



# **Writer's Bloc 2016**

## **Letter From The Editors**

Dear Reader,

Welcome to *Writer's Bloc*--a literary magazine authored by students, teaching assistants, and instructors in the Cornell Prison Education Program.

The work encapsulated in this 2016 publication is centered upon the theme of walls and boundaries. The compiled writing and artwork reflect authors' experiences and interpretations of this subject. This magazine itself penetrates the very walls of Auburn Correctional Facility, allowing writers and artists who live on either side to share their stories in one, cohesive volume.

As you embark upon the journey held within these pages, we wish to set you off with these insightful words of James Baldwin: "It was books that taught me that the things that tormented me most were the very things that connected me with all the people who were alive, or had ever been alive."

With this, we the editors leave you to take what you may from the work between these covers. It is our hope and intention that you, our reader, will experience an iteration of the fluidity of supposedly impenetrable walls and boundaries that our collective participation in this program has rendered clear to us.

Sincerely,  
The Editors

Amber Aspinall  
Anay Hindupur  
Hannah Mueller  
Jake Meiseles  
Lucy Stockton  
Phoebe Hering  
Sophie Allen  
Yena Kang

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## **Life's Song**

E. Paris Whitfield

I'm a song that has yet to be sung,  
My melody is struggling to be played,  
My lyrics are unwritten,  
wanting of an unfamiliar page.

Tune, still subliminally sublime.  
A bitter flatness enfolds my existence,  
a crueler reality, the latter, to realize.

My keys somewhat broken, white, black, unsequenced.  
My smile buried inside itself.  
Even as hope's embers burn within my eyes.  
No more tears left to lick up against the gates of impassive time,  
Ears grasping the empty winds to hear any signs of Tomorrow's breath.

Consequences being no coincidence,  
As soon as I ceased worrying,  
the moment I stepped aside of myself, and loosened my talon grip on those  
controls that I never genuinely controlled,  
something most extraordinary begun to play throughout my soul,  
Life's symphony.

It has been through being lost, trapped, suffocated within adversity, my  
life's song has found a succession of musical tones.

With pen in hand, Today is writing.  
Carefully, cautiously, I am persevering  
finding solace in uncertainty that my end's note will resound higher than my beginning's.

## **Incomplete Me**

Johanna Scarlet Diamond

Hi, my name is Jae Diamond, and I am in transition. That is to say that who I am now is temporary. I am not quite who I was years ago and am not yet who I want to become. At times I have a vague sense of who I am myself except to say that I am in the midst of transition. But where do I find my identity when I am far removed from my previous self with no way to grasp at my future self? Not content with who I am physically and unable at present to move forward. I am in a prison within a prison—knowing exactly where I am yet lost. Limbo? Purgatory, perhaps? In the occasional moment of clarity I am able to define who I am in my future: complete and whole and happy. My future...that is where my identity waits. Mentally and emotionally I have surpassed my physical transition, however, until mind and body are reflections of one another I will remain in a fleeting state of passing from one moment to the next. Unqualified to claim an identity without betraying who I see in passing windows and stagnant puddles and mirrors.

Others who see me seem more capable than myself to identify me. They seem so self assured and confident when calling me a homo or a fag or when I'm shown pictures and told, "That's what a real woman looks like." I know who I am and that that person is a transgendered woman—it is the conveying that leaves me breathless. Can I blame those who are not mind readers and who cannot see the inner workings of my mind; who take only what they can see as truth? And when I look in the mirror I can understand why they call me a boy...a boy. Because no man would ever give up manhood for womanhood. I say that to say does it really matter who I know myself to be when so many others voice their objections? The number 2 is the number 2 for a reason and red is as well red—they have the belief of the majority that they are which they are said to be. In relation to me the majority has an effect on how I see myself but not who I am. Meaning that I am extraordinarily and ever concerned whether or not I am an ugly woman; never a boy who doesn't look like a woman.

Being in transition is difficult; you don't know how or what to feel. In my case there are so many things working against the fulfillment of my identity: the clothes I have to wear, the makeup I can't have, the facial hair I can't seem to entirely remove, and amongst other things the surgery that is unavailable to me at the time. My identity is my current transition—the process of becoming who I want to become underlies most, if not all, of what I think or do. My identity is a process waiting to be completed; I know who I am I'm just not completely there yet.

## **Morphine Dreaming**

Lucien Chin

As the morphine courses through my system,  
my body goes limp and I'm slipping  
off into the distant space;  
to a place where the mind  
knows no confines or restrictions  
and the afflictions of the world are a mere reminiscence.  
Subservient, subjugation,  
indoctrination and inferiority  
complexes linked to complexion  
are not complex enough to exist in this morphine dream.  
Here there is no hatred,  
no racism,  
or any other baseless stereotypical discrimination.

I'm morphine dreaming.

This morphine high magnifies  
the scope of the all seeing eye.  
This morphine high enables the blind  
to capture the lies that lie in between the lines  
of all history that has been transcribed.  
This morphine high got me unraveling treacherous truths  
that threaten to  
incinerate traditions inherited by America's children.  
Traditions that rendered anyone other than a pilgrim  
3 fifths of a man.  
Traditions that continue quietly standing  
as a result of conservative pandering,  
gerrymandering and politically expedient  
photogenic philanthropist.

Morphine dreaming got me reaching  
for a deeper meaning of life.  
In my quest for understanding  
I find myself  
traveling back to the future  
where I'm met by adamant accusers, knowledge jewelers  
who perceive me as a thief for being a truth tutor.

Morphine dreaming  
I'm seeing myself being nailed to a cross next to the crucifix  
where Jesus is.  
Jesus begins  
to tell me to remain under truth's tutelage.  
I tell him, "No disrespect, Christ, you're the shit,

but I question why're you putting your life at risk  
for a world where ruthless ideologies of Isis  
will lead to a night of Parisian crisis.  
And don't forget Beirut.  
Again, why're you putting your life at risk  
for a world where American snipers get applauded  
for the killing of millions  
and bald Eagles dismember,  
disfigure, disintegrate innocent women and children.  
Sad to say, more violence is all that awaits,  
as cancerous, power hungry presidential candidates  
propagate walls and war.  
Again, why put your life at risk  
for a world where social turbulence  
results in the Trayvon murdering and rage in Ferguson.”  
What's the place of violence in social justice.

You see, I'm morphine dreaming.

What will incite a movement  
that is so desperately needed  
to cease the seizing of Eric's breathing.  
“I can't breathe!” he said.  
What will bring about change--  
Invoking rage or sympathy?  
That Ghandi-King strain has been slain literally  
so let the tweets of this generation sing to you in symphony  
with hash tag rage.

Hash tag morphine dreaming

I was once posed a question  
that until this morphine dream I've been too afraid to answer.  
Cause it meant looking in the mirror in retrospection,  
and possibly finding fault in my reflection,  
flaws in my complexion and ancestral connection.  
But this morphine high got me seeing a little clearer,  
honestly a little nearer  
So the question:  
Would life be better if I weren't black?  
Instinctively one might ask,  
“what type of question is that?”  
But, to be frank  
and pride to the side...  
Nevermind,  
this morphine wearing off I'll answer the question another time.

Morphine dreaming.

## **Rubix Cube**

Sheldon Preston Johnson

I have been chiseling at this ambit-monolith for decades now. I have made much progress, but there remains so much more work to be done. It seems like the more layers I painfully peel away and erase, new ones are discovered and displayed—they somehow reconstruct themselves like scabs on a wound. Yes, a work in progress. You see this Berlin wall, these boundaries, obstacles, borders, partitions, Mason Dixon lines, perimeters, hedges, are self-imposed: tangible and intangible, invisible yet ever present like the present state of things. Conscious and subconscious, subtle and bold, smooth and polished, hard-sharp-rugged and cold. I have been chiseling at these shackles for decades now.

Am I making sense? How about these fears that have been preimposed, preconceived, institutional and self taught. Crippling me, inhibiting me, prohibiting and discouraging me, thwarting and impeding my ability to flourish...self-sabotaging any opportunity to know myself and show others my true intrinsic value. Speed bumps in the curves of the road I have traveled while racing through life. Denouncing alliances and promoting ideologies that have kept me enclosed within my own cage of ignorance, perpetuating doctrines that influence generations.

Do you still not get it? In school my teachers taught me and advised me to know my place, expect and respect the racial-economic limitations that society has imposed upon my race. When I chose not to conform and continued to challenge and climb higher, they institutionalized me to a psychiatric ward. Clouded my dreams with Ridalin and Thorazine, nightmarish realities: straight jackets and broken needles—told me that my dreams were unrealistic, my aspirations impractical, my reasoning irrational. My very own pipeline, from school to prison.

Are you still perplexed? At home I learned to fend for myself, believed that the examples my Daddy set were right and exact as he abandoned his duties and responsibilities as a Father. 'Poppa was a rollin' stone,' so wherever I laid my hat was my home. My sisters taught me how to fight as I defended them from Condors preying on their innocence. The streets taught me that the good die young. I suffer immortally from survivors guilt. I learned that my word meant everything—no matter how stupid, nonsensical, unwarranted or preposterous what I had committed myself to seemed. In my silly pursuit of young love I was told that pain is love and saw those who profess to love me, the very first ones to hurt me. Learned that my heart is vulnerable and fragile, allowing my emotions to easily consume me. I learned quickly that in the process of trying to save a drowning friend I was subject to be drowned myself. I was taught that to love is to live.

Am I making sense now? You see, these barriers and walls I have built, cast and baked in a baste of anger—ignorance and defense mechanisms designed to protect and deflect all the harsh realities that life has a way of imposing. I have in essence deprived myself of so much. This is my Rubix Cube, a multi-faceted complication of mental and emotional shields that have calloused, tainted, prejudiced, and hardened my views and positions, into an abysmal darkness where hope has been asphyxiated. You see I have been chiseling at these walls, shackles, restrictions, restraints, and manacles for decades now!

And just when I was ready to give up and slaughter hope, there materialized microscopic cracks in the fabric of the concrete statue that I have chiseled for so long. There birthed a humility, a compassion, an understanding in the knowledge that these walls I have slowly built since I escaped the walls of my mother's womb are the bars of my own creation. And if these walls I have built, advertent and inadvertent, could talk they would say I am still so afraid to let

anyone in, I am tired of crying granite tears that roll and stumble, breaking everything in their path; I am ashamed of the bruises imposed and blood I shed. If these bricks could talk they would tell you that 'I can learn to endure the how as long as there is a why.' If these corridors could talk they would tell you that I regret so much and wish I could no longer see the past in my future. If this arcade could talk it would tell you that I am dangerously in love and despite what others think, I feel and believe I deserve to know and embrace love.

This is my RUBIX CUBE of colors, circumstances, fates that shaped and molded me into who I've become. A kaleidoscope of potentialities, where carbons and hydrogens collide and break apart, only to then bond to adenines and guanines—evolving, turning and twisting this RUBIX CUBE in the promise that I can find some uniformity, clarity...a semblance of order—purpose in the WALLS that encompass me...to this RUBIX CUBE.

## They Say...

Reggie Bell

The deluge of derogatory terms being dispersed to define me for identifying as a 'free-thinker' are enormous and degrading. Maybe they say these things to discourage me from seeking freedoms from narrow restrictions or, perhaps, so I will yield to psychological handling and treatment, and ignore that which demands questioning. Yet, I must challenge grammatical constructs dictating conventional ideals that are deemed appropriate behaviors, and if this means I am a person poorly adjusted to social situations and environmental conditions, then so be it despite what they say.

The law of the land requires that I obey established customs but this does not imply that I accept these practices in silence. I will go to great lengths and beyond limits to be heard as a dissident, amid accusations of lacking culture and refinement for fear they may say I am, at last, conforming. Currently, they are saying that I am uncivilized and deeply offensive to morality and common decency. Still, I will not allow mere words to deter me from speaking out against cherished beliefs and sacred institutions.

D's are the letters they use in names to devalue and describe me. But they only say them in ignorance of my concern for them. I say, I form opinions on the basis of reasoning, independent of authority. They say, I'm just a dysphemism.

## **The Border**

Yena Kang

The structure looms over me  
as an all seeing eye, refusing to blink.  
Extending to no end with bricks of black and brown,  
with words still left unspoken, too much to tell.

Piles of abandoned bottles of blue and green,  
many broken and others barely whole.  
Each find their homes in the indents of footprints  
that all lead to the same blank and mimicked expressions.

It's unclear if it wants to keep me in or shut others out,  
seeking to be my only company in this almost deserted town.  
It sees me sometimes, and looks on with unknown kindness –  
a certain mystery with a glowing secretive gleam.

It's always been there,  
since this place was founded or built,  
maybe resurrected from nothing.  
No one really knows its beginning.

There are legends about its impenetrability.  
Of the climbers who fell,  
the storms that were halted,  
the countless fists that its contacted.

Others here see it for it is hard to miss.  
Somehow they go about their day  
looking over their shoulder as  
an assurance it still stands tall, unmoving.

Everyday, always at high noon,  
I can see her from my window.  
She does what I do and stands there,  
looking up with her neck painfully strained.

She stands oblivious to the whispers  
and shouts from stranger mouths  
or from eyes of the playing children  
looking on curious and compelled.

For me or for her I don't know why we do it,  
whether it's for reassurance or rooted in fear  
of what lies beyond or

what remains right here.

I know we have different eyes  
that have seen different things.  
Still I wonder when she looks up  
if she sees something different from me.

I see a crack  
through the chipped off cement of its old, worn bricks  
that have endured Mother Nature and prying fingertips  
where one sliver of sunlight insists on peeking through.

Maybe she sees it too.

I just know that every day from where I sit  
in that same rusty window  
she turns and sees me  
looking and her, and she watches me.

She winks.

## **The Alley**

Lucas Whaley

A sneering mouth  
    which spews darkness  
    which drools muck and slime;  
Hemmed-in by battered bricks  
    crusted walls stretch sanity  
    casting shadows upon open sky;  
Inhabited by that best forgotten  
    Glass bottles, empty and broken,  
    Jibber dully with ceaseless echoes;  
Steel-girded dumpsters slouch  
    Ballast of that silence and trash  
    none dare casually dispose;  
Backdoors below fractured lights  
    which lean from blank facades  
    are the sole egress;  
Foul stench of slums flows  
    A spreading plague  
    of poisonous pain;  
Dank shades drip like paint  
    to splatter and cling  
    on those passing near.

