

# LOVERS & KILLERS

MARY  
TURZILLO



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*Lovers & Killers*

*This is for Jack and Geoff:  
my past and my future*



MARY TURZILLO

**Lady Killer**

*for Jack Unterweger*

Handsome Jack

strutting your white suit your Leo ring your classy dog  
prison schooling prison abs prison eclat

how the girls love you

how they trust you in your white suit

somebody's daughter somebody's wife somebody's slut

until daybreak

until three months later their bones turn up

Bloody Jack

How I hate you

somebody's pimp somebody's lover somebody's son

but also desire you

and don't know why

through the sterilized wall of a sheet of paper

I am fascinated

Bundy and Burke

Ripper and Bosch

Hard-fisted Jack

if I were young if I were somebody's daughter

somebody's slut

would I let you drive me into the woods?

why else do I rivet my eyes?

is it the suit is it the chest hair is it the hot breath?

I am your victim

through the page through the paper through time

I confess

I escape

my hands on your throat.

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**Lincoln Road Hotties/Pastel Towers on Collins Ave**

*with Scott Green*

Stick thin hotties  
Roll-blade Lincoln Road:

they no longer bleed  
having left  
all that reproduction stuff  
behind with their one per cent fat

they slice their way  
into Vogue, G.Q., People,  
eyes like cigarette burns  
souls focused on their art

be it cinema  
or haut couture  
or maybe just  
the art of punching holes  
in their rival's hearts.

Pastel  
towers on  
Collins Avenue under  
moonlight. South  
Beach  
does not  
sleep. Predators lounge  
on the  
poolside  
furniture. Gold

chains draped around

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their necks.

Blood  
drops flecking  
designer clothes. Screams  
are muffled  
by  
the waves  
that surge beneath  
Miami's moon.  
Jaguars  
racing from  
Florida's sun rising.

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

### Lady M

When I was but new, a wee slip of a thing,  
we played lords and ladies, queens and kings.  
I begged to be king but my brother said no  
girls can't be kings. Go wash your tear-streaked face.  
So I bided my time and thought: my brother is wrong.

When I grew to have breasts and hips, my father said lo,  
you will marry this lord and live in a northern manse.  
Do not cry, for this man is a noble warrior lord  
go, wash your face, that you look comely for him.

But the castle was cold summer, fall, and spring  
and the darkened woods crept like swords marching near  
and witches cackled and wailed outside at night  
and they took my babes away to wetnurse  
for I had duties to run my warrior lord's manse.

I thought, if I cannot be king perhaps I'll be queen  
and I whispered and kissed and scolded and nagged  
and beseeched and shamed my noble lord  
and now, downstairs, he whets knives against stone.

We will have ghosts at table, phantom daggers before  
his eyes.  
He will be king, and finally I will be queen  
and I'll wash and wash till my hands be clean.

## Gacy

In Jack's dream  
we live with John Wayne Gacy.  
Something is wrong, Jack says, but I don't seem to care.

Gacy lives on the first floor,  
brings home construction workers  
who scream, briefly, in false dawn.

Jack says, Mother, we should run,  
but it seems okay to me.  
The killer can't be interested in us.

Women of a certain age aren't his thing,  
and he only uses trick handcuffs.

Trick is, you need the key.

The dog snuffles in the basement dirt  
and Jack says he smells something dead in the bathroom.  
But I keep saying, oh son, it's okay.

It's hard to get a good rental in this town,  
especially when you have cats,  
though the cats keep disappearing,

and Jack must be kidding when he says  
he feels hot breath  
in the night  
on the back of his neck.

**News Release: Corals and  
Humans Share Nerve Genes**

So a brain coral has a mind of its own?  
Star corals dream of extrasolar planets  
or maybe of being divas,  
worshipped by seafans.  
Blue coral depressed,  
yellow cup coral cowardly,  
shrinking from the hammer coral.

Hermaphroditic, yes, but still  
pink leather coral seeks bars longing to meet fox coral  
or a horny staghorn coral.

Perhaps they will do lunch  
at a table coral, drink champagne  
from bubble coral, indulge in lettuce coral and cauliflower  
coral from plate coral,  
a flowerpot coral for centerpiece, under a tree coral.

Dare we try  
the purple mushroom coral?

The Gorgonians won't mind  
atoll.

At the other end of this genetic string,  
My nerves are asea.  
I am stung by cnidae, stinging cells.  
My soft parts die with each season,  
leaving calcium, stony barrier reef.

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Living on the outside leaving my fossil  
a dead reef, ever larger  
stone artifact of nerveless cells  
evolved a million years  
outside.

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

### The Last Weed

Gardeners all over the US celebrate tonight.  
Except for specimens in containment labs,  
the last weed in North America was just exterminated.

Mrs. Hazel Hlupki, of Parma, Ohio, says she battled  
the creeping charlie under a licensed shrub for months.

Mrs. Hlupki gushed gratitude  
when the lawn police arrived  
with blowtorches and radioactive implants.  
Said she had tried P-Roon™,  
but her grandbaby had convulsions  
and she thought there might be a connection.

"I asked her, why'd you wait so long?"  
reports Lt. Baxter Killthrush, responding officer.

Mrs. Hlupki, holds up a bottle of P-Roon™  
"You know, paraquat is cheap, and this brand" –  
it has a Q-Mart price sticker –  
"has such a nice fragrance."

Victory for horticulture!  
No more Canada thistle, chickweed, crabgrass, nettles –  
sorry, listeners, are you cringing?

No more itchy ankles! No unsightly patches of tiny purple  
flowers!

Our nation just one green and gorgeous velvet billiard  
table!



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(Except when August dries it a nice shade of snuff.)

In other news, US Customs arrests a ten-year-old  
for smuggling a dandelion in from France.

Elsewhere, in a Caltech level four containment lab  
a clover specimen spontaneously develops thirteen leaves.

And teeth.

