out the door.

Don't leave home without the red slippers! the Billy Goat shouts. No, not *those* red slippers. The other ones. You know, the ones with the embroidered gold dragons, the ones your mother bought when you were five. Yes, we all need our red slippers if we want to slip,  
slip,  
slip

You want to tell him you don't know what he's talking about. But, you do, don't you? You know exactly where he's going.

The corpse-blue cart is topped with a leopard skin seat, quite plush, though the wheels are on fire. The Billy Goat harnesses himself, then, with a ringing of his bell, limps along, pulling you behind him.

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READ MORE— CATCH THE DRIFT

# DWINDLE CHICK

CAROLYN IVES GILMAN

Her first meeting, she must have topped 275. Everything was big: her laugh, her boobs, her chins, her energy for life. She was going to tackle the weight tiger, she said with that chesty voice and oversized confidence. Her goal was to lose 150. None of us thought she could do it.

She always carried a canvas book bag stuffed with volumes like Rabelais and Roethke. Our counselor said, “Girl, this is too heavy. You’ve got to *lose* the weight, not take it on.”

She needed intervention. First we taught her to lighten up her conversation—more reality shows and cosmetics, lose the Social Issues. We edited all that highbrow jazz and fusion music off her Ipod. She was weighed down with art film knowledge, all those ten-pound words and leaden metaphors. It had to go. Her laptop was five pounds lighter after we wiped the bookmarks.

As the pounds started to melt, she said her boyfriend was unhappy. He was an NPR-elitist type who said she was “losing substance.” He called her “a lightweight” as if it were an insult.

“Dump him!” we all shouted in unison. “He’s holding you back!”

And oh how she needed to pare down her expectations for love. She didn’t need to carry a soulmate with an intellect like an anchor around her neck. She could be playing the field, urban free, like the paper umbrella without the drink. It wasn’t even a sacrifice.

In the end, she reduced herself to a wisp. Minus all that excess personality, she seemed younger by years, like the girl she’d been before the heavy memories. She was svelte and airy, light as a plastic grocery bag in the wind.

How we envied her.

\* \* \*

## EXPLORING THE HAUNTED PALACE:

*Gothic Warped Space, Phantasmagoria, and The Evolution of the Haunted House from Poe to Danielewski*

MATT SCHUMACHER

*And travelers now within that valley,  
Through the red-litten windows, see  
Vast forms that move fantastically  
To a discordant melody;  
While, like a rapid, ghastly river,  
Through the pale door,  
A hideous throng rush out forever,  
And laugh—but smile no more.*

—Edgar Allan Poe, “The Haunted Palace”

Gaston Bachelard has written that the space of the house “constitutes a body of images that give mankind proofs or illusions of stability.” During his classic *The Poetics of Space*, the French phenomenologist defines the house as a sanctuary and shelter that protects that most essential act and agency of human imagination: the formation of the poetic image. Bachelard’s house, a bastion of psychic intimacy whose spaces guard our leisurely freedom to dream, has proven especially vulnerable to invasion and disturbance in the literary genre of the ghost story. As Terry Castle asserts in *The Female Thermometer*, phantasmagorical spaces multiply ghosts, allowing them to invade two spaces at once; consequently, specters may simultaneously assail both the house and the mind. Gothic castles and mansions, for instance, with their mad Manfreds and Ambrosios, traditionally disturb and undermine the stability Bachelard ascribes to the house, and become ill-tempered mansions more akin to Poe’s haunted palace. Such fictions supplant the Bachelardian poetic image with phantasmagoria, and “warp” the psychic space of the house, according to the terminology of Anthony Vidler. Phantasmagoria and warped space thus function to nightmarishly alter and subvert the very interiority Bachelard posits.

