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THE SOCK DRAWER

LITERARY  MAGAZINE



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Founded in June 2020, The Sock Drawer aims to collect the voices of contemporary artists and writers. In a world as tumultuous as this one people need an outlet for their voice. With a current of feminism and activism running through the veins of the editors, The Sock Drawer seeks to be a place to release the tension of existence.

Letters & Comments: TheSockDrawerLitMag@gmail.com

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ON THE COVER
“Untitled 1” by
Cynthia Yatchman

MEET THE TEAM

FOUNDER/EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Gracelyn Willard (she/her) is the founder and editor-in-chief of The Sock Drawer. She is a 2020 graduate of Hood College with a degree in English and a concentration in Creative Writing. She was a 2019 presenter at the Hood College Discovering the Humanities Conference. She had a nonlinear college career due to her battle with multiple chronic illnesses. She loves to read Roxane Gay, Valeria Luiselli, Agatha Christie, Terrance Hayes, and Wisława Szymborska. Her quest for the perfect gluten free madeleine is never ending and at times she wonders if she loves coffee more than her boyfriend. Her last job was as a cheesemonger and she identifies as bisexual. Her passion is writing, reading, editing, and bad reality tv.

NONFICTION EDITOR/
ASSISTANT EDITOR-IN-



Kerstin Holman is a 2019 Virginia Wesleyan University graduate. In order to get the most bang for her buck, she got her BA in three majors: English Literature, Theatre (with a concentration in dramaturgy) and Women's & Gender Studies. Some writers and voices who inspire her to not only speak but listen are Roxane Gay, Da'Shaun Harrison and noname. As TSD's non-fiction editor and contributor, she hopes to continue polishing her writing craft by bringing awareness to and discussing topics including race, gender, sexuality, and existential crises. She recently became a New Jersian and her interests include bowling, watching "RuPaul's Drag Race," and eating sushi.

BOOK REVIEW EDITOR



Izzy Peroni is the Book Review editor of The Sock Drawer. She is a recent graduate of Hood College, with a degree in English with a concentration in Creative Writing, and a minor in Studies in Women and Gender. Her main contributions to the magazine, as well as the rest of the world, will include poetry, fiction, and book reviews. The majority of the creative media she consumes is either horror or science-fiction, ranging from 70's slasher flicks to often non-traditional ghost stories, as well as practically anything having to do with aliens. She obsesses over the work of Elizabeth Bishop, and unintentionally imitates her biography. Her hobbies include video games and adoring her cat.

ART & MAGAZINE EDITOR



Julia Gonzales was voted "Most likely to become an Artist" in 6th grade and knew her love for creativity would never waver. Growing up, she competed and placed in several minor art competitions within her community and enjoyed experimenting with various mediums and techniques. She is currently pursuing a degree in Computer Animation at Full Sail University with the intent to one day produce children shows. She is inspired by works from Damien Hirst, Erik Johansson, Frida Kahlo and Leonora Carrington. Some argue that she loves her cat a little too much and her current drink of choice is iced chai tea.

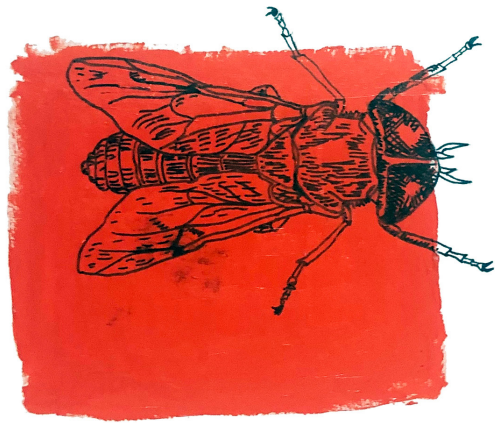
FICTION EDITOR



Madison Diemert is a 2020 graduate of Minnesota State Mankato. She holds a degree in English and a minor in Anthropology. She is currently pursuing her MFA in Creative Writing at Augsburg University. While Madison is not obsessing over nostalgic cartoons from her childhood or watching every true crime documentary she can get her hands on, you'll find her searching for the perfect cup of cold brew. As The Sock Drawer's fiction editor, Madison hopes to read as many unique stories as possible and hone her craft as a fiction writer herself. Madison resides in Minnesota, where she lives with her boyfriend, two best friends and (approximately) 400 books.

"No, the only tired I was, was tired of giving in."

- Rosa Parks, American
civil rights activist



"My Bug Friends"
by Megan Ulrich

Hello
&
Welcome

The Sock Drawer was created with the intention of creating a community of writers that are often ignored, marginalized, or ‘pushed to the back of the sock drawer’ by society and the publishing industry. We aim to raise up diverse and unique voices that tell stories that are not told often enough. I aim to use my privilege and platform to elevate these voices and bring to light talented individuals through The Sock Drawer. In the wake of ignorance, racism, and violence in the United States and the world it is of key importance that this space cultivates productive, honest, and genuine works. Here at The Sock Drawer, we stand with equality, Black Lives Matter, and many more movements pushing for positive, productive change. It is time to rise past the forced silence and scream. Change will come and we will be here to help facilitate it.

In Hope,

Gracelyn Willard
Founder/Editor-in-Chief

POETRY

Jude Brigley
Chelsea Locke
Lynne Reeder

“The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any.”

- **Alice Walker**, American novelist, poet, and social activist

Developer

By Jude Brigley

In photographs, it's the glimpses
that enchant or surprise –
the expression not held
for the camera, the half

face cut by the frame;
my father's head in a book:
my mother wielding a spade
away on a sandy beach, while

we preen and pose with
cricket bat or sun-hat;
aunts caught in mid-flow
or unexpectedly smoking

a corked cigarette.
And the half-eaten sandwich
that leaves you speculating
on the filling. Egg and tomatoes
an elegant sufficiency.

If only you could move the camera
slightly to the left to see
why your brother turned
his head at the last moment,

or why the loving gaze of your
mother cannot be followed
to its source. The faintly dreamy
landscape half-recognised,

and the unrecognisable
strangers with no one left
alive to claim them.
Blowing up the tiny 1930 prints,

the computer claims have
poor resolution, the faces
clear to show themselves
in uncanny details, as the cracks

in pavements, fur collars,
an initial pin, a discarded glove,
and familiar walls blossom
to reveal what was always there.



Balance

By Jude Brigley

My mother is desperate to find her i-phone
which does not exist, in order to contact
children whose names she does not know.

She does not recognise her home
but thinks we are in Ohio
after a long journey in a plane.

She does not know the name for *cup*
improvising *purse* as a container.
She mimes a need to write a message

but when she finishes the squiggles
make no sense. I try to find the ways
to make her safe but see the fear

in her eyes. 'Who am I?' she shouts.
'I don't know people's names.'
You never did, I try to compensate.

I don't know which I dread-
her blankets on the floor, or neatly
piled and folded in a row.

She spends the night in concourse
with her dead. She wills her mother
into being to comfort her instead.

So when the nurses pull her in the bed
And she calls my name and wants my hand:
there is consoling succor in sufficiency .