**It**

Benjamin “Benji” Moriera

This is what prison can do to a man,  
It will make you cry,  
and wish that you would die,  
It can turn you into a monster,  
or make you take heed to counsel,  
It can make you feel dead while still breathing,  
because what’s left of you is depleting,  
for It is the cemetery where the hearts are still beating,  
float in and out of consciousness,  
as you hold on to empty promises,  
thinking only of what was and could’ve been,  
living in the past seems to be our constant sin,  
continue running back to what was then,  
but nothing seems to be more real when,  
I have seen how it plays out for others in the past,  
as the Life we once knew slips out of our grasp,  
his daughter’s growing up without her dad,  
and this isn’t even when things start to get bad,  
the baby he left is no longer a little girl,  
he might get a hug but minus the twirl,  
she doesn’t want a soft and cuddly teddy bear,  
her finger’s all up in his face because “Daddy” wasn’t there,  
he tries to convince her that what he did was for her,  
but she doesn’t want to hear it and her emotions begin to stir,  
suddenly she gets up and now she is leaving,  
so he ended up being—who knows for how long—the father who’s left grieving.



**Within These Walls—A Prequel (Part 0.5)**

Kasim Callender

I'm hollow  
From past sorrows  
That left me nothing to look forward towards  
Other than dreary tomorrows  
Because at present  
Your presence  
Presents  
A pleasant  
Anomaly within my essence  
That lessens the pain  
Of the lessons that I've gained  
In the name  
Of my father, my sons,  
And what's left of my spirit  
Within these walls

## **Yesterday**

William Izzo

Sitting here with nothing to do,  
But close my eye and think of you.  
Your eyes are bright, your smile would shine,  
I'd forever be proud to call you mine.

Now it dies and all I see are  
Clouds of gray.  
I wish you were here like  
You were  
    Yesterday!

## Her

Lucas Whaley

Dust blew across the windshield, scratching a thousand unseen fissures into the glass. Each grain was an ember, burning gray as it impacted, left its mark, and flitted away in the length of a heartbeat; the length of forever.

The vacant desert landscape was a reflected abyss, a projection of destitution without source or destination. The engine roared its challenge to the low rumble of thunder charging across the predawn sky.

He gripped the wheel with sealed hands, knuckles like tombstones, shoulders laid forward, eyes shrouded by heavy lids. Behind him, the horizon became a thin gold line pushing against the gloom. His foot pressed down upon the accelerator.

Somewhere on that empty highway a brick wall waited...

I haven't eaten in two days. Hollowness fills me, abandoning me to a cold the pounding summer sun can't touch. I adjust my backpack on my shoulder to hide a shiver. I feel the strap give a little. I hope it holds. The black vinyl pack contains everything I own: toothbrush, walkman, a pair of jeans. It's a heavy load.

I'm standing in front of a gas station, mentally preparing myself for larceny. Daylight on darkness. I face the opposite direction, eyes on the street, I rarely enjoy looking where I'm headed.

I grew up only a few blocks from here. That was—stop. Don't think about that. Head in the game. I stare at a black jeep pulling alongside the far curb. I focus on its glossy box-like shape, straining my eyes, willing them to aridness.

I wish it would rain.

The jeep slides away, quickly becoming part of the endless morning traffic; a girl stands discharged upon the sidewalk in its place. Her honey hair creates a golden-brown halo, igniting rounded cheeks and a tiny nose lightly kissed with freckles. Lips like opened petals. Long lashes stretching, reaching out for an embrace. A black backpack slung over one shoulder.

I ran out of toothpaste yesterday. I haven't washed in four days. I've been wearing these same clothes for a week. I've been paralytically shy my entire life. So why is my mouth opening and calling to her? Why are my feet carrying me in her direction? I think she's smiling. Can't be right. I swallow. I try hard to ignore my pulse drumming out a death metal song in my ears. I step out into traffic.

She's waiting for me...

He felt an arm slip through his, a head lean tenderly onto his shoulder. He held on tighter, but did not bother to turn from the road laid out before him from the painfully receding night.

There wasn't anyone there.

Only memories...

We sit on the roof of an abandoned house, watching the hazy winter sunset turn the gray clouds blanketing the sky to brilliant shades of purple. I lived here once in my childhood. It has been condemned.

She reaches over and takes my hand. The words are unspoken, but they are there, hanging between us. Transforming the nature of our relationship with the power of their sincerity.

It's beginning to snow, big fat flakes which drift toward the ground in languid sweeps like gently falling feathers. The snow brings with it a stillness that ripples out across the town around us. The sounds of cars and lights of houses glide farther and farther away until they disappear altogether behind a cottony curtain.

I feel her shiver and we climb back down into the vacant house. Earlier I had collected all of the old curtains I could find, piling them together to use as blankets. I feel guilty now looking at them. She shouldn't be here. She has a house, a family, a warm bed. She is only here because I don't.

She could be anywhere, with anyone. But then she seems detached from everyone, from the world, in a way that's hard to describe. She is never really part of the crowd, even when she's surrounded by it. Some vital piece of her is always kept secret, private. A hundred best friends and none of them know her. She manages to be the center of attention without ever being seen. Why doesn't anyone notice?

She's a mystery.

So why can't I think about her without feeling this sense of...belonging?

We huddle together against the cold, staring out of a bare and broken window into the driving snow. I can feel her heart beat.

It feels like home...

The world was a blur. The miles raced by him and still he went nowhere. A captive between yesterday and tomorrow. He barely noticed anymore. Who could read the clockface with one hand missing and the other broken beyond repair?

Everything counted in seconds; the measures of agony and ecstasy...

We sat on a hillside, gazing up into the midnight sky, an island floating through a sparkling sea. This far out there is no press of city lights to cast a veil over our contemplation of eternity. Sometimes I feel like other people can see it, the inevitability of us. Sometimes it's all I see.

Dawn breaking.

I touch her hand and the distance flees. Like two flames on a single wick, our closeness is a stronger glow, warmth and guidance.

Entwined.

Embraced.

Clasped.

Locked.

Her breath sustains me.

There, under the watchful eyes of the constellations, galaxies collide, shifting gravity to a point somewhere between them.

Darkness burns away.

On this temple that is a hillside I am finding salvation. No god could promise a paradise as perfect as this moment. Conversion. I will only ever worship at the altar of Her. I will dedicate all of my days to Her. I will sacrifice everything that I am to Her...

The thunder sounded closer now. Nothing had ever sounded so far away...

As his car continued to slice through the night, a fork of blue-white lightning danced across the sky before lancing into the ground barely a foot from the highway. He didn't acknowledge it. It was as a dream to him, and he already knew what it felt like to bask within the warmth of a dream.

It was glorious, and it was fleeting, and, ultimately, it was painful as it burned you away to ash.

Then there was only the cold. The cold and the echo.

But echoes were supposed to fade away; how did an echo become a voice? How did a mind become a cemetery...

I approach the casket slowly. I have been putting this off all afternoon. Always finding one more person to have some inane conversation with. What is there to say? What words can adequately sum up the life of an angel whose radiance had illuminated my whole world?

I had forgotten how cold it is in the dark.

I force myself to take each agonizing step, every detail of the scene before me gouging its image into my brain. The room is choked with the miasmatic smog of too many perfumes and cleaners crashing together discordantly. Rows of plastic chairs, orange and chrome, are arranged to either side of a narrow aisle. No one uses them. The guests mill about in their black clothes and somber masks, ghouls come to feast on the corpse. I don't understand the reason for the heavy drapes that seem to hang everywhere. They make me feel as if I'm walking out onto a stage. Or off of one.

The casket is made of some sort of dark wood which has been polished until it reflects the subdued lights of the parlor like a mirror. The brass handles along the sides have been etched into the likeness of leafy vines. I haven't been asked to be a pall bearer. The inside is padded with red velvet criss-crossed with black diamonds. She would have hated it.

I am beside her.

Throughout the day I have heard people comment on how good a job the mortician had done, how life-like she looks. It's bullshit. The body laying there looks nothing like Her. She isn't her golden-brown hair, or her round nose. She isn't the tiny beauty mark just to the right of her upper lip. She is her laugh, her touch, her love of everything Mickey Mouse. She's that stupid dolphin noise she makes that never fails to cheer me up.

I notice they have tied a black scarf around her neck and wonder morbidly if they even bothered to stitch up the wound. She had been found in a dumpster. The indignity of it is a jagged gash against the void which has been rent in my soul. It is a wonder I can still feel such a small sorrow, but cuts are like snowflakes; each one unique, each hurt distinct.

The soft murmur of people on the other side of the room is an intolerable buzz in my head. How can they speak at a time like this? Don't they feel cheated? Don't they realize something has gone horribly wrong? Something that was never supposed to happen?

Don't they feel guilty?

My sanity is pacing within the sanitarium of my mind. Or is it a sanatorium? Is there even a word for a hole so devoid of hope as to be assigned the exile of both the ill and the mad? I am a living testament that such a place must exist, for how can I ever be well, physically or mentally, without her?

I remember when we met—me, a dirty street kid, flirting with her, who was so beautiful it was like talking to a dream. She had smiled shyly. I remember our first kiss—in the back of a

pickup truck barreling down a country road in the middle of the night on our way to anywhere. I remember everything. More than anything I remember that she believed in me. No one else ever has. Where do we go when there's no one left who believes in us?

Destination descent.

I clutch my chest as I bleed out my heart. My knees ache, I think I've fallen to them. Oh god, how do I find my way without her?

Even if I somehow find the strength to carry on, it will be as a shell—a ghost haunting the land of the living. Until I can pass on...to reunite with her...and live again...

Another peal of thunder growled across the heavens. Still it didn't rain. No one ever remembered the rain. The shades of the past become an endless succession of sunny days, but a sky is never so blue as when it contains a few clouds. Beauty is found between the contrasts and the imperfections.

His eyes glanced down at the fuel gauge. He couldn't keep this up forever, the tank was almost empty. It had been that way for days.

"I love you."

Behind him the sun's brilliant crown broke over the horizon. He didn't see it. Before him the darkness grew more profound. He couldn't look away...

## **Restless Days and Sleepless Nights**

Louis Kelly

Life is a struggle of emotions  
A delicate dance of pain and joy

When the right words can't be found to  
Connect with my oldest boy

He's emotionally lost and I'm missing  
Years of life locked in a spiritual prison

Trying to find the true source of my pain  
So I can pour water over its burning flame

Even when there's nothing around to complain about  
I still run in circles to gain money as proof that I made it out

I should've realized what I was getting myself into first  
Because of my careless decisions I made the situation worst

Some nights I feel like I'll drown in the endless sea of regret  
Other nights only my toes get wet

Even after the pain passes my heart  
My brain is still trying to find ways to pick it apart

Then there's the beautiful song of morning  
And it's time for the delicate dance to restart.

## **It's All a Matter of Time**

Benjamin "Benji" Moreira

I am the one behind this wall,  
so I can't blame you for your doubts and all,  
but I wish you'd known sooner,  
that my feelings for you are genuine and True.  
the perhaps you'd be sure about me and see this thing through,  
I wouldn't dare play with my words—let alone your emotions,  
you must believe me, even though I understand the nature of your notions,  
I hadn't wanted one, so I have no girl nor a wife—NADA;  
but without you I feel like I have—what's less than nothing?  
you gave me in such little time,  
what I was neglected of and deprived,  
the kindness and sincerity I found in your eyes,  
a deep desire to hold you continually grows within,  
all I think of now is how to make you mine, but when will we begin?  
the chance afforded already once before, although it was too short-lived,  
a second time presented itself, but how many chances does life really give?  
this place is designed with intentions to dehumanize me,  
I wanted nothing to do with the world whose objective was to desensitize me,  
but when you came along and treated me with care and charity,  
it all came together and I began to see with much clarity,  
so I offer you a burden to hold that may be far from fair,  
because the Truth is, you brought me hope that would allow me to bear,  
whatever time I have left in here,  
whether it be months or a couple of years,  
those tricks that you couldn't use on me because I'm in here,  
I anticipate them as I look forward to what my freedom might mean,  
the opportune happiness with you like it's been my dreams,  
sure it all sounds too good to be true,  
but I had too little time to relate how I feel about you,  
and now I pine for the moment when I will see you again,  
I hope it is soon—but God only knows when.

## **Samuel Langhorne Clemens + The Mark Twain Study**

David Edwards

History 104: 19th C American History was one of the greatest pleasures I've enjoyed in years. When I discovered that our last primary source reading was Samuel Clemens, and recalled the repeated admonitions of Professor Reed to maintain focus on 19th C historical contexts, I thought first of the Civil War, Woodlawn Cemetery, Elmira Prison, and everything that connects them to 19th C history. Such connections would certainly not be lost on Professor Reed, so why reiterate!? "David...we are...19th C history!"

Neither would the irony be lost on Clemens that Elmira Prison, ("the hill" or "the reformatory" to the locals), looms large and high over his grave site, since he said the dregs of society can be observed while standing in front of the prison (pause) "at shift change."

So, being a tad obstinate, I decided to respond with a story from my youth; an expression of my gratitude to Professor Reed for an excellent course, and for her long suffering endurance of me. A version of that response follows here at the behest of Ms. Reed.

The "Great Storm of 66" hit Syracuse with a vengeance. I was only four years old, but I remember the skiers lowering food down into the house from above the second story window. Do memories constitute substance? I think they most certainly do. That snowstorm is the oldest memory I can recall; though I believe our lives, every second, is recorded in our minds for a definite reason and purpose. The following summer we moved to Elmira, New York.

I grew up at 380 West 5th Street in half of a huge red double house that sat on the north east corner lot of 5th and Davis, (named after Ernie Davis of football fame), in Elmira. Elmira College bought the property, so the house is gone, but the memories remain and are both precious and painful. I first learned about Samuel Clemens and Mark Twain during the years between 1967 and 1975.

In 1975 we moved to Savona, N.Y., and in 1977 we moved back to Elmira Heights, N.Y. 257 West 10th St is only a few stones throws from Elmira prison. In the fall of 1977, with the leaves off the trees, Aunt Gladys, the Eastern Star Prophetess, while exacting a firm grasp of my earlobe, pointed across the hill at the prison and foretold my future residence there.

