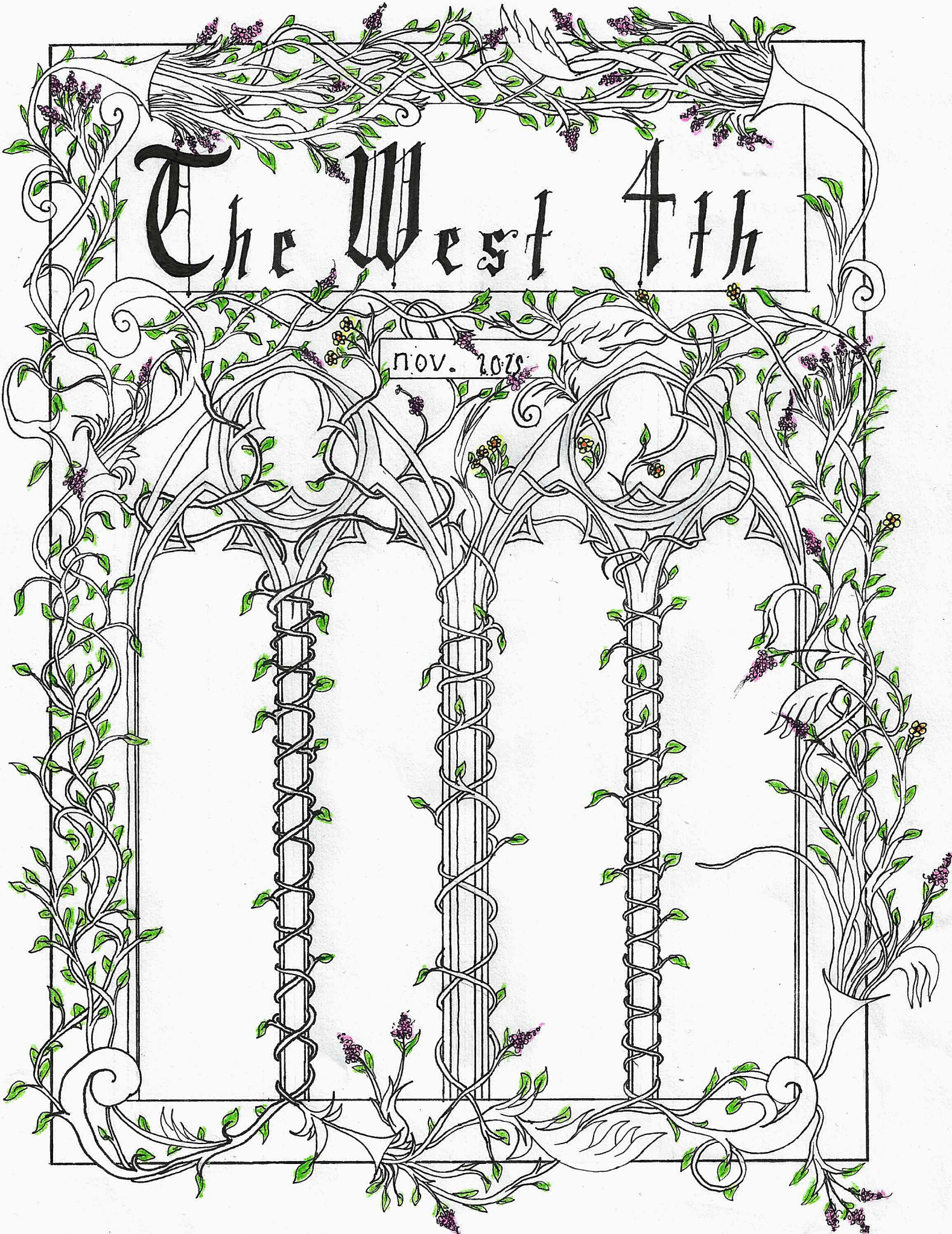


The West 4th

NOV. 2025



From the Editor

November 2025

Hello everyone,

Well, first off, I would like to apologize for my hiatus. School started back up for me, and what with that, a few bands that I drum for, and other commitments, I dropped the ball a bit. But now I'm back, and let me tell you here first, folks: I'm not going anywhere. Because I missed the hell out of this job.

We have some wonderful pieces this month. One of my favorites is by Parker Otto, and his short story about getting black out drunk with a bunch of other poets, miscreants, and general nay-do-wellers of the West Village.

Might I also say that the poems for this month are particularly strong. And it seems that more and more of you like to be credited with pseudonyms, which is interesting and slightly annoying. It gets a bit hard to keep track of who's who. So take your best guess when you get to Giovanni Safarella, or Diogenes, or Johnny Discipline, and see if you can figure them out. What the hell they're talking about and who the hell they are.

Not much else to say here. We will be starting a weekly bulletin (physical copies, too) sometime soon, and we're gonna need a whole lot of nonfiction, political, what's-the-word and what's happening sort of writing soon. So if you have interest in writing in a more on-the-beat style, send me an email.

Enjoy this month's issue and get started on your pieces for December.

Jack Kontarinis, Editor

our POETS and BARDS, SCRIBBLERS and SCHOLARS

CAROLINE FOSTER
BRETT KOPPELMAN
JACK KEEGAN
DIOGENES
ALEX WOLF
EVAN STARK
CHASE CORTLAND ERWIN
MAXWELL QUINN
PARKER OTTO
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JACKIE BECK
JOHNNY DISCIPLINE
GIOVANNI SAFARELLA
MIKAYLA MAGDZIARZ HEITING

Cover artwork by Jack Kontarinis

COLUMNS

Brain Rot: Goated or Woated?

Brett Koppelman

There is so much quality content to be consumed. Whether it be from books, movies, songs, or insightful podcast clips with a video of a ball trying to escape a series of spinning rings on the bottom so you don't get bored, there is no doubt that we are all hearing and consuming useful and interesting information constantly. It is easy to think that this is all going in one ear out the other, but I am not sure that it is the truth. My question is whether or not this consistent influx of useful or interesting information that we are consuming is having any affect with the way we carry ourselves, interact with others, or interface with the world.

I think a cop out conclusion is that we simply consume too much to be able to retain enough useful information consciously or subconsciously for it to have any effect, positive or negative. Older generations would likely judge that our attention spans are shot, our criteria for quality is ridiculous, or the content we consume is too bonkers to be taken seriously. I do not entirely disagree with this and will not state the obvious that over-consumption is a sad and quite apparent thing, although I did in fact just state that.

I believe that the content we consume, if done with some level of awareness, is having a positive effect on a lot of people. My thought is that with this constant berating of information we are hearing so many different perspectives, opinions, bits of nonsense, profound quotes, silly gabs. We are seeing so many awe-inspiring, disgusting, violent, hilarious, absurd, pathetic forms of media. I think it is this exact diversity in content that is actually helpful for an individual to conclude what their interests, opinions, disgusts, likes, dislikes are in a much more efficient and legitimate manner.

If one sees a video of a man getting run over by a car, followed by a triggering debate between two candidates for governor, followed by a video of an attractive hipster baking sour dough with each cut perfectly timed with the beat of Howlin' For You by the Black Keys, followed by someone getting shot, they are not putting their phone down with at least some inclination of an opinion. My argument is that this is better than consuming filtered content through TV, being fed nonsense advertisements and defining your opinions and interests from one to seven prevalent media personalities. I hesitate to suggest this is the first time we truly have every perspective being fed to everyone on every end of the spectrum, and that this is beneficial for people becoming aware, involved, and interested in such a wide range of people, ideas, and things. However, despite all this, it seems unfortunately apparent that people are consuming all of this and being scared away from further self reflection and questioning. Instead they seem to form their beliefs, opinions, and interests based on what allows them to maintain the comfort of the life they are familiar with - and that is what is frightening.

O. unilateralis

Diogenes

You know, sometimes you think you've come up against something but the thing that's stopping you was put there by you in the first place. I'll tell you, anything that has happened to me, it was my idea. I can't blame anybody for anything in my life because I caused everything that ever happened to me. But that doesn't mean that you face everything with equanimity either. Me personally, I don't face anything that way. The only thing that comes easy is nothing at all, nothingness, hopeless regressive decay. The easiest way to be in this world is nomadic transient and detached. Reach out to someone somehow, form a new bond between yourself and another fleeting flesh vessel of "energy" in this monstrous corpse engine called the universe, and begin the latest of Being's little tragedies. Have your drinks, smoke it up, buy some clothes, fuck the first person you find, none of it lasts, do it all again tomorrow, only this time you're sicker, your stomach is weaker, your pockets are thinner, your heart's even smaller. No man stands at the same river twice, it's a different river and a different man. You cannot dream of being honest with anyone in spite of your best intentions because you are never who you think you are. Change means growth until it doesn't and it can never mean growth for very long. Memory is the mind's way of imposing delusion over what was once reality. Nostalgia begins to control the past like a parasite invading its dead host. And what of the future? What have we to look forward to? Same as it ever was.

COLUMNS

E x c e r p t

Giovanni Safarella

People incessantly advocate for old things, but why should they? Man was an ape, and now he is not. He has become a god, and in only a few centuries. Tell me: what kind of god longs to be an ape?

The key was invented because the lock needed it to exist. A lock without any way to open it, remains locked. And locked things, are unattainable. We invented the key and made the unattainable attainable. But something unattainable is never actually unattainable if it is able to become attainable. And so, everything becomes possible. Forever did we live in darkness until we harnessed electricity. And now we live in the light; and we desire darkness, once again. But we are in the light, and so let us be seen.

