

Archaic Torso of Gumby

is a series of interlinked stories by Geoffrey D. Morrison and Matthew Tomkinson that explore the uncanny materials of late-capitalist pop culture, from video games to claymation to children's picture-books commissioned by oil and gas companies. Each story reveals unlikely connections between subjects as different as a sentient wallet, a gathering of headless saints, a sixteenth-century courtier who thinks he's a horse, and an ice cream vendor from Denver. "By turns cerebral, goofy, and heartfelt, *Archaic Torso of Gumby* is a delirious rabbit hole for the adventurous reader."

Praise for Archaic Torso Of Gumby

"Archaic Torso of Gumby is a strange, experimental, hybrid collection that is by turns powerfully imaginative, wickedly surprising, and totally hilarious."

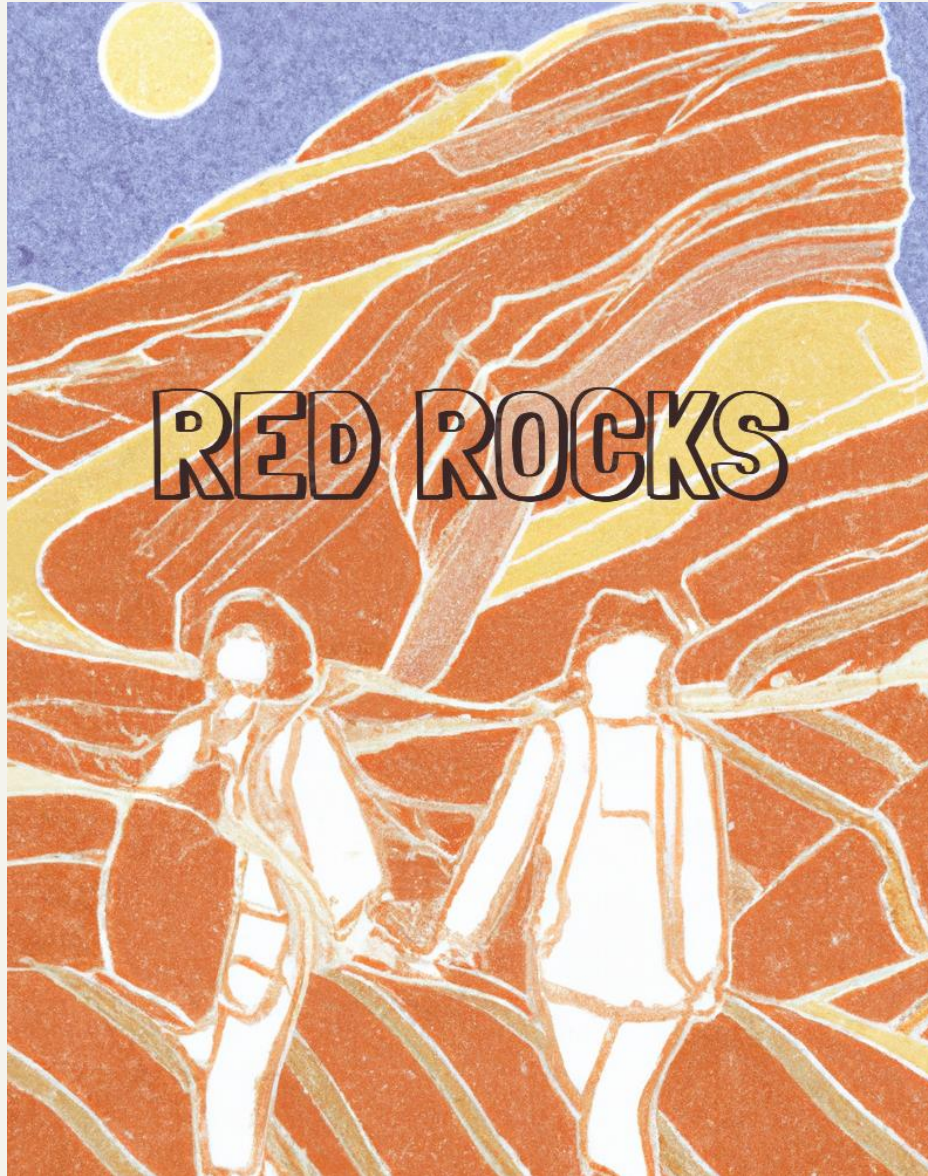
– David Huebert for Canadian Literature

"Archaic Torso of Gumby mobilizes a kaleidoscope of influences, histories, and literary styles, not to mention a bifurcated, symbiotic authorship."

