TAG

4 / Studded
Part begets counterpart. We move through a world lousy with inversions, balancings, and tango. In this spirit, TAG celebrates riotous coupling and role reversal. TAG is the horse riding the human, the cross-dressing executioner, the martyr trading places with the martyred in medieval hagiography. TAG talks to itself, TAG looks inside you to see what’s in me, TAG spins in concentric circles that run off-kilter. In the words of the ballad, “strange motions will abound / yet let’s be content, and the times lament, you see the world turn’d upside down.”

In other words, TAG is a journal/experiment of new writing that publishes two works per phase, the authors of which becoming, in turn, the editors of the next phase.

Maintenant, vive le Studded.
4 / Studded

November 20, 2013

Edited by Luke A. Fidler and Anthony Opal

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for my brother

Is it possible that we know nothing about young girls, who are nevertheless living? Is it possible that we say 'women,' ‘children,' ‘boys,' not suspecting . . . that these words have long since had no plural, but only countless singulars?

~Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*

They were two.

They were two. Everywhere they went, they subtracted things from people who couldn’t put two and two together. For example, at dinner parties, when no one was looking, they would take all of the raspberries out of the fruit salad and eat them one by one while standing side by side in the dining room when everyone else was still outside drinking beers and telling the children to get down from the trees and wishing they were married to other people or just not married at all. Since most people can’t put two and two together, nor can they ever relax and enjoy themselves with all the children climbing the dangerous trees and all of that marital ennui, they can never understand where the raspberries went or maybe don’t even remember them being in the bowl to begin with. Other times, these two would take someone’s boyfriend, or girlfriend, or husband, or wife, or mother, or son, and no one ever knows what happened.

They were twin sisters and had perfected the art of multiple sleights of hands and lips—while one would entertain the unsuspecting victim with stories of raspberry embezzlement, the other would slip out a back window with the boyfriend, or girlfriend, and not being able to put two and two, or one twin and the other, together, the woman, or man, or sometimes a duchess, would look all over the house, or castle, and never figure it out. Wasn’t she interesting? the duchess would say to herself, shutting the castle door behind her, the one who steals raspberries? And then: has anyone seen my boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife, mistress, fiancée, daughter, maid, horse, dog, the tapestries bequeathed from the neighboring chieftan? And what about the rubies?

Two and two together.

Then there is the heroine of our story, distant cousin to the twins, who were two, and we regret to tell you that she really could not put two and two together at all. As our story opens, she is sitting by the side of the road waiting for someone to come by and help her put two and two together, but being the type that can’t put two and two together (or really, any integers), she has completely neglected to notice that she is sitting by the side of the road—a certain portion of Highway 64, to be exact, somewhere between one place and another, that has been shut down for almost six months for bridge repair. So here is our heroine, who in a former life had been the Roman emperor Titus’s daughter Lavinia who, believe us, could in fact put two and two, or one and two, together (Tamora + Chiron and Demetrius = trouble in the woods), but she had neither the tongue nor the hands to make it clear or palpable, whereas our heroine, she had tongue and hands but could not make sums or compilations or glosses with them, of herself or of any combination thereof.

Although it goes without saying how beautiful she was, there were days when she couldn’t tell her ass from a teakettle, even when she was falling over one (a teakettle). Likewise, trips to the grocery store were fraught with peril because, not being able to put two and two together, she did not understand the differences in weights and measures and could not see why, for example, a .85 oz. tube of toothpaste wasn’t the same as or at least comparable to a 6 oz. tube, and always opting for what was cheapest (because, at the very least, she did
understand that there was never enough money), she never could figure out why there was never enough toothpaste in the tube when she needed it. Extrapolate this anecdote to containers of milk and ice cream, and even to gallons of gasoline, and you can understand why she was stranded on the side of the road. But because we do not feel we should burden our readers with the dilemma of moving our heroine along, we will leave her here for a little while and return to this spot when the sumac along the highway has turned a blazing red and, miracle of miracles, our heroine is on her way, rolling with the tumbleweeds into the city where all of this takes place because, in addition to not being able to put two and two together, she also does not have the wherewithal to withstand the force of rolling tumbleweeds. She is light like that.