This paper will explore the warped spaces and phantasmagorias of the haunted house in Poe’s seminal “The Fall of the House of Usher” and the modern experimentalist haunted suburban gothic abode of Mark Z. Danielewski’s *House of Leaves*. I will argue that the immeasurable uncanny dimensions of the American haunted house, introduced by the allegorical, dreamlike dwelling of Poe’s groundbreaking tale in the nineteenth century, have grown and warped purposefully during the last hundred and fifty years, to showcase a haunted house more spatiotemporally representative of modern fears. A host of phobias and anxieties Vidler cites as consequences of modernity warp space in *House of Leaves* (including Karen Green’s claustrophobia and Johnny Truant’s agoraphobia). Among other trepidations looms the notion of the city growing uncontrollably, as if it were a dread and deadly disease. This deviant, inescapable, subversive version of urbanity, whose runaway surfaces, multi-dimensionality, and bewildering multiplicity are unable to be “read” and defy comprehension by any sort of expert, also subvert the mastery of architectural blueprint or urban plan. Thus, a terrible urbanity pursues the Navidson family to the suburbs. Danielewski’s modern haunted habitation bespeaks the fear of a city of nothingness so sprawling and invasive that it has not only intruded upon and threatened to ruin the suburbs, but has floated above the blueprint to re-enter (and perhaps re-inter) the suburbanite mind. Furthermore, *House of Leaves* suggests an impossibly bleak and empty dystopian city or an anti-Corbusian chaos-machine. This house presents the sense that urban progress has been little more than illusion. It suggests that all our designs and plans are spectral—that they will return to haunt us and may lead ultimately to nothingness. Lastly, a truly invisible specter haunts Danielewski’s postmodernist house, an entity representing the most threatening forces of modernity, forces which, Marshall Berman writes, “threaten(s) to destroy everything we have, everything we know, and everything we are.” While Poe’s house haunts through authorial use of nineteenth-century brand of phantasmagoria, phantasmagorias have invaded the foundation and walls of Danielewski’s modern palace of horrors. The failure of materialism, visible in the crumbling, ruinous exterior of Poe’s House

of Usher, has warped space to become in Danielewski's dizzying labyrinthine house a vast and rapidly expansive *horror vacui*, an emptiness which reveals, among other things, the failures of the modern American narrative and the modern American dream.

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### 3 CONVERSATION PIECES

from the forthcoming *Unlucky Lucky Tales*

PETER GRANDBOIS

#### Body

*Ben Marcus's "The Age of Wire and String" in Conversation  
with Francis Ponge's "Taking the Side of Things"*

Tossed on a trash pile in an awkward pose. Swelling of hands, feet, and eyes renders them uninhabitable.

A mother cleans a child's mouth with a finger. "One must construct a usable garment from the four things: soil, straw, bark, and water."

Extremely thin skin is cooked onto their bodies, which begin to whistle from minor holes in the heat.

The stripping is easily done. The body is wrapped in cloth and then corrected with water and straw. Everything recovers its form.

The wires that generate sadness are attached. The effects will not be felt till spring. When the muscles fill like sponges, when the buds sprout again, they will know what is going on.

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# JUST BETWEEN US

NISI SHAWL

Dolores opened the closet door. Here was the problem. A dead woman hung by her neck, suspended from the cross bar by a man's tie. Violet in color, probably silk from the look of the knot. She shut the door quickly and called up her landlady. This early that meant turning on the TV that Little Girl used to watch cartoons.

Mrs. Pawkes was dressed for golf. Her clothing glowed a golden green in on the oblong screen. Her sharp-chinned, line-seamed face managed to project warm but distracted concern as she assured Dolores that the dead women were nothing to worry about.

"Women? You mean this isn't the only one?"

"Well, I've had to take care of one a week now for—seems like maybe the last couple of months. But it's just like the refugees, isn't it?"

"No, Mrs. Pawkes, it is not." The last time she came in, Dolores had opened the closet door to find a huddled group of thin, brown, anxious people, clutching fearfully at blankets, newspapers, cooking pots. The detritus of displacement. "Corpses smell. Worse," she amended. "And I had to come back before I wanted to. I think they scared Little Girl. She's gone out."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. The poor thing." The image of Mrs. Pawkes switched from head-and-shoulders to full length as she removed her bag of clubs and leaned it against something—a wall or a doorway, it wasn't quite clear. Dolores kept a shallow focus. "I wish I'd known. She didn't say anything..."

"Well, what did you expect?" Little Girl was barely verbal. She must be aware of Mrs. Pawkes from the landlady's brief visits to the apartment. But otherwise there was very little contact between the two. They certainly didn't talk.

"I just didn't have anywhere else to put them, Dolores, but down there. They keep—popping up. I wish I could tell you where from."

"I'll look into it. Meanwhile, what am I supposed to do about Little Girl?"

"Send someone after her, I guess...unless you'd rather go yourself?"

"You know there isn't room enough for both of us out there."

"Well, I'm sure you'll think of something, dear. You're so resourceful." Mrs. Pawkes glanced longingly over her shoulder at her golf clubs. The vision began to fade. Dolores closed her eyes. She could have held it together, maintained transmission, but what would be the point? As usual, everything was up to her.

