

PENGUIN REVIEW

stories, pictures, plays, and poems

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Dear Reader,

The cliché “a picture is worth a thousand words” is one that many of us can say we have heard all too often. I am not one to criticize the value of visual art nor place it above or below any other art form. However, I am awfully biased when it comes to written art. Unlike any other species, humans have not only language, but the ability to manipulate it into something that can fill a person with overwhelming joy or even move them to tears. It is amazing what our words can do, and I am a believer that one word is worth a million more.

My first year as editor for *The Penguin Review* has been a great one. Thank you so much to my staff and friends who believed in me and encouraged me to keep on working and not give up when times got difficult. This issue of *The Penguin Review* may be lacking in pictures, but I can confidently say that the thoughtfully and beautifully written words found within it speak for themselves. Enjoy!

Emma Hamilton
Editor, *The Penguin Review*

Finite Infinity

I am a soul-machine, a fantasy factory.
As are you, and you, and you.
When I engage my think gear,
I ponder people, places, and things;
Strike hot iron synapses with hammers of thought.
And rise eternities from pools of day-walking dreams.
Randomly will a frame, brain, and body to live;
Casually conjure races of men to entertain.
Now and again, mold a sweet feminine figure to star in a role.
A microcosm of me, I built her real as can be;
Her man-made-woman mind has man-made-woman musings.
So, some of her sighs manufacture a face.
Inevitable.
A masculine marble forms from her fickle fancy,
With man-made-woman-made-man-mind complete.
Then, man-made-woman-made-man thoughts repeat.
Go to line 3.
Here I die.
And the man-made-woman lies down too.
And the man-made-woman-made-man expires three.
And all of my universes go with me.
And all of her galaxies cease to be.
And all of his realities fall, like he.
And thee, and thee, and thee.
When I end, I kill infinity.

The Forgotten Child

Her knives dance on their toes over
the surface of amber oil. Her forked tongue laps it up
like a tooth-sharp ballad.
With the poison still on her breath,
she's crowned
and married to a boy who'll die
with the first taste of her blighted skin.
She was the youngest.
The middle child bowed beneath her black boot
and the metallic tang of venomous arrows.
The eldest's blood was slowed to a sludge.
It sits pretty in a belladonna-rimmed goblet.
Who's the chosen queen now?
She earned her salt.
She was made for the dark throne.

Untitled--After Peter Meinke

This is a poem to my mind
whom I have found myself trapped in for years
whose black-tar gnarled claws encased me nightly
shaking me violently
refusing to let me go anywhere but a colorless sea of
suffocating pressure
finally releasing through my eyes
puffy and red
tear-soaked
scratchy throat
I just couldn't swim
I foolishly allowed you to glue the mask to my face
because when I had no place, you drew me in and
because nobody else knew me like you
beautiful, alone, desolate peace
Now I hear, though, the malicious temptations you sing in my
ears
I see the bruises you leave at night
and how nobody deserves to be dragged down
or feel the need to battle against themselves
Nobody's beauty should be
stifled, mutilated, killed
So I write this poem, this plead for farewell
for hope, for my mind, in belief it may become buoyant

Socks Patterned with Ghosts

To peg my sister's gift of ghostly socks
as a true act of kindness would be wrong.
Alas, this is how I chose to view such
an unorthodox event. I've always
love her just as much as our mother does.
My sister is unique. She rarely leaves
her cave, her room, her safety from the world.
But how I would love to watch her explore.
The birds are tossed from the warmth of their nest
at quite a young age, but still they do fly.
My sister, so promising, spread your wings.
Seriously, why don't you have a job?

Truth, the Abstract Puck

Truth,
the mischievous sprite,
dances around my head, dangerously close to my
mouth
When you capture him, he demands to be freed,
but you hold tight
in case he creates a mess on his way out
From his cage, he calls upon anxiety and nausea to harass you in your
sleep
His haunting, high-pitched whine of a song sticking to you until you
part ways
and clean up the destruction he left behind
The calm that surrounds
you after is always worth
It

The Philosophy of Earthworms

How was I supposed to guess that things would turn so sour? My favorite specimen. It began slowly, at first. Just a ripple, and just barely a thought. If somebody decided to look back at our childhood, I doubt that they would be able to predict what was to come. Or maybe they could sense the toxicity from miles into our past, but for now, let me tell you how much it made me smile to see you dancing in the rain today.