Half of everything.

Our heroine, distant cousin to the twins who subtracted things from people who can’t put two and two together, has a sad brother who can only ever see, and feel, half of everything, and who carries his regrets and resentments, typed on onion-skin paper and placed in thin manila folders, in a special briefcase handcuffed to his wrist like James Bond, only he was no James Bond. He was more like Bartleby the Scrivener, but that was only what he became, for as a child he radiated a dazzling goodliness in the kilowatts. But now, well, now he had a weakness for logic and thought everything should move along the lines of so-called common sense and that was a set-up for personal disaster if ever there was one. Time and again he would insist on rationality, and lo and behold, other people would never oblige him, being married, as they tragically were, to their fickle emotions. As a result, nothing made sense to him, not even the weather, and in order to cope he started to squint so that he could only ever see half of everything—that way, he could pretend that, if the other half were visible, everything would make sense and he was just choosing to forgo a foregone conclusion in order to save his sight from the blazing radiance of perfect symmetry. He also looked down at the ground a lot while he was walking, as that saved him the occasional trouble of squinting too much, or seeing people as they really were.

As a child, the brother, not having yet become his present self, believed in someone who, strictly speaking, wasn’t real: Henry, the trusty servant to the Frog Prince in the story by the Brothers Grimm. You see, everyone remembers the Frog Prince and the little girl (the insipid little girl, as the brother always remembered her) who angrily throws the frog against a wall (or reluctantly kisses him in the less violent, and therefore not as exciting version), thereby turning the frog into the handsome prince who marries her and makes her a princess. But what most people forget, but the brother never forgot, was Henry the faithful servant who comes in a carriage to retrieve the prince and his child bride at the end of the story, and who, while the prince was in his state of amphibious bewitchment and lost to the world, had bound three iron bands around his heart so that it would not burst from grief and sorrow at the prince’s absence. While driving the prince and the prince’s betrothed home to the castle, each of the three bands cracked and broke, one by one, as Henry’s heart swelled with joy. The popping cracking! The brother had spent his whole life looking for Henry, and although it may be obvious to say so, the brother was eternally bereft of him and there is no remedy for that in this world. Everywhere he went, there was a constant strain of Bach’s Suite for Solo Cello No. 3 in C Major echoing in the chamber of his shackled suitcase.

Lisa of Cincinnati.

And then there was the anchorite, who was one. The lost sister to our heroine who couldn’t put two and two together and her sad brother who only saw half of everything, she lived in a walled-in enclosure on the east side of a mansion in Cincinnati owned by a couple who felt they simply had to have everything. At that time, it was simply de rigueur to have an anchorite and all of the fashionable houses had one. It was not uncommon, when waiting in the foyer of one of those estates in the best neighborhoods, to see a sign that said, “please don’t spoil the anchorite.” But of course you had to spoil the anchorite, anyway. You would bring her almonds, maybe some cognac, and an issue or two of Vogue, if you could get away with it. Anchorites were a bit more exciting at the time of our story than they were in the Middle Ages. Instead of just sitting and praying and contemplating the beyond and imagining what it would be like to be married to Christ and to kiss his wounds and catch his drops of blood in so many silver cups—technically speaking, hallucinations, which had never been much to look at through the
narrow window (hence, medieval anchorites were never the spectator sport they could have been), these more modern anchorites would set interesting little tasks of endurance for themselves. With just a small bit of petrol and a Bic lighter for instance, an anchorite might draw a circle of fire around herself and will herself to sit very still as the flames danced around her, or she might kneel, with bare legs, for hours and hours, on a scattering of pink Aegean sea salt. Or, she might engage in staring contests with visitors. You could never win a staring contest with an anchorite, even with pink Aegean sea salt under her bare knees, although many tried.

