

Tony Trigilio

Practicing for the End

My first journey
out of body:
paralyzed in bed

watching my grand-
mother step into
a carriage that

whisked her from
this world, beyond
the ghosts wandering

upstairs in her
creaky, pale yellow
house. After that,

I practiced until
I could make
myself leave at

a moment's notice.
Frozen in bed
again, I stretched

ghostly arms above
my head, pushed
away—*flash*—flying

through ice-cold
black air until,
swarmed by purple

dots, agitated star-
clusters, I pulled
myself back to

bed, willed it
through fear, brute
force. I woke

shivering. Five years
later, floating away—
a late-afternoon

nap—into the
kitchen where I
found my roommate

at the table,
hunched over scattered
notes, a case

study, the final
project for his
marketing class. For

once, the twilight
felt alive, something
continuing—the power

and wonder and
panic in that.
This was rehearsal.

When it happened,
I'd be ready.
That summer, another

nap, my sleeping
body grew smaller
as I ascended,

gaseous mist, toward
the ceiling. Unconscious
and fetal beneath

me, curled in
a garish burgundy
tracksuit, my precious

body no longer
mine. Closed eyes.
Stomach rising, falling.

Waving me away.
Didn't need me
to come back.

Episode 708: January 22, 2019

from Book 4, The Complete Dark Shadows (of My Childhood)

“We don’t get to choose what or whom we love,” Maggie Nelson writes in *Bluets*, but we can choose *how* we love whom we love—a lesson lost on the necromantic adults of Collinwood, raising children in a nest of ghosts and vampires: Quentin coerces Little Jamison to enter the bedroom of the family matriarch, Edith Collins, so the young boy can see her fresh corpse in its casket (watching the 3/12/1969 episode with my mother, just a few months shy of my third birthday, I really didn’t need to witness an adult bullying the show’s youngest child into a solitary encounter with a dead body); “I’m just afraid that Great-grandmother will sit up and start to get out of her coffin,” Little Jamison says, which made perfect sense to me as a child, convinced that every casket contained a potential haunting, a fear I learned from *Dark Shadows* but repressed until I was 15, when I observed an undertaker lowering the head bolster of my grandmother’s coffin before closing the lid: standing among my fellow pallbearers, I imagined her at nightfall, deep underground, reaching to scratch her way out of the box, unaware she was an unfettered ghost who could rise like vapor—and I shuddered, prompting my brother Carmen to put his arm around me, as if I were simply grieving.

Episode 732: November 10, 2019

from Book 4, The Complete Dark Shadows (of My Childhood)

Their furniture draped in celery-blue tarp, Laura takes a clumsy stride in her royal-blue taffeta gown while Quentin writhes in a chair

next to a burning cerulean candle in the cottage they once used for extramarital trysts; later, Rachel, worried about the trauma that awaits

Jamison and Nora at Worthington Hall, flutters around the Great House wearing a pastel-green servant's dress underneath her Mondrian lemon and

lime wedge-pattern apron with forest-green bow tie and matching hair ribbon, while the witch Angelique waits for her cue offstage in a black

and blood-red evening gown with cornflower-blue sleeve cuffs and vest, green eyes popped wide, Manson-girl-style, preparing to resurrect Quentin

from the dead once again—this time on the 18th anniversary of my mother's death—and before the credits roll, Laura reappears, Jamison and Nora's

mother swaying like a drunk in front of the crackling Great House drawing room fireplace in a cheap, admiral-blue velvet dress with black sheer lace collar.

Episode 746: March 21, 2020

from Book 4, The Complete Dark Shadows (of My Childhood)

The governor of Illinois locks down the state two days after the Spring Solstice—we're permitted to leave our homes only for exercise and essential business like groceries and pharmacy prescriptions—a necessary defense against the plague but a tripwire for my OCD, which once required me to perform 40 vigilant steps before I could leave my apartment (rituals that included, among others, checking to confirm the oven burners and faucets were off, then rechecking to verify they hadn't turned themselves back on after I'd originally examined them, and petting the cats on the head to ensure they wouldn't die while I was gone), a condition magnified by COVID-19 anxiety, each day more unpredictable than the next as more cases are diagnosed, and no rational way to forecast how long this will last or whether the tissue-thin social fabric can survive the stress, amplifying my worry the virus will be, at worst, the extinction event I've always feared, or at best, a slaughter; but after adding up the 24 steps required to leave my new apartment—an embarrassing number, smaller only because my former home was twice the size of this one—I'm soothed by seven ivory candles and four cerulean in the Old House drawing room; 21 rivets visible on the clanging metal door with barred window that leads to Barnabas's casket in the Old House basement, the coffin flanked by four oxblood candles and a fifth burning in the antechamber where Jenny weeps, relieved that the body in the casket was not Quentin but Barnabas (of course, she opened it, no one in the morbid Collins family brood can resist lifting coffin lids to see what's inside); and 12 cerulean candles in Jenny's self-isolating lockdown room on the top floor of the Old House, three of them partially obscured by the shadow of a boom-mic.



Tony Trigilio's newest books are *Proof Something Happened* (Marsh Hawk Press, forthcoming 2021) and *Ghosts of the Upper Floor* (BlazeVOX [books], 2019). His selected poems, *Fuera del Taller del Cosmos*, was published in Guatemala in 2018 by Editorial Poe (translated by Bony Hernández). Trigilio coedits the poetry journal *Court Green*, and he is an associate editor for *Tupelo Quarterly*. He is a Professor of English and Creative Writing at Columbia College Chicago.