**Stop to Kill the Roses**

He remembered it was his fiancée's birthday,  
so he stopped at the little shop called the Fly Trap  
Where he picked out a lovely swarm of roaches.  
with hymenoptera added as a lagniappe.

She was trying to exterminate the roses near her driveway  
without harming the beautiful colony of slugs  
which she knew fed on blossoms. Oh why  
must we have these drat flowers in order to enjoy  
our bugs?

"Sweetheart," she cried, opening her arms to the  
pretty crawlies,  
"Let me fetch a jar for these. Or shall we just let  
them scurry  
all over the living room? Let me turn off the chandelier  
so the lights won't make them hide and worry."

She shrieked when she went into the pantry to fetch  
crumbs for them.  
A horrid begonia had appeared outside the window  
and, nightmare of nightmares, was about to burst  
into bloom  
acreep with more horror than imagining could endow.

He responded to her cry with sympathetic passion,  
bringing a can of Roundup he kept in his car,  
For he knew her floraphobia, more than rational  
caused her to see in every tulip her bête noir.

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Later, in bed, she unwrapped his other present,  
and released a colony of ants. For what is fornication  
if not attended with the sweet delicious tingle  
of a thousand tiny legs, the thrill of formication?

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

### Vicious Trees

Not the kind that wave menacing branches  
in Walpurgis Night winds,

nor the type that worm their roots  
into your drainage system, flooding your house,

these trees anaesthetize you with their blossom's  
fragrance  
then grow fast enough to wrap twigs around your neck  
so in the morning your wife finds your corpse yoked  
and strangled

or they prick you with paralyzing sap  
and grow thorns (overnight)  
into your legs, arms, trunk, even eyes,

trees that moan, take pity, take pity,  
then turn into dryads and quicken your daughter,  
making her mother to chairs, tables, oak benches,

or they whisper, just whisper,  
how you should leave the forest to them,  
to them and the dark moon and sky,  
how you should die, just die.

## **Inquisition**

To be fifty is to be suspect  
guilty until proven innocent.  
There are only two kinds of prisoners:  
symptomatic  
and asymptomatic

The inquisitors profit richly  
from those they discover guilty  
so the trials are thorough  
and if one is overzealous,  
why, his fellow inquisitors  
can forgive a mistake or two.

The crimes:  
This one drank and smoked  
this one had several husbands  
this one enjoyed rich foods  
this one slept late and drank milk  
this one got up early and drank water  
this one lived by the golf course  
this one must have done something,  
we just don't know what.

As a prisoner  
you lose your last name.  
Even the nameless who never saw you before  
address you like a child or animal.  
But the inquisitors have only last names.  
They are gods,  
gods in white.  
Even the nameless are goddesses.

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So you are stripped and probed,  
raped with calipers,  
made to drink nauseous drinks,  
given enemas and stabbed with poisons  
your blood is drained,  
you stand before the death ray machine.  
They picture your organs  
and tsk tsk about them.  
Your genitals are squeezed and bruised.  
If you object, or ask questions,  
they chuckle.  
And this is but the trial.

If guilty  
(and guilt is presumptive)  
then you are slain by slow poisons  
that first strip your beauty and vigor.  
You are filleted,  
your organs are cut out one by one.  
The death ray is turned on high,  
and you are burned.  
Your hair falls out; you cannot eat.  
The wounds bloom when you get home,  
if you can get home,  
so the inquisitors do not have to look  
at ugly things.

The inquisitors themselves sometimes  
are put to the question,  
but because they know the secret language,  
they are less often found guilty;  
they are allowed anodynes  
for the tortures.

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But they are the gods.  
Their goddesses give you endless forms to write up,  
as long as they have left you  
two fingers to write,  
saying, pay the inquisitor,  
pay the god,  
die poor and in pain.  
They can cure you, for after all,  
who caused this disease?

You are guilty.  
Remember, you are always guilty.

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

### Case 3785

Boyle, my partner for ten years, is driving.  
We got this call, along about two A.M.  
Woman holed up in Garden Avenue Apartments.  
It's not her place, of course; she's hiding.

The old bad one? Yeah, says Boyle. The ebola.  
I can't get used to this. Sure, we're supposed  
to track down the baddies, the killers,  
and, yes, sometimes you have to shoot,

But God! what did people do to deserve this?  
Boyle is going in. It's his turn, and I don't argue.  
He puts on the mask, the hooded disposable suit,  
the gloves. All treated with anti-virals.

Boyle knocks. He has to, to make sure.  
Nobody answers, so he kicks the door in.  
He has his revolver out, although he can't expect  
much resistance. Not in these cases.

I see him go in. The night expands around me  
like a huge black-blooded cell, and I am its DNA.  
Please, I think, for Boyle's sake, let the place  
be empty. Just then, two shots.

And Boyle comes out. He stands far off, and I get out  
the flame thrower. He strips off the suit, using the method  
they taught us, not to get dirty. There's a splash of blood  
on the suit, on the chest. When he emerges from the mask

he's weeping. An old fart like Boyle!  
"There was a baby," he said. "But it was the ebola,



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no question. I did them fast. It saves the suffering, and the cauterizing team will come around in an hour,

right?" "Right, pardner, I say." "I used to have a family," he says. I know all this. His family lives over in Parma. Nice woman, two boys. "How can they make us shoot kids?" he asks.

"It's okay," I say, though it isn't. "The kid, the mother, they'd die anyway." Their insides turned into mucus and rotted blood, black gore spurting from mouth, anus, ears, nose, eyes.

"I know," he says. And he turns around, still struggling with the suit's fasteners. Which is when I notice the hole. His suit is torn, a rent three inches long in the side.

"Step back from the suit," I say, as I always do, as he gets free of it. He drops it on the sidewalk and I flame it. It goes up fast. "Look over there," I say. I draw and shoot before he can think.

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### **Our Christmas Letter**

*(to my dear dear friend whose daughter just graduated summa cum laude from Harvard and whose son is now an Eagle Scout.)*

Dear All,

Well, folks, we've had a year.

