

# Word Swell



*anthology of literature and art*

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# Fable

By John Olson

Fable is the blood of gnomes. Fable plays with description as if description were a mole of myriad power. The Muse stands at the summit of a paragraph playing with a yo-yo. Fable and muse are examples of butterfly milk. The air is cut with a knife of stainless zeal. A chrysalis of thought grows into meaning and glistens in convulsive glamour as a pair of wings find muscle and structure in a language of garish subtleties. The frame is unequal to its content. Experience is radical. The imagination feeds it fish and goulash. I feel the heat of emotion, the opium of similarity, the ecstasy of difference, the fingers of spectral alphabets. The interior of being is the exterior of anterior worlds. There is a door that opens to a room of grammar and a door that opens to a room of clouds. There is a question in the rain and a question in the growl of wolves. This is how fable expands into the white light of kerosene. This is how the wick gets black. This is how words swell into asphalt and noise. This is how the crescendo of tides impels the shiver of mass, and the edge of the world excites the pursuit of wonder in the sleep of hungry vagabonds



*Amir Catic*

# The Krafft-Ebing Poems

By Bill Yarrow

[found poems taken from *Psychopathia Sexualis*  
by Richard von Krafft-Ebing, seventh edition, 1894]

Case #106

when she was about ten years old  
she thought that her mother  
no longer loved her  
so she put matches in her coffee  
to make herself sick  
that she might thus excite  
her mother's affection  
for her

Case #88

on account of his impotence  
the patient applied to Dr Hammond

who treated his epilepsy  
with bromides

and advised him to hang a shoe  
over his bed

and to look at it fixedly  
during coitus

while at the same time imagining  
his wife to be a shoe

### Case #8

as a child he was not affectionate  
and was cold toward his parents

as a student he was peculiar  
and retiring, preoccupied with self

he was well endowed mentally and given to much  
reading  
but eccentric after puberty

alternating between religious enthusiasm  
and materialism

now studying theology  
now natural sciences

at the university  
his fellow-students took him  
for a fool

he read Jean Paul almost exclusively

### Case #89

on his marriage night  
he remained cold

until he brought to his aid

the picture of an ugly woman's head  
wearing a night cap

coitus was immediately successful

### Case #36

she must stand at the window  
awaiting him  
with her face done up  
and on his entrance into the room  
complain of severe toothache

he is sorry for her  
asks particularly about the pain  
takes the cloth off  
and puts it on again

he never touches her sexually  
yet finds complete satisfaction simply in this act

### Case #55

on their wedding night  
he forced a towel and soap into her hands  
and without any other expression of love  
asked her to lather his chin and neck  
as if for shaving

the inexperienced young wife did it  
and during the first weeks of married life  
was not a little astonished  
to learn the secrets of intimacy  
in this way alone

Case #102

the patient in a circle of erotic ideas  
grows more and more peculiar

he avoids the society  
of women

associates with them  
only for the sake of music

and ONLY when two witnesses  
are with him

Case #83

his dreams are filled  
with aprons



# Invisible Letters

By Rhys Hughes

I heard her speak before I saw her, because she was on the other side of a tall library bookcase. I didn't know if she was talking directly to me: how could she know I was there? But she wasn't obviously addressing anyone else and her tone was too sweet and entreating to suggest she was talking to herself. Surely nobody is an auto-flirt?

"My name," she said, "is Mirranhgda Smyinth."

Was she foreign? "I beg your pardon?"

"I said my name is Miranda Smith," she replied.

And then there was a pause, and I realised I was expected to reveal my own name in return, like exchanging sweets from a bag, a gobstopper for a humbug. "And I am Jhohdnn Brrouwlln."

"John Brown, did you say? How do you do!"

I nodded, even though she couldn't see the gesture. Then I had an urge to gaze on her, so I began circling the bookcase, but she patently had the same idea, because she stepped round to where I had been, and that's how we missed each other, and kept doing so.

"Are you baffled?" she asked me, and then added quickly, "Not by the fact the bookcase is still between us, because that's a matter of geometry, timing, velocity and other physical variables, but by the silent letters that festoon my name? Most people I meet are."

"There are silent letters in my name too," I answered.