– Peter Szuban for The Temz Review

"If I were to venture a single-word summary of Archaic Torso of Gumby, I might, in the end, land on joyful. There is a palpable glee about the vagaries of literature."

– Max Karpinski for PRISM International



RED ROCKS

90-MINUTE FEATURE

Adapted from

Archaic Torso of Gumby

by Geoffrey D. Morrison and Matthew Tomkinson

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Logline

In 1970s Denver, a young woman's struggles with class, identity, and family history will come to a surreal boiling point at a Grateful Dead concert in Red Rocks Park.

Moods

- ❖ Atmospheric
- ❖ Trippy
- ❖ Character-driven
- ❖ "A vibes movie"

Plot Summary

Denver, July 8th, 1978. As she finishes her closing shift at an ice cream parlour, Tara Dadesho O'Halloran explains to herself her hatred of the Bee Gees. A young man comes in and orders ice cream, leading to Tara's flashbacks of earlier experiences of harassment by male customers. However, this purchase occurs without incident.

She watches the clock. Sheepishly, she monologues to camera that in private she sometimes calls herself a "windswept daughter of the mountains," but admits that this is a total fiction. In flashbacks we learn about her parents: her Irish American mother, her Assyrian American father, their working-class bohemian existence, and Tara's longstanding assumption that they must once have been Communists.

Tara fantasizes that she is in Barcelona, explaining to a handsome and sophisticated man why, of all bands, she likes The Grateful Dead. She tells him that she loves them like she loves geology: their live versions mutate and change like a river transforms a desert landscape. She says that the music is also intimately tied up with death, for her. The man asks her why, but she seems reluctant to answer. We then flash back to September, 1968: Tara's younger brother Bruce's eleventh birthday. Bruce receives The Byrds' *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* as a present from his father, but he thinks it's "for girls" so he gives it to Tara in

exchange for exclusive TV-watching privileges. This is a huge deal for Bruce, because he is obsessed with a Gumbyesque Claymation fella called The Claymate. So begins Tara's discovery of country rock and, ultimately, The Dead.

An entire Little League team bursts into the ice cream parlour. Tara serves them while flashing back to a Colorado School of Mines Geology Department field trip to Utah's Nutty Putty Cave. Around the fire, the mostly male students talk about their future plans to make loads of money in mining, oil, and gas. Tara's interests in research and conservation are largely scorned. Back in the present, the Little Leaguers finally clear out and her shift ends. Tara drives home in a reverie of rocks and rock music.

Back home, Tara's roommate and best friend Ruby is on the phone with a man who does not love her. This is kind of her thing. Ruby is a witchy 1970s proto-punk, and she speaks with a Patti-Smith-esque poetic cadence. Once Ruby hangs up, she and Tara tease each other about the Dead concert, which Ruby is only coming to under protest. Tara complains that no one else would join her; her brother Bruce thinks Garcia "can't shred." Ruby searches for her less-good leather jacket. Tara showers and gets ready, and we quietly come to understand the extent of her body image issues. As Ruby and Tara leave, their landlady, Mrs. Grantham, wistfully wishes them a good night.

On the drive to the amphitheatre, Tara flashes back to a picnic at Red Rocks Park with her parents, Bruce, and the Dadeshos visiting from Michigan, including her grandparents, Sawa and Sawtha, who fled their village in what was then the Ottoman Empire in 1915 during the Assyrian Genocide. Sawa does not love Colorado. He tells Tara's father that these arid hills are "too much like home," and he does not mean Michigan. He means the village that no longer exists. Back in the present, Tara tells Ruby that her father, for his part, had always hated Michigan. She expresses how unsure she is of how to process all that has happened to her family. Ruby tells a story about how her grandmother fled a pogrom in Russia around the same time.

