

MEAT FOR TEA

VOL 16 ISSUE 4
THE VALLEY REVIEW

ELECTRIC

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review was founded by Elizabeth MacDuffie and Alexandra Wagman. We are a non-academic affiliated magazine committed to recognizing and featuring the work of the artists, writers, and musicians living in western Massachusetts and beyond.

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This issue is dedicated to the memory of Michael Rothenberg - writer and co-founder of 100 Thousand Poets, Artists and Musicians for Change.

guest salutations

Jerome William Berglund

Welcome friends, to Meat for Tea's own singular electric light orchestra. Congratulations on obtaining seats to this exclusive affair, they are not easily come by. So what is this elemental force we gather here to celebrate, worshipped diversely the world over under eclectic names, with analogous visages?

Throughout ancient Babylon they honored Baal, and in shadowy lodges across our nation those most influential, robed and cowled, venerate him still. In Norse fables Thor is the recognized master of lightning, Greeks argue this to be Zeus's domain, wielding fatal bolts fashioned to his specifications by cyclopes, or in Vulcan's forge. For the Hindu it is understood to be the prerogative and bailiwick of the great Indra. Historians are often of a mind these four are but one deity under different guises, well-traveled.

His power indeed surges through every cell of our bodies, extracted from food by mitochondria and converted into energy, sparring with protons and neutrons in their charged dances at an atomic level.

In Abrahamic faiths lightning causes Jews to tremble with reverence in the torah. Christians conceptualize their messiah's appearance as akin to its trademark streaking across the sky. The Quran specifies each bolt which falls is leveled with care and intent upon deserving targets.

4

Modern man, desirous of playing God himself, is wont and quick to harness this supernatural strength for his own perverse and blasphemous ends, promptly channeling it toward basest purposes imaginable: execution, fortifying prison plantations, torturing prisoners.

If you've ever worked as an electrician, been 'bit' as they call it with founded fear and paranoia, one comes to fast respect this force with enormous care and consideration. Once in my imprudent youth electricity damn near slayed me, laid this frail body out paralyzed and twitching for minutes which felt like hours passing. I'll never treat it lightly again, and nor should you ever get complaisant, make the mistake of acting so foolhardily.

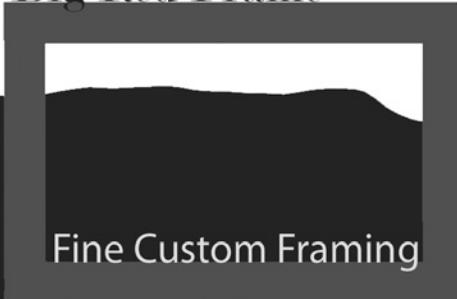
So pull up a chair, don the appropriate rubber gloves and boots, verify all wiring is in good order and thoroughly taped, grounding is properly placed, OSHA regulations are in compliance followed to a tee.

Once those critical formalities have been diligently discharged, we can get down to our very important business. For while electricity may mean death to the villain, it can also provide that very invaluable key we so desperately need to a better tomorrow, a green, sustainable future which at the eleventh hour might conceivably yank mankind up from its fossil fueled death spiral onto a zero emission, renewable path.

Galvanism is the fruit and - pun intended - currency from which we can convert solar bombardment, kinetic ocean and wind currents, to replace the pollutive coal and nuclear wastes which are presently inundating our air and seas. It is entirely logical, rational even to perceive some figurative or literal Higher Power in that potent might which heats our homes, cooks our meals, drives each transport, charges these very typewriters.

So let us praise this thousand-masked demiurge, at the pleasure and generosity of whom this very moment I am not freezing in my snowy land, enjoyed a hearty dinner of tacos thanks to the benevolent stoves and thawing furnaces. Should this divinity prove merciful perhaps our next generation may just stave off Armageddon yet. Of thee we sing, hail hail.

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an electric city

Peter Tacy

It was once a “place beyond the pines”
in the Algonquian common language.
Later, a Canal made the town a hub,
empowering it to share its fortune with
fertile lands far beyond the river’s
long-established broadening valley.

Things slipped; just a railway by-station
(we had our ups and downs, downs and ups);
an ever-willing part of the economy’s dance --
oft a partner, but never queen of the event..
So Schenectady awaited, with its station,
for the fated moment of electrification.

Legend has it that Edison’s choice
to make a vacant broom-corn mill
in our sleepy town into what became G.E.
was our city’s electrifying decision.
Just as much, it was the choice of J.P. Morgan
to force the inventor-businessman out
of General Electric that turned the trick.