Now the anchorite of our story, Lisa of Cincinnati, lost sister to our heroine who couldn’t put two and two together and to her sad brother who only ever saw half of everything, and therefore also a distant cousin to the twins who were expert at subtraction, was especially fond of playing dead. No one could play dead better than Lisa of Cincinnati, and no matter how many visitors peered through the narrow window of her reclusorium and rattled things around, like their bags of Skittles or coffee tins filled with pennies, nothing could disrupt the look on her face and body of beatific deadness. As you may already know, being the educated type of person who can put two and two together, an anchorite’s cell was designed for lifetime enclosure, and the anchorite was literally walled in to the foundation of a church, rectory, or house, with only a small opening cut into one wall through which food, water, and small books could be passed in, and leavings and waste products could be passed out. Ideally, there was no window to the outside as that would ruin the feeling of having been sealed inside one’s own mausoleum. The anchorite was dead to the world, as it were, but to herself—oh, to herself, and to God, she was more alive than you could possibly imagine.

As we were saying, Lisa of Cincinnati excelled at playing dead and spent endless hours in this game of self-mortification. Lying prostrate upon the stone floor, which was also her bed, Lisa of Cincinnati had trained herself to be so still that you could not even tell if she was breathing, and those visitors who brought small battery-powered fans and pointed them toward her through the opening cut out in the wall, hoping to make her shiver, never succeeded in accomplishing anything except rustling the pages of the Vogue magazines that lay here and there on the floor in between the tins of almonds and empty bottles of cognac. And as Lisa’s body lay on the floor, dead to the world and to curious tourists, her soul, which was also her body, made such passionate and violent love to God (who, in her mind, bore an uncanny resemblance to Uma Thurman) that portions of the outside walls of her enclosure were shattered into a thousand flying shards of concrete that flew across Cincinnati and pierced unsuspecting citizens in their hearts, out of the wounds of which their lost child selves tumbled out and ran down the streets, shrieking with wild elation at their sudden freedom from the cages of the adults they had sadly become. And this is why, even today, and even though this was only the anchorite’s hallucination, the parks of Cincinnati are filled with wild children speckled with bits and pieces of concrete who live in the treetops and whose laughter can be heard rippling the small green petals of the violets on late summer nights. Because dreams are real that way.

Coming together.

The authors are beginning to wonder where this story is going. We honestly don’t know, but what we can tell you is that this story concerns a certain moment late one humid August night when all of the characters in our story came together in the same place. By “came together,” we mean they all ended up in the same city on the same night—even more so, they practically brushed up against each other at the intersection of a particular longitude and latitude—but by “came together,” we also mean that, in different ways and in different beds, and not really in beds, but on the stone floor of a reclusorium, down a windswept street, and under a proscenium arch separating a living room from a foyer, they arrived together in the ex-stasis of arriving, by which we mean, a general coming together.

The brother was a glass-hanger, or as it was said, he worked in curtain wall construction. Curtain walls were the façades—glass, aluminum, steel, and stone—that were hung on the outside of buildings, usually skyscrapers, and the brother had worked as a hanger on many projects, including the Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur, which were built on 120-meter foundations. As soon as a building’s structure was erected, the brother would show up to hang the façade, thereby turning the hulking mass of steel and concrete into something that glittered like a palace, or a spaceship, or the future. At the time of our story, he had recently arrived in Cincinnati to hang a façade of pink
quartz crystal on Lisa of Cincinnati’s enclosure, for the couple who owned her, although they understood that Lisa needed to live in a state of complete and bare and stony deprivation (not counting some issues of *Vogue*, and maybe some Skittles), they did not understand why her enclosure should not be pretty to look at from the outside. Unbeknownst to the brother, his distant cousins the twins who subtracted things had also recently been summoned by the same couple to install new security technology for their new moat, as wayward and drunken teenagers had been sneaking in at night to taunt the anchorite. The twins were experts at home security systems and had their own company and they felt you could never be too safe from those who were always trying to subtract things from you. There are no better security experts than those who are themselves talented thieves. Their plan was to install crocodiles in the moat, and they had brought several of them from the Everglades in their black Cadillac Escalade specially fitted with tinted windows, wet bar, and amphibious wading pool.

