

# MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 13 ISSUE 3  
THE VALLEY REVIEW

GAME

# Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

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## salutations from the editor

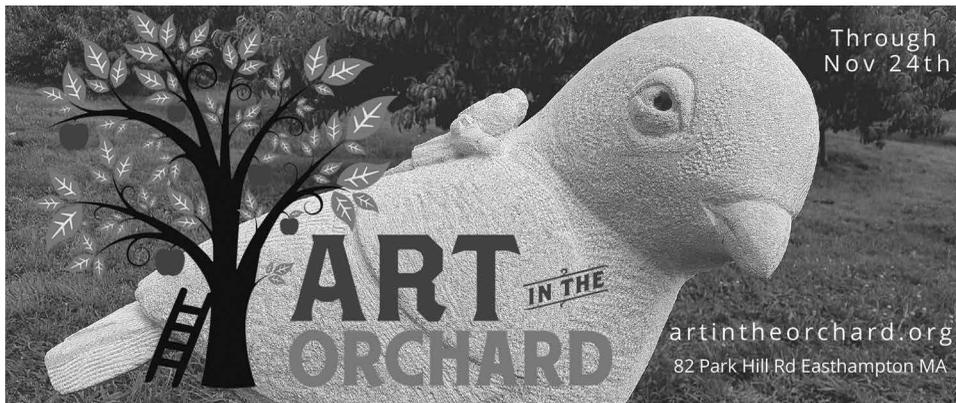
I suffer from imposter complex, do you? I remember for the first couple of months in my Master's program, and again for the first several months in my Ph.D. program, I walked around like Inspector Gadget, nervous someone would discover I actually didn't belong there. Even today, after publishing Meat for Tea for nearly 14 years, and this after teaching writing for a decade, I sit to write this very salutation and think, "Now is when the world will discover I actually can't write at all. I'm a hack." Then I'm comforted by Charles Bukowski's wise words, "The problem with the world is the intelligent people are full of doubts, while the stupid ones are full of confidence." And I think there may be hope for me after all.

We have in charge of our nation, a very confident, very stupid person. So confident that he claims to be loved like "the second coming of God." And I can't help but be reminded of Yeat's "The Second Coming." The center has not held, our planet is either on fire, deluged by hurricanes, or both at once, children are shot in the face, and the mentally ill are scapegoated. And a rough, orange, beast, has been slouching towards Bethlehem all the while.

Yet, in the midst of all of this, the "Game" issue is coming out and the Cirque will be a celebratory gala, with tattoo art, stand up comedy from Ezra Prior, a gorgeous film written by Corey Mesler, so much spoken word, and live music from Strange Hours and The Walking Ghosts, perhaps the biggest Cirque ever. Because this, my friends, is our life raft. We must cling to our art now more than ever. I know I'm holding on tightly.

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Besos y Abrazos,  
Elizabeth



# plastic: an experiment in five poems

Jane Yolen

## Time Traveler

Time is plastic, elastic,  
This moment I am a young wife,  
strolling in the Bois du Boulogne,  
a bottle of wine, nineteen cents a litre  
(if you bring your own bottle)  
in one hand, your hand holding the other.  
We are laughing, you pun in three languages,  
we make a baby in a VW bus.  
Now the bus is gone, the child grown,  
with children of her own.  
And you are spread over two continents,  
ash and charred bone.  
I am old, invisible, and only the Bois--  
now filled with small cars.  
wheeled bars, sausage sellers, red lights,  
and bottles of wine at several dollars per--  
remains.



## Toads Singing on the Pool Cover

Romance does not always acquaint itself  
with fine dining and a heated towel.  
Sometimes a pool cover on a muggy eve,  
dark and slippery with decomposing leaves  
brings out the sweetest love songs  
from those leapers.

I can't say a fuggy night and plastic  
does much for my hormones,  
but those toads have claimed the night.  
I set my binoculars aside.  
Even amphibians need respite

from the peepers.



## Trade-Offs with the Muse

She's worn the heels down  
on this latest pair of shoes,  
striding about my writing room.

Her hair is pinned up  
with a plastic chopstick  
left over from our lunch.

Two spots of red on her cheeks,  
the scars of our last argument  
over the Oxford Comma.

I hand her a new pair of boots.  
She sniffs at the gift.  
"Save your money," she says.

At the rate you're writing  
you'll need it.  
She makes me laugh.

I make her sigh.  
We are both happy  
with the trade

and the work that gets done.



## The Last Polar Bear

He is grey now,  
with age, loneliness, fear,  
peering through the bars  
of ice that keep him  
from roaming the small  
Arctic park.

Seals gather to laugh at him,  
throw him the occasional fish.