The Letter Glitch

For My Bipolar Ass

By Chelsea Locke

Dear C,
I know you're tired.
And I know it's not your fault
that we don't hang out anymore
and your thoughts seem to float past this reality
and into that damn dream world we cling to
like we did daddy's hand
that day we splashed our toes in the gulf
when we were four. We fell asleep in his arms.
Do you remember? Back then
we were an I
 an I
 an I
and I wish you could just rest our eyes
for more than a few hours at a time.
Maybe we could stop confusing reality
with that damn novel we claim to be writing:
a hundred pages from other people's lives,
one paragraph for ourselves. Who are we
to write their words?
Who are we,
 are I
 I and I
bonded with God? No. We are bound
together like the bones in our foot.
We broke it once. Remember?
We kicked the wall.
Who were we so mad at? C,
I hope that you are well.
Dearest C,
I miss you.
Please come back.
I don't want to be left
too far behind.



Cloves

By Chelase Locke

From where I sit amongst the flowering organs
of today's roadkill still waiting for their souls to rest
I can almost make out the irrationalities of perfection
in every pair of feet still trudging along the worn path
and stumble hard onto one knee in the presence of reality,
but allow me to look a little further up now
and lose myself in the oil paints smeared behind her eyelids
until the day is swallowed ever so delicately
and I might somehow slip into the fields of my subconscious
where her fingers are always wrapped in my tangles
and envy rides as an aftertaste to her cloves still on my tongue.



mis//carriage

By Lynne Reeder

she moved the ultrasound wand over my uterus / searching for something i knew was no longer there / the steady beat of a new heart forming / sending its tidal waves through sonar / the ocean i'd witnessed two weeks ago / now still as a winter lake / frozen on the screen / pretending perhaps the equipment was faulty / while knowing my body was instead / and the technician small talked her way through / as if i couldn't see what she wasn't allowed to say / as if the blood that had started flowing that afternoon while sitting in my classroom / hadn't been the worst kind of premonition / the slow leaking out of life / the taking of what wasn't yet fully there / the quiet settled over me / as she wiped the gel from my stomach / told me to wait for a doctor to discuss the results with me / and gave me directions to the bathroom / where i sat and wondered / how i was possibly going to make it home / without staining my car seats / where i stuffed my underwear / full of thin toilet paper / and emerged to a two hour wait / for a phone call from a doctor i'd never met / charged with placing the word over my womb / miss, you're having a / miscarriage / miscarriage / mis / carriage / miss, / carriage / put your shoulders back, girl / carry yourself better / hadn't i been failing at holding myself upright / for years / why should a child from me / be any different / mis / miss / can you miss / what you never had / can you drive to a doctor pregnant / and leave not / and be the same woman / can you carry a loss / like a wrinkle in your skin / small / but altering how you look / to everyone including yourself / at everything after / can you have another baby / and still spend a week / every 28-34 days / bent over the toilet / remembering the night / of your oldest daughter's Christmas pageant / when the churning began / when you couldn't stand up straight / mis / carriage / posture, dear girl / when the toilet became a graveyard / and you sat / alone / wondering how / you'd ever carry anything again / without this / pulling it apart



Epitaph

By Lynne Reeder

Moss grew over her eyes before coating my throat. The softness of silence on my tongue. Nowhere to utter her name unless everywhere. Bones brittle as a broken home, one sinking six feet deep. Turn my chest to stone, engrave every rib. Walk through the dead and notice the dandelion wisps half-blown, growing in the fingertips of the grass. The trees reaching. The graves bowing. The stoppage of memory, the calling it forth. Reach in my mouth to pull out the soil, unhinge the jaw from the years of hurt. Untether this wild stallion grief never meant for taming. Mane to the wind, hooves digging their way to her. Kicking up the lavender of this loss. The natural rhythm of missing her place in my blood. The undoing and the running and the rooting. The discovery of all the ways she stays, long after becoming gone. The moss in my eyes. The safety of this story spilling from my tongue. Nowhere to utter her name but everywhere I go.



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"Untitled 3"
by Cynthia Yatchman

FICTION

E.F.S. Byrne

Madison Diemert

Kavan P. Stafford

“I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept.”

- **Angela Y. Davis**, American political activist, philosopher and author

Imprisoned

By E.F.S. Byrne

They approached each other cautiously. She hesitated, then sat down. Their voices faltered through the hollow echo of a recently cleansed room. They took their places without physically connecting. There was a brief moment when they might have shaken hands but it froze over, ice too brittle to be stepped upon. He proffered a palm, but she couldn't bear the thought of touching those hairy trigger fingers. She wasn't sure if he really meant it, if that outspoken gesture was genuine or an offence. He followed her eyes, equally uncertain of how to read the proceedings.

The room remained sterile, a neat, clinical reflection of their conversation, lacking warmth but very efficient in its layout. The table stood silently between them. One was led in by a guard, the other by a lawyer. There was little space to express the emotions that had been funneled into carefully compressed packages over the years. But it was a start. Neither had expected tea, coffee or cakes. The plastic chairs rattled on the uneven floor as they sat and broke eye contact in a burst of nervousness. They had to share the water bottle. They both fumbled with the plastic cups. Slowly, their words were forced to roll formally over the chainsaw that separated their souls, the conveyer belt they tried to jerk them into motion.

A hiss of frosted breath, the push of a jaw scarred by fire, an arm cut off at the shoulder. It was difficult to handle, face to face. And of course there were the others who would never be there to refuse a handshake. Sometimes it would be easier to go back and be a nineteen-year old with illusions and viciousness rather than dare the path of redemption offered by a broken body struggling to forgive. Victims of course, always survive, in one shape or form; and so do their assassins, in one form or another. It is the surviving which makes a terrorist attack difficult. All out nuclear war had its attractions: there would be no one left to deal with the fall out.

"I appreciate the fact you have come." His voice rattled, tongue catching chaffed lips, a hand instinctively wiping nose hair that badly needed trimming.

Her weathered hand slipped a photo across the table, veins throbbing blue, red, under the heat, sighs of aggression. Her sleeve was carefully ironed, stiffly pointed, allowing no address.

Blood seeped, still alive after so many years. Unfocused snaps of terror lingered

FICTION

behind tired eyes, fresh as a daisy, stillborn as a magpie with no home to go to.

The prisoner looked grim. He picked up the image and stared into its entrails.

“There are many more.”

The prisoner just nodded.

They exchanged broken sentences for half an hour. There were no witnesses. No records. Victim and slayer faced each other, eye to eye, without touching, struggling for an angle, a point of view which would allow them see each other.

She could still remember the bomb going off, the scream she uttered through the glass of her third floor bedroom. Their daughter was getting ready for school. Husband and father: mother and daughter watched him explode into flames, flinging himself from the car to die in agony on their door-step.

Had he run or faltered, for a glimpse? She couldn't bring herself to ask. She didn't really want to know if the man opposite had needed to watch his victim die or not.

And he didn't want to answer. Finding a way forward meant evading memories which could only burn, brand and stigmatize.

She left first. He waited his turn. Reconciliation was a long haul. She was standing at the bus stop when bitter exhaust fumes hit the evening air as a truck crunched its way out of the garage opposite, deep red logo fading into the damp evening sky. She refused to wipe away a tear. A cell door rattled. No one noticed. She let the busses pass, one by one, each smelling more and more like a burnt out car.



The Lake

By Madison Diemert

I was in grade school when I learned about The Lake. It was a secret thing my classmates passed down to one another between white-knuckled fingers, our voices dimming to only whispers, daring to be caught and snuffed out. I learned about The Lake in the dark corners of classrooms, through heads shoved in lockers, nestled between rented library books, and past the swings near the fence on the roadside.

My friends insisted The Lake held all the mysteries of the universe, the water deeper than any other in the world, so deep that your head would explode if you ever made it to the bottom.

Because of all the secrets, one said, our brains can't hold it all in and it needs to go back to the world.