Outside the amphitheatre, Tara is surprised to see Bruce and his friends Pete and Manny. They are metalheads with denim vests and identical T-shirts that say BAPHOMET. They look out of place, and admit they are only there to meet up with their dealer, Wheezy Boy,

who has just scored an experimental new therapeutic drug called “ADAM” (known better now as MDMA). Wheezy Boy has sampled his own wares, and enthusiastically praises the new drug with a series of dubious metaphors about being inside God’s ass. The boys are all in, and Ruby expresses an interest when she learns it makes music better – even music you don’t like. Tara decides to try it as well so that Ruby will not be going it alone. Wheezy Boy takes them to his AMC Gremlin and makes them individual “parachutes” of the drug using strips of paper torn from a Good News Bible. They swallow them using Cheerwines Wheezy got from his Memaw.

High times outside the amphitheatre. The metalheads think they are flowers. They link arms and sway to the music over the PA. Ruby has a prophetic revelation that she and Tara are “motionless in the face of their own dreaming” and will become just like their landlady. She tells Bruce that he is going to screw up so catastrophically that he will be forced to take on responsibilities, make money, and become respectable, but that he will hate this, feeling “haunted by his own ghost.” Bruce thinks this sounds “metal” and is unbothered. She tells Pete and Manny they could go either way, or a third way.

The concert begins. The metalheads do not have tickets and stay outside. Ruby and Tara enter and are swallowed up by ADAMic time. Hours pass, probably. Ruby, agitated since she made her prophecy, freaks out during a drum solo. They leave the amphitheatre. The metalheads are still outside, still happy, rehydrating with Cheerwines. Bruce tells Tara that Garcia “can shred.” This means *so much* to her. She feels a little more hopeful about her family situation in general, but still needs to care for Ruby.

Tara tucks Ruby into the camper shell of her pickup with blankets, a flashlight, and Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Word for World is Forest*. A tender moment. They may love each other more deeply – more romantically – than they are currently willing to acknowledge. It is equally uncertain for them and for us.

Tara hears a sound she doesn’t like, and leaves Ruby to investigate. All good; a hippie girl named Genevieve just screamed in surprise when she peed on a snake. Tara reassures her that it’s a harmless bullsnake and helps her back to her friends, telling her as she does so

how much she loves this place. She drops geological knowledge that blows Genevieve's mind.

Alone again, Tara soaks in the music and the hilly scrubland. She feels like she just may have a shot at figuring out her family's past and her own future. As she stares into the darkness, a figure approaches. It's The Claymate, Bruce's favourite character when he was young. He's corny and gee-willikers in an Eisenhower-era way. He gets embarrassed when Tara swears. But he knows her by name, and he cheerfully tells her how he met his girlfriend, Miss Viscous, through their shared love of music. Tara grills him about how he got to be so happy, and he confesses he wasn't always. In an episode Tara remembers well for being Bruce's favourite, he escaped from Planet Earth in a bid to avoid doing chores. They are silent for a moment. Then The Claymate produces a coin he says he was ordered to give to her. "By who?" Tara asks. "The dead," says The Claymate. Tara misunderstands, thinks he means the band. "No," says The Claymate. "The *dead*." In a moment, he is gone. Tara looks at the coin. It is a 1915 Ottoman lira.

Core Themes

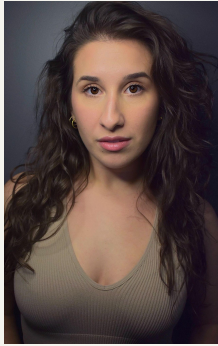
Music and music fandom

Family history and trauma

Social class and labour

Female friendship

Principal Characters



Tara Dadesho-O'Halloran

Character Specs: 23 years old, curly black hair, Assyrian and Irish ancestry

Description: The Gilda Radner to Ruby's Laraine Newman.

To get a sense of Tara, watch this character trailer performed by actress Sofia Vacca:



“Fucking Bee Gees? Again? It’s been like this all summer. You know why. Come on. You *know* why. Because, okay. Disco. Objectively, great music. Not my genre, but that’s not the point. The point is that some record executive assholes took a big long look at mean, ugly, straight, white America; big, beautiful, black, gay disco. And they said: “We have to make some adjustments.” So they found some, what, *Australians*? And they put them all over that *Saturday Night Fever* movie that doesn’t make sense. No! It doesn’t make sense! Hear me out. They’ve got little racist Johnny and his boys calling each other “the faces.” I asked Ruby. Ruby knows what they’re saying in New York. She says *nobody* there says that. And then later they have him saying “Attica! Attica!” in his bedroom as if it’s some Italian thing and not about the pigs. Believe me, a guy like that would be cheering for the prison guards.”