A photographer's flash  
makes him cringe.

He does not even bare  
the few teeth he has left.

When he dreams,  
it is not of running  
across the ice floes,  
or hunkered down  
by a sea hole,  
waiting for lunch to appear,

but of one last dive  
in the blue ocean,  
where he sets his cold white bones  
down on the bottom,  
that is free of plastic,  
a welcome, natural end.



## Because We Have Forgotten

In this Denmark of the decade  
All that is rotten seeps upward,  
infesting the body politic  
with those things best left forgotten.  
Little bits of acid, words, ideas  
that we should have outgrown  
and haven't, fester in the dark.  
And now a spark has set them aflame.  
In this old card game, kings and aces high,  
we are trumped by  
our old misgivings, fear of others,  
tribal once again as the lights  
go out on the glorious city  
that once guarded our hill.  
Send the Lady with the Lamp  
home, that old immigrant  
in her stone skirts and silly crown.  
Led her wade the plastic ocean.  
We need not remember  
her guidance any more.  
Dim that damned uncomfortable light.  
Let us sit here happy in our own cold night.



# a white guest pass: navigating the human experience as a white-passing person of color

Giorgia Alexander

I wasn't sure what I wanted to title this essay, but I knew it had to be written. I know I have one major point I want to make, and that is *white people need to stop being comfortable being racist around other white people*. I don't want this essay to be too personal, but I realize on some level it has to be for you to fully understand the weight of my words.

I want to provide you some background about myself so that you understand why I can make this claim with such conviction, why I feel so strongly that this is a major problem, and why it needs to come from me. You see, my experience as a racially ambiguous person needs to have some type of value. I would hate for all my issues with identity and the obstacles I face in the world because of them to be in vain. If I'm going to have a challenging experience, you bet your ass I'm going to make it mean something. That goes for everything in my life.

I don't want this essay to be too focused on myself though, as I said, my main point is that *white people need to stop being comfortable being racist around other white people*. Now, before I dig into this, let me explain...

I have a white guest pass. I'll explain what that means later. Here are the facts: I am a young woman of British, Nigerian, Irish, and Italian descent, there's a bit more DNA from a few other origins...but these are the primary ones, *and I know this because when you're mixed race you get real clear about what you "are". You're different, so you get used to having to explain yourself*. To add another layer of confusion, I was born in England, and the only reason I have citizenship in the United States is because my mother was born here during the period her two international parents were studying together at UMass Amherst, which incidentally, is also my Alma Mater. My Grandfather, from Nigeria, and my Grandmother, from England, gave birth to my mother, in Northampton, Massachusetts.

Sometimes people will try to guess what I am. I've been told I look exotic, many times, which frankly is something you should only ever call a car or a plant- not a human being. I've been asked if I was from many different countries, some so specific and so far from being accurate that it's kind of funny: Albania, Armenia, Egypt, to name a few. People are usually dead wrong with their guesses. Most often though, I've noticed people will just assign me whatever identity makes them comfortable. *If I'm being honest- its been my experience that people choose to see me as white. At least, I think that's what they're doing, because inevitably there always is a time when its revealed that I'm mixed race and they act surprised and suddenly something shifts in the air- until it settles again.*

So who chooses this? Who decides I'm white by default? Well usually it's white people. It's been my experience that people of color usually notice non-white people who pass, more than white people do. It's ironic really, and the psychology behind this is a different essay all on its own, and it's not something I'm choosing to focus on today, but maybe in the future- for now I'll just leave you with the question to linger in your mind.

As you've probably picked up on, I don't know how much of a role I had in this- my white identity. I would imagine a huge part of this has to do with the fact I grew up in a predominately white area. Perhaps if I had grown up around more people of color I would've developed my identity differently. I had to fit in where I was though, and whether conscious or unconscious, probably a mix of both, I assumed my white identification- but I always knew that it was a guest pass. How do I know this? *Because as soon as you encroach on white comfortability the illusions behind belonging are shattered, and you suddenly realize your white pass has an expiration date, or rather, it has a list of Terms & Conditions you become more acutely aware of as time goes on.*

You will eventually come to discover that once you've accepted this white identity -whether originally your choice or not- upholding it has its rules on either side of the pendulum. As I said, I don't want to harp on too much about my personal experience. I do however want to highlight a pop culture example: recently the singer Halsey has spoken out about her biracial background, as her father is half black and half white and her mother is white, the same racial makeup as me, but inverted maternal and paternal backgrounds.

Halsey even went on to say she identifies as a black woman but acknowledges her white-passing privilege. This shocked fans and spectators on either side of the racial fence, with some people arguing that she should "stay in her lane" as a white woman. Unfortunately for Halsey, simply existing and owning all parts of who you are will never be easy. It's something that at the end of the day will ultimately be determined outside of your own volition, no matter how well intentioned you are.

