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Editor's Note

Ah, summer. The tantalizing smell of incinerated frankfurters, the enchanting tingle of mosquito bites, the gentle *BLAP-BLAP-BLAAAAAAAAAAPPP* of the neighbor's gas-powered weed whacker.

Set the box fan on "Hi," help yourself to a popsicle, and settle into the hottest days of the year (and, you know, the history of recorded temperature) with issue 121. Contributors include Catherine Kelley, John Kucera, DS Maolalai, Ken Poyner, Greg Schwartz, and Miles Varana.

Stay cool, friends.

—Laura Garrison

Art Appreciation

Ken Poyner

Quibble is astounded that some townsfolk still cannot distinguish a feral violinist from a rogue violinist. Even without a taste for the underlying science, simple observation should in time reveal consistencies and differences. With a little attention, it is clear that rogue violinists have patterns, hold within them a repertoire. Listen often enough, and a clutch of rogue violinists might string together recognizable Vivaldi, a partial Bach concerto. Feral violinists have more passion, yet do no planning. Their output is sporadic and arrhythmic. Why townsfolk do not discern this, Quibble cannot fathom. Are they listening? Who would ignore free music?

KEN POYNER's four collections of flash fiction and four of speculative poetry are available from most web booksellers. He was an information warrior for thirty-three years, and now supports full time his wife's powerlifting. Recent work has appeared in *Analog*, *Café Irreal*, *Rune Bear*, *Tiny Molecules*.

A Museum

Miles Varana

The bolts of the old submarine
wake downriver, as its rooms
fill with water, like memories
of food in the belly of a toad.

MILES VARANA's work has appeared in a variety of publications, including *SOFTBLOW*, *After the Pause*, *Chicago Literati*, *Viewfinder*, and *Crack the Spine*. He has worked previously as a staff reader and managing editor at *Hawai'i Pacific Review*. Miles lives in Madison, Wisconsin, where he tries his best to behave like a good millennial despite his abiding hatred of tapas.

A Sandwich for George Orwell

Catherine Kelley

I'm waiting for you, George Orwell, on this splintered bench just outside of London, the smells of the livestock market invading my nose. I can hear the haggling of customers and the quaint old cars running along the road, but all I care about is seeing you. At any moment you'll appear, on your way to the spike where you'll sleep tonight next to a tramp with a dust-blackened face and the stench of urine on his trousers.

As I look for your black dungarees and secondhand brown coat, I have to keep in mind that you'll be more than a decade younger than in the black and white photos I have studied in English textbooks. But, of course, I would know you in a crowd of thousands, your oblong face and thin mustache like poems I have memorized.

In my bag is the sandwich I've dreamed up for you: English cheddar on homemade brown bread spread with real butter. I've wrapped it in a white linen cloth as pristine as your sentences. On the bench beside me is a thermos of strong Ceylon tea, with milk and no sugar, loose tea leaves steeped in an earthenware pot . . . exactly as you like it.

These past several minutes I've found myself continually smoothing out the wrinkles and folds in my dress—an ankle-length sundress in lemon yellow that I hope you'll like—and I can't help but glance at my watch again and again, but not because this waiting weighs on me like a Monday afternoon at my office but because I'm counting the minutes until I can give you what you

need—the sandwich and the tea but also words that will sustain you. I want to blurt it all out right now—that the *plongeur* hell in Paris and night after night of tea and two slices here in England will not be in vain. In only a few years *Down and Out* will be published, *The Road to Wigan Pier* soon after that. One day, you'll be read by millions, *Orwellian* will enter the lexicon . . . Of course, I've decided to leave out a couple of details—that you will spend months in a sanatorium coughing up blood and leave us only six months after the publication of your masterpiece. . . Wait. Is that you turning the corner? Yes, there you are, lanky 6' 2, halo in full glow, but with none of the lines around your mouth I'm used to. I reach in my bag and take out the sandwich. My hand is trembling.

"Excuse me, Mr. Blair," I say, almost choking on anticipation. "Would you like a sandwich? You must be hungry." But you continue walking with your gaze straight ahead. "Excuse me! I brought you a sandwich!" I say, projecting my voice into the street. Without a glance, you stride past me. "Stop, please!" With the sandwich in one hand, I run after you as though chasing God, stopping just short of stepping on your boots. My fingertips grace the arm of your coat, but you don't register my touch. I run several feet ahead of you, unwrapping the sandwich as I go. Then I turn around and hold the sandwich up to your face, but you walk right through me.