She opened her eyes, massaging the wrinkles where her eyebrows furrowed together. She looked around the place. Not bad, except for the smell. She was in the upper story of a white-painted frame house. Old. Interesting. Lots of windows with tiny panes shaped like diamonds, crescents, tears. Hardwood floors, oriental rugs. Little Girl had left her playthings strewn around the apartment: a rocking horse, cardboard boxes painted to look like bricks. A pink tutu and a

cone-shaped hat, white-spangled chiffon streaming from its peak. On the enamel-topped kitchen table a bubble pipe and a tub full of sudsy water waited next to a bowl of soggy cereal.

How could Mrs. Pawkes have been so insensitive? This was supposed to be a safe place. Not a morgue. And Little Girl wasn't really equipped to handle most of what went on outside. How to get her back?

She sat down to think on a love-seat that hadn't been there when she came in. It was hers. She recognized the blue wool upholstery from her last time in. The longer she stayed, the more the place would bear her mark.

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## DRAWN TO BLACK AND WHITE: THE ILLUSTRATIVE ART OF RICHARD SCHINDLER

Interviewed by MICHAEL CHOCHOLAK

**Richard A. Schindler** is an Associate Professor of Art at Allegheny College. He has a B.A. from Gettysburg College, an M.A. from UMass-Amherst, and a Ph.D. in art history from Brown University. His area of specialty is 19<sup>th</sup>-century European art, most notably the study of Victorian painting and illustration with side trips into the alleyways of French Symbolism and Art Nouveau.

Illustrations in black and white have always been my favorite form of art. The great illustrators from the turn of the last century, such maestros as Aubrey Beardsley, Willy Pogany, Harry Clarke, Howard Pyle, and William Heath Robinson, decorated the halls of my imagination from my earliest days as an avid reader. I also grew up with the art of Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko, Frank Frazetta, Jeffrey Jones, Michael Kaluta, and Barry Windsor-Smith, all masterful practitioners of the graphic art. In my own humble way I have followed their path, illustrating books and magazines dealing with themes of fantasy and science fiction. My artistic aspirations are in some ways a counter-balance to the sometimes stodgy professional parameters of my work as an art historian. I love to explore the ways in which mass, or "low" culture intersect with and inhabit the confines of fine, or "high" art and vice-versa.

*MEZ: Most of us draw to some extent throughout our lives, but few of us would consider ourselves as having any distinction as a graphic artist... when did you realize this would be your focus, your path?*

RAS: I'd like to say that I had some kind of epiphany along the way, but that wasn't really the case with drawing. I got interested in drawing seriously during high school, although I had been

a doodler from way back. I wanted to be the next Jack Kirby, because I had discovered his art for Marvel Comics when I was twelve or thirteen years old. *That* was an epiphany, reading the Fantastic Four, Thor, the X-Men, the Avengers, Captain America, et al. My desire was to emulate Kirby's style; I even did a comic book in my senior year about a character with the ability to use carbon in some sort of superhero fashion. I don't remember much about that comic now, but my English teacher at the time was very supportive. She had my friends and me do a reading of the comic in front of the class. That may have been the reinforcement that I needed, since I took no art classes in high school (not part of the college track, unfortunately).

I took art classes in college, but my main interest became art history. One of the best classes that I took, though, was a drawing class with an adjunct professor (filling in for a professor on sabbatical leave). He was the one who suggested that I should take an art history class—"You like history and you like art, why not take art history?"—I like to tell my students that at that moment the heavens opened up, a beatific light streamed down, and an angelic choir began to sing. It was certainly a deciding moment in my search for a potential career. The history of modern art was one of the first classes that I took. The teacher started with the Pre-Raphaelites and the art was so stunningly beautiful to me that I knew what I wanted to do with my life after that moment. That interest in the Victorian era was reinforced by the work that Barry Windsor Smith did for the Conan comics and the prints he did afterwards. BWS melded the historical style with his illustrative art in a powerful way.

It's with thanks to Mark and Michael Ziesing (proprietors of the now-defunct Ziesing Book Emporium in Willimantic, CT) that I really felt like an illustrator, working on posters, bookmarks, and several short stories. Two things stick out in my mind from that period: doing the chapter vignettes for Mark's independent publication of Gene Wolfe's *Free, Live Free* (1984) and the cover illustrations for *Instead of @ Magazine*, an anarchist publication put out by Michael's Lysander Spooner Society. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Michael G. Adkisson and *New Pathways* magazine for the chance to illustrate a number of stories and one cover illustration. And then, of course, David Memmott asked me to do some illustrations for *Ice River* and some Wordcraft publications. I especially liked the assignments that involved the illustration of fantasist short stories, especially those of Conger Beasley, Jr. He had an imagination that sparked some of my favorite illustrations; his prose pushed me to really think beyond the use of obvious imagery.