Clara's gangrene hasn't cleared up  
Doc says she may just have to live with the smell.  
Our oldest is on dope again, cough medicine, they think.  
He stole the mayor's car to rob the dollar store behind  
the mall  
and we put a second mortgage on my mother's house  
to go his bail.  
I have that bladder infection again.  
I think it's the clap, but you know Clara, always the  
optimist.  
The lawsuit's going pretty good. The lawyer took off for  
the Caymans  
with the deposit and some of our blank checks,  
hasn't called for a month, but  
you know Clara, she says he knows the judge.  
Daughter's pregnant again.  
Two babies before her fourteenth birthday.  
Clara says she's not going to take care of this one,  
not after what happened with the deep fryer.

But the novel's going fine –  
Hope you have a happy.

## **I Have Drunk the Blood**

I have drunk the blood of virgins  
yet been but faintly aroused, by no means sated.

I have drunk the blood of sages and men of science  
and am no wiser for its salt tang.

I have drunk the blood of cows and pigs  
and it tasted no more degrading than more noble fluids.

I have drunk the blood of werewolves  
and stand unchanged, strong, without rage or brutality.

I have drunk the blood of dragons  
and it burned through my body  
leaving my mouth scorched and my pores scalded.

I have drunk the blood of gods –  
Dionysus, Aphrodite, even your Jesus  
and I am still mortal  
and still I thirst.

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### **Proxmire's Complaint**

*In 1975, William Proxmire awarded his very first Golden Fleece Award to the NSF "For squandering \$84,000 to try to find out why people fall in love." He seemed unconcerned with the vast number of murders and suicides that have been motivated by thwarted love.*

They share the bitter medicine.

Will it kill them? No, the fumes go to their brains  
and they change glances with desire instead of hate.

Tristan knows, it was the oxytocin she breathed  
that makes her gaze, hypnotized, at him.  
Isolde knows it must be vasopressin  
that makes his heart pound against her breast.

They know it was the phylter lying Brangwin gave.  
They know their love is false.

Yet the illusion burns so real  
they swear murder and death.  
Tristan vows blood and regicide.  
Isolde presses his sword to her jugular  
before she'll part from him.

They seek the night, the dark.

Yet they know it is illusion,  
they know that mania is not sanity,  
they know they have been poisoned with desire.

Still, they have organs meant to glorify this pain,  
but do not pray to be relieved.

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Kurwenol tells them of knockout mice,  
in whom the hormone receptors are suppressed.

Isolde vows, "I would not cut that poisoned gland,  
from my heart, or from his."

Tristan, madly jealous,  
schemes only to have Isolde, or kill her striving.

If it is disease, it serves its own ends.

The phylter, the drug, the hormone  
the madness has its own design.  
It cares not if the lovers live to bear young.

Only that the madness live from age to age,  
humans but a strategy of chemicals  
that hormones should rule  
above mere human pity.

**The Need of Her Flesh**

he was the one  
to father her children  
his scent clouds of love  
her perfume drew him

as he embraced her, she nibbled his neck  
which tasted fine, so when they joined  
she took a bite, another, another  
helpless with love  
he kept going, kept making  
suicide love  
while she ate his head  
he didn't know  
didn't need to be told  
he was the one  
he would father her children

he tasted so fine  
she kept on eating  
his body kept going  
after his head was gone  
and she began laying

sated only  
after munching his thorax  
his wings and legs  
being too chitinous

to nourish her children  
she needed his flesh

she loved him to death.

**The Hidden**

you have shown me  
rockbed underneath the stream  
the horror underneath

the scream beneath the music  
the bone beneath the flesh  
the blood beneath the skin  
worms under the velvet

the grave beneath white roses  
your death beneath your grace.

## Tangles

Mother, comb my tangles out  
and sooth my aching, unkempt head.  
Bend your feckless crown, my child.  
I will comb you, have no dread.

Mother, do not hurt me so –  
The elf-locks pull and give me pain.  
Bow your head. Give over to me  
till you are lying where I've lain.

Why does that snarl so vex and puzzle?  
This is the knot of birth, my child.  
Well may you moan and cry with it,  
the bane of all things tame and wild.

Ah! What relief, you've got that out,  
but at the nape my scalp pulls tight.  
This is the pain of first love, girl,  
that turns to heavy all that's light.

I thought I could not bear that hurt  
but now you worry dozens worse.  
These are the trials a mother bears  
from the sorrows of each child you'll nurse.

Old woman, stop! You'll pull my hair  
until I'm bald as some old crone!  
Once started, baby, do you think  
life can be lived on joy alone?

Is that the last snarl, Mother? Please,  
have you no care or tenderness?



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Oh? Would you have me finish quick?  
And is short life a thing to bless?

No! But you pull my hair like boys  
pull wings from dragonflies.  
Weakling! Well, let me cut this snarl  
Snip! There, on the carpet, child, it lies.

Scissor-blades gnash. What can you mean?  
Will my life and marriage end in good?  
Not now, but soon enough, you'll chop  
your tresses short for widowhood.

Why must you plait my hair so tight?  
Brush and smooth it free and loose.  
You will not find life free and straight,  
But twisted like a hangman's noose.

Give me the mirror. How pale I look!  
And yet my hair lies smooth and straight.  
The snarls are gone, child, go your way.  
Live your life, and bear your fate.

**Sirens**

Sirens are thirsty tonight.  
In the brine, they lap you like kits,  
coily pretending to be pretty and helpful.  
They suck your tears, your spit, the plasma from  
your blood.  
They reach out tendrils of singing.  
You know you need them –  
how can you say no?

They work so hard for you,  
dragging with the current,  
to pull you under,  
to kiss you to breathless,  
to take your pleasure,  
to slap you against the sand.  
You can lie there. It's easy.  
You will give what they want.  
You will bloat in the tide.

