CORVUS REVIEW S/S '19



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Between Ourselves

Jon Serri

I look in the mirror and wonder what Jon should do. He doesn't remember last night or the night before that, this week seems hazy, and in a sense, the summer is just a blur, but he told me everything. We sit down over coffee (tea for him) and I retrace the events of the evening and in this, I hope to help him with the previous night, week, and time in his life as a whole.

The reading went well I say. Many people admired his use of voice to bring his characters to life and connect with the audience. Near the back of the small Lower East Side bar with the low ceiling and urine-scented bathrooms, a blonde girl who reminded Jon of his estranged sister who left home at the age of seventeen to join an all-girls Replacements cover band handed him a yellow pill. He asked for two and she obliged and he bought her a drink to make this a *fair-trade deal*. They took a shot, tequila for her, bourbon for him, both well bottles so as to take advantage of the 2 for 1 special. The bathroom where they made out reminded him of the boy's room in high school where certain teachers would give certain students money, marijuana, speed, the promise of good grades, if they performed certain acts, and the memory of this made anything further than kissing and groping and promises of a next time impossible.

Jon stumbled out into the humid night and forgot why he left or even where he was and how by chance, he'd arrived there in the first place. He figured he'd go east, hit the water at some point, and then make any and all decisions. That's when I took over and guided him towards his car. We debated, then discussed, and finally, he relented and handed me the keys. The trip home went smoothly, the proof of which lies in the very conversation we are now sharing, and yes, maybe it is problematic not to recall where he parked, but I tell him that if he makes a right at the corner and walks down the hill, he will find a 1978 Ford Thunderbird with its passenger side tires resting on the curb. He must move it by Tuesday for street cleaning.

We read together. I tell him I don't like it. The writing is indulgent, egocentric. You can't write like Borges I say. He agrees.

We look in the mirror and wonder if he should wear his grandfather's dog tags and then go to that place in the Bronx where Big John and Evelyn lived, that place where he fell off the rocking chair and split open his infant soft head. They won't be there he says, haven't been in years, but I tell him to trust me and we walk out the door, make a right, and go down the hill.

We arrive at the house and everything looks as he remembers only smaller, and for a moment he expects to find Yiayia and Papou but he knows that's impossible. Instead, an Abuela and Abuelo answer the door and greet him like a cousin from their homeland. They rain kisses down on his head, pat his cheeks, and tousle his hair. She points to the rocking chair in the corner and rubs the scar on Jon's forehead. We pass through the hallway, pausing to look at the pictures of nieces, nephews, and grandchildren that adorn the walls. Generations spread out across our eyes. Abuelo points to a photo in the corner of a man sitting on a wooden fence, Eladio, a farmer from the mountains who raised golden-eared pigs in the 19th century. Abuela slides plates of pernil and tostones into our hands and leads us through the kitchen into the yard. Jon points to the peach tree from his childhood. Peaches and cream while sitting on the porch. Taking the pits and planting them around the neighborhood. Abuelo seats us at a domino table and introduces us to Eladio Jr. and Esteban. We pass a bottle of rum around the table and sweat under the August sun.

The men speak in Spanish and we sit there unknowing and confused. Shouldn't have taken German for Amanda Tisch I say to Jon. Too guttural, no romance. Abuelo points to the food and we smile and pat our stomachs.

Eladio Jr. reaches into the cooler and pulls out bottles of Mythos and sets them down on the table. The bottles seem from a different era, the labels faded by time. Abuelo asks Jon if he remembers the feast. Pigeons land at our feet and peck at the remains of our lunch. Jon smiles and says I think so but I was just a boy. Abuelo gestures with his hand for Jon to keep going. So what else can he do but tell a story, a story of Big John and Evelyn selling their first home? Of the lamb cooking on the spit and the sounds of the bouzouki and was it Eladio who then brought out his guitar and how the combination of rebetiko and bachata must have sounded strange to the Irish neighbors who were previously amused by this Greek family but now horrified at the abundance of brown people moving into these homes and the strange sounds and smells that arrived with them. When the cops came the women made them sit down and Yiayia and Abuela gave

them enough food to bring back to the station and Papou cut them roses from the garden to bring home to their wives. What could they do? Things were different then and Jon sat perched on the lowest branch of the peach tree, his feet dangling just above the heads of his aunts, uncles, and cousins, hoping that no adult would notice it was well past his bedtime. The gamblers played poker under a cloud of tobacco, the gossips told stories over coffee, and the dancers kept moving in a circle, hands, and arms intertwined with the lead waving a white handkerchief in the air.

