

The Cartographer Electric,

the fugitive printsource of Binghamton University,
mapping exciting uses of language:

issue #1,

featuring the poetry of Cody Todd, Flo(rencia) Varela, Erik Leavitt, and

Derek Abdekalimi,

and a short story by Joel Davis,

and a music review by Steven Rybicki.

Dearest readers,

SO. We got sick of seeing our POD print counts in the computer labs going to waste. We're putting them to good use!

SO. We're excited by poetry readings. Anyone can walk in and who knows! Maybe they fall in love for a minute. The Cartographer Electric is the print equivalent of a poetry reading. We hope to put poetry where people might just walk by, pick it up, read it and who knows! Maybe they fall in love for a minute.

SO. It's an experiment, in part, trying to get poetry out there into the general subconscious. It's also an experiment in print form. We want the format of Cartographer Electric to change like language: sometimes a booklet, or flyer, or broadsheet.

NOW. Printing at the rate of inspiration on whatever paper we can find, we present **THE CARTOGRAPHER ELECTRIC!** We ask you to **SUBMIT!** Tell your friends! Tell your friends to **SUBMIT!** Submit your experiments, things you're not finished with, things you are finished with. Be uninhibited! Submit via e-mail: cartographelectric@gmail.com.

LASTLY. There is no lastly. Just **SUBMIT** damn it!

Self-conshusly,

Micah Towery,

founder of The Cartographer Electric,
speaking as the editorial WE.

P.S. Help us by donating your unused print counts! E-mail us if you're interested! Don't let them go to waste.



Cover art by Derek A.

Etc. by Cody Todd

Since it is a lifetime
speaking to me in fragmentary characters of light,
since it is a lifetime, where you're stifled by the woman
carrying her laundry as if it were a basket of heads
beneath a guillotine,
since it is three, and the morning looms, as you scrape
the ash from the cherry on this joint, illuminated
with all the hilarity of the cosmos,

since a poem can be thought of as a new example
of etcetera, etcetera,

perhaps it's best to begin, like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle did
every time: here lies a body of a woman on the floor.

Meanwhile, dawn lifts like the shrug of a god only in charge
of sweeping away the stars under the rug, and I am called
by the dead woman's mother, to be told that she blew

a back-door through her skull,

and the coroners say she had a belly, like a rock tumbler, filled
with aspirin, and far too many almost-liter bottles in the garbage,

maybe I am summoned to figure out why something like this
could have happened; can we pick your brain,

the way you sift your fingers through a bowl of nuts,
separating the garbage from the cashews,

until you dig deep enough in the dish, to see her face,

blue as a fish's pigment, her mouth gaping until it is filled
with etcetera, etcetera?

And who wouldn't like to go away
even with the promise of return? Children smash gnats
onto the butcher's smock of their palms, it isn't enough
that they were only drawn to the heat in their heads,
just coming and going, coming and going,
these bodies blessing bodies of water and stone.
Where was I? I remember:

your mouth presses to mine, and our tongues
fight like angry salamanders. Or like that fire-eater,
practicing in the cemetery along Interstate Ninety-four,
at dusk because the shadows of the headstones
force him to believe the graves have been exhumed.

Nobody vies for the dead anymore,
just those isolated few

beneath the sulfuric gape of night.

And since I always stay celled in night's quarters, my head
not whole as well, having endured far too many moments
of exuberating glee, coupled with one monotone, sad note
from a clarinet, a saxophone, a kazoo, everything
in the symphony we attended, with our minds,
rotisserie chickens, under the hot lamps of ecstasy pills...

As for the dead-girl's mother,

a lotus-eater as well (gin), and her father once went out

to rob a liquor store and returned as a sponge. I sing like Nero did
when the sacked cities burned to ash,

like a small rain in up-state New York that forces you
to rethink going out,

young, naïve, stupid, and beautiful thing, stay here.

Check this out, I knew this girl

who rolled around on a wood-floor,

on piles of thumb-tacks and broken glass

because her body was a coloring-book

for scars shaped like a pitch-fork, a snow-flake, her father's ghost...

Check this out, I am this guy who rolls around

on a set of train-tracks that stretch like a rubber-band;

I'm hoping, in the cycles of ground and sky that pass my eyes,
for a strength that doesn't pursue silence, but is composed of it.

Melted ice-cubes.

