

THE GREAT AMERICAN POETRY SHOW

VOLUME 1

The
Great
American
Poetry
Show

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Volume 1

edited
by

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Mutiny in the Body

I just found out
I'm going to be an Aunt again
and my ovaries
just grabbed my uterus
and squeezed
hard.

They're getting pissed
and taking hostages.
The eggs are worried
and ready to scramble.
They've elected a scout
for a kamikaze mission.
It's dodging guards
in its search for freedom
on its way to certain death

because the swimmers are scarce
and they're scared to commit,
hiding in latex foxholes
and napalm jelly,
killing themselves
in their fury
to avoid the fallopian falls.

Yes, the ovaries are pissed
and seeking revenge.
There's a battle being fought
and it isn't always pretty.
I'm on a diplomatic mission
seeking a cease-fire
with sweet talk and promises
of better men
to come.

Susan Ahdoot

Superstar, How Do You Play My Song?

After six months of this relationship
in which I have ridden your ups and downs
like a captive note in a scaling exercise,
tried to sway with the push/pull of your need/not need,
sat unused through the movements of your silent symphony,
tried to stay in tune/time while you banged out non-chromatic chords,
beat myself trying to upbeat your melancholic arias,
and bent the sound of my otherwise musical disposition into erratic noise,
I have decided to rest.

But while I rest here in this tuneless silence,
I would really like to know,
how do you play my song?

How do you play my song?
In whirling swirls of sound,
dizzying waltzes,
triumphant crescendoes,
quiet lute-like phrases on a droning wind,
cascading love into a sea of music?

Or do you beat it slowly
like a drum
to old battle marches
when real music was lost to war?
How do you play my song?

How do you strum my strings?
Like the composer
searching, testing,
trying to put together a sound that harmonizes?
Do you squeeze from me the sounds
of smiling children and dreamlike eyes?

Or does your mind see barbed wire
and do your scars ache
as you pluck too hard for music?
Do you rip at my chords with snarling teeth
trying to reproduce the sound of your own anguish?
How do you play my song?

I am music.
Do you feel me?
Do you rise up,
sail on my high C's,
slide through the dimensions of my sound and
drift down my rivers of harmony?

Or do you hum my song nonchalantly,
in mo.no..to.nal..rhythmic..progressions
only..showing..the..rate..of..the..thing,
not even showing the depths?

Do you stroke me
with even streams of feeling
to let my resonant tones soothe you?

Or do you pull at me,
like a Fender,
to electronic boogie basslines
while you rock yourself to sleep?

How do you play my song?

I am the music you make.
You are the maestro.
I can be operas, concertos,
down-home back-porch blues,
jump-up-for-joy gospel-revivals,
Arthur and the Pops, funky jazz.

I can be acid
pop-pop-pop-popcorn
bubblegum
rubberband-band-band-band
synthesized
syncopated
demonstrated-to-be-the-joint rock,

if you play me that way.

I can soar through your free flights,
mellow your soft tones,
sound out your solos in sixteen notes, Allegro,
or just float liquidly
through the shades of your emotion,
if you play me that way.

You are the maestro.
I am the music that you make.
I am your music.

And if you play me right,
we can be a SHOWSTOPPER!!!

Ronald Douglas Bascombe

Café Culture #1

I'm just trying to be honest with you,
says the woman at the table next to me
to the man across the table from her.
And though I have no way of knowing exactly
what they are talking about, I know she is
telling a lie, because she says it as if telling
the truth was simple, and God knows, and I know,
it is not. And the man, I think he knows
this too, because he cups his hands around
his double latte and stares, as if he were
studying the froth of whipped cream, which he
eventually dips a timid finger into. And then
he raises that finger to his lips as if he meant
to gesture silence, as if that was his silent
and honest reply to this honest and overheard lie.

Grace Bauer

Meditation at Cape Cod

Most of us grocery boys and ushers want soft talk
close by: a certain sound of women as the soda shop closes –
their loud whispers to each other. We think of our mothers

fifteen years back, voices settling into a hush like warm covers
back home. It's when they don't want to wake their kids but want -
it's only natural - to talk anyway. About food, steamed or baked,

about Sunday salads and barbeques, maybe about the brief peace
of their boy's nap that opens the house to a little emptiness of time –
for magazines, easy talk on the phone, talk that makes the air

precious. Even the older guys remember that talk that brings the world
close to itself where it seems incomprehensible events might be solved:
the lies of unshaven cranks, the dangerous sliding of crustal plates

full of fossils, held, golden brown – all these
finally sorted out, and the long summertime beach and sky
softly explained around us, sure as the eternal freeze frames inside naps

with their speechless tracer-bullet dreams that flash off
through the dark, all that slow understanding, an understanding
men at 19 cannot hope to sum up. But when we hear the low,

fluffed-pillow woman talk, we quit our jiggling impersonations a minute, quit
the soda-jerker dances of wiseacres convinced that a six-pack
makes a man. We hear the whispers. We change, suddenly

know a thing about bobwhites who gather into peaceable coveys,
gather again – in the parts of night where breathing can pause – into a time
of compacted heat. A huddling circle form. And we turn our heads

toward inscapes, travel backlands. We walk into the cabin -
cedar closets, neatened stacks of yellow towels,
pine-green blankets promising the hush of warmth.