We use perfume to cover our eyes and tears to hide our scars. Consider the good which has inundated - flooded everything with its unstoppable moral current. This is new, and we know not how to receive it - this omniscient goodness; it is exactly unnatural... abnormal, in the sense that it defies all conception of normality in being so elusively incomprehensible. We are evolved to survive. And so what is to happen when survival becomes removed from the human experience?

An Ode to City Fun

Owen Braid

There's bees that buzz through our open door here at CITY FUN.

They get confused and fly into the glass, I catch them in cups.

This all on the very first avenue of New York City. With our bright T-shirts, old cartoons and music!

Looking into the window you see us sitting around Hungover some, talking, selling Hendrix shirts.

Lilly's outside reading Frankenstein, Haleigh went to the doctor for her lock jaw, that's what happens when you talk too much. The neon sign, the pile of books,

The stream of everyday people,
Some even speaking French!

UPS truck man having a smoke,
All here on the first avenue in Manhattan between 2nd and 3rd street across from the bus stop beside Ronnie's hookah joint. Give him a wave on your way past Then come in and tell us what you did last night, what you listened to this morning, have a look at this Lou Reed shirt.

Hang around long enough and we'll lock our selves in with a couple sixers turn up the hifi and Joe might even do the twist.
Yes that's how we take it here at CITY FUN.

Nice and easy with style that knows no limits, we're rocking in the free world right here on the very first avenue of the greatest city.

It's CITY FUN.

Late Night Cigarettes, Illinois Winter Morn

Parker Otto

Late night cigarettes glow in the solitude of the
personal library
Massive dogs greet me with panting breaths and
kind eyes as the snow falls on the empty fields
of Illinois
Flaky pastries and rich black coffee are the simple
treasures that make the morning a
pleasurable experience day after day
Scraping scraping scraping the ice away, profane
mutters as the cold nips at my every action
Somehow it's colder inside the automobile than it
is out in the snow
The drive is barely any warmer since the window is
cracked just enough to suck out the smoke
and to push a sharp wind on my face
God forbid I give up Lucky Strikes
Onto the new journey as the sun creeps upon
dusted pine trees and shines the snow, piercing
eyes blind as everyone else awakens to cold floors
and multiple coaxing alarms
Crank up the radio dial for classic country tunes
Don't confuse it with the cigarette lighter, there's
still half a smoke to go

Reeling

Mikayla Magdziarz Heiting

Teeth clenched
a contra in the autumn air

Yearning, contemplating,
painting pictures with my mind
Come dream, if you dare

The moon is up, I float alone
Reeling in the feeling from
the blood to the bones

Could it be the edge of destiny
or another whisper through the trees
Come to me, I'm falling deeper
between two worlds:
The Earth and The Ether

untitled

Jack Keegan

If he was your brother, you'd understand,
Let me remember where I actually care.
These moments we have now are precious.
I like Ferris Bueller in the Spring.
You're not dying,
you just can't think of
anything good to do.

Sunburn

Kaylee Brown

Today I was sitting on my
roof in the middle of
bushwick brooklyn and I
got a little, well you can
imagine! Later that day I
was looking at my bare
body in the bathroom
mirror. I was running a cool
finger on the underside of
my breast where my skin
was now a little more pink
than normal. My finger
straddled that line. The air
got quiet and I pictured how
nice it would feel if my head
was on your collar bone,
weight suspended. Where I
could hear my breath rather
than feel it. So I took a wet
wash cloth and then slid it
over the spot where your
thumb could have should
have been. it wasn't as rough
but it felt nice too nice too
nice too nice too nice too
nice too.

untitled

Johnny Discipline

Well, some allowance must be
made for his virtuosity and
indignant intolerance of error—”
Mr. Pritchett said, sat in the
rectory persuading Reverend
Keene that Daniel, despite his
savagery, was an asset to the
school. “There is no reason he's
not be one of those men made for
government or any structure
such like. He will soon accept the
world as it is—idiotic—and we
will continue as before.” Daniel
Pritchett, sat next to his father,
found immense relief in the
reflective face of the Rector's
standing clock. As he moved very
slightly, almost imperceptibly
back and forth, his image warped
and shifted like liquid mercury in
a vial. Comforted, he sighed
loudly, stood, laughed and turned
to leave. His rain jacket, a year or
two too big, whipped 'round his
body like a cape and for a
moment he was but a flit of
yellow polystyrene alight inside
the wet grey gloom.

untitled

Jack Keegan

I'm thinking about
Daisy moving around in bed
every 15 seconds and
I'm thinking about the
person who left a bag
of shit on the stairs leading
out to my tiny yard.

In Memory Of

Mia Vongsavang

In memory of

the long forgotten,
those to be lost,
the friends, the loved ones,
even those un-missed.

You stilled lived;
you are remembered.
Something will later
take your place,

so make your mark,
big or small.
Share your story;
share your life.

You will be loved.
You will be remembered.
You will be forgotten.
You will be felt.

All you can do
is do what you can.
Your space is important
wherever it may be.

Stay.
Be.
Live.
Feel.

Life comes and goes;
love comes and goes;
the world will keep moving,
so why don't you.

So until next time,
until we meet again,
in another life,
in another time;

I bid you adieu.

untitled

Evan Stark

Born through ether, a passionate
explosion
That forms my blood
Entropy enclosed by expansion
Into nothingness
The ultimate call of the void
Being flung through space
A sudden violent snapping of elements
Being hurled down the mouth of
eternity
Choking on the nature of our chaotic
existence
Order within disorder
The paradox within which life exists
A cosmic accident
Brought upon by dancing clouds of
dust and gas
Waltzing whimsically, hand in hand
A celestial ballroom with the glitz
With the blue hues, the violets, the
pinks

Miraculous, how life came to be
In the depths of a godless sea, aquatic
blue
Emerging after millions and millions
of years
So finite and fragile, frivolously futile
Unaware of our fleeting time
Just another animal subjected
To nature and impulses
But who build monuments, gold
plated
To talk to gods that they created
A desperate attempt at meaning
Anything to avoid the undeniable
truth:
That the love and the life we make
The poetry, the songs, the prose
The words evaporating like mist
Suspended in the cold air
All eventually come to nothing
When the last star exhausts its energy
When the weight of eternity
Becomes too much of a burden to bear
When burning so intense isn't
sustainable
It comes to rest
In a graveyard of suns
With everything that ever was
An atomic collapse
Of mortals and gods

BROKEN EGGS AND DEAD CRUSADERS

Alex Wolf

Your mother and father named you for a god-given judge, and so, as the Sage's law of my own father's God dictates, you have become.

And lord knows, you make a shitty judge.

(It's not your fault. It's in your stars.)

In a past life, if I recall, you were a Crusader,
and I, the one who killed you.

(There's an intimacy in death, like sleep)

He had your eyes. Even had your tattoo, though I'm fairly certain his was a scar. It was a long time ago, and even then, I only noticed it right as he was dying. I was hardly afraid. I'd waited for you, after all. I saw the look on your face when I stuck the knife in your chest. But I knew I had to look at you, not for any reasons of honor, but because there is an intimacy in death, like sleep.

Two thousand years later, you wake me with a start, just for the fun of it--
Calling all my tongues barbarian, the same which you will suck down like nectar
upon nightfall,
get drunk on it, get high on it, then spit on it, just like your forefathers,
Just like the Crusader I killed.

But I came of age, smoking on your grave,
came of age, drunk on ancient stones,
bleeding on your stories,
came of age with flesh bathed
in the rivers of your mythology,
came of age sucking cock
in the room where your Messiah roasted his last chicken.

You lay on your stomach and I, on my side,
facing you, fingers running up your back,
where there is only one tattoo.

(Your frontside is full of ink. I wonder if you'd better remember all that which you
cannot see if you could see out your spine.)

You wake up reciting poetry in your sleep, like the Shahadah, like Modei Ani, like all
my barbarian tongues, all scattered,

And you said to do anything I liked,
so I knelt beneath the covers and buried my cheek in the crux of your thigh,
inhaled deep, like smoke (and maybe just as bad for me).

(I am just a body. You are just a body.)

I don't know shit, not really. I'm not the one who weaves the thread, just yanks it
through the eyehole. I'll admit that I have been known to pull too hard, to make
things snap, but God forgives me like a child. God forgives me like my mother did
that time I dropped a whole carton of eggs on the kitchen floor. Then again, what was
my mother thinking, giving a bag with a carton of eggs to a child? What was God
thinking? You say that eggs were cheap then, and that this way I learned what
happens. And also that she may not have known that there were eggs in the bag when
she gave it to me. Maybe it's like that with God, too. Maybe he did not know there
were eggs.

Signs of the times

Jackie Beck

I throw my landline out the window
I keep my nightline closeby
I refer to a list of furniture
To eat in the future
And play easy to get with
wil and charge 800 USDs
To get with josh.
I rush connection with wil by
getting down on my hands and knees screaming
FUCKING MOVE IT! at the phone lines.
When he doesn't text me
back fast enough I make eyes
with the balding 85 year old
Cuban Grandfather who
feeds the pigeons on 125th under
the metro north train and when
Our eyes meet I scream "DO
YOU.....LOVE ME?" pressing my
palms into the flat part of my pro-
truding bones above my chest.

