

# BLEAKHOUSE REVIEW 2015

Editors: Robert Johnson and Casey Chiappetta  
Associate Editors: Alaa Chaker and Emily Dalgo







*20th Century American Death Penalty*

*Joanne Conelley*

This painting represents the individuals affected by the death penalty in the last decades of the 20th century, from 1977 through the end of 2000. A red line represents a murder victim, and in many cases, one line stands for multiple victims. Each black line represents a man or woman executed since the reinstatement of the death penalty in 1977 up until the beginning of 21st century. There are 683 black lines. Red and black lines intersect to represent the inherent intertwining of these deaths. A blue line represents a man or woman exonerated from death row between 1973 and 2000. There are 91 blue lines woven into this painting, just as exonerations are woven into the fabric of the death penalty.

BleakHouse Review is an online literary magazine that provides a venue for writing and art on human liberty, both its deprivation and its achievement. Some people find freedom behind prison walls; others, ostensibly free, build prisons for themselves in their everyday lives. The interplay of persons and settings, as well as limits and possibilities, forms the palette on which our writers and artists work, examining their subjects with imagination and care.

BleakHouse Review is edited by Robert Johnson and Casey Chiappetta. For the 2015 issue, we gratefully acknowledge the assistance, support, and editorial acumen provided by associate editors Alaa Chaker and Emily Dalgo.

Enjoy.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## POETRY

03	<i>Natural Habitat by Alaa Chaker</i>
04	<i>I Don't Need a Mirror by Melis Cengiz</i>
07	<i>Eclipse by Alaa Chaker</i>
09	<i>Whispered through the Plumbing by Bill Kakenmaster</i>
10	<i>Jailbird by Melis Cengiz</i>
12	<i>Locked by Leila Khelfaoui</i>
14	<i>Shouts by Sofia Crutchfield</i>
15	<i>The Deprived by Melisa Azak</i>
16	<i>Cycle by Emily Dalgo</i>
24	<i>Solitary by Emily Dalgo</i>
25	<i>If I Walked with You by Cassandra Fowler</i>
26	<i>A Message from the Watchtower by Cassandra Fowler</i>
28	<i>From Where I Sit by Alaa Chaker</i>
29	<i>Singing Rivers by Melis Cengiz</i>
31	<i>Apathy by Emily Dalgo</i>
35	<i>Afterlife by Emily Dalgo</i>
36	<i>Melvin by Isabel Zayas</i>
27	<i>Words, Words, Words by Missy Bochnowicz</i>
39	<i>Street Brawlers by Melis Cengiz</i>
41	<i>Shattered by Kari Lorentson</i>
42	<i>Detached by Alaa Chaker</i>
44	<i>She is the Beginning by Tatiana Laing</i>

## ART

05	<i>A Number by Jacob Bray</i>
30	<i>Holding On by Jacob Bray</i>
31, 32	<i>The "G" Word by Arianne Schaffer</i>
40	<i>Fading to Black by Jacob Bray</i>
45	<i>Endure by Morgan Walton</i>

## PHOTOGRAPHY

<i>Young Girl by Casey Chiappetta</i>	02
<i>Railway to Heaven by Carla Mavaddat</i>	06
<i>Refugees by Casey Chiappetta</i>	11
<i>Juggling Life by Carla Mavaddat</i>	13
<i>Herded by Casey Chiappetta</i>	17
<i>View From an Inmate's Window by Emily Horowitz</i>	23
<i>Repeating History by Emily Horowitz</i>	27
<i>Cloud on Earth by Carla Mavaddat</i>	34
<i>Hiding by Casey Chiappetta</i>	38
<i>Censored by Emily Horowitz</i>	43

## PROSE

<i>Home by Emily Dalgo</i>	08
<i>Indignity by Susan Nagelsen and Charles Huckelbury</i>	18-22
<i>Freedom of Speech : An Insight into</i>	46-53
<i>Prison Writing by Antonia Roberta Siino</i>	

BIOGRAPHIES OF WRITERS AND ARTISTS: 54-56





**YOUNG GIRL**  
*Casey Chiappetta*

## **NATURAL HABITAT**

*Alaa Chaker*

I was born somewhere between the intersection of  
never to be loved and never to be accomplished

I was raised somewhere between the intersection of  
no one cares about you and no one believes in you

I was educated somewhere between the intersection of  
there is no place for you and there is no hope for you

I was cultured somewhere between the intersection of  
your type doesn't succeed and your life doesn't matter

I was imprisoned somewhere between the intersection of  
this is where you always belonged and where you always have been



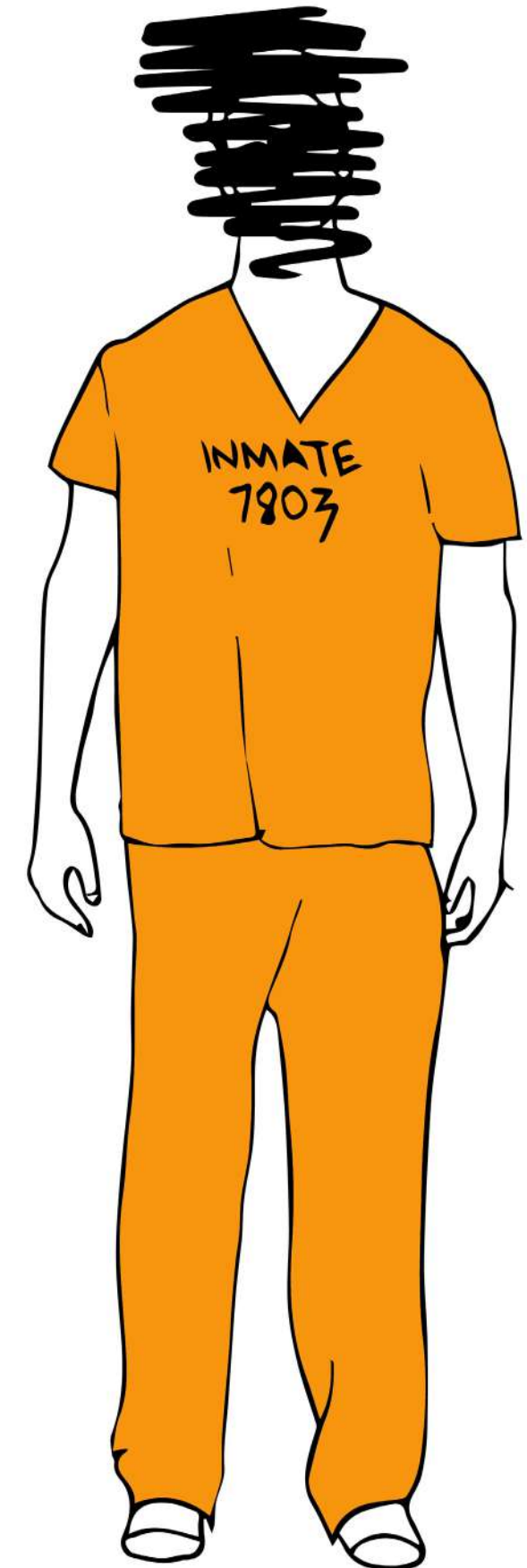
## I DON'T NEED A MIRROR

Melis Cengiz

I don't need a mirror  
To see my hair,  
What good will it do  
to see it tangled and coarse.  
I don't need a mirror  
To see my lips,  
What good will it do  
to see them chapped and curled  
down.  
I don't need a mirror  
To see my eyes,  
What good will it do  
to see them empty and forlorn.  
  
Prison has revealed me to myself  
I don't need a mirror.

## A NUMBER

Jacob Bray







## RAILWAY TO HEAVEN

*Carla Mavaddat*

## ECLIPSE

*Alaa Chaker*

I've come to abhor the sun  
the constant nagging reminder  
of the world outside and the life behind.

There's a kid right now playing football in that same sun  
A teenager at Ocean City basking in its rays  
A couple in Reno picnicking to its setting canvas

The same sun that lights up their lives, eclipses mine  
I used to love football practice, sandy beaches and sunsets  
until every ray of sunshine was torn from my being



## HOME

Emily Dalgo

I like listening to the radio or having the TV on, even if I don't watch it, because it's proof that there are other people out there. It makes me feel less alone. White noise isn't something I can do without actually. I'll listen to any noise. White. Black. Yellow brown pink. Any noise is better than silence.

For my birthday, my son gave me a sound machine for when I sleep. It came with two CDs: "Summer Night" and "Thunderstorm." I usually listen to "Summer Night" because thunderstorms were something I couldn't escape, even in prison, and those sounds remind me of the nights that I don't want to relive in my dreams. "Summer Night" gives me dreams of camping; sometimes I feel like I'm remembering when I have these dreams, because there's a sense of nostalgia. But I've only been camping once, and I don't even have memories of it. I was five when my parents took me, and the only scenes in my head are from the two pictures I have in a desk drawer, both Polaroids now stained with water. Now they look more like tiny watercolor paintings than photographs. In one watercolor photo, I'm standing in front of a lake wearing black rain boots that look too big and bulky, swallowing my feet. My blonde straight-cut bangs peak out from under the dark green hood of the oversized sweatshirt I'm wearing. I'm holding out the line of a fishing pole, and on the end is a little silver fish. The silver is blurred, I guess because the picture was snapped right after the catch, and the fish is still flopping on the hook. My "Summer Night" sounds CD reminds me of that night, even though I don't remember it. The chirping crickets and the echoing of the vast woods sound like what that night must have sounded like all those years ago. After I had taken off my sweatshirt and my wet boots, after my face had been washed in the cool water of the lake by my mother, and after I had drifted to sleep. I must have listened to these crickets and these echoes that I fall asleep to now.

But now I'm aware that after 3 minutes and 13 seconds, the track repeats itself. There's one high chirp and then it starts over, for as long as I've set the CD to play. I've listened to this Summer Night too many times. The longest setting is 2 hours. Sometimes, I wake up in the night, after the sound machine has shut off, and am painfully aware of the silence around me. I panic. I fumble in the darkness to press play to dissipate the soundlessness in my bedroom. Once, I accidentally hit "next" in a panicked darkness and the CD flipped over to a cracking thunderstorm. I shrieked and slapped the machine to turn it off, but knocked it off my bedside table instead. At that point a hall light turned on and my son opened my door, finding me curled into a ball on my bed crying, shaking, terrified in the aftermath of a panic attack. I can't stand the silence, and I can't stand the sound of that cracking thunderstorm; it reminds me of the night I was moved to solitary.

Maybe any noise isn't better than silence, because the noise of thunder triggers silence in my head.

## WHISPERED THROUGH THE PLUMBING

Bill Kakenmaster

*I started to hallucinate voices as clear as crystal. I heard my family in a casual familial conversation that I couldn't join. I heard Koran readings in a heavenly voice. I heard music in my country. Later on the guards used these hallucinations and started talking with funny voices through the plumbing, encouraging me to hurt the guards and plot an escape. But I wasn't misled by them, even though I played along.*

-Mohamedou Ould Slahi, Guantánamo Diary, pp. 272-3.

Weak and broken, Mother's voice

Slithered out of the pipes.

Rusty pipes flushed Allah's

Heavenly word into

Dripping vile, poisoned black

Lies. Unreality

The bleak, beige, no-window-world

Along with iron songs;

Corrodes the mind's prison walls—

Angles hooked Mother's face.

Mutated, haunting songs

Of home. Strained melodies—

A limp fish, her skeleton

Croaked "Genie," cruel; cold.