But later, the MBA’s took charge.
That did it for our little city. Not pretty,
the aftermath. Bit by bit, GE departed.
As the moving trucks went south, we glimpsed
a vision of our electric moment; in that flash
we saw our darkest selves, lit very bright.
And yes, the end of every brilliant day, is night.



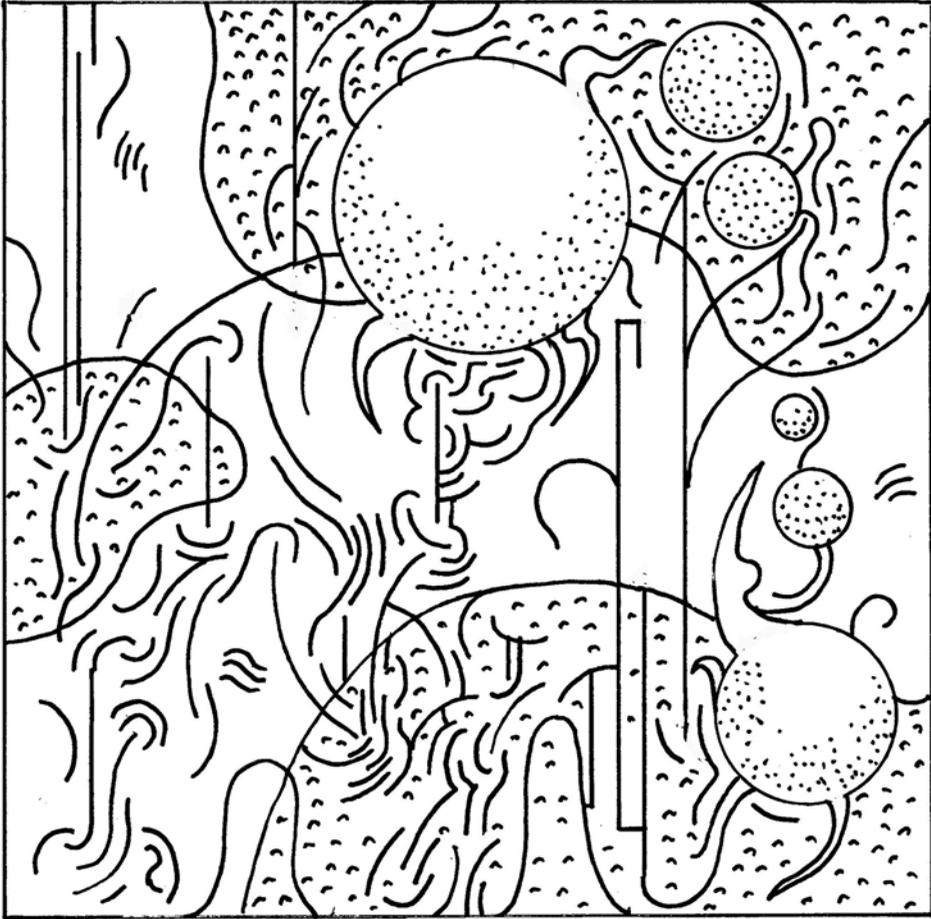
a small candle for mr. edison

Jane Yolen

We were born on the same day,
though many years apart.
I told my parents, when older
(not wiser, but bolder)
that he had brought the world light
and I had brought light to their world.

I was right, not in the large, but in the small.
Edison had done something for everyone.
I had simply been born. My small candles
would not shine for years.
They still light a few houses
sometimes schools.
Maybe even in Schenectady.
Not brilliant day, nor darker night.
But once in a while my work
Gets something right.





Steven M. Johnson

hot water soup

Jose Oseguera

“At your age, I could find my own food and cook it,”
Dad would say when we’d tell him we were hungry.
Mom’s response to his parental wisdom:
“Well, that’s because your dad and his brothers
were raised like animals.”

The few times he did cook,
Dad used to heat up water in a pockmarked pot,
big enough for a single mug.

“Why don’t you make enough soup
so that your kids can also eat?” Mom said
as the soft-boiled water’s chlorinated rank
softened the acrid track scent of metal
scraping against a rusted burner grate.

“It’s not soup,” Dad said
and poured the liquid into his cup.
“It’s just water.”

He blew on the porcelain lip
and slurped with a stare as empty as his stomach.

“Well, at least warm up enough for them too,” Mom said.
She was like a bitch who’d rather eat her puppies
than watch them go without food,
damned if she didn’t try to make her thin paycheck
spread as far as spilt water.