Coagulated love. The perpetuation of fire. Body,
not blood

zipped up with a hung toe-tag

and a mortician that cares enough to peel your gape into a smile

they'll say you, was you, is you,

as if the moments are stitched into a tapestry, they'll remember
etcetera, etcetera,

or nothing—a fingernail shaving you tore off with your teeth

in my bedroom all along.

Cody has left Binghamton for the greener pastures and warmer clime
of southern California. His first book is almost finished.

New anatomy by Florencia Varela

Our bones are bending again
like rubber bands twisted
from a childhood of plastic forts
into this fun house's mirror reflections.

They stretch like a braided neck
vessels straining the way down
the center, a piece of hollow land
burning inside a ribbed cave.

My legs spill down into lithe
concrete tiles, a chessboard
dry-swallowing its pieces.

Your eyes blink, origami lashes
close. Times slows
a halt, our fingers stop short

the body reflects twice off the mirror symmetry
tears itself from me, the sways a new way
of our hips

You are witness our self.
the th ird pers onofy our self.

Revised Fragments from Catullus

by Erik Leavitt
previously published in Spoon River Poetry Review

Catullus Revised: Fragment 139

Okay, so maybe I lied,
and swindled a few dollars here and there, and on occasion
slandered the gorging flatworms you call friends;

and still I can't muster an original statement
on the matter of you, my whorish Lesbia.
And even though you spread your legs to the world
like a mall's grand opening
and every priapic beast
west of the Mississippi knows the stink of your bed,
please come back.

Come back and I will forget
the internet photos and frothing packs of men,
pretend these were not barber shop tragedies
the codgers will echo for years to come.

And when they ask
what this poem means,
I'll tell them it's loneliness as an endangered species,
or a prowler slipping in the back door,
the hinges oiled just for the occasion.

Flo(rencia) is in fact an immigrant. There are many poems written about her and she enjoys tacos most in company of fellow poet friends. She will be graduating from Binghamton this year. She has published a chapbook by this same title. You should get a copy.

Catullus Revised: Fragment 144

Thursday: from across the bar
someone buys a cop a Chardonnay,
and the next day the trooper
who pulls me over
has got your lipstick on his collar.

All men, songs say, are wronged
by both women and the law,
but Lesbia, where in this equation
does your restraining order fit?

I know your lawyers say
my love is the hound who chews
his stitches open, and this...I guess...is
true:
the straight razor of your name
can split the finest hairs,
my simple tongue doesn't stand a chance.

Lesbia, this is the life
we'll lie to our children about;
where the gods might press
worthy Mr. So-and-so
to the silly putty sky
and he will leave the faded newsprint
of his constellation there, a mannequin
in the store front sky
wearing his favorite coat and slacks.
And his best girl will look on. And envy.

Erik is currently at Boise. He spends his Saturday nights revising his writing and contrary to what he might have you believe, he has never had a restraining order taken out against him. He also likes bacon and drinking with strangers.

Catullus Revised: Fragment 133

Lament, ten thousand laments;
hand out the arm bands
and half-mast all the flags;
let's have a moment of silence
for Muffin—my Lesbia's tea cup
poodle—

crushed beneath my book case;
Orcus has lobbed his tennis ball
and sent the little bastard
yapping down to hell.

And though more than once
he nipped apart my notebooks
and lassoed piss
across my favorite shoes, you asked
me
to hack deep into the jungles
of my heart and write an elegy
for your Snookie-wookems.

Instead I dig a trench behind
the flower bed and dump Snookie
alongside his breeding papers
and the blood smeared lexicon
that unabridged his spine.

But tomorrow I will scrounge the pet
stores
and buy you another indolent rat
with a bad haircut and an attitude
because love, Lesbia, is literate
in the campaigns of surrender,
a text book coaxing us
to desire the things we cannot stand,
and to try and write
where no words will go.

A Supermarket in California by Derek Abdekalmi

Allen, I was in your supermarket,
for I too was hungry at the time
when the werewolves were out

munching on little children, and I was
empty—
I walked into your public library
to look for a friend.

I searched through periodicals
only to find a Long Island MILF who wasn't
interweaving
through the traffic of illegal immigrant
gardeners.

And what are you doing in the Judaic studies
section
Tom Cruise?
You know it's not cool to read.

It's like seeing Paris Hilton
in the frozen food section of Walmart
eating Pillsbury right out of the cold
wrapper.

I saw Angelina Jolie, lonely and childless,
poking through the books on West Africa.
This was before you ever proclaimed

Free the wobblies!;
Praised your parents for letting you miss
shul;

Before anyone made love to another man.

