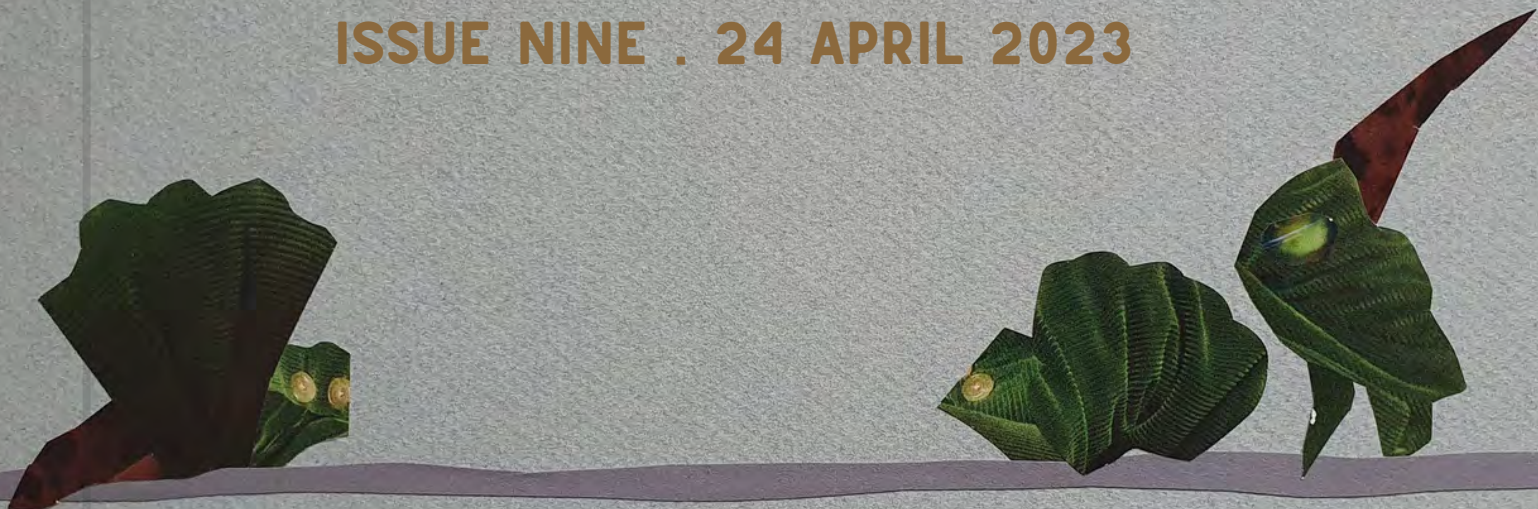


# HOWLER DAILY

FOUR FRESH STORIES FOR YOUR WEEK

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POETRY

# screeamer

julian george

# W

Warren didn't think of it at the time, but the idea of screaming in public was planted in his head in the boys' room in high school (Marist). Lester "The Molester" Harris (nicknamed after his sort of lookalike, Oakland Raiders' great Lester "The Molester" Hayes), who was standing next to him, told him of his habit of screaming into a pillow, loud as he could, till he could scream no more, dead to the world and all the pain in it (and all the pain it caused him). Lester was usually stoned.

Lester had picked up on this from a popular self-help book, *The Primal Scream*, which Warren had also read, except Warren "forgot" the pillow part and screamed his damn fool head off as if being attacked by wolves. His parents, serious professional people with all the right credentials, sent him to Dr. Mantis, a child psychiatrist, after that episode, which meant skipping the odd class or two, no sweat. Dr. Mantis, a Thirtysomething similarly credentialed but covered in corduroy, said it was a case of post-childhood, early-mid-late-adolescent hysteria, or perhaps a case of very early premature early-adulthood agoraphobia, fear of life, rare but

nothing to be worried about unless it stemmed from an unconscious or semiconscious or fully conscious childhood or infancy trauma he was too ashamed to talk about or confess to, Catholics, (go figure), I'll get to the bottom of his shame and trauma and expose it to the light of reason and hygienic scrutiny. Was he properly toilet trained? Was Warren a bed-wetter? Did he masturbate? If so, how often did he masturbate? Where and when? (Put that down!) Had he started seeing girls yet? Was he interested in girls or was he in a latency phase? Would he like to talk about this lack of interest in girls or was he perhaps interested or not interested in boys? And if he didn't want to talk about this interest or lack of interest in boys or girls, why didn't he want to talk about it? What was he hiding and where was he hiding it? Would he feel better talking to the hand, puppet-gloved, of course (blue dogs for boys, pink cats for girls), he didn't want Warren to get the wrong idea or the right one. Spill! (Or words to that effect.) Warren smirked. What a --

He started to daydream about screaming "fire" in the cinema where he

worked weekends, but thought better of it. The law took a dim view of such pranks and might put him in "The Cooler" (an expression picked up from *Hogan's Heroes*) or, disregarding his status as an underage outpatient, in the "Laughing House" (from *Kiss Me Deadly*, a blast). Worse, his boss, whom he had a crush on, might give him the axe; she'd indulge Warren's rudeness to customers ("the customer is always wrong," she'd chirp, "even when they're right"), but wouldn't indulge a catastrophic loss of turnover.