I love knowing that the smell of the worms and dew is one of your favorites, but that it broke your heart knowing how many of them drowned in the puddles. You always danced towards where I waited, through the sloppy puddles that lined your father's haphazardly thin driveway, but when you saw the worms your eyes stopped smiling. I watched you pinch the bridge of your nose, your fingers seemingly pulling your brows with them, before looking at me and sighing.

"You know what?"

"Wha—"

"Alchemy," you announced.

"Excuse me?"

"It's like God, you know? He uses equal exchange. That's what I think, at least," you would say, giving a little shrug as if this was suddenly all very unimportant to you. You were always very spiritual and would seasonally delve into the realm of religious as well. "He gives us the rain so we can live, then takes away the worms that were all done being worms."

Your mind was always so flighty but drawn to the idea of tranquility; you were the only contradiction that seemed to make sense to me. It aggravated me to my core that somebody could be so naturally charming, but I love you despite it. It was never a secret, even if we both acted like it was.

Even when we were children, I loved you. I loved you when you would splash through puddles, gathering all the suffering worms and returning them to safe patches of grass along the sidewalk. I loved you when you would lay in the summertime grass with me, dissecting grasshoppers, soon replaced by lightening bugs when the moon replaced the sun. I even loved when the day's play would darken your short flame-orange ringlets with sweat; your heart-shaped face kept you seeming so delicate.

"You sure space out and stare a whole lot, Charlie." I remembering

you giggling at me, anchoring me back into reality. My sweet sweet spaceYou grew to continue trying to save people, and I suppose I am growing to dissect them. Maybe you were right about the alchemy.

It was not the balance of life on Earth I was pondering when you would start coming home from classes later each day, I was questioning what I had I missed, maybe even who I had missed. As your best friend, you think you would spend more time talking to me than whoever has been leading you away after class. This pondering didn't quite calm my craving, in fact, it stoked its flames. It was too much to handle thinking about. I needed to avoid missing another second, so I could always see your gap-toothed smile, and every other curve I wish I could trace and unravel. Sometimes it would be easier if you knew what was on my mind, then you could at least try to escape it all, but don't you already? Can't you feel what I'm feeling? You have to know. You must feel it too. If not, then feeling such things are a burden, interrupting my life, and there is work I could be doing instead of waiting for your eyes flutter closed while you attempt to do yours.

The most concerning part of it all is that I have been watching you, and I'm only partially sorry to say it. If I stopped then I wouldn't know anything else about your life outside of us. You've been leaving me out. You've been forgetting the worms. But you surely have not forgotten your campus, your classes. Now all those classmates and homework are beginning to consume your life, just like this sickness is beginning to consume me.

"Char, are you in there? You have to come into the daylight sometime or you're going to turn into one of those creepy pink and white lizards that live in underground cages. Yanno, like the ones we used to watch on the Discovery station?" you rambled the muffled speech through the fogging glass of my window. You still insisted on thudding your clammy palms against my windows, hoping I would hear you, instead of using the doorbell

like any grown person would.

My fists balled around increasingly damp Tootsie Roll wrappers, treating them as I would a foam ball, when I walked you from our quiet street to the library. You refused to drive your beaten, black Jetta and I just never seemed to have anywhere to be, so of course I would accompany you anywhere you were willing to invite me.

“Cars are dangerous,” you shrugged so often that I knew to expect your nonchalance. “You can crash into other stuff, people can crash into you, people can hide underneath them or inside of them—you know, to kill you or rape you or some crazy shit like that,” but for some reason, you found walking at all hours to be a more understandable choice of transportation. You only used your car to travel fairly long distances, like the twenty minutes it took you to get to your campus. The only difference is that I’m the one walking with you, leaving the car as the obviously safer route. I’m not tempting-and-a-half inches away from you in your car. This is when the clearest memory of my fantasies began to take shape.