Jon stops there and takes a long pull from his Mythos. Abuelo slaps him on the back and laughs, a booming sound that scares the pigeons away. I tell Jon it's time for us to go and we hug Abuelo and Abuela and tell them we'll make this a habit. We go back through the house, past the pictures of nieces, nephews, and grandchildren, past that rocking chair, out the front door, and step off the porch. I put my arm around Jon's shoulder and tell him to take us home.

Jon Serri spends most of his time in New York City with his wife and daughter but tends to write, think, and live better at their home in Saratoga Springs, NY. He teaches high school English and avoids complaining about his students. His short fiction has been featured in Corvus Review.

Extraordinary Rendition
Nick Sweeney

My neighbor won a makeover in a competition in a magazine. "Was it in *The New Republic*?" I asked her. She shook her head with something approaching pity and told me which one. It was not one I knew. It would never have been one I knew.

Something gave her the idea that she'd be on TV for it, but that ordeal was not part of the prize. All the same, in case it was, and they were just telling her that, and might spring it on her as a last-minute surprise, she dressed up in clothes that were... *nice* – don't get me wrong, they were *nice* – but either deliberately retro or just simply current a decade before. It was kind of hard to tell. She also had her hair done as retro/frump, and while she was at it had eyebrows kind of glued on, and troweled on a ton of makeup before going. It was a bit like cleaning before the cleaner arrived... which she also did because I'd seen her many a time through her living room windows, up on chairs, dusting, before her Latina treasure strode sternly along the sidewalk and up the path.

At the makeover, my neighbor thought the make-up girls would be kind to her like they were to the women on TV shows. She thought they might be *interested* in her – she still suspected hidden cameras, and an excited presenter, heading a camera crew, leaping out of nowhere to holler, "Surpi-yize!" – but they weren't. She thought they'd put her at her ease with girl-talk that crossed the generation gap and reduced it to the thinnest of cracks. They actually verged on sulky with her, though were sunny enough with one another as they talked soaps and clubs and boys and clothes, crazy cocktails, and a rumored new shade of hair color that would take overheads in the coming months.

"It was plain..." my neighbor started to tell me and went silent. She pondered something.

I nodded, and finished her utterance with the words, "That they looked down on you as a hapless and somewhat ridiculous creature fallen unexpectedly among them, an ungainly, helpless beetle on its back, waving its legs, and thoroughly despised you." I thought I was helping.

She looked hard at me, which made me add, "But of *course* they didn't." She said, "It was plain that they were just doing it for the money."

It was my turn to look hard at her. I wondered whether I should ask if they ought to do it for pleasure. Perhaps they just enjoyed the... *product*, I suggested, the end result – "You," I prompted, when she frowned, but that just made her frown harder – and not the *process*. I said, "Well, as long as *you're* happy with it. That's the most important thing."

She was happy enough to bring back a head-and-shoulders portrait of herself, on the scale of an eight-feet-high Amazon of a woman, made over. She had to pay \$79.99 for the gold-leafed frame it was in. She also brought Polaroids too, painful as hemorrhoids, I thought, of herself as a work-in-progress under harsh lights; they could easily have been mistaken for portraits of a woman at the dentist, in the middle of a procedure that was doing her good but serving her a down-payment of agony. They had coffee-stains on them, and one of them was... *rippled*. They were the roids in the room, I thought, souvenirs rescued from the trash.

She invited me and our other neighbors in for coffee and cake. She had never done that. The cake was kind of dry. The coffee was instant, in both senses of the word, shoved into our hands almost as soon as we'd sat down. As we tasted it and looked acidly at one another, our neighbor began the unveiling. I confessed, "I've never been to the unveiling of a portrait," and the others murmured the same. The brown paper came off, partly aided by scissors and a staple-remover.

We gazed at the portrait, this new version of our host, like something in a stately home, plus-sized, made over, *rendered* by snarky girls and a photographer.

"Post-makeover," our neighbor said, the Latin adding *nothing* to what she was saying, "people outside look *through* me." We joined them and did so, it seemed because she leaned over to explain, "It's like they're not sure if it's me, anymore."

