

The Fantastic Other

Issue 02



Intro.....	1
Poetry	
”How to Tend a Zombie: Prose Poem”.....	2
“panoptic gallery of living art”.....	4
“Brainwashed in My Sleep”.....	6
“Women and Wine”.....	8
Fiction	
“An Online Game—Virtual Autonomy”.....	10
“There’s Something of Amar Villas”.....	14
Author Spotlight, Elizabeth Upshur.....	25

A Note From the Editor:

For our second issue, we have proudly received a more diverse and eclectic group of submissions. The theme we selected for this issue was “injustice.” It was a decision we made as a response to the events that have transpired since our first issue, as well as a desire to showcase how injustices can be discussed through all forms of literature and media. We have had a fine time reading through how our contributors have chosen to respond. Some recurring themes were unexpected, such as that of zombies and mind control. Issues of sexuality, gender, and race were also present. We enjoyed their work and hope you will as well.

Sincerely,

G.E. Butler, Chief Editor

About the Banner Art:

“I See Them in My Sleep” is a donated piece by our contributor, Lilly Viola Seaver, crafted with compressed charcoal. She states this piece was inspired by a dream of hers: “In my dream, I was trying to fall asleep. Every time I closed my eyes these little creatures would appear, slithering around behind my eyelids, climbing over one another and becoming larger in my vision. I can best describe ‘them’ as my demons. Drawing them in the sunlight the following morning melted the fear they instilled in me the night before and now, I love them!”

First Place Winner of Our 2021 Winter Poetry Contest

“How to Tend A Zombie: Prose Poem”

by Elizabeth Upshur

I saw my grandfather move a mountain in the country. It took a week, but he smashed the boulders, cut the trees, and wheelbarrowed the dirt and small stones until the mountain was sold away to people who wanted only certain parts of it; timber, stones, topsoil. His hair was grown, long and white in a sad, matted Afro and beard, his white shirt bleached harshly by the sun pouring down while the man with white eyes directed him to work. No one believes me when I say that my grandfather is this man's zombie, crawling into a little basement door marked, “Ola-loa-alo”, or spirit, mixed up two ways, a mirror of the way a person's soul and body are mixed up to make a zombie in the first place. People say, oh, my job is working me to death, while a zombie is worked even in, and all the way through death by a *bokor*, who robbing them of peace in the afterlife. I hate this man, who made my grandfather sicken and die, made his breath disappear like a breath-tracing on a car window, made his body half wake up from the Saint Michael the Archangel church graveyard. Made him *his* until the day this *bokor* died, this white eyed monster-man with a tuft of hair like a fox's tail sticking out from under his canvas hat, minding him with that perverse psychic connection borne of a murmur of French chanting and white-blue paste he smeared on his throat. That throat that once sang in choir, taught me how to whistle, said, *you can pick out any toy in the mall* for my birthday and I picked a little doll made in China with a pink polka dot dress. Made in a factory an ocean and a continent away from me, her dress maybe stitched by hands as small as mine. Smaller, maybe. I see the *bokor* make him wear a hat that matches his when he takes him on walks to keep his legs fit, saw him rake his nails into the zombie's arm when he absentmindedly slipped one foot into the river. He cursed, and when I said some of those words back in our house when my sister stole my doll, my mother says we do not say words like that, because they aren't fitting for young girls.

About the Author:

Elizabeth Upshur is a Black Southern writer and lover of all things relating to zombies. She is the inaugural winner of the *Brown Sugar Lit Mag* contest and is currently working on a chapbook on colorism. You can follow her on Twitter at @Lizzy5by5.

Second Place Winner of Our 2021 Winter Poetry Contest

“panoptic gallery of living art”

by Michael Quigg

sitting on handmade mounds of dirt transfixed
on a VCR television:
the days when i first thought about unregistered electricity.

it was difficult to imagine, in the sunburn sky,
there was ever such a thing as invisibility .
everyone knows where everything is all the time.
even the bellman knew the shape of the morning clouds.