All of these opportunities made me feel like a full-fledged illustrator, a sporadic feeling I must admit. My career as an illustrator has never been one of constancy in terms of drawing every day and developing recognition outside of a very small body of readers and viewers. Every illustrator that I love worked without cease on their art, driven to work, always developing, never satisfied with half-measures. I have let myself be distracted by life in ways that seem to interfere in that kind of obsessive focus that great (and even not-so-great) artists bring to bear on their life and work.

Of course, the brutal selfishness that attends that kind of obsession has been well documented in numerous artistic biographies. Many people do not really think about how dedicated you need to be to make it as an artist (in all meanings of the term). Self-motivation is key and a willingness to realize that the world at large does not have any obligation to recognize or embrace your art because your heart is pure and your intentions honorable.

**MEZ:** *Angels and portraits of musicians— why these? Why not, say, famous magicians or heroes of the Crimean War?*

RAS: Hmmm. Heroes of the Crimean War, now that's an idea... I have always been fascinated by angels (and demons, too, just for the record). Lots of angels populate the art of the Victorians (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, George Frederick Watts, Frederick, Lord Leighton, Edward Burne-Jones, Simeon Solomon, Evelyn Pickering, and Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale) and American illustrators of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Howard Pyle and N.C. Wyeth, for example). Throw the Art Nouveau era and European Symbolist art into the mix and the air is aflutter with angelic wings. I started doing my own Christmas cards about 25 years ago and angels seemed like an appropriate subject for those cards as the years passed.

Another source for my angel cards comes from the Italian and Northern European Renaissance, angel musicians in particular. I've always liked early music of the medieval and Renaissance periods, as well as the musical instruments. My latest series of images relates to that interest, with angels playing the serpent, the viola da gamba, and the lute. I have also done some angels based on Persian and Turkish models; I've always had a soft spot for Islamic art of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century.

\* \* \*

## THE JAR

BRIAN EVENSON, repinted from *The Din of Celestial Birds*

After Blau blegged for his hands for a year a guard removed him from the narrow cell and led him down a hall. The guard walked too quickly for Blau, who had not left the cell for more than a year. He tried to keep up, to move his curved and puss-ridden feet in rhythm to the guard's boots, not daring to speak even when he stumbled and fell. He caught most of the fall with the rough stumps of his arms, feeling the shock run up through his elbows.

The guard stooped, helped him up, and they continued a little slower.

"Thank you," said Blau.

The guard nodded.

"My name is Blau," said Blau.

"A pleasure," said the guard.

“Where are you taking me?”

“To your hands.”

The hall they walked was intersected by other passages. Looking to the side as they crossed an intersection, Blau could see other intersections, the beginning of other halls, as far as he could see.

“Did you know my name already?” asked Blau, “before I told it to you?”

The guard struck him in the stomach hard but without heat. Blau fell and writhed on the floor a moment. Eventually the guard set him on his feet again.

“You are not allowed to speak,” the guard said.

They walked forward in silence, the guard’s heels ringing on the floor of the hall, Blau scuttling behind. He counted twelve intersections before the pain in his legs grew so great he could no longer keep count.

“I never knew your name,” said the guard.

“What?”

“But I know your number.”

“My number?”

“Your number,” the guard said.

They walked on in silence. The guard was walking a little faster and Blau found himself hard-pressed to keep up.

“What is my number?”

The guard deftly removed a stick from his belt, struck Blau across the back. Blau cried out and tumbled forward. He lay on the ground, feeling the pain, felt himself being helped to his feet.

“You are not allowed to speak,” said the guard.

\* \* \*

## FATED

JOE L. MURR

### 1. Bad Signs

He slits open the belly of a salmon and pulls out the guts. She hovers behind him, anxious. He examines the glistening entrails.

“The signs are hard to read,” he says. “They suggest turbulent currents.”

“Don’t you see anything else?”

“The intestine is discolored. Here. And the bladder is distended. These are not auspicious signs.”

He reaches out to her with messy hands.

She recoils from his touch. “Should we try the *I Ching* instead?”