Yet not misled in prison,

The manuscript kept dry,

Her bones broke, cracking as guards

Scratched their suicide notes

Unsoiled by torture's lie

Whispered through the plumbing.

On seven-sixty's parchment-

Like skin. Dry. "Hurt the guards."

*Author's note: Mohamedou Ould Slahi, GTMO Prisoner 760, remains detained in Guantánamo Bay at the time of publication.*



Melis Cengiz

## JAILBIRD

They caught me  
For my wings flapped too loudly –  
Or maybe because  
I didn't flap enough.

The trembling rails on my cage  
Are sounds of comfort  
For they remind me:  
One day, I'll be out  
How foolish was I  
To think I could fly  
To soar the skies  
To soar the skies  
And freely glide

But I quickly found out  
That once fettered,  
Scarlet wings  
Can be bleached: never  
So why sing?  
When no one wants to hear  
Even the chirps that escape  
When – just for a moment – I betray fear.



REFUGEES  
Casey Chiappetta



## LOCKED

Going on year nine.

No Sun.

No touch.

Just passing the time.

I am locked.

A blood-fight, they say.

No proof.

No reason.

Off to solitary, to cell of grey.

I am locked.

A sentence upon a sentence,

No calls.

No visits.

Just my book of repentance.

I am locked.

The days pass on.

No, weeks.

No, months.

Lonely years, from dusk until dawn.

I am locked.

I hear the screams of deterioration.

No sanity.

No help.

Just men with a desperate frustra-  
tion.

I am locked.

To my freedom I pay a grievance.

No hope.

No trust.

For the same flag, that I pay alle-  
giance.

I am locked.

Twenty three hours a day.

No windows.

No air.

For my "wrong doings" I pay.

I am locked.

But can a man change?

No lies.

No games.

To how much can behavior range.

I am locked.

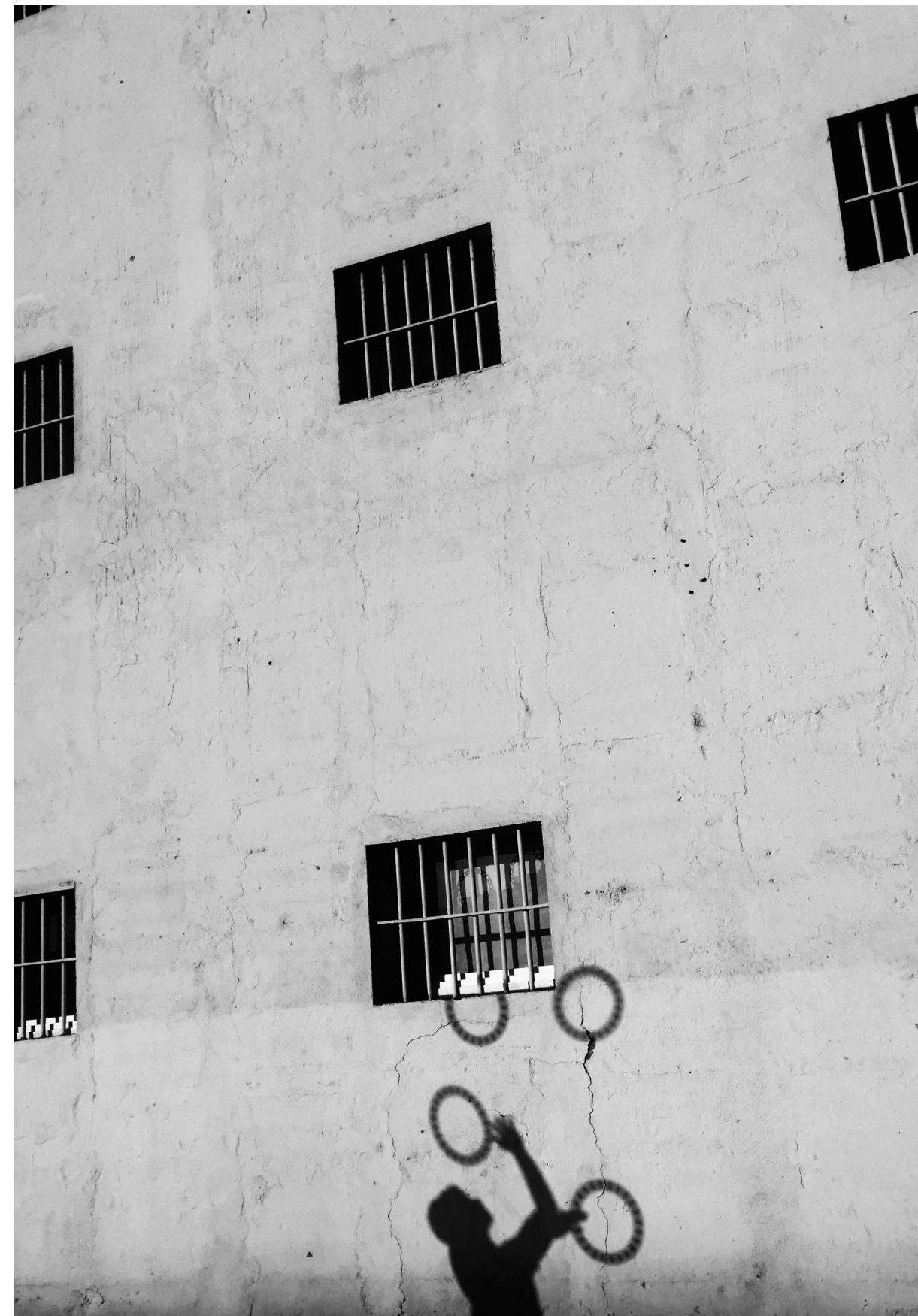
Though it seems a useless assign-  
ment.

No opportunity.

No motivation.

For my will has died in confinement.

I am locked.



## SHOUTS

*Sofia Crutchfield*

Eric Garner said,  
with an arm wrapped around his neck,  
a boa constrictor with a badge:  
“I can’t breathe”

Someone’s aunt on Facebook said,  
with her ignorance wrapped around her  
heart,  
warm and comforting:  
“Obviously he could breathe if he was  
shouting.”

I think maybe she didn’t watch the video,  
didn’t hear a man gasping his last words,  
not a “shout” but a plea:  
“I can’t brea... I can’t... can’t brea...”

Or maybe she didn’t watch all of it,  
didn’t feel like catching the end,  
where the “shouts” fade into a silence that  
speaks for itself:  
“I don’t breathe, not anymore.”

## THE DEPRIVED

*Melisa Azak*

*The time for remorse was when my husband was yelling to breathe. That would have been the time for him to show some remorse or some type of care for another human being’s life.*

–Eric Garner’s widow, Esaw Garner

Behind each black man taken to the ground stands

a Mother

a Daughter

a Wife

Now

Mourner

Orphan

Widow

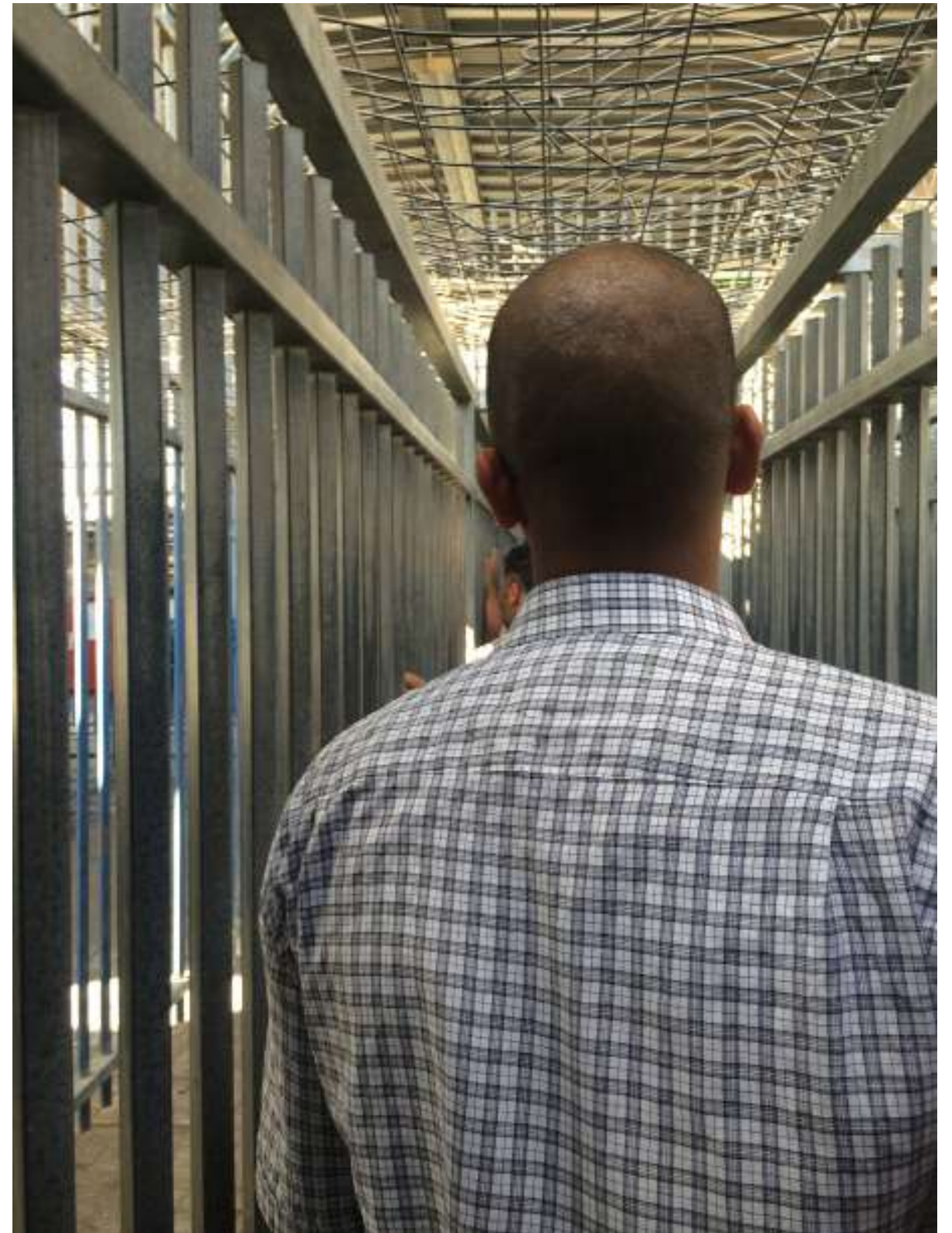


## CYCLE

*Emily Dalgo*

---

No one is left to protect you,  
because you've become what we need protection from.  
No advocates or witnesses, just prisons that are businesses.  
Trading stocks on your life, held against the ground with a knife  
Your affidavit: you better engrave it,  
on your mind  
on your soul, because who you were they'll never know,  
what you did, what you said, where you've been: it'll all go  
in time, in time. While you do your time.  
Your capital offense put freedom in the past tense,  
But who gets to decide  
if you live or if you die?  
Those unknown faces in the crowd—whose eyes watched the clock?  
As it ticked toward their liberation and away from yours,  
those unknown faces in the crowd, listened to what they could  
although legal jargon allows for little to be understood.  
Now no one is left to protect you, or speak on your behalf.  
You're beaten and degraded by the security staff.  
Punishment consumes you, becomes you.  
Odious inclinations, cruel temptations with no explanations,  
No justifications.  
Grit your teeth shut your eyes clench your fists, for whatever's going  
to come.  
Because you are who we need  
protection from.