Halsey will always only have a guest pass to whiteness, because historically, having one drop of "black blood" means you are black- full stop. The history and the implications of the one drop rule are again, another essay for another time. *However, what is truly upsetting, is that not only does Halsey only have a white guest pass, she doesn't have a home as a black woman either. So there she is... left to oscillate between worlds.*

Whats a girl to do? Look at Mariah Carey, look at Rashida Jones, they're constantly flip flopping between identities as mixed women who pass as white. Mariah Carey recently posted a photo of herself with Colin Kaepernick, stating what an honor it was to meet him, and suddenly she was ambushed. She was told to retract her statement by millions of her white fans. Just like that, her white guest pass was snatched. She might not have asked for it to begin with, but its what people granted her anyway. If they want to claim you, they will. *Suddenly, she's faced with a barrage of hate and her identity which no longer belonged to her to begin with is hit with a tornado all over again. This will happen many times in a mixed persons life.*

Lets talk about Rashida Jones and her role on *The Office*. They called her "Karen Filippelli" and they even made sure to write lines in the show that focused on the fact she was "Italian-maybe Filipino" making sure that people weren't confused by her complexion, and if they were confused they could find solace in the fact that the white characters on the show were just as confused as them and therefore its okay. It's almost as if everyone could only relax once they knew who she belonged to.

*Imagine what its like to embody that frustration, fear, and confusion, to be its source, to live your life as an anomaly.*

I can relate to these women. I've googled these women. I've always wanted to hear from these women, and I still want to hear more from these women! Because I have so much trouble with my guest pass. *I have guilt with my guest pass. I have resentment with my guest pass. I have trauma with my guest pass. I have privilege with my guest pass.* That is the one that matters the most, in my humble opinion, the most important one: privilege.

If you are white-passing you have privilege. How am I going to use my privilege? I am going to use my guest pass to expose whiteness for all that it is. I am going to gut it from the inside out. I am going to be like a Soviet spy and infiltrate whiteness to extract the information I need, to see if we can somehow use that information to fix the muddied waters we're drowning in.

I'm going in and I'm coming out with the insider facts and figures we need and I'm willing to share them. *I'm a chameleon with a mission, I can move through different worlds like an inter-dimensional cat in a Sci-Fi novel, and I intend to use this guest pass like the magic it can maybe be. Like Harry Potter and his invisible cloak, like a German Jew who dyed her hair blonde in World War 2 to evade the Nazi's right under their noses and help free Jews who couldn't pass.* It's a dark comparison, I know- but probably the most appropriate. I'll extract some truths and I'll share it without any hesitation, I have nothing to lose. Because I already know I'm only visiting whiteness. I only have a guest pass anyway.

Lemons, lemonade.

So back to my main point. *White people need to stop feeling comfortable being racist in front of other white people.* Now that I've told you about me, its going to make more sense why I feel this way. I have had countless experiences in my life as a white-passing person of color where I've encountered racism between white people. When I say between white people, I don't mean towards each other, I mean racist conversations amidst the company of other white people. I may be making assumptions here, but its happened so often, that I can only assume its a trend everywhere and "we" (\*ahem\* white people) are just not talking about it.

Every time I have heard or seen white people condemning racism they have had diverse audience, and in that way, their anti-racism is simply performative.

*I can confidently say that over the course of my entire white guest pass card carrying life I have never seen a white person call out or put a stop to another white persons racism without being in the (known) company of a person of color.* Let me explain to you how infinitely infuriating this is.

I've been in the backs of trucks with otherwise seemingly decent people who have said cruel, disgusting things, out of nowhere. I've sat there as they used the N word without a second thought, with no one else in the back of the cab so much as flinching.

There have been many scenes like this, different places, different faces, same outcomes. Same shock, same pit in my stomach. When I don't stand up to these people in these moments, of which there have been many, I feel a deep betrayal down to my core. I betrayed myself. I betrayed truth, dignity, justice...by my silence.

Please, I don't ask for your sympathy, but picture yourself as me in those panicked moments. Picture yourself as your heart races and you wonder- if they find out about who I am- am I safe?

There have been times I've felt safe enough to speak up. These times, disturbingly enough, are around people who know I'm mixed race but continue to say racist things, because in their mind they've assigned my identity to what is comfortable for them. I've had an ex boyfriend say racist things and when I confronted him I've been told "You're white, shut up." Of course, he's wrong on too many levels to count, but I ask you, even if he was right and I wasn't mixed- what does this say about intercommunication between white people? Are white people not allowed to be offended by racism, purely because its intrinsically wrong?