## Men

Maybe men are different.  
I would never have had the eclat  
to visit my exlover at three in the morning.  
not caring how she nervously tried to put you out  
waiting for her new, jealous lover. You:  
trying on her clothes,  
cock jutting against the panty silk  
(how did *that* feel?)  
trying to talk a hole into standing still  
so you could fill it.

And if I wrecked my dear car  
the police would fetch me to the station  
leaking at the eyes and nose  
where I would wait for someone  
to take me and my snotty kleenex away,  
I would mourn for days.  
But you just get mad  
at the old bitch whore car  
involved with phallic obstacles  
(heedless that it was you that drove it into a pole)  
and stone her to shards  
like a Buick adulteress caught  
doing it with telephone poles.

**Tohoku Tsunami**

Taro finds a sea turtle  
belly-up, helpless, tormented by thugs:  
he rights it, cradles, gives it back to the sea.

Another sea turtle, immense,  
as from woodcuts of monsters devouring Kyoto,  
walks out of the tide, finds Taro

dumbstruck, afraid.  
But Fisherman Taro, doused with sea-spittle,  
grows gills.

Come, come with me. The huge turtle  
named Ryujin, sea kami,  
tows him to ocean's root:

a palace refulgent  
with kanju, chrysoberyls that make the tide fall.  
and manju, alexandrine plates that make the tide rise.

The kanju are scales  
the manju also  
are scales.

The palace is a dragon.  
In its deepest coil, Ryujin presents  
Princess Otohime. *My daughter.*

the turtle you returned to the sea.  
Otohime's beauty sponges away Taro's recall  
of fishing and Miyagi, his home.

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Taro, Otohime's consort now,  
lives in a palace. It stirs now and then,  
scales chrysoprase, corundum, coils serpentine.

The dragon  
Ryugoju, seabed, origin, center,  
coils jealous around princess and fisher.

Taro yearns to see his mother.  
Otohime (salt tears) agrees, gives him a box. *Do not open.*  
He forgets to ask why.

The dragon  
ready to sleep years, centuries, aeons,  
releases Taro.

Taro walks inland,  
finds Miyagi's streets  
buzz with cars, light-blaze, women in brief skirts.

He asks  
have you heard of Taro, the fisherman?  
Urashima Taro? Yes.

A legend. Walked into the sea  
to rescue a turtle. Never returned,  
but his footprints on the beach were lined with jewels.

Taro asks of his mother.  
That was long ago, they say.  
She has been dead three centuries.

He sinks down.  
All he knew is the dust of burnt offerings;

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he is wayfarer in an arid, metallic land.

Bereft on a city curb,  
he remembers the box  
It will bring back my world.

He opens:  
an echoing dragon sea-heart opens.  
The dragon's jewel-scales flex. First the kanju,

call the sea back to the dragon  
so the tide sinks,  
and folk wonder has the sea abandoned us?

The dragon flexes again  
and his belly-scale manju ripple  
and the water rushes inland.

All is awash, lights put out,  
temples cars people crushed  
as an anthill engulfed

until finally the vat opens  
where the folk grow electricity,  
irradiating Miyagi

with billion-jellyfish poison  
and, not having sea turtle shells,  
folk tumble, sicken, and die.

The sea washes Taro back  
to the palace-dragon,  
which coils, then yawns.

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The princess closes the box.  
But no man  
can live three hundred years.

Taro ages and fails, blood staining salt water. He dies.  
The princess weeps.  
The dragon, flood-weary, sleeps.

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### **Diving into Uranus**

*for Geoff and Leah*

We pierce the thick crust and descend.

They do not understand.  
Our lights stab their rudiment eyes  
We are fireflies of pain to them.

Their speech is subsonic, beats per minute:  
– do-wah wah wah wah –  
our voices seem bursts of static  
meaningless in their slow methane realm.

We slow down.  
Our computers try to parse the thuds of their tongue.  
We squeak like devils and they flee  
in slow wallows.

We try to detain them:  
a mistake.  
In their dense medium, they are juggernauts  
momentum as dark as their stone sky.  
We flit in and out  
returning after years  
to them just instants.

They fend us off, heavy as boulders,  
as asteroids.

They are sapient, yes,  
in their slow considered way.  
They know their world, its chemistry, its weapons.  
We flash through like spirits.



MARY TURZILLO

We are their demons  
flitting in and out, our brightness their agony.  
They will exorcise us.

**Gift from Above**

The alien  
in the open portal  
looks different to each human in the crowd,  
each human  
watching on media:  
to some, a kind green elf  
to others, a gray slug with fangs.

He (is it he?  
some see a lovely girl)  
extends a hand  
(is it a hand?)  
and a gift  
a coronet, a crown  
beautiful  
so lovely the watchers  
fall weeping to their knees.

Some reach  
for the crown.  
It multiplies: a crown for each.  
Each crown  
gives gifts of knowledge,  
craft, skill, empathy,  
above all joy.  
But some refuse the gift  
no thanks  
they feel unease  
they watch for signs of sickness  
in those who accepted.

MARY TURZILLO

They think of Trojan horses  
of smallpox blankets  
of men in black sedans offering candy.

The alien smiles  
(or seems to smile)  
and retreats to its ship.

The portal  
is closing.

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

### The Bus

She was dreaming, dreaming of a forest,  
that girl who dyed her hair with streaks of purple,  
a girl whose gaze wandered upward, skyward  
as she waited for the tardy uptown bus  
her thoughts airy, her hair tossed and windblown  
thinking the traffic noises harsh and jagged.

Dreaming too, of mountain peaks all jagged  
beyond her fantasy of fairy forest  
where petals of wildflowers floated windblown  
in red and violet, in cerise and sometime purple  
If she could catch some fairy bus  
that took a route not earthbound, only skyward!

And as she sent dream travels skyward  
a guy leered, hacksaw-lean and jagged  
"Hey, come on, bitch, give us a buss."  
He and three thugs from Forest  
Fenns, or someplace where purple  
bruises are a mark of love, and jagged

broken teeth are what girls win when jagged  
love or what they call love falls from skyward.  
He reached out and tugged a purple  
streak she'd dyed for fun. His windblown  
jeer burned like an angry bone-charred forest.  
She thought, "Please, where the hell's my bus?"