You will wonder how it could be that, at a certain point on a humid August night, the twins, who were two, the heroine, who could not put two and two together, the brother, who could only see half of everything, and the anchorite, who was one, could all be together in the same vicinity—even pass each other in the hallway, as happened with the brother and the twins, or one look upon the other, as the brother did with the anchorite, or roll by the open windows in full sight of the twins, as our heroine did—and not recognize each other. It is a depressing but true commentary on our times that siblings and cousins grow up and lead separate lives and, little by little, no longer resemble themselves. Promises are made to keep a better correspondence and then the years go by with no messages, or only a pre-printed card bought in a store with harsh fluorescent lighting that says, “Happy Birthday,” signed “Your Brother,” but it could be anyone’s birthday and anyone’s brother. Eventually, there is not even that and the years roll by like so many unclaimed shirts and dresses at the drycleaners.

*Once upon a time.*

Once, they had all been children together and instead of his bald spot, the brother had possessed long curls of golden hair that their mother refused to cut because they were so beautiful, even though their father always said, with some irritation, *he looks like a girl.* Every summer, the brother and his two sisters, and their twin cousins who had grown up with them after their parents drowned in a boating accident (well, really, their father became a schizophrenic and their mother ran off with the psychiatrist, but “boating accident” seemed a more romantic end for their family)—they would all be sent to Dublin to live with their two aunts while their parents would travel to Turkey and Greece to pretend they were young lovers again, unburdened by children. Times were different then and no one begrudged the parents their happiness in the sun-blanched whiteness of the grottoes, caves, and hills of an ancient Mediterranean world. Because the aunts were so permissive and kind and thought children should lead unencumbered lives, they would send the brother and his two sisters and the twin cousins out into the city each day to have “adventures,” with the instructions to only come home at 6:00 for supper, and again, after supper, when the sun was setting, which in that part of the world was never until 10:00 or so.

The world of children is a secret one and we are reluctant to peer too closely into those past summers and to violate them. Suffice to say that the brother, two sisters, and twin cousins explored every nook and cranny and shop and alley and park of the city and they ventured out into the country as well, looking for shallow sun-drenched pools of water in the rocks above the sea, where they would swim for hours, and for orchards whose apples they could steal and eat until they were doubled over with pain. Suffice to say that they often traveled for miles and miles, concocted secret rituals and games together, and loved, especially, to sneak into empty houses when no one was at home, rummaging through cupboards and under beds, and trying on other people’s clothes. Suffice to say that they loved to climb hills and to make forts in the underbrush of forests and outposts in the tops of black pines, but that they were always too timid to go into the cold, black waters of the north Atlantic Sea. Suffice to say, they befriended many stray dogs and were expert shoplifters of candy, especially Smarties and Crunchie bars, and they often had a difficult time explaining to their aunts why they weren’t hungry at suppertime. Suffice to say, their service to and friendship with each other was a type of holiness and all their worship. Suffice to say they loved each other with a burning ardor that was not yet broken. Suffice to say, this chapter is now closed.
Mind the jouissance.

But what of that humid night in August and everyone coming together, arriving, as it were, at the same place, while also arriving, together? It all happened, or began to happen, when the brother, who typically only saw half of everything, was applying the last pink quartz tile to the frame of the narrow opening into the anchorite's cell and, so concentrated upon his work that he forgot to squint, he looked through the opening of the enclosure and saw, with all of his eyes, Lisa playing dead, and he was suddenly seized with the desire to lie down beside her and also play dead. Having spent so many years winnowing and saddening and squinting himself, it was no problem to get through the opening, which he did handily. And lying on the stone floor next to the anchorite—his sister, but unrecognizable to him—who was one, but now was two (or was it three?), he stretched out his body so that he was on his side, facing but not touching her, and closing his eyes he saw Henry driving the carriage toward him, and one by one, the bands around his heart began to break at just the same moment that Lisa was ravished by God's fire, the concrete splinters of her enclosure hurtling through the damp night of Cincinnati.