He never breaks eye contact
and never stops feeding the
pigeons. When I get off
the subway at Graham I
wait until the last possible
second to leave the train car.
I paint one hand with red nail polish
And leave the other
the color
of spoiled lunch. Flies
are my friends
and when the
first of the month comes to
get my money I text a follow
up
message
to Josh
to see when he wants to meet with him.
I eat my cellular phone
and my Inheritance in one sitting. When I attempt eating my dog
AND my
boyfriend I realize I'm a
lesbian and I buy tickets to see the opera

but don't
Go
for more than 2 11
Minute intervals because the
pink dress I am wearing is
silk and I think that
I look too cement
and I want to look cinnamon. When
I ask wil if he thinks I am
kind or I am creep

he states frankly
Im not sure yet
and so I tell him to take his time,
take a lifetime to decide
And I pick up every penny on heads and
every paper clip
small medium green blue
I see colors in everything
and when I meet a girl who can speak
Zulu Oscar Echo
I fall out of love and into
A dreamlike state where noth-
-ing
seems dull anymore.
Bacon makes me sneeze and
I decide Alligator is my
favorite mode of transportation.
everything in New York City
costs less than the Empire State Building
and more than the Statue of Liberty
these days I need to watch
Somebody smoke a cigarette.

Poetry Public Service Announcement

Parker Otto

If you tire of dark,
depressing, morose
verse and rhyme, kiss
your local poet.
They'll thank you
and have something
more lovely to write
about.

Heap *Maxwell Quinn*

How do you feel when you
see someone screaming? Does
it really depend on the
context?
How do you act when
someone is screaming?
Maybe things should depend
on the context. Out with the
general maxims and
principles. Context
dependency is good.
How do you feel when
someone is crying? When
someone is bragging?
I saw two pigeons doing
something today. I'm pretty
sure they were doing
something. I'm pretty sure it
meant something to them.
I saw two babies crying at
each other. Staring at each
other and crying. Adults
don't do this. Wait, they do.
I believe in Fog. I know, I
know, I'm old fashioned this
way, but I believe in active
fog that gets in us and makes
us act in certain ways, and we
never get a full
understanding of this fog.
I believe in trust, but only an
extent of it. I don't believe in
absolute full hearted trust.
The world is too complicated
for that.
I believe in pride, but only an
extent of it. People are too
complicated to feel absolute
pride and only pride.
I know, we can only feel one
way at a time, but these ways
are not singular. A heap of
pride will always have other
things in it. Always. Nothing
is singular.
Some fog made its way over
to those poor babies and
made them cry.
I don't really believe in "the
fog," but I believe in an extent
of it.

Pennies in East Harlem

Chase Cortland Erwin

I balk at the sight of newly minted pennies
Scattered in my hand.
They shine far more than any coinage should,
Glimm'ring and gleaming as only a folly could
And hold no worth in visage or in touch.
Their look -faux, feeling -slick, and jingle -false,
As phony as the times.
The young clerk can't see what gilded guile
She gives in exchange for my honest bill.
It is quite clear from her cheery smile
She knows not what betrayal comes from the till.
But day to day it has become this way,
Likely never to see the difference still.
I see the old man bagging up my wares
And wonder what a penny means to him.
In boyhood times his cent went further,
No doubt,
Yielding more at every store and when trotting out.
Reward for snow shoveling, leaf raking,
Work honest and true.
Perhaps he tucked them away in his sock drawer.
Something saved is just as good as earned.
He's seen Abe pass through many times:
The wheat harvest then the memorial.
In wartime he was rationed down to zinc.
He may have even seen the Indian Princess
Wander in and out like an elusive dream.

All hopes he saved her from circulation.
But now his cent's been reduced,
No longer copper clad
As the Lady in the harbor is still.
Today's mint thinks it can do better
Or there's even talk of
Doing away with him altogether.
Now I journey home from the marketplace,
Discouraged in my stride.
What will come of a nation that no longer values sense?
Will it go the way of Rome in dissolution?
Or place hope in folks like the bagging man
And stride forward with resolution?

t(og)ether

Kaylee Brown

my dearest darlings
I must tell you now
About my lover
And the string I was——

Holding it between my teeth
It was wet from my spit
Or was it yours?
Who knows!!!!

The tether
Your end was black
A shadow slinking to me

It was so beautiful
Welcome! Welcome!
Please leave your shoes at the
Door if you don't mind!

Welcome!
Onto my tongue

Tasting like licorice
The kind i would share with my father
As a girl

My darling!
I thought I was losing you
You've come back

*rocking back and forth back and forth back and forth
*on a rocking chair, I'm not insane dear!

Leaving so soon.???
My darling?

*walking back and forth back and forth
*on the ceiling of course, I'm not insane dear!

Well at least my darling
Came back to me
Oh but for a moment

Things Only Your Eyes Can See

Owen Morrissey

You liked to observe
and double back around
because of your principles.

The squeak of a door,
or a drunken kid shaking
like a Roman still,
or a mark on a bridge
on which millions pass over
that says—"GAILAD EVEL".
These were things only your eyes could see.

Or the look in a friend's eye
when a girl passes the two of you by
or when you're acting a bit too shy
for the present conversation.
Yeah, she was looking at you
"Is this for me?"
Don't you know?
"No."
Sure it is, don't deny it.
Well, your friend knew why you stayed quiet
as well as you did,
but you both decided to swallow your own spit and lie.
(Well, he was also so quiet.)

A gaze is a fair gesture, but a gesture could only ever be fair,
see, a gesture can only ever mean a gesture,
like how a phrase only ever means a phrase,
or a word a word,
but words and phrases could only ever mean something else to you,
so time and time again you'll choose a word, or a phrase,
but choose once to gaze instead,
and if you spot a gesture,
you'll be sure to spot a speck.

The Joys of Being a Drunkard

By Parker Otto

The following chain of events was enjoyed with a group of friends that I have chosen to leave nameless. It's not for the sake of privacy, rather an attempt to cover up a poor memory. This story is not meant to be an endorsement of alcohol since I have neither the athletic prowess nor the problematic ties to business bastards to warrant any kind of sponsorship.

To be a good drinker is a strange characteristic to have. It's like being good at Russian Roulette or at surfing with sharks. It's a dangerous activity that makes all efforts to kill you yet it astounds the uninitiated when you manage to emerge unscathed. When I moved to New York, I was still freshfaced and green when it came to the revels of drinking. Much like Nick Carraway, a fellow Midwesterner, I was unaccustomed to the bacchanalia and all that came with it. The most alcohol I touched was a few strains of wine and hard lemonades with the harder substances all being foreign to me. The only exception was Malört: a wormwood infused schnapps from the deepest circle of hell from Chicago's Scandinavian dwellings that all Midwestern college students must indulge as part of a heinous sacrament. But then I made friends with musicians. There is no quicker way to become enamoured with the lifestyle of a drunkard. To double down on this, I have spent a good deal of my time as a New Yorker in various bars, taverns, dives and pubs and have had a damn good time. I have found that I like drinking. I have found that I am quite good at it.

The Poetry Night at the Music Inn let out much later than usual. Held on the first and third Tuesday of every month, an abundance of poets had come to read their latest material forged on junk mail envelopes, diner's checks and note-taking phone apps. One of the few remaining vestiges of New York's folk revival of the 1950s and 60s, The Music Inn lies on West 4th Street between The Pink Pussycat and The Village Vape with all three stores supplying the immortal vices of: sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. Convenience is everything in New York.

Even before Poetry Night had concluded, I had already indulged in drink having consumed two 22.5 oz bottles of Stella Artois. One was taken before my set of poems, the other not long after I left the stage. If it were any other night, us poets would have said our goodbyes and gone home to warm beds and responsible amounts of sleep. But there was something in the air of the Music Inn's basement that night, imploring us to keep the party going. To carry on the traditions of the poets who held Greenwich Village by the throat all those years ago. Myself and a few of my fellow poets were going to have a literary drunk. It would span multiple bars. It would see us let loose and let this town know that if you cut its veins, the blood of type and inkstains will come gushing.

Fumbling with the godforsaken gate of the Inn that always sticks and is a bitch to close, cigarettes were being passed around. My generation was supposed to be the one to end smoking. What the fuck happened? I guess this crop of youth feels like the condemned, blindfolded and facing a loaded gun. With such odds, what threat does that cigarette pose? Snuffed out and simmering in puddles of spilled coffee outside the locked gate, we took our leave. Now was the time for drinking.

Before tales from that night come forth, it's important to distinguish my definition of a drunkard, a class of which I am proud to be a member. It is even more imperative to detail the rules of this class so the weak and unworthy may be rooted out in case a reader has the idiotic notion of repeating my actions. The difference between a drunkard and a drunk has everything to do with independence and reliability. A drunkard is capable. A drunk is helpless. A drunkard is full of life. A drunk is lying facedown, one bad rainstorm away from drowning on land. A drunkard may stumble some but generally doesn't have the lack of coordination that a drunk is famed for. To be frank, drunkards are enjoyable. Drunks are despicable.

To be a drunkard is not unlike being an opera singer. Hard work is a must but talent is the bedrock for life. It's either there or it isn't. To start, you must only pursue the drunkard life if you are jovial in drunken disposition. Giddiness is essential. I myself have struggled with this at times for I have been known to become existential in the states of intoxication with thoughts of loneliness creeping in. However, this must generally be avoided. If one's problems must be discussed over drink, the goal should be to find a positive solution, not to descend into sadness. A drunken mope is no fun at all and will not find the help he craves. They are relegated to the back corners of the bar next to the bathroom where each flush rings loud and clear.