School was a burden I eschewed, and skipping was chronic. Much of that misspent time was passed in Woodlawn Cemetery at, or near, where Samuel Clemens was laid to rest. Clemens married a daughter of the Langdon family which explains his residence in Elmira. There's a plaza, I recall, that bears the Langdon family name. But, in my estimation, it is not the Clemens Performing Arts Center on the Clemens Center Parkway, nor the fact that he lived, married, and was buried in Elmira that means the most. Rather, it is that on the Elmira College Campus sits the Mark Twain Study, where he, in solitude, composed works that have enriched the lives of millions.

Elmira College, until the late 60s or early 70s, was a women's college, and as a boy the campus was my playground. When they built the library, with double tennis courts on both sides

of it, my backyard was directly across the alley and cater-corner from the entire campus. “Newtown Towers,” if I recall the name correctly, was hard to sneak into to ride the elevators, but it was party central, and I would be stuffed with cookies, soda, pizza, and stuff! Residential housing was scattered all about the campus, and I’d make sure to make the rounds, but the towers were the score! I learned early on the valuable lesson of girls and chocolate. With the exception of chocolate I was completely spoiled. The “Octogon Fair” on campus each October was the source of excruciating anticipation.

On the lawn of the library just north of the east side set of tennis courts is a wall of modern art. This wall is about 8 feet tall and 10 feet long with oddly shaped “blocks” protruding in various colors—Mike Magno, Steve Turner, Carlton J. Brink Jr., myself, and others would climb the wall just to sit on top of it because that’s what little boys do. Since 1972 was the year of the flood, when Hurricane Agnes wiped out downtown Elmira, we were less than 10 years old.

The Mark Twain Study sits on a slope of hill overlooking a small pond, (frogs + pollywogs!), and though I was told that it was moved to Corning Community College, I also heard that it is back at Elmira College, where it belongs!

The Study is a small round building, about 10-12 feet in diameter, and I think, actually octagonal. With four or five steps up to the door, and windows all the way around, it is quaint and masculine. I used to climb upon the roof because, again, that’s what little boys do! Climbing down one day, and here comes the confession, I put my foot through a pane of glass in the door. So, naturally, I went in to investigate. After checking out his chair and rifling his desk drawers, I had to tamper with his typewriter. I wish I could remember which one, but when I pushed down on the key, and the letter arm swung out, I grabbed it and it bent—not a lot—and I bent it back. But even then, at eight or nine years old, I knew it mattered more, because of whose typewriter it was.

“Professor Reed, as a historian, you must be appalled, and I beg forgiveness. When I saw Samuel Clemens as the last primary source reading, and figured that you selected it for our course, I felt compelled to tell you. After 43 plus years, I’m pretty sure the statute of limitations has expired, and I did weigh my final grade against the uniqueness of this response.

But I wanted to finish the course by giving you something “historical,” that, until your wish to have this in print, only the Lord, you, myself, and the guy who fixed the window might know.”

To my relief, Ms. Reed responded: “...not appalled, and I doubt if Clemens would be!” I’ll gratefully take that as (pause for effect) Clemency.



## **The Path We Walk**

Cody Testerman

Throughout life we choose a path to walk  
whether to follow or make our own  
Paths will cross and leave us to decide  
to stay together or walk alone

Light is seen when we go through darkness  
we will walk although each step is blind  
For every hardship will define us  
some lose their way and are left behind

Fears hold us back while dreams drive us on  
to see what awaits around the bend  
We can not turn back so we walk slow  
because we know that the path will end

**Within These Walls Haiku 1**

Kasiem Callender

From within these walls

Rehabilitate thyself

Why are you afraid?

## **Chemical Romance or Poetic Justice**

Just

My mind is trapped.

Disillusioned by the illusions, and the deluded fusion  
of hopelessness and faith,

My mind is trapped.

Trapped in a vortex due to a complex conquest of a people  
whose value is seen only by those outside of themselves,  
and never within. Never within.

My mind is damaged.

damaged from broken promises, like broken bottles  
slammed on the cracked concrete—and jabbed to  
pierce someone's already broken heart,

My mind is damaged.

Perpetually interrupted in its quest for peace, by its  
inability to reach, with hands and feet, and speech,  
anything deep enough to allow me to sink,

My mind is trapped.

It is said that they can lock your body but can't  
trap your mind. This is a lie, an untruth.

The manifested mind is a product of popular culture,  
colored by one's own perception,

Like life is a catch 22.

Like holding on too tight makes it harder to let go...  
and when it's hard to let go you hold on too tight,  
it's a catch 22.

I had a dream once that I was dreaming of being  
free,

and awoke to that reality wishing I was still asleep,

My mind is trapped.

In a catch 22.

Hoping I can free it long enough to find some meaning.

Meaning that I'm searching...ever searching but I can't seem to find the key.

## **Just Another Dream**

Demetrius Molina

Have you ever had such a deep and desirable dream that you woke up not knowing where you were?

Last night was my high school graduation. I was there along with all my family and the entire E.F.A. class of "03." Donned in a navy blue cap and gown, I nervously approached the stage waiting for my moment of glory. "Demetrius E. Molina"... as my name was announced by the Vice Principal, the entire Clemens Center Arena, led by the roar of the Molina section, erupted with applause.

"Congratulations Meat, you did it!" shouted one of my many supporters. After walking the stage and receiving my diploma, I was left with a great sense of pride and accomplishment. At that moment my future seemed so bright. I was 18 and had my whole life ahead of me. Hard to believe that in just 5 short years I would be convicted of murder.

Opening my eyes, I find myself surrounded by suffocating metal walls and strangling steel bars! Where am I?? How did I get here??

At first I'm lost and confused, but then all at once it comes rushing back to me like a terrified child. I remember the birthday celebration gone **TRAGICALLY WRONG** and the **ICE-COLD CUFFS CHOKING** my wrists. It's impossible to forget the lopsided trial that ended with my mother's hopeless cries or the defeated look on my girlfriend's face after the verdict. I'm trapped in a cage feeling like a bird, unable to spread my wings. While days of me flying are only distant dreams. As I sit confined to the 5 by 8 world of mine, I cannot escape feeling less than! Such constraints hinder my ability to physically move beyond but my mind is able to travel great distances. Often I journey back several years to revisit happier times as a child, before I lost my innocence. In here to reminisce is to relive and to relive is to dream and by dreaming I survive...

## **Within These Walls**

Kasiem Callender

Within these walls;  
If I could lay down and cry  
Would my eyes ever dry?  
Or would my tears flow for years  
And show my fears for what they is  
Within these walls?

Within these walls,  
I clearly see the illusion  
In the amusing depressing musings  
Of all these winners forever losing  
The choice of choosing  
Anything within these walls.

Within these walls  
I pray that I don't fall prey  
To the infinite shades of grey  
That I encounter day after day  
Every damn day  
Within these walls.

Within these walls  
I've tried to repent  
But learned to relent  
To the stench of the environment  
As I try to make sense  
Of the cents that I collect  
And clench to my chest  
In relation to the trucks of products sent  
From within these walls...  
I'm so lucky that I don't have to pay rent  
Within these walls!

Within these walls  
I'm just a flea trying to flee  
This sea that I see  
So I can be all that I can be  
Without compromising morals or bending knee  
Because that's not my cup of tea  
But then again, that's what put me  
Within these walls  
And I want to be free...

## **Eyewitness**

E. Paris Whitfield

Dingy stale air co-mingled with pain, anticipation, and extinguished  
Potential.

Shabby metal webbed windows beckoning hell's breath to seep over its jagged  
soot edged cracks,

only allowing pinches of sunlight to slither through.

Dampness licks human skin, with abandoned joy.

Unbreathable.

Wiretapped ears pick up on the trail of flowing salty tears,

Stifled, yet so audibly clear.

Time, ticks and tears

Bits of expectation away,

like a shark latched onto its prey.

The only lifeline sustaining the essence of who I use to be, is fastened in  
that ancient promised plea deal offered in Psalms 23,

nothing left to do but pray.

Persistence battle with those invisible hands,

the result produces piles of brokenness swept into huge piles.

Moments out of sync with the World's reality,

Intentionally.

Seamlessly days are raped into a singular continuing night.

Remnants of visions, mopped lazily into State's initialized biodegradable  
eco-friendly floor wax.

Methodically it repeats, repeats, repeats...

Humans counted, as sheep, for the next shift's count.

Mundane, or perhaps survival within this circumstance causes complacency,  
slowly eroding the instinctual road map,

forgetting where may ought to be striving to go, rather than settling for

where so many are, and will be left at,

entombing in this graveyard of living Beautiful—Brokenness.

Few of us are chosen to see it, remember it, bearing witness to it, share it.

So others may become a little more free.

## **Undulant**

Lucas Whaley

Tomorrow's tide rushes onward  
Assail concrete breaker's rise  
And barriers ward off deluge  
Hold back, Hem-in  
Impede all but occasional spray  
Pellucid droplets ascend  
Then plummet,  
Plummet and burst  
Open on sharp rocks,  
Of shore's labyrinthine oubliette;  
Shallow pools confined to dark corners  
--Still reflect dim constellations--  
Sea's tears slip along  
Magnify hidden paths  
Magnify, collect, and merge  
Coelesce on spillways  
Plunge homeward  
To relinquish salt-laden burdens  
of these obstructed Mes  
of these obstructed Yous  
When possible tides subside  
Leaving mutually obfuscated sides  
Leaving mutually obliterated lives

## **Enforcing Fate's Boundaries**

Jacob Russell

Mostar, once the chief city of Herzegovina, was just another casualty of the merciless years-long Serb campaign, a burned and broken skeleton on the banks of the Neretva River. What little that remained of the once-celebrated city was held together by rubble-strewn, nameless streets with faceless buildings. Chilling and tenebrous, Mostar was a cold cadaver of a city that even the sun could neither warm nor brighten.

A population of more than 120,000 was decimated to tens-of-thousands—the rest being displaced by the bitter civil wars or becoming statistics of the Serbs' "ethnic cleansing." Those who remained in the metropolis' hulk no longer walked its streets; they sprinted them hoping to outrun the aim of the Serb snipers swarming the city like a lethal infestation. When the denizens risked traveling the cratered and debris-ridden streets it was usually with buckets in-hand, the need for fresh water vanquishing the need to remain safely hidden.

Two boys carried no buckets as they plodded through the pitchy-black of the moonless night. They only moved at night, when it was safer. Moving around Mostar was never safe. At night, however, the snipers were not as much of a threat, thanks to the smothering blanket of darkness spread over the electricity-lacking city each sundown. The only illumination came from the probing Serb spotlights, the flashing muzzles from small-arms and artillery, and the random firing that continued to consume what was left of Mostar. The acrid smoke corrupting the air couldn't mask the reek of chard and rotting bodies. The boys feared both the malevolent darkness and what it concealed. The angry chatter of automatic weapons shouting back and forth in the night was sporadically outmatched by the repugnant roar of tanks and artillery. Still, the boys crept forward. They could not go back to a family or to a home that no longer existed, nor could they stay put, trying preserve life in a slaughter house.

So the pair stumbled through the dark, propelled by the promise not of a brighter tomorrow but simply of a tomorrow. They moved from demolished doorways to piles of rubble to bombed-out vehicles, anything that offered protection and concealment. The eldest of the two, taller than his brother by nearly a foot, led the way. The younger one clung to his brother's hand, pulling strength from it as it towed him along through the night. Any suspicious sound set off a chain reaction: freezing in mid-step, scanning the immediate area, and then scurrying for any available cover. Serb patrols always lurked in the dark, waiting to spring ambushes on Croats attempting to flee their city-turned-tomb and the fate predetermined from them by the Serbs. The boundary of surviving Croats' lives was measured by the ever-shrinking Serb perimeter slowly snuffing out all life in Mostar.

Both boys' feet were bare, covered only with gashes and bloody grime. Neither boy avoided shattered glass or other jagged debris. Their feet, like the rest of their bodies, were inured to such pains. Their tattered, filthy clothes hung loosely from their long-starved bodies. Hunger chewed its way out of their shriveled stomachs as cold clawed its way into their spent dirty bodies. Only the whites of their exhausted, bloodshot eyes marked them in the darkness. Weeks worth of dirt obscured their faces, helping them meld into the shadows where they hid and lived. They were faceless, nameless wraiths wandering a dead cursed city.

The ground beneath their flayed feet suddenly rippled with slight tremors. Both froze, ears straining for the expected sounds they knew would soon follow. Desperately, they search for a bolt-hole. Seconds before scurrying to a collapsed building front to burrow into the ill of pulverized stonework and wood, they heard the familiar noise that incited in them a feral terror.

As they finished burying themselves, the ground around them shook with a force that dislodged several large slabs of stone and fractured concrete from the pile. The cement chunks and boulders avalanched down threatening to crush the boys. The squeaking of sprockets and the

growling of the powerful engine intensified to the point that the older boy was sure their eardrums would rupture.

The Serb M-84 tank burst into view as it rounded a corner and ground to a noisy, shuddering halt in the center of an intersection thirty meters from the boys. A powerful spotlight burned away the dark as the tank's turret meticulously rotated 360 degrees.

The boys held each other, and their breath, as the mechanized predator searched for prey. The rhythmic panting of the beast's idling engine filled the panicked quarries' nostrils with diesel fumes. Their hearts tried to pound apart their ribcages when the turret stopped, its spotlight inspecting the heap of debris concealing them. A dark and pitiless eye, the barrel of the tank's 125mm cannon seemed to stare directly at them. Both trembled as the searing light picked apart their sanctuary, as if sniffing them out. It was not until the turret continued its search that they once again began to breathe.

Its search completed, the tank sat idling in the middle of the intersection. Suddenly, the massive machine spun 45 degrees on its axis and began moving down the very street on which the boys hid. They watched with helpless panic as the metal monster arrogantly rumbled toward them, refusing to alter its course and crushing all obstacles in its path.

The older boy pinned his brother's body beneath his own as the tank's right tread climbed onto their rubble fortress. Terror overcame the younger boy and he struggled in vain to break free from his brother's grip and run. When he tried to scream out in panic, his brother's filth-encrusted palm smothered his mouth.