And something came. It wasn't what you'd call a bus  
It was a star-traveled speck of windblown  
life from somewhere in Andromeda. The forest  
of the stars brought it from skyward

MARY TURZILLO

Its hull was smooth, but where it landed, jagged  
concrete chunks were torn. It spouted flames of purple.

The man brought by that ship – blue? purple?  
– he told the four guys, "Come on, here's your bus."  
They didn't move, but with a jagged  
blade he herded them like windblown  
seed. Then looked at her. Just looked. And skyward  
he and his ship rose, back to a foreign forest.

Her dreams were of that forest; it was alien and purple.  
She cast her vision skyward, waiting for some midnight  
bus.

Her hair was windblown, and her thoughts were jagged.

**The Good News**

So, this Good News you have for me:  
you say Jesus got downloaded  
into a human body (pinkish gray, in my Bible)  
so he could get crucified  
and make up for the fact that my great  
great great great great –  
(oh forget it, let's just put an n subscript on *great*)  
– grandmother and maybe grandfather too  
couldn't keep their hands out of the apple barrel.

So, suppose there are other guys out there,  
intelligent critters,  
people with language and morals and maybe a taste  
for Calvados  
out there, out - on, say, 51 Pegasi f –  
what about them? Are you going to take your Good News  
to them?  
Why aren't you supporting the space program?

Or maybe you figure Jesus  
got downloaded into a green tentacle body  
and they tortured him there, too  
picture a cross with eight or ten crossbars,  
and he died, showing a lot of compassion  
for people who can't seem to honor  
a simple (if nonsensical) rule.

I mean, it's not like in Eden he forbid them to poison  
babies  
or beat small animals to death  
or even cheat at poker or do insider trading,  
so I guess he had to come up with a simple rule,

MARY TURZILLO

like "eat any of the gaseous bubble spiky balls  
but not that ovoid with the eyestalks and seeds  
of chrysoberyl,"  
because they didn't have apples.

But anyway, suppose they failed that simple test –  
sort of a moral Turing test –  
and ate that funny fruit.  
He had to do it all over again, poor Jesus.  
What? Okay, I'm not supposed to worry about aliens.  
I get it. But just say we found them.

If they weren't saved –  
oh, you're saying they didn't fail the test?  
Or are you saying they never got the test,  
God didn't care about their morals?  
They would be beasts, then, and it would be okay  
to kill them because they don't have souls.

Now let's talk about Buddha here.  
Suppose Buddha got himself downloaded all over  
the universe –  
I'm sorry, did you have another appointment?  
Can't you stay? I did have a few more questions.  
Would you care for some apple strudel?

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

### Café

Yeah, Brundlefly lived. I guess you heard.  
Survived the shotgun blast – or was it drillpress  
crushing?

He opened a coffee shop on Coventry:  
The Bug-Eyed Monster Café, right next to Flytrap Gifts.  
Says he's not bitter, though the coffee sometimes is.  
He loves those stickybuns and danish,  
and patrons claim they see flyspecks in the icing.  
Yet the place buzzes.

It's his eyes that really draw people,  
unveil a soul that's been through changes.  
He's observant, too. Read you like a book, they say,  
Those compound facets focused on you.  
And, like a good barkeep, he listens well.

He sees a thousand sides to any problem.  
His advice? If your husband strays, "Forgive him.  
You'll draw more flies with honey than with vinegar."  
Children ungrateful? "Throw the maggots out."  
Wish you were in New York or Paris?  
"Take Continental or United, man, don't fool with  
that Telepod."  
If you're a Case Tech scientist whose experiment  
goes awry,  
"Maybe they'll get Vincent Price or Jeff Goldblum  
To play you in the movie, like they did with me."

Sometimes, late at night, he pours himself a mug of joe,  
stirs in thirty packets of sugar, sticks his proboscis in,  
sucks in deep. Ruminates.  
You say, "She never accepted how you'd changed.



MARY TURZILLO

Tried to shoot you dead, or maybe mash you. Yet  
you forgive?"

He says, "She just thought to put me out of my misery."

"And what's she up to now?" you ask.

"Oh, she bought a Beetle, had an affair with Spiderman.  
You know, she never really got me out of her hair.  
She hangs around here sometimes. Like a moth to flame.  
I think I drove her just a little bugs."

The thousand eyes fill with tears. He knows she's never  
coming back.

Quietly, he schemes: He'll find a hole in her screen door.  
Dreams that, as in the poem,  
she'll hear a fly buzz when she dies.

## Digging up Galileo

Forensic physician Watson  
and historian Galluci  
want to dig up Galileo.

They want to go to Florence,  
open his crypt in San Croce Basilica,  
disturb the hero-heretic's ghost.

They want to interrogate his dead eyeballs,  
to inquisition his DNA. They question  
why he said Saturn had ears.

Saturn has *rings*, they say, *rings*!  
How could you think *ears*?  
It must be – well they have their theories.

Unilateral myopia maybe.  
Inflamed middle eye. Or, get this:  
creeping angle closure glaucoma.

Poor Galileo! Where the hell were they  
when he was squinting at blurred images?  
Or, as for that, when the Inquisitors shut him up?

And, get this: they need the Vatican's fiat  
to bless their resurrectionist scheme.  
Ah, Galileo! Is it poetic injustice

the Church has charge of your dead eyes?  
Or will you have the last laugh  
knowing the Pope might say no?

**Tatiana**

Tatiana understands human words.  
While she grooms her whiskers of blood  
she listens intently  
if imperfectly  
to the gossiping keepers  
how an old mother tiger was found dead and dissected  
in a zoo in China  
her cubs stillborn and in a freezer,  
how another sister ripped out the bowels of a keeper  
formerly beloved  
who said the wrong thing, moved too fast,  
moved too slow.  
How a tiger, little older than a cub,  
was found fettered by a bicycle chain  
along route 18  
shot five times in the head.  
Tatiana understands.