I know which deck you park in, the one on the farthest end of campus, almost a cliché how isolated you make yourself, despite your irrational fears. You were right, it is the perfect time for ambush. I can almost see the instant chill and drop of cool sweat at the small of your back. You are not as brave as you want to be; your hand only trembled towards the door after your squinted gaze darts all around. My hand, though, does not tremble. It is steady. The moment strikes and so do I. A mutilated, gargled howl sails from your throat. The speed of your sliced Achilles tendon darting up your calf was like a taught red ribbon, cut by the mayor’s scissors.

My mind shuttered on and off with scenarios, always grotesque, always alluring.

Things began to get more dangerous. The nights became longer outside of your bedroom window, and I am not quite sure how you never seemed to notice my eyes in the night or the crunch of my boots in your mulch, but there were a lot of things you never seemed to notice anyway. Noticing was not your strongest trait.

Some nights, I could feel my eyes glaze over, no longer really watching you chew your lips or read a book. When they glazed, I went from wishing I were inside, holding you close and kissing your face to wanting to get inside so I may get the chance to hold you tightly and sever the spots where your eyelids connect to your brow bone. It would be done delicately.

Like a surgeon, I would lay you down and begin my steady work. A familiar cross-shape etched in slowly oozing lines of blood, quickening to a pour, overflowing. You were always overflowing, just not usually with blood like this. I step back to admire the work I have begun before diving in to my most horrific and bloody type of wet dream. I begin to remove things. Long things, coiled around my wrist as I pull them out. Hard things, that block some of my more important targets. Terrified things, that roll in the back of your head before you leave this world. Now tell me, is God still real? Could he decide your fate like I did?

I stopped finding myself able to walk with you without feeling like somebody crushed Adderall in my coffee. My heart was jittery and throbbing inside my chest. I felt suddenly sweaty and like my lungs sat inside my larynx whenever I heard your voice. My smiles became weaker, easily caught slipping into a tight line. I am really becoming the killer now, it's not just my dreams anymore.

Everybody catches a horror scene unfolding in their mind at some time in their life. We all have fleeting moments of insanity or purely dissociated thoughts, but this was different. I knew that now. I felt like one of those serial killer documentaries that shallow teenagers fingered each other to. Except, I am mighty and I know. There is nothing serial about my needs. They are strictly for you. Though I could look at any other member of society and take them or leave them, you have always been my priority.

Sometimes, when we were small, I would find worms in flowerbeds after the morning rain. I would gather them and, purposely, lay them on sidewalks and along the road. I knew you would find them and save them, and the ones you could not save were allowed to me. You gave me these worms and allowed me to slice them or turn them inside out. Is that the

alchemy again?

I reaped what I sowed when it came to the worms. Now, here I am again, waiting to sow you after years of lifting you up.

It is time, at last, to explain myself to you. You must be told. I must tell it.

“By the time you read this letter, you will know what I have decided on. But I needed to let it out and finally free my mind. The problem is, I have a craving. A strange type of lust, almost a thirst. I want you, but not in the ways I had always dreamed of before. We are different now, a mutation of what we once were. Where our relationship once blossomed, now gnarls with weeds and thick throngs of thorns instead of petals. So what it is that you need to know... I want to feel the blade dancing against your skin, splitting each thread of silk. I want to rewrite my lovesong in crimson. I’ve been watching in such a sickening way. I don’t want to give in, I promise. The scariest thing about it is that ... I might. There is only one other option, in my opinion. I either remove you or myself. What I’m trying my absolute best to tell you is, one of us has to die. By the time you reach the final words of this letter, you will very clearly know which path I have stumbled down. Either way, I will be waiting for you. I still want to say that I am sorry, and it surprises me that I’m not sure exactly what it is I am sorry for.

Farewell,
Charlie”

Forged

He is steel

like train rails that exile him
to a frigid wasteland of red—
where his bitter tears ice over his face
and sit amongst crosses of wood and stone—
a monument of mourning.

He is steel

like toes of the soldier who stumbles
away from him with shattered teeth—
iron taste of blood mingling with vodka,
forming a poison tongue that delivers two fates—
banishment or death.

He is steel

like the unsheathed blade he grips
as he prepares to gut the roving guard—
who looms over a mile of rusted red barbed wire
that he claws under with only the moonlight to guide—
him and the blade.