And your head swells up like this— another raised his arms above his head, gesturing, *like a balloon. And then all the blood and guts and brains splat out. Like my dog's head when my dad ran him over.* Then he started crying.

Other kids decided that it was where all the old people went to die. Or maybe only the rich and famous. Maybe it was only poets or actors. Maybe it was where our pets went when our parents smashed their heads into the pavement with pickup trucks.

When I got to middle school, I learned that The Lake wasn't far from school or from home. This made it easy for the bravest of us to visit, even in the dead of winter. My mother warned me not to go absently, after I asked her how to get there. *You might drown,* she said, walking back to her office where she shut and locked the door.

My friend with the dead dog decided to go one day, and when he came back to school, he was different.

Was it scary? Were there dead bodies in there? we asked, our voices growing too high, too loud even for the fence. In hushed murmurs we continued, *did you see your dog? Do you think anything is actually in there?*

Where we expected excitement or maybe tears, there was only silence. Our friend kept his beady eyes toward the dead leaves on the ground, frost covering their brittle brown ridges. He blew air from his nose like the mythical dragons we imagined to be only a few years ago, the dragons we abandoned on the tire swing when we first heard of

FICTION

The Lake. No matter how many questions we asked or how many times I would nudge his shoulder, looking for any reaction, he did not move. He did not say a word, his little blue lips forming a harsh line across his translucent face. When the bell rang, calling us inside, he began to trudge toward the double doors, teachers hollering at him to pick up his feet. It was like there was nothing inside him anymore.

When we saw the other kids at lunch, the ones who accompanied him, they refused to speak too. The four of them followed the lunch line, grabbing their trays and allowing the mimicked food to be slopped on without so much as a blink. They went through the motions but it was like who they were got sucked out and swallowed, drowned in The Lake.

For weeks they stayed like this, but each day it got worse. We noticed our friend's skin becoming paler and compared it to the freshly fallen snow.

Like a vampire, one of us said.

No, like a ghost. Like someone dead.

Gone was any semblance of our friend as he wasted away right before us; his lips disappearing before his eyes lost their color, his hair falling off his eyebrows and then in chunks from his own head, littering the halls and clumping up on the carpets of classrooms.

When one of us threw a ball at him to see if he would catch it, it hit him in the jaw. It made a resounding thud as his body lurched back, falling to the ground. We paused. He did not get up. We ran to see if he was alright, bending over his shriveled body lying in the snow. His gray eyes stared blankly, no recognition that anything had happened to him. And there, on the right side of his jaw, was the baseball.

It was jammed, wedged into his bone and folding his face into itself. His white skin was warped, cracked, breaking apart like brittle bark in the cold. Like the dead leaves crunched up underneath our winter boots. There was no blood. Beneath the fractured pieces of himself his insides had turned black. Like his entire body was rotting from the inside out.

I turned away before falling to my knees and vomiting. I retched so hard my throat tore and blood spattered across the frozen ground, my early breakfast. Before I could get to my feet teachers were rushing toward us.

Are you okay? What happened? Oh— oh my god— someone call 9-1-1!

I was picked off the ground by a large burly science teacher and brought to the

THE SOCK DRAWER

nurse's office. I laid there on a cot for an hour before my mom picked me up. She did not ask about what happened, but I explained the incident to her anyway. *Make sure you wash the dishes after you finish your homework*, she said in a flippant response. When the school called later, she did not tell me what they said.

The next day my friend was not at school. No one dared talk about what happened to him. No one mentioned The Lake or what it did to him, what it did to the others who were still there, fading away. Their feet drug beneath them now as they walked, their mouths becoming slack as if their jaws were not strong enough to close around their teeth. Every day, it got worse.

They really do look like they're dead.

One day, in the lunch room, an eyeball fell out.

She was the first of the four others who began truly falling apart. We noticed it worsening when her teeth began wriggling loose from their sockets and pinging down the hall, when her nails ripped from their beds as though they were being pried away by tweezers. No one knew what to make of it, no one knew how the teachers did not notice or why she was still allowed at school. And that day, while she was bent over her instant mashed potatoes, body swaying uncontrollably, her eyeball fell out of her head.

It plopped into her potatoes, sticking so perfectly into the mushy mound that it did not move or roll off the tray. The girl made no notice of her missing organ, nor the slick green strand of pulsing nerves stretching out of her empty socket, still attached to her eyeball. The lunch room was hushed, silence rushing over our heads and sucking out all the noise inside of us.

A girl beside me began to cry, then scream. She stood so abruptly she knocked over her chair and fell to the ground, scuttling away on hands and knees from the scene. I could not move as the lunch staff hurried to the girl's side, one of them puking straight into her lap. I watched as they tried to grab her and their hands sunk into her body, fingertips dipping right inside of her. A moan of disgust rippled through one of the women, and she dropped to the floor.

The girl was taken away, awkwardly drug across the floor as her glassy eye followed by, squeaking across the floor and picking up flecks of dust along the way.

My mother got another call from school that night and she did not tell me what was said. But I knew the girl was finally dead. Just like our friend.

Maybe they're zombies, one of us said under a library table.

FICTION

But zombies eat brains. They never eat anything, said another.

But they can't be really dead, they're still moving.

That was when one of us proposed going to The Lake ourselves, to investigate. She was wide-eyed and serious. The rest of us stared, too amazed to open our mouths. She insisted we go but didn't get close, didn't go into The Lake.

But did they even go into The Lake? What if they just looked at it with their eyes and this happened to them? I said. They all turned their heads to look at me. None of us knew what occurred at The Lake, that much I was sure of.

It's up to us to find out what happened to them, the girl said, *it's our duty as their friends. And we'll be safe. We won't even go by it. Okay?*

It took a few moments. Each of us were lost in our minds, in whirling thoughts of teeth-cluttered floors and dead eyes, smashed-in faces, exploding heads, and crumbling skin. I was the last to agree, after more convincing. We would go after school that day, miss the bus and tell our parents to come late.

I left with a hole growing in my stomach, expanding as the end of the day grew nearer. Each time I looked at the clock the hole grew into a pit, then a crater, then a bottomless black hole. I began sweating in my t-shirt, the liquid cold and slick against my forehead. I swept it off with the back of my hand, flicking it at the ground. I couldn't keep my legs from shaking, so I tried to focus on the *tick... tock... tick... tock...* of the clock. But the more I listened the louder it became until my head was pounding, pulsating as the bell shrieked directly into my brain. I jerked up and dashed into the hall to my friends.

They wore solemn faces, slowly grabbing their books out of their lockers and stuffing their backpacks full. The panic I felt was still inside me, swimming around like a live goldfish about to be flushed down a toilet bowl. I breathed heavily, almost heaving. But they ignored my show of worry and drug me out of the building, past the fence and onto the road. It wasn't far from here, they insisted. It wouldn't be long.

They were right, though our twenty-minute walk seemed to last a lifetime as we pushed against the blistering air. Our faces were chafed, raw from the beating we endured from Mother Nature. The wide-eyed girl stopped us at a line of a dark trees, turning to look at us.

We're here, she announced. She spun on her heel and marched past the tree line, trying to appear brave despite her quivering shoulders. We followed, hesitant as we climbed up and down banks of snow. I realized the closer we got to The Lake, the slower

we became. I glanced over at one of us, then at another. Our limbs were thickening, freezing over and becoming stiff. Our joints stuck together and protested each movement. Then it came, like an invisible virus being swallowed down with a breath of air. Sudden, out of thin air. A feeling like none I had ever felt, dragging my heart down to the very bottom of myself. I hadn't known grief like this to ever exist inside me. But as The Lake came into view, the oily black waters lurching this way and that despite the cold that should have frozen them, it got worse.