Tatiana understands gravity;  
she's been testing it her whole life.  
She's heard them talking  
of a sister who leapt up on the back of an elephant  
attacked a cameraman  
(she understands cameras)  
and wondered, what happened?  
what happened?  
Did the sister eat the cameraman?  
Was his liver fat and tender?  
She measures the breadth of the moat.  
She measures the height of the walls.  
She is bored.  
She understands.

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

Tatiana understands boys;  
there are many of them,  
fat meat, slack in the face,  
chattering, playing, throwing her pinecones,  
throwing the little red light from their fingers.  
Tatiana has seen a thousand boys  
though Tatiana's limited words  
do not give her means to measure thousands.  
Only that there are many  
and that they are fat and careless.

Tatiana understands space, and air,  
and Tatiana springs high, exploding, an arc of flight,  
delighting in release of her hams.  
And once over the wall, she springs again.  
because that is what Tatiana was born to do.  
She springs at the boys and they fight back,  
which is what boys were meant to do.  
And the one beats her face with a rock,  
so she turns and trots off,  
seeking the one she saw before  
the one with the sharp voice.

Tatiana understands blood and softness and slow  
ineffectual prey.  
She understands scent and tracking,  
and she has long eyes and huge hearing.  
And she knows what he wore, how he smelled,  
and there, there he is.  
He goes down,  
light as a calf, victim of gravity  
of which she is adept.  
The boy screams like an monkey

MARY TURZILLO

and Tatiana rips, her jaws impassioned,  
her soul inflamed.

Tatiana does not understand guns;  
Her mother might have explained, but didn't.  
Tatiana only understands  
the hard jolt, the bee-sting,  
the slow dimming of light,  
draining, darkening,  
until she begins at last  
to understand.

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

### Davey

The crackle of the Van de Graaff,  
DNA from the Dunkleosteus.  
A three year old slipping under the velvet rope.

Davey seemed okay until the first full moon  
but it was oh so lucky the swimming pool was full.

And we soon learned the pool  
must become a salt-water pool.

He grew. He consumed  
pounds of flesh, shark preferred.

We kept him home from school  
during later full moons.

It wasn't his body,  
shaped by the moonlight like a giant guppy  
but big as a school bus.  
It wasn't his gills, pumping water like bellows.  
It was his double-hinged jaws, the razor plates  
he grew on those nights instead of teeth.

On those nights,  
Davey loved water, snapped those big hinged jaws,  
jaws like the blades of a double guillotine.  
We took him once to the ocean.  
He gamboled and splashed, breached the water  
like a drunken dolphin.  
When it was time to come home, we were afraid.  
Really afraid. Not that he would snap at us  
with that sheering maw.  
But that he would stay in the sea

MARY TURZILLO

that he would swim far out  
and find himself afloat, a suddenly human boy,  
too distant from land.

What will happen when he is a teen? we asked  
Who will he marry?  
Will his children be placoderms, too?  
Will they snap wire-cutter jaws on their mother's breast?

Perhaps even the waning moon will not make them  
human.

We didn't expect the field trip.  
The teacher took his class back to the museum,  
to where his DNA first was corrupted.

He stood transfixed  
before the fossil that had conferred his DNA.  
"It's just bones," he whispered.  
Then, "What does this mean, *extinct?*"

And the teacher told him,  
though I think he already knew.  
At home, he retired to the bathtub,  
lay watching the moon through the window.

And we found, next morning, only a husk,  
the remnants, armored bones, scissor jaws,  
as if eaten by time.

All that was left of Davey,  
after the dawn, and the waning.

## Singing the Blues

In her red swimsuit and elegant gold-horned hat  
she went looking for pieces of him –  
one in the British Museum, another in a dry gulch that  
    feeds old Nile,  
another atop – well, Seth had a very sharp knife  
and a real grudge.

Gory, that search; she took an ice chest for forays ashore,  
and a fridge that ran off the cigarette lighter in her skiff.  
Some of the pieces were pretty far gone  
and then she had to catch the catfish that ate the best part  
    of him,  
and, squeamish though she was, cut it open  
before digestion went too far.

But it had. However, gold can take many shapes  
and a gold dildo can serve in times of need.

This is what comes of family closeness, she thought,  
as she assembled the pieces ,  
and of trusting a clever sailor with a coffin and blade.  
But she had a trick up her sleeve,  
a song so sweet and horny  
it made every dick on the Nile rise  
including Osiris himself.  
And, inspired by her own magic's potency,  
she rode that gold rudder until she turned into a mother,  
mother to us all, but especially to her son-nephew.

Now necrophilic incest is a crime, but only if you're  
    caught  
and only if the corpse is really dead.



MARY TURZILLO

Seth was annoyed; he always is.  
And ladies: don't try this at home:  
Isis only sings when she's really wet.

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

### **Saint Theresa and the Fuck-Me Shoes**

Here's to the ladies who could only walk a few steps  
because they wore fuck-me shoes  
or bound their feet into scented rotten slugs  
to arouse their men with the smell and doll toes,

to the women who had a rib removed  
so they could keep their 26 inch waists  
and who packed an enema when they went visiting  
so they could void themselves thin before lacing their  
corsets,

who wear scarves for propriety  
to hide their hair, their face, their whole body,  
even if they die of the heat,  
hiding even after marriage from their husbands,

who painted themselves with lead  
of put belladonna in their eyes,  
who smoke nicotine or eat speed  
so they can look thin and hate their food,

to the women who don't notice that a man's beauty  
and a woman's are cut of the same cloth,  
except perhaps the woman is more gracile  
and feline and concentrates strength into intensity.

Here's to the women burned on funeral pyres  
or Saint Theresa sacrificed to her own virtue  
because it was fuck that guy or die  
and she decided to die.