It was as if they were trying to see the woman within, she insisted, the *real* woman. But surely that woman didn't exist anymore? That woman was at home, where she never strayed far from the portrait as if to remind us: *that one in the frame is me, you know – you* see *that, don't you? – the* real *me, and not the flesh and blood you see before you, imperfect, eyes narrowed and knowing what you're really thinking.*

"That's what you call *extraordinary* rendition," one of the invited neighbors said at the unveiling. When we looked the statement back at her, she nodded, pitied our

ignorance, said, "Do you not *know* that? It's the latest *kind*. The latest kind of rendition there even *is*."

"But doesn't that mean..." I searched for a word. "Transported?"

"Well...we *are*," another of them said, latching excitedly on to the imaginary *thread* of the thing. She winked at me, then popped her cake into her mouth, and made a gagging face, and gag fingers, which I thought was... snide. For a second, I saw my face in hers, brought to sneering and uncomfortable life; my own makeover, rendered and fixed irretrievably in time.

Laikonik Express, Nick Sweeney's Poland novel, was published by Unthank Books in 2011. His novelette The Exploding Elephant is out with Bards and Sages. He is a freelance writer and musician. More than any sane person could want to know about him can be found at http://www.nicksweeneywriting.com

Our House

Norbert Kovacs

The two of us build the house with no hired help. Long, yellow planks of wood go into each room from basement to attic. The place comes together in tight blocks. I go through adding carpet to cover the floor in every room, except in the kitchen and the bathroom, as seems fit. I hang pictures on the wall that seem to study us more than we study them. Once I'm done, you say the new house makes you feel claustrophobic. You cut windows into the walls to view the fields better. You break open the floor and add cubbies beneath the boards. You stuff these with old keepsakes: photos, diaries, childhood toys. The horde rolls by itself into bundles under the boards. You add doors between rooms. When I open one, I see a door to the next close at hand.

The smell of the tar that holds our floors and walls together makes us uneasy. We wander the rooms, trying to forget it. In the study, we read our fill of moralistic books, then we eat in the kitchen while giving accounts of our lives. We pack the basement with junk. Old, angry notes from friends. Clothes torn in argument. Items we fear. The next thing, we head to the foyer where we smile and pretend happiness for our guests. The house surprises us into new attitudes all the time.

We tend to the place the best we can. We clean a room of the trash that settles on the floor due to our daily living. We collect the napkins that drop from our pockets. I brush into a bag the broken vase you had tipped from the shelf. The room is set to order. However, another room becomes a mess while we are cleaning. The bookcase falls and every book tumbles onto the study floor. The glass falls from the dish strainer and smashes in the kitchen. We go to tidy the spillage. The several messes puzzle us for they seem to come out of the blue. Time alone, we know, cannot cause them. However, we try to accept it. And we clean, so the house does not crumble onto our heads.

When we tire of our tasks around the house, we sit in the living room and try to enjoy our leisure. I read the paper; you watch TV. As if on cue, the voices start. We hear them throughout the house. One calls, a second responds. Then a third. Sometimes their words sound in agreement. At other times, challenge. Or provocation. We try to name and locate the voices, the two of us, the only people actually in the house. The calls and cries move among the rooms in

the meantime, joining in bizarre duets and choruses. My father's angry words migrate from the study as our friend's bark begins there. My former teenage crackle, unsure and lonely, leaves the guest room and joins the sound of our friend's spouse, moaning in the kitchen. We cannot ignore the voices, though we have heard them many times. They have become ingrained to our ears. I read their spoken words from my book in the study. In bed, we speak with the house's voices in our own. Or as our own, if you like.

We live in a peculiar house, you'd say. And we continue building it regardless. We are adding a new room on the remnants of our old patio this spring. We believe we should never stop building, moving through the rooms, and listening to the many voices that inhabit them. Our built strangeness is home. We have come to think any less would be our death.

Norbert Kovacs lives and writes in Hartford, Connecticut. His stories have appeared in *Thrice Fiction*, *Westview*, *Gravel*, *STORGY*, and *The Write Launch*. Norbert's website is www.norbertkovacs.net.

Other Side

Julianne Basile

If emptiness haunts the living,

"What haunts demons?"

Appears to be a relevant question.

I have no friends

So I wait for their shadows

To slip past me in the mirror.

I ask them to prom,

Proffer movie tickets

And they agree to a date,

But insist

on stopping in purgatory

on the way.