Our leader finally fell to her knees, a raucous sound emitting from her body. Still, she did not stop. She crawled on bare hands toward The Lake, calling out to us. *I can't stop! I have to see it. I have to see what's inside.*

The tears started to well in my eyes, involuntary and shocking. They froze to my cheeks as I trudged through the knee-high snow, sobs racking my body. The tears clouded my vision, but I could still see The Lake, the dead trees bent over it, as if they too were folded in on themselves with pain.

My brain began to filter through all the horrifying events I had faced in my short span of life until my vision was seized by the images... My cat falling from a tree and breaking her spine, my mother purposely slicing her finger off with a knife, my grandfather lying in a casket with one eye open, maggots eating away at a turtle I kept secretly in the backyard, my father's unmoving body bent over the steering wheel, his body lying in a casket, his casket being lowered next to my grandfather's, his grave being covered with dirt and grass and weeds and—

I opened my mouth to cry, to release the pain rising up inside my body. But before I could make a sound, my vision suddenly cleared again. My friend was bent over The Lake, peering into it. She gripped the banks with her swollen, purple-black hands and leaned down. Her nose was almost touching the inky water when I shouted, *STOP!*

It was too late. Her head dipped into the water and the rest of her went with it. I halted. Only one of us was left standing beside me. He looked at me, cheeks frozen and eyes wide with fear. Out of the corner of my eye, the two others were standing over the water, heads bent at a ninety-degree perfect angle. Their necks were so severely bent it seemed as if they would slide right off their shoulders and splash into The Lake.

Something inside me told me not to look at them, that if I did, I would not be able to stop again. I reached for my friend, arm stretched out as far as it could go.

Don't... just as my fingers brushed his pea coat, he turned to watch the last of us fall slack into the murderous waters. There was no sound when their bodies smacked the

FICTION

sleek black waters. His mouth dropped, a silent scream as his head shook violently. Spit and tears spattered around him as he charged for The Lake. I shouted after him, but he did not stop. I kept my eyes focused on a spot close to The Lake, where I could still see him without giving the body of water what it wanted. Without hesitation, he submerged himself. I crumpled to the ground, sobbing.

Without thinking, I began to crawl. I did not look up to see where I was going, only that I knew I needed to get there. The thin gloves covering my hands were soaked through and my new jeans were sopping. I kept going, despite the imminent frostbite settling into me, making a home.

I did not look up until I had made it far across the tree line. I stood up to look back at where The Lake stood, where I could see the shadows of my friends slowly rising and clawing at the frozen grounds to get out of the water. I watched their dripping bodies sling forward through the snow, slowly but surely making their way back to civilization.

I understood then. As my chest began to loosen and the tears dried themselves, I knew. I had saved myself. I survived The Lake. But the others did not. I did not know then how strong I was, as I turned my back on my friends who were condemned to slow and torturous deaths.

I wrestled my way through the snow back to the main road and walked the whole way home, leaving my gloves behind on the sidewalk. I never looked back. When they were at school that next day, I pretended not to see them. I ate lunch alone and took up residence at a different library table. It was easier than begging them to remember me, to come back.

Even now, I struggle with the thoughts of never knowing how I did it, why it had to be me. As I watched my friends collapse in on themselves from whatever transpired at The Lake, I wondered if perhaps, death would have been preferable.



Sentimental

By Kavan P. Stafford

Duncan finished reading and lowered the page. Nobody laughed. That was a good thing. But nobody seemed to have noticed that he was finished either. Lisa and Niamh were leaning back in their chairs, fiddling with their phones under the table. David, ten years older than all the others (except of course Duncan himself), was surreptitiously looking at his watch. Maria and Bryan at least had the good grace to pretend to be looking at his poem though they were staring at it so intently that Duncan knew their eyes had glazed over and they had lost interest.

He felt a bubble of rage in his gut and quenched it before it reached his mouth. When any of the others finished reading they would always find him looking at them, paying attention. It mattered. They weren't just here to hear the opinion of Clara, the tutor. They were supposed to be helping each other.

Clara, for her part at least, looked interested. He hadn't been able to bring himself to look up while reading but he had heard her make small noises at all of the appropriate moments, encouraging him to continue. Now she was leaning forward with her elbows on the table, one of her trademark colourful shawls wrapped tight around her shoulders. Today's had tiny blue foxes chasing after pink hens on a green background. The foxes looked hungry but the hens didn't seem concerned.

She had Duncan's poem in front of her with several incomprehensible notes made in the margins and between lines. She had parsed it and marked where the metre deviated. Beside these marks she had made more notes. Duncan felt a bit sick as he noticed she had twice crossed out whole lines.

Clara looked at her notes for a few more moments before speaking. When she did finally speak she toyed with her pen as she always did. Her hands were incapable of being idle while her tongue worked.

"Right well," she said by way of warning to those who still were not listening. Everybody looked up but they looked at her and not at Duncan. He sat down slowly.

David raised a hand to head height, "Sorry to interrupt, Clara," he said, "But I was just wanting to remind you that I need to shoot off a few minutes early today. Seminar time change..."

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Clara waved this away, “Just go when you need to,” she said, “Now does anyone have any thoughts on Duncan’s piece?”

Duncan remained silent. That was part of the deal in these seminars. You couldn’t respond to any of the criticism until the person giving it was done talking. It was the part Duncan hated the most. He didn’t even like it when it was someone else’s turn. Watching them look at the table while they listened to a piece they had slaved over get slaughtered was almost too much to bear.

Surprisingly it was Niamh who was the first to speak. She rarely had much interest in the class beyond the confines of her mobile phone. She was the archetype student who took the creative writing dissertation option as the easy way out and found it to be harder than she expected. Her short stories, all about divorces and marital strife she could not have experienced during her twenty years or so on the planet, were perfunctory and dull. Of course, Duncan was careful to be more constructive when he gave her his feedback.

She put down her phone and was rolling a small piece of gum about in her small fingers, “I didn’t really get it I guess?” she said, the inflexion of her voice suggesting a question. “I mean, in it Duncan -”

“Not Duncan. The poetic speaker, remember,” Clara said gently. She had pulled her shawl a bit tighter and was listening carefully.

“Sorry – the poetic speaker was like really sad because he had forgotten where he put his keys? It just seemed a bit dramatic to me. I can see you’ve taken some inspiration from Larkin in writing about the commonplace,” Duncan had never read Larkin at all, “But I don’t really think you got it right this time. Sorry.” she added as if spontaneously regretting her criticism.

“Now,” said Clara before Duncan could respond, “You know we don’t apologise for constructive criticism here. We’re all here to help each other with our work. Isn’t that right Duncan?”

She smiled winningly at him. She was a pretty young woman and when she smiled like that she had dimples that reminded him of his Esther when he first met her. He couldn’t help but smile back.

“Aye pal,” he said to Niamh, “Don’t worry. I’m wanting to get better you know? And I’m not going to get any better with people telling me I’m amazing when I’m not. Know what I mean?”

“Do you have anything more encouraging to say?” Clara asked.

“Well I thought it had a really clear voice.” Niamh said slowly.