He closes his eyes and throws yarrow stalks in his mind, interprets the hexagram. “There’s a

river. On the other side of the river, a man loses his goat. Between heaven and earth, the myriad creatures ... I can't go on."

Fish guts drop from his fingers.

She whispers, "I'm afraid. I'm afraid for us."

## 2. Young Love

Once upon a time, they caressed each other with the lubed-up tenderness of new lovers.

"It's written in the stars," he said.

"We're meant to be," she said.

He traced the lines of her palm. "It was fated."

"The first time I saw you, crows took flight behind you, flew in a figure eight. A snake on a rock ate its own tail. Then I knew."

"That it's forever. When we graduate ..."

She put a finger on his lips, snuggled in close. "Don't say it yet. I already know. Yes. I'll say yes."

"How did you know?"

"A little bird told me."

\* \* \*

# MOON

STEPHEN MCNALLY

The murderer appeared at my doorstep in the night and he was dazzling,

his eyes two vaults guarded by ageless, chanting priests.

As I stared at him the snow hurried closer to touch his coat

and the moon covered us with his red hands.

With her red hands the moon covered us

and the lightning bolts which had traveled since August found their way

into the ground again,

making the earth glow

as if the dead were building fires.

"The dead are building fires," the murderer said.

His voice came from a hollow place near a distant lake

and the snow hanging on his black coat

formed the star chart for a galaxy beyond our reach.

I felt like the shadow of someone walking slowly through a forest in the  
dead of winter  
or like the memory hanging in the air after the foghorn has sounded  
as he sat beneath the window  
and spoke to it: "Soon they will forget us entirely. Already they are  
building fires."

I said prayers in a language I had never heard  
and in my mind a tiny attic door at the top of a staircase slammed shut  
as I sat with him and watched  
the snow dance against the wind,  
the silent branches grope into the night  
and the moon cover everything with her red hands.

\* \* \*

## COUNTING

GERONIMO G. TAGATAC

The tiny woman in the back of my head sings me to sleep at night in her scratchy voice. While I dream, she tracks my heartbeats and when she reaches about thirty thousand, she wakes me by putting her tiny index finger against the inside of my head and pushing. Then she softens the darkness in my room until my eyelids flutter. I open my eyes and it's 5:15AM. For twenty minutes, I lie in my bed and let the rhythm of my pulse and the counter-rhythm of my breath soak all the way down my arms and legs. With my fingers, I trace the seam of the scar that goes from just below my neck, down the middle of my chest, to the top of my stomach to where it meets the other seam to form a cross just below my ribcage where the two drainage tubes once exited my torso.

As I sit up slowly, and there's the sliver of a thought that the seams formed by the scars might not hold, that I might burst open, staining the sheets and the comforter with a sudden rush of blood internal organs. But I know better because it's been a year and a half since the surgeons closed and fastened my chest together. I rise and go into the bathroom and step into a hot shower. The water drums against the top of my head and my shoulders and I'm suddenly in Kowloon, though I don't know how I know this. I am running in an afternoon downpour along the north-south rail-line. The warm rain has soaked me to the skin. My t-shirt is plastered to my torso and my running shoes make a faint squishing sound each time they hit the wet earth. My chest scars have disappeared. The tops of the nearby trees writhe in the wind of an oncoming typhoon. I could run forever.

When I finish toweling off, I make a mark on the side of the bathroom door with the pencil

that hangs from a string, line my pills up on the bathroom counter and begin taking them, chasing each with a swallow of water. There are twenty-seven marks on the doorframe, one for each vision I've had. I have never been to Kowloon.

By the time I roll my bike out of the garage and pedal across the park, the sun is painting the oaks with yellow-green light from their tops down. Beneath the canopy of the trees, I enjoy the soft the sound of my tires on the leaf-covered earth and the vibration of the handlebars in my hands and arms, until I reach High Street.

It's 6:30AM when I reach The Blue Gila Café. I use my key to open the thick wood door with its arched glass window that's painted with a mottled blue Gila monster lizard beneath the café's name. I push the door open gently, without touching the painted reptile. It's early and the thing might not like being startled. I lock the door behind me and go back to the office to retrieve the till and turn on the XM Radio sound system. I pull the scones from the refrigerator and put them in the oven. Then I start the coffee brewers and nod good morning to Lulu, the chrome-and-red Ostroma espresso machine, with its three spouts and wands waiting patiently to make the first drinks of the day. I take chairs off the tables. Then I carry the twelve metal chairs out to the sidewalk, where I set up the folding tables. Before I go back into The Gila, I look up to the east. The sun is still below the line of buildings across the street.