He is steel

like the ship's hull that slices through
crashing violet waters and lifts a curtain—
revealing a distant land of red
and white and blue; revealing a home—
a town of hope and grit and a foundation forged

by steel.

Erosion

I watch a stone crumble before my eyes, and years
of weathering have exposed it as merely a man.
Every time the thought appears, my stomach churns
as if I had spooned cayenne pepper down my gullet.
So I choose to see a stone. A stone, too unyielding to fracture
under the impact of twisted metal or radiation blasts.
A stone whose obstinance sustained eighty-eight
years of life simply to spite Death's cold hand.
I decide that eyes now glassed over by delusion
were simply iced blue from Siberian winds.
It takes the tears of confusion dripping down
his cheeks for me to recognize a stark reality.
He cannot handle being a stone any
longer, and I cannot handle the erosion.

Photographer

Battery Life begs for mercy.
Poor old Film is on his last leg,
but Eye is guilty for lusting.
For Memory.
For Moment.

The Man in the Santa Claus Suit

The transformation begins as soon as he opens the box. He's humming "Jingle, Jingle, Jingle," from "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" as he works, gently—almost reverently—removing the suit piece by piece and laying it out on the bed.

"I've been doing this for almost forty years," he says. "And it never gets old."

Veteran community theatre actor Chuck Wilcox has appeared in over a hundred plays, so many that he cannot remember them all. His naturally twinkling blue eyes and white beard make him a natural for the role he revels in: Santa Claus.

He slips the padding on over a sleeveless T-shirt, secures it in the back, and dons another red T-shirt over it. It reads: "#Jolly." He pulls on the bright red trousers, snaps the suspenders into place and grins.

"I used to wear plain red suspenders, but my fiancée bought these candy cane-striped ones for me," he says. "I like them. They're more Christmassy. Can you tell that I love Christmas?" He winks.

Chuck's first "performance" as Santa was for an audience of one, his friend's son. He continued to make personal appearance for friends and family members, including his own grandchildren, and local community theatres. Chuck is the assistant director and drama coach for the Girard High School drama club and a former assistant director at the Youngstown Playhouse Children's Theatre.

These days, he makes personal appearances at schools, youth events, community events and private holiday parties. At age 60, he doesn't need a fake white beard anymore. He certainly needs the padding, though; he's kept his sturdy and muscular high-school wrestler's physique.

After graduating from Ursuline, he worked in a machine shop and then as a transportation coordinator at St. Elizabeth's hospital. While he's still in good shape, he admits he's grateful that he is still able to pick children up and that he learned at an early age how to do so without injuring himself.

He finishes the song with a flourish: "I'm the king of Jing-a-Ling! Ho-ho!"

Donning the jacket and hat and fastening the thick black belt, hefts

his bag over his shoulder and grabs a leather strap studded with jingle bells.

“I tell the children that these used to be Rudolph’s bells when he was a baby reindeer,” he says. “They all want to give them a jingle.”

Tonight, he’s appearing at a youth group event for preschoolers and their families.

“The children always have lots of questions, so you have to be ready,” he says. “They want to know what Mrs. Claus does, they want to know about the reindeer—these days, a lot of them have the Elf on a Shelf, and they all want to know if I know their elf.”

And of course, they tell him what they want for Christmas. Most of them want toys. Chuck has watched toy trends come and go over the past three decades.

“I have to keep up on the latest toys,” Chuck says. “So, I visit the toy stores and I see what’s new. I go to the video arcade and see what the kids are into. It keeps me young.”

Sometimes, they want something that Santa can’t give them.

“It’s heartbreaking,” he says. “Sometimes they want their daddy to come home or they want their grandma to get better. I wish I really did have Santa magic.”

At the venue, an elementary school auditorium, the DJ plays the introductory song, “Santa Claus is Comin’ to Town,” and the children sing along while Santa waits just out of sight. As the final note sounds, Santa shakes his bells and strides into the auditorium with a booming “Ho ho ho! Merry Christmas!” And the crowd goes wild.

Santa is a rock star among his adoring fans. Even the parents and older children are grinning and clapping wildly. He waves and makes his way through the throng to his seat, an armchair that has been decorated to within an inch of its life with ribbons and festive holiday ornaments. Next to Santa’s throne stands a tree covered with handmade — child-made — ornaments.