Duncan suppressed a sigh. The criticism and praise in the seminars were always like this; so incredibly vague it was hard to tell one from the other. When Esther used to read his poems and short stories she was always clear about whether she liked it or not. She wasn't one for a lot of praise but when she put the papers down she would either say, “That was good,” or, “That was shite.” You know where you stand with comments like that.

“Any response, Duncan?” Clara asked. She was smiling lightly as she always seemed to be. Duncan supposed it was quite a nice job doing what she did. Listening to stories and poems all day (he had no real sense or understanding that her job, perhaps once upon a time limited to such pleasant pursuits, may have other less pleasant elements) would be quite an enjoyable way to spend your life, he thought.

He cleared his throat, “Well I've maybe not been clear enough about the speaker and why he's so upset. His wife, I think, has been forgetting things and he thinks she might be forgetting him. That's sad but he thinks it would be even sadder if he started forgetting her. So when he couldn't find his keys he panicked you know?” He slumped back in his seat after this speech, much longer than he was used to, was finished.

There was silence for a moment as the rest of the class gave this a cursory consideration, “I think you would have been better going for a dramatic monologue or something like that,” Bryan said. Bryan rarely had much to say and usually saved his breath for agreeing with his (Duncan assumed) girlfriend, Maria. It was unusual for him to offer an opinion of his own.

Predictably, Maria disagreed, “What are you, a thousand years old or something?”

Duncan noted with amusement that she glanced at him out of the corner of her eye and hesitated as if seriously considering that he might actually be that old and would therefore be offended at her remark.

To her left, David sat up a little straighter, scratching his tight grey beard. Duncan had expected, when he first arrived on the course, to get on with David as he was a bit closer to his own age. The opposite had turned out to be true. David was a pretentious wank and Duncan got on better with the young people, who included him in their jokes and chats with surprising readiness. They even invited him regularly to nights out. He had never went with them and wondered if, in the few months before the degree would be finished, he should. Almost as soon as he considered the idea he rejected it out of hand.

“I would say that *storytelling*,” David loaded the word with a certain dismissive

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contempt, “Doesn’t have much place in modern poetry anyway.”

“That’s interesting,” Clara said. She looked at Duncan, “What would you say to that, Duncan?” She seemed to enjoy these impromptu debates in her seminars. She had taught Duncan on the Victorian Novelists module the year before and she had been the same in that. Duncan didn’t enjoy such ambushes. He didn’t see much value in a debate you weren’t allowed to prepare for. That was just a memory test wasn’t it?

“Um,” Duncan fiddled with his watch strap, a habit he had picked up in school and never lost, “I don’t know to be honest. All my poems have a story.”

“I know,” David said condescendingly, “And I’m not saying anything *against* you Duncan. I’m just saying, like, that we,” he gestured vaguely around the whole group though Duncan felt sure that he was excluded, “Need to think about what modern poetry is and what it can *do*. And we need to ask whether telling *stories* is a good use of it, you know what I mean? But I don’t mean anything against you. Don’t take it the wrong way or anything.”

“Right,” Duncan said. He had no interest in arguing the point.

“You guys know what I mean right?” David asked the others.

“Ye-es,” Lisa said, stretching out the vowel a little. She was a chubby girl with bright pink hair and a cheerful demeanour. Duncan liked her the most out of the little group, “But I think that can all be tied up in the idea that, since white middle-class men have already done it, it’s not worth doing again, you know? When that’s not necessarily true.”

“Aye but Duncan *is* a middle class white guy.” David said dismissively. He looked at Duncan, “What did you do before you retired?”

“I was a train driver,”

This was greeted with a brief silence. “See?” David said, breaking it, “Decent money being a train driver.”

“That doesn’t invalidate my point though,” Lisa said, “You said that poets should never use their poems to tell stories and I was saying that it’s only been done to death by one group of people.”

“Whatever,” said David, rolling his eyes, “I don’t see why we have to bring politics into everything like that though.”

“It’s not *politics* -” Lisa snapped.

“All right,” Clara said smoothly, cutting through the tension before anybody said

anything they shouldn't. "That's enough on that subject I think. But what would be worth doing would be if everyone was to see if they could look out some secondary essays on that very subject for next week,"

"Which subject – storytelling in poetry or politics?" David asked. Lisa stuck her tongue out at him but the venom was gone. Duncan admired that about Clara. She had a way of picking just the right moment in a contentious argument to cut in and deflate everybody.

Duncan and his boy, Liam, had always fought like cat and dog when he was a teenager. They were both more alike than they wanted to admit and had argued about everything from politics to whether Liam should go out on any given night. Esther had a way of interrupting at the exact right second just as Clara did; letting the argument get far enough along that they both felt a little silly when it stopped but not so far that they felt that they couldn't back down.

"Well I liked the poem," Maria said, "I don't see anything wrong with a poem telling a story if it's a good one. It was interesting."

"So you liked the subject matter?" Clara prompted.

Maria thought for a moment, "Yeah," she said, "I quite like medical poetry and I thought it could fit well in that tradition."

"I would agree with that, Maria," Clara said, "I thought it was a well written poem. I have some notes here for it but not many. Overall I thought it was a striking piece of work and I would say Duncan, though it's up to you of course, that you should consider including it in your final portfolio after a wee bit of editing,"

Duncan flushed a little, "Thank you," he said quietly. The rest of the group, even those who said they didn't like it, looked suitably impressed. Duncan knew this was why Clara left her contributions until last. She didn't want to influence the discussion one way or another.

Clara nodded, "Don't thank me – you did the work. Right," she clapped her hands, the noise surprisingly loud in the silent, wood-panelled classroom, "So don't forget to find something about poetry as storytelling to bring in next time. An article, a book, an interview, whatever. We'll spend ten minutes discussing them before we hear something from..." She consulted the typed-up list in front of her, "David,"

David was already on his feet, shoving his stuff back into his bag as fast as he could. Duncan felt a little pang, knowing it was silly, as he saw him crush the sheet of paper with

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his poem on it down under his Norton Anthology. He looked up from his frantic packing and nodded, "I'll have something ready," he said.

Clara smiled and he swung his bag over his shoulder and headed out of the room.

"All right," Clara said, "That'll do for today. Send me an email if you want to ask me anything."

Everyone else began to pack up. Duncan did as well but took his time. He knew that Clara liked to speak to the person who shared their work at the end of the seminar. He picked up the spare copies of the poem and slid them back in his little black faux-leather folder. Esther had bought him that as a surprise when he was about to start the degree. She went all the way into town for it.

He put his own Norton Anthology in the plastic case he had for it and put it in his bag. The folder, he left out for now. When everyone else was gone, Clara came over with her annotated copy of his poem.

"I really did think it was excellent, you know," Clara said. She set her copy of the poem down on top of his folder and Duncan saw that there weren't nearly as many notes as he had thought when he was reading it out. She perched on the side of the desk, "I run a wee campus magazine, *Craftsman*, and we're always looking for new fiction. I think that this would fit in really well among the other stuff we're publishing next quarter if you wanted to make the changes I've suggested in the notes."

Duncan flushed a little and the hands that put the annotated poem in his folder shook a little, "No thank you," he said, "I'll make the changes but I think I'm a wee bit too old to be in student magazines."

"Not at all!" Clara protested. She leaned over and patted his wrinkled hand with her plump smooth one, "Think about it eh?"

"I will. I'll maybe ask my wife what she thinks," Duncan said.

"She'll love it. Bet you."