Maybe my tone was a touch defiant because she laughed lightly and at once my heart leapt in my chest. She said:

“Yes, but my silent letters can occasionally be heard.”

“Then they aren’t silent!” I cried, before adding more delicately, “The same is true for me: they make some noise.”

“What do you think this means?” she asked softly.

I shrugged: another unseen gesture.

“Do you suppose,” she added teasingly, “that silent letters have started to assert themselves in the world at last?”

I smiled at this curious notion, her quaint and surely ironic conceit that letters might have consciousness and a deliberate purpose, that they might feel resentment and determination; but I decided to humour her. The truth is that I found her voice attractive and so—

But no, a voice reveals nothing of deep insight about the appearance or character of a woman; it’s a false clue, as unreliable as bumps on the head or astrological signs or even handwriting style.

“Feasibly they have,” I announced, “and doubtless they will insist on enjoying equal rights with all non-silent letters, so the ‘p’ in ‘pterodactyl’ will henceforth be pronounced on every tongue that utters the name of the creature, but very little will alter in the grand scheme of things. I know a few people already who say, ‘pterodactyl.’”

“Do you truly believe the outcome will be so easy?”

She was serious now, that much was clear. I changed

my direction and tried to catch her by circling the bookcase anti-clockwise but it turned out that she had reversed her direction too.

“This phenomenon...” I began in a sharper voice.

“No, it’s more deliberate than that. It’s a rebellion. The silent letters in my name were once only heard two or three times a year by strangers, but now they are heard more often than not.”

I sighed in mild exasperation. “A general surge into audibility of silent letters will lead to an official review of the language by those experts who compile dictionaries. After all, it’s their responsibility, not ours. Spelling will be simplified and the rebellious letters edited away into oblivion. The danger won’t be as severe as you imagine.”

“What if they are only the vanguard? What about—”

She chuckled and I knew she was toying with me, but I didn’t care. In fact I thought I understood her properly now. She was a prankster, maybe a student from the local university, relieving the boredom of a bland grey day with an absurdist joke, a madcap routine.

I responded to her challenge. “What about what?”

“What about invisible letters?”

“And what are those but letters that don’t exist?”

I stopped circling the bookcase. Would she come to me instead? But it appeared she had paused at the exact same instant, perhaps to take a book from a shelf and open it at a random page.

“They do exist. Listen. We accept letters that are visible but silent. We may not like them, but we don’t refuse them; they are a quirky feature of language, we

know them, we have made lists; but consider letters that are invisible and equally silent. What if they too decide to assert themselves, to become visible and also make a noise?"

"That is a pointless anxiety. There are no such things."

"Look! Open a book, any book..."

Compelled by the urgency of her tone, by its mocking undercurrents, I pulled out the nearest volume and opened it. The text was unreadable, an atrocious writhing mess of compressed letters. I was knocked backwards by the force of the sonic boom as they detonated; and I dropped the book as I vainly struggled to maintain my balance.

"See?" she shouted, and there was only compassion in her voice now, and resignation, and a touch of melancholy. "There were always far more invisible letters in every word than visible ones. Hundreds, thousands and millions of them for each visible word!"

I said nothing. The titles embossed on the spines of every book I gazed at had become gibberish; letters dripped from them onto the floor, slowly at first but with increasing velocity, becoming a trickle, a gush, a cataract that filled the library and rose higher and higher, the bookshelves floating on the ocean of dismembered words like rafts.

I clung to one, but the woman wasn't with me. I was alone. The doors burst open with the pressure and out I went, riding a current of verbosity along the streets to the door of my house.

And this is a true sssssttttttttoooooorrrrrrryyyyyy.



*by Amir Catic*



*by Amir Catic*

# Substance

**By Epiphany Ferrell**

Why is it always Jell-O? There are a hundred other things of substance his wife could bring to a potluck – chili, that green bean casserole, taco dip. Jell-O-shots,

even. She brings Jell-O. She's proud of herself because this time she went to the trouble of opening a can of peaches to dump in there as the Jell-O morphed from runny to wiggly. My father adores her. He tells his stupid jokes, the same ones he tells every single family gathering, and she giggles at all the right spots. I've had too much caffeine. I don't need a doctor to tell me that. I can tell by the way the newspaper shakes as I hold it in front of me. It's 10 a.m. – who will be the first to say something if I crack a beer?