The tank's track was less than a meter from their faces—so close both smelled the sickly sweet stench of the thick, dark grease that encased the sprockets. Each squeak and clank of the heavy steal-linked treads reminded the boys of its untold number of victims, mocking their unheeded pleas for mercy and their final shrieks of crushing agony. A warm wetness washed down the outside of the older boys' right leg, cooling as it flowed downward, creating a cold and pungent muck around his feet. The older boy wasn't mad. Tanks always had the same effect on his brother.

They watched as the killing machine inched away and the ground's quaking slowly subsided. Hope reappeared once the tank turned a corner a few streets up. The boys quickly disinterted themselves and moved toward the intersection that the tank had occupied. The older boy knew it would be safe, that the iron-clad hunter would not return any time soon. He led them across the intersection, abandoning the safety of concealment to cover more ground as quickly as possible.

As the older boy led his brother through the center of the intersection they froze. Night unexpectedly disappeared. The beam of light suddenly engulfing them scared them more than the dark ever had. The younger boy fearfully gnawed the filthy fingers of his right hand as both tried looking beyond the blinding brightness shining down upon them. They could barely make out the silhouette of another tank.

At that moment the older boy grasped the fatal magnitude of his mistake: He had led them into a trap from which there was no escape. Standing in the center of the intersection, there was nowhere to flee, no place to hide. With no more hope to cling to, the boys clung to each other. They stood in unmoving silence and waited. Time no longer mattered to them as lifetimes passed.

The night suddenly exploded back into darkness.

The tank's engine awoke with a belligerent roar. Slowly, it moved backwards into the night, away from the intersection, down a nameless street with faceless buildings, leaving the faceless, nameless boys in the center of the intersection to their predetermined fate.



## **Unbreakable**

Robert Cartagena a.k.a. yolo

This column appears not in the papers for the rich and famous, but before the eyes of the poor souls with burdens in stride of pace, pride, and prayer. For the subscribers to read, between these lines, behold my anger. The truth sinks skin deep into the depths of my soul like an anchor. My quarter century of fame in shackles and chains...years of shame, limiting my reach to the world beyond bars, gates and a forty-foot wall. Though very tall a small giant to my god. I often wonder which will open first—the gates to heaven, hell, or freedom? Are they exits or entrances? For each is locked and unlocked with the keys of judgment. I am who I was... until the day the world no longer fears my change or hesitates to embrace me as who I become. I've come to a place where I draw a line with drops of tears between the truth of my reality and trusting in fate, that intersects between rage and faith...oh these walls harden the hearts and comfort no one. So where is my release once I've breached the brink and feel faint and confused, my mind twisted, my soul broken, burned, battered, bruised, and bended. Am I surrounded by thousands who clone my image? Listening to the sound of my voice, under thoughts that are suspended with conviction above the law. To no avail for I cannot invoke my own constitution and so I am out of commission in these conditions. This unsteady rhythm, flowing like a river that goes in circles. And I am drifting on hope, like a weak wooden raft struggling to not be overcome by the waves of despair. I've seen it all along the paint of these walls that reflect the art of my dreams opposite these bars. There is no stage or podium just walls and boundaries...the circumference of my phobia.

## **Disappointment**

Sheldon Preston Johnson

A lingering effervescence  
some would call resentment.  
But, if you're complacent  
the no show appointment  
fails to express the statement  
that  
when you expect people  
to do what you would do  
you're setting yourself up  
for disappointment.

It seems that my efforts  
amount to two-thirds  
of wasted spoken words  
in an attempt to have my sentiment heard.  
A Sheppard leading a blind herd?  
Speeding toward a concrete curb  
with no airbags  
to protect shattered dreams.  
Just twisted metal  
and razor shards of glass.

Inspirations lost  
aspirations long past  
in a metaphorical black suit  
when our relationship passed  
blood and Roses and  
icicle tears at an imaginary mass.  
A cold hypocritical world where  
we discriminate against one's  
convicted social class  
for the sole purpose of abstinence  
deprived of intimate sustenance.  
Malnourished. On this emotional fast.

In Maslow's hierarchy of need  
the absence of love could  
potentially bleed  
one of all instinctual deed  
to reciprocate.  
A pressure cooked concoction  
flavored in a baste of hate.  
Leading to the constant

demented internal debate.  
The infinite promise to hold on  
be patient and wait?

A NEVERUARY—February  
second week wish.  
A Scrooge that lies dormant  
festering,  
within his own cracked petri dish.  
Once the time to lose  
all that is lost perish  
Can one truly cherish  
the merits of disappointment.

## **A Tear Gone AWOL**

Raymond VanClief

Forever has my valor been questioned.  
I'm a dismissed idea, broken and underdeveloped.  
The true idle play between departure and reanimation.  
A type of haze that clouds the judgment of a weary face.  
And so I cling to the weight that become too much to bear.

Imagine an anvil chiseled from the cynical remains of an unapologetic truth.  
From there the water pools...  
Slowly descending towards my mouth,  
Etched in a river of sorrow.  
Where the salt-like flavor leaves a bitter taste.  
A sojourn to heartbreak  
With an eruption so strong it makes the soul quake.

And so this is where I cascade...

I have been placed in this moment where I fell from.  
There was no where to go, so I continued to run.  
Never afforded a brand of loyalty till I created some.  
Still a false sense of security when there is none.  
An unexpected memory is my nemesis when it comes.  
So I take the painful road march to savor the freedom.

## **Wanting More**

Louis Kelly

We wanted more. We wanted more everything. We wanted more imagination, so we could think of more things to want. We wanted more time. We wanted to be timeless, fun, fearless, even a little crazy. We wanted help. Sometimes none came, sometimes no one knew. So what? We were the best anyway. The greatest in the eyes of us, but also our hardest critics. We wanted to be seen. Look at who we are! No, really who the hell do we think we are? We wanted more peace, or to be left alone. We comprised too much, we wanted to be more ourselves. We wanted more alone time, while the cycle played in our heads. The record of our memories, which held us to standards we could never achieve. Even if we could do it all again. Now, we want less. We want less responsibilities, less consequences for our actions. We want less problems, less hurt, less pain, tragedy, misfortune and heartache. We wanted out. We know all of the amounts now and that's enough. We know less is more sometimes. We know less is the wisdom to understand, that we have had all that we can handle. Less is understand that's all we got. Less is humbleness. We could never have it all. Now, we have more compassion to take less. Let's not be greedy. Let others have some, that's where the power lies, in knowing the limit. Not taking on more than you can before you reach yours. We've already had just enough anyway. You guys can keep the rest.

**Untitled....**

Sprinkled gatherings sprout  
cognitive connections while  
soulful stares are interrupted by  
Nature, Culture, and Place.  
Meanwhile, as the plot thickens, energy  
within unkept Dwellings surges  
into Solar Storms.... As the Art of Peace  
melds with Acts of Faith,  
sweets are the commodity for communion  
with the Woman who Watches over the World.  
But, as salient as we are, a fear to be free  
keeps us ajar, leaving one only to  
wonder - will Black Pearls  
ever nurture The Sweet Breathing  
of Plants....

Internal Affairs....

By: Khalib Gould

## **The Metal Detector at the Entrance of Auburn**

Emily Kling

It always beeped  
when I went through  
the metal detector,  
reminding me  
where I am.

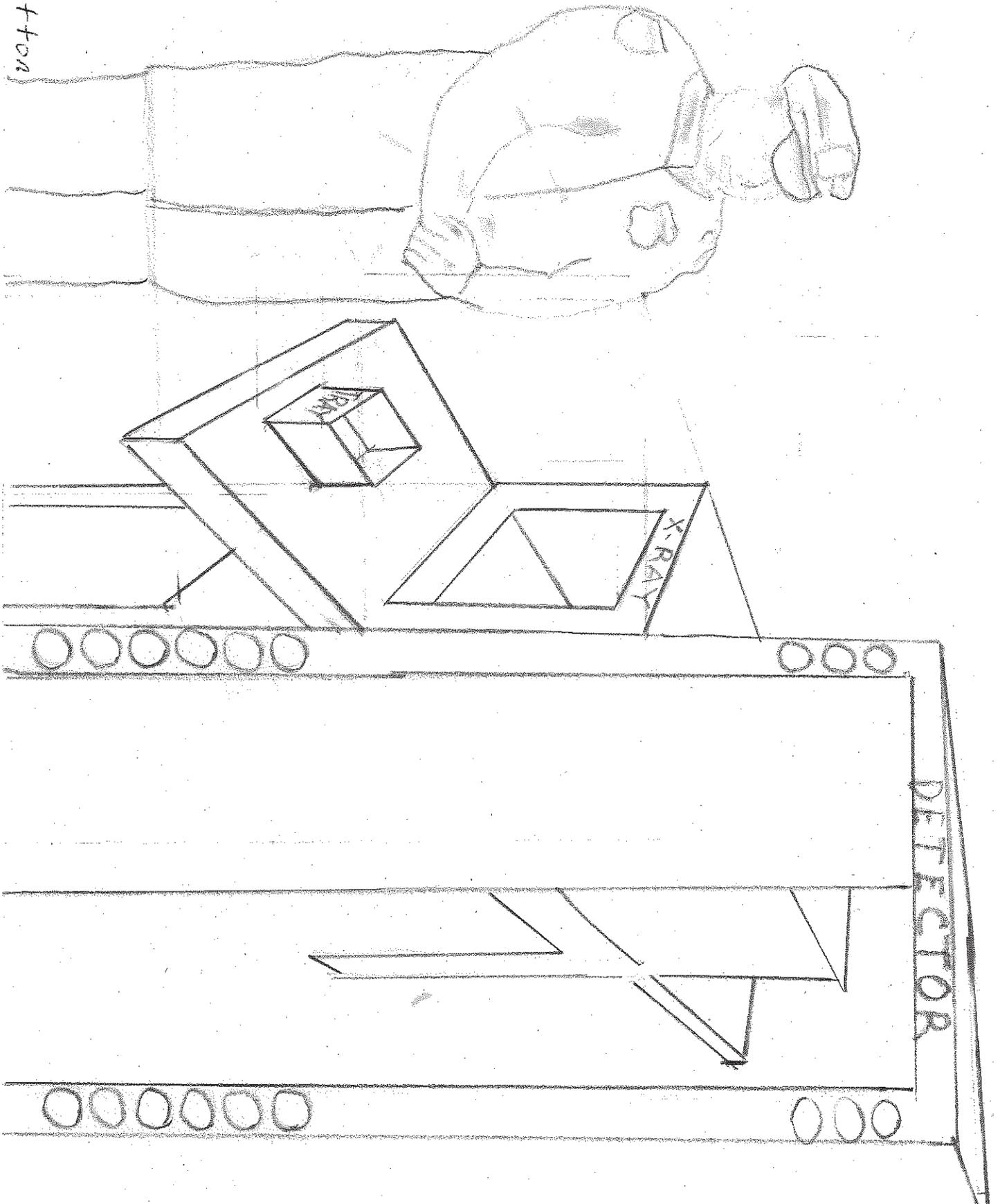
Which was easy  
to forget once  
inside the classroom.  
How can this be  
a prison?

With all of you  
laughing, learning  
often teasing.  
Such different men  
unconfined.

I lack the words,  
and I looked (I swear)  
to express what this,  
what all of you,  
mean to me.

Now longing to  
walk through those  
metal walls,  
one on my left,  
one on my right.  
beep, beep, beep.

By: Cotton



## **Within These Walls Haiku 2**

Kasim Callender

Walls are all I see  
Boundaries, ceilings, limits...  
We shall overcome

## **Walls: Physical and Psychological**

David Edwards

Arguably the oldest reference to the word “walls,” in a real book, is found in chapter 24 of the book of Job. In Hebrew the word is חָמַי, #7791 in the lexical dictionary of the strongest Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance, and is pronounced šûrâ Bishop Ussher, in his definitive chronology, dates the book of Job at circa 1780 B.C. In verse II of chapter 24 the word “walls” makes its singular appearance in the book. The context in which walls appears is: “the [walled] city...landmarks...the poor...needy...their children...want of a shelter...the murderer...thief...” and more. The impression is of threats, fears, and the desire for safety and protection that a walled city might provide. The setting of the book of Job some 3,800 years ago is Edom, (Job 1:1 CF Lam 4:21), in the land of Uz at the southern end of the Dead (Salt) Sea, and typologically prophetic of Israel in the coming tribulation period called “the time of Jacob’s trouble.” The walled city will then be at Petra, “selah.” (Selah in the scriptures is always significant of the 2<sup>nd</sup> advent of Jesus Christ in the context in which it appears.)

Traveling now to the east and a bit north through 15 centuries finds us in the midst of a 37 year period during which the wall of Gog was built. Much better known as the Great Wall of China, the wall of Gog is some 1,500 miles long averaging 22 ft in height, and 20 ft wide with 40 ft towers located every 100 yds. Substantially rebuilt under the Ming Dynasty: 1368-1644 A.D., the wall of Gog runs from the north east coast at Hopei to western Kansu. First built between 246 and 209 B.C. during the reign of emperor Shih Huang-Ti as a defense against the marauding Scythians of the steppes above China’s northern frontier, Ezekiel 38: 2-3 identifies Gog as the “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.” In 1909 the Scofield Board of Editors identified Meshech and Tubal as Moscow and Tobolsk in Russia as we know them today.

Moving again from the third century B.C. China-Russia border going north and west forward nearly 400 years we arrive in 2nd century A.D. Scotland where we find the Romans building two walls: Hadrian’s Wall circa 122 A.D., and the Antonine Wall circa 140 A.D. Hadrian’s Wall was a Roman defensive wall at the frontier of their occupation into Scotland. Built on the order of emperor Hadrian, this wall ran about 74 miles from the Tyne to the Solway. The frontier advanced northward and 18 years later the Antonine wall was built on the orders of emperor Antonine Pius. This wall crossed the most narrow part of Scotland running 40 miles from the Forth to the Clyde.

