

Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal

Volume 11 | Issue 1

Article 21

June 2011

Sunday: New York Subway

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Recommended Citation

Churney, Kyle (2011) "Sunday: New York Subway," *Harpur Palate: a Literary Journal*: Vol. 11: Iss. 1, Article 21.

Available at: <https://orb.binghamton.edu/harpurpalate/vol11/iss1/21>

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Churney Sunday: New York Subway

**SUNDAY:
NEW YORK
SUBWAY**



**KYLE
CHURNEY**

"What does it mean, American?"—Larry Levis

The child's father slaps a *Wall Street* on his knee
to emphasize his words:

M.S.N., he mouths, *M.S.N.*

like ABC's.
M.S.N.

loud enough to let the whole train hear,

though the man across has slept from Washington
Heights & the woman

unconsciously rocking a stroller remains obscured
in her paperback:

Thugs and the Women Who Love Them.

*

Let a man's soul be a circle—a coin.

Let it be a crumpled piece of fibrous paper,
grimed from fingergrease, flecks of cocaine

*

Kathleen, if she were old enough to want,
would will the father,
who folds & folds the news meticulously
as the debits of his checkbook ledger, to say

You're the prettiest girl in Manhattan—
though she doesn't understand

Manhattan as island, Manhattan as emblem
of America.

Even the superlative hides in an eggshell:

She doesn't know that someone's always most,
the best. She watches in the mirror

as she soaps her hands & is happy

she is Kathleen.

He could say *I love you*, & she'll love him
for the timbre of his voice itself—

years before she questions his notion of love—

as she drives one day on the Mogollon Rim
between Heber & Payson, Arizona,

as she descends

from the fallen receipts of aspen leaves & peaks
foreclosed with snow

to sepia hills peopled with saguaros like men,
Churney: Sunday: New York Subway

maybe, then, she will know . . .

She gapes at the ads above the tinted, graffiti-
slashed windows of the train

*

as I remember waiting at the subway
where two models, tipsy from noon mojitos, swayed

like sheets of newspaper, swayed

with their own weightlessness,
batted their wrists at one another & giggled:

One reaching far into a white sack, taking an afternoon
to twist her wrist,

tearing at the hidden contents

while businesswomen hurried over Fifth Avenue,
DON'T WALK crimson flashing on their taut, shiny hair;

a cabbie clicking coins in a dispenser,
smoothing his dread with a dollar bill,

the model baring her thin, lacquered lip, twisting
and pulling so hard her drunkenness diminished,

rum-breath

diluted with oil & urine & mechanical chatter.

Slowly, smirking, crouching at the platform edge
she pulls from the sack a piece of tortilla

clutched in her glove-white fingers.

waits for its communion,
then clutches the tortilla in its paws.

*We are not worthy so much as to gather
the crumbs under thy table.*

It twitches its cheeks like a man about to sneeze

who sits in the rain on a five-gallon bucket,
a cat on his lap zipped to its neck

in a camouflage jacket warmer than his, the man
who strokes its rayon back,

hood tight upon its ears, tight as unbelievability:

What do cats love

but themselves, licking their fur the way the vainest man
dips his fingers in pomade & slicks his thinning hair;

rubs his fingers under the faucet &
regarding the mirror, runs them through his hair again.

*

Oh how I want Kathleen's father to lean,

elbows on his knees & vomit nickels

and twenties onto the floor.

It might somehow explain—

though not how I'd be on my knees,
gorging on the bilious money.

She starts at a photo of malnourished teen
fastened to the train car wall, while in a Bangkok slum

a pimpled teen chews chili mango, his laugh echoing

from corrugated fiberglass across an alley,
echoing back to the cinderblock wall

a crook-toothed pimp has paid him to sit against:

Do this & I won't pull down your pants.

The pimp flips the teen a 10-Baht coin,
who shoves it in his pocket, whose tongue burns

& ears sweat

as an American man is inside the house with three girls.
He wonders what he would do if one of the girls

was his sister, Phueng, & he laughs. He laughs
because the girls are from his neighborhood;

he will see one, he's sure, this afternoon—

so, too, the pimp.

He wipes the morning sun from his brow & laughs,
& America says nothing

until the lecher confesses to the pageant murder:

the blonde with teased bangs who was six;
whose face the mother tricked with mascara, rouge,

vermillion lipstick.

Guilty. Guilty, the women spit at the television
after the graveyard shift in Alamogordo,

mentholated smoke rising to the newscaster,
quarters drowning in pint-glass rings of beer.

*

After the pedophile has left, tucked into his jeans,
scalp showing in his fresh comb,

he hands the teen a pack of gum & treads sated
through the muddy alley back to his motel.

His steps echo off the alley walls, back & forth
between his ears

until they are cold steel numbing his cerebellum.

He tastes culpability, which tastes like rotten cilantro or
white-bread stuck to the mouth

from his mother's boloney sandwich, & he thinks

*

I am American.

I am American, cradled in my recliner when I say
This problem's too quadratic—change the channel.

Your mouth, as it says *I don't know of*

*chronic hunger, I haven't felt it, but here,
a piece of salami.*

American is
to stretch your legs to the seat across the aisle,

as if to say to the girl who watches, *Yes,
I am American.*

To slap loafer soles and stilettos on a sidewalk:

Churney: Sunday. New York Subway

to stare at a cupped hand, & to want nothing more
than to place nothing in that hand.

WILL
CORDEIRO

Our forehead downfalls to a shuddered ground
A shock of light awakes the eyes of strangers
Who've slumped on one another's shoulders
Across lunch tables holding bottles in their jaws
Their temples rattled on a pane of glass
They wish their tumbled backs from overhead
And tumble off vegetal out the gate
Shuffle darkened streets leading to the harbor
It slanders through the tunnels on the same
To neighborhoods beyond these streetlights
I felt a girl and her hair seems a life
Age Helixes done for going back home
Your mixed connection, 11:00
I'd chance to transfer, so a faint white eye
Has grounded. Can't sleep for Fort Authority
Best get a room now. First bus before six sharp
The hollow station echoes when he turns
I stinger—before he's gone—his linen badge
Flash tonight's security badge and badge
I hold the dogweight of my heavy bag
Avoid the anti-dump bin crushed on the floor
And light I can find an after-hours
The nearby which lowers me with some time
To kill I wonder up the Avenue
I still I had a godforsaken job—
In the wall between the visible ground, year