If the word "demon" is derived

From the Greek "damos,"

Meaning messenger,

I will not kill them.

I will allow them to show me

The way my dust-cloud moves

Across eternity,

Point out where the specks of me

Could be rearranged

Into a more cohesive shape.

I will count their knocks,

Count the scratches they leave,

Learn every bit of Latin,

Analyze their dreams

So enough scientific knowledge
Can be gained to suck the potion
From their bloodless veins,
Choke them for their treasured names.

Until the day comes
When I can confidently say,

"I've batted Baal,
One of the Seven Princes of Hell,
He caught me far from Eden,
And he ain't no rookie demon."

If you look them in the eyes, Their faces wax translucent;

They are the Wizard of Oz,
Small men
who fool the world
with big voices.

If emptiness haunts the living,

Then I haunt these demons.

Julianne Basile is a reckless youth from North Jersey. Her work has been published by the *Plum Tree Tavern* and is forthcoming in *The Stray Branch*. She regularly performs at poetry slams and enjoys getting chased in the forest.

Windshield Wipers Andre Hampshire

For my Mother and Grandmother

My past has come to me
Like heavy rain on tainted glass.
If tonight into the darkness I fade,
If tonight my road ends in a crash,
Think of my childhood
And forgive the rest.

Poet and composer, Andre Hampshire has come to know two languages well, one by nature and the other by necessity. While all of his writings are in English, he hopes to write Portuguese poetry should the time ever come.

Night Flight Bill Arnott

A hum of soft blue light
laps in gentle waves
undulating on the cusp
of audibility, down
length of deprivation canister
thrum of pressurizing air
40,000 feet of flatulence
recycled fart
keeps us aloft
according to my nose
aerodynamics admittedly
not my forte

Enfolded on a reclined seat
thin padding custom shaped
to fit no human form
I'm shimmied, beneath
brightening blue
near neon now
wash that rises to a chop
as though I've fed my bed
with coins — an hourly motel
same stained and sour soiled mattress
without the all-day cable
i.e. porn
just fevered pitching rock
of two impatient lovers

lulling me erotically
eager now to simply go to sleep
in the deadening smell of backside

Beyond a porthole window stars are humming past same silent sound as our internal blue launched like Boney M aboard their flight to Venus disco ball in orbit with the stars Cyrillic static sputtering from Sputnik Oh, those Russians!
Ground control to Major Tom Hanks, to Houston we have a cataclysmic problem: everyone aboard, I fear just may have shit themselves

Vancouver author, poet, songwriter Bill Arnott is the bestselling nonfiction author of *Wonderful Magical Words* and *Dromomania*. His poetry is in the League of Canadian Poets *Heartwood* and Paper Dart Press UK *PLAY* anthologies. Bill's poems, reviews, and articles also appear online.

Blind Pig Robert Beveridge

The sound of glass against pavement at four in the morning burnt sugar odor beneath the high sweet juniper sick and the barest hint of copper ripples outwards from 12th street and engulfs a city, a planet

November 2018 marked Robert Beveridge's thirtieth anniversary as a publishing poet. When not writing, he makes noise (<u>xterminal.bandcamp.com</u>) in Akron, OH. Recent/upcoming appearances in Medium Chill, San Pedro River Review, and South Broadway Ghost Society, among others.

The Darkest of Nights
Jeffrey Zable

Just another blank space within another blank space. That's how it goes if one lives in one's head: a head that is full of murderous intents that were never carried through.

It's easy to think of oneself as a coward-someone who's taken the easy way out: the easy road to minimal success.

I prefer to engage with cats and dogs I meet along the way, as most seem to appreciate my humor and ask how I'm doing against the odds.

There are no odds, I immediately respond, given that this sunlight will soon reflect the darkest of nights. . .

Back to Normal Jeffrey Zable

I was talking with Sue Nommy when she mentioned that sometimes the ocean rocks itself to sleep, but other times becomes angry—enraged and says out loud, "Well, if there is no God, then why shouldn't I follow the course of human history: rape, pillage, cheat, and destroy those who are the weakest!" And when I pointed out that sometimes the weakest are among the nicest people around, she pondered that for a moment and then walked away into the sea. The next time I saw her she seemed angry—enraged as she was riding on the back of a whale and yelling obscenities, while violent waves spread over the land taking thousands of lives. And as I stood at the top of a hill, the water just inches below my feet, I shouted out to her, "Are you happy now!" Without responding, she rode that whale as if it were a bronco, until everything died down and was back to normal.