I pushed down stacks of books
until I found the right image
I wanted to catalogue in my head.

It's 4AM and we're racing shopping
carts
into pyramid displays of canned water
chestnuts.
The supermarket's our kingdom;

No one knows what to do with us.
Allen it's getting late.
Do you have a ride home? because I'm
going by foot.

Do you have a place to stay?
or are you hitching a freight train
back home?

(I put your book on the return cart
and laugh about the amazing dream I
just had.)

We'll race around America later

(and maybe we could steal some
watermelons from a farm
or do a bank holdup and hide in an
abandoned roller rink),

but right now I have to go home and
sleep.

Before I go, I have one more thing to
ask:

What was America like
when McCarthy defecated on everybody
and you
were stuck in Seattle without an
umbrella?

Derek A. is, without dispute, one of the most creative people at Binghamton. Consequently, we have no idea what the hell he's talking about sometimes.

Six Eggs and Grace by Joel Davis

Previously printed in Blood Orange Review

I. Karl

I saw the eggs first. Summer and Lewie were like no where to be found, so I was definitely the first to see them. And I honestly didn't have a clue how they got on the table like that, just sitting there like a constellation caught mid-orbit in a photograph taken by some fancy NASA satellite. The pink Styrofoam container they belonged in was also absent. Not in the fridge. Not on the counter. Not in the garbage pail, even. It was like just plain gone, but them damn eggs sat there like they was waiting to catch a breeze and roll off onto the floor and end up like Lewie's dad when he jumped from that ledge: cracked and splatted. They had to clean Mr. Jones up with a sponge.

What'd they call it in that movie? *Cement poisoning? Deceleration trauma? It's not the fall that kills you; it's the sudden stop at the end.* Regardless, Summer said the photos of him all smashed like that ended up on a website until Mrs. Jones's attorney somehow got them removed.

Mr. Jones's fame made people give a holy crap about what he looked like with his insides on the outside. With his yolk all over the kitchen floor beneath that fancy hotel. His not-so-protective shell made into a puzzle with a thousand tiny pieces in a box with his omelette kit of a body on the cover. Honestly, like who really gives a damn what the kidneys and spleen of a dead washed-up actor look like? Half of sick, degenerate America apparently.

But these six eggs were like starting to freak me out a bit. Summer's always going ape-shit-crazy about Salmonella and raw chicken and cooking foods to the right temperature and all that Emril Lagasse boloney. So I doubted very much that like she had placed them there. Summer? The girl who'll only put the gallon of milk on the left side of the fridge three inches behind the Smuckers butterscotch ice cream topping so as not to upset the Feng Shui vibe in the room? Naa, she didn't put them there.

I stood close to the table now. Close enough to lean over the six eggs. Hmmm. One was cracked, one was smaller than the others. And two. Two were like brown. I'd never seen brown eggs before. They looked the color of a girl I dated in college, before I dropped out to learn TV/VCR repair. Now no one's got a VCR, and I lost the brown egg girl.

I definitely lost the brown girl.

I heard a noise somewhere else in the apartment, jumped with a start, and my hand inadvertently pushed one brown egg toward the edge of the honey-colored table. It rolled, almost in slow motion, and over the edge it went. I lunged toward the egg as it fell in what seemed like slow motion motion.

II. Summer

After Lewis's dad died, we all were all little different. Lewis's mom and sisters, too. All of us. The three of us, Karl, Lewis, and I were best friends. I had been dating Lewis for about a year when his sister Lana called to tell us that Lyle committed suicide. He hadn't worked in over a year. And he couldn't even get any B-movie gigs. So he went to the hotel where his first ever movie role was filmed in 1974, and jumped from the thirty-second floor, where he had the famous line that was even on *Jeopardy!* once. I used to misquote it, but Lewis has it tattooed on my brain now. It goes like this: "No, I don't know the meaning of life, but I do know I'm gonna make us some damn eggs then I'm gonna make love to you as if I'm dyin' tomorrow. 'Cause that's all that matters, Grace, is you and the goddamn eggs." Lewis has known it by heart, of course, since he was eight.

Karl always makes morbid jokes about a sponge, but it was really sad. And all the *LA Times* could muster was a business card sized article on how J. Lyle Jones had quote *plunged to his death. The coroner has ruled it a suicide. A gifted character actor, Jones was a staple in many 70s B-movies* end quote. Then they printed his

famous line. They put a 'g' on the end of dyin', and it got Lewis pretty upset. After the spot ran in the *Times*, Lewis would scream over and over, "It's dyin' tomorrow! It's NOT dyin' tomorrow! And it's 'cause NOT BE'cause, Jesus!"