The line forms almost immediately as child after child perches on his lap and chats with Santa. For the few minutes that they sit on Santa’s lap, they have his undivided attention. He asks them about their lives and about their favorite cookies. He cracks silly jokes. He poses for picture after

picture.

When a child hugs him, Chuck always makes a point of waiting for them to let go first.

“Sometimes, it’s the only hug some children get,” he says. “I just try to give them what they need.”

Santa Claus is the ultimate improv role, and for the next two hours, the children drill him relentlessly.

A little boy in a dinosaur shirt wants to know: “Who’s your favorite reindeer?”

“Well, Comet is the fastest, and Dancer is the prettiest, but Rudolph is my favorite because he always tries his best and he never gives up,” Santa says, providing both an answer and a message of encouragement.

A girl wants to know about Mrs. Claus, and he answers that she runs the school for elf children and tests new cookie recipes.

“Ha!” a boy says in a jeering tone. “All she does is make cookies!”

Santa places a finger next to his nose.

“Making cookies isn’t easy,” he says. “You have to know math and chemistry, and you have to be really good at fractions.”

The girl places her tiny hands onto her hips and glares at the boy. “See? Making cookies is hard work!” she says. Santa chuckles.

“Mrs. Claus is better at math than I am,” he says. “But we both do what we do best!”

Santa Claus isn’t just visiting children — he’s changing lives. Santa embodies the notion that giving is better than receiving and kindness is better than greed. Chuck doesn’t just play Santa Claus; in many ways, he is Santa, a true believer in the Spirit of Christmas spreading the gospel of peace on earth and good will toward all.

Children must surely sense that he cherishes them because they don’t show any fear, not even the very young children. Babies miraculously stop fussing and crying when he holds them.

Santa joins the children as they dance the Electric Slide and the Hokey Pokey. He crawls on the floor with the toddlers. He meanders around the room, dispensing hugs to young and old alike and tasting the dozens of varieties of cookies. After all, this is Youngstown, home of the cookie table.

Chuck confesses that, as the former owner of Wilcox Bakery in Struthers, he shares Santa's sweet tooth. He still loves to bake, especially around Christmastime.

Finally, it's time to leave. Santa heaves his bag over his shoulder, gives Baby Rudolph's bells one last jingle, and as he reaches the doorway, he turns and for a moment, there's a sense of expectation in the room.

Santa does not disappoint. He waves and shouts: "Ho ho ho! Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night!"

Tastes Like Home

The golden sun rises over the river of this foreign land, illuminating the morning dew. The clouds are strewn across the sky like they were pulled apart by the hands of some force unseen. A cool breeze brushes me, making it hard for me to light my Lucky Strike. I like Lucky Strikes. They taste like home.

My father and I used to smoke Lucky Strikes, often on mornings like this. The cool Ohio morning air felt just the same as the air here. The sun rising over the barn across the street, the dew on the rolling hills of corn or soybeans or whatever was being planted that year. I remember, across the street, the telephone pole wrapped in some kind of ivy; it started when I was little, and before I was deployed the pole was completely covered. It looked similar to Jesus hanging on the cross. Funny how I never really noticed it until I was far away from it.

My father and I would light up a cigarette on the front porch swing while mom made breakfast. My sister would be practicing piano; we could hear it faintly on the front porch. I would make a comment that she was never going to get good at piano; I wish I had never said that. Her constant practicing would annoy me, but now I long to hear the messed-up chords out of rhythm. Funny how when you are so far away from home you begin to miss things you hated.

Pops told me he'd quit, and he made me promise not to get addicted. But these small moments where I smoke by myself are the only thing keeping me sane. I'm with him with every inhale, with every buzz of nicotine. If this doesn't kill me, the enemy will. I'd rather go out on my own terms. More than anything, I'd rather go home.

I want to see my mom chasing our English bulldog off the couch, my dad's wave from the car as he drives to work, my sister packing her things for school; small things, small moments that are seemingly dull but exceedingly precious in hindsight. I want to see the sun rise over the barn, I want to sneak pieces of corn from the field when no one is looking. I want to go back to the creek and catch crayfish and I want to stay up all night watching TV. I want to listen to my sister complain about school and her friends and about how much "life sucks," and I want to tell her about my experiences here and let her know that nothing is as bad as she makes it seem.