Duncan just smiled, "I think sometimes I'm too old for all of this," he said, "Not just the magazines,"

"Nah," Clara said, "You're not the oldest student I've had. I had a woman who was doing a PhD at seventy-eight once,"

"Well at least I'm not as old as that," Duncan grunted as he put his folder carefully in his bag.

Clara laughed, "I'll walk you out." They left the room and began to go down the twisting marble stairs, "So what made you come and do your degree?" she asked, "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

Duncan was a bit surprised and wondered why someone would keep a secret like that. He wasn't the kind of man who played his cards close to his chest for the sake of it.

"Always said I would when I retired." he said, "I didn't really think I would though. Then this guy I was pals with ended up having a heart attack at work. He was just getting on the train and just like that," Duncan snapped his fingers, wincing a little. They were a bit stiff, "He died. He had kids and everything. I was a lot older than him but still it made me think about how you never know how much time's left."

Clara was nodding earnestly. "Plus," Duncan said, "My wife told me to."

She laughed, "She sounds like a tough woman your wife,"

"Aye," Duncan said, "Tough on me anyway."

She laughed again and let them out of the door. She wrapped her shawl a bit more tightly around her shoulders, "You away home? No more lectures or anything?"

"Yep," Duncan said, "Home for my dinner."

"Good man," Clara said, turning towards the library, "I'll see you next week," she called over her shoulder, "And think about the magazine."

Duncan didn't stop to watch her go. One glance at his watch told him he had a train to catch. It seemed to him sometimes that he spent his whole life catching trains.

Duncan made his way slowly up the stairs holding the dinner tray. It was a tense part of the day, as he was neither a natural chef nor a natural at balancing the tray. He had dropped it several times over the previous two years, almost often enough for him to give up and install laminate flooring instead of carpet for the ease of cleaning. Today he made it to the top with only a slight bump when he misjudged the height of the last step. The tea sloshed in the mug but didn't land on the plate. That was good. He didn't want to ruin Esther's fish and chips. It was her favourite for a Friday.

"That had better be my dinner boyo!" she called from their room. He smiled. She had been asleep when he arrived to let the home care worker go home but if she was shouting out jokes that meant she was having a good day. He pushed the door open with his foot and stepped in with the food.

"Ah," she said, smiling a little severely. She was propped up in her pillow and looked

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like she had a bit more colour than usual in her cheeks. Her white hair was fanned around her head like a geriatric halo (a simile he would keep to himself) and her hands, knotted with arthritis, were half-holding a magazine. She put it aside as he placed the tray on its little stand over her legs. "I'm glad my butler got home," she said, "I was getting tired of the substitute."

Duncan laughed a little and sat down at the bottom of her bed, "You know, I don't know if it's worse when you can't remember my name or when you wind me up,"

She laughed too. Her eyes didn't, "You wouldn't have me any other way old man." she said.

They sat in silence for a few minutes while she picked at her food. "I read out one of my poems at the seminar today," he said. She frowned, "The university seminar. For the degree," he added patiently.

Her brow smoothed, "Oh aye. You going to read it to me then or should I just steal it from your bag when you're not looking?"

He smiled and pulled his black folder out from his bag at the foot of the bed, "Ready?" He asked. She nodded, her face alert. He read out the poem slowly, pausing at all the right places and taking the odd peek at her expression which remained neutral as it always did when he read his work.

When he finished she took a bite of fish and chewed it thoughtfully.

"So?" He said.

She swallowed the fish, "Shite," she pronounced cheerfully. "Sentimental shite that one."

Duncan laughed, "Aye, that's what I thought. My lecturer wanted it in the magazine. The university magazine,"

She snorted and took another bit of fish, "You can do better than that for a magazine," she said, "You've got a million better than that."

Impulsively he leaned over the tray of food and hugged her, smelling the sweet scent of her hair, unchanged after all these years, "I don't know why you're trying to butter me up," Esther said. But he could feel her smile against his chest, "It's still shite,"

He kissed her forehead, "Sentimental shite."

She winked at him as she used to and had another bit of fish. They sat together as the night closed in. In the morning, when he brought her porridge, she asked him who he

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was. He told her his name was Duncan.

“Are you a nurse?” She asked.

“I’m a poet,” he said. “A shite one though,”

He smiled sadly at her uncomprehending face.



NONFICTION

Kerstin Holman

“I just want to be able to live my best life the way I want to live my best life. In all the glory of my transness and all the glory of my blackness and all the glory of my queerness.”

- LaSaia Wade, Transgender activist

Disclaimer: The Sock Drawer cannot verify events that do not appear on public records. Any views expressed are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Sock Drawer or its staff.

vantablack

By Kerstin Holman

Disclaimer: The Sock Drawer cannot verify events that do not appear on public records. Any views expressed are the views of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The Sock Drawer or its staff.

1. in my short existence, i feel as though having a favorite of something has never been in my control. i did not hand-pick a nose that i knew would be enthralled with the smell of black coffee, nor did i choose to have tastebuds that dislike the flavor of the aforementioned drink. i do not think that i noticed when or why, but at one point i found myself gravitating towards feelings, emotions, *things* that i knew were not good for me. i allowed it to do what it does best and absorb me.
2. i do a lot of selective second-guessing in which i question the things that i should be the most certain about. *do i still like watching Brooklyn Nine-Nine?* it's entire philosophy is to champion cops as the good guys, but then again, it's not the first nor the last show to do that. *do i actually like painting my nails?* sometimes i feel like it's more for others than for myself. *do i forgive them?* whether it's a yes or no, i do not think words can do my feelings any justice. and yet, that is all i have.
3. do you ever wish you were different? that you could eliminate a trait or habit of yours? if you could cast off the unwanted pieces of yourself into the depths of outer space, would you? would you change for yourself or someone else? i can tell myself that it would be for me, but i know a familiar face or two would be flashing in and out of my mind. their stares would have my focus as i bury those flaws i didn't realize i had until they helped me see them.
4. have you ever known someone who claims they aren't one to cry but when the waterworks come, it screams rehearsed? i guess i'd cry, too, if i couldn't come up with a better rebuttal. so i cry. i blot my tissue and i see that some of its whiteness has vanished, my inky mascara bleeding into the soft fibers. i wonder if my crying is more real than theirs because transparent tears do not affect the appearance of their tissue. my tissue can represent the relationships that leave visible damage, while theirs can symbolize the scars that remain hidden, vanishing from both sight and mind with the short passage of time.
5. is it possible to assign a feeling a color? do my emotions emit some kind of hue when i express them? i cannot hide the fact that i am attracted to many a color. i wish i could

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soak each one up and carry them around with me. things would be heavier, though. maybe it would be best to have a singular color represent me. let's have it be the most obvious one then, shall we?

6. even though i do not possess the correct amount of rhythm, i feel like i am constantly dancing on the line of that one word that we both refuse to address. the thin, black tightrope is somehow strong enough to carry the weight of our bodies, stress, resentment, and hesitation. i can see them fumbling with the steps. perhaps they never really knew the choreography to begin with. they've always been the person to encourage freestyle. i can't help but be jealous of their ability to improvise their moves. i can feel the tears in the rope widening, but i allow the music to distract me from our impending crash and burn. our failure doesn't upset me, though. we were amateur acrobats and i've always been afraid of heights.
7. talking doesn't work. i have found that distance is the ideal method. i don't think that the perfect solution is ever going to present itself with fireworks and trumpets. maybe the answer will be a bit more subtle. but the most obvious choice isn't necessarily the easiest one to make. the most difficult answers can become easier to live with over time until, eventually, you just go back to living.
8. having a quarter-life crisis is a side-effect of being a college graduate. i look forward to graduating from one crisis to the next. maybe life as a whole is one big series of crises. mine seem to tangle themselves with one another; blurring lines, making it too fuzzy for me to identify which problem is supposed to be more devastating.
9. i had so many plans to do something else. i envisioned a future that now will never be. i allowed another pollutant to enter my lungs. even though i try my hardest to purify the atmosphere, the smog has crept in now the pieces of myself have mixed with the foreign particles. i will use these contaminations to learn how to develop a better filter.
10. darkness cannot exist without light, i know that to be true. but what i have learned to embrace is that very darkness. it's always been painted as something to fear; that the unknown, the silent, the blurry is to be avoided, or approached with caution. instead, i choose to sprint towards the vantablack expanses, knowing that what awaits me will not always be better, but it will be new.