## HERDED

*Casey Chiappetta*

---

# INDIGNITY

Susan Nagelsen and Charles Huckelbury

In early May, we got a letter from a friend of ours, one in which he predicted the precise date and even the hour of his death. Contrary to standard expectations, we were not in the least skeptical and immediately began making plans for a world without him in it. Bill was able to pinpoint the date and time of his death because the State of Florida had put him on notice that it intended to execute him on June 12, 2013, at 6:00 in the evening.

From a strictly philosophical perspective, knowing the exact time of one's death can be liberating: no more guessing about our allotted time on the planet, no more worries about what's coming down the road. One can make specific plans, tie up loose ends, and have the luxury of preparing extensive goodbyes to friends and families that would normally be stunned into grief by the unexpected. The existential implications, however, are quite another matter. Our friend's life was about to come to an abrupt end after only 58 years, and nothing could fill that void.

Bill Van Poyck ended his life in Florida's death chamber after a series of poor and incalculably misinformed choices, choices he freely admits were his, the worst being when he and an associate attempted to free a state prisoner from a prison van while being transported to a medical appointment. One of the two guards resisted, and Bill's partner in crime shot him to death on the spot. Attempts to free the prisoner failed, so Bill and his co-defendant fled. Their escape was short lived, however. A police chase and running gun battle ensued, ending when the getaway car crashed and Bill and his partner were arrested.

Bill's guilt at trial was a foregone conclusion.

The surviving guard identified both men, as did the police who captured them and recovered all the weapons. The only question was the punishment the men would face, presumably based on each man's participation and culpability for the guard's death.

As in many other states, Florida has a statute that defines any homicide resulting from a criminal act as felony murder and makes the defendant eligible for the death penalty. And by any homicide, we mean any homicide. If, for example, a burglar is fleeing from a house he has just robbed and being tracked by a police helicopter, and the helicopter should hit a tree and crash in the process of pursuing the burglar, the thief can be charged with felony murder if anyone on board or on the ground dies from his or her injuries.

If, say, the FBI is pursuing a fugitive and surrounds the motel in which the bad guy is settling in for an evening of Monday night football and one of the tactical squad opens fire on another agent mistakenly identified as the fugitive, the guy in front of the television will be charged with felony murder.

Consider: an armed robbery of a supermarket goes bad, and the police surround the building, trapping the robber inside with customers and staff. After futile negotiations, one of the customers breaks free, runs outside with his hands in the air, and amid the bright klieg lights is immediately shot and killed by the posse outside. A few minutes later, one of the store's personnel gets away, runs outside with his hands up, and is also gunned down. After this, no one else is attempting to get away from the bad guy inside. At least he's not shooting anyone. Finally, the robber gives up, surrenders,

and is charged armed robbery, kidnapping, and, yes, two counts of murder for the people killed by the police.

Each of these three scenarios is based on actual events in which the individuals committing a crime were charged with capital murder although they never killed anyone. The rationale behind the statute is simple: but for the criminal activity, no one would have died. And no one can argue with that justification, but should men and women so charged and so convicted be put to death?

In the originally controlling case<sup>1</sup> regarding this issue, the US Supreme Court, Justice

Enmund's case originated, not surprisingly, in Florida. The US Supreme Court became involved after Florida's highest court ruled that the "felony murder rule and the law of principals combine to make a felon generally responsible for the lethal acts of his co-felon." In other words, the Supreme Court overruled Florida's court, which had upheld the death sentence of a man who had not killed anyone. That should have spared Bill's life.

The law, however, contrary to biblical myth, is not carved in stone. Four years later, the Supreme Court modified its earlier ruling,

*Our friend's life was about to come to an abrupt end after only 58 years, and nothing could fill that void.*

White writing for the majority, said that that the record did not support a finding that the man originally sentenced to death, Earl Enmund, killed or attempted to kill anyone. Neither was there anything that indicated he intended to participate in the killing or that he facilitated the killing. The death penalty must therefore not be imposed on anyone who has "aided and abetted a felony in the course of which a murder is committed by others but who does not himself kill, attempt to kill, or intend that a killing take place or that lethal force will be employed" (798). That is, the culpability of someone who does not kill or intend to kill is different from a co-defendant who kills during the course of an offense, and the punishment must reflect that disparity.

<sup>1</sup> *Enmund v. Florida*, 458 U.S. 782 (1982)

declaring that it would henceforth leave an Enmund determination entirely up to the states.<sup>2</sup>All that would be necessary to impose a death sentence on someone who did not actually kill is that at some point during the legal proceedings the trial court make the requisite factual finding regarding a defendant's degree of culpability in the homicide. Once that finding has been made, no matter what the outcome, it must be presumed correct under 28 U.S.C. 2254(d), which governs federal habeas corpus proceedings.

That was Bill's precise position as he awaited execution. The trial court conducted the requisite hearing, after being erroneously informed that Bill was the shooter, and the Florida Supreme

<sup>2</sup> *Cabana v. Bullock*, 474 U.S. 376 (1986)



Court affirmed the finding and sentence. Even after the state's admission that he did not fire the fatal shots, the state courts found that his nonlethal actions were sufficient to warrant his death sentence. He was put to death not because he killed someone but because his co-defendant did during the course of a felony in which he participated.

Bill's co-defendant in the case was Frank Valdes, who the state subsequently conceded was the person who shot and killed the guard, although the prosecutor in Bill's case told his jury that Bill was the shooter. As in the Enmund case, Bill did indeed aid and abet a felony "[i]n the course of which a murder [was] committed by others," but he did not "kill or attempt to kill or intend that a killing take place" (798). By established precedent, Valdes could have been sentenced to death, but Bill should have received prison time without a death sentence. And yet, under *Cabana*, Florida killed him on June 12 because of its interpretation of the felony murder standard. A related case, however, raises more questions about that standard's equitable application, at least in Florida.

On July 17, 1999, Frank Valdes was beaten and stomped to death in his death row cell by guards at the Florida State Prison in Starke. The crime launched a joint investigation by local officials, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, and the FBI. Nine guards were subsequently suspended, with pay, pending the investigation's results. None of the guards would cooperate with investigators, and all retained counsel. To repeat, none would even

talk to investigators. If you watch enough cop shows on television, you probably suspect that the invocation of one's Fifth Amendment rights automatically signals guilt. So it was in this case.

Two medical examiners testified that Valdes had been stomped to death, suffering fractures of his sternum, vertebrae, nose, and jaw, along with numerous internal injuries. According to autopsy reports, there were boot prints on his face, neck, abdomen, and back. Valdes also had twenty-two broken ribs. According to the *New York Times*, when prosecutors asked Dr. Ronald Wright, a former Florida medical examiner, how such injuries might be inflicted, he said, "You jump up in the air and you come down with your feet on somebody" (February 10, 2002).

Nine guards were eventually implicated in the murder, their defense predicated on the bizarre theory that Valdes' injuries were self-inflicted. According to defense lawyers, Valdes had repeatedly thrown himself on the cell floor with sufficient force to break his back, sternum, jaw, nose, and all but two of his ribs. This phenomenal feat of determination occurred in a cell that was seven feet by nine feet with only a concrete slab for a bed. When asked about the numerous injuries, the defense blandly stated that they could also have resulted from the guards' attempts to perform CPR. That doesn't, however, explain the boot prints, unless the guards at Florida State Prison are taught an outré method of saving someone's life by jumping up and down on his inert body.

Three of the guards were subsequently tried for murder, conspiracy, battery, and official

misconduct. The trial was conducted in Starke, Florida, the same rural town in which the prison resides, which happens to be in Bradford County, one of the state's poorest. The prison is also the town's largest employer, often putting two and three generations of guards to work in a family tradition.

On February 15, 2002, after hearing the gruesome details of Valdes' murder, the jury deliberated only 3 1/2 hours, barely long enough to choke down the chicken-fried steak for lunch, before coming back with not guilty verdicts on all counts. The audience in the courtroom cheered. Reactions from the locals, most of whom either worked at the prison or were related to someone who did, were unanimous. The case was "political," even though the respondents could not identify the beneficiaries, or it was based on the word of convicts, who had absolutely no credibility when their testimony conflicted with such community stalwarts as the charged guards. And Valdes' death? It produced a collective shrug: one less convict off the count.

The jury's explanation for the verdict did, nonetheless, raise more than a few eyebrows and has relevance for Bill's execution. One juror justified the verdict by explaining that there were so many guards involved in the murder, so many injuries that were individually fatal, and so many boot prints on the body that the jury simply could not determine which guard was primarily responsible for killing Frank Valdes. That being the case, so the reasoning went, the prudent course of action seemed to be to hold

no one accountable for one of the most brutal homicides state medical examiners had ever seen.

Which brings us back full circle to the rationale employed by the State of Florida to justify its execution of William Van Poyck: felony murder.

If, as the Florida supreme court's inquiry found, and the US Supreme Court now assumes is correct, every individual proactively involved in a felony in which someone is killed is equally culpable, then by law every guard who participated in the murder of Frank Valdes in his prison cell was guilty of felony murder. That left only two sentencing options, the identical options Bill faced: death or life in prison. The charges, however, were limited to second-degree murder, a decision unexplained by the local state attorney. The guards engaged in a sustained assault on Frank Valdes, which is a felony under Florida law. Thus, Valdes' death was a direct result of that underlying felony, which means the guards--all the guards--should have been charged and convicted of felony murder. But they weren't. Not only were they not charged or convicted of felony murder, they weren't convicted of anything except "doing their job." The identical legal standard that condemned Van Poyck should have been a perfect fit for the men who killed his co-defendant, but instead of facing death or life in prison, Valdes' killers simply went home after another day's work.

It took twenty-three minutes for the state to kill William Van Poyck on June 12. Originally

scheduled for 6:00, the execution was delayed by an hour to allow the governor to return to his office from a trip to Illinois, just in case he had changed his mind after signing Bill's death warrant. Anyone expecting a sudden epiphany was disappointed. At 7:01 p.m., the first of the three drugs began flowing. Bill was pronounced dead at 7:24.

A few days before his death, prison employees went to Bill's cell to measure him for his burial suit, an event he described as surreal, and he was briefed on the execution method. According to the *Washington Post*, the head of the Florida Department of Corrections, Michael Crews, the procedure used to kill him was "compatible with evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society [and] the concept of the dignity of man" (March 19, 2014). He did not explain how strapping a helpless man to a table and pumping poison into his veins until he dies comports with the concept of the dignity of man.

On the day Bill died, we took a long walk by the river that runs near our home. We held hands and talked about our friend as the guards strapped him to the gurney. We both checked our watches at about the same time the poison began to steal his life, the hour punctuated by the somber tolling of a church bell. In his last letter, Bill remained upbeat, almost buoyant, telling us that he would see us later "on the flip side." The contrast between the still calmness, the easy flow of the river, the birds singing around us, the sheer abundance of nature worked to make

death seem impossible, a bogeyman conjured to frighten children into good behavior. But as the minutes ticked by, we knew that death was indeed real, and we would get no more letters from our friend.

Bill was resigned to his fate and at peace when he made that final walk. His last words to his executioner were "Set me free," and we will never think of his last hour without smiling at his undiminished faith that he would be going to a much better place. He died although he never killed anyone. In comparison, men who actively participated in a murder by kicking and stomping another helpless man to death are going to live well past Bill's fifty-eight years, the times of their deaths remaining a mystery. The analogy with another trial over 2400 years ago is inescapable.