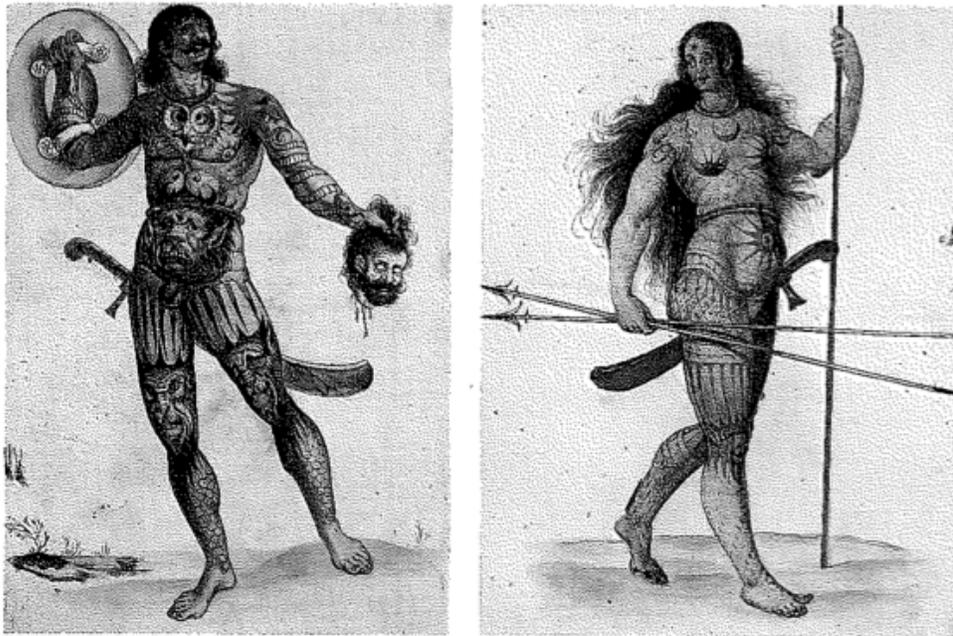
Both walls were built as defensive strategies; Iain Mac Ivor, former Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Historic Scotland, tells us that:

“The first military works to divide north from south Britain were made by the Romans, and for a long time there was a fanciful link between the famous wall from Tyne to the Solway and the border between Scotland and England. The Scots were to find a lasting source of national pride in the notion that, whereas the southern parts of Britannia had been taken over without too much difficulty by the mighty Roman army, their own ancestors had held out against the Roman Empire for centuries, and that this undaunted resistance forced the Romans to build one of the wonders of Europe to protect their

province of Britannia--Hadrian's Wall (Scotland: The Story of a Nation, Magnus Magnusson, 2000, pp 14-15)."

Antoninus Pius died in 161 and the wall bearing his name in Scotland was abandoned that same year. By 180 the Romans had pulled back to Hadrian's Wall, and by 214 the Romans had withdrawn from Scotland.

"...in 297, one of the most famous names of the north appears in the documentary record—the Picti, that war-like painted people who are still considered one of the great enigmas of early Scotland,...They are mentioned as playing a key part in the great 'Barbarian Conspiracy' which, through accident or design, attacked Roman Britannia simultaneously from all sides in 367; the Anglos and Saxons overwhelmed the coastal forts of the south and east, the Gaelic speaking Scoti from Ireland came sweeping in across the Irish Sea, and the Picti overran Hadrian's Wall from the north...and by 410 the last of the Roman army...had left Britain's shores. A century before they left, however, the Romans had given this enduring name to their main enemies in the north of Scotland: in the year 297 a Roman poet had referred to them as Picti ('painted ones'). The name stuck, and the 'Picts' became a genuine term for the many 'Caledonian' tribes who lived north of the Forth-Clyde line and who thwarted the imperial ambitions of the Romans at their ultimate frontier (Scotland: The Story of a Nation, Magnus Magnusson, 2000, pp 19-21)."



A male and female Pict imaginatively depicted as 'noble savages' by the Elizabethan explorer John White (c.1585), inspired by descriptions in classical sources but coloured by White's experience of Roanoke Indians he had seen on a visit to North America.

Traveling once more to the west and south, passing by another 1,400 years we arrive at the unappealing walls of 1810 Auburn Prison. From the early 1800s until "the fire" in the early

1930s, I'm told the walls were about half the current height. The walls, as we see them now, are approaching 100 years of age. I watched from where I work in the prison industry shops as the crew resurfaced the western most portion of the north wall over the course of this past semester. (The work was high quality and highly efficient; I'm not easily impressed, but these guys are good.)

Please forgive that my impetus is assuaged a bit here; it's difficult to be enthusiastic about these walls...however, there are two things I learned this semester that do merit mention concerning Auburn Prison. The first is that sometime during the week of June 14, 1919 Buffalo Bill Cody and the Wild West Show made an appearance in the yard of Auburn Prison. Our 19th Century American History teacher, Professor Reed, brought in a picture from that event.



On Tuesday, February 9, 2016 in the "Lake Life" section of Auburn's "The Citizen" newspaper there is an article (front page) with further related details concerning that event for the inquisitive reader.

The second "event" of interest is that Leon Czolgosz was executed here. Further, it is rumored that Czolgosz was buried in an unmarked grave; a pit of lime here on prison grounds Officer De Bord (a.k.a. "Tight Shirt") confirmed for me that it was, in fact, muriatic acid; commonly known as hydrochloric acid. The intent was to completely dissolve the body. Ah, the power of Google! Yes, it happened shortly after 1901, when Leon was executed for the assassination of President McKinley. I discovered this while looking up McKinley in preparation for a response paper for my history course. The rumor came from an "old timer" officer who heard it from another old timer...etc., to me it had that distinct whiff of truth; turns out to be so.

These physical walls certainly are arduous. With a proper definition of “wall” we’ll move on to the psychological walls.

WALL /wôl/ n. [ME, Fr. OE WEALL, Fr. L. VALLUM RAMPART, Fr. VALLUS STAKE, PALISADE] 1: a structure (as of stone or brick) intended for defense or security or for enclosing something 2: one of the upright enclosing parts of a building or room 3: the inside surfaces of a cavity or container (the ~ of a boiler) 4: something like a wall in appearance, function, or effect (a tariff ~) --walled /wôld/ adj. (The Merriam Webster Dictionary)

As I transition to less concrete walls, and think about the above definition in reference to biology, the inside surface, and the example of “boiler,” I find a bit of wry humor in considering my mother’s womb as a boiler of sorts. A similitude to the colloquial “bun in the oven”; a batch in the boiler seems somewhat more humorous.

Within the walls of St. Joseph’s Hospital in Syracuse, N.Y. on December 28, 1962, between 11:30 and midnight, my mother tells me that I was in a big hurry to exit the wall of her womb. Shortly thereafter a piece of paper—a vertical surface, a wall?—was produced with my mother’s fingers and my already big feet printed on it. I did not see “mama” that night, nor would I see her for over 50 years, but she kept that piece of paper and I now have it in my possession.

Please forgive the interlude. I was overcome with an inexpressible wall of emotions. Not all adoptions turn out well and there may be someone reading who would like to find his or her family. The legal wall of paper can be removed. It was a wall of fear that prevented me from trying to find my mother sooner. In my mind I had been rejected, though that was not the truth, and should I seek a second helping? Anger also conspired with my fear in causing this hesitancy.

Within the walls of the offices of the N.Y.S. Dept. of Health is a woman named Karen Foggia, to whom I am eternally grateful. Contact her if a “reunion registry” is applicable to you.

On 8 ½ x 11” and 8 ½ x 14” surfaces, walls of legalese were constructed to build a wall of separation between my mother and me. Mustering the courage, in spite of my fears, I constructed a little wall of words that removed a much larger wall. I met my mother inside the walls of the visiting room of Auburn Prison. Mom knows all the details of my criminal history; she got all the records and was devastated. But she came anyway. I pled guilty to murder, but she came. With guilt comes also shame, and my mother walked through a wall of shame so that she could touch her son. Seeing my mother subject herself to these walls, and the shame I inflicted upon her conveys to me another sense of remorse that I had not thought possible. As the days passed with mom, sad and painful walls became walls of joy for both of us; forgiveness changed the nature of these psychological walls.



Pam (Mama) and David (Son)

Physical walls can be seen primarily as both defensive and offensive at the same time. The Great Wall of China and Hadrian's Wall are both described as defensive, but were they not also offensive to those against whom they were built, being offensive? Psychological walls are much more difficult to define; they cover much more ground and encompass all aspects of what it is that defines humanity.

The essence then that I extrapolate of what walls are psychologically is that walls represent the entire spectrum of human thought, motive, intent, and emotion. Context determines whether they are beneficial or detrimental.

These next walls are walls I consider to be dung; the awful walls called religion. The case can be made that all the wars of history can be traced, ultimately, to these walls; from the tilling of Cain upon Able's skull to today's "War on Terror." Calling the walls of religion dung is no stretch; for the Apostle Paul refers to his religion prior to salvation as "dung" (Philippians 3: 1-14 attn. vs. 8). The law, (religion), as a means of acceptance with God, (salvation), was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way, (removed). So, naturally, the walls of religion are prolific in this dispensation of salvation by grace through faith as a free gift and not of works Ephesians 2: 8,9 CF. Titius 3:4-6. The walls of religion proliferate because they are antithetical to absolute truth. God ordained the sacrifice of the Lamb, Able obeyed, Cain brought a wall of religion: the fruits of his labours. Able was accepted in his obedience, Cain was not. So Cain further practiced his religion on his brother's cranium. This is the essence of the walls of religion, and today, as 6,000 years ago, it has not changed one iota. All religion/religions in this age are evil; that is putting it mildly. Religion, any religion, has NO part in salvation.

Walls of religion also deny they are religion; evolution is a religion of science fiction; it has no scientific foundation, but is a ridiculous religious faith. To the walls of evolutionary religious promulgation, within the walls of schools, can be traced the influence that has produced, in increasing numbers, those that can falsely justify rejection of moral standards. Accidental animals is the faith of evolution; animals are amoral. Prison cells are filled with people who practiced their faith in evolution, but most evolutionists don't practice what they religiously profess to believe and teach. In fact, to seek the cure of disease is antithetical to natural selection—duplicity. Evolution is a wall of religious hooey. Walls of religion, be they sacred or secular, no matter how they are concocted, contrived, or conjured, are the worst walls constructed in human history—they are criminal. The standard for acceptance by God is absolute perfection; this is acquired by imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone. “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (John 5:12) and it is that simple! All delivered in one syllable words.

My vehemence is the product of over 20 years of intensive study of all religions; not my faith only. There is a wall of religion that rests between my mother and me that her salvation alone can remove. Within the walls of religion a false sense of security, the easing of a defiled or seared conscience, and acceptance with those likewise deceived is found. Salvation is not only exclusive from religion, but it is diametrically in opposition: good versus evil respectively. Eternity without Mom gnaws at me; the walls of the throne room of God are my only solace in this. When one is truly saved he should understand that it is a person, not a religion, that saved him. St. Paul told it right; religion is dung.

It's 2016 or later, if this is in print, and another wall of time has passed. I face a wall this year that will decide my immediate future. This wall, I'm told, is a flat-screen on which I will see the parole board via Skype. Many walls have been built, and many walls are destroyed in preparation for this appearance. There is the sense in which my debt can never be paid, the sense in which my debt was paid for me, and the sense in which I have paid my debt. I have fulfilled my agreement with the people of the State of New York. In fact I have far exceeded it. Mom is getting older and has serious health issues; I would love to spend the remaining years with her and my sister. I see a wall of joy beyond these prison walls that I can hope to arrive at soon. I know I shouldn't be so hopeful, but I am. Mom “photo shopped” me into this picture; it expresses an aspiration I have to one day play the great hymns of the faith on the Great Highland Bagpipe. My pastor, James Lagoe, shares my hope and believes, as I do, that the Lord will bless such a ministry. I think the saints, young and old, will very much appreciate hearing such a “joyful noise” (Psalm 98:1-9).



With this submission to Writer's Bloc, the wall of my first semester in the Cornell Prison Education Program will be complete. Building this wall has truly been a great joy. A wall of joy only begins to describe the happiness, fulfillment, and sense of purposeful accomplishment I feel. At the end of the last class in those courses I felt a wall of sadness that they were completed.

Tomorrow I have the joy of enrolling in the next semester to build another wall; hopefully this wall will improve my constructing of these walls of words, and perhaps I'll be more philosophic than I already think myself to be. English and philosophy next.

These paper walls have so much potential for us. As a defense, an offense, or for safety, protection, and preservation we record our lives and hope that others will correctly discern the writing on the walls.

## **From Man to Superman—Then Back Again**

Raymond VanClief

From the moment I stood  
I became destined to fall  
Devalued in stature  
Then rose above it all.

I am the one you claim is excessive  
The one you taught to appropriate all  
I've known plenty of victims  
Considering, I was the first I saw.

So don't pity me  
This dream comes with a cost  
Paid ten-fold in blood  
From the moment of birth.

It is I who struck this deal  
To become the modern day Faust  
You may believe I am weak  
Because you can't recognize strong.

Then place your limitations  
I will break them all  
Go ahead and ostracize me  
You'll still heed my call.

I am your anti-hero  
The one you can't ignore  
One whose existence you denied  
When justice can't take no more.

I am no mere superman  
But a man with a super call  
In spite of dreams deferred  
I lived through it all.

By acknowledging my flaws  
While respecting yours  
As a collective life preserver  
In a fallible world.

To reclaim being human  
By dredging one's soul.

## **The Reality of the Garden**

Lucas Whaley

It could most properly be called a cathedral. Not one of those decaying medieval edifices, whose stout doors defiantly face the rising sun daring mendicants and fallen angels to do their worst. No, this places contained several citadels of holiness within an imposing curtain wall. Labyrinthine pathways crouched between stonework, which huddled together against all-pervading sin. The occasional rocky countenance of some gargoyle leered down at passing souls. It was a proper place of foreboding.

Somewhere within, he fled.

He ran as though it was his only chance of survival. He ran as though it mattered. He ran down a corridor, open to a garden on one side, its ceiling covered in unhealthy crimson splotches. Past narrow pillars he could see rose bushes in tightly ordered rows, their blossoms burst open like over-ripe fruit and wilting in the chill twilight. Amid the distance of storm-tousled skies he perceived spires, like spears, stabbing heavenward. Slicing. Piercing out from the wound to the well. All points lost to indistinctness. Laughter echoed around him like the swirling shadows cast by candlelight.

His pursuer was close now.

Every fleet step of foot denied him some small portion of the courage he would require to make his stand. Every length of ground gained was ground that would be lost later. Not slowly either, but all at once and suddenly. The shroud of fatigue fell over him, blinding him with blurriness and tripping him. Then, a short curve ended all further steps. He was cornered.

