



JACLR

*Journal of Artistic
Creation & Literary
Research*

JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research is a bi-annual, peer-reviewed, full-text, and open-access Graduate Student Journal of the Universidad Complutense Madrid that publishes interdisciplinary research on literary studies, critical theory, applied linguistics and semiotics, and educational issues. The journal also publishes original contributions in artistic creation in order to promote these works.

Volume 3 Issue 1 (July 2015)

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"Convergence"**

1ST PRIZE "VIRGINIA WOOLF" FOR SHORT NARRATIVE

Recommended Citation

Sanz Jiménez, Miguel. "Convergence." *JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* 3.1 (2015)

<<https://www.ucm.es/siim/journal-of-artistic-creation-and-literary-research>>

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Convergence

"When life attains a crisis, man's focus narrows... The world becomes a stage of immediate concern, swept free of illusion." Lou Ford, *The Killer Inside Me*.

The lights dimmed and faded out. The room remained pitch black for a few minutes. A bright beam came out from the back wall and a countdown of black and white numbers took place in the silver screen.

The evening screening was crowded with people. They had come from all over the county to The New Strand. It wasn't a big movie theater, in fact it had just one screen, unlike the new ones that were being built in the City. "City people are crazy." That's what the locals used to say, and Ethan Anderson needed to mingle with them, for now.

He did want to see that movie. He'd heard good reviews about it on the radio, The New Strand was close enough and he needed something for the time gap he had, otherwise he'd go nuts. He parked his truck right across the street, next to Fred's Feed and Supply. Ethan waited in line till it was his turn to buy his ticket, and then again at the concession stand. He made sure the locals spotted him, though he didn't feel like having some casual conversation with those assholes. He asked for some popcorn with butter on top.

"Anythin' else, sir?" said the young, nearly childish girl at the concession stand.

"No."

"\$.75, please."

Ethan gave her a dollar bill and didn't stop to get his change or to listen to the girl tell him "Enjoy the show." The movie was about to start and he didn't want to miss it. It was in black and white, just like he thought it should be. Enough of that Technicolor bullshit.

He laughed out hard and loud when the girl who seemed to be the main character was killed on screen. He couldn't help it. He stopped for a second, coughed out some popcorn and continued laughing. He wondered if the killer from the movie also suffered from "the sickness". The first time he had it, he was just a kid. His dad soon realized what was happening to Ethan and tried to nip it in the bud, but it didn't do him any good. "The sickness" returned periodically to take control of Ethan, and every time it got harder and harder to hide it from the rest of the community, to hide what he did to other people. He thought he'd left it behind when he moved from his hometown in Texas to Moline, by the Mississippi River. Yet he hadn't. It didn't take too long for his wife to see him suffering from it and, eventually, it was his daughter's turn to witness the unbearable.

The detective from the movie was falling down the stairs, waving his arms in despair. Ethan wondered if he could do the same thing to those chasing him out there. It was too soon for that, the two corpses wouldn't be found until next morning. He still needed to take care of a couple things.

The audience seemed to be impressed by the movie's ending. Some people didn't dare to admit they had actually enjoyed it. Ethan walked out of the theater, lit a cigarette and stood aside. It was beginning to rain and he just looked up instead of talking to the people coming out of the movie theater. He crossed the road, got in his truck, lit another cigarette and started the engine.

It wasn't a long drive from The New Strand back to Atalissa. The drizzle had turned into a heavy curtain of rain and Ethan was in no particular hurry. He decided not to rush and enjoyed the view —isolated farms surrounded by cornfields. All that water was good for the crops and for the Mississippi, anyway.

The old man behind the counter was reading yesterday's paper when Ethan walked in the motel. He'd only been in the rain for a short time, but he was already drenched.

"Jeez! It's pouring out there!" the old man said.

Ethan didn't answer. He stared at the old man and waited.

"How can I help you, sir?" asked the old man, eventually.

"I'm sure you have a key for me."

"And what's your name, sir?"

"Mr. Anderson."

"Mr. Anderson, uh? Let me see." The old man bent down behind the counter and rummaged through his papers and filth. "Oh, yeah, Mr. Anderson. A young lady checked in earlier. I guess she was Mrs. Anderson, uh? Said she was supposed to meet someone. Here is your key."

Mr. Anderson picked up the key and walked out. As he got out to the rain and the parking lot, the old man grinned and yelled "Have fun!"

Ethan stopped by his car and looked down at the key in his hand. Its keychain said "Room 237." He picked up the Sharps rifle from the back of his truck and checked it was fully loaded. He smiled as he walked toward the stairs up to the second floor of the motel. He could feel "the sickness" taking over him. Everything was playing out exactly as he'd planned. Melissa had checked in earlier, as he'd expected. She'd probably left the jewelry store in a hurry, and now she'd be worried sick, waiting for her lover to run away. Poor her, she didn't know a damn thing.

Room 237. He hammered the Sharps rifle and knocked on the door. There was no answer. He opened it carefully and stepped in.

"Honey, I'm home!" Ethan called out, trying hard not to burst out laughing.

The lights were out and the room reminded him of The New Strand a few hours ago. It was pitch black. He stopped for a second. He could hear the shower running. Perhaps it

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was better that way. He went across the room, turned right and kicked the bathroom door open. He aimed at the shower and fired the Sharps rifle until it was empty.

The shower kept running.

He heard a gun being hammered. Ethan Anderson just had enough time to turn around and see Melissa, drenched, aiming a handgun at his face. She only fired once.

The next morning, *The Quad-City Times* front page read like this:
"Family Dead in Jewelry Heist
Ethan Anderson, esteemed member of our community and owner of a jewelry store downtown, apparently decided to rob his business for reasons unknown. The bodies of his wife and daughter were found at the family's house, while he seems to have committed suicide in a motel room in Atalissa, where he was found with the money and jewelry he stole. It's a hard time for Moline's community..."

Bioprofile of the author: Filólogo y traductor, cursó Estudios Ingleses en la Universidad Complutense de Madrid y siguió profundizando en el estudio de la literatura contemporánea en Estados Unidos, donde fue profesor de idiomas.

Su carrera literaria se centra en el relato breve, género que le animó a escribir a una temprana edad. También ha escrito guiones para cine y cómics (por ejemplo, la tira *Mr. Pinchos*) y colabora con reseñas de películas, cómics y series de televisión en las páginas web *Reino de series*, *Nuestros cómics* y *Nerd Alert*. Desde 2008 mantiene su propia bitácora, *What's the Rumpus?*

Escribe en español y en inglés, y en sus relatos cultiva el género negro, el terror y la ciencia ficción, entre otros. Algunas de sus obras más representativas son: «Proyecto Alfa» (2008), «Los tipos duros no existen» (2009), «La condesa» (2012) y «Convergence» (2015).

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