REVIEWS

Interview - Darren Demaree

Madison Diemert

Izzy Peroni

“My generation is now the door to memory.
That is why I am remembering.”

- **Joy Harjo**, Poet Laureate
of the United States

An Interview with Darren C. Demaree

This month, The Sock Drawer Book Review Editor, Izzy, had a very exciting opportunity to interview Darren C. Demaree, about his upcoming poetry collection, Unfinished Murder Ballads. The collection, published by Backlash Press (UK) and available for preorder October 30th, is a masterwork of prose poetry exploring and subverting the traditions of murder ballads, and constructing incredible mini-narratives that fulfill their purpose despite their ‘unfinished’ nature.

Izzy Peroni, contributor and editor of book reviews for The Sock Drawer, was able to get some insight from Demaree about his poetic process, inspirations, and narrative construction.

Izzy: Let’s start with form. Every piece in this collection is prose poetry- what draws you to this particular form?

Demaree: Each project carries with it some experimentation with form, but with these short narrative pieces (vignettes, really) prose poetry felt right. The tradition of murder ballads in song-form lends itself to a chorus or to some rhyme, but one of my goals of finding different entry and exit points to each piece removed that as a possibility. I didn’t want the vantage point of each speaker to be limited by the form or a possible predictability that an adherence to tradition murder ballads might force it into.

I: Could you explain some of the traditions of murder ballads?

D: Traditionally-speaking murder ballads all revolve around a crime, or some terribly violent act that must be explained or avenged in some way. There’s lot of revenge stories and love stories gone wrong in the songs. One of my favorites is “Two Sisters”, and it revolves around a sister pushing the other off a cliff to avoid competition for a lover/ husband. That’s a typical scenario in terms of murder ballads. I tried to push and pull things into more modern Midwestern scenarios, but there are still revenge and love-gone-wrong narratives in there for sure.

I: This collection debuts in a particularly volatile moment in history. Was much of the inspiration drawn from the violence we see in the world today?

D: This project came directly after I finished writing a 702-poem sequence called “Trump as a Fire Without Light”, which was later published by Nixes Mate as a book called “A Fire Without Light”, and the rage I felt writing all those anti-Trump poems definitely carried

into the creation of this project. I don't know exactly how the body count stacks up in this collection, but the male gender is definitely punished over and over again for our many weaknesses and wrongdoings. I'm sure some of that came from a desire to punish some of our national male figures for their terrible lack of empathy. Some if it came from my own experiences with male authority figures. There is a lot of violence in our world, but there really isn't anything graphic in this book. There is violence, of course, every poem is a stage set for a terrible act or just after a terrible act, but I've never had the stomach to be truly gruesome in my writing.

I: I can't help but notice that, thematically, this collection is wildly different from your poems that were published in the last issue of The Sock Drawer. The similarity I see, however, is that those poems were also thematically connected to one another- in your writing process, do you most often write poems collectively?

D: I spend a lot of time preparing large projects. Planning arcs and themes and scenes and repeated phrases. Figuring out the pacing. How the music should work in a long sequence is especially difficult. So, most of my work happens with a manuscript in mind. The "Emily as" poems are the closest thing to my real, poetic voice. I always return to them in between larger endeavors. They fit. I write them well. I suppose they are my largest project as I write so many of them, last year a collection of twelve years of them came out as "Emily as Sometimes the Forest Wants the Fire" as Harpoon Books' first title. I'm sure eight-ten years from now there will be a collection of twenty or so years of the "Emily as" poems.

I: Addressing the described murders- some poems seemed more sympathetic to the various characters than others; murderers receive more understanding than victims- sometimes there is no identified killer. How did you build these narratives?

D: Therein is the unfinished part of the poems. The entry and exit points vary wildly, so depending on the scene it was very important to me where the speaker in the poem came in. The short narratives put a lot of pressure on those decisions. I was pushing myself to find more sympathy than judgment in the writing, because the characters in each piece are almost all judgment. I was a pacifist for a very long time, and that included the things I wrote. That changed when I had children and realized that I would be willing to participate in a violent defense of my kids. That realization, that I was willing to hurt another human being, if it would ensure my own kid's physical safety was a dramatic

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moment for me. That this particular ideal has been smudged, not by anger or vengeance like in these poems, opened up my creative practice to more examinations of the how and why violence takes place.

I: I found the moments of third person narration to be the most engaging.

D: Third person is a strategy to be sure. Keeping the third person in the dark a little bit or free from judgment was difficult. I didn't want an unreliable narrator scenario because with pieces this short it's just too much to try to execute. In the end, I was very happy with the poems in third person, they're some of my favorites.

I: How do the images towards the middle of the book add to the narrative?

D: Those photographs are beautiful. I think they add to the landscape in a very productive way. There are no people in them, and the black and white really lends itself to an eerie feeling. There is no whole place in those photos. You really feel like some of these poems took place in those visuals. It was a fantastic boost to add them to the collection.



The Complexities of Eleven Different Women Shine Through Their Struggles as Shown by Caitlin Horrocks

By Madison Diemert

This Is Not Your City by Caitlin Horrocks features eleven short stories about eleven different women. No matter the problems the women face— or rather, no matter how magical or mundane— Horrocks takes us through wild and unusual journeys. The collection focuses on themes such as motherhood, grief, dealing with regrets, and the effects of a shattering illness while balancing between reality and fantasy. Horrocks dances on this invisible line throughout her collection, weaving in and out of reality so naturally, you don't even notice.

The women Horrocks introduces us to are all troubled and exiled in some way. In "Zolaria" it's the guilty conscious of the woman who bullied her childhood friend after she became sick. In "Steal Small" it's Lyssa who struggles with her morals as her partner, Leo, sells dogs for medical experiments. In "In the Gulf of Aden, Past the Cape of Guardafui" it's the mother held captive by not only pirates who hijacked her cruise, but also her son's severe disability. Whatever it is that plagues these women, Horrocks creates an unbreakable bond between the reader and character. Despite Lyssa allowing Leo to torture dogs, I still sympathize with her— I even sympathize with the woman in "Zolaria". It is something I have never seen before in a short story collection. Even though many of these women bring about these problems onto themselves, their struggles and emotional distress are genuine. They feel that their troubles are real and their solutions— though not always the best— are the only way they will ever be happy again.

Take the woman in "Embodied". She slowly becomes unhinged while recognizing people from her past 127 lives, people who she might have loved, even people who might have killed her. This causes her to do something abhorrent and normally unforgivable, but she gives a sound argument for why she must do it: "...I remember being held under the water by my mother, put down like an animal. I don't know who she was or why she did it. But I always knew that if she came back, if I recognized her, I wouldn't be able to forgive her." Doing the thing, as horrible as it is, is the only way to right the wrong in her world. We believe in her. In "Zero Conditional" Eril treats her students unjustly, but because we can understand why she is not simply a bad person. She is a woman struggling with self-esteem, with working a job she hates, with a life she never wanted

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to live at twenty-one. Knowing why Horrocks' women make bad decisions creates an understanding, one that is hard to overlook.