Jeffrey Zable is a teacher, writer of poetry, fiction, and non-fiction, and a percussionist who plays for Afro Cuban and Afro Haitian dance classes. He's published his writing extensively—more recently in Alba, Tower Journal, Rasputin, The Bitchin' Kitch, Picaroon, Ink In Thirds, Uppagus and many others. In 2017 he was nominated for both The Best Of The Net and The Pushcart Prize.

Killers

David Estringel

I cut you

with words

to watch you bleed.

You starve me

with silence

to see me wither.

Funny,

we should look back

upon that lifeless heap

we left--

surprised—

wondering,

"How could you let that happen?"

David Estringel's work has been accepted/published at Foliate Oak Magazine, Indiana Review, Terror House Magazine, Expat Press, 50 Haikus, littledeathlit, Down in the Dirt, Route 7, Setu, Paper Trains, The Elixir, Soft Cartel, Harbinger Asylum, Briars Lit, Open Arts Forum, Cajun Mutt Press, and Former People Journal, and The Ugly Writers.

Springtime Death of Whydah Sibyl Ken Allan Dronsfield

Stand at ocean-side, exhale screams cut through dense air, her throat tightens releasing weird screeching caterwauls. The ice melts and Sibyl climbs the tower; in a gown of white with gold lace; coat-less, barefoot and cold, warm sunrise is soon. Covered in darkness, within the icy dream cursing those of pious dogma and reform wearing a studded gemstone black collar; gifted from her knight now dearly departed. Deep within the throes of welcomed death, Whydah Sibyl reaches with gnarly fingers; breathless as water drips from castle walls. Reciting, "as the dead are never truly gone; unless they are totally forgotten by the living. My life; a coolish sea breeze, stormy at dawn; entranced, raving mad as a boiled chicken." Whydah Sibyl still sings her lovelorn sonnet, and now rises high into the clear black sky, whispers echo in soft light, 'your knight waits'. Cast in a verse of silent night, she disappears into the crest of a rolling wave, never forgotten.

Ken Allan Dronsfield is a disabled veteran and poet from New Hampshire, now residing on the plains of Oklahoma. He has three poetry collections, "The Cellaring" a collection of 80 poems of light horror, paranormal, weird and wonderful work. "A Taint of Pity", Life Poems Written with a Cracked Inflection, and "Zephyr's Whisper", Poems and Parables of a Seasonal Pretense. Ken loves writing, thunderstorms, walking in the woods at night and spending time with his cats Willa and Yumpy.

Dinosaurs Too

David Boski

you used to download porn on LimeWire using a dial-up internet connection, watch wrestling when the WWE was still the WWF, use a Zenith VCR to record movies off of your gigantic television set, own a Walkman and after that a Discman; there are kids out there who have forgotten more about technology than you have ever known, you get tired for no reason, your hangovers are much worse now, it takes you longer to piss, and you have grey's in your pubic hair; you can't get up without having a cup of coffee or two or three, sometimes your back hurts and according to WebMD you're completely fucked; plus, you're old enough to be a father -to a teenager, and one time a woman at a bar replied 'wow that's old' after you told her your age but that's ok; cause one day

she'll be a fucking dinosaur too.

David Boski lives in Toronto. His poems have appeared in: Cacti Fur, North Of Oxford, The Rye Whiskey Review, Under The Bleachers, The Dope Fiend Daily, Alien Buddha Press and elsewhere. His chapbook "Fist Fighting and Fornication" was recently released by Holy&intoxicated Publications.

Legend of the Bee Queen (for Sylvia Plath)
Brandy Thompson

Apis Mellifera

grafted during the first instar,
the bee queen emerges from her piping season,
seizing back her marking pen then
October 1962 – she marks 25 commemorations.

Sovereign to the worms and the dirt
ever before the flowers —
the (falling) matriarch pledges her fertility
— the ripe decay of thirty summers and all of her sustenance,
down to her last drop of bee bread when

grave-digging season sets in —

the wintering winds advance their fury,
only to fall powerless to her excellency's own —
she, the ruler of perpetual oblivion from birth;
she, the hemolymph, possessing all the warmth of a winter cluster, alone.