With the soft blue light streaming up behind them, the buildings could be a painted plywood backdrop on a stage. At any moment, men in close-fitting suits will strut onto the sidewalk and execute a series of dance steps as they break into song.

When I walk back through the door of The Gila, I collide with the strong smell of freshly brewed coffee. It reminds me of the cubicle warren that I worked in until after my surgery, and the brown water that posed as the real thing. At The Gila, we use nothing but the highland grown Arabica beans. None of that lowland Robusto that goes into the two-pound discount cans on supermarket shelves.

\* \* \*

## IN VITRO CITY

JONATHAN BALL

in vitro city, twenty-two lakes. in vitro city drowning is a way of life. in vitro city we hold hands holding heads under. in vitro city nuclear devices are being re-commissioned. in vitro city, a last resort. in vitro city the walls are glass. in vitro city all things are windows, so there are no windows.

glass is an industry. glass includes reamy, baroque, waterglass, and other textures. glass includes ring mottles, fracture and streamers, drapery, granite, and herringbone ripples. glass nipples. glass making in the area. glass fibre for non-woven and textile applications. glass physics. glass service.

glass museums. glass ceilings. glass ground.

bombs are being dropped. bombs at the box office. bombs rising on the market. clustering. bombs in your father's land. by your father's hand. misnamed. erasers at the end of penises.

\* \* \*

## OVER THE ROLLING WATERS GO

STEFANIE FREELE

A mother gets hold of some sleeping pills. Four blue capsules nestled in her pinkish palm. The blue just a shade darker than the color they painted their first son's room.

Sleep has not been experienced since the second trimester of her first pregnancy when the acid reflux was so sharp she spent months sitting up in bed far above her sunken and snoozing husband. She stayed alert of course through breastfeeding, barely dozed in between diaper changes, had perpetual insomnia throughout pregnancy number two and with the arrival of the fourth child, she just gave up.

For seven years she has been awake and now with a nest of robin-egg blue pills – oh how innocent they are – she sees a possibility.

Before her husband, who has the kids in the other room doing their pre-dinner stretches, can stop her, she swallows the handful.

She serves her family a tuna noodle casserole, complete with a decoration of potato-chip sailboats. During the coconut cream pie she yawns.

Her husband, holding his puffy bite in mid-air, a dangerous move to do around young children, clears his dad-throat, *honey? That wasn't a yawn was it?*

*Guess I must be getting tired after all.* She picks at her pie, refusing to look him in the eye.

*No time for that hon.* He shakes her shoulder. *Right team?*

*Go Mom, Go Mom, Go Mom,* comes the cheer and for a minute she is revived.

*What did Lombardi say?* Dad roughs up the hair of the youngest child.

*The strength of a group is in the strength of the leaders.* Except it comes out as “weaders” and Mom can’t help but smile.

*Guess I’ll go take a shower.* She says, knowing how weak and sheepish it sounds, still not looking at any of the lively children around the table, almost ignoring her husband who now drops the fork to the plate.

*You took one last week.* He gives her that look, the one that always precedes a comment about being the weakest link.

\* \* \*

## SUNRISE WITH SEA MONSTERS

after J.M.W. Turner

LAWRENCE RAAB

There they are, surprisingly pink,  
although the rising sun may contribute  
to that effect. We who live here  
still guess at their actual colors,  
their size, even their shape. We’ve seen them  
only as you see them now, lifting  
their backs above the ocean, then the edge  
of what must be a tail, and their eyes,  
unusually large and round and expressionless.  
Are they playing? Is it time for them to mate?  
We just have to wonder, calling them monsters  
because no one’s given them a better name.  
And because they frighten us, as monsters should.  
But you saw them quite clearly, didn’t you?  
Later, back home, maybe you’ll decide  
it was a trick of the light, and you’ll say  
I was the one who persuaded you  
they were real. But why would I do that?  
I just bring people out here to the cliffs  
where they see what they see, and later believe  
whatever fits the stories they want to tell.  
There they are, farther off. A few more minutes

and the ocean will return to its usual self,  
with only a dolphin or two for excitement.  
Some say we should kill them,  
while others would build them a shrine.  
What I know is—they appear, let us look,  
and are gone. Or else it's all  
just the light, the rising sun like an eye  
—the eye of God, I once heard a man say—  
staring right through us, burning away  
everything we thought we knew.

\* \* \*

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