I don't understand. Is this the arrangement? I can look at him, speak to him, touch him, but without him knowing that I'm here? But didn't you say . . . I squint away my tears, and now your figure is getting smaller in the distance as you walk away, taking my dreams with you. With my cold hands, I wrap the sandwich again, hold the linen cloth to my chest. I imagine Winston Smith gathering

bluebells for Julia, his arm around her waist, their first kiss, Julia's note to him that started everything . . .

Now the sandwich is floating out of my hand, it begins to break up into molecules, like tiny bubbles, that drift upwards towards the gray sky. A wave passes through me, and I feel myself dissolving into light. Soon, an ocean and decades will once again separate me from you.

CATHERINE KELLEY writes from Southern California and has had stories published in *Everyday Fiction*, *The Frogmore Papers*, *805*, *East of the Web*, *The Blood Pudding*, and *The Bookends Review*. She practices Zen meditation, hoping it will someday help her forgive and the people who dump garbage on her street.

Three haiku

Greg Schwartz

mail-order robot
I show her how to turn
me off

proprietary algorithms
the robot dog
licks itself

unexpected package—
the postmark
shimmers

GREG SCHWARTZ works from home and writes when he can. Some of his poems have appeared in *Talebones*, *Space & Time*, *Horror Carousel*, and *Modern Haiku*. He was fortunate to win a Dwarf Stars Award in 2015. He is a current member of the Haiku Society of America (HSA). In a pre-fatherhood life he was the staff cartoonist for *SP Quill Magazine* and a book/magazine reviewer for *Whispers of Wickedness*.

Dark-Matter Window

John Kucera

Somewhere, at the edge of a galaxy,
The lights are going out.
Someone is pulling the cord
And turning out the stars.

Or maybe the tide,
The unseen gravitational force,
Is smearing the white energy
Across the dark-matter window.

Or maybe a man with a ship
Is hopping from one star to another,
Trapping the sparks in Dixie cups
(He's taking them away for observation).

I can see the stars going out.
The corner of the universe is fading
Like frog tails, climbing with new legs,
Out of this water of black holes

And elemental muck.
This big beast is leaving me
Behind on a pebble
At the bottom of the pond.

JOHN KUCERA was educated at Carlow University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His work has appeared in *New Reader Magazine*, *The Sandy River Review*, *Connections Magazine* and *Friends Journal*. He lives in Arizona, where he writes and teaches.

Two Poems

DS Maolalai

Quarterly building review

lightbulbs cracking
open like so many
oysters. a bin at a sea-
food buffet. if I were a teenager
living here now, I suppose that I'd also
break buttons. the locks on the front
doors don't work and the fire
extinguishers have long become
decorative, used up as tattoos
and as dangerous. inside the drywall,
damp moves its hands
like an octopus under a rock
and the overhead seagulls
have made hell as well of the gutters
and are pulling out wiring.
the monocouche wrinkles
to sunburn, old leather and coke cans.
I calculate budgets, make
notes and take photographs.
list various things we can't do.

A cube of the night

rain falls at angles
and lands on the windowpane
in a series of sloping cat-
scratches. inside the extractor
fan hums and its light casts
a warmth across everything; pots
boiling over and scorch marks and
everything else. my stove is a pattern
of overlapping circles; a map of the orbits
of planets in burned soup and black.
and my house is a cube
of the night sectioned off
from the night by a thick growth
of ivy and walls
and a manfully struggling
lightbulb. the world
is outside
and it's terrible.
and in here it's terrible
too in a manageable way.

DS MAOLALAI has been described by one editor as "a cosmopolitan poet" and another as "prolific, bordering on incontinent". His work has nominated eleven times for Best of the Net, eight for the Pushcart Prize and once for the Forward Prize, and has been released in three collections: *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden* (Encircle Press, 2016); *Sad Havoc Among the Birds* (Turas Press, 2019); and *Noble Rot* (Turas Press, 2022).

On the cover:

“Melting Woman”

ALEJANDRO is a 3D and fractal artist working in Mexico City.