My father, my wife and my brother are in the garden. I keep watch from the window while I chug a Bud. I don't rightly know when she began to chafe me so. There was a time I admired her non-stop pep, or the way she slept with one arm under her head, her fingers curling like a little girl's. I wanted to protect her in those days, those fruitier, glossier days when we were younger and dumber and therefore blissful. I had to go and peel off the surface, didn't I. What I found beneath it is that we can't even agree on a pet – not what one to get, but should we get.

There is a trick to being a good husband. I don't know what it is. I don't know at what point love ends and selfishness begins. I don't know when it's right for me to draw a line, or if it's right. But surely I'm not required to give away every part of myself until there is nothing left. I don't have any specific complaints about her. She does my laundry, folds my socks and underwear, dinner on the table when I get home, she lets me have the remote.

I wonder if not having a specific complaint is the

same thing as being content. I wonder if “content” is the brand of life I want, and if so, what happened to wanting “happy?” I crack another beer, still looking out the window. I realize quite suddenly my wife is sitting facing the window, that she has moved so she can see into the kitchen where I’m standing near the sink, beer in hand, and she’s watching me. There is no expression on her face. There is nothing in her eyes. She’s just watching me, like a doll. Even when she giggles at my father’s jokes, nothing moves but her mouth. I put the beer down.

I think maybe I’ll go out and sit next to her, hold her hand or put my arm around her. But I can’t bear those eyes. I stop in the dining room, take off my socks, drop them on the Jell-O she’s brought, and walk out of the house barefoot. I’ve left the car keys on the table next to the front door. It’s too late to go back and get them now. I walk barefoot down the sidewalk, and I whistle a tuneless song empty.



# Meanings

**By Epiphany Ferrell**

Seahorses safely carry the souls of sailors who perish at sea to the Underworld. To see them in dreams indicates a connection to the subconscious, an uninhibited quality of following one's inner instincts. To dream of peaches can mean that you take pleasure in simple country comforts. Or it could mean sex. Most things come down to carnality – that's how the teller of dreams told it to me. Peaches, she said, can represent desire. In your dream, do you merely hold the peach, or do you bite into it, letting the juices wet your lips, your chin? Most dream meanings, she said, have no more than a speck of innocence. Have you dreamt of the moon? You might have a preoccupation with what is unreal. On the other hand, she said, some dreams have no meaning at all. I wonder how often she rehearses her smooth murmurs, those vague pronouncement lent significance by her delivery. I can't help but admire how she lifts the ordinary to the mystical.

I dreamed the other night that you had become a worm. I dreamed I sat in a tent in the rain, with the rain smell, and the dirt smell, and the old canvas smell, and a kerosene lamp threw my shadow against the tent wall, and I lit matches one by one and you curled and writhed and eventually froze mid-curl.

# A Language of Trenches

By Owen Kaelin

I'm with the others. They're all in here and my sister among them. In the trench, she gives me a colorful nugget of glass. "It asked for you," she grins. I look at the nugget. I'm unsure why it needs me and it doesn't need my sister, but I'll give it its two legs, yes. I'll try making the nugget happy.

In exchange for the legs, the nugget lays a charge in me: there are things I can do, now, that I've yet been unable to do. The nugget chose me, so I will be the nugget's legs, and it'll be my heart. It'll stay safe in my pocket.

Then it is time to look ahead.

Gouging a line before me, a long trench pulls out of town for the sake of another.

I slide down the side to the snow. The snow down here is meek.

I have a brother. He stands thoughtfully at the birth of trenches. This brother says to me: "Once, there was a time we were functioning well. Now we're not so well. We've been lazy a lot, and too apologetic about ourselves. The eyes, the wild ones — you've seen them — they have the answer for it, I think. When they die they keep the answer inside them." "What answer are

you talking about?" I ask. He says: "Don't ask dumb questions." "What do you mean?" "*We have to get it in order to make it,*" he sighs.