As Mom walked towards the door,
Dad placed the cup on the counter
and embraced her as carefully as one would
hold a nearly full receptacle,
ready to spill equal measures of love and hate.
There was no hug or kiss from her end,
just a stranger embracing another stranger,
a mop, vacant stoneware
and not a woman who’d carried his children
on three separate occasions.

As they stood there,
all they hated, loved and hoped for
was as visible as the arsenic and phosphorus

caked on the sides of the charred pot.
She dug her claws in his skin,
as she did into every word she spoke to him,
and walked towards the door.

“So, I guess you guys probably want some too,”
Dad said after he heard Mom close the garage
and slam shut the car door.

We drank a lot of tap water soup,
not for the taste, but rather,
because it made our bellies pop-out
and our guts feel warm inside and out:
the cocktail of minerals wouldn't kill
the hunger; but it'd drown the growling, our flaws,
and deliver us into a torpor that felt nice
until Mom got back from work.



missa

Jose Oseguera

—for Nicole

The capuchin's yellowed remains—
travertine filigree, intricately latticed below the ground—
were faint ghosts that lay in pieces,
far from the basso continuo of cars rumbling on papal cobblestone,
and the celesta cadenza of tiny espresso spoons
clinking on the lips of tiny porcelain cups,
resting on tiny, white saucers
before a choral fugue of sips and “aahs.”
Rome was a rose blooming in eternal beauty,
and we were her fortunate children—
still breathing and baring the sumptuous weight of flesh.

The frigid air in the depths was thick with silence—
a museum inside a crypt beneath a church—
the sweet jaggedness of incense seeped through the Urban rock;
its scent dared us to relinquish any remnants of romance
hidden in this Sheol's hard walls and narrow hallways.
We looked at each other— waging more than the afterlife—
yet dared not talk or interlace fingers
lest we be shunned by the priest who took our money and,
upon entering hallowed ground,
implored you to shroud your freckled shoulders and cleavage.

The brown robes and hoods that once clad their brethren's fervor—
the marrow inside the martyrdom—
hung desiccated and dusty,
untouched even by men holier than I'd ever wish for either of us to be.
The stacked skulls— a honeycomb of bone—
smiled simultaneously as cherubs chiseled out of Carrara marble,
singing mass in hushed prayers—
hums that reverberated down my spine.

When you asked me why Saint Peter had been crucified head first,
or why those bees were chasing your lemon gelato in Barberini Square,
I had no answers until I stared into the brothers' joyous, dark eye sockets.
I wondered if our bones would ever be exhumed—
juxtaposed in grim beauty— and whether those whose eyes
were still covered in fibrous tunic would be able to see,
in our ivory pearlescence, how much I loved your pumiced tissues
or that they were once layered with a skin
that smelled of orange peels when it rained,
one I used to coat with endless kisses,
sometimes because of a look you'd give me,
and others, for no reason in particular.

So, I took your hand— those fallible phalanges
that played the piano only when no one was listening—
I kissed it long until my lip smack resonated deep in its spongy core,
and thought about how the mass of what remained of you and me
would be displayed when our turn came to be eternal.



a brief introduction

George Franklin

Anonymous wrote before writing existed,
Before figures on walls or scratches on papyrus,
Before prizes awarded at festivals, or
Fees for commemorating a charioteer.
Anonymous' works were voluminous and
Incomparable for their range of emotion
And varying topics, for their insight into a
Condition that wasn't quite yet human,
Horses and lions on the savanna, the night
Someone invented fire. Legend has it, he may
Even have been immortal—his works written
Over centuries, lifetimes spent on revision.
Anonymous carved letters into steles
Set up at the last hilltop before the desert
Began, warning travelers that beyond these
Words lay nothing but sand and empty sky.
Anonymous satirized the emperor and the court,
Describing their sexual encounters in precise
Detail, how this one needed tincture of
Rhinoceros sperm to get an erection and that one
Was so dry she filled herself with an amphora
Of olive oil before each assignation. Thus,
Anonymous often found it necessary to flee
From one country to another, and his works
Became full of travel, prison, and escapes
Over rooftops. Sometimes Anonymous bunked
In sour hay with pigs and goats and sometimes slept
In Chinese silk or cotton from Egypt. The works
Of Anonymous have been praised by both
Grammarians from Alexandria and the harshest
Critics of medieval Baghdad. Yet despite these
Accolades and the evidence, prima facie, of
The texts themselves, some lesser scholars
Still persist in doubting his existence.