The hall had terminated into a depressing gazebo. A shortened pew gasped out from each of its five sides. Some obscure idol rose from the center to gaze outward at the garden. He stumbled down to the far railing, kneeling on the bench there. Beyond the marching bushes, the blank face of brickwork crept out unabated in all directions. Not a single egress presented itself. Flash of lightning and again the laughter. Infinitesimally closer.

He turned back towards the statue. Its face hung above him like the waning moon. Sculpted eyes gouged the space below it disdainfully. The nose bent over a lower jaw which had been shorn away. The debris of the defacement lay littered around the base. A monument to no one. He was out of time.

It had caught up with him at least.

The tendrils of Its presence unfurled around the open space. He watched it approach. Slender as a stiletto and sheathed in midnight robes, Its sallow skin seemed to ripple with each fluid footstep. Lengthy strides precise and deliberate. Straight hair, the colorlessness of newly formed specters, descended below skeletal shoulders. Emerging from cavernous sleeves, spidery fingers crawled from hands webbed with scars. It was a blade striking towards him from beyond the darkness. Its seemingly fragile vessel had traveled up from the belly of some forgotten beast. Tossed upon tides of unfathomable madness to reach this world's distant shores. The malignancy contained within It had claws reaching from eons long past to ages yet to come.

Sweat tore from him in torrents, his heart thundered through his head. The storm of mortal understanding. Eyes flash with chthonic momentousness, a flash polishing his mind with abrasive sands until it shines like stars against velvet skies. With a light not seen until long after its sources demise. The realization that the only redemption is found in the pulse of the struggle is no simple acceptance. You must simply accept it.

But acceptance does not necessitate surrender.

## **Acts of Kindness**

Leroy Lebron Taylor

Sirens ...

Handcuffs ...

Police Station ...

– Next –

Lawyers ...

Judges ...

Guilty as charged ...

– Then –

Sitting in county jail waiting ...

Waiting to be shipped off to State Prison.

SING SING?

ELMIRA??

ATTICA????

Visions of violence and oppression fueled my incessant worries about how my next Twenty-Two-Years-to-Life would be spent. Decades of television and movie drama (Oz, Shawshank Redemption, Faceoff, and countless others) had me wanting to Escape From Alcatraz before I ever got there.

All the stories from dudes in the county who'd already been "Up North" had me believing that I had to smash the first guy who gave me something for "free" upside his head with a can of Jack Mack in a sock.

I was prepared for the worst, while deep down hoping for the best.

After being received at the more modern Downstate Correctional Facility, I was sent to Auburn, the country's oldest operating prison, built in 1809. The term "big house" felt out of place here because of the cramped quarters and low ceilings of the cell block landings—personal space is non-existent because there's no space.

My first few minutes here led me to a C.O. that looked like the Marlboro Man with his red, weathered face and mustache, cigarette and all, except he didn't have the cowboy hat. He and I were alone on the landing. He gave me this intent stare obviously meant to intimidate. Out from his mouth blew a cloud of smoke before he asked, "Why are you here?" (loud and forceful)

"They just told me to come up here."

"No, what's your crime, rape, robbery? Why are you in my prison?"

"Murder in the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree."

"Yeah, well I ain't scared of you." (Takes another pull of cigarette) "Go to thirty-seven cell, don't stop on my gallery, and lock in when you get there. Understand!"

"Yeah."

"Then what are you waitin for? Go lock in and don't stop till you get to thirty-seven."

The gallery is narrow, less than four feet wide, meaning a guy can reach out a cell to grab and cut you with ease, or splash a pot of hot water right in your face. In my left hand was a foam tray holding some food, my right hand was free and closest to the row of cells. I was almost there,

about five cells away, when an arm reached out towards me. It was holding a can of orange soda?

“Take it,” said a young-looking, chubby-faced Spanish kid with curly hair.

“No, I’m good.” I yelled out loud and clear so everyone could hear me. I couldn’t believe that I was already being tested, not even five minutes in. Was that the guy I’d have to smash with the Jack Mack can?

Then just as I was about to step into thirty-seven cell, a voice from next door beckoned me. “Don’t lock in, there’s no mattress. Go tell the C.O. you need a mattress.”

“He told me to lock in,” I said to the voice.

The cell was so dark I couldn’t see a face, just a silhouette. “If you lock in you’ll be sleeping on that metal frame all night.”

I was stuck, not knowing what to do, then my heart jumped a few beats because the cell gate came to life with a loud clanging sound over and over. Clang, clang, clang it reverberated steel on metal and the C.O. was yelling and waving in the distance, I assumed he was telling me to lock in.

“Trust me bro’ go get the mattress.” He was so cool and calm.

I decide to trust the voice and march back down the gallery to a fuming officer.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?”

“I need a mattress.”

“There’s no mattress in there?”

“No.”

“Oh, good thing you came back or you would’ve had a rough night. Follow me.”

I not only got a mattress that night but also that orange soda, with a specific message that no strings were attached. Cuba, the young curly head, knew that I had no cup and wanted to show some courtesy. No one in county told me about the good guys that I’d find in prison.

No one ever told me that prison would be the place that I’d discover new things about myself that were always there, just buried deep within under layers of neighborhood “norms” (you know, the every day hustle). I don’t remember hearing stories about men personally redeeming parts of themselves by giving back to the community. For instance, a classroom full of men in prison crocheting hats, scarves, blankets, teddy bears, and all sorts of creative items that are donated to charitable organizations; hospitals, shelters, churches, and schools. Items that warm less-fortunate children’s heads, ears, necks, hands, and hearts from the cold world, when otherwise they would have to endure the weather without those colorful, insulating barriers.

As a part of that group of men, here in Auburn Correctional Facility, I found an amazing way to give back. You see, I learned how to crochet those hats and scarves which led to sweaters, belts, bracelets, miniature puppies (so cute!) – and blankets. There was this one very special blanket that landed on the lap of my then wife’s 88 year-old grandmother. Squares of bright pastel greens, yellows, and pinks all sewn together in a balanced symphony creating an inviting sight for sore eyes. It truly brightened any room it entered.

She did not know her only granddaughter was married to a black man, let alone a black man in prison. The family thought it best for her health to insulate her from any blood-pressure-raising information. Grandma did know, however, how much that blanket warmed her lap on those cool days on the front porch where she loved to rock back and forth watching the world pass by. The children racing by bundled up in their hats and scarves yelling down the block to friends. Grandma would refer to us as “them blacks”. “You know them blacks are crazy

Elizabeth” she would warn my wife out of genuine concern. Grandma was raised and still lived in a time that preceded the “integrated” world as we now know it.

That blanket warmed her weakened legs for five years: legs that carried her through almost a full century of U.S. history. The Great Depression, The New Deal, WWII, Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Segregation, The Civil Rights Era, Vietnam, “The War On Drugs,” Mass Incarceration, Desert Storm, 9/11, and The War On Terror.

One of Grandma’s most pressing concerns before she passed away was that she be buried with her blanket. She wanted it to continue keeping her warm in her final resting place. I was deeply touched and amazed to know the significance of what I had made in this cell. Even though she never knew who made that blanket, it did not change the fact that I was able to provide solace, thus conquering the walls and barriers that tried, but failed, to isolate Grandma from such acts of kindness.

If she knew that I made that blanket, I wonder, would it still have comforted her? I like to think that it would have and that she’s smiling right now.

## Untitled

Christopher Wallace

Tangled in a web of my own weaving, I find myself in dire need of assistance. But I'm unable to reach it because I've confined myself behind a wall of choices. Choices of the past dictate my miserable future. Unable to escape myself I revert into myself. Afraid to face the unknown I simply ignore it. Perhaps it's wiser to be blissfully ignorant than conscience of your own shortcomings. Maybe not. What do I know? For one I know I'm afraid to be alone. Afraid to be alone in this big world all by myself. Yet, I'm not allowed to show fear. I'm expected to be an inhuman human showing no emotion whatsoever. An impossible task, if you ask me. How can I be strong when I feel so weak? When life rains blow after blow upon me, I fall repeatedly under the assault. On my knees I view the world from a new perspective...one that I feel I'll become intimately familiar with before this is all over.

In blackness I nearly succumb under the pressure of my sorrows. Seeking a light I feel and bump my way through, hoping to spot that illusive light. I was always told that if you travel far enough you'll eventually see a light. That's what "they" say...Well, who the hell is "they"? I've yet to meet a person with that name, so why am I listening to them?... Listen to your heart something screams silently from within. What it is I do not know, but perhaps it's time I finally listened. Taking solace from the thought I take a deep breath...and nearly collapse from shock. Something new is assaulting me but it's not harmful. Light and sweet, light and sweet like flowers after rain. At first this new scent frightens me because all I've ever known was the smell of my own fear.

Hope slowly begins to spread its majestic wings within my soul for the first time in unspeakable years. The webs begins to quiver but for once it's not because of my struggling. Something else is causing the quivers, someone actually. Who is this someone responsible for what I'm currently experiencing? Looking up I see a face and it's one I know well. Haunting my day while commanding my nights, her face is beautiful to behold. Will she be the one to release me from this hell I've secluded myself in? I pray it is so because right now I'm drowning in misery, while attempting to stay afloat in despair. My life has no meaning without a meaning if you understand my meaning. These chains of mine I've worn for far too long. So long that I've forgotten what it feels like to be without them. I require a constant reminder of what it is to be human. Locked inside an inhumane setting one can only pray to escape from unscathed.

I realize now that the weight of the world no longer rests on my shoulders alone. Now it is spread equally between my shoulders and heart. Yet, I feel liberated in a way never before experienced. Am I still afraid? Always...but with this woman by my side my fears recede into the distance. Forever there but at bay for the time being. New to my life is this feeling, I find myself able to gather a new strength for what is surely to come. I want to say thank you for the things you do for me without conscience thought. Oh, indeed these chains of mine feel lighter, the walls are not as close as they once were and these webs less constrictive...It is not freedom but perhaps the first step along that long, hard road.

**Claribel**  
Jacob Leahy

I miss you  
An aching unlike any  
Looking forward  
To seeing your beautiful face  
Hearing your voice  
Or touching the thoughts  
You took the time to put on a page.

I love you  
So much more than any other  
I have or will ever know  
Looking forward  
To seeing your beautiful face  
Hearing our children play  
Or touching your hand  
As we watch the life created before our old age.

## Desert Rain

Hannah Mueller

There is a lizard sitting on one of the crumbling bricks, motionless underneath the setting desert sun, a fleck of shining green in his sights. He could shoot it, he thinks, should be able to hit it if he focused on willing down the tremor in his right hand, and he is tempted to do so simply to see if he can.

But it would be a wasted bullet, a wasted meal, all for the sake of stroking his pride, and besides: Tee hates it when he shoots the lizards.

“Leave them,” he once scolded El when he caught him throwing rocks at them, out of boredom, out of anger that could go nowhere, out of need for the satisfaction he only could get from seeing another being hurt. “They bring good luck.”

*You* bring good luck, El caught himself thinking, because if lizards were good fortune, twins were so even more – at least that’s what people used to say: one soul, two bodies, the legend went. But he would not say that out loud, for fear that they might finally come to their senses, that they would move on and leave him behind. So he nodded, and smiled in apology, and bent awkwardly to set down the rock, his leg burning, a pain he welcomed because he felt it was deserved.

He lowers his rifle.

Slowly, he makes his way closer, catching himself when he stumbles over a rock in the sand. He is sweating again, shirt clinging uncomfortably to his back, and his bad leg hurts where the stump chafes against the splintering wood of the makeshift prosthesis. He squints against the sharp, merciless light of the sun as he scans the ground, looking for anything dangerous, for anything useful, coming up empty on both accounts.

By the time he reaches the wall and sets his palm flat against the brick, the lizard has long disappeared into one of the cracks between the stones.

“There you are,” Tee says, appearing around the side of the wall. His long braid is slung over his shoulder, like a heavy snake curling around his neck, his skin tinged red with rusty desert dust.

“Water,” El says-asks-hopes, and isn’t surprised when Tee shakes his head. “No water,” he says, resigned.

“Not anything,” Ar adds as she steps up to them from the other side, dragging fingers through her close-cropped hair, scratching the skin in the back of her neck. “It’s just a wall.”

“Not just a wall,” Tee disagrees, and raises his hand. He’s holding a singed piece of parchment, like a page ripped from a notebook in haste, covered from top to bottom in tight scribbles from a stranger’s hand, faded-black lines spilling over the paper like vines growing over masonry.

“What is it?” Ar asks, and her brother traces the writing with one finger carefully, as if he is caressing a small bird.

“I don’t know,” he says thoughtfully. “It’s not in any language I’ve seen.”

“It’s useless, then,” El says, feeling irrational anger curl helplessly in his chest.

“It’s a sign that people lived here,” Tee protests, still clutching that damned piece of paper, and El wants to rip it from his hands. Instead, he clenches his hands into fists at his sides, the sharp edges of his cracked nails digging painfully into the flesh of his palms.

“And now they are gone,” he bites out. “Perhaps it’s a sign we should not be here either.”

“We are not going anywhere else tonight,” Ar sighs, the weary voice of reason. “The sun will be gone soon. Better set up camp before it gets dark.”

They settle in with the wall in their back, a protection against unwanted surprises, if nothing else. They eat, they drink, as much as they can allow themselves, because who knows how long the draught is going to last, how far this godforsaken desert stretches. There is not enough water to wash, and what would be the point: the red dust gets everywhere, sits under their finger nails, seeps into their pores, sticks to their scalps, unstoppable, persistent. When El sits to remove his wooden leg, a drizzle of sand rains to the ground. His skin is an angry, painful red where the grains have been chafing away at his leg all day, second by second, bit by bit.

“How bad is it?” Ar asks, and El looks away from the concern on her face.

“Worse than yesterday,” he finally says. “Better than tomorrow.”

Ar falls silent, then, merely curls up close to her brother, and El stretches out close to them both. Before the twins found him, he used to sleep alone, for long months, for longer years, just the unforgiving darkness around him and hard stone underneath his heart. He did not sleep much, back then.

But he will sleep tonight, the draining dreamless sleep of the exhausted. The desert grows cold at night, but when he reaches out, he can feel Ar’s coat brush against his fingers, and the wall at his back still radiates heat. Good for something, after all, that miserable heap of bricks.