As the innocent Socrates told the Athenian jury who condemned him, which of them is better served, he going to his certain death or they to their uncertain ones, only the gods knew. Socrates, as Plato tells us, drank the hemlock while members of his jury and other dangerous individuals went about their business as if nothing had happened. Unlike Socrates, neither of us has ever believed in gods, and thirty-eight years of prison struggles effectively shut the door on any such tendencies that might have otherwise arisen. We were, however, once naive enough to believe in the rule of law and its equitable application. Our friend's execution shut the door on that delusion as well.

## VIEW FROM AN INMATE'S WINDOW

Emily Horowitz





## SOLITARY

*Emily Dalgo*

---

Pain is tangible  
even in my sleep.

I hear your voice  
far away.

A distant memory  
shakes me awake.

These dreams pervade my sleep,  
Crippling my unconscious thought.  
Leaving me awake, alone; the taste of you still on my tongue.  
Let me lie in wonder,  
Seeing the forged images again.  
Leaving me depressed, alone; the feel of you still on my tongue.  
Communication isn't connection  
and as I hear your voice  
I am reminded of the loneliness sheltered by my skull,  
my skin.

Night seeps through the cracks  
in droplets of darkness  
Swimming, silent  
cold

Distant and alone.  
Toes squirming heart pounding  
Night seeps through the window and yanks my sheets  
away from me  
A metal skeleton  
Heavy but hollow  
Turning pupils into dilated receptors of pain so palpable  
They taste it in each salty blink and  
each twitching stare  
At the white ceiling.

## IF I WALKED WITH YOU

*Cassandra Fowler*

If I walked with you

Would my feet bleed,  
Gashed by the glass you left broken on the ground?  
Do your feet bleed now?

Would I drown in the deluge of sweat rushing from my pores?  
Would others drown too?

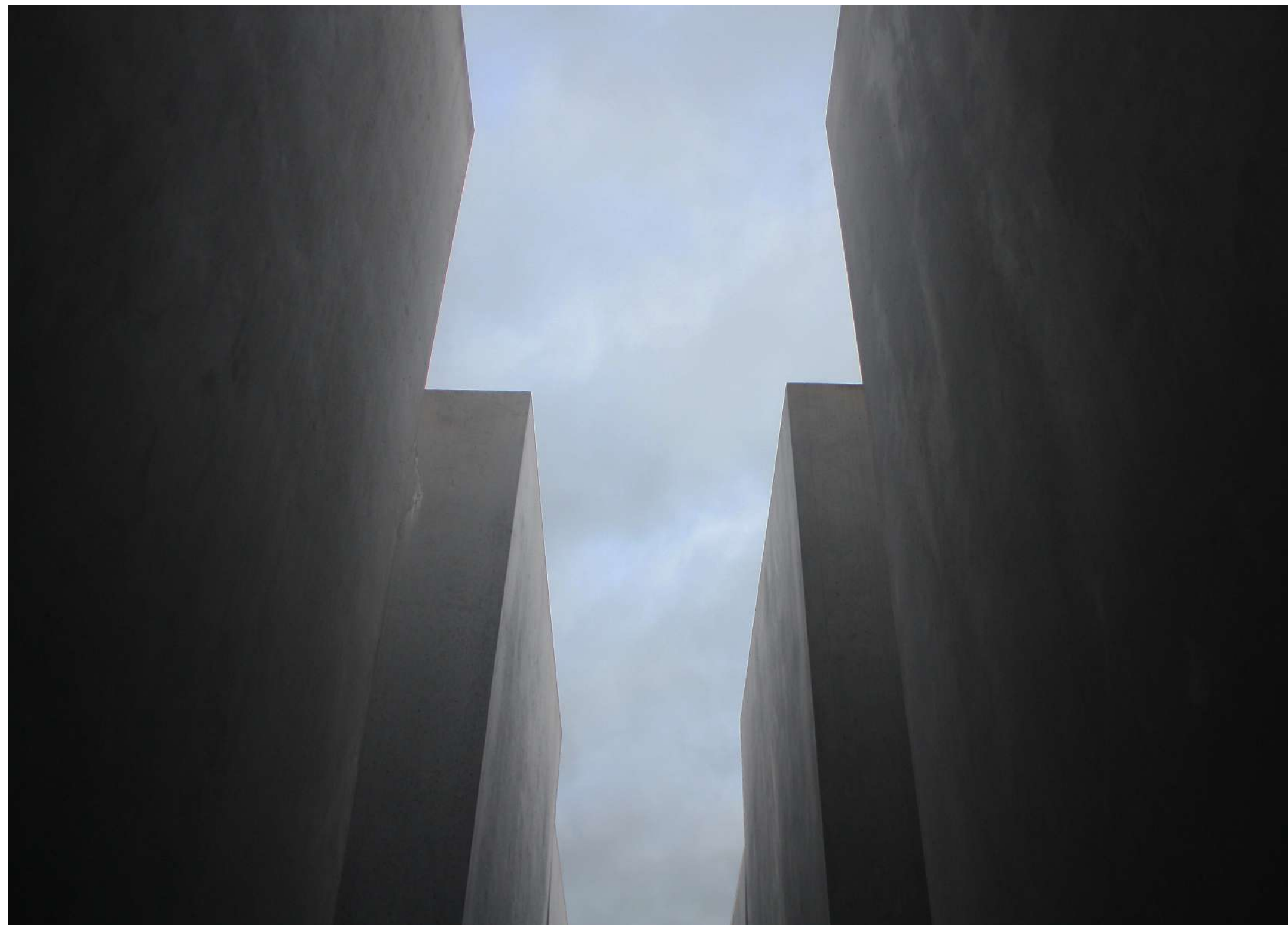
Would puss-filled bubbles push up to the surface of my skin?  
Would the heat of hellfire be too much too bear?  
Is it too much for you?

And the rest of the condemned,  
May I walk with them too?

## A MESSAGE FROM THE WATCHTOWER

*Cassandra Fowler*

Mercy takes the first shift  
Then comes Vigilance,  
Then Justice.  
Luckily we don't need people.  
The prisoners watch themselves.  
They just don't know it yet.



## REPEATING HISTORY

*Emily Horowitz*



## FROM WHERE I SIT

*Alaa Chaker*

Hey there sweetie, did ya notice that red light over there?  
What are you doing? Don't reach for that seatbelt.

You were going pretty fast, pretty lady, almost 20 over  
You were doing 55 in a 50... is this nice car even yours?

Oh you had to rush cause you have a cute little one back there  
Are you sure you don't have any drugs over here?

I think I can let you off with a warning this time, Ma'am  
I'm gonna have to write you up, just protocol against dangers to society

## SINGING RIVERS

*Melis Cengiz*

"Come here,"  
Said the spider to the fly,

A silent river  
Never caused any harm.

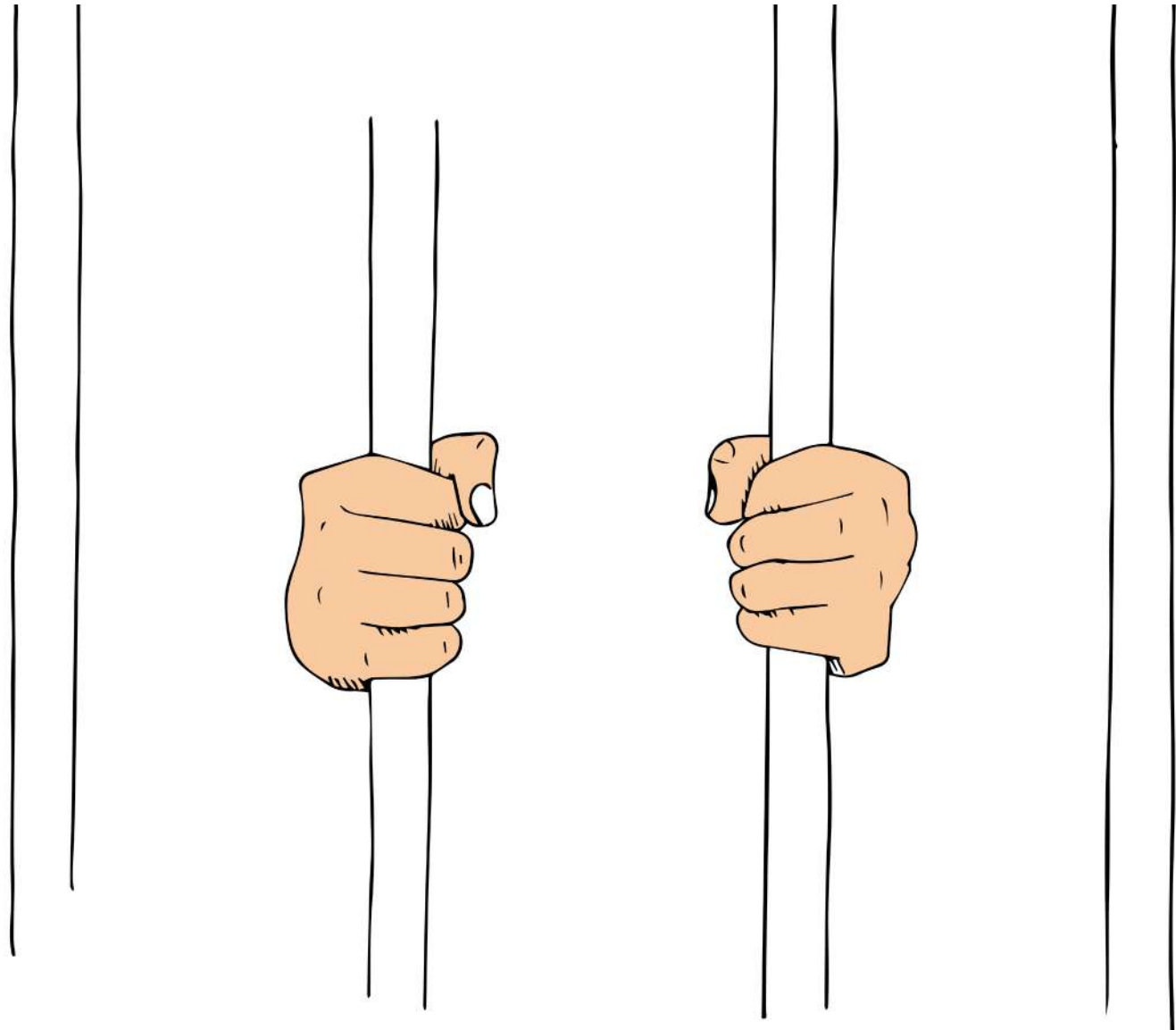
Add a couple stones  
Now the river sings out,

Can't risk the sound  
Influencing deaf sprouts.

So your new life begins  
Trapped in my web,  
But be careful still  
Not to impulsively wail.

My threads are not as tight  
As all the cachet may make them seem,

Can't risk your buzz  
Influencing my deaf sheep.