Ruby Arkhangelosky



Character Specs: 23 years old, red hair, Russian and Jewish ancestry

Description: The Laraine Newman to Tara's Gilda Radner. A poet who keeps falling in love with unavailable men.

To get a sense of Ruby, watch this character trailer performed by actress Rachel Stone:



“When we met, he was technically not a priest. This part is important. He was a *candidate* for the priesthood. He hadn’t taken his vows. He wasn’t sure he wanted to. He was confused, and he needed to talk to someone. I saw that right away in the poetry seminar. He kept writing sonnets about temptation. I wanted to be there for him as he figured it all out, but his seminary was a little strict. It was easiest to just use the phone. God knows I’d used it plenty with my other boys. But Tara said she could tell he was my favourite. She said my voice got “smoky” whenever he was on the line. I don’t know what that means. Before you ask, our conversations were perfectly chaste. Philosophical, even. Maybe *too* philosophical. Near the end, I could feel him reasoning his way back into getting ordained. In the end, he did. I still miss him. *Mark. Well, Father Mark, now.*”

Bruce Dadesho-O'Halloran

Visage: Ramy Youssef

Character Specs: 21 years old, black hair, Assyrian and Irish ancestry.

Description: A metalhead fuck-up with an uneasy relationship with his sister.

The Claymate

Visage: Gumby, but without violating any relevant intellectual property statutes.

Character specs: Uncertain age. Green. Viscous. Cheerful.

Description: A corny 1950s do-gooder made out of goo. The star of the stop-motion animation *The Claymate*, which was Bruce's favourite show growing up.

Key Scenes

1. 1978. Tara stands behind the counter of an ice cream parlour called Tas-Tee Mountain. The radio plays the Bee Gees' "How Deep is Your Love." Tara hates it. So much. She tells us why.
2. In flashbacks to the mid-late 1960s with Tara's v/o we learn about Tara's unusual parents, a forklift operator and crossing guard with a vast collection of old jazz and folk records and a suspiciously deep knowledge of old CPUSA in-jokes (they think "Country Joe and the Fish" is a hilarious name for a band).
3. Fantasy sequence: Tara is in Barcelona, explaining to a handsome Catalanian that her love of the Grateful Dead and her love of the desert are intertwined. She explains there is a darker dimension to this too. She explains the origins of the term "grateful dead." He asks her why death is so important to her. She can't or won't say.
4. Flashback to September, 1968. Bruce gets *Sweetheart of the Rodeo* for his birthday, but he looks at the cover and says it is "for girls." Tara is transfixed by the cover of the album, and lets Bruce watch all the episodes of *The Claymate* he wants in exchange for the record.
5. Tara sees Ruby on the phone with yet another unrequited lover. Ruby poetically describes to him a spider she saw that day. Tara reminds Ruby of the concert she'd agreed to attend. They tease each other but Ruby doesn't back out of going.

6. Tara and Ruby drive to the concert. The rocky landscape reminds Tara of a time when her Assyrian grandparents came to Colorado from Michigan to visit. Flashback to the visit. Tara's grandfather finds the landscape around Red Rocks park uncomfortably reminiscent of the village he and his wife were forced to flee as young newlyweds during the Assyrian Genocide of 1915. Back in the car in 1978, Tara and Ruby discuss painful family histories.
7. Tara and Ruby arrive at the Red Rocks Amphitheatre and are surprised to find Bruce and his friends Pete and Manny there. Bruce, Pete and Manny's friend and dealer Weezy Boy arrives under the influence of an experimental therapeutic drug, ADAM.
8. Ruby delivers a prophecy under the influence of ADAM.
9. Tara tucks Ruby into the back of her truck after she becomes too overwhelmed to stay in the amphitheatre.
10. The Claymate gives Tara an Ottoman coin from the year 1915.

Comparisons

Setting/location:

The low-rent outskirts of 1970s Denver. A semi-desert sandstone amphitheatre.