As I've gotten older, I've learned to detect racist people earlier so I don't end up stuck in a vehicle, an apartment, or a job with them. This is something white people don't have, you see, this is a sixth sense that people of color have. Maybe you all can learn to develop it. The thing about senses though is they tend to develop from need. Until you need to know for your own survival who the racists are, you probably won't develop your senses. I'm here to change that with a call to action.

The times I have seen white people stand up to other white people and call them on their racism have been few and far between, but I usually can remember them well and thats because they're all centered around little old me.

I'm telling you right now white "allies" and listen to me loud and clear:

*I don't want to be the reason you aren't racist, I want you to figure that shit out on your own.*

I don't find it helpful or heartwarming when you tell the crowd around us making racist jokes to stop because "Giorgia is part black". I find it insulting and disturbing that you can't stand on your own two feet as a white person and tell them to stop because regardless of who's company you're in- racism is vile and a cancer to society.

I don't find you brave, I don't even find you well intentioned. I don't appreciate it when you have conversations behind my back with our racist mutual friends about how to be sensitive around me and my feelings. I find it pathetic and cowardly.

*I don't think you should need a reason to know racism is wrong. I think you should feel it inside of your bones, and I don't think you should need a witness.*

Everyone should be offended by racism. If you need a personal connection with someone of a different race in order to empathize with them, I'm worried for you.

Yesterday I was watching an interview between Ashley Graham and Amy Schumer, and Ashley, who is a white woman married to a black man, was asking Amy what made her "wake up" to social injustice. Ashley offered her own story as an example of her white redemption: finding and marrying a black man who taught her what racism really means and what it means to be a person of color. She asked Amy if she had a black friend that showed her the way, and Amy said yes.

Look, I'm not saying that it's terrible if you have someone close to you that is a person of color and thats the reason you decided to take a closer look at the world around you and examine

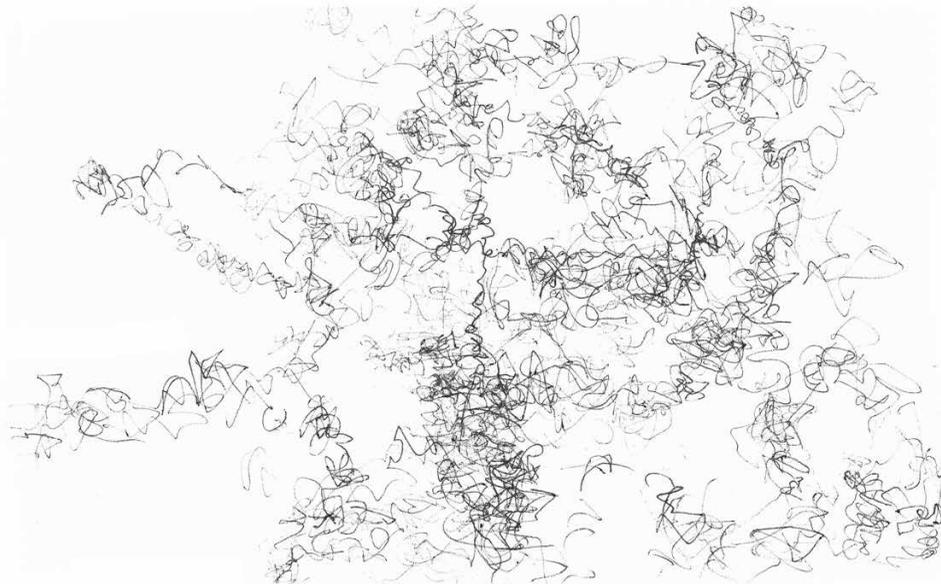
what whiteness really means. If that's you, cool, great, I'm glad you're here, welcome to the table. If you were waiting for an invitation or a reason, here it is. You see me standing here with my expired guest pass. I'm asking you though, now that you're here, please stop waiting for more people of color to be your friends, your audience, your teachers, and your coaches before you speak up.

Please say something no matter what, not just because you find out I'm mixed and you're embarrassed by your white family or friends who say things in front of me they'd never say if they knew. Please stop telling them about me as your reason for confronting them.

Please stop telling me that your cousin is black, or you dated a guy who is half Mexican, or your best friend is an LGBTQ+ immigrant from Guatemala. *Please just start doing the work.* Please just stand in your own skin and denounce racism because it's racism, and we no longer have the time to wait for you to get your shit together. People are dying.

*Please put an end to racism in the privacy of whiteness.*

Because that is the heart of the evil. That is where you need to put the wooden stake.



futility  
Brandee Simone