Now six months later and Lewis can't get over it. His mother Greta finally got the horrible pictures off the internet. She just sits and watches *The Food Network* all day.

Which reminds me of the eggs. There were five eggs on the kitchen table. I think the brown one was supposed to be me. As if someone around Lewis and me has trouble with me being black and him being white. I tossed the brown one high and arcing in the air, right into the sink. Heard it splat an unusual splat, but couldn't see it. And then I thought about Lyle.

III. Lewis

Screw the *Times!* My father didn't succumb to that 70s film politics. That's why he didn't work. But he made some influential films. His films mattered. Man, even Vincent Schiavelli got an obit and a quarter page. Screw the *Times*, man!

My father's agent told me that the morning my father died he had gotten a job offer from some audition he had done two weeks before. Some B-film. The paycheck would've been decent.

I had been to the jewelers to find the perfect ring for Summer. I want her to be my wife. I should've asked her when my father was alive, so he could've been there. Oh well. I found the perfect ring. I don't remember the carats and all that stuff, but it just looked like her. I really want her to be my wife forever. The big German will be my best man, but he's gotta move out of the apartment. Who's gonna cook his eggs for him on Sunday mornings while we all watch *Fair The Nation?* He can come over I guess.

Those must've been his eggs on the table the other day when I got back from the jeweler. I walked in and saw them there. Figured he was doing something with them. Some recipe from that BAM! guy on TV. I took my shower. Couldn't stop thinking about my father and those internet pictures. I never should've looked. Jesus! I felt like

I was one of those eggs on the table, and I was starting to boil in water. Maybe get hard boiled for Easter. Just sit in the bottom of the pot, letting little bubbles seep out until my insides become solid and motionless. Then someone can come along and strip away my outsides and get to the real me. Maybe Summer can do that. No one pulled away my father's shell, and then it was too late. He was like Humpty Dumpty just sitting up there, an accident waiting to happen. It's the wall he was sitting on. It never should've been there in the first place.

(Long Pause.)

So when I got out of the shower I slammed the bathroom door. I suppose because of my father. I'm just upset things happened the way they did. I just didn't know things were that bad. And that damn *Times* article. Jesus!

I smoked a bit of grass then went to the pub for a beer. Summer was due home at seven.

That night after we made love and before the big German got home, I noticed only four eggs left on the table. I threw them in the trash. There's no way they were any good at that point.

That B-film role for my father that I mentioned? It was a chicken farmer. The role was to be a goddamn chicken farmer. Maybe he could've said to one of the chickens, "Cause that's all that matters, Grace, is you and the goddamn eggs."

IV. Lewis's sister, Lana (on the answering machine)

Hey, guys. My friend Adrianna, you know the one I told you about? She's incubating baby chicks and I dropped six off to you. I suppose they need to be kept warm. She wasn't home when I took them, but, anyway, they're on your kitchen table. They'll be chicks in time for Easter. Love you all. Bye.

V. Greta Marlene Jones (Lewis's mother)

(Watching *The Food Network*)

Ahhh...*Hungarian* paprika!

VI. J. Lyle Jones (Lewis's father)

(Archival footage) "No, I don't know the meaning of life, but I do know I'm gonna make us some damn eggs then I'm gonna make love to you as if I'm dyin' tomorrow. 'Cause that's all that matters, Grace, is you and the goddamn eggs."

Joel is a senior at Binghamton. He has two kids and he used to study engineering.

Sufjan's *Theology of the Body* by Steven Rybicki

I'd hate to add hollow accolades to Sufjan Stevens. Reading coverage of him and his corpus, I think it's fair to say that he's more exasperated by the glowing reviews of fair-weathered music critics than any of those cynical and ironic indie connoisseurs. But, with all due respect, fuck the feelings of Sufjan and the precious indie-press establishment because I was driving through Virginia's Pulaski County and for some reason it just makes sense to write about Sufjan's "Casimir Pulaski Day." And I promise not to write prosaic acclaim for *Illinois*(!). I'll vouch for "Casimir Pulaski Day" because it simply overwhelms me.