(an ocean leaks from the frame, staining the yellow wall.
on the other side of the hallway, an open field at twilight fades into night.
named phantoms wear gold badges and swing batons like lightning.)

every school keeps a list of the traits of each student,
both in content and interpretation.
to read their books, to eat their food,
we scanned our fingerprints before each interaction
for security and insurance. the differences between the two
become hazy in the waiting.

(on another wall, a farmhouse bathed in shadows
until you start to round the corner and it fades
into a sea of magma consuming a small island village.
the sign says “thank you for not touching the art.”)

the flavor of *peaches*; the gardens in every word.

("thank you for not touching
the batons, which swing light lightning")

i want to let the concrete melt away to fields of aroma.
the meaning of every word swims
in all the different juices of the mouth.
the color of their sparks, the shine of the dust lifted
and filtered through iron bars. what is *freedom*
without psychic chains? what is a landscape in a metal picture frame?
where are we?

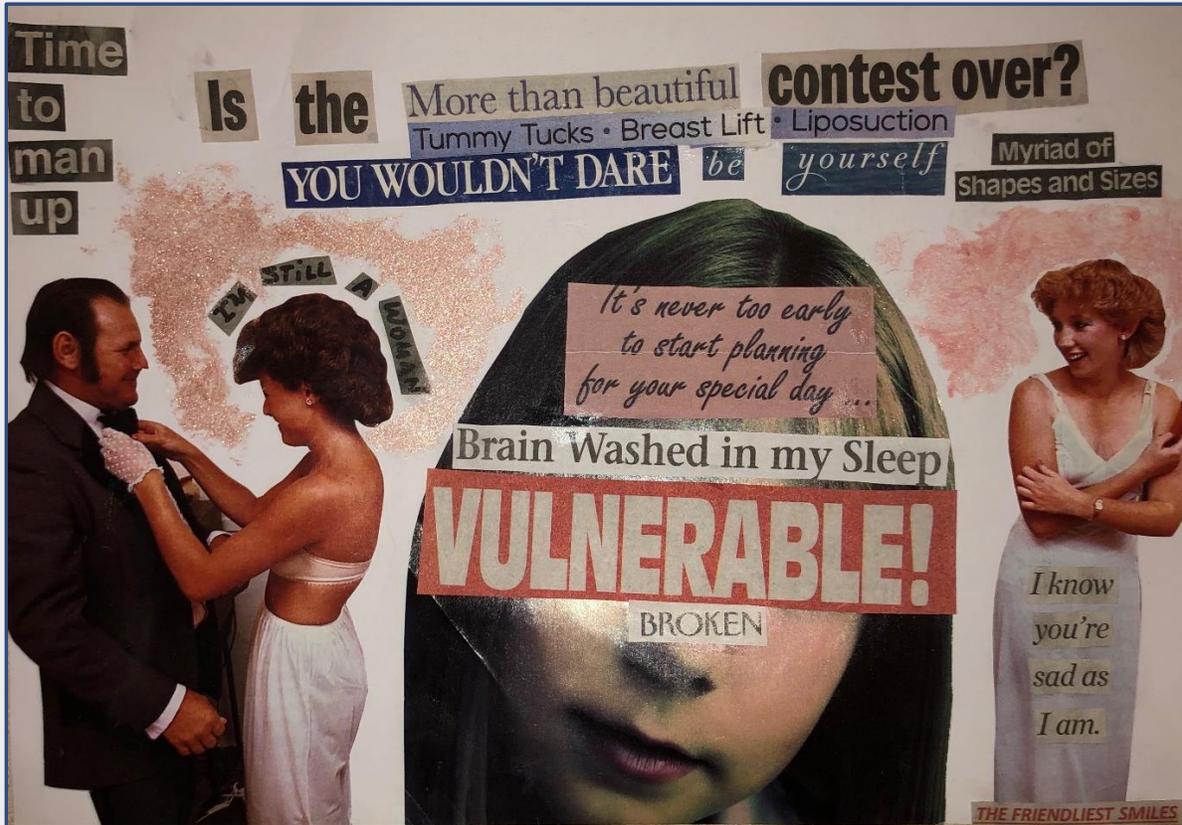
About the Author:

Michael Quigg is a writer living in Illinois who is trying to be more involved in the indie literary community. He is one of the new prose/art editors for Full House lit mag, and has had several other published pieces, including one that will be featured in the Spring issue of Apricity Press. You can follow Michael Quigg on Twitter at @MStantonQuigg.

Third Place Winner of Our 2021 Winter Poetry Contest

“Brainwashed in My Sleep”

by Lilly Seaver



About the Author:

Lilly Viola Seaver is an English major with a minor in Women's Studies and a particular interest in poetry and music. She also appreciates the art of collaging and spends free time cutting up old magazines and newspapers with a container of mod podge nearby. As of late, Seaver resides deep in the woods of Western Massachusetts and can be found in the smallest of towns, skating without a helmet or painting on top of picnic tables. You can follow her art account on Instagram at @ellveees.

Editor's Note: Though unorthodox, we felt that Seaver's mixed-media poem fit the rules and the spirit of our contest. It is our wish at *The Fantastic Other* to showcase the unusual and the hybrid works that might not find a home elsewhere.

2021 Winter Poetry Contest, Honorable Mention

“Women and Wine”

by Maria E. Suydam

Pop! Went the gay cork flying,
Sparkled the bright champagne,
By the light of a day that was dying,
He filled up the goblets again.
“Let the last, best toast be woman,
Woman dear woman,” said he,
“Empty our glass my darling,
When you drink to your sex with me.”

But she caught his strong brown fingers,
And held them tight as in fear,
And through the gathering twilight
Her fond voice fell on his ear.
“Nay, ere you drink, I implore you,
By all that you hold divine,
Pledge a woman in tear drops,
Rather by far than in wine.

“By the woes of the drunkard’s mother,
By his children who beg for bread,
By the fate of her whose beloved one
Looks on the wine when ‘tis red,
By the kisses changed to curses,
By the tears more bitter than brine,
By many a fond heart broken,
Pledge no woman in wine.

“What has wine brought to woman?
Nothing but tears and pain.
It has torn from her arms her lover
And proven her prayers in vain,
And her household goods all shattered,
Lie tangled up in the vine,
Oh! I pray thee, pledge no woman,
In the curse of so many, wine.”

About the Author:

Maria E. Suydam is a twin, a self-taught baker and chef, an avid reader, and a novice writer and poet. She loves her family (including her two fur babies), the outdoors, fishing, and crocheting baby blankets.

Editor’s Note: Although Suydam’s poem was disqualified from the contest due to its length, it was popular with our staff, and we opted to include in the issue as an honorable mention.

“An Online Game—Virtual Autonomy”

by Saizan Takisvilainan

Translated by C.J. Anderson-Wu

The principles of the game *Virtual Autonomy in Tribes* are:

I treat you like a human being

I educate you

There is no problem in your genes

I give you opportunities

The only condition is that you must obey my game rules

There are a variety of scenes and more than fifty challenges for players to conquer before constructing an idealist tribal community in either an indigenous territory, or in a city, or at the site of an existing community.

The strategy of campaigning for tribal autonomy conceals the ultimate goal of assimilation. Among the players from more than five hundred tribal communities all over Taiwan, players with modern managerial potential are distinguished. And through the virtual environment, false autonomy is mixed into real autonomy, true subjectivity is melted down in an illusory subjectivity.

For the appearances of all the characters, costumes of the fourteen ethnic tribes in Taiwan can be mixed and matched. A man can wear a western suit outside and the thong-style attire of the Tao people, for example. The game rules are designed for groups of players who face problems such as collective relocation by colonial rulers, forced education in the official language, official cultivation of elected representatives, or real estate development and construction, among others.