His chance came one slow frigid evening, a Woody Allen double-feature, *Annie Hall* and *Manhattan* (Woody wasn't terribly big in *Burt Smokey and the Bandit* Reynolds country), as he worked the box office, a cubicle in front of a shabby art deco cinema from the silent era. Rubbing his mitts and clearing his throat, he warmed up with a few mi-mi-mis, the Caruso of Camp Bowie Boulevard. Finally, a truck rumbled past; he let out a scream. Not a soul heard him.

The second time, however, his boss, who was poking around behind the candy case, wondering what she could

scarf that wouldn't add to her waist, did hear and rushed outside.

What was that?

Nothing.

Are you alright?

A nod.

It's too cold for you out here, with your chest. Come inside to the candy case and let Stu take over. He won't mind. (He drinks.)

Driving him home that night, she told him she knew what he was doing. She did the same herself, into a paisley cushion. Screaming was a fun – and liberating -- way of letting off steam. Then she sighed, the words of a song he was unfamiliar with, *Angel Eyes*, escaping her violet breath. Warren examined her face for a clue as to her feelings and reckoned he could steal a kiss, which, to his surprise, she welcomed with a warm, wet mouth.

A decade later, on a half-empty DC8 flying over the Big Nowhere, he fantasized about screaming, "We're all going to die," and the ensuing pandemonium. He snickered, amused with the notion of this Surrealist act. OK, he wasn't running down a street with a pistol, firing blindly into a crowd, but by gum Dali and Buñuel would be

proud to claim this young provocateur as one of their own. A timid-looking, straw-faced man seated across the aisle winced. Was he a mind reader?

That Christmas, Warren and his ex-boss, now alcoholic and burdened with caring for her deteriorating father all on her lonesome, became lovers for a few overcast weeks, any port in a storm.

Years passed. Warren was ensconced in the City of London, gainfully employed in some financial chicanery or another, an insufferable ass in a nice English suit. He'd hear from home, happily in the form of cheques, bribes to buy his long-distance love. Thank you. (Keep 'em coming.) One day, shutting the door on the moist chilly air, slitting open the latest missive, a clipping instead of a cheque fluttered out: his ex-boss, his sloshed, quick, back to my blue room far away upstairs playmate, had died after a long illness. Bam. He reeled back, bam, as if shot, bam, as in his favorite old gangster movies, Cagney, Bogie, Eddie Robinson, they died so well, crumpling into an uneasy easy chair, gasping, nothing coming up the pipes, a howling, blood-curdling scream, a catharsis that would leave him floored, would have

done him a world of good but nothing,  
the stuffing knocked out of him, for  
real.

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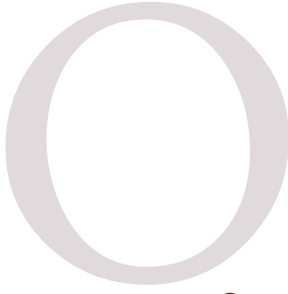
- ▶ **Julian George's** writing has appeared in *Perfect Sound Forever*, *New World Writing*, *Slag Glass City*, *McSweeney's*, *Panoplyzine*, *Ambit*, *The Journal of Music*, *Film Comment*, and *Cineaste*. He's been a wine merchant, a UN translator, an auctioneer, and a carer. His novel, *Bebe* (CB Editions), appears this autumn in the UK.

# she has notifications silenced

will neuenfeldt

- ▶ **Will Neuenfeldt** studied English at Gustavus Adolphus College, and his poems are published in *Capsule Stories*, *Months to Years*, and *Red Flag Poetry*. He currently lives in Cottage Grove, MN.