Possible Canadian Filming Locations

Alberta Badlands (Drumheller and Red Deer River Valley)

Okanagan Valley of British Columbia

Tonally similar films:

Asteroid City (2023)

***I'm Thinking of Ending Things* (2020)**

Licorice Pizza (2021)

Ingrid Goes West (2017)

***Twentieth-Century Women* (2016)**

Rubber (2010)

Mulholland Drive (2001)

High Fidelity (2000)

Almost Famous (2000)

Dazed and Confused (1993)

Wild at Heart (1990)

Raising Arizona (1987)

Stranger than Paradise (1984)

Heartworn Highways (1976)

A Poem is a Naked Person (1974)

Medium Cool (1969)

Tonally similar music:

Bria, *Cuntry Covers Vol. 1 EP (2021)*

Margo Cilker, *Pohorylle (2021)*

Sierra Ferrell, *Long Time Coming (2021)*

Lili Mae, *Other Girls (2019)*

Nikki Lane, *Highway Queen (2017)*

Lucinda Williams, *Lucinda Williams (1988)*

The Grateful Dead, *Red Rocks: 7/8/78 (1978)*

Emmylou Harris, *Pieces of the Sky (1975)*

The Grateful Dead, *Workingman's Dead (1970)*

The Flying Burrito Brothers, *The Gilded Palace of Sin (1969)*

The Byrds, *Sweetheart of the Rodeo (1968)*

Tonally similar visuals:

Twentieth Century Women (2016)



Licorice Pizza (2021)



Ingrid Goes West (2017)



Almost Famous (2000)



Medium Cool (1969)



Dazed and Confused (1993)



Boyhood (2015)



FINAL PITCH

We have seen many movies about obsessive rock fandom, but they tend to come from a male perspective. Even when they don't, they have often placed women in "groupie" roles with a romantic interest in band members. In *Red Rocks*, we see a young woman with a poetic and spiritual appreciation for The Grateful Dead that mirrors her love of desert landscapes. In so doing, the film provides an opportunity for a unique visual sensibility and style, rooted as much in the entrancing whorls of exposed sandstone as the vibrant colours and textures of 1970s Americana. The film also offers a chance for the freewheeling, experimental spirit of 60s and 70s New Hollywood—with its strong imagistic and tonal emphasis—to manifest through a film that stridently places women's subjectivities and desires at its centre. Last but not least, *Red Rocks* has a surreal undercurrent that will appeal to all who recognize the basic absurdity lurking behind almost all of North American cultural life.

Bios

Geoffrey D. Morrison is the author of *Falling Hour* (Coach House Books, 2023), the poetry chapbook *Blood-Brain Barrier* (Frog Hollow Press, 2019) and co-author, with Matthew Tomkinson, of the experimental short fiction collection *Archaic Torso of Gumby* (Gordon Hill Press, 2020). He was a finalist in both the poetry and fiction categories of the 2020 Malahat Review Open Season Awards and a nominee for the 2020 Journey Prize. He lives on unceded Squamish, Musqueam, and Tsleil-Waututh territory.

Matthew Tomkinson is a writer, composer, and researcher based in Vancouver. He holds a PhD in Theatre Studies from the University of British Columbia. He is the author of *oems* (Guernica Editions, 2022), *Paroxysms* (Paper View Books, 2022), *For a Long Time* (Frog Hollow Press, 2019), and *Archaic Torso of Gumby* (Gordon Hill Press, 2020), co-authored with Geoffrey D. Morrison. His shorter work has appeared in venues such as *Minor Literature[s]*, *Exacting Clam*, *Anthem Press*, *The Town Crier*, *Performance Matters*, *Sonic Scope*, and more. Matthew lives on the unceded territories of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the q'w'a:h'ə'ə' (Kwantlen), q'icəy' (Katzie), SEMYOME (Semiahmoo), and scəwaθən məsteyəx (Tsawwassen) Nations.

Gordon Hill Press is a publisher of poetry and stylistically innovative fiction, non-fiction, and literary criticism (especially concerning poetry). We strive to publish exemplary writing by a diversity of writers, particularly writers living with invisible disability.

Extraliterary Liaison Kevin Andrew Heslop is an up-and-coming Canadian filmmaker whose practice connects theatre, poetry, film, art criticism, journalism, and the visual arts. In 2021, he published *the correct fury of your why is a mountain* (Gordon Hill Press, 2021); in 2022, he founded Astoria Pictures, an independent film production and distribution company; and in 2023, he released his directorial debut, *mo(u)vements*. (Astoria Pictures, 2023). In addition to active practices in the visual, literary, and performing arts, Kevin works as a producer representing titles from award-winning publishing houses towards their adaptation to the stage and screen.

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