## HOLDING ON

*Jacob Bray*

## APATHY

*Emily Dalgo*

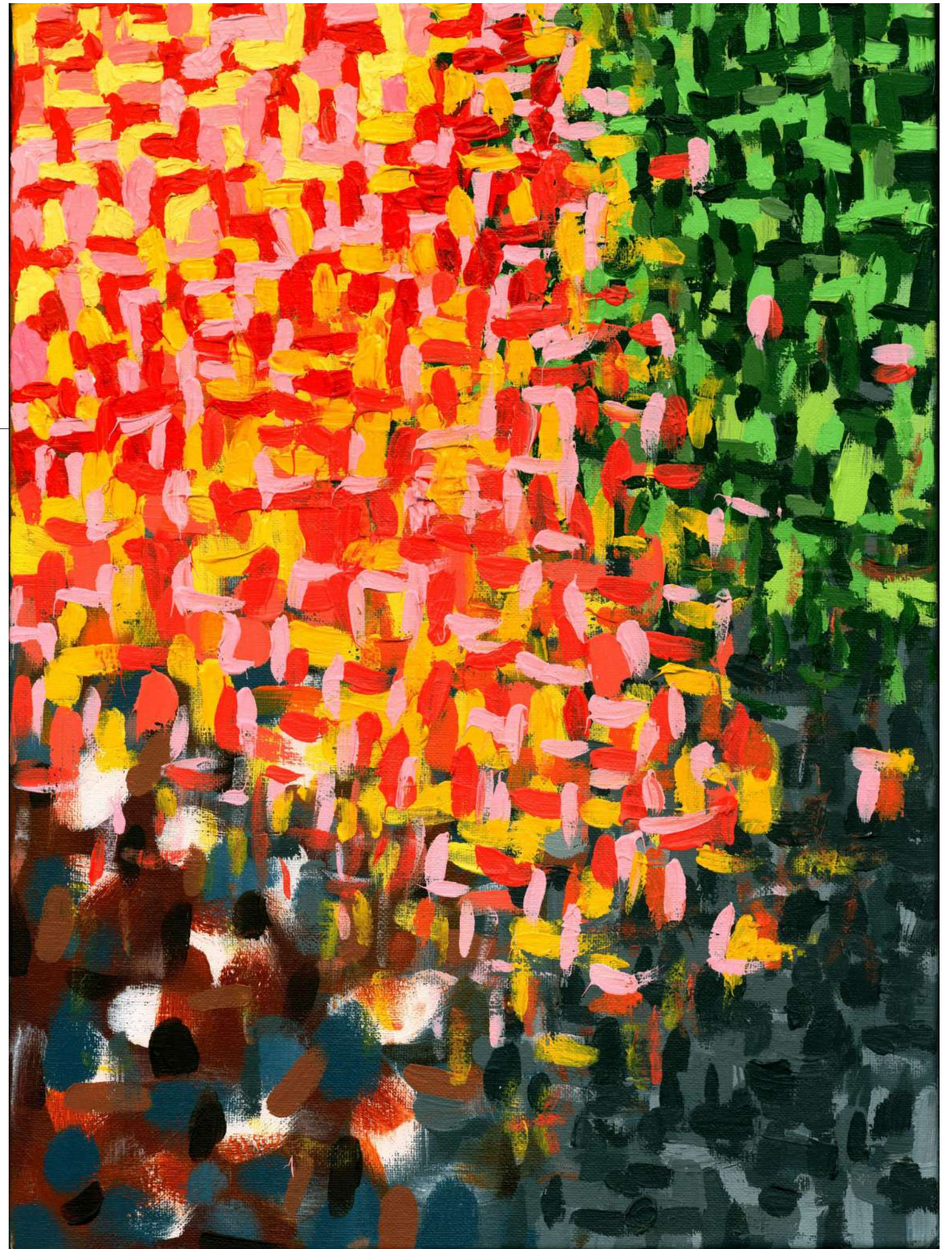
I'd rather feel sadness than nothing at all  
but lately its sadness or nothing at all  
so what do i do when i feel nothing at all  
and i long for sadness  
but when the sadness creeps back and hurls me into darkness  
all-consuming coldness  
aloneness  
i long for nothing at all?



## THE “G” WORD

*Arianne Schaffer*

Engulfed in the ideals of being a “young-professional” in Washington, I created this piece eight months after moving to DC. I was inspired by the city colors of springtime to create work expressing my newcomer observations. The blossoms were bright, the people had goals and I couldn’t image living in a more gorgeous metropolis. Initially, this painting consisted of four even district quadrants. But as I unpacked the history of DC, my privilege blindfold began to unravel. This wasn’t urban pioneering I saw; it was gentrification.







## CLOUD ON EARTH

*Carla Mavaddat*

## AFTERLIFE

*Emily Dalgo*

If I choose  
to die  
If I choose to  
take my life  
What will become of the secrets I hold?  
of the memories that they torture out of my grasp.  
will they dissipate into the wind or sea  
or do they stay inside, waiting to rot away with me?  
will they be locked inside my skull cell always  
or will they leap and bound and find the sun's rays?  
If I choose to die, will I live on  
Through the stories untold—  
the power of the unknown and the questions left  
Unanswered?  
If I die under their command, I have lost.  
If my eyes are shut tight in fear, I have lost.  
The clandestine destiny demands to take the rest of me,  
But I will choose another finale.



## MELVIN

Isabel Zayas

---

*"All right, Warden, let's give them what they want."*

– Last words of Melvin White

Warden:

Please take your seats

Turn off all cell phones and electronic devices

The show will begin in just a few minutes

Today's act comes to us from Ozona, Texas

Melvin Wayne White, age 55

Sentenced to death for the rape and murder of a little girl!

What a monster! What an animal!

Look upon this disgusting barbarian as he faces his final moments

The audience excitedly takes their seats

Trying to get close to the front row.

They chatter amongst themselves, looking forward to the execution -

The community event of the week

The show begins, the lights dim

Melvin Wayne White is strapped in

He says he can "taste it" when the deadly chemicals flow

The audience is released, happily, back into the dark

## WORDS, WORDS, WORDS

Missy Bochnowicz

---

1,392

people executed

in the United States since

reinstating the death penalty in 1977.

In their final statements

the most commonly used word:

love.

Love for their families

(family – the second most common word).

Love for friends,

for God, the Lord, Jesus Christ

Love for the warden,

guards, fellow inmates.

Love gives way to thanks,

then to sorrys, justs, forgives

It's all a formula,

really.

Everyone has the same things to say

before they die.

## HIDING

Casey Chiappetta



## STREET BRAWLERS

Melis Cengiz

We yell,  
We shove,  
Push,  
Sometimes kick  
We could punch,  
Gas,  
And shoot;  
With no consequence  
We order,  
We judge,  
Scare,  
Shamefully abuse:

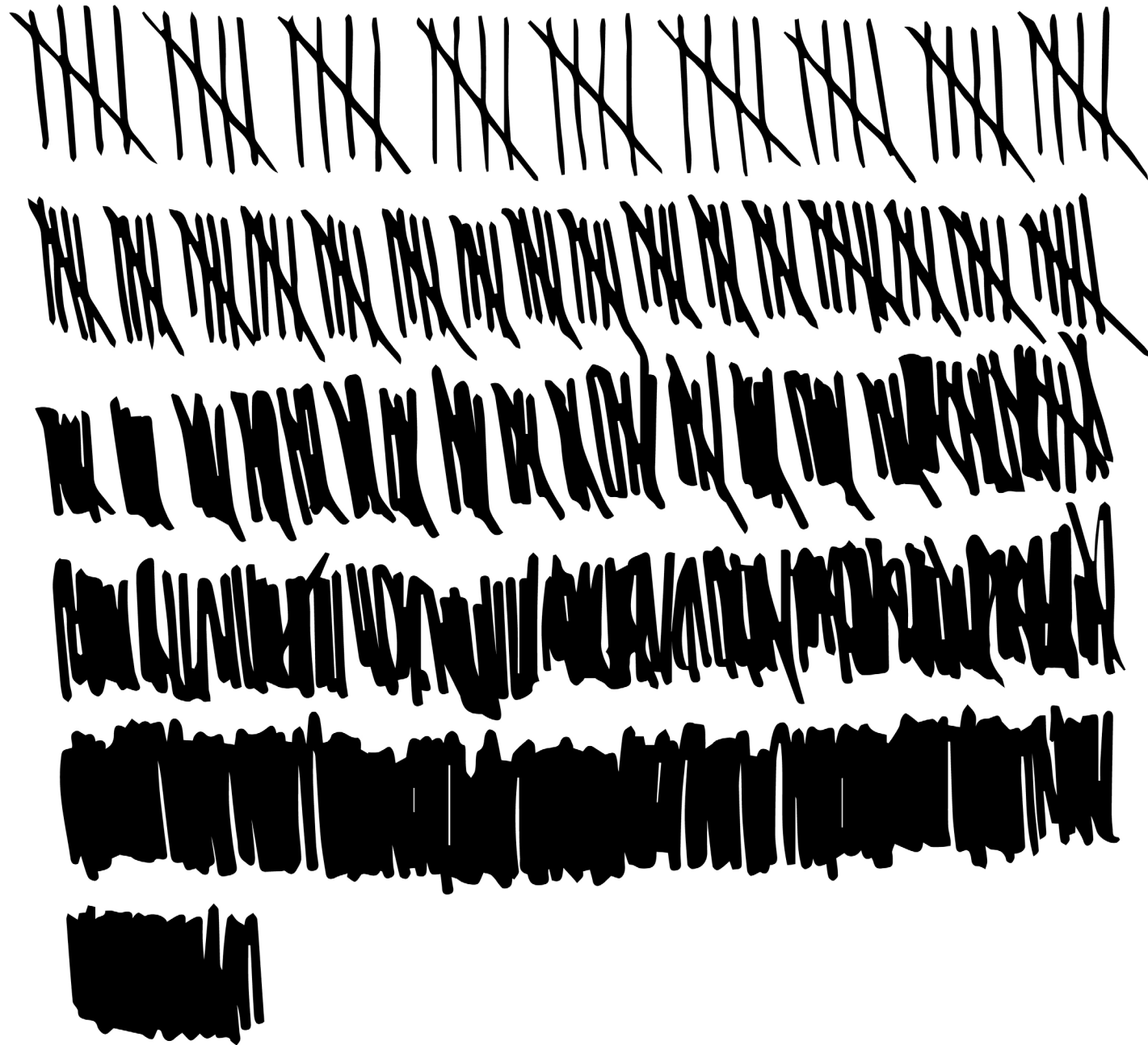
Street Brawlers

We roam the streets  
For those  
Like Us,  
But lacking in uniform



## FADING TO BLACK

Jacob Bray



## SHATTERED

Kari Lorentson

A copper-colored slab of clay lay cool, pure, and untouched  
At first it was molded and handled with care.  
Art or beauty the clay could have been  
but into a ball it was squeezed, like a wadded piece of gum.  
Alas, the clay began to crumble  
Discolored and dilapidated, it was thrown into a blaze.  
Fiery hot, the inferno scorched with rage.  
Heat turned tiny cracks into deep crevices  
shattering it and forever broken.  
Forever burnt. Forever broken.

## DETACHED

*Alaa Chaker*

The heart is the most malleable  
of all the organs

Your legs remain tightly attached to the hip  
Your arms securely fastened to the shoulders  
Your eyes fit snug into their sockets  
Your head screwed tightly to the neck

But the heart,  
the heart has means of detaching  
altogether from the bones and flesh  
left behind like a lone icicle in March

my body may be here  
but my heart remains there.