**IG:** @wjnpoes



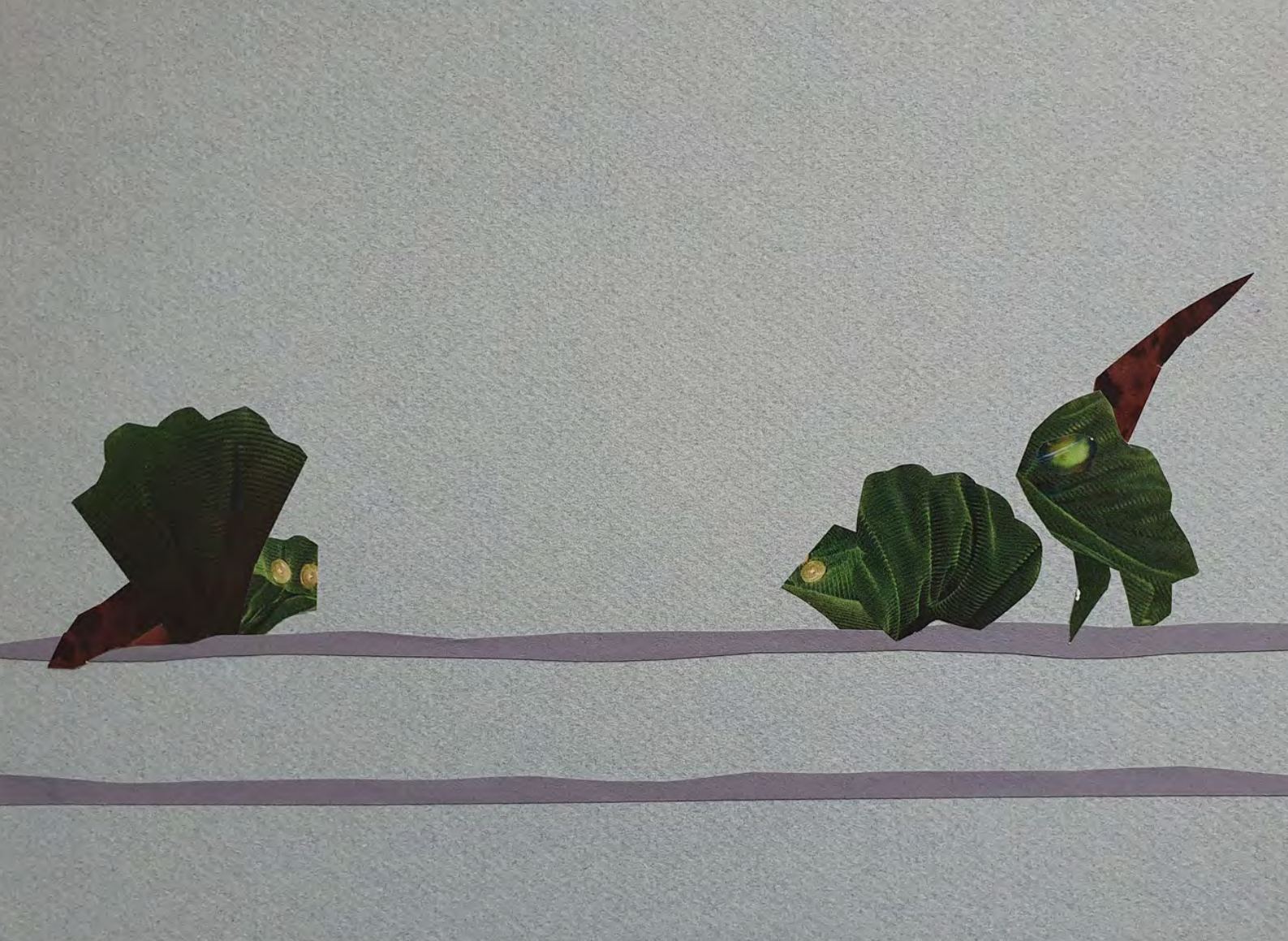
One purple crescent  
sent into sky  
where my blue cloud  
wafts above, alone,  
aware it's been seen  
yet lingers to be heard.  
Rain clicks from fingers  
before droplets dry  
to admire characters  
we typed across night  
and the stories they  
tell twinkle white.  
Through the window  
drafts of our last chat  
whisper in stereo  
and lull me to dream  
to awake in overcast.  
I reply with more  
blue into the heavens  
so another afternoon  
of bubbly clouds scroll by.

# what happens next

monika galland

- ▶ **Monika Galland** is an artist based in Basel, Switzerland. She has been making collages, drawings, and watercolor paintings over 30 years.





# while you were away

erin olds

- ▶ **Erin Olds** is from Cleveland, Ohio, and is currently an MFA candidate at the University of South Florida.

I

I'd leave the lights on each night you weren't home,  
even in the bedroom,  
so they wouldn't think I was there alone.

I slept with a pillow over my eyes.

Well, sleep is a weird word to describe what I did when  
I'd leave the lights on. Each night you weren't home,

small noises scared me. I'd drown them  
with the TV blaring downstairs, deadening the air  
so I wouldn't think. I was there alone

and sometimes I got cozy in a cold shower, afraid  
of the air outside waiting to wrap around wet skin. And after,  
I'd leave the lights on each night. You weren't home,

and I would think, *safe* is a pretty term, a feeling to dream of.  
I slipped a ring on my finger, though it wasn't love,  
so they wouldn't think I was there alone.

I struggled out of blankets, packed my clothes, wrote this poem,  
left. And double locked the door.

I'd leave the lights on the night you came home  
so you would think I was still there. Alone.



# HOWLER



the howler project is a CREATIVE COLLECTIVE  
and outreach organization, making space for  
human connection through STORYTELLING.

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