So he sleeps, and then he doesn’t, blinks awake to the gloomy twilight of dawn. The sun starts climbing over the horizon, but it is still almost dark, and he realizes that the sky, bright whitish-blue only yesterday, is hidden behind a layer of grainy fog, oppressive and heavy to his eyes.

He rolls away from the sleeping twins, his stiff muscles painful when he moves. He straps the wooden leg on with hands that are only slightly shaking, leaves a smear of blood on the wood where a brittle finger nail has ripped all the way down to the bed.

He walks along the wall, drags a hand against the brick in passing, feels the stone dry and rough against his skin. When he gets to the end of the wall, he stops, looks back at the siblings, still fast asleep, then steps around the ruins and slowly starts heading back on the other side of the wall.

Hidden behind the crumbling brick wall, the twins are now out of sight, and as usual, their absence sparks a moment of doubt in his chest: that perhaps he will return to find them gone, that perhaps they were never there at all, that perhaps his mind conjured them up, two figments of his imagination to keep him company in the desolate, endless desert. That perhaps, and this might be the worst of all, that perhaps it doesn’t really matter. That perhaps what’s reality or dream has not mattered in a very long time.

Something white in the sand catches his eye. A bone, he thinks at first, the kind you find in the desert, whittled smooth and dull by the sand and the passing of time. But when he pokes it with the tip of his foot, there is no resistance, the material pliant and soft under his boot. It’s another piece of paper, perhaps from the same book as the one Tee was holding onto with such determination, and El can make out letters or signs, foreign, unrecognizable. Tee will want to see it, he knows, and the thought makes him want to step on it, use his boot to bury it more deeply, away from searching, hopeful eyes.

Instead, he kneels awkwardly, digs the scrap of paper out of the sand, shoves it into the pocket of his coat, to be surrendered later, a white flag of resignation. But when he sets his hands against the ground and attempts to push himself back to his feet, his bad leg twists underneath him and makes him fall back onto his knees. He curses, tries again, and fails. By the time he has shifted himself into a seat with his legs stretched out in front of him, his breathing is labored, his hands shaking.

He catches a movement from the corner of his eye. When he looks up, the lizard is staring down at him from its perch on the wall, frozen, unblinking. His fingers are itching, he can feel the butt of the rifle digging into his back. The lizard tilts its head. It is missing a piece of its tail, he sees, dragging behind a blunt-ended stub where it should carry an elegant curve of golden green.

He remembers, a long time ago, when he was still a boy, there was a cat, fat and rusty orange, like the color of desert dust. Once, he watched the cat chase a lizard, out of boredom maybe, or at least that's what it seemed like to him, a cruel game rather than necessity, but what does he know about the mind of a cat. The lizard survived, in the end, but it sacrificed a limb, left its twitching tail behind in the cat's claws, and escaped, imperfectly marred.

He shakes his head, and blinks. Perhaps we are not so different after all, he thinks, and leaves his rifle where it is. Clinging to the crumbling wall, the crippled lizard blinks back.

There is wetness on his cheek, and he wipes it away, angry at himself. Crying is a waste of water, a waste of strength. But another drop hits his face, his forehead, his chin, and he thinks that perhaps he is not crying after all, that perhaps instead someone somewhere is crying over him.

El tilts his face up to the sky just as it opens, raindrops bursting on his skin, rolling down his nose, wetting his hair, soaking him quickly down to the skin. He scoots backwards awkwardly, the ground now slick underneath his hands, until he feels hard stone against his back. He leans his head against the wall, feels the soil turn into mud under his palms, lets the rain wash the dust off his face, his hair, his neck.

He watches. And waits for the desert to bloom.

## **Mein Haus**

E. Paris Whitfield

Heute, mein perfektes Haus  
hat keine Wand  
frisch im freien  
offenes Fenster  
deshalb ich kann sehen  
eine freien Sonne  
freien Himmel  
Freiheit...  
Freiheit,  
mit meiner Mutter,  
meinen drei Brüdern, meinen vier Schwestern,  
mein fünf Neffen, meinen sechs Nichten,  
meinem Liebhaber...

\*English Translation:

## **My House**

E. Paris Whitfield

Today, my perfect house  
have no walls  
fresh/clean outdoors  
open windows  
so I can see  
a free sun  
free sky (Heaven)  
Freedom...  
Freedom,  
with my mother,  
my (3) brothers, my (4) sisters,  
my (5) nephews, my (6) nieces,  
my lover...

## **Walls**

Jake Meiseles

I grew up surrounded by walls. There was no way out. I was destined to live my entire life on the inside, trapped by the religious beliefs of my community. There was one path and one path only. I heard the stories about those people who were off the path. I knew the horrible life those people led. I knew the terrible end that would befall them.

I can still remember arriving each day. Seeing the iron gate and red brick walls in which I would be miserable. The basketball court, with its cracked pavement, where I would spend hours alone in my mind, taking shot after shot, hoping the ball would not roll down the hill and onto the highway. Or perhaps I hoped that I could be like the ball and just roll away.

Inside those walls was all that I was not but all that I was expected to be. But I did not want to be what was expected of me. I did not want my every move watched and my every action regulated. I did not want to be told by community leaders what to eat, what to read, whom I could talk to, what to wear, what to listen to, and, most importantly, what to think. Without even fully knowing what I was missing I envied those on the outside.

I saw the failure of others who tried to leave. I did not want to be like them but I could not remain behind the brick walls. I realized that education was my only real hope for escaping those walls without becoming lost like the others. I began heading up the stairs every day. The roof was far from my tormentors. Looking down from above those red brick walls, I felt almost liberated. I was going to give myself what I was denied. I would then take out my books and begin the long journey to educate myself. All the while, in the corner of my mind, a little voice would whisper those doubts, "Will I really be successful? Will I ever be able to escape? What will I become?"

\*\*\*

Writing this means I have escaped. This would never have been allowed in the old days. Those books truly did hold the key that allowed me to unlock that iron gate and leave those brick walls behind forever.

I am free.

## **Musing with Mythology (The Goddess of Learning)**

David Alleyne McKean Brander

She seals the sum of her sisters; before epochs, before ages  
Zeus and Mnemosyne kept secret; from learned, from sages

Her beauty draws forth worship; by lines, by verses  
Clio can tell all history; with blessings, with curses

She gives all elegance to form; in step, in time  
Terpsichore inspires the motions; the dancer, the mime

Her voice is vibrant glory; upon soul, upon ear  
Polyhymnia evokes singing; they feel, they hear

She is music completely; every note, every sharp  
Euterpe bestows instrument; the flute, the harp

Her words are boundless; for proverb, for sonnet  
Calliope and Erato; the epic, the poet

She emotes pure drama; such faces, such magic  
Thalia and Melpomene; one comic, one tragic

Her domain is the cosmos; each star, each cluster  
Urania makes note; this bright, this luster

She is named Lengua; the tongue, she is Language  
The pride of her parents; the sum of her sisters

### **Within These Walls (Part #1.5)**

A collaborative poem by  
Robert Cartagena, a.k.a. yolo; and,  
Kasiem Callender

Oh, say can you see  
The boundaries  
Surrounding me  
By the dawn's early light?

What so proudly we hailed  
To no avail  
At the twilights last gleaming...

Whose broad stripes and bright stars  
Became unclear  
From right here  
In this perilous fight

O'er the ramparts we looked from  
For meaning  
Scheme'en  
On a dream that we're dreaming  
And the rockets red glare  
Compared  
To our thousand yard stares  
Detonates  
Like bombs bursting in air

Giving living proof  
That your truth  
Isn't true

("You in the booth!")  
And the flag is still there

Oh say  
What difference does it make to me, deprived of liberty,  
If that star-spangled banner yet waves  
In the land of the free  
And the home of the brave,  
  
From within these walls?

THESE WALLS DON'T DEFINE US  
THEY CONFINE US  
AND EVERYBODY SEE  
THAT THE SYMBOL OF JUSTICE  
IS WEARING BLINDERS  
SO EVERYTHING IS NOT WHAT IT APPEARS  
BE MINDFUL  
LIKE PRIME GOLD  
THE HUMAN SPIRIT WON'T DECAY  
FROM TIME EXPOSED  
IN CONDITIONS LIKE THESE  
NEED AMNESTY  
ASK DOC WETHERBEE  
I AGREE  
DEFINITELY  
TO THE SOLUTIONS  
OF RETRIBUTION  
POLICE SHOOTING AND EXECUTIONS  
WRONGFUL CONVICTIONS  
LOOK LIKE  
THE KLU KLUX KLAN IS RECRUITING  
SO THE CLASS WAR  
WE GONE NEED A CLASS FOR  
PUNCH YOU IN YOUR GLASS JAW  
FOR NOT TELLING THE TRUTH  
ABOUT THESE BAD LAWS  
YOUR INTENTIONS IS EVIL  
YOU ONLY WANT TO TARGET CERTAIN PEOPLE  
BLACKS AND HISPANICS  
PLUS WOMEN PAY NEED TO BE EQUAL  
ITS SICK LIKE THE NEEDLES  
FOR THE DIESEL  
THAT GOT DISEASES FOR YOU  
LIKE CLEATS IN SOIL  
BIG BROTHER TRACKING YOU DOWN  
THE NEW WORLD ORDER  
LIKE DONALD TRUMP BE ON BORDERS  
OFFICIALS JUST WANT TO EXPLOIT US  
AVOID US  
AND TOY US  
AROUND LIKE COURT APPOINTED LAWYERS  
IN SMALL TOWNS LIKE FERGUSON  
MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENTS SPOILING  
SUPPOSE TO BE SERVANTS OF PEOPLE

BUT POLICE IS HURTING THEM  
RESURFACING VERMINS  
REMOVING THE DIRT LIKE DETERGENTS  
MY MERKING THEM  
INSURRECTION IS URGENT  
FOR URBAN MEN  
LIKE THE VIRGIN MARY KIN  
RESSURECTING YOU DERELICTS  
TO EMERGE AGAIN  
RISE UP  
THINK OUTSIDE OF THE BOX  
OF THE GOVERNMENT BRANCHES  
I'M AT THE TOP  
LIKE THE EYE THAT WATCH  
CHANCE IS  
THAT THE FOUNDATION IS GOING TO BE CHOPPED  
IF THE STANCES  
OF THE RACISM JUST DOESN'T STOP  
IT ENHANCES  
WHEN A BLACK PRESIDENT GET TO THE SPOT  
LIKE DANCERS  
WE GONE BE PARTYING WHEN IT POP  
GET YOUR HANDS UP  
FREEDOM IS AROUND THE CORNER  
I KNOW YOU GOT A QUARTER  
SO GET IN THE LAW LIBRARY FOR YOUR DAUGHTER  
RIGHTING MY WRONGS  
LIKE MIKE TYSON WITH CHARM  
FIGHTING INDICTMENTS THAT'S LONG  
LIKE PING-PONG  
ARM OF THE LAW IS STRONG  
BACK AND FORTH WITH GRIEVANCES  
TRYING TO FIND A WAY HOME  
NOT EVERYBODY BELIEVE IN THIS  
INNOCENCE LIKE A NEW BORN  
PURSUE ON  
REGARDLESS OF THE NAYSAYERS AND DOUBTERS  
YOU COWARDS  
CONFORM TO POWER  
AND FOLLOW SOCIAL NORMS SOUR  
NOT DOING NOTHING  
BUT WATCH THEY COMMUNITY GET DEVoured  
YOUTH HANGING OUT IN THE WEE HOURS  
TRUTH ABOUT SCHOOL TO BE HONEST  
A PRISON PIPELINE  
ON OUR WAY TO PRISON UNIVERSITY

LIKE SURGERY  
GET TO THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM  
EMERGENCY  
CERTAIN THE DOCS NOT QUALIFIED  
ITS JUST A CURTAIN PLEASE  
A COMPANY THAT NOBODY DON'T CARE ABOUT DIVERSITY  
LIKE SERPENTS BE  
SQUEEZING THE HEART AND LUNGS  
I'M STARVING TO LIVE  
LIKE BUMS BE STARVING FOR CRUMBS  
THEY PARDON THE ONES  
THAT GOT DRUG CRIMES  
FOR DOLLAR SIGNS  
MERIT TIME  
FOR VIOLENT OFFENDERS YOU WON'T FIND  
THIS PARADIGM  
IS OUT OF LINE  
LOOK AT THEY MINDS  
THEY LIKE ALBERT EINSTEINS  
GIVEN A CHANCE TO REFINE  
THROUGH CPEP CURRICULUM  
SHINE BRIGHT  
LIKE DIAMONDS MINED FROM AFRICA  
DELIVER THEM BACK TO  
SOCIETIES DIFFERENT SLUMS  
TO BUILD IT UP  
CIVIC CONSCIOUS  
LIKE POPE FRANCES  
LIVING IT UP  
VOLCANOES ERUPT  
COMBUSTION  
BECAUSE CORRUPTION  
ON THIS EARTH IS DISGUSTING  
THE REPURCUSSIONS  
IS SOMETHING  
WE NEED TO BE CONFRONTING  
ITS NOTHING  
BUT FAKE BOUNDARIES HOLDING US BACK  
THIS SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION  
LIKE A CONTRACT  
THAT I SIGNED  
AND DIDN'T READ THE FACTS

## **Walls of Conspiracies**

Tyreek Williams

As I stand in front of this building project,  
Disguised as this project building.  
I feel sort of like this test subject—  
Object of some cruel conspiracy.  
Now I know it's hard to hear me over  
The cries of ghetto children.  
Sirens blare they answer calls of  
Murders and drug dealings. I see the  
Youth attend juvenile detention...  
They call them schools for hire learning.  
Why doesn't anybody pay attention to these  
Walls that are burning...pay attention to these walls.  
Every month, Ms. Johnson collects her farewell check,  
Oh excuse me mean welfare check.  
With all due respect to the majority for  
Recognizing the minority struggle. And thanks  
To the overseers...I mean officers, for  
Protecting the urban community; the same ones  
Who told me that they couldn't wait until I turned 16—  
So they can send me to Rikers Island—smiling—  
Violent-racial profiling because of my skin.  
And thinking about It makes me sick or yet  
Just rather thirsty. So I drink until blurry visions  
Appear from looking up from this gurney.  
That all started from this journey to the nearest  
Liquor store, across the street from another liquor store,  
Around the corner from the marijuana spot, so  
Say 'no' to drugs I'm thinking not the message  
That I see clearly. I'm constantly confronted  
By the marijuana man; running from old Uncle Sam's  
Tax extortion scam. And he offers me a combination  
But I just can't concentrate, because  
It's like when they camp-concentrate, I just  
Can't contemplate exactly what  
It is I want to be. So you see I never had ADD  
Or some engineered learning disability. You  
Distorted my learning ability with your plantations—  
I mean Correctional Facilities. But who believes in  
This wall of conspiracies oh no certainly not me;  
I guess this is just the way things are and how they're  
Supposed to be—conspiracy theory.