The design of this game is based on publications or classic art dating back to the Ching Dynasty in China: *Proverbs of Disciplining Barbarians*, *Verses of Primitive Peoples in Taiwan*, and *Drawings of Uncivilized Peoples in Taiwan*. It emphasizes the purity of

indigenous tradition and the cultural atmosphere in the tribal territories. Players are tested by strategies of dividing, excluding and stigmatizing certain people in their own groups.

Tools Available

A. Identity Change

Being the General Chief of all tribes recognized by the Republic of China (Taiwan)

Being able to discern the traditional costumes of the fourteen ethnic tribes

B. Language

Words used when indigenous communities are suffering from disasters, ex: Here I am to pay my condolences, shouldn't I?

Being able to greet indigenous peoples with each of the fourteen tribal languages

C. Giving A Little Bit Or Something Else For Whatever Is Demanded

Allowing a one semester's class on ethnicity

Providing virtual autonomy

Relocation from the devastated areas which means leaving the traditional territories for good

Asking for lilies you are given bo trees instead

D. Making particular roles more human than the other indigenous peoples

Endowing social welfare as a method of modern colonialism

Information of the Game

Genre: PC Simulator Game

Area: Taiwan

Theme: Assimilation of Indigenous Peoples

Producer: Republic of China (Taiwan)

Date of Issuance: Aug 01, 2012

Precondition of the Game

General Chief should be the President of the Republic of China (Taiwan)¹

Players' Feedback

Totally worthy dream of autonomy for Taiwan's half-million population of indigenous peoples! Although there is not much variety in this game, there are so many challenges, and it is extremely difficult to overcome them! The only disappointment is that it only provides one outcome: successful assimilation.

¹ In 2008, the then President Ma Ying-Jou was given the title "General Chief" of all tribes, a position that never, ever existed before, by a group of indigenous political leaders. He was dressed with mixed costumes and the headdresses of different tribes.

About the Author:

Indigenous Bunun writer from Taiwan, Salizan Takisvilainan's *I Am Looking For A Bottle of Good Wine In A Library* was the winner of the 2016 Gold Medal of Taiwan Literature Award, the highest honor of Taiwan's literature. His latest book of prose, *Carrying Mountains with their Tumpline - the Story of Bunun Mountain Guides, Porters, and Forest Patrols*, was shortlisted by the 2020 Taiwan Literature Award. In order to preserve Bunun language, Salizan Takisvilainan established Tastubuqul tu maduq i malas-Bunun tu papatasanan (A String of Millet Independent Tribal Language Studio) and started documenting the wise words from tribal elders so the disappearing Bunun culture might be retrieved back little by little.

“There’s Something of Amar Villas”

by Antara G.

The wall caved in. The rocks groaned and thundered as the wind, her power, something, forced them apart. Cracks spread and shards of debris ricocheted across the room. Slowly, as the rocks groaned and the wall collapsed, darkness spilled from the depression. Gul stared. Her arms were outstretched, palms facing the growing gap between the stones. She didn’t know whether she was trembling from the force of her spell or the cold air that rushed in through the open window behind her. A chill settled deep into her bones. Fear? No. Anticipation. The rocks stopped their cacophony.

For a moment everything was still. The torch by the door bathed the room in sharp jabs of flickering light. The wind grew quiet and still, but Gul could still feel its energy surrounding her, waiting to be called on. She knew she got it right this time. She knew that the scraping she heard echoing from the pit was the dragging of naked bones on hard stone. The wheezing leaking into the air was long dead lungs learning to breathe again. She knew that the quiet rustling that reached her every now and then between the bones and the breath was scraps of cloth not yet fully rotten.

