

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 8 | Issue 1

Article 6

June 2008

The Elegist

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Recommended Citation

Pancholi, Rumit (2008) "The Elegist," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 6.
Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol8/iss1/6>

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Pancholi: The Elegist

THE ELEGIST

Rumit Pancholi

for Michaela Valentino

The man behind the dark podium
parts his book of euphemisms
and reads with a stutter
like a child with stage fright.
We look on, patting the backs
of the old ones,
abuzz as if refusing flu shots,
shimmying to the end of the queue,
our saltwater fish circling
the iron insides of a dragnet.
We are their elegists with one brow up,
unsure of our own words, unrecited
and acidic. We are trained
to read with sincerity and pause
for a tissue between the end of one page
and the start of the next,
as he shakes his head *no*,
turning blue, unable to go on.
We learn that this, too,
is a part of the performance
so we do not startle
when his wooden replica
takes over, finishes in monotone.
From a corner, we see
the man's face return to white
as if risen from a womb
to release the one distended breath
he's held since birth.