Although the time cannot be set precisely, and it may have been a matter of physics more so than of chronology, at about the same time, or place, the twins, having just installed the crocodiles in the moat, had been arguing in the foyer, while the couple waited for them in the living room, over whether or not, after serving the bill and distracting one or the other with their calculations, they should subtract the husband from the wife or the wife from the husband. Although they could never explain it later, to either their friends or themselves, they were both suddenly seized with a compulsion to add instead of to subtract and there, under the proscenium arch dividing the foyer from the living room, without even worrying about the bill, they added the husband and wife to themselves, and in the midst of this delicious operation, or sum, the twins, who were now four, saw through the open window of the living room the heroine of our story, rolling in cartwheels down the street with the tumbleweeds of summer. But what they could not see, or know, was that at the moment they saw our heroine, who was also their cousin, roll by, was that their cousin was just then seized by what can only be called a tumbleweed jouissance—this is the feeling you get, or rather, a kind of explosion that occurs, after you have been blown, with and like the tumbleweeds, through the prairies and towns and cities of the Midwest, until suddenly God appears beside you and, reaching into your body, pulls you out of yourself, and yet, there you still go, rolling along your way.

This is the moment at which the heroine ascended above herself and above the tumbleweeds and above the street and above all of the houses and the entire city of Cincinnati and, like one of the wayward seraphim, looked down through the clouds and into a small window set in the north-facing wall of an apartment on the tenth floor of a nondescript brown building at the end of a dead-end street, where her brother, not a glass- or pink quartz-hanger at all, but a tax accountant, lay sleeping, dreaming all of this into existence, because none of it really happened at all, except for the childhood. And his sister, who because she could never put two and two together had walked in front of a moving bus on Lexington Avenue in New York City and did not live to turn this into a funny anecdote at cocktail parties where all the adults always wish they were with people they did not arrive with—well, she was in the heavens above him, blessing him with her tumbleweed jouissance. And that is why she is the heroine of this story, because even though she can't put two and two together, she is always watching over the brother like that, because he was always, for her, the one, her lodestar, her jewel, her pearl. But in this scenario, souls are only souls and even though Augustine of Hippo argued otherwise (because he was a hopeless optimist), they are bereft of their carbon-based and heat-seeking bodies—they can only watch, and helplessly at that.

Envoi.

To Henry, wherever you are, faithful servant and carriage-driver to the Frog Prince, consider our tale, if you will, as an emergency flare that has been fired into Ursa Major from the crevasse of the brother's briefcase. Do you see it burning there among the constellation, where it will burst and then scatter, like red stardust, raining back down upon those of us who are walking with our heads bowed down along the grey avenues of all the busy cities? This is our signal to you, Henry, a cry for assistance. We have only the one flare, and we have decided to stop being prudent with it. Henry, we appeal to your loyalty and to your steadfastness and even to your once-begotten sorrow.
If by chance you receive *this* our flare, *this* our letter to you, come unto the brother of our story with your carriage and your horses, by which we mean, Henry, come unto *us*, and take us away from here, for the brother—by which we mean, *we*—we have great need of an hallucination such as you. In other words, Henry, we have need of your queer and unshackled love. We have need, also, of your limbs and your arms and your lips. So make yourself palpable among us, like God, who, when the anchorite, who was one, came alone, but was not really alone, God licked the edges of her heart with his tongues of fire.

**EILEEN JOY** is a specialist in Old English literary studies and cultural studies, with a wide variety of publications in poetry and poetics, historiography, ethics, affects, embodiments, queer studies, the politics of friendship, speculative realism, object oriented ontology, and the post/human. She has also published fiction and poetry in *Black Warrior Review, Whiskey and Fox, New Virginia Review, Swink Magazine, The Sun*, and *Sou’wester*, among other journals. She is also the Lead Ingenitor of the BABEL Working Group, the Editor of *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies*, and the Director of *punctum books: spontaneous acts of scholarly combustion*. 
4.2 HOW KIND YOU ARE
by PETER JAY SHIPPY (tagged by DJ Dolack)