## CENSORED

*Emily Horowitz*



## SHE IS THE BEGINNING

*Tatiana Laing*

The first one  
From which all life has come  
Degraded and diluted for your  
pleasure

Say her name  
While she's still alive  
While her heart still beats  
When you hear her cry

See her pain  
Don't ignore the signs  
Don't believe the excuses  
Don't believe the lies

For hundreds of years  
You've ignored her tears  
You've ignored her fears  
You've stolen her innocence

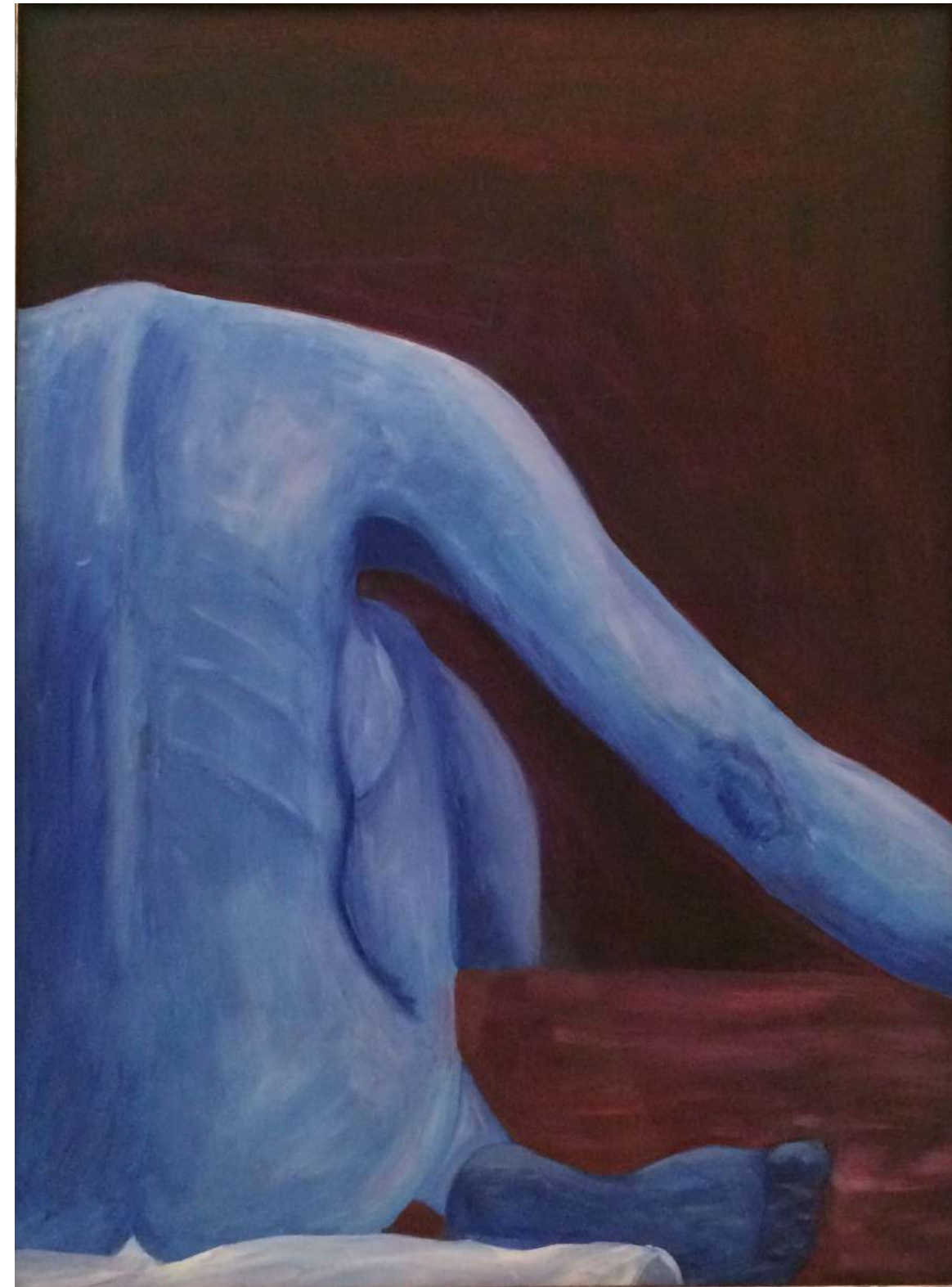
She's the scapegoat  
For your shortcomings  
For your hate  
For your selfishness

She's the vessel  
For adversity  
For hardship  
For suffering

And you lock her away  
Away in a cage  
Away in chains  
Away from your gaze

But you'll rue the day  
You put her away  
You bruised her black skin  
You battered her mind

She'll rise and rise  
With a resilient stride  
With beauty and pride  
Because she is the beginning



## ENDURE

*Morgan Walton*

# FREEDOM OF SPEECH: AN INSIGHT INTO PRISON WRITING

Antonia Roberta Siino, University of Bologna

## ABSTRACT

*The history of literature is rich in works inspired by the prison experience of their authors, some written while their authors were still incarcerated. The aim of this work is not to analyze the success that a work written by an inmate could have but to explore the debate concerning the potential to write that prisoners may have. In many works concerning life in prison this aspect is often left behind. The fact that someone sentenced to prison could write and publish like anyone else is accepted by some people but is frequently a source of outrage for others. The first part of this work focuses on the power of writing and its functions; the second part focuses on the opposing stances about the inmate's freedom of expression. Finally, the paper articulates the importance of writing in the Italian case.*

## INTRODUCTION

The history of literature is rich in works inspired by the prison experience of their authors or written while their authors were still incarcerated. Just to give an example of the most famous of them: "Don Quixote" by Miguel de Cervantes'; "The Prince" by Machiavelli; "Our Lady of the Flowers" by J. Genet; "On the Yard" by Malcolm Braly; "Soul on ice" by E. Cleaver; and the "Conversation with myself" by N. Mandela.<sup>1</sup> Because of diverse motivations, many imprisoned men and women have decided to spend their prison or post-incarceration time writing about their lives, thoughts, and prison experiences. Among them are both innocent persons (incarcerated because of their fight for civil rights) and persons who committed various type of crimes (from the minor to the most serious). Included in this cohort are famous personalities and people with various levels of education.

In prison, the social hierarchy is distorted in a sense. Some inmates succeed in retaining a certain

level of pre-incarceration power behind the bars, but they lose something important exactly like the rest of inmates' population, notably "tangible possessions and intangible connections to the outside world" and "their claim to compassion and care" (Johnson & Tabriz, 2011:xxi-xxii). In prison, the rich and the poor suffer the same terrible experience.

As in the rest of the world, in the Italian experience we find testimonies like Victor Hassine's narratives, which feature a mix of ethnographic reporting and creative writing (short stories and plays) describing what life in prison really means (Johnson & Tabriz, 2009). Many Italian life-sentence prisoners have written books concerning their experience in prison, but none of them has achieved in Italy the success Victor's book has achieved in the USA.

The publication of books by incarcerated authors often generates free-speech arguments, with the opinions separated into various camps. In many works concerning life in prison, this

aspect is often neglected or ignored. The first part of this work focuses on the power of writing and its functions; the second part focuses on the opposing stances about the inmate's freedom of speech; finally, it specifically addresses the importance of writing in the Italian case.

## 1. THE POWER OF WRITING

Writing can be defined as an organized system of symbols made conventional by society itself to fix, communicate, preserve, and pass down mental process and linguistic expressions through time (Cavallo, 1997). It has represented a unifying and civilizing strength for the birth of modern societies (Goody, 1997), and even if writing cannot be considered as a "prerequisite of rationality and civilization" (Olson, 2015: para.2), its spread has definitively modified the way to pass on socio-cultural values and the uses of languages (Goody, 2002). Some of the first testimonies of writing hail from Egypt and Mesopotamia of the fourth through the third millennia B.C., and show diverse functions of the invented scripts; e.g. ritual, magical, economical (Haarmann, 2002).

The first uses of writing seem to be inserted in a collective dimension; there was no yet space for an introspective use. Among the functions ascribed to writing, some authors focus mainly on: the support of memory, reification of ideas, social control through the dissemination of ideas, systematic interaction over time, and the articulation of the aesthetic (Bostad, 1994). In fact, writing is connected to both an interpersonal dimension and to an individual one, since it allows the creation of a meaning for oneself and also for others. For the purposes of this paper, the most pertinent functions are surely the memory

supporting and the reifying. Considered as one of the main supports for external memory (Charness, Best & Souders, 2012), writing can become an instrument that helps prevent forgetting one's own history, fixing it in a durable way. As the Latin proverb says, *verba volant, scripta manent* ("spoken words fly away, written words remain"). Concerning the reifying aspect, writing is not a direct representation of thoughts (Olson, 2015), but it renders them visible, giving them a concrete manifestation, allowing the individual to reflect on it and re-elaborate it more consciously (Goody, 2002).

Other intellectuals focus on the main goals of the authors themselves and the intended purpose of the text: "There are written texts which show that the writer's main objective can be the transmission of facts and written texts which show that the writer's aim is the establishment or maintenance of a social relation with the reader(s) and the expression of personal attitudes" (Kalaja & Leppänen, 1991:273).

The individual dimension now begins to have more and more space than in the past; but the collective dimension is always present because of the human need to express ourselves to others. Expressive writing, "a way of putting thoughts and feelings into words as a therapeutic tool" (Al Sanousi, 2004: 1), can have diverse forms: autobiography, letter writing, short message writing, night/day dreaming, Writing a thought promotes a better reflection on the world and stimulates us to express clearly what we have in mind (Goody, 2002). It can therefore be an instrument to order and better understand the world itself. It also means that writing must assume the structure of literacy to represent a therapeutic tool.

The therapeutic function of writing is now recognized in different research studies. As

<sup>1</sup> See: [criminaljusticedegreehub.com/30-literary-works-penned-in-prison](http://criminaljusticedegreehub.com/30-literary-works-penned-in-prison).

summarized by Al Sanousi (2004), some authors focus on journal writing (Progoff, 1992), others on the links between emotional disclosure and physical/psychological health<sup>1</sup>, still others on creative writing, such as poetry (Bolton, 1999). A combination of these studies shows that “expressive writing (...) seems to be effective,” although, as it will be explained, “the benefits are different from one person to another” (Al Sanousi, 2004: para. 9).

The power that writing can have is astonishing. All over the world, people are persecuted because of their declaration of rights violations or simply because of their thoughts; indeed, throughout history, people have died for their words. Writing can be the cause of going to prison or, paradoxically, it can represent a way out of the prison itself. The aim of the present work is to analyze the power of writing inside the prison world and its therapeutic function.

## 2. OPPOSING STANCES

The possibility of expressing ourselves through writing is not generally recognized when applied to prison inmates. The discussion can be divided into three camps, between those who actively support this kind of self-expression, those who deny inmates have any right of freedom of speech or self-expression, and last, those who think that inmates should be able to write about their experiences only if they are sincerely remorseful. In this part of the work, I compare these positions to stimulate a reflection about them.

Transferring the considerations articulated in the previous paragraph to the prison world can help to understand why writing can be so

<sup>2</sup> “(E)vidence has accumulated indicating that not disclosing extremely personal and traumatic experiences to others over a long period of time may be related to disease processes” (Pennebaker, Beall, 1986).

important for inmates, above all for those serving a life sentence. Two types of positive aspects can be underlined in this context. First, because of a personal narrative an inmate can pass on his experience to others outside the prison world; he can describe his everyday life, his fears, his hopes. Writing thus becomes a way to share his life with others living outside a totalitarian institution like the prison. This external memory allows an inmate-writer to reaffirm his own existence, reminding him that he still is a human being.