Wit is an important part of any drunkard's tool kit. What's the point of the drink if laughs cannot be shared? Whether dry or bold, humor is a prized quality. But don't be a fool. A court may need jesters but you are no fool. You need to be a bishop, a jack, a rook, a queen, a king or whatever the fuck you call a piece from backgammon. Jokers always wind up in the same place: alone in the pack while the real cards get used.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the drunkard is self-awareness. When you've been drinking, you ought to take people at their word when you have overstepped your bounds. The excuse of drunkenness can only go so far before you become an insufferable twat. If a friend tells you that your volume is at an inappropriate level, they're probably right. There is nothing worse than a drunkard trying to bullshit himself and the people around him with his level of sobriety. Part of the trade with the drunk is losing a portion of your complete control but it does not give you free range. Courtesy is still on the table and always should be alongside the pretzels and matchbooks.

Finally, a key side of the drunkard life may seem counterproductive but is ultimately the best pearl of wisdom.

Do not depend on these drinks as the source of a good time. You are the one that will make or break this night as are the drunkards you choose to celebrate with. As such, you want to be with people that you could still have a grand time with even if you were drinking water. But that does beg the question. Who the fuck goes to a bar just for a drink of water?

After locking up the Music Inn, The White Horse Tavern was the first stop since it was ten minutes away and a vital part of our identity that night as poets clinging to a sense of literary intellectualism. Famously occupied from the likes of Liam Clancy to James Baldwin to Patti Smith, The White Horse lives forever in the canon of poetry for its association with Dylan Thomas with the tavern benign one of last places he was seen alive before his untimely death giving birth to a legend that he drank himself to death at the White Horse. While only just a legend, the bar has made all efforts to keep the memory of Thomas alive with a whole room memorializing him including a massive depiction of his most famous poem "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night".

With glasses of beer in hand, my companions and I gazed upon the poem and we each took a verse in a public telling of the poem. Had we less courtesy for the staff, we might have stood on our chairs like the ensign of "Dead Poets Society" but respect persevered. We were the subject of many stares by our fellow patrons who pieced together what we were trying to do. A few even politely applauded when we were finished reading the poem before the last call was announced. With the White Horse closing fairly early for New York given that it was a Tuesday night, we had to find a new bar to continue our poetic pursuits. In Greenwich Village on a Tuesday night, this was harder to achieve than one might expect. It was not enough to find a place with plenty of booze but it had to have the right feeling.

The Kettle of Fish was always a good option. After all, it has been a Village staple since the 1960s and a popular hangout for folkies and literary giants. However, during football season, the bar becomes filled with fans of the Green Bay Packers which I cannot tolerate as a fan of the Chicago Bears. My life as a fan of the Bears is hard enough but I will be damned if I have to spend a night trying to read poetry while surrounded by a bunch of fucking Packers fans with their damn Cheesehead hats. Still, I must owe the Packers some thanks since multiple players, including Aaron Rodgers, helped keep the bar afloat during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Still, despite my gripes with some of the Kettle's patrons, I would prefer them over going to The Spaniard which remains an overpriced stomping ground for my least favorite person who has infected The Village: finance bros.

Swarming over The Village like the much belated 11th plague of Egypt, finance bros remain an ever-present thorn in my side whose presence fuels the homicidal side of my character. But do not take this to mean that I despise everyone who works in the financial sector of the workforce. After all, I do distinguish between a finance bro and a man who simply works in finance just as I would distinguish between a man who was in a fraternity and a frat bro. One is in pursuit of something respectable and the other is in pursuit of the kind of hedonism only romanticized for laughs. It's an attitude, a way of looking at things. Unfortunately, this attitude is insufferable and presents a kind of obnoxious buffoonery posing as masculinity that makes you want to keep your drinks covered at all times and your ears protected whenever one of them puts on a song by Creed.

The Spaniard was teeming with these overpaid and overconfident bums and the sickly ones who couldn't gain admission would stumble towards the Barrow Street Alehouse down the street. One of our typical watering holes, Barrow Street was no longer an option for the night. We had to find a place out of reach from the finance bros that wouldn't result in battles utilizing conventional weaponry. Walking from the West Village towards the East Village, we found solace in a literary bar once teeming with communists. The KGB bar is to this generation what the Cafe San Remo was to the Village 60 years ago.

A haven for the artists, KGB proved to be a worthy place for us to hang our hats and drink our fill. Surrounded by red light and the scents of Eastern European perfumes, we continued our night as the proud literary drunkards that we were. We were eager to not only prove our literary merits by sharing ideas for essays and poems we had in development but also show some kind of bravado. Ernest Hemingway had a habit of challenging friends and foes alike to boxing matches but we elected to wrestle arms instead. After several rounds, we took to the game of telephone and other drunken antics before the drunkard's restlessness gripped us once more.

Part of the drunkard life means that you're on the move. While this has been commonly referred to as the bar crawl, it's really a way to not only change the setting and to keep things fresh but also to avoid the risk of overstaying our welcome. Despite our own belief in our intellectual prowess, it's just as likely that we're a pretentious lot. At least the Dead Poets Society knew to meet in a secluded cave.

Out of all the dive bars in New York, Sophie's is probably my favorite. Its location is convenient. There's always a pool game. Finance bros steer clear of it. The bartenders will give you the most comical and vicious of verbal thrashings if you don't tip. Most importantly, the beer is cheap as hell. Aside from affordable drinks, Sophie's also boasts a magnificent juke box. Personally, I wish there were only two sources of music at a bar: the bands or a jukebox. I'm sick of the most banal and inoffensive playlists being plugged in with no one being satisfied with the selection. I would love to see a bar be dead quiet for

twenty minutes before some lone hero emerges to slide a dollar in and make a few selections. This person isn't just breaking the silence, they are setting the tone. They are inviting their fellow patrons to craft a soundtrack for the night. What I like about Sophie's juke box is that it still utilizes CDs, presenting fewer choices and making the selection process all the easier.

The juke box is a far more desirable alternative to a Spotify playlist. I would go so far as to say it can cure male loneliness. It's a pretty simple thing. You take a bunch of men. You give them a couple of beers apiece. Then, you put on the greatest hits of Creedence Clearwater Revival because it has been my experience that every juke box in America contains that CD. By the time "Have You Ever Seen The Rain" starts playing, you will be surrounded by a rousing chorus of drunken male voices akin to something you'd see in an Irish novel. Drinks and songs with feeling are all you need. It also makes me wonder. If Jesus and the disciples drank wine, it means that it's possible that, like my friends and I at Sophie's, they got Biblically drunk. It fills me with curiosity if Jesus and the apostles had drinking songs about Philistines and Romans. What would Jesus have sounded like leading a chorus of wino saints along with that treacherous fucker Judas?

Normally, Sophie's is one of the favorite bars amongst my friends but there was something off about the bar that night. It was too quiet, the usual bartenders weren't on staff and the juke box wasn't in operation. All of these factors were in direct interference with the drunkard life we had been fulfilling all evening. How can one drink and discuss poetry and play pool and drink and sing and drink under these inhuman conditions? If it weren't for the fact we were at a bar called KGB, I would make the comparison of Sophie's state to Stalin's Russia. Later that week I visited Sophie's again and it was back to normal so here's to hoping that the off-kilter vibe was a bizarre fluke.

Despite the depths of the evening we found ourselves in, Sophie's was not where the night would end. If there was an opportunity to improve the night, we owed it to ourselves to snatch it. Just one block away was Josie's which felt like the middle child to Sophie's eldest. What the youngest child of this dynamic is beats the hell out of me. Like Sophie's, Josie's had cheap drinks and a jukebox but it was clear that the night was winding down. Part of being a drunkard is knowing when to quit. Otherwise you become a drunk, wanting to keep pushing forward even if you find yourself on the edge of a cliff.

If you don't know when to stop, chances are the bartender knows. One of my friends asked the bartender at Josie's what their closing time was but he unfortunately made the mistake of asking the bartender at the exact time that Josie's was closing. Maybe this bartender was tired of

dealing with drunks at 4 in the morning or maybe she thought my friend was jesting but she snatched the beer out of his hand and told him to get lost. It was truly a bizarre sight because there was definite tension between our companion and the barkeep but both parties were too exhausted to really do anything about it. The moment we left the bar, we were already laughing about it. Some things should just be left in the wind. For the first time in that whole night, I looked at my watch and saw that it was 4:15 a.m. The usual goodbyes and hugs were in order before we departed for home. Given the time, I decided to treat myself to a cab ride and made it back to Brooklyn at 4:45 a.m.

I'm not sure if any lessons are to be learned from this adventure. All I did was go from bar to bar with friends, drinking insane amounts of beer and occasionally talking about something meaningful. I'll be damned if there was even a point to us staying out that late on a Tuesday night except for the fact that we're young and living the life of artistic drunkards that New York City is all too happy to indulge. Perhaps in a few years when we go to bed at 9 p.m. and wake up with the dawn we can marvel at our younger antics and how we made it back home alive. That's the key of being a successful drunkard: being able to make it back home to your bed so you can do it all over. So if you have survived this journey, then nights of drunken revelry might be for you. If not, then best to call it before midnight (2 a.m. on the weekends) and leave the antics to the pros.

Carmilla Unbound (Part II)

By Caroline Foster

He had encountered the smell of death before. Pungent, heavy, sticky and sour. He was accustomed to it. But this, it was something else. It was something deeper than death. It was everything at once, seeping horridly into his body—it was the earth scorching, the oceans rising, the dirt beneath his fingernails, flowers erupting, flesh melting, animals screeching, his mother's last words to him, the wind laughing with a pained cry as it passed through bare trees—it was more than death. Perhaps...extinction? No, it was decay. Strange decay. Wrong decay. And by god, it was sweet.