No, I don't want to do that. I want to sympathize with her and comfort her. I want to be there for her, and dad, and mom.

I miss the smell of mom's potato soup cooking in the crockpot. The smell of prayer candles she lit all around the house. The smell of dad's pipe tobacco. The smell of the garden, with the tomatoes and potatoes and onions and strawberries and watermelons. I wouldn't complain now if mom asked me to go pick things from the garden. I'd tend to it all day if I had the chance.

But no, the only thing I have from home are these Lucky Strikes.

"Make 'em last," said dad. And I am. I only smoke one when I need to be home. And I am home, for about the length of a cigarette.

Biographies

McKayla Anne Rockwell is a senior English Literature major planning to graduate in May 2020. She currently works at YSU's Writing Center as a consultant and plans to pursue a master's in Early American Literature. Her poetry has been published in two anthologies, *Where the Mind Dwells* and *The Best of Poets*, through Eber & Wein. She has a passion for writing and editing young adult and children's literature and is currently working on her first fantasy novel.

N.P. Stokes is an undergraduate English major at Youngstown State University. He is writer of realism, creative fiction and poetry, as well as literary criticism. His realism tends to focus on the issues faced by the working poor living in America's Rust Belt, while his works of fiction and poetry center around philosophical ideas and perceptions of reality. His works have been previously published in *The Penguin Review*, and he has most recently received YSU's Robert R. Hare awards for his academic and creative writing.

Tom Franken is an undergraduate student at Youngstown State University in Youngstown, Ohio. He is majoring in Communication Studies and minoring in Creative Writing. His work has been published by *The Penguin Review*, *Havik*, and *Volney Road Review*. Tom hopes to eventually write something as beautiful as the song *Africa* by Toto.

Robin Stears is a writer and crossword puzzle constructor and a copy editor at YSU's newspaper, *The Jambar*. She aspires to a life of creating, drinking coffee and napping. She will graduate from YSU this spring with a degree in English on the Professional and Technical Writing track.

Joshua Nauman is a Professional and Technical Writing major from Newton Falls, Ohio. He enjoys writing stories about the small moments in life.

Shelby Swick is a poet, a writer, and is genuinely confused most of the time. Luckily, this does not stop her from enjoying every crazy moment of majoring in English at Youngstown State. When writing, she gets to focus on something calming and let herself feel something other than frustration towards her busy schedule and two precious cats.

Marah J. Morrison is a senior at Youngstown State University. She is majoring in journalism, but she is also minoring in creative writing. It is her second year as the Arts and Entertainment Editor at the university's newspaper, *The Jambar* and she is a member of the Society of Collegiate Journalists. Marah enjoys listening to music, reading, photography, writing, traveling, and calligraphy. She also enjoys spending time with her family and friends.

Tanner Mondok is a senior at Youngstown State University studying journalism and photography while also working as the photo editor for *The Jambar*. He is an award winning photographer, being recently recognized by the Ohio News Media Association and placing second for photojournalism in 2018. He plans to pursue a career in video game journalism or working as a photojournalist after he graduates in May.

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Joining Penguin Review

Penguin Review is always looking for new members. All YSU students are accepted regardless of major and class standing. The only requirement is that members participate in events and activities *Penguin Review* has signed up for. If you would like to be part of *Penguin Review*, it is as simple as showing up to a meeting or contacting us if you can't attend but would still like to join. Meeting times and dates can be found on our website, penguinreview.com. If you have any questions, please email *Penguin Review* at penguinreview@gmail.com.

Submission Information 2020

Penguin Review accepts submissions from YSU undergraduates September 1st through January 1st. Submissions should be emailed to penguinreview@gmail.com along with a cover letter stating your name, a short biography, email, home address, phone number, and the genre in which you are submitting. Please also include the genre you are submitting in the subject line of the email and do not include any contact information actually in the submission file.

We accept up to 1,500 words of fiction or nonfiction; up to ten pages of a screenplay; or three pages of poetry. We also accept up to three art submissions. Art submissions should be sent in at 300 ppi, as a jpeg file type, and in separately named files. Further submission details can be found at our website, penguinreview.com.