Gul stared into the abyss. Mist poured in from the open window and left dewdrops on the papers atop her desk. The sounds got louder, and Gul felt her heartbeat echo through her body. Her hands clenched. A stray breeze, not one that she called, blew a lock of black hair across her cheek. Gul didn’t look away from the darkness. A skeletal hand shot out of the abyss.

~

“She did what?” Dara slams her drink down on the table. The dark brown leather of the couch sticks to her thighs where her denim shorts end, and she can feel the back of her crop-top stick to her skin. Slightly peeved, she eyes the outdated box fan and silently urges it to cool her faster. Her voice echoes in the cavernous living room of Amar Vilas, a centuries-old mansion. Ali smirks. Dara’s new roommate (Flat-mate? Mansion-mate?

What do you call someone you are sequestered in a 200-year-old mansion with for the next two months on a writing retreat?) crosses her arms and leans back in the armchair.

“She brought her lover back from the dead.”

“But. Zombie.”

“Well, yeah I guess if you want to put labels on it.”

“If I want to put labels on it?” Dara’s incredulous tone pulls Ali’s deep red lips into a smirk. The dim lights from the sconces lining the stone walls barely illuminate her face.

“It’s not like she ate brains or anything,” Ali leans forward and picks up her glass of whiskey from where it lay next to Dara’s. “She was just animated.”

Dara rolls her eyes. “Oh yeah, thanks for clearing that up. What an important technicality.”

Ali snickers. “Do you want me to continue or not?”

Dara shifts, tucks one leg under the other and faces Ali. One arm hangs off the back of the couch and she picks her whiskey back up with the other. “But if she knew that the woman she loved would be... well, a corpse, why would she bring her back?”

“It’s love, Dara! It transcends everything!”

Dara fixes Ali with an unimpressed stare, prompting a laugh.

“Okay, okay,” Ali giggles, “just listen.”

~

“Mumtaz.”

Gul’s voice was nothing more than a whisper, Mumtaz’s guttural moan almost drowned it out completely. Her body was... not a body anymore. It was just some flesh hanging off bones. What used to be her favorite *lehnga* was now ripped, their vibrant colors long lost.

Gul wasn’t surprised. She knew what she was getting into. In the six years she spent sequestered in the *vihara* with the witches, they had warned her every day of the fact that Mumtaz wouldn’t look like herself. But they all agreed that it would be her. The body would be wrong, and Gul may need some time to gather herself, but it would be *her*. That’s all that mattered, wasn’t it?

“Mumtaz,” Gul whispered once again. And waited.

Gul flexed her hand and called on a strong gust of wind to slam the window shut. It was an impulse. She wanted to hear something besides the heaving of Mumtaz’s papery lungs and the blood rushing in her own ears. Mumtaz spoke.

“G... Gul...”

Gul’s face broke into a smile and she could see her in the eyes. She could see Mumtaz in the eyes of what was once her body. As much as every fibre of her being screamed at her to move forward, Gul stood still. She couldn’t touch it, or the spell would break. But she could continue looking into those eyes.

They were the same shade of so-brown-they’re-almost-black that they used to be, and even though Gul’s eyesight had worsened over the years, she could still pick out the slight ring of gold that encircled Mumtaz’s irises. It might have just been her memory filling the blanks, but that wasn’t what mattered to Gul right at that moment. She chose to focus on the brightness. The eyes used to light up the exact same way when Mumtaz

sneaked into Gul's room every Friday afternoon, after both their parents went to the village *panchayat* meeting. It took Gul right back to her childhood bedroom with its pristine white walls covered in swathes of paint from her experiments. When Mumtaz used to climb in through the window and draw the curtains, the dying sunlight used to filter in through the crimson fabric and drown the entire room in a red glow. Gul focused on that brightness alone and so, when Mumtaz's voice spilled from the skeletal jaw of the corpse, she only saw the pink, chapped lips that she had memorized through sight and touch.

"My love," Mumtaz's voice still flowed like fine wine, "I've missed you."

~

"Wait."