The second aspect to examine is the reifying function, because in re-elaborating one’s thoughts, the inmate is led to elaborate his ideas and reflect more deeply on his feelings. This process illustrates the well-known therapeutic/cathartic function of writing itself: “Confronting the event, then, should help the individual categorize the experience into a meaningful framework” (Pennebaker, Beall, 1986). In this way, an inmate’s life becomes communicable, and through the writing he can say to the world that he still exists.

Moreover, thanks to educational programs organized by some penitentiary authorities and academic institutions, uneducated prisoners are led to do something probably not planned when they were free: learning to read and write (if they are illiterate), attempting academic studies, and even graduating. And why not? Some of them may succeed in publishing books, winning literary awards<sup>2</sup>, and even having literary awards named after them, as is the case with Victor Hassine, in whose name BleakHouse Publishing offers funded

<sup>2</sup> With reference to literary contests open to all kind of writers or specifically dedicated to inmates (such as the Annual Prison Writing Contest of the PEN American Center in the U.S.A.). For the Victor Hassine Award, visit: <http://www.bleakhousepublishing.com/victor-hassine-memorial-scholarship/>

awards. The prison experience opens a new way to see the world, and writing can provide the means to express it. Through their writing, prisoners may start a path of reflection, growth, and change.

The fact that a killer can study, earn a degree, and write a book can represent an important phase in the rehabilitation process, generally considered one of the main factors that characterizes a modern society. But individual feelings are not always as rational as the criminal justice system should be<sup>1</sup>.

The image of the inmate is always linked to rudeness, ignorance, and a lack of education. In this context, the link between writing and literacy, as “competence with written language, in both reading and writing” (Olson, 2015: 1), emerges dramatically. Many people do not accept the idea of an educated inmate, or worse, the idea that a convicted felon could achieve intellectual goals in spite of what he has done, instead of simply remaining a forgotten inmate.

Most “non-inmates” refuse to hear about inmates and their personal history; they want only to deny the inmate’s existence. “Writing is inherently a topic in psychology. It’s a way that one mind can cause ideas to happen in another mind”<sup>2</sup>. The problem is that many people think that no good ideas can be spread by an inmate’s creative or intellectual works. It seems that the re-educational aim of penitentiary system does not exist for these “non-inmates”, who just want to keep the “guilty” under lock and key. In this sense, giving an inmate the possibility of a new life (even if always in prison) is irrationally considered as a denial of his or her

<sup>1</sup> Clearly, the reference is on an ideal criminal justice in which all programs are well applied and degeneration are absent.

<sup>2</sup> See: <http://edge.org/conversation/writing-in-the-21st-century>

victim’s suffering. This attitude reflects clearly the original connotation of penitentiary: society must have its revenge against those who tried to undermine its order.

Certainly, an inmate’s writing does not necessarily imply a true understanding of crimes the person committed. The results of a therapeutic path through the writing is effectively determined by the individual’s personality. This is another element negatively considered by most people. In this perspective, a proper re-educational path should be characterized by a complete redemption and regret as far as concerning the committed crime. Inside the prison world and its therapeutic function.

## 3. WRITING AND THE ITALIAN CRIMINAL JURISDICTION

The Italian Constitution entered in force in 1948 and introduced into the field of criminal jurisdiction, among others, the principles for which penalties for violation must have a proper legal basis (Italian Constitution, 1948, Art. 25). Those principles include a fundamental respect for humanity and the re-education of inmates (ibidem, Art. 27, Section 3), plus the abolition of death penalty (ibidem, Art. 27, Section 4) (Siino, 2015). In compliance with these principles, Italian criminal legislation is charged with the oversight and regulation of recreational activities aimed at inmates’ reintegration.

Nevertheless, Italian criminal jurisdiction provides for life imprisonment without parole (the “ergastolo ostativo”) for predetermined types of crimes and offenders. According to Art. 4-bis of the Criminal Code, lifers convicted of certain crimes (e.g. terrorism, mafia association, drug trafficking,



human trafficking, and kidnapping in order to extortion) can benefit from alternative measures or other judicial benefits provided they chose to collaborate with the authorities<sup>1</sup>. In Italy, about 1200 prisoners are currently under sentence of imprisonment without parole, but no official data exist because the application of Art. 4 depends on the inmate's willingness to collaborate with law enforcement, and this can change rapidly. Most of these inmates were convicted of mafia crimes and can be put under the so-called "hard regime" introduced by Article 41-bis of the Italian Criminal Code. Inmates put under the hard regime are denied access to some re-educational activities, i.e. they cannot obtain a job outside prison, a reduction of penalty, or socializing benefits (Sofri, 2012; Castellano, 2012). The contact with external world is therefore completely disrupted.

As previously mentioned, the application of this provision could be suspended if a lifer decides to collaborate with the authorities or if his collaboration has become useless because of diverse reasons<sup>2</sup>. In reality, the possibility that inmates collaborate is really remote for three reasons. First, a man who belongs to mafia type organizations should reject all elements of the system of values passed on to him by his social context<sup>3</sup>. Second, his collaboration implies that he has to denounce the crimes he committed and the people he has lived with until that moment (including parents and friends).

1 The modification of art. 4 of Italian Criminal Code determined a great exacerbation of penalties and it was a reaction after important mafia attacks of '90.

2 The collaboration is considered useless if judicial force has obtained all the information they need, concerning a specific series of crimes, from other informers or thanks to investigations.

3 Criminal Jurisdiction does not require a real regret or contrition for the committed crimes but just useful suggestion concerning them and the criminal groups which inmate belongs to.

Third, he will be afraid of the consequences of this collaboration on his family's life.

For all these elements, scholastic programs, through which inmates can have access to education (and eventually, graduate), laboratories, creative writing courses, or poetry courses, are very important for all who will probably never leave prison because convicted under the hard regime of Article 41-bis.

As previously mentioned, the distinctive feature of the Italian legal scenario is the presence of the mafia phenomenon. In fact, the debate concerning the "inmate's freedom of speech" becomes more lively when the inmate writer belongs to the world of mafia organizations. For example, a yearly literary award in memory of Leonardo Sciascia<sup>4</sup> is organized in Italy. At the 2014 competition, a member of the panel of judges left the venue because he considered unacceptable that a killer-writer could reach the final stage of a competition of this kind. Nevertheless, Giuseppe Grassonelli, a mafia killer, participated with his autobiography and won the competition.

The main objection raised by those who cry shame when an inmate's book is published concerns the lack of remorse by the inmate himself. In fact, a cathartic use of writing does not imply the achievement of a complete redemption, above all for the mafia crimes. This aspect is evident in the Italian case, in which members of a mafia group do not consider the murder of another mafia man as a real homicide. A man belonging to a mafia group, convicted of several homicides and author of many books during his imprisonment stated, "Apart from a minor crime

4 Leonardo Sciascia was an Italian intellectual, writer, novelist, playwright and politician. He is also famous for his works against mafia and political corruption.

I committed when I was a child (a bag-snatching from an old-lady), for all the other crimes I have been charged with, I feel no guilt" (Ficco, 2011).

Apart from the general difficulty of accepting the image of a literate inmate, this strong opposition to inmate writers belonging to mafia groups hails from the role of these organizations in Italian history. Organized crime of mafia type damages not only the single person that inmates might have killed (or his family) but the whole society. Even if this aspect is still not completely analyzed, mafia crimes have a collective dimension rather than an individual one. The presence of mafia kills more than single persons, both guilty and not; it kills the hope of entire generations of young men and women by impeding the democratic, economical, and cultural development of the entire society<sup>1</sup>. In spite of the governmental effort to silence prisoners, many voluntary associations work in order to guarantee this freedom of speech to inmates (e.g. Antigone Onlus, Gruppo Abele Onlus, VIC, and others<sup>2</sup>). Thanks to volunteers, lifers can still interact with the outside world.

#### 4. REFLECTIONS

Currently, the role of writing in our societies has changed, mainly because of the diffusion of new models of communication: Internet, telephone, and television. But for most inmates, the outside world is still fixed and far away, and the only possible way to communicate thoughts, fears, or opinions is still via a pen. In reality, it is mainly possible thanks to volunteers who support this idea of rehabilitative process; because of

1 For example: the request of the "pizzo" (protection money) to a businessman or the presence of a mafia entrepreneurial activity modifies the law of the market in its entirety.

2 For further information see: [https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg\\_2\\_4\\_3\\_4.wp](https://www.giustizia.it/giustizia/it/mg_2_4_3_4.wp).

them, inmates' messages can leave prison.

Reflecting on the positions previously discussed, three elements come to light. First, words written by inmates satisfy individual needs, because they acquire a different meaning fixing their experiences and making them in a sense real and concrete for others. But these words can also satisfy a collective need for truth: words from the inside can unveil the real mechanism of the prison institution. Second, the inmate's success in recovering himself through the power of introspective writing is a great achievement for society as well, because it means that the rehabilitative path has been completed. Third, the debate concerning the recognition of some rights of persons convicted of high crimes (and who have not repented for them) has shown to be highly problematic, as the Italian case clearly shows. Nevertheless, Art.21 of the Italian Constitution states that "all people have the rights to express freely own thought through the word, the written and each other way of communication (...) press cannot be subjected neither to authorization nor censure" (Italian Government, 1948)<sup>3</sup>.

Freedom of speech should be extended to all persons irrespective of their committed crimes. The experience of Victor Hassine teaches this lesson very well: he displayed altruism through his actions aimed to promote prison reform and to obtain better conditions for him and for his fellow inmates. He "co-founded a post-release transition house for newly released prisoners who couldn't otherwise secure an acceptable housing plan" (Hassine, 2012: xi) and promoted the adoption of educational programs inside prison. How could anyone have denied the right

3 [https://www.senato.it/1025?sezione=120&articolo\\_numero\\_articolo=21](https://www.senato.it/1025?sezione=120&articolo_numero_articolo=21).

of free speech to Victor Hassine, even though he was convicted of first-degree murder? Such a denial of free speech would be a great injustice.

The real matter to consider is that the cathartic function of writing cannot work by itself. On the contrary, it should be accompanied by other measures aimed at fostering reconciliation between the offender and the rest of the society. In this perspective, restorative justice could and should play an important role.

---

## REFERENCES

Al Sanousi, H. Ph.D. (2004). The Psychological Role of Expressive and Literary Writing - A case study on Kuwaiti Women. *PSYART: A Hyperlink Journal for the Psychological Study of the Arts*. Retrieved August 20, 2015, from [psyartjournal.com/article/show/al\\_sanousi\\_phd-the\\_psychological\\_role\\_of\\_expressive\\_and](http://psyartjournal.com/article/show/al_sanousi_phd-the_psychological_role_of_expressive_and).

Bolton, G. (1999). *The Therapeutic Potential of Creative Writing: Writing Myself*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Bostad, F. (1994). What happens to writing when texts in "a world on paper" are replaced by messages in "virtual space?", 1994 *Research Congress of the Nordic Association for Semiotic Studies*. Retrieved from: [http://www.hf.ntnu.no/anv/Finnbo/Finn\\_ToC.html](http://www.hf.ntnu.no/anv/Finnbo/Finn_ToC.html)

Castellano, T. (2012). *Cosa desidero, a parte la libertà?* Retrieved from <http://www.gruppoabele.org/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/3447>

Cavallo, G. (1997). Storia della scrittura. In: *Enciclopedia delle Scienze Sociali*. Retrieved August 20, 2015, from [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/scrittura\\_\(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/scrittura_(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali)/)

Charness, N., Best, R., & Souders, D. (2012). Memory function and supportive technology. *Gerontechnology*, 11(1), 22-34. doi: 10.4017/gt.2012.11.01.006.00.