She is the solitary swarm and the numb-lipped lone-ness stinging and streaming out her black-death ribbons all at once – mad and buzzing for a legacy, with her ink-stamped honeycomb of grave goods

she migrates to a last December where Yeats' ghost has been commissioned for the blessing of her coffin hive on Fitzroy, in Primrose the Fates' parting pittance
and the royal clock snow-stopped to mourn
the coming of her majesty's farewell year
(how sticky with pride she must have been)

1963 February –
the death season; she is abdicating
nothing; the queen propolizes her throne
and with permanent assemblage – –

She remains entombed and numinous to reign in the 4 a.m. phosphorescence of her fever-hazed confession room — — She the immortal and malevolent nebulous with the brooding antennae and a brimming pollen basket; she remains.

Not of country; not of colony but surely of a realm preceding America . . . She, the mother tongue, spoon-fed of royal jelly – with her London death – the old smoke – and the headstone to prove it.

Brandy Thompson is a lifelong resident of rural southeastern Ohio. A former cashier; retail worker; factory worker; waitress; & insurance agent – ill-suited to each of these, what with her head perpetually in the clouds and all. Presently, she makes an occupation of reading, writing and evolving – *sans* time clocks.

Never at the Hour of Crickets John Morrison

She led me by moonlight to a willow thicket beside a slow creek

said a moth needed more from a great ape. Even

as I whispered *please*, she became a flicker of blue and we

finished, *Olly Olly* oxen free, and I laid down

on the bank to watch through closed eyelids

clouds jostle and tear like the pink spun glass

insulation in the attic. I see into the ceiling and above

the ceiling is the roof and above the roof

another sky. I see we all live in one

house though we

never	see	each	other
110 101	SCC	Cacii	outer

never will, not at dawn, not for coffee, not at bedtime,

never at the moment of bats.

John Morrison writes in Portland, Oregon, and sometimes runs the trails for a few miles. His poems have appeared in the *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Cimarron Review* among other journals. His book is *Heaven of the Moment*. He teaches at the Attic Workshop.

Famous Unknown Persons Michael Minassian

Jack drums his fingers
on the steering wheel
while I watch the exit ramps
speed by like a tape
reel on fast forward,
looking for a sign
or message written in the code
of interstate numbers
or hidden symbol
in the names of highways or roads.

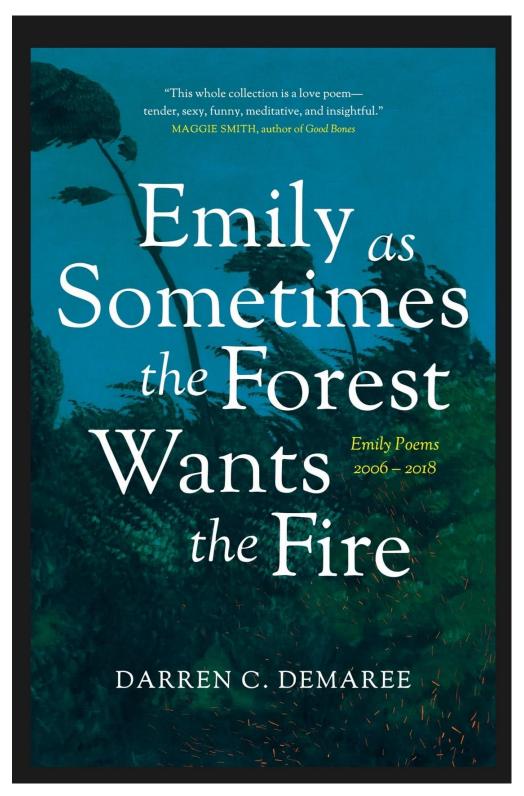
Jack is the first to break the silence, You and I, he says, are famous unknown persons. He pauses, then continues, Without us, the whole earth, the universe might disappear.

Then I repeat my name, then Jack's—next, I recite the names of all in our family,
Armenian, American, Persian, and the names of the homesick along the highways and back roads of America.

We drive along, the radio tuned to a talk show—

the murmur of voices
merging with traffic noise, whistling wind,
the sound of the disappearing landscape,
and famous unknown persons,
history's hitchhikers, trailing behind.

Michael Minassian is a Contributing Editor for *Verse-Virtual*, an online magazine. His chapbooks include poetry: *The Arboriculturist* (2010) and photography: *Around the Bend* (2017). For more information: https://michaelminassian.com



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