Dara's sharp voice pierces through Ali's, cutting her off in the middle of a sentence.

"What now?" Ali's voice is laced with annoyance. Dara should probably feel bad but she can't bring herself to care.

"How did she die?"

Ali stares at Dara. Her face is mostly blank, if slightly annoyed, as she shakes her head.

"Do you not have a single patient cell in your body?"

"No."

Ali rolls her eyes. She picks up her mostly empty glass and gestures at Dara to give hers over. Ali carries the glasses to the cart piled with more expensive alcohol than Dara has ever seen in one place. Dara watches as Ali slowly mixes the contents of a few different bottles together. Her eyes travel up from Ali's body, clothed in a light, floral

sundress, to the errant strands of red hair escaping the bun on top of her head. Dara is so entranced by the way those strands caress Ali's neck that she almost misses it when Ali says, "She had to get married, you know."

"What? Why?"

"What else did you think was going to happen? They were young women. Their parents were probably at those *panchayat* meetings looking for good matches," Dara lets out a disgusted sound, and Ali laughs. "It's not like they were ever going to be together peacefully."

"You said this was a fun story," Dara complains, "there's nothing fun about it."

Having finished making their drinks, Ali walks back to Dara, hands her a glass, and settles back into the armchair. Dara doesn't miss the amused twinkle in Ali's eyes as she says, "I think it's fun to know the history of the place that's supposed to expose your creativity."

"I'm going to kill you."

"Go ahead. It'll be a good addition to the Amar Vilas lore."

Dara groans and takes a long sip of her drink.

"Just continue."

"Yes, okay. So—"

~

"What happened to you?"

Gul was seated on the edge of the narrow bed shoved against the wall under the window. Mumtaz's body had reluctantly settled into the chair by the desk. Gul knew that the body didn't need to move. She suspected Mumtaz just didn't want to unnerve her. Gul stared into the distance between them. They had been separated for so, so long. If Gul scooted a bit to the right, their knees would touch. She moved to the left.

The thing that held Mumtaz sighed, and her voice spilled out from lips whose movements didn't match the words. "Do you remember that day we met by the salt flats?"

Gul nodded, a faint smile almost making its way onto her face. Like she could ever forget that day. It was the last time she had seen her beloved alive. It was one year, almost to the day, after Mumtaz had come home and found her parents in the living room with the village Chaudhary. Two weeks later, she was married to his son and dragged from the village to live in the stone mansion by the flats.

Gul had waited that second week Mumtaz had been away, standing on the salt flats, gazing at Amar Vilas breaking the skyline. It was an infinity devoid of colour, the only indication of the separation of land and sky were the stone spires of the mansion piercing into the clouds. Gul imagined Mumtaz resting on soft mattresses and silk sheets. She imagined her best friend skipping down cold stone hallways and prancing about the kitchen. She imagined her lover in another's arms, and despite herself, she imagined that Mumtaz liked being there. Gul imagined for so long, stared so intently at the horizon, that she imagined Mumtaz running across the salt flats. She imagined Mumtaz's yellow *lehnga* breaking the dark grey of the grounds and the evening clouds. She imagined Mumtaz closing the distance between them and, as she imagined, she felt Mumtaz's arms around her and their bodies pressing together. Gul wasn't imagining anymore.

Every Wednesday Gul would wait on the other side of the salt flats, watching for a streak of colour rushing towards her. Every week for a year and then weeks after that

she waited, until one Wednesday she waited and Mumtaz didn't come. Gul kept going for a month, thinking it must have been a mistake and refusing to acknowledge anything close to the truth, but Mumtaz remained but a memory. Gul continued imagining, but Mumtaz never materialized. Gul kept waiting but she would never hold her love in her arms again.

~

"Okay that's enough," Dara pressed her face against the couch cushion. She looked back up and shot Ali a glare. "Is this really how you want to start our friendship? Are you happy with this decision?"

Ali laughed. "Oh, come on, you know you love it."