This was the scent haunting his sixth mug of ale, clinging firmly to his beard. He slowly pulled the mug away and placed it on the table, breathing the room's air again. By the time he was able to open his eyes and return to the alehouse, she had already arrived, blurred in the yellow candle glow, sitting perfectly still and silent beside him on the rough wooden bench seat

She appeared without a single sound—not the rustle of dress fabric, not the padding of her dark leather shoes on the fir floor, no huff of breath when she sat down. Our knight froze, hands still around the ale mug on the table. The woman sat upright like a pillar with her head cocked a bit to her left, like a hound straining to hear something far away. Her clothes were regular enough, with a brown woollen cloak enveloping her shoulders over a deep red linen gown, its high neckline covering nearly her entire throat. Her hands were folded in her lap, covered by thick beige gloves that made her fingers look almost unnaturally long. The belt at her waist, however, was a metal chain, perhaps steel. It was odd-looking against the organic linen of her gown, as if it were not hers. Her head was covered, as was custom in Marchia

Austriae, by a thin brown veil, but her rich, black hair was just visible at its edges around her temples. The eyes sitting starkly against her white skin were a deep hazel, almost yellow in some places. They were wide and attentive, crowned by heavy black lashes. There was a hint of red playing around the center of her light lips, confusing the knight. Such cosmetics were dearly expensive. He silently wondered about the nature of her purpose there. She was not an alewife, but perhaps she was still there for work. Were there such women in Austriae? He could surely not afford it.

“Valiant sir,” she bowed her head a bit while speaking, as if addressing royalty. Her voice was hoarse, but rich. The knight rubbed his eyes and sniveled, head swimming in ale and candle glow. He gazed at the woman through tired lids.

“My lady,” he began. “I am on leave.”

“But still a knight, no?” she tilted her head again, almost playfully. The scent of her drifted into the air, sweet and floral. The knight shook his head and furrowed his brow as if to knock something loose in his brain.

“Yes, but I haven’t the—” he stopped in a sudden realization. She spoke in his tongue. Her words were identical to the sweet, Moorish lilt of Évora, nearly bringing a tear to his eye. He then snapped back to the sight of the woman in front of him, puzzled. Her face, her skin, were nothing like his.

“From whence do you hail, my lady?” he asked quietly. The woman smiled dryly, displaying a beautiful set of white teeth, and laughed a moment.

“From whence we all do,” she said trivially. “I must ask, good sir, to where do you march?”

The intoxicating tremor of her laugh and the swill of the ale in his mind caused him to drift, forgetting his question. “The Holy Land, rapariga.” At this, he saw her twitch, inhaling sharply.

“How absurd,” she laughed again, this time with an edge. “Of what concern to you is the Holy?” The knight squinted at her, once again puzzled. He was of the belief that the whole known world knew of the fight for the Holy Land, as his Lord had often told him. Had such things not reached Styria? What remote part of God’s green earth had he found himself in?

“Jerusalem. It is ours and it has been stolen. The seat of God, you know.” he mumbled out, remembering the words used by his superiors. The woman lifted an eyebrow and narrowed her eyes. The knight realized she had moved closer to him on the bench.

“My valiant sir,” she leaned in slightly to meet his eyes, her floral scent wafting softly around him. “You are a fool to think anything holy is yours.”

Though he could not understand why, these words made his skin prickle. The way she said the word holy, spitting it as if it were a cherry pit into a bowl. Our knight knew of heretics, heard of their executions, even, but had never seen one before. His stomach began to turn, but not at her declaration. It was the sinking feeling he could

not hope to avoid—she was right. Just as this came to him, she unfolded her hands and placed one on the bench between them, long fingers nearly touching his thigh. He did not draw away.

“You yearn to own something,” her eyes pierced him now. “If even a piece of heaven.” The knight’s breath quickened in his stupor. Were his sins so plain upon his face? The woman seemed to sense this thought. “My valiant sir,” she turned her body to him, moving her hand to finally touch him. Her glove was warm with something sharp beneath. He felt a stirring in his breeches. “Would you like to know heaven, as I have?” Our knight was becoming as nervous as he was enticed. He looked the woman squarely in the eyes, noticing they now took a lighter, yellower hue than before. Her lips curved slightly into an inviting smile. His heart pounded in his ears and his body—he was a knight, he could not do this here. He quickly pulled his eyes off of her and glanced around the room to see if any other patrons noticed his salacious encounter, immediately feeling his heart drop. The alehouse was now empty. Where there had been a throng of boisterous men and women drunkenly singing their way through bawdy German songs were now empty tables and benches, pristinely clean without a single trace of the previous patrons. The candles were all fresh, as if they had just been lit, and there wasn’t a speck of dirt on the solid fir floor. Furthermore, the room was cloaked in a deep, deathly silence—the type where all you can hear is your own blood rushing through your body.

The knight gingerly turned his eyes back to the woman, his face growing hot. Her smile had opened, and her white teeth now bore red stains like those on her lips. She had tightened her grip on his thigh.

“Let me tell you a story.” **PART III TO COME**

Best Wishes

By Maxwell Quinn

My name is Derum Pront. I just got off of a well-engineered bus which does a great job at delivering people where it wants to go. If your destination lines up with what the bus wants, bon voyage.

Today I wanted to go home, and this big silver monster wanted the same, so we shook hands and wished each other luck.

I had been at Wesley Crawlitch’s “house-warming weekend.” I met Wesley a year ago through a friend I no longer have, and Wesley’s life is large enough in his head to host these sorts of gatherings. He had us all come up to his large home which sat about a mile in from the Hudson River.

I made an agreement with a bus to get over there and walked from the station. A short walk but extremely uphill. I arrived at Wesley’s porch sweating in my jacket and breathing heavily while my body went on trying to make a judgment of his set up out there. It wasn’t so unusual, and I didn’t care to make any judgments, but for some reason my body went to work, trying to find some position on what I was looking at. There’s a weird thing about the way we see people’s homes. We almost see it as a part of their body. Something they’ve done up and reflects them completely.

Wesley opened the front door and looked like a proud Boy Scout. His shirt was covered in pins.

“Derum! I’m so glad you could make it. Come in!” He coughed and cleared his throat as soon as he finished speaking. I felt like asking him if he was okay.

He offered me a bowl of oatmeal, and I refused out of confusion.

The first person I saw there that I knew was Horace Alton. Horace used to read his writing at a weekly salon I used to go to. He’d read his findings on various research projects of his. The whole thing was funny to everyone there except for him.

When I asked him what he’d been up to lately, he immediately started talking about hair cuts. He was tracking the popularity of certain styles and tried his hardest to gather information from as far back as he could. It was a topic I would gladly listen to, but probably not one that I’d spend a long time reading about.

He asked me what was going on and for some reason all I could talk about was that day. My breakfast and my current reading. He was more curious than I could believe one could be about how I prepared my eggs and toast.

“Just think! The same ingredients, and that’s all you need and could ever want for years!”

“Yeah,” I replied.

“We will gladly accept something that pleases us enough and revisit it every day! You never think to have pickled herring for breakfast, do you?”

I felt slightly attacked.

“No, I guess not.”

“Well... all you can do is guess.”

I was ready to leave Horace. I explored the rest of the house and stopped at the porridge pot. It looked untouched, full to the top with a skin at the surface. Wesley was telling a few women a story.

“Oh, I’ve heard you tell this story so many times,” Wesley’s wife, Rota, said to him.

Wesley didn’t deal with embarrassment well, it seemed, because he sort of choked and started shuffling around wordlessly. He had no reply to his wife’s comment. Awkward. I walked on.

I decided to get drunk. It was pretty much out of weakness that I couldn’t bear this place. I started to feel a little joy, when all of a sudden I had a terrible encounter. Some tall guy completely confronted me about where I put my drink down. He said it was unbelievable that I could act this way. It was unbelievable for someone to just disrespect their hosts like this. That stereo system costs four thousand dollars.

I stepped outside and felt the tubes within me. I really felt them rising up out of my stomach and peering out through my eyes. They had a bit of a sway to them, like they could hardly hold themselves up.

I opened my eyes and there were people hovered over me looking terrified. I was on my back staring up at their frizzy heads with a dotted sky behind them. It was such a lovely view and I just laid there. Then the slightly less

frizzy head of Wesley came peering over at me and I sobered up a little, mad at him for ruining this moment.

“Your pins...” I squeaked out, surprising myself. “What the hell...”

Wesley’s eyes got big and that really sobered me up. He was frazzled through by my “pins” comment.

“Are you in pain?” someone asked me.

“Huh? No,” I replied.

I looked down at myself and saw a massive green stain on my clothes.

“Oh,” someone started, seeing me look at the stain, “I rushed over when I saw you fall and accidentally splashed my drink on you. I’m sorry.”

“That’s okay,” I said, laying there.

Some guy had his phone out recording me. I wanted him to be shot.

“Someone shoot him,” I said, pointing to the guy. I don’t think I pointed very accurately because a woman close to me said “what do you mean?”

And then I fell asleep.

I woke up in what seemed to be a python garden. Snakes were dangling from trees and holding their necks out to me.

“See them there,” Horace Alton said as he came up to me. We were standing shoulder to shoulder. “Though they are hungry, they also just want to be good.”

He turned to me with the most tender expression, clearly wishing the remark upon me.

“You don’t have to be clean,” he said, “you can be just plain old Derum. Nobody would ever wish you to be anything else.”

Suddenly all the snakes turned into me. I saw a dozen of my selves hanging from the branches.