Ficco, C. (2011). *Intervista all'ergastolano Carmelo Musumeci*. Retrieved from <http://www.agoravox.it/Intervista-all-ergastolano-Carmelo.html>

Goody J. (2002). Introduzione. La scrittura: società e individuo. In G. Bocchi, & M. Ceruti (Eds.). *Origini della scrittura. Genealogie di un'invenzione* (1-11). Milano: Bruno Mondadori.

Goody, J.R. (1997). Antropologia della scrittura. In: *Enciclopedia delle Scienze Sociali*. Retrieved August 20, 2015, from [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/scrittura\\_\(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/scrittura_(Enciclopedia-delle-scienze-sociali)/)

Haarmann, H. (2002). Modelli di civiltà a confronto nel mondo antico: la diversità funzionale degli antichi sistemi di scrittura. In G. Bocchi, & M. Ceruti (Eds.). *Origini della scrittura. Genealogie di un'invenzione* (pp.28-57). Milano: Bruno Mondadori.

Hassine, V. (2012). *Life without parole. Living and dying in prison today*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Italian Government. (1948). *Italian Constitution*. Retrieved from: [https://www.senato.it/1025?sezione=120&articolo\\_numero\\_articolo=21](https://www.senato.it/1025?sezione=120&articolo_numero_articolo=21).

Johnson, R. & Tabriz, S. (2009). *Lethal Rejection: Stories on Crime and Punishment*. Carolina: Academic Press.

Johnson, R. & Tabriz, S. (2012). Opening Reflections on Living and Dying in Prison Today. In Hassine, V. *Life without parole. Living and dying in prison today*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kalaja, P., & Leppänen, S.(1991). *Transaction and interaction in writing: the case of electronic mail*. Retrieved from <http://www.afinla.fi/sites/afinla.fi/files/1991Kalaja-Leppanen.pdf>.

Olson, D. (2015). Writing. In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Retrieved August 20, 2015 from <http://www.britannica.com/topic/writing>

Pennebaker, J.W. & Beall, S.K. (1986). Confronting a Traumatic Event: Toward an Understanding of Inhibition and Disease. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 95(3), 274-281. doi: 10.1037//0021-843X.95.3.274

Progoff, I. (1992). *At a Journal Workshop: Writing to Access the Power of the Unconscious and Evoke Creative Ability*. Los Angeles: J.P. Tarcher, revised edition.

Siino, A.R. (2015). The article 41-bis Of The Italian Criminal Jurisdiction. Indispensable Instrument Or Basis For Torture? *Sicurezza e Scienze Sociali*, 2, being printed. Milano: Franco Angeli.

Sofri, A. (2012). *Giustizia: gli uomini ombra che moriranno in carcere*. Retrieved from [http://www.ristretti.it/commenti/2012/settembre/testi/rassegna\\_stamp\\_24\\_settembre.txt](http://www.ristretti.it/commenti/2012/settembre/testi/rassegna_stamp_24_settembre.txt).

## BIOGRAPHIES

MELISA AZAK is a senior in the School of Public Affairs at American University. She is majoring in Law and Society and wants to attend law school after graduation. Melisa is deeply interested in mass incarceration, capital punishment, and prison reform. She is especially interested in how race and gender influence the treatment of prisoners. Melisa hopes to one day become a death penalty defense attorney in the Deep South.

MISSY BOCHNOWICZ was a student in Professor Robert Johnson's Deprivation of Liberty class during her senior year at American University. She graduated in May 2015 with a B.S. in Biology. She took Johnson's class as a General Education requirement but considers it to be one of her favorite courses she took.

JACOB BRAY is a student in the honors program at American University where he studies political science and fine art. His interest in the issues that face American prisons and those within greatly increased after taking a class taught by Professor Robert Johnson.

MELIS CENGIZ graduated from AU in May 2015 with a degree in international studies and economics. She is an analyst at Kroll Compliance.

ALAA CHAKER is a fourth-year Honors student at American University pursuing a dual degree in Political Science and Mathematics & Economics. She is driven by her passion for social justice and ensuring equality of opportunity. She joins the press with an interest particularly in exploring how politics, policy, and law play a role in influencing systemic social and civil inequalities, such as those that lead to mass incarceration and inequitable access to justice.

CASEY CHIAPPETTA is an undergraduate honors student majoring in sociology at the American University. She is currently studying social policy at the London School of Economics through the General Course program. Her passion is the study of people and the ways in which different groups interact, particularly with regard to power dynamics. She has been doing graphic design and photography for five years.

JOANNE CONELLEY graduated from American University in 2015 with a MS in Justice, Law, and Criminology. Her studies focused on the theories and realities of punishment in the US, and how these tie into the criminal justice system at large. She also has a BA in Justice and a BS in Mathematics.

SOFIA CRUTCHFIELD is a senior at American University majoring in Law & Society and minoring in International Studies. Through coursework and community service, she has seen first-hand the empowering effects of creative writing in the world of criminal justice, and couldn't be happier to support the Review.

EMILY DALGO is a third year honors undergraduate student at American University pursuing a degree in International Studies with a focus in justice, ethics, and human rights. Dalgo is the Chief Development Officer of BleakHouse Publishing.

CASSANDRA FOWLER is an honors student at American University studying Justice and Law. Her interests include community building in communities of color, reforming the reentry process, and providing adequate legal support to the poor in civil and criminal matters. Cassandra hopes to continue to use the arts as a means of creating empathy and fostering discussion about solutions.

EMILY HOROWITZ graduated from American University in May 2015 with a major in Interdisciplinary Studies: Communications, Legal Institutions, Economics, and Government (CLEG), and a minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She also completed a four-year certificate program in Advanced Leadership Studies. For her honors capstone, Emily analyzed abortion access in New York state prisons and created informational materials for legislators, women in prison, prison guards, and medical professionals.

CHARLES HUCKELBURY has received four PEN awards for fiction and nonfiction and is the author of two books of poetry, *Tales from the Purple Penguin* and *Distant Thunder*, both published by BleakHouse.

ROBERT JOHNSON is a professor of justice, law and criminology at American University, editor and publisher of BleakHouse Publishing, and an award-winning author of books and articles on crime and punishment, including works of social science, law, poetry, and fiction. He has testified or provided expert affidavits on capital and other criminal cases in many venues, including US state and federal courts, the U.S. Congress, and the European Commission of Human Rights. He is best known for his book, *Death Work: A Study of the Modern Execution Process*, which won the Outstanding Book Award of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences. Johnson is a Distinguished Alumnus of the Nelson A. Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy, University at Albany, State University of New York.

BILL KAKENMASTER is an undergraduate student at American University's School of International Service. He plans to graduate with a B.A. in International Studies and a focus in human rights and peace and conflict resolution. Kakenmaster's academic interests include transitional justice, Latin American politics and society, and human rights activism. At SIS, Kakenmaster is heavily involved with undergraduate research and publication. He works closely with *Clocks and Clouds*, the undergraduate research journal for international and public affairs. Kakenmaster has also presented his own research at the 18th Annual SIS Undergraduate Research Symposium, for which he was awarded Best Research Paper.

LEILA KHELFAOUI, raised in Amherst, Massachusetts, grew up with a passion for social justice and activism. She has always incorporated the art of creative writing throughout her academic pursuits, and enjoys expressing her views on criminal justice reform through literary art. In May of 2015 Leila graduated with a Masters of Science in Justice, Law and Criminology from the School of Public Affairs at American University.

TATIANA LAING is an honors senior in the School of Public Affairs at American University. She is majoring in CLEG (Communications, Law, Economics, and Government) and has a deep interest in reducing mass incarceration by improving reentry practices. Since arriving in Washington DC in the fall of 2012, she has become involved with a number of organizations that work to reform the criminal justice system. In the spring of 2013, Tatiana was selected to become a consulting editor for BleakHouse publishing and became one of the founding writers for BleakHouse's blog, *The Bare Light Bulb*, where she composes monthly blog posts addressing relevant social justice issues such as Stop and Frisk in New York, Death Penalty Practices, and the George Zimmerman Trial. In the spring of 2014, Tatiana interned for Brennan Center for Justice, where she was able to gain invaluable experience in the advocacy field in addition to research experience on the topic of mass incarceration. In her tenure there, she completed a large research project on the experiences of women in prison. Her scholarship and informed activism led to her selection for our flagship award, the BleakHouse Fellowship.



KARI LORENTSON is an undergraduate student at American University in Washington, DC. She is pursuing a BA in Political Science with a concentration in Public Policy. Lorentson's research interests include higher education and justice policy. Lorentson is also a member of Pi Sigma Alpha, the National Political Science Honor Society.

CARLA MAVADDAT is a McGill University graduate in Political Science, Communications, and Spanish with a passion for photography and design. She is originally from Montreal, Canada but grew up in Washington D.C. Carla is interested in human rights, social justice, and is a strong advocate against poverty. Her photographs have appeared in *Adore Noir*, a fine arts photography magazine, *Laws: An Open Access Journal* from MDPI, and in *BleakHouse Review*. She was the graphics and design editor for *BleakHouse Review*, Art Director for *BleakHouse Publishing*. Carla is currently pursuing her Masters in a Strategic Communication at American University.

SUSAN NAGELSEN recently retired as the director of the writing program at New England College in Henniker, NH. Her book, *Exiled Voices: Portals of Discovery*, is a collection of writings by women and men in prisons across the country. She is associate editor of the *Journal of Prisoners on Prisons*, a peer reviewed criminal justice journal published by the University of Ottawa. Her most recent work appears in the *New Plains Review* and *Ephipanymag.org*.

ARIANE SCHAFFER is a third-year undergraduate honors student in the School of Public Affairs at American University. Growing up in New Orleans, Louisiana, Schaffer's work is inspired first-hand by experiences in urban development and education equity after Hurricane Katrina hit the city in 2005. She has always been fascinated by the challenge of matching actionable solutions with real life problems, and driven by the complexity of managing multidisciplinary team efforts. Schaffer plans to continue her education in graduate school.

ANTONIA ROBERTA SIINO is a PhD student in Sociology and Social Research in the Department of Sociology and Business Law, University of Bologna. Her scientific interests are focused on organized crime of the mafia type and its interactions with civil society.

MORGAN WALTON is a 2014 graduate of American University's Justice, Law & Criminology program with a concentration in Justice and Public Policy. Art and writing have not taken center stage in her professional life, but Professor Johnson's Death Penalty course connected her with artistic expressions of corrections experiences. Morgan was an avid artist in high school and created a self-designed art minor as an undergraduate at Mt. Holyoke College in Western Massachusetts. Oil painting is one of her preferred mediums, but she also enjoys drawing, watercolors, and woodworking. The female figure is particularly inspiring and a favorite artistic pastime is attending open figure drawing and painting sessions.

ISABEL ZAYAS is a sophomore in the honors program at American University. She is majoring in Law & Society, and has a strong focus on mental health law and immigration law.

For more information, visit [www.bleakhousepublishing.com](http://www.bleakhousepublishing.com) to review our books, magazines, art gallery, awards, and outreach activities.



**BLEAKHOUSE  
PUBLISHING**