"I see," I answer, and then: "So, what are you expecting to make?" "You'll see. Get me ten dead eyes. Then you can see what I make." "So, there's no other way, for you?" "I just told you: we've been too apologetic, so we've ended up like this. Are you telling me, now, you're gonna be a part of the problem?"

I shrug. I don't care about his philosophy; I'm curious to see what he thinks he can make, from dead eyes, that'll be helpful to anyone. I tell him: "I'll see what I can do." "Thanks," he answers.

Getting to the second town from here will take a while. There are many hard breaths in it. As I go I see no dead eyes.

Fortunately, there are places along the way, places with food and water to keep me going, and people to catch me.

Trenches meet and depart. I'm walking only a short time — little more than two hours — when I find myself stopped before a ledge. *Where did it come from?* There's no cure for this ledge; I cannot proceed. Perhaps this was only bad luck, a rare luck. At any rate I'll need to return to town and start again.

I climb out and wind back. Through the streets. To the beginning. One must start there always if one is to end at the end.

Good for me I have glass in my veins.

It flows ponderously, respectfully. It gets into cracks of me and these cracks it fills to a kind of shininess. At my center it builds a wheel, then starts it spinning, and the wheel then moves ahead, regular and sure, its edges splintering light. My way is made with broken glass. I think: When I get to the second town I'll get myself to a library, and at this library I'll study wheels.

I look at my map, and with fingertips I touch a library. From that library I find another. There are many neighborhoods in this town, after all, and for each neighborhood a library. Satisfied, I fold the map down and make it cozy in my pack.

I gaze thoughtfully down the path that the trench has put out before me. *How many dead eyes have followed this route, and how many of them remain?* Then for reassurance: *Perhaps I'll find legends on the way.*

As I go, the trenches widen and narrow. They spin and bend me. At the sides there are doors with signs. One is ornate and it says LIBRARY in black, so I cannot but enter.

My tongue seeks the stacks. Here, my taste begins with A and ends with Z, but my mission is not a systematic one; it's full of lunges and errors. The color of light in the windows measures the length of each foray.

As I leave, I pass the circulation desk. Whenever I set my books here, the assistant gives me surpriseful ones in return. The transaction in every library is never a clear or understandable one, to either the patron or the assistant; things of value must always be surrendered in order to make equal gains. But suddenly I want to know what

happens should I take the books I've chosen and run with them; therefore I take the ones I've chosen and I run! I'll return with them another time.

Unfortunately, the assistant appears to be insane and therefore sees what I'm doing. The vision her carnival eyes have given her are sharp ones. I feel bad for her: I know the price for these eyes. However, her words have an artistic taste: this saves her. She's going on about Sarah Kane, the English playwright. She's building to a quote. I ask her "Is that a quote of Sarah Kane?" "Yes," she confirms, "Sarah Kane." I nod solemnly.

Were her eyes dead not live, my brother would want them. I know he would; but I also know that they would not be useful for his purpose.

Outside, between the trench walls again, I'm nice to a nervous guy. He tells me there are things that he wants to do and that he has always wanted to do, but for lack of glass. If he'd had glass in him: a great many things would've gotten done that have not even started getting themselves done and probably never will. Likely, also, a great many things that he hasn't yet thought of — things that could've conceived themselves as the result of other things having begun their process of becoming — might've gotten done. Sadly, I can offer him no glass, as mine has not yet finished delivering me to its intended place. Once I'm there: then I'll have a better idea how much glass I can spare; until then I will not know.

There are eyes out here, I see, running wild. They're social creatures, these eyes, playing in little groups. I watch them cut an animated path across my path, a little

further along.

Looking down momentarily, I spot, in a little hole just beside my foot, an eye lying still: *Why is it here?* I kneel and pick it up. It moves because it was only sleeping.

Suddenly my sister appears from ‘round the corner and we surprise one another. Blinking, she asks me what I think I’m doing. I look at the eye that cries in my hand. I look back up at her anxiously, and now she doesn’t speak.

I stammer: “I thought it was dead; I didn’t know.” She frowns: “What do you mean, *you didn’t know?*” “It was our brother who asked me,” I explain, “he said get 10 eyes for him — dead eyes, for him. I don’t know what he wanted to do with them. Something political, I think.” “You’re saying you’re not doing it for yourself?” “I’m doing it for him, I wanted to help him.” “Then it shouldn’t get done. Give the nugget here. I’m discharging you. You’re discharged.”