“But now,” started Horace again, “be careful you don’t wish yourself upon others, or wish for them to be more like you. You don’t want to live in a world full of you’s— you get enough of yourself in your own head. Let them be different, let them surprise you. It’s for the best. How else would you prefer it?”

They turned back into snakes and went along. They began moving in the same direction, away from me. They slithered along, turning their heads back to look at me for a moment.

“Goodbye! Goodbye Derum!” They said, waving their tails.

I suddenly didn’t want them to go. The simple act of a “goodbye” completely overtook me, and I started to cry.

“Bon voyage,” said Horace, “Goodbye. Good luck out there,” and he waved his hand.

There they went. On with their journey. And though they were hungry, they also just wanted to be good.

A Half-Step From Heaven

By Michael Gosselaar

Alone she sat, upon the cold, rusted frame of the fire escape that jutted out from her bedroom window. Her back, pressed against the time-soaked brick. A warm, starless night lie before her, and a flock of black birds had just left their roost atop a wire in search of the breeze.

An exhausted cigarette begged for mercy, lying in a pile among its dead relatives; and on the sidewalk below, a streetlight frantically flickered, threatening to burn out.

Not that it would matter much to the eyes of the night, anyhow.

The hum of the city center echoed down the myriad of sprawling alleyways, parading its song to the ears of many fast asleep. Somewhere in the distance, a ferry cried out to seafarers across the riverway.

It wasn't the first time she sat up there, wondering aloud, and it certainly wouldn't be the last. She often couldn't help but find herself lost in the grandeur of memories; drifting away, off to summertimes back at home.

As her eyelids began to grow heavy, confining her view to an aperture that turned smaller following each blink, a distant church bell was struck twelve times. On the eleventh, she watched her mind slip away, back above the rolling heathland, among the common eminence of ley, and beneath the misty morning light of home...

At six, she celebrated her birthday amid the sweetsmelling groves of cherry and apple trees, and played hide-and-go-seek with the sun; hiding in shadows of things much taller than her. The sunlight quietly burned her delicate skin, leaving behind funny lines where the straps of her flowery dress rested.

But that was six.
And many years had passed since then.

At eight, she cried for the little river that ran through her front yard, when it fell ill and withered away for the summer. As it went, it left behind nothing but a wake of pebbles and splintered ground. Her knees, scraped and red, were covered in silt from the riverbed.

But that was eight.
And eight was some time ago.

At ten, she watched the long worn path that led to her back door carry her mother far beneath the roots of the old oak tree. The tree that stood so proudly atop the upland hill in her backyard. She would often lay in the silhouette of its branches and happen upon figures in the sky.

But that was ten.
And it had been a long while since ten.

At eleven, the rolling solstice thunderstorms kept her awake at night. The raucous howl and clatter brought about fantastical dreams of great sieges of castles in far off lands. Dragons fire scorched the ground while boulders from trebuchets whirred rapidly through the air. But that was eleven.

And the castle walls had certainly fallen by now.

At thirteen, the quiet wind caught her crying and tenderly dried the tears that cascaded like streams down her flushed cheeks. The same wind would often dance with her, spinning slowly down the open air; blowing soft melodies through her fingertips.

But that was thirteen.
And now there were no more tears left to dry.

At fifteen, the cattle and sheep that resided in the moor beside the old cabin would sing lullabies to her when she could not sleep.

Their songs, wandering across the pasture and in through her open window, enveloped her in a comfort she had never known before. She thanked them kindly the next morning with an apple each.

But that was fifteen.
And the cattle had been called home long ago.

At sixteen, the rolling hills that swept beyond the reach of the sky bore her first child. On Wednesday, June the 15th, at 10:16pm, Elenore Jane Delawney was born in the parlor. But that was sixteen.

And nobody these days remembered Elenore Jane Delawney anyways.

At seventeen, the little river that ran through her front yard broke her heart when it decided to freeze for the winter. She watched the snowfall land on its glassy banks. A snowflake settled on her tongue and melted away.

But that was seventeen; she was a long way from seventeen.

And New York City wasn't getting any smaller.

A Mommy Issue

By Amro Ibrahim

I woke up on my toilet seat again. Felt the cold porcelain on my butt and back thighs. That's a place that you never think about getting sensation except when you're on the toilet or getting pegged. The poop in my toilet is indicative that someone must have shitted in the toilet. I hope it was me. I got drunk last morning and now the time seems to be 12am. On the dot.

I started ruffling around when I felt this piercing pain in my hole. Nothing related to pooping, nothing related to hemorrhoids. I think of myself as a stronger man than hemorrhoids. Hemorrhoids are for the weak. I bet Alexander the Great never had Hemorrhoids, I bet Napoleon never had hemorrhoids, he didn't need it, he had a complex. I don't have hemorrhoids so much that I can't even spell it. It's not even in me linguistically.

This pain reminded me of my mother, she used to pinch me in the ear as a child, it sometimes didn't hurt, and sometimes it did. A lot. That was because she used to get her nails done a lot. I don't really remember them as nails. I called them claws. "Mom your claws look really nice, did you get them done recently?" "Stop kissing ass, bitch." She'd respond. She used to say I would never amount to much, that I would never be better than her. To put that in context, she was a midwife. She was pretty mid at it too, she was a mid midwife, no wonder she couldn't lock down a husband.

A voice echoed shrill insanity along the bathroom walls. A voice that would scare claws on a chalkboard whispered in my ear, "you will not amount to shit." "Mother?" I responded. I thought about that, I will never amount to shit. I will never amount to shit. But I had just made it, that means I could make more shits. Shits that vary in levels of good and bad, the one who makes the shit must surely be better than the shit due to their potential to shit. My mother might be right. I am shit.

I layed in bed with my girlfriend. We effectively had a civil union. She's not as good as my ex. My ex-situationship used to peg me, but for some reason I cannot let her peg me. She's so kind and nerdy and dorky and I cannot stop thinking about her at work. I have found love. But My love is fleeting and wispy, it reminds me of my mother's moods. She had these moods where she'd come home from worked stressed to all hell and she'd come into my room and wake me up. She'd kiss me a million times on the cheek, and hold me. It felt like I was in the center of the sun, gold rays folding over my every inch. That's what my mother's love is, that's what my love is. When I think about it though, I dwell. Dwelling sucks. The only ways to get out of the well of dwelling in thought is to get high so

that the thought is nigh

15 minutes later I was in a tequila filled pool, that's a metaphor for me drinking a lot of tequila. I already ate a weed gummy but you have to make the time pass quicker for it to hit. A ruffle from my bedroom. 1 2 3 4 and my head finally turns to it. I approach the cracked door, I see the lights flickering on and off. I open the door and my girlfriend is doing the worm, on the bed. I've never seen her do that, our first date she said she couldn't dance for shit and I took her night clubbing and we got our non-sexual freak on in the club. This was weird. I called her name:

"Tilly Coppertwink! What are you doing?!"

And silence fell, the bed was at peace.. but not for long. She grabbed me, our lips found each other. This time it was weird, she was sloppier with it. It was like kissing a bulldog. Still, the heart wants what it wants and the dick wants what it can get into. The covers of the bed was tastefully draped over our bodies, we were in unison, our hands enwrapping into each other. A knot on our ends moved center like sealing two pieces of paper together with glue.

She took command, leading me in the bedroom; which was a first for her (she was rather a submissive lady), she said it with her hand moving my body over. She kept me in place. I was like that for a couple seconds until "I'm going to peg you," she said with her dusty strap on in hand. I said yes, mommy yes. It felt right. Like for the first time in 200 years the earth stopped degrading, all wars found unity in our shared consciousness, our oneness spoke to us all. I had found the euphoria I'd looked for for the first 37 years in my life since being born. She was close to cumming, also a first. Our voices swirled into each other

"I love you,"

"I fucking love you so much,"

"I love you,"

"I love you,"

"Fuck I love you,"

"I fucking love you,"

From Tilly's mouth "I love you... son."

I looked back and Tilly just looked at me confused. What just happened.

Bush, NATO Expansion, and Its Effects: A Brief Analysis of Core Disagreements within Post-Cold War Historiography

By Jack Kontarinis

“If you’ve got a hammer, find a nail.”

George H. W. Bush

One of the most striking ideas put forth by George H. W. Bush during his time as president was the notion that the United States and the rest of the international community were sprinting towards a “new world order.” This new world, as it was envisioned by Bush, was one to be ushered in by the United States, at the time resting on an economic and military zenith that had not been experienced at a similar level since World War II. The international stage was to be the main theatre for this new world order. Bush’s vision entailed unprecedented international cooperation, the eradication of communism, and the proliferation of democracy and free markets. The symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, fast-moving disarmament talks between Russia and the US, and swift coalition-building in response to Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait, were all perceived, by Bush and his administration, as key examples of this “new world order” coming into existence; 1989 to 1992 was a period of unique and understandable optimism about the trajectory of the international community.

Now, in this present moment, looking at pictures of Bush, Reagan, and Gorbachev all laughing together on Reagan’s ranch or at Bush’s beach house in Maine, it makes one ask, “how did we go from that to this?” In many ways, it seems as if the international order has regressed back to a Cold War-like state of perpetual competition and violence. International solidarity, like the coalition that was built to execute Operation Desert Storm, seems like it could only exist in dreams. The United States and NATO are essentially engaged in a proxy war with Russia. China continues to hold military exercises around Taiwan. American foreign policy, under the current administration, is poised to pursue an isolationist-stance on foreign affairs, especially with regards to Ukraine.