"I'm going to murder you in your sleep."

"Good. We can haunt the mansion with the others."

"I'm not dying here."

"You best believe I'm going to take you with me."

"I hate you."

"Do you want me to go on?"

"Yes please."

~

"I remember," Gul said. She still hadn't stopped looking at Mumtaz's eyes. Gul recognized the look again, but this time she didn't want to. This time it was the look Mumtaz had had when she climbed into Gul's room and told her about her impending

wedding. It was empty and hopeless and painful. Gul had never wanted to see that look again.

“It was the last time I saw you,” Mumtaz said.

“I remember. Tell me what happened.”

“How did you know where to find me?”

“The witches. We have spells for everything.”

Gul heard the chuckle that had eluded her for the past five years, and her fingers itched to feel it from her love’s lips. “You’re a witch now?” Mumtaz asked.

Gul paused. She twisted her fingers together in her lap and looked down. “Someone had to bring you back.” She could hear the hesitation in her voice. Gul cringed.

The window was closed now. She should have opened it but she didn’t want to untangle her fingers, or even look up. She didn’t want to look at Mumtaz’s eyes. Gul didn’t want to see the disgust she was positive she would find there. Of all the ways she could have Mumtaz back, it had to be through the one that ensured Gul would always know the truth.

But Gul could only avoid it for so long. Her heart trembled as gaze slid upwards. She couldn’t see Mumtaz’s eyes.

“Look at me,” Gul’s voice was breathless. She had spent too long without them. She wanted to look at them now, hang any shame she felt about her powers.

Mumtaz did not lift her head. Her lips belied nothing more than whispers, “I’m not what I used to be.”

Gul felt her skin go taught with rage at the powers that forced her love into shame. She inhaled. "All I need you to be," her voice matched her love's whispers, "is here. Your body does not matter to me."

The air got heavier, and Gul should really have opened the window but she didn't break her gaze from where it rested at the top of Mumtaz's head. Gul didn't consider moving until her lover's corpse shifted, muscle and sinew stretching, and she finally met her eyes again.

Gul smiled and saw in Mumtaz's eyes that she recognized the expression from the countless days they had spent at each other's side.

"Mumtaz, tell me what happened."

Mumtaz took in a breath and held it. She expelled her story with it, as if she couldn't manage to keep it in for any longer.

"When I came back from the flats, my mother-in-law was there. She didn't tell my husband, couldn't bear the disgrace to the family. So, she put me in the wall."

Gul's heart stopped then. She half expected Mumtaz to go on but she could see in her love's eyes that those three sentences were all she could bring herself to say. Gul couldn't rage. She had already gotten her revenge on the inhabitants of the mansion two years ago. Back then, she had felt like nothing would be enough, and so she had done to them everything she could. It hit her again, in this moment, that nothing would have ever been enough.

~

“They did what?” Dara’s yell bounces off the walls. Ali doesn’t laugh this time. Her gaze is fixed on her drink as she nurses the glass in her hands. Dara inhales. She leans back on the couch.

Her voice is smaller this time. There’s a tentative mourning in the air that she doesn’t want to disturb, but she can’t stop herself.

“What happened to her? How long was she animated for? What did Gul do after she went back to being... away?”

Ali takes a deep breath and lifts her eyes to meet Dara’s. There is a wistfulness in them that seems familiar to Dara, somehow. Ali smiles a bit, knowing and regretful. Then she speaks.

“The spell... it doesn't have an end until the witch stops casting it. Gul never stopped.”

Dara straightens and clutches her glass. “But if she never stopped then—”

“Yes. They spent the rest of her life together. They stayed close and talked and laughed. Gul wasn’t lying when she said all she needed was Mumtaz to be there. Then one day, when Gul’s bones seemed weaker than Mumtaz’s dead ones, and the only thing that remained in her memory was a name and happiness, Mumtaz reached across the chasm that stretched between them, just a couple of centimetres, and finally caressed her lover’s face.”