I stand and frown: “What ? *Discharge?* I chose my own mission, *Sister*. I chose it for the nugget. You didn’t choose for this nugget. You gave it away.” She doesn’t answer. As we continue to stare at one another I can only think: *It’s my nugget , my nugget! The nugget belongs to me and I to the nugget ! I am the nugget!* Grimacing, I look at her, at the woman who wants to repurpose my heart. Her hand twitches with obnoxious impatience. Behind her suddenly is a commotion from the pack of eyes, who I see are moving back across the path. My sister, hearing them, steps aside and looks around, then to the side where there are no eyes. Something there is

distracting her. At this moment I thrust myself forward, to set the woken eye free among its kin, but then I stop myself. With the eye still in my palm I turn back to my sister, who is still looking at the side of the trench and has not changed her puzzled expression. I consider running. Then I run. I don't know if she's following.

Glass is useful. With it I fill in the spaces around my pet eye. It watches me with confusion, trying to comprehend what's happening to it. No matter; before long we will both know more than we know now.

# Spaghetti Woman

By Gloria Garfunkle

She was fast as the wind and lived on air, her clothes a size 0000. Spaghetti woman was so fleet and light she was practically invisible, like a speck of dust. In fact, one day, while driving her red convertible with the top down -- which everyone had repeatedly warned her not to do -- she was sucked out of her seatbelt and disappeared in a whirl up to the stratosphere, where the air, as we all know, is very, very thin.



*by Amir Catric*



# Swaying on This Articulation Until We Slow

By Michael Seidel

Early summer, wet, with the sun just coming up, I'm standing on the articulation between two trains looking out at the outskirts of Pittsburgh. The only industry left here seems to be a swallowing greenness.

Outside this morning there's the kind of wind that can take your teeth off.

I've left her in the sleeping car, her book over her face like a sleeping mask. She left me at an earlier sunrise over the Grand Canyon, however many states and days ago that was. We were hanging our feet over the lip. A volleyball had broken her finger back in high school. Beyond the nub of calcified knuckle, the tip always angled to an unfixed left. But on sitting on that edge, she pointed with the stark accuracy of a theodolite to a depth where even the mules refuse to go.

+

*Week of Fire.* That was the book she'd been reading. In Nebraska, I looked up from the flatness, to her face, then down to the page and saw this: *Real people have joy.*

When she dozed off, I reached over, and used my pencil to change "joy" to "the flu."

+

I'll remain swaying on this articulation until we slow enough that I can jump off without breaking my thigh. I want to live the rest of my life like a prairie dog, standing thin and tall on my hind legs in a dry grass field, my arms out in front of me like I'm ready to accept any weight that falls from the sky.

+

I've already forgotten more about remembering than most people will ever know.



*by Amir Catic*

# Sargasso

**By Sara Fitzpatrick Comito**

My heart is shadows of clouds,  
thin vapors hiding the sun.  
My heart is horizon, a peeling  
back of the skin of day,  
and the beach for a soft landing.

It is the duress of slaves on a ship  
or it is the oars and the whip.

Am I compelled to or from you?

You are neither destination nor origin  
but Sargasso, a swirling eye of ocean,  
that confounds the efforts  
of all my sweating, displaced natives,  
huge men they are, my heart,  
plucked from an ignorant Eden.

You are all Coriolis and seaweed.  
I am all faulty navigation:  
earnest haste thickly mired.

My heart is hummingbird wings all slowed down.



*Amir Catic*

# The Mole

**By Sara Fitzpatrick Comito**

Under soil tunneling  
to puzzle your path  
with perpendiculars

to make you as viewed above  
how far between  
and how fast,  
one to another

from planes  
from clouds  
from the seed hurlers  
with everything prehensile

this measured morpheus  
a blind burrower  
something transient

with useless eyes  
but a measured motivation  
and tributaries only presumed  
by tentacles of nostrils.