With the green ocean, the azure grass, the whales
grow no longer than my palm, celadon

plus a pinch of gilt, some swim with the clouds,
some below the waves, lit by puffer fish lamps

the tavern dissipates the aggression
of anticipation, the book of tentacles advises

the pilgrim to whitewash a shoebox and fill it
with falling, a feather, a leaf, distant splashes

call us to the patio, in the koi pond
a dog swims after a school of wind-up sharks, round

the plastic castle, over the china shipwreck,
you rest your chin on your folded arms,

your sunglasses reflect a mug of beer, the gulls
look down, too, embarrassed mendicants, they pin

their wings behind their backs and beak for scraps,
chanting the 99 names for bread, they beg

the pilgrim to whitewash a shoebox and fill it
with the green ocean, the azure grass, the whales

call us to the patio, in the koi pond
the dog’s owner leashes her bikini’s bra

to his studded collar and they jog to the sea,
as instructed, I pass you a glassine envelope

filled with a floppy disk, greenish beetles,
a child’s gazetteer, police files, hockey cards,

a birth certificate, a lock of red hair brushed
with falling, a feather, a leaf, distant splashes,

some below the waves, lit by puffer fish lamps,
you take out a permanent marker and reach

across the table to trace my lifeline, how kind
you are, how kind, I whisper, how kind you are.

PETER JAY SHIPPY’s 4th book is A spell of songs (Saturnalia, 2013). His work appears in The Best American
In the words of Caroline Caddy, "Be precise / authority is magic." We find the editor to be an enigmatic figure who redacts, solicits, curates, and wields magic when necessary. This sidebar asks how and why we might edit gravity or Gertrude Stein, newspapers or Ngugi wa Thiong'o (in 50 words or less).

1 Being an editor means being an archaeologist digging to find something magic. It's exciting to find someone new, someone unknown, to discover, to reveal a new voice. But also to publish those long admired. It means getting to say I love you. Developing relationships with our writers? That's the icing.

-Amber Nelson, Alice Blue Review

2 Editing for me is manifesting a different kind of engagement with the world and the writers I love, not just trying to crank open a space for the work that I believe in and want to see everywhere but also getting to see what writers--all you writers whose work I read in my various guises--are doing. It's participating in the much larger ecosystems in which we write and read and publish and being part of the ongoing health of those ecosystems and the conversations we have about what the future is and what the future of story / poem / essay / genre is and how those technologies (story / poem / essay / image / hybrid / whatever) are changing as we reconsider the technologies we read and compose with. That is, I hope I am helping get a say in the question of what the future means.

-Ander Monson, DIAGRAM

3 The submission pool is a river. Those voices that don't get pulled away are like heavy stones, and it's my job to pick up the brightest ones, even the ones that shine with a kind of darkness. The poems are smooth and warm. They don't want to be put back.

-Kyle McCord, io Poetry

4 "Thanks for this kind invitation! But I don't think, at this point, I have anything of real interest to say on the subject of editing. Ideally, I disappear behind a pile of books!"

-Devin Johnston, Flood Editions
Cybercloth, digital dirt, algorithmic armor. Inspired by model journals (Glossator), blogs (In the Middle), and databases (CDMMSS), PALFREY approaches the medieval world in the spirit of collaboration. We publish short interviews, invited screeds, and other labors of creative postmedievalism.

2 SAINT ACQUIESCENT
by DAVID STEANS

Saint Acquiescent (2013) David Steans with Iona Smith
.MP3, 2 minutes 41 seconds: tagjournal.com/DAVID-STEANS

The ballad Saint Acquiescent tells a horror-story about a Saint. The Saint has lived a long, Godly, selfless life doing good deeds and saintly works. The ballad is narrated by the proverbial Saint ‘Acquiescent’ (we no longer know his actual name). As the ballad opens he is nearing the end of his life and is looking forward to well-earned rest in Heaven. Contemplating his life in a cave, the Saint picks up a stone which starts talking to him. The stone tells him that even though he’s nearing death, he must carry on doing good deeds and saintly works. So when he dies shortly thereafter he returns from the grave and keeps on trying to do good deeds and saintly works. Of course with unfortunate results, due to him being a gradually decaying corpse.

*An earlier version of the ballad featured as an element of Hardeep Pandhal’s installation In Praise of Conjecture in the exhibition ‘Convocation’ (Glasgow School of Art, 12th October - 1st November 2013).

DAVID STEANS is an artist based in Leeds, UK. In 2013 he won the inaugural Vantage Arts Prize and his work is featured in Cadavere Quotidiano, a book of writing by contemporary artists. He is co-founder of Leeds Weirdo Club.
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