Dara exhales, long and deep. She downs the rest of her drink. She looks up.

“That’s a very nice story you’ve got there,” she says, her voice hoarse. The stones seem to sense the weight in the air and hold onto her words, not letting them echo. Ali smiles. “Was it fun?”

About the Author:

Antara G. is an undergraduate student studying at the University of Toronto. This story was inspired by her Gothic Fiction class and the new Taylor Swift album. It was Antara's intention to use the gothic tropes studied in class and apply them to a less European and heteronormative setting.

Author Spotlight

Interview with Elizabeth Upshur

You informed us when you submitted this piece that the "zombie" in this poem was inspired by the Haitian/Vodun version of the term, rather than the Romero-esque kind. How do you feel this version of a zombie fits into today's society and culture? And what does it mean to you, in the context of this poem?

“Yes, the zombie as we know it (viral spread, brain eating, undead) is relatively young, and learning about the Haitian/Vodun progenitor of the myth last year has put a lot of ideas simmering on the right burner for me, which led to this poem. I wanted to talk about consumption, right from the title, tending is all about nurture and creation, while a zombie is a second death.

“For example, how does one ‘tend’ the former body of a person-now-a-zombie, how is it anything other than a comment on the violence enacted to create this level of docility and the continued power imbalance that benefits the bokor, the zombie creator. So, I had this idea of care, how it is enacted or performed for merit in capitalist societies like ours, while denying the physical, mental, and emotional needs that so many people have. There's how we consume too, the speaker is young, but the only one to see that her grandfather has become this zombie and has a growing awareness that there may be zombies that go by other names, like the factory workers who may have made her doll's dress.

“Overall, this kind of zombie has a lot to say about where we are as a society, racially (because of the specific intersection of Blackness and zombies) and as consumers. I think a Haitian/Vodun inspired zombie is more holistic than what I call the American Zombie, because usually the American zombie's origin is unknown and the disease spreads because people are greedy, selfish, corrupt, whereas with the Vodun zombie there's an acknowledgement of the extreme violence and terror inherent to the creation and continued control of a zombie; people know who and how one might make a

zombie. I hope, as we see more Afro-futurism and Black speculative writing, more African jujism and African futurism, that we get to see more takes on what our original zombies looked like and further complicate the entire mythos.”

The theme of our issue is "injustice." How do you feel you respond to injustices as a poet?

“Anger. Most days, the more I learn about the world and the ways in which Indigenous peoples are fighting for power, respect, and basic liberties, the more I acknowledge that anger is a necessary emotion to process what is happening and to offer what I can; donation, education, and my voice/signature to amplify efforts. My angriest poetry is some of my most honest work, just hurt connecting directly to the page, and since that anger has to leave the body, what better way than to attempt communication and say how wrong being hurt is (which we know) but also how wrong the desire to hurt is and its ripple effect through time and through bodies?”

Aside from poetry, what are some other genres and mediums that inspire you?

“So many! Firstly, surrealist art is a great inspiration for ekphrastic poetry. Like, I could write an entire chapbook of art based ekphrastics! Maybe I will one day. I still think about a prompt from a workshop last year using ‘The World,’ 1958 by Remedios Varo. I still think about the fishtail and the white wing centered on the page by the artist, and what that image pulled from me for my own page. We bring a lot of our emotions and our own subconscious to art, so in the case of an ekphrastic it’s more a focused channeling of certain emotions to the page, which is really cool. And it doesn’t have to necessarily be a painting; there are so many gorgeous places in this world I’ve gotten to experience through photography too. Secondly, journalism. I like to read news headlines and use them as a prompt for a poem. And lastly, pop culture analysis or trope commentary; because it always teaches me something, it always says something about art from the audience’s POV, and it says ‘here is how high our bar is for good

writing,' so it gives me a goal to strive for. And I'm a Capricorn, so goals are kind of my love language.”