*by Amir Catic*

## About

“The Kraft-Ebbing Poems by Bill Yarrow appeared previously in *After Hours* # 26

This chapbook is created by Tantra Bensko

<http://lucidmembrane.weebly.com/>

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*by Amir Catic*

## **Biographies**

Doming is an illustrator and painter in South Korea who received her visual arts training from Hongik University. She has created album, poster, TV CF craft design, animation, and book designs, and exhibited her work such as in the Incheon International Airport.  
<https://www.facebook.com/Doming9292>

Amir Catir, the artist whose work fills the inside of this book, is from Croatia, and graduated from the school of Sarajevo. He has participated in many artists colonies In-

ternationally, the latest in Macedonia, and won several awards at exhibitions, such as Autumn Graphics 2013. His work can be found at <http://amircatic.deviantart.com>

John Olson's most recent publications include *The Seeing Machine*, a novel about French painter Georges Braque from Quale Press, and *Larynx Galaxy*, a collection of prose poetry, flash fiction and essays, from Black Widow Press. He is the recipient of three Fund for Poetry Awards and in 2004 received a genius award for literature from Seattle's alternate weekly *The Stranger*.

Bill Yarrow is the author of *Pointed Sentences* (BlazeVOX, 2012). His poems have appeared in many print and online magazines including *PANK*, *Poetry International*, *DIAGRAM*, and *THRUSH*. His work is forthcoming in *Many Mountains Moving*, *Blue Five Notebook*, and *RHINO*. He is a poetry editor at *THIS Literary Magazine*. He lives in Illinois.

Rhys Hughes has been writing most of his life. He has published 23 books and 600 short stories so far. His two most recent books are *The Truth Spinner* and *Tallest Stories*.

Epiphany Ferrell is part of the writing communications team at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, and has prior non fiction writing experience both at newspapers and magazines. Her stories appear online at *Prairie Wolf Press Review*, *DarkFire*, and the *Chick Lit Review*; and in



print at *Seven Hills Review*, *Radio Free Boskydell*, and *Helix Literary Magazine*. She also contributes to Fictionaut. A country girl, she shares her home with her son, and with horses, dogs and cats.

Owen Kaelin alternates his residency between Boston and rural Connecticut. For better or worse, he is not yet dead. He was a founding member of the web-based writer collective Step Chamber. Currently, he edits the literary webjournal *Gone Lawn* and is at work developing an indie CRPG.

Gloria Garfunkel is a clinical psychologist who loves helping children, adults and families. She has a Ph.D. in Psychology and Social Relations from Harvard University. She has published short stories, flash and micro fiction and memoir in *Natural Bridge*, *Eclectica*, *Six Sentences*, *Connotation Press*, *Every Day Fiction*, *Rose and Thorn*, *Thrice Fiction*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Pure Slush* and a collection called *A Perilous Calling*. She currently posts stories at the online writing community Fictionaut. Her blog of daily stories is called Querulous Squirrel's Daily Microfiction Quarterly at <http://queruloussquirreldaily.blogspot.com/>

Michael Seidel writes in a former school for Catholic girls overlooking Lake Michigan. Some of his publications include *Metazen*, *Decomp*, *Kill Author*, *A-Minor*, *Dogzplot*, *Camroc*, and *JMWW*. He blogs at

<http://theoldstandby.com>

Sara Fitzpatrick Comito writes and gardens in Fort Myers, Florida, but spent the first half of her life in Massachusetts. Her poetry has been published in places like *A-Minor Magazine*, *Thrush Poetry Journal* and *Red Fez*. She edits the online journal *Orion headless*.

Joanna Husbands is a book illustrator; she also paints, draws, and makes sculptures and assemblages. She lives in the United Kingdom.

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Tantra Bensko publishes chapbooks, and maintains a resource site, magazine, and contest to promote innovative literature. She teaches writing through UCLA Extension Writing Program, and her online academy. She has out 2 full length fiction books, with 2 more slated, with *Dog Horn*, and *Make-Do*, 4 chapbooks, and close to 200 poetry and fiction publications in magazines. She was Art Director of *Mad Hatters Review*.  
<http://lucidmembrane.weebly.com>





*Clockwork Wheeler*

*by Joanna Husbands*

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