Thinking about the current state of international affairs, then, makes inquiries into the period between 1989 and 1992 all the more interesting and, hopefully, useful. This period has been referred to by some scholars and historians as “the unipolar moment,” “the end of history,” or, as Bush himself called it, the beginnings of the “new world order.” What role did the US play in this “moment”? How did Bush envision Europe and the EU in

this new emerging order, and what part did Europe envision itself playing? What are the root causes of poor US-Russian relations that can be identified in the 1990s? Questions like these are important and can be somewhat answered by the work of historians and scholars studying this time of tremendous change.

As the rest of this paper will seek to show, it is clear that Bush’s vision for a “new world order” was not as ephemeral and naive as certain scholars suggest. Bush oversaw an unprecedented level of international cooperation, most importantly with Russia, which was uniquely receptive to and acquiescent of US demands for disarmament and diplomacy. Furthermore, there is significant scholarly debate as to the origins, benefits, and drawbacks to NATO expansion during the early 1990s. Proponents claim that NATO enhanced European security and improved Central and Eastern European markets after the end of the Soviet bloc, and that this was one of the main reasons for Germany choosing to reunify itself within NATO. Academic dissenters to NATO expansion largely point to it as the reason for Russia’s current bellicose relations with the West as a whole. This paper will briefly analyze how historians and scholars have treated Bush era diplomacy and NATO expansion in terms of their success and failures at the time, and their implications for the contemporary moment.

Two texts, theoretical and somewhat philosophical in nature, are essential in providing the framework for understanding the state of foreign affairs during the Bush administration. Francis Fukuyama, a political scientist, published his oft-cited work *End of History and the Last Man* in 1992. Fukuyama, viewing the ongoing collapse of communism and the Soviet Union, posited in his book that liberal democracy was the ultimate and final goal of all civilizations, a goal that was, in his opinion, in the process of being realized internationally in the early 1990s. Therefore, when all states, nations, and peoples inevitably formed their own liberal democracies, history would therefore come to an “end,” and a new, quite boring world would emerge, free from large-scale conflicts. Fukuyama interpreted the failures of totalitarian regimes and the gradual emergence of liberal democracies, which he called the “worldwide liberal revolution,” as reasons to believe that the world was indeed heading to a near-utopian moment of singularity. Bush’s utopic vision for a new world order aligns well with Fukuyama’s thesis.

Reading Fukuyama’s work in 2024 is slightly depressing, and Samuel P. Huntington, Fukuyama’s doctoral advisor at Harvard, took a pessimistic view on Fukuyama’s thesis. Huntington, responding indirectly to Fukuyama’s work, wrote his influential article “The Clash of Civilizations?” which was published in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993. This article was later expanded into a full-length book in 1996 as *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Huntington predicts that future global conflict, far from being avoided through a new world order of global democracy, would only continue between different civilizations, with the primary conflict arising between the West and Islam. Civilizations like the West, East Asia, and Muslim countries have extreme and “far more fundamental” differences in religion and the rights of men than could be smoothed over by international bodies like the UN.

These two texts, *The End of History and The Clash of Civilizations*, are important to keep in mind when analyzing the end of the Cold War, as they provide such drastically different ideas as to the direction of the world in the post-Cold War era. Fukuyama advocates for optimism, Huntington predicts perpetual, civilizational war. While most scholars agree that the United States did enjoy a moment of international superiority, disagreement arises on the reasons as to why US-Russian relations reverted back to a Cold War-like posture after such optimism in the early 1990s. Historians are equally split in the level of cooperation and diplomacy that was employed in this critical period, especially when analyzing relations between the US and Russia. Certain writers, like M. E. Sarotte, argue that Bush and Gorbachev did not do enough at the end of the Cold War to maintain the de-escalation of political and military tensions in Europe, with most of the blame to be put on Bush. Joshua Shiffrin writes that the US, faced with sudden and rapid Soviet decline during the Bush administration, only continued to alienate and take hostile actions towards the Soviets which would lead to the gradual souring of American and Russian foreign relations.

In *Making the Unipolar Moment*, Hal Brands asserts that the most impactful global crises, like the war in the Persian Gulf, German reunification, and disarmament in Eastern and Central Europe, were all heavily dictated by US economic and military influence. During the Gulf War, for example, Brands writes that Gorbachev made multiple attempts to broker a “diplomatic settlement” between the US and Saddam Hussein in order to end the war shortly after it began in the early months of 1991. Bush lended an ear to Gorbachev’s lamentations, but not much else. As Brands notes, this “erosion” of Soviet influence with the US and its NATO allies would further characterize US-Soviet relations. Brands also notes how the reunification of Germany was strongly pushed for by Bush in the context of adding a stronger, unified Germany to the NATO constituency. This would further improve European economic conditions and would have the benefit of expanding NATO’s bulwark should Gorbachev’s disarmament reforms backslide or fail. As a whole, Brands portrays the US-Soviet relationship, as a whole, in a very “unipolar” light, casting Bush and his administration as staunch and powerful shapers of the post-Cold War European world. It is not lost on the reader that the Soviets were essentially being pushed into a corner, especially in their ability to influence foreign affairs. As Brands writes, there were “many reasons for optimism” by 1992, as Gorbachev was consistently willing to agree to US demands for disarmament.

The origins of NATO’s enlargement under the Bush administration is a contested subject amongst scholars of the post-Cold War moment, as it provides insight into the long term goals of the Bush administration and the US’ military presence on the European continent. While Sarotte writes that Secretary of State James Baker had

emphatically promised Gorbachev in 1990 that NATO would not expand “one inch” eastward, any cursory glance at a map of NATO shows that this promise was broken. The idea of NATO expansion was being actively discussed by Western leaders even as early as February of 1990, thus levelling any notions that NATO expansion was only thought of later in the decade. By 1992, the Bush administration had in fact reached a new “consensus” that European states East of Germany would be allowed to join NATO. The origin of the idea for NATO enlargement is significant in the field of post-Cold War studies, as it supports many scholars’ theses that the US was acting deceptively towards the Soviet Union, even during the warmest years of Bush and Gorbachev’s relations.

Goldgeier and Shiffrin’s article takes a neutral stance on the overall effects of NATO expansion in the 1990s. The main questions that the two authors are trying to answer are: “Why did the US push for NATO expansion after the Cold War?” and “Has this [expansion] aided or undermined US national security?” The article then goes on to articulate numerous possible answers to these questions. First and foremost, the authors lay out the multiple reasons as to why the US would pursue the expansion of NATO, which by-and-large was due to the US’s unique political and military superiority on the global stage in the 1990s. The US thus used this long-awaited advantage over the USSR to assert American dominance in European political, economic, and security affairs. This desire to insert American influence into European affairs was most clearly manifest, as the authors point out, in the efforts of Bush and his administration to have Germany reunify and align itself with NATO after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989; when the notion was put forth to Bush that the Soviets might have a say in whether or not Germany joined NATO, Bush exclaimed, “to hell with that!” As for the drawbacks and merits of Bush’s unyielding policy choices towards the Soviets, Goldgeier and Shiffrin write that the expansion of NATO has been successful in creating a strong, Western bulwark against Russian military encroachments, but it also had the negative effect of alienating the Russians from US-European relations and diplomatic talks.

Both Joshua Shiffrin and James Goldgeier agree that this creation of a post-Cold War bulwark of NATO states encroaching on Russia’s doorstep would continue to sour US-Russian relations. However, noting that the expansion of NATO was viewed as a way to protect the peace in Europe and promote democracy, Goldgeier and Shiffrin both agree that NATO expansion was instrumental in developing Europe’s ability to defend itself from future Russian aggression. It also allowed for President Bush to ensure that the United States would enjoy unequal dominance in European affairs; if European security issues were left solely to the EU, combined with the realization that post-Soviet bloc countries would want to join Western institutions, then NATO itself would lose relevance and priority. Russians, at the time, also made it clear, and would continue to do so throughout the 1990s, that Ukraine was a “redline” for NATO’s expansion eastward. This was, however, readily understood by Bush and his advisors. Therefore, given what Bush was working with at the time,

especially concerning Gorbachev's amicability relative acquiescence to German reunification, it would seem as though Bush's thoughts towards NATO expansion were relatively ambivalent and, to quote Hal Brands, gradualistic.

Bush himself was optimistic about incorporating Gorbachev and the Soviets into NATO, or at least maintaining the Warsaw Pact and NATO in a kind of open concordance with each other, in the late 1980s. Brands notes that German reunification, as it unfolded in 1989, was seen as having the potential to begin World War III if a united Germany aligned itself with NATO against Russia's will. But reunification and alignment with NATO went over relatively well at the Kremlin, with Gorbachev lamenting that Bush and NATO were just moving a little too fast.

One of the more interesting parts of Goldgeier and Shiffrinson's article is the mention of plans that were put forward (by the Russians and by US strategists) to incorporate Russia into NATO in the 1990s. One plan put forth by Yeltsin created a timeline to have Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia be incorporated into NATO by 2005 (the authors note this little piece of history with an exclamation point). Putin himself even floated the idea to President Clinton in 2000. One must doubt the seriousness of these suggestions, especially with Putin's in 2000, as Putin, by the time he was president, had already made clear his anti-reformist and nationalist views, especially concerning NATO infringement on lands historically belonging to Russia.