The world-building in each story is entirely its own. Horrocks somehow finds a way to change absolutely everything about each story, while still connecting each one by its characters. I would call what Horrocks does “soft worldbuilding”; there are no hard and fast rules for her worlds. There may be some explanation for some strange happening here or there, but in Horrocks' stories, the world just is the way it is. Things happen because they are normal. This is how Horrocks is able to make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar. The characters do not question what is happening, as it is entirely their reality and they are stuck finding solutions to their unhappiness. This makes everything much more believable, rather than if Horrocks decided to go a different route and try to explain why, for example, the woman in “Embodied” remembers all her past lives. Instead, we hear her account of living those past lives and take it as truth. If Horrocks spent all her time setting up rules for her stories, not only would this be a larger book, it would be far less fascinating. There is an amount of unknown that creates a sense of wonder and thrill for the reader. Horrocks captures that perfectly in her world-building.

There is another interesting thing going on in Horrocks' writing. Because of her soft world-building, there are moments where the reader doesn't entirely know if what's happening is real. This can be disorientating for some readers. Taking “Zolaria” for example, there are periods in which the girls truly believe their myths of which they created. The lines between reality and fantasy blur. Even after the narrator has grown up and had a family of her own, she still speaks to the ogre she and her friend made up, saying to him, “Mr. Veen, I once ruled a kingdom and left traps for you in the woods. Don't you want your revenge?” I will say, “Mr. Veen, you are an ogre and a thief and the patron saint of Julys, of summer Sundays, of miracles.” I will say, “Mr. Veen, do not take my children.” This may no doubt leave the reader wondering if Zolaria was a real place and if Ogan Veen was a real, monstrous ogre. There is no clear answer here as Horrocks does not give us one, and like her world-building, this can be an exciting thing. Readers who enjoy reading between the lines and ambiguous endings that allow for you to make up the rest of the story will no doubt enjoy *This Is Not Your City*.



The Rhythm of Violence: a Review of *Unfinished Murder Ballads*, by Darren C. Demaree

By Izzy Peroni

The human attraction to fictional violence in all forms of media is never sated; we seek out gory, trigger-happy video games, and books about gruesome, unsolved murder cases with shocking motives. *Unfinished Murder Ballads*, the latest book of poetry by Darren C. Demaree that is available for preorder October 30th, is an exposition of this thirst; each prose poem carves a narrative from a seemingly senseless act of brutality like a statue is carved from marble. Each moment, character and murder are treated with different levels of sympathy and clarity; there are places where we may be inclined to believe that vengeance was justly served; in other places, the murderer feels intangible, like they could be a natural or supernatural force. For a poetry collection about death, the character descriptions make them feel nearly alive in front of us, and with all their lives packed into short paragraphs, we feel drawn to every person and their predicament, and nearly obsess over the facts of their death.

The choice of prose poetry for this collection is masterful on the part of Demaree—each narrative stops and starts at the exact correct moment, even though, by all means, these stories can be considered ‘unfinished.’ Every detail catches attention precisely and forcefully, and even in poems like “The Luminous Conjunction,” where no active murder is taking place, the rhythmic beats of violence and dread are found in the details; “Black grass and the wilderness without a touch of water, without a bark of possibility, and the landscape then becomes as much of a monster as any animal that ever passed through it.” In the world Demaree builds, every living thing has the potential to become monstrous, if given the correct context.

What catches my attention the most as a reader is the moments where the truest monster is not the murderer, or where the death of a character seems brought upon by comeuppance. We come to understand through language and context that, in some ballads, the murdered man was a molester, or that the killer was an abused child destroying the home she had been raised in. We come to term with stories void of reason, but somehow understandable; two old men settle their differences, and end their friendship, with bullets; two women spill blood over the names of flowers in their shared garden. The violence at times is as senseless as our own violent reality, but the narrator of this collection supplies palatability.

REVIEWS

Unfinished Murder Ballads speaks loudly in places where words are left unsaid. The violence is a constant backbeat to the human lives we see splayed before us in these poems, and only the beauty of poetic language and form create solace within the despair. Keeping in the tradition of lyrical murder ballads, we give our hearts over to the killers who spill blood in righteous vengeance. We come to appreciate the loss of the senses in its various forms, and connect to the rare first-person narrator the way we connect with the deepest parts of ourselves; “I want to say the awful things that plum and dip inside my scattered, ecstatic freedom. I don’t want it to be okay.”



“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

- **Maya Angelou**, American poet and civil rights activist

DISCUSSION

Madison Diemert

Living During a Pandemic

By Madison Diemert

By now, the entire world has been living through a pandemic for about six months. Each country has been handling COVID-19 differently— some better than others. New Zealand, for example, has had a total of fewer than 2,000 cases since then and has reopened as a country. To compare, the United States has had 8.23 million cases.

Currently, The Sock Drawer team resides in the U.S., and though we are all states apart, we are all experiencing very similar things. We have all gone back to work, those of us who are still in school have resumed classes... and we are all living in constant purgatory. None of us can go outside without wearing a mask. We are social distancing from the people we love the most, and after eight months, there doesn't seem to be an end in sight. But it's not just the five of us who are living this way. There are millions of people, not just in the States, who have been failed by their leadership and are being forced to keep their economy going through a global crisis. There are millions more who are jobless with no source of income. So for me, that begs the question: how the hell are we actually living through all of this?

It seems impossible. It feels like the country should still be under total lockdown with the cases constantly rising and the political unrest only getting worse. It's as if we're being forced to live life as if COVID-19 did not exist. You're expected to work forty hours a week and turn in your assignments on time with no exceptions. You're to take no time off or care for your mental health because *why would you, everything is fine!*

At least, that's how I feel. Since March of this year, my anxiety has been out of control and I was unemployed from May until very recently. Things have been looking up, but there is still a constant reminder that we are living in a global pandemic. People are dropping like flies around us and there is nothing we can do about it. I still don't know how to get on in the current state of the world without having a daily anxiety attack. I've tried hard to take care of my mental health, but it seems like there is only so much I can do.

No number of hours played in the Sims 4 or six-dollar coffees can truly allow me to escape the reality that our country is eating itself from the inside out. There are only so many times I can paint my nails and re-watch *Avatar: The Last Airbender* before I gravitate back toward the depths of social media. Where my family is at constant war with each other, where the news is so dystopian I truly feel we've been transported to another

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dimension. It's so much escapism and distraction on my end not to fall down a wormhole of bad news and imminent doom. I know I'm not alone in this, either, and thinking about that fact also creates an even bigger sense of existentialism.

I am in a constant loop of being anxious, finally feeling stable, then falling right back into my disorder once again. For now, there is absolutely nothing I can do to stop it. What can anyone do when they have no power?



FICTION



"Untitled 2"
by Cynthia Yatchman



At The Sock Drawer we aim to raise the voices of those who have felt that their voices have been placed in the back of the sock drawer. We welcome all art and all artists, while giving special notice to those who are often marginalized by society.

Tell Us Your Story! We want to hear from you. We are now accepting poetry, fiction, nonfiction, book reviews and art submissions for upcoming publications.

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