**Warning !**  
Reggie Bell

I impart to you these words of wisdom not only to goad you but also to guide you towards awareness. It is my duty as an elder to caution you against moral corruption and pathos that breed ignorance. There are those who will castigate and condemn me for robbing you of your innocence but it is that very innocence on which influence preys. And it all begins with ‘harmless’ nursery rhymes that are a part of every child’s initiation into the folds of manipulation.

Old McDonald has a farm E I E I O  
and on his farm he has some cows E I E I O  
with a moo moo here and a moo moo there  
here a moo, there a moo, everywhere a moo moo  
Old McDonald has a farm E I E I O

McDonald is a Gaelic name. Mac- or Mc- literally means son or fellow: used to denote man. And Donald literally means ‘World Ruler.’ In reality, the harmless nursery rhyme is establishing that ‘man’ is the farmer who lords over the public, and people are, essentially, livestock feeding on that which the sower provides.

If you are finding this revelation a bit disheartening I offer you another perspective, which I must warn you is equally unsettling. Let us argue that Old McDonald is a fictional character is neither a leader nor provider for the people. In fact, let’s give him another identity, altogether.

For the sake of argument, our new representative is a shepherd and we are his flock. As you may be discovering though the names change the condition remains the same.

Whether we identify as cattle or sheep, we are being bred for psychological slaughter. We are, in essence, sacrificing our individualities, our freedoms, and any aspiration towards equality. Therefore, I urge you to wander far from the herd or flock and graze, instead, on that which nature provides. Do not waste your life following fantastical roads towards oblivion but rather plod your own path toward enlightenment, by believing nothing and questioning everything. Then someday you, too, will know freedoms from the restrictive diets on Old McDonald’s farm.

## **New Borders**

Maurice Cotton

In a book I was reading it is insinuated that equal people are being treated as immigrants because they are subjected to processes of border-patrol-custom-officers. I intend to discuss some ways of how people are treated as foreigners in their own country.

People are foreigners in their own country because they are treated as the “other.” This is evident from the writing by Jimmy Santiago Baca about immigration. He says, “At the gates we are given new papers” to belong (1).

For example, at border crossings proper identification-papers must be produced at the gate (1). The people in power want to distinguish themselves from the others. The identification process is supposed to serve as a protection against terrorism, but the process is blatant discrimination. The process is sometimes abused because people who are the same are subjected to searches that amount to molestations at the domestic prison-gates, courtroom-gates, on the street-corners or school-gates.

At the gates at least two purposes are served. Either to keep people out of society or to keep people in the society (2). Access into the society is granted if people have the proper identification. If people do not have the proper credentials, people are not released into society, as an offender serving time is denied access to liberty. The problem is people who are supposed to be granted access to the American Dream are being denied the dream. Where the process was limited to the borders between countries, the same process is being used to separate citizens from happiness, a student from school, or the wrongfully committed from liberty.

It will not be long before new papers will be required at the gate to board a domestic bound train (2). Identification is presently in use to board a domestic bound airplane. People cannot enter a public courtroom without going through a process similar to crossing a border because they must go through a metal detector or x-ray machine. The new papers were issued to Indians, Chinese, Jews, African-Americans, and Others who were alienated (2).

The identification process has become problematic. The side effects have alienated the people in power (2). There is either an internal or an external defect with the people issuing the papers. Police officers must be required to wear body cameras because they cannot be trusted to abide by the policy. Citizens are being mortally wounded on surveillance tapes.

There are justifications for new papers, new borders, weapons or other. Citizens cannot attend school, movies, churches or public gatherings without security measures such as being armed. There have been several massacres, while students and instructors were learning. Also, on more than one occasion, citizens have been executed while enjoying movies or praying.

So, it will not be long before new papers at gates and x-ray machines are required in order to enter society to belong.

## **Forbidden Love**

William R. Izzo

I have a secret, deep down inside,  
In my heart, and in my soul.  
I fantasize, I dream, and I abide,  
Knowing I may never reach my goal.

It's my secret that I hold dear,  
It's part of me, it's in my mind.  
To forever lose my secret is my fear,  
And holding on to it keeps me confined.

Cause I don't want others to judge,  
What my secret is, I will not share.  
So keeping my secret I will drudge,  
Cause reverberations of others I wish to spare.

I will hold my secret close to my heart,  
And pray for intervention from above,  
That this secret won't tear me apart,  
That I will not die from my

Forbidden Love!



## **Transgentrification**

Johanna Scarlet Diamond

I am a transgender person. To say I have it hard would be unfair to most but to say I have it easy would be unfair to me. And this leaves me somewhere in between, where neither life's hardships or life's ease keep me from acknowledging the terms and conditions [which I have left unsigned] of my life. In short, they outline my life socially, politically, in labor and in religion. I am not to go outside of the lines. I might offend someone else's way of life. They stipulate what I am and am not supposed to do; how I am and am not suppose to respond; and finally that I am to be okay with the place that I have been given outside of the circle of acceptance--I am seated next to Tolerance and Contempt; unable to see past Mockery.

This contract has not been written, or typed and printed, for two reasons: 1) Most of society has learned that it is easier to hate in secret—it turns the legalities of discrimination into a dismissive case of hurt feelings; 2) This same society has no intention of making their fears accessible for public viewing. Fear: another commonality that is found acceptable in its avoidance and suppression. Nevertheless, this contract is embedded into my life and threatens to take every minute, hour, day of my life, and in the end my identity.

These terms and conditions set against me are constantly changing due to my unwillingness to grasp the figurative pen that is poised and ready for me to sign my name on a dotted line. It is my unwillingness to sign over my identity that has led me to Transgentrification: the result of such unwillingness, which is the displacement of any location, status, position, relationship, etc. I have as a transgender person to accommodate a non-transgender person. Where I am is never where I am supposed to be; because who I am is never who I am supposed to be.

I know Transgentrification well because I will not submit to a transfiguration of self. I will not conform to society's expectation of what it means to be a man or a woman. There are those who acknowledge what it means to be transgender--that is simple, I have never been anyone else--but they don't know what it takes to stay transgender. And I am a transgender person.

## **Looking Glass**

E. Paris Whitfield

Little pieces of me,

Yearning to be placed together.

A million little stories of mine, many untold, some others yet to unfold, all craving to be woven into something worthwhile, better.

Myriads of thoughts swim around my mind like a pregnant fish too big for her prisoned glass bowl.

See me,

Travesties have.

Inequalities will,

Power won't.

Injustices still does.

See me, we are we.

Who am I becoming to survive ... What path am I walking through only to find fragmented answers, while striving to become whole?

Where will these shimmery shadows lead me ... Why continue to awaken from my dreams to be reminded of someone else's nightmare?

How do I breathe, if there isn't any air?

When will Nina Simone's truth allow the Sun's rays to find My Little Valley?

A million little pieces of me disassembled,

fearful I will be forgotten,

potentially threatened by the slightest winds to be scattered.

My voice is crackling, fragile.

See me.

**Within These Walls Haiku 3**

Kasiem Callender

Painful, confining  
Sometimes insurmountable  
The walls within us

## **Rentals**

Emily Jones

Today, a record number of customers complained about the bodies I gave them.

Since I started working here, there are usually three or four complaints per morning—bruises we didn't lighten as much as hoped for, extra skin we didn't remove—but today there were at least twelve.

Following company policy, I told the customers that the quality of their rental is guaranteed only so long as they follow our precise regimen of physical exercise, balanced with nutritional intake, up to a given period of time.

Some mental forms reluctantly acknowledged their failure to follow these Instructions, while others snatched the body, assumed their physical form, and stormed out.

My co-workers told me not to take it personally. It's only my job to amend each body as much as I can, based off what the mental form gives me.

I shouldn't be complaining. Overall, I do enjoy my job.

Every night, as they drift off to sleep, mental forms come into the shop with their rented physical form. Overnight, I work to repair the rental, building scar tissue to cover punctured skin, lengthening fingernails—general maintenance. In the morning, when the mental form arises, it comes to pick up its repaired rental.

The rentals usually last around 75 years, though sometimes more or sometimes less, depending on how well the mental form follows the Instructions.

And the mental forms are usually pleasant enough.

At the Drop-Off every night, the youngest ones speculate about how their bodies will develop, and at the morning Pick-Up, marvel over my incremental additions to their height or hair length or teeth. *They* don't seem to mind the extra skin I add to their bodies.

The slightly older ones are uncomfortable with my modifications, but not rude about them. Some encourage me to speed up my work, and others wish I would slow down, but at least they all seem to accept that my job is obligatory.

The even older ones are my favorites. They rarely express as much excitement as the youngest ones, but they also don't have the discomfort of the slightly older ones, and their interests are most aligned with my own, as a Body Renter. Striving to perfect their form, they allow me to produce my most masterful work, portraying the human physique at its prime. It's this work—of crafting and toning muscles, and developing the brain to its fullest—that I most enjoy.

These mental forms are also the ones that most frequently request a Dual Rental. That is, another mental form is growing inside them, and they need two bodies to encompass both them and their second mental form. Though these customers double my workload, their enthusiasm about the second rental usually compensates for it.

And then the complainers come in. Their gripes derive from the realization that, as their bodies age, they have to follow the Instructions extremely carefully, if they even want a chance of wearing the same body they wore before. They don't understand that their bodies have become frayed and unraveled over years of use, and that even though I work tirelessly, I simply can't restore them to the same level of quality as before.

The whiners aren't even the worst part of my job. Far worse are the ones who come in, lay their body on the counter, and tell me they don't want it back in the morning—mental forms who don't want to be customers anymore.

And then there are the ones who keep coming back until I have to tell them that I don't have a body to rent them anymore—that their rental has expired. Some accept this renunciation, but others crumple into despair and beg for me to extend it.

And, following company policy, I tell them that their rental was guaranteed only up to a given period of time.

## **Bedroom Walls**

Sophie Allen

I can hear my heartbeat echo off my bedroom walls at night:  
a low drum roll introducing the chorus  
that plays in my mind every time I try to sleep.  
Some nights it harmonizes all the lies I've told.  
On others it hums time falling through my fingers.  
I try to muffle the noise with memories  
and blankets and darkness but it only seems to get louder.

I'm trying this new thing where I write the songs down.  
Somehow the stanzas string together  
like bones hanging on a laundry line. Don't you like  
the way it sounds when they tap softly together in the wind,  
--lonely remains still chiming something kind of beautiful?

But I always tear up the poem I wrote last night,  
shaming words that took up space they do not deserve.  
My trembling fingers graze empty notebooks and frayed spines and  
I wonder whether courage can be learned.  
When sleep is a receding ocean and I can feel tomorrow behind my eyes,  
I try again to write.

I am a careless wordsmith stealing shop hours before the sun rises  
cramping sonnets into empty spaces  
plagiarizing words that I did not create  
bedroom walls crumble as I loosen mortar with my tongue  
and I hope that one night I can use the rubble to build a door.

i!

Anonymous

To deprive a man of education is to deprive a man of purpose, to deprive a man of purpose is to essentially deprive him of life.

Of course when one is expected not to live but to simply be, his existence is not his own.

He has no right to it if he cannot autonomously assume governance of that intrinsic quality inherent in all of nature.

The freedom which one is birthed with, that infinitesimal moment before it is appropriated or apprehended by those who have forfeited their own.

Yet I am but the culmination of every self that I have ever been since coming into being.

That immemorial period of pure existence is still a part of me, indelible residual of lost liberties buried deep within the crevices of my suppressed subconscious, obscured amongst a myriad of oppressive impressions.

I have not forgotten and yet I am forgetting who I am now, evidently I have been forgetful of who man is and what he is to become when he abandons intellect and the pursuit thereof in favor of ignorance and its insidiousness.

The manifestation of my existence is upon me at the moment, ominously darkening my future, foreboding as eternity itself. It had become transparent that I have been opinioned to die condemned to an interminable death in the cesspool of oblivion, my potential unrealized, undermined, unimportant, unpromising and unprotected.

By whatever mechanisms one chooses to forgo his humanity by emasculating that of another are insurmountable exemplars of evil.

The depravity one must embody to participate, whether knowingly, passively, or inadvertently is so inhuman one would presume it to be an anomaly, a rare outlier, a mutational malfunctioning of morality.

This moral compass exists only within the mind – its tangibility ever so transient as to seem nonexistent – and the mind exists only if it is determined to have utility.

This utility is arbitrarily and capriciously predetermined.

I am witnessing an atrophy of the mind endemic to the human race. A contagion whose infectious principles perniciously corrode every benevolent blessing bestowed onto man.

To remain is to capitulate to the indomitable, an act of acquiescence that would concomitantly transform me into a co-conspirator in the subversion of self.

If this is the fact of life I have been delegated to become well acclimated with, I wish to no longer participate in this phantasmagoria of freedom.

If I am to merely view my only opportunity for life in this realm from the audience accompanied by disenfranchised spectators, I reserve the privilege of exiting this panorama of parody on my own volition.

However to injudiciously attribute this malevolent ethos to the entirety of humanity is to disregard and destroy the valiant conduct of those who altruistically strive in the face of incessantly obtrusive oppression in order to reclaim the last independence of consciousness, thought, rationale, inquiry, cognition, and the highest lost orders of intelligence afforded to man. They who are imbued with that inexorable spirit of valor will unequivocally reverberate through space and time, traversing all maliciously manufactured paradigms.

To lift a man out of ignorance and allow him to exist unfettered and unmanacled by the collective contrivances of constriction and constraint that confound thought, is the sole function

of mankind pace those who seek to control the totality of my being; who I am, who I was, and who I am to become.

The universal gesture of martyrdom is subsumed within me, no matter how quixotic.

To die for the immortality of my existence ...

¡FELO DE SE!