MARY TURZILLO

Here's to the needle that threads my own ears  
so I can wear silver and turquoise,  
and here's to the sex-mutilated woman  
whose femininity is measured by relinquishing what  
nature gave,

and here's to the boy babies circumcised at birth.  
Maybe it's sufficient revenge,  
except that it's the women who do and teach this to girls.  
Only when mitochondria die will this madness end.

**What Yeats Left Out**

She should not have walked by the river  
should have run when He came for her,  
trammeling, treading her, flying her,  
soaring with her into clouds  
blinding white and frightening as His wings

The air is cold  
the wings inexorable and huge  
the swan's member pure divinity  
and the queen shrieks:  
though no virgin  
she wishes no bestial child  
nor godly either,  
but He penetrates,  
His pleasure to take her flesh  
and fly

and coming, pleasure fulfilled,  
dropping her without thought.  
She screams, falls,  
crashes against boulders.

The river laps her  
but she breathes.  
She cannot move  
and so weeps and shrieks.  
A day and night she lies in the rock shallows  
until a ranger finds her  
and two eggs  
radiant  
between her nerveless legs.

MARY TURZILLO

Tyndareus suspects her:  
even after the river washes  
the stink of rut from her groin.  
He doubts her story,  
thinks she could move if she liked.

She cannot move,  
spine broken,  
only her face alive,  
but she wants those eggs.

She lies and weeps,  
makes complaints, then demands,  
and because she is queen to Tyndareus the Spartan  
her women bring the eggs.

Dreaming, she warms them with numb flesh.  
Timely,  
the shells crack and part  
and Tyndareus is half-pleased  
at the two who resemble him  
and only for a moment questions  
the strange boy from the second egg  
and the glamour  
of the girl child.

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

### Persephone in Autumn

Bare willow branches drip with icy rain.  
She sees a moonstone bowl of twilight:  
dark twigs splinters in clouded crystal,  
the world prised in a pendant rain drop.

Mother warned her not to taste strange fruit  
but she's grown used to her dyspeptic lord.  
Who else would she marry, daughter of a goddess?  
Love? Her heart's more virgin than her flesh.

Half obsessed by summer, damp and drowsing half  
her year,  
Persephone cares little for human grievances  
of infertility, of day-lilies withering, of pears rotting.  
Mother-of-pearl skies are her second home.

She wonders about her father – was it Zeus?  
Or a mortal murdered by the great god out of jealousy?  
Maybe some cold soul she passes every evening  
walking the banks, poisoned by Styx waters.

And what of Dionysus, the son she gave to Zeus?  
As in revenge, Hades pursued some mint-breathed  
nymph,  
but had no joy of her, perhaps because he owns  
only a few cattle overground, and an island prison camp.

She phones her mother sometimes, hearing desperation  
in the older woman's voice. Warning, warning,  
maybe this time he'll cancel your return.  
Maybe this time winter is forever.

MARY TURZILLO

Never give me grandchildren – and now  
Persephone feels that tug of the moon less and less  
so maybe it's too late for babies.  
Hades loves her beauty but merely wants to own it.

Really, did she expect the father of Death  
to be potent and fertile? He would quicken her  
with jagged bone bits, congealed blood, steel.  
No, better to leave it. Her heart's still adolescent.

She grows old without growing up.  
She watches the clouds, remembers sunburn weather,  
pulls her anorak hood up and thinks,  
he can't live forever. She could hasten that.

**Iphigenia in Shaker Heights**

I'm the pretty sister, Dad says,  
so I get to go out and model my new suit  
for the entire Aegean navy. For morale, Dad says.

Electra's the smart one,  
Orry says she needs to up her Paxil  
or else get out more, stop obsessing about Can This  
Marriage Be Saved?

Orry's just a guy, what would he understand?  
He says I look hot in my Spandex thong.

Not what I need to hear  
from my own brother, thanks anyway.

Daddy's annoyed the winds are down,  
his yacht becalmed.

He's annoyed over Helen, too. Promised to defend  
Uncle Menny's honor when she ran away.  
Paris? Come on: he's no stud. He's a pretty boy in  
gilt armor.

And Mom? She's already got the wandering eye  
for my own uncle, for heaven's sake.  
If Dad goes away again –

Sometimes these business trips last for years.  
Sometimes the fleet doesn't make it back.  
Sometimes Dad brings home a woman he claims can  
forecast trends.



MARY TURZILLO

Don't think I'm so innocent.  
Orry looks thunder when I mention Aegeus.  
He counts the towels and the kitchen knives.

Daddy kisses me, hands me onto the skiff,  
going home to explain it all to Mom, he says.  
The sea is calm, nothing can happen to me out here  
as they row toward Sea Serpent Rock.

**Bearded Kaliópe**

*with Geoffrey Landis*

Bearded Kaliópe, memory's progeny  
graveyard of thought with pale tombstones of words  
frail epitaphs, frosted-over cenotaphs,  
weary with rumor, all discarded in the wake  
of epiphany surging forth like bats in the twilight  
like pallid ghost-birds  
or moths, gravid with new understanding

Androgynous muse, mother of Orpheus, father-killer,  
healer of fretted ambition, son of logic's dawn,  
the winds of words wrapped in the music of melancholy,  
listen to us, lady-sir of epitaphs,  
bend to our plea, angel of soft cursings,  
as the river of madness meets the springs of the Lethe  
open our mouths, lend us words to silence the foolish,  
give us names to betray our entreaters. Let the  
pale bats of epiphany free to fly through the night's  
fog, and the tombstones of memory fall;  
fling ignominy on those who oppose us, your devotees.  
Why, after all we have uttered, o angel of  
beautiful lies, o muse and lover and father of  
all our words, why do you desert us  
when we have most need of defiled demigods  
of the ancient gibbering chaos? Let fly your most vile,  
your beloved entrapments of ghost reason.

Let us just once, before we taste of your spring  
of Lethe, feel the torrent of words pour uncensored  
like pallid ghost birds, upward, and upward, and upward  
into the dark.