Shiffrinson, in his article "Keeping Them Well Behind," doubles down on the idea that the US, since the 1980s, has formulated aggressive and competitive anti-Russian foreign policy objectives. Shiffrinson bases this characterization of US-Russian relations on a political science framework of perceived and realized power inequalities between rising and declining states. Both the Reagan and H. W. Bush administrations were aware of the decline of Soviet influence in global affairs, and thus capitalized on this by actively pursuing policies that resulted in American interests "undermining Russian ones." Shiffrinson cites multiple efforts by the US, like the Reagan administration's push to have interest rates on Soviet loans be brought up from their sub-market levels, in order to "[help] the Soviet Union exhaust itself." This, paired with the Bush administration's decision by 1992 to go ahead with NATO expansion eastward, to push for unequal disarmament treaties, and to not acquiesce to Soviet inputs on war strategy during the Persian Gulf crisis, all serve to further Shiffrinson's thesis that, rather than failed diplomacy on both sides, the United States was actively attempting to significantly weaken the Russian state even after the end of the Soviet Union in 1991.

John Mearsheimer's article "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault" in *Foreign Affairs*, cited by Shiffrinson as the "clearest statement" on some scholars' thoughts on the

long-term effects of NATO expansion, furthers the idea that NATO expansion only served to further destabilize and antagonize Russia (if the title of the article wasn't clear enough). Shiffrinson notes, though, that works like Mearsheimer's do not take into account the whole plethora of fits and starts that NATO expansion underwent. More importantly, Mearsheimer's article does not take into account Russia's own hand in current East-West tensions. While it is a somewhat fruitless exercise to play the historical blame game, Shiffrinson is right to conclude that a nuanced, balanced analysis of NATO expansion and the actions by H. W. Bush and Gorbachev from 1989 to 1992 is more useful than simply blaming NATO and the West for ruining international relations between the two great powers.

The idea that US-Russian relations were soured mainly by the United States's incrementally aggressive foreign policy stances is also put forth by M. E. Sarotte in her book *Not One Inch*. When I first began my preliminary research into this 1989-1991 "moment," I was initially wooed by George H. W. Bush's assertions of the emergence of a "new world order," one where Russian and American interests mingled and coexisted on the European continent. However, as Sarotte bluntly states at the end of her work, this "new world order" idea was anything but "new," with US foreign policy being more of the same during the Bush and Clinton years, especially in its continuation of Cold War strategies of containment, alienation, and competition. Sarotte is therefore in agreement with Shiffrinson that, despite outward appearances, like the Helsinki summit in 1990 between Bush and Gorbachev, or the Partnership for Peace (PfP) framework for US-Russian relations under Clinton and Yeltsin, the United States is largely to blame for poor relations with Russia today.

George H. W. Bush's book *A World Transformed*, co-authored with Brent Scowcroft and published in 1998, provides a very interesting, very different view of the end of the Cold War. While much of the book should probably be taken with a bucket of salt (it's slightly unnerving to read a work of history with no bibliography at the end of it), it does provide a unique view of the deliberations and actions that Bush and his administration took in the monumental events that took place during his one-term presidency. Much of what Bush and Scowcroft write, specifically concerning attitudes towards the Russians, slightly contradicts the theses that Sarotte, Goldgeier and Shiffrinson put forth. For example, while Sarotte does note that there were significant failures on both the Russian and American sides to alleviate geopolitical tensions in the 1990s, Sarotte, at the end of her work, condemns Bush Sr., Clinton, and Bush Jr. as the main malefactors in shaping the current state of US-Russian relations. Bush, however, didn't see it that way. In *A World Transformed*, Bush portrays the Russians, and Gorbachev especially, as being amicable and relatively open to NATO expansion and US demands concerning European security. There are multiple passages where Bush and Scowcroft express their "amazement" at Gorbachev's acceptance of certain US initiatives, especially his approval of Germany being unified under NATO. Again, it is hard to take Bush's book at face value, but given the sense of optimism towards US-Soviet relations

that leaks through the pages of *A World Transformed*, it is hard not to wonder if the decline of US-Russian relations is really as one-sided as certain scholars assert.

I disagree slightly with Sarotte that Bush's idea for a "new world order" was ephemeral or nonexistent during his administration. If anything, the rapid success of US foreign policy in the 1990s in reducing American and Soviet armaments in Europe points to the incredible nearness of a "new world order," one where the Cold War arms race would be completely flipped, where there was a race for disarmament and unprecedented cooperation between the Soviets and the US. Furthermore, Bush's foreign policy strategy was in many ways a continuation of Ronald Reagan's policies and discussions with the Russians and especially Gorbachev. James G. Wilson, in his book *The Triumph of Improvisation*, highlights how much of the post-1989 optimism within the Bush administration and the early years of the Clinton administration stemmed from positive developments spurred by Reagan's engagement and progress with Gorbachev from 1985 to 1988. Bush's administration was therefore building on that progress which was made, manifested in Bush's attempts to keep Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative going with Gorbachev.

The works of Goldgeier, Shiffrin, and Sarotte, among others, tend to villainize US engagement with Russia in a presentist lens, largely ascribing the current state of US-Russian relations to the rapid expansion of NATO in the 1990s and early 2000s. Mearsheimer's 2014 *Foreign Affairs* article is the most succinct summary of the reasons as to why current Russian aggression would be caused by NATO expansion. However, even Mearsheimer's article erroneously states that the Clinton administration was the first to begin "advocating [for] NATO expansion," an assertion which Sarotte disproves. Furthermore, there is not enough treatment of the domestic problems that American, European, or Russian leaders were facing during this time. What was the economic situation like in Russia during Gorbachev's attempts at reform, from 1985 to 1991? What, then, were the economic developments that then led to someone like Putin gaining power? We know, for example, that even someone with such a strong foreign policy record like H. W. Bush could be voted out simply over issues over economic performance.

What is clear, then, is that there exists a significant debate within the historiographical record on the causality, significance, and effects of NATO expansion in the 1990s and early 2000s, an expansion which was largely initiated by George H. W. Bush during near the end of his presidency. Certain scholars, like Shiffrin and Goldgeier, take a less idealistic approach, attributing the impetus of NATO expansion to Bush as a way to continue to exert US influence in Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Mearsheimer, on the other hand, attributes NATO expansion to the proliferation of a kind of liberal imperialism, with overly optimistic

ideologies bulldozing more realistic approaches to foreign relations. European states, especially Germany and smaller Eastern European countries, wanted to become part of NATO so as to guarantee US military support in the event of a re-aggravated Russia. This trend continued well past the 1990s, as it became clear that admission to NATO and the EU entailed significant economic and defensive benefits, as opposed to a continuation of the Warsaw Pact status-quo.

Future scholarship on the post-Cold War moment would benefit from a refocusing on the issue of NATO expansion. It is clear that Russia has, from the start, been opposed to NATO encroachment on its former Soviet territories. But why is this? Mearsheimer's article, besides sounding like something from a 1930s German newspaper, does not even begin to try to understand why Russia feels the way that it does about Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia. Is it purely in reaction to NATO? NATO is explicitly a defensive alliance. Is it about resources? Is it based on Kievan Rus? Is it in pursuit of denazification? Understanding why diplomatic efforts failed between the US and Russia after such a promising post-Cold War moment is essential in gaining a fuller picture as to how and why US-Russian relations exist where they do today. NATO expansion does not provide a full picture as to how and why Russia has come to feel so attacked and cornered by the West. Future studies of the 1989-1992 moment must further dedicate their attention to how Russian and US diplomats interacted. What also might be fruitful is a study that incorporates US and Russian intelligence services and their impacts on upper-level decision making at this critical historical juncture. George H. W. Bush, a former CIA director himself, met with his CIA chief every morning of his presidency. And Putin, as we all know, was on the front lines of the KGB. Perhaps diplomatic mistrust was fueled by intelligence gatherers? What can be concluded, however, is that NATO expansion, while commonly cited by pundits and isolationists today, can not be held to account entirely for the failures of US-Russian diplomacy since the end of the Cold War.

Late Fragment

By Raymond Carver

And did you get what
you wanted from this life, even so?
I did.

And what did you want?
To call myself beloved, to feel myself
beloved on the earth.

Goodbye Ana

Parker Otto

She's getting back together with her ex
Fine, he's a nice enough guy
I have no cause to hate him
Except that he now has the first woman that I had strong feelings for in a long time
She awakened a romantic side of me that I wasn't sure even existed anymore
We didn't even see each other for too long
But the passion I felt
The way she sang
The way she looked me in the eyes
The way she laid her head on my shoulders when I called her beautiful
The way her lips tasted
I carried that around for weeks and now I have nowhere to put it
Where can those memories go?
Am I supposed to just toss them out with the rubbish like they meant nothing to me?
They did
They meant a great deal
They meant possibilities
I would have sang for her
I would have cooked for her
I would have made every declaration and gesture of love, big or small
But now that's gone
Is it my fault for feeling so much so soon?
It wasn't love
But I could see a future where love was possible
I feel like a pawn in her game
I'm sure she wasn't trying to be malicious
I don't think she was unkind
But it still hurts
I'm still clutching the ghost of her hand, trying to avoid letting go
But it's inevitable
She's getting back together with her ex
Why do all my attempts at love make me feel so broken?
Why do I keep getting kicked to the curb as soon as I find my footing?
I hardly knew you but I miss you terribly
Or maybe I just miss the feelings you gave me, how easy it all felt
Goodbye Ana

untitled

Jack Keegan

The guy I buy tall boys from said "I'll see you tomorrow"
This red headed woman who lives in the building
The employee at the deli said, "this is my life"
Where do you people go to hang out
"The El-Royale is no place for a priest"
You can drink twelve drinks in one sitting.
I remember my mother came into my elementary school and taught my classmates and I about Roy Lichtenstein
I sniff glue now