Like all good songwriters, Sufjan's not trying to convince me of the reality of "falling" or "sin" or "love." Instead, he invests "Casimir Pulaski Day" with particulars that exist for the characters of his sentimental teenage odyssey. The particulars of the song aren't surprising because, like all of Sufjan's best verses, the song is established around the human body. The boy, the girl, and her father are the three human characters. The girl is conjured as having "cancer of the bone." Cancer is, perhaps, a cliché (because that form of cancer, as we all know from *Magnolia*, is irresistibly

fatal). But giving Sufjan the benefit of the doubt, cancer is interesting, because it indicates that the girl's body has revolted against her. And this situation is not being processed in a clinical manner. Instead this self-destruction of the flesh is understood in physical, emotional, and spiritual terms. Our (us laypeople's) instincts process death similar to Sufjan's shell-shocked characters: the mind just tries to reflect and reconcile the sensations of the flesh.

The whole affair begins with our story's narrator, smitten with the girl, offering her artifacts that are emblematic of a wholesome life of a child. What is astonishing about the relationship between the two is how Sufjan conceives of the "innocence" of the characters. It seems in our American culture we like to comfort ourselves with the suggestion that children and teenagers are internally innocent until being defiled by external conditions. This innocence is defined in terms of an ignorance of the horrible segments of the world. This convention is flaunted in the song: as it happens in the "real world," the young are aware of the most profound darkness that threatens our existence: anxiety about death. Sufjan simply understands that children's innocence is the lack of first person experience to connect to that anxiety, not the lack of understanding that the anxiety exists.

The bodies of the boy and girl have uncovered mutual attraction. The song suggests that the boy and girl understand, on a rudimentary level, that love and death are tied to the body, and that the body is a mystery. These interactions of bodies are the facts that we convince ourselves are true because we feel our bodies long for others AND watch nature destroy life in

the same swift, prosaic, merciless manner it is birthed.

Like the body, this love is wrought with complications and it does not exist in pure and abstract terms. Rather, it exists in messy globs of contact between the primary parties. The boy sees the "fight pressed up against (her) shoulderblade" and senses the desire to kiss her, but also knows that the desire is entangled with complications. With more contact and the anxiety is not alleviated; it merely shifts to a more intense entanglement. They go from him almost touching her blouse to a heightened level of intimacy that makes her hysterical with fear. She's scared of her father finding out "what we did that night," but it cannot be underestimated how much their love has been permeated by the fear of alienation. The girl is wandering, preparing for her demise, and the boy is alone, shirt tucked in, shoes untied, crying in the bathroom.

The song is delicate with the impending grief that these characters must confront. The father is not the villain in this song. He's in the midst of a futile negotiation with an unnamed god to "prove that he was sorry." The boy and girl are engaged in their own fruitless negotiation, but they make specific pleas of God: "Tuesday night at the Bible study / We lift our hands and pray over your body." In the end, the boy is left with the body of his young love, because the result of the prayers was always constant: "nothing ever happens." She surrenders, the boy is left with her shell, and he is left to strain and attempt to desire/will life back into her: "I thought I saw you breathing."

The song ends with a stark statement about the paradox of spirituality, which is effective because of how it incorporates God's role in the ordeal. The narrator is convinced of "all the glory that the Lord has made" and "the glory when He took our place," but the

characters refuse to exempt God from the problem of evil, because God seems to be the fount of all the anxiety that the boy, girl, and father have experienced: the "complications" that arise when they are able to see "His face."

God has a crucial role in the song because it's His providence, or lack thereof, which has created the girl's body and yet enabled it to engage in rebellion. He is at once the astounding architect and the unrepentant monster. And given the mystery of our body and how it interacts with other bodies, how could it be any other way? The song ends with Sufjan's boldest statement of ambiguity regarding the divine: "All the glory when He took our place/But He took my shoulders and shook my face/And He takes and He takes and He takes." God has created the wonder of existence and has provided the form and content of salvation to humans, but it's also painful to believe in God because there are those moments of extreme discomfort that are His fault (He took my shoulders and shook my face... and He takes and takes and takes).

Sufjan's song is profound because it is conceived, and navigates, around the frail bodies of his human characters and it deftly broaches the topic of our undeniable knowledge of God's harsh paradox: He takes and takes and takes, but at the same time, nothing ever happens.

Steven is completing his Master's in Philosophy at Texas Tech, and working on a book about terrorism. He is a co-founder and former moderator of the Alexis de Tocqueville Society (a separate entity from the one associated with the United Way). Atsociety.blogspot.com