## **Mucusoids**

We are  
mucusoids from Fomalhaut,  
advanced divine technology –  
whole memories contained in each cell.  
We split up, each half containing  
the personality of the whole, individuality retaining.  
You can splash us, sop us, soak us up.  
We go our way, unkillable, collecting  
the wisdom of the whole Milky Way  
(or, as we say,  
Snotty Way).  
At world's end, our legends say,  
mucusoids converge  
in the center of the galaxy  
to make one Giant Mucusoid,  
complex immortal soup,  
a person, not a group,  
knowing all that any mucusoid ever knew.  
You cannot destroy it/us,  
immortal pus.  
Bend us, spindle, mutilate, or fold,  
we split, re-merge; we keep our cellular mind,  
preserving all our kind.  
For God created us  
when he had a bad cold.

**Danse Macabre**

"The sudden movement of tectonic plates that triggered the February 27th quake in central Chile shifted immense masses of rock a few meters closer to Earth's core, tilting the planet's axis a few centimeters and imperceptibly shortening the day." –*Science News, March 3, 2010*

Earth, you hitched up your skirt,  
and shaking your hot flashy flesh  
triggered those big temblor twitchings.

First number, a Haitian death-mereng:  
two hundred thousand trampled  
underneath your bloody heels.

But that didn't do it;  
it took the second piece, that *cueca chilata*,  
a dance like the rhumba,  
mimicking roosters and hens  
hot to do bedroom flamencos,

to send your rotation arsy-turvy  
tip you flat off your axis –  
what were you drinking, *señora*?  
That pisco sour a bit too fuerte?

Or that empanada,  
served up on the Nazca plate,  
maybe too picante:  
made your gut rumble like planets colliding?

Ah, Earth, you tectonic hooper:  
you chose Chile

MARY TURZILLO

not just for its eponymous pepper,  
but for its slogan:

*Por la razón o la fuerza.*

By reason or by force.

You made our day a beat shorter.  
So impatient, my hot-blooded planet!  
You just can't wait the full 24 hours:  
for your end-of-day party.

Where next will you dance?

**Rapture**

A Corpus first  
tears free of the spikes,  
crawls down the wall  
bleeding the floor with red acid.

He heads for the street, hungry for souls,  
for love. Others, aroused, answer,  
come alive, robes now seething  
hearts each an inferno.

The Sacred Heart of Parma  
steps antaeon down from lily niche,  
hair beard and robes heavy roiling  
grows man-skin, man-blood.

And the colossus, taller and tallest,  
the Cristo Redentor  
massif, his step breaking pavement,  
mind intent, heart nuclear.

They tread the streets  
eyes lasering all that is holy  
hungry for righteousness  
eating the prophets and santos first

Then famished for innocence  
they find the children  
cowering in playgrounds  
hiding among cherry trees.

The Christs' eyes  
retching rays

MARY TURZILLO

burn the chosen  
to blackberry sweets

And the young are gone up.  
Now older gods rise,  
Krishna and Jove's sons tumbled from temples  
stretching gold skins,

searching out mothers,  
finding more children,  
sating godly desire,  
saving those blameless by burning.

Then he awakes  
the dark angel antimatter birthed,  
Satan the antagonist  
vomited from each of his icons.

They troll highways,  
both powers, trying their strength  
each hunting each, burning, collecting  
crushing the earth kin

till they meet: Christ and Enemy  
engage, wrestle, skin burning skin  
light, heat, blasting puissance,  
interpenetrating godhead to godhead.

And near annihilate,  
passion turned potency,  
demon loving savior,  
mating, and maybe

## LOVERS AND KILLERS

the devil is a woman,  
or perhaps not, androgyne,  
careless now of mere us,  
but exploding ending destroying:

Love hot for love,  
hot for its adverse,  
a world  
gone in orgasm.



### **The Shrine at Fushimi Inari**

I am delighted, Inari-Kitsune,  
at the path up the mountain,  
ten thousand gates and your lovely wicked smile,  
the gay teeth of your foxes,  
bowls of inari sushi and bland broth,  
scent of lavender and forest mold,  
and the cats, the cats of your shrines.

I am enchanted, Inari-Kitsune,  
by the intricate ways and the kanji I don't understand,  
by the lanterns that burn with no light I can see,  
by the souls in the statues and rocks,  
the red dresses worn by stones,  
and the shy cats, the beggar cats, the white cat asleep.

I am bewildered, Inari-Kitsune,  
by splitting of paths and staircases,  
by sundown and sculptures of foxes,  
stone foxes who will not eat us,  
we are assured, sculptures of you as a fox,  
goddess of harvest and not of blood,  
though the red cloth spills down your breast.

I am lost, Inari-Kitsune.  
How shall I return to Kyoto  
when your way is forked and dark,  
through ten thousand gates,  
through the souls of the gods and the dead  
holding out hands in the darkness?  
And you, fox goddess, appear  
as cats, silent cats, mocking cats.

## Author Note

Mary A. Turzillo's novel *An Old-Fashioned Martian Girl* and Nebula-Award-winning novelette "Mars Is no Place for Children" are recommended reading on the International Space Station. She has been nominated for the Rhysling, the British Science Fiction Association Award ("Eat or Be Eaten, a Love Story"), and the Pushcart Prize (*Your Cat & Other Space Aliens*, vanZeno). She has recent and forthcoming work in *Asimov's SF*, *Paper Crow*, *Analog*, *New Myths*, *Strange Horizons*, *Bull Spec*, *Magazine of Speculative Poetry*, *Ladies of Trade Town*, and *Stone Telling*, plus an authorized Philip José Farmer sequel story, "The Beast Erect," in *The Worlds of Philip José Farmer 2*, Meteor Press, 2011.

She has been a member of an amateur Shakespeare company, both as an actress and a costumer, and has conducted theater tours in the US, Canada, and England. She now lives in Ohio with her scientist/science fiction writer husband, Dr. Geoffrey A. Landis and enjoys hiking, travel, true crime about serial killers, and visits to beautiful Lake View Cemetery.