Tim Bellows

Antietam Battlefield

“More men were killed or wounded at Antietam on September 17,
1862, than on any other single day of the Civil War.”

-i-

Antietam is still
an open grave

Shrouded by grass
and obelisks

Past a two-lane highway.
Antietam is still

Where I liven my soul
with the Spirit

Of Founding Father ideals
and white columns

And absurd nostalgia
for an era

Not lived, but hawked
in glossy texts

And in televised Civil War
re-enactments. Still,

I find my roots in Antietam
whether or not

I'm homegrown American.
A Park Ranger

Hands me a pamphlet -
a deed

For the Spirit that hovers
over the ground

Of Antietam - like the waters
at Creation.

-ii-

Here, Abel murdered
Cain.

No Good or Evil,
but petrified

Cornfields and a bridge
flung into History.

A filling station's open Sunday.
Main Street

In Sharpsburg, nearby,
a still life

Of dead-end, small-town life
animated,

September seventeenth,
'sixty-two,

When thousands of soles marched
past a pick-up

Where a guy's jamming quarters
into a coke machine.

-iii-

Dust darkens a daguerrotype
of the few short blocks.

Turn right or left. Both
lead to eternity.

A jogger, a fool, as if
the troops

From Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New York
had declined

The order to pave the road
with bones.

He prances through the battlefield -
oblivious,

Well-shod. Grotesque
as a corpse.

I'm ashamed
for the both of us

Reaping inspiration
from the winds of the Catoctins

That stir the Spirit
of Antietam

In a ghastly maelstrom. Green
and silent.

Anne Myra Benjamin

Freshwater Pearls

I know every small day since you arrived,
I can count them like the friendly stars
or string them on a thread like freshwater pearls
and wear them about my body.

Spring is coming close enough to touch: the froth
on apple boughs, the half-winds, the scanty oaks,
I am writing it all down for you, I am painting it,
trying to fit a lid upon the box.
How much will be enough?

Look at the company you keep:
a morning glory that you picked for me,
a crushed leaf,
some tiny stones to shy into the creek.

Down at the beach
we sit in the lee of a dune and watch the peeled world,
naked and honest and raw to each wave,
and every time, the writing's getting washed away.

I cup my fist around the trickling sand,
watch you chase another impossible bird,
and slowly I understand:
this is how today is made,
a luscious stretch of over-abundant blue,
the naked body of a tree washed smooth,
and you in your water shoes, without a limit on our love.

You are coming down the present in your short dress,
you have not done this before, alive in your first April,
but this is your stride, the rhythm of arrival,
and you carry the moment aloft,
brimming, like pale water in a silver cup.

Sara Berkeley

Smoke from Oregon Fires

I have driven us out to the farthest parking lot
close to the cliffs, where my hunger for flight is appeased.
Fall, obediently grey with light rain, hugs the car,
I drift around the shallows of my daughter's sleep,
I would row through it, but she never goes that deep.

When I sit with her in the dark,
my arms around the generous mercies of the dark,
her childhood memories are patchworked in the
velvet corners of the room, and round the frog walls streams
the endless ribbon of her nursery-rhyme dreams.

She knew she was a girl, knew she would be born
feet first into this silvery world without consent
to decades of continuous sun and decades of snow
but she couldn't know that her beauty would be
held up to the light and the light would drown in it.

I have her by heart, I recite her, and then she changes
and I'm lost, like in space, end over end.
Up north of us the firemen are losing ground
to fire, their smoke comes down this far
and smudges out the still October air,

and in our car I'm listening to her breathe
and I'm noticing her hair
the way it's still so fine and fair
and I am listening to her breathe, and I am
listening to her breathe
and I am listening to her breathe.

Sara Berkeley

Strawberry Thief

You were a lot like planting a garden.
The seed, for example, buried deep in September,
smell of raw lumber as we made the beds,
sun on my belly as though the sun could grow you,
and me on my knees in the heavy Spring,
digging and digging.

Bean seedling, starting with that soft double leaf,
already you are wild thyme, climbing rose, strawberry thief,
I cannot contain you, you send out shoots
beneath the wooden beds, coming up all daisy-eyed
among the raspberry canes, arms full of douglas cones,
singing in your tiny cage of bird bones.

The last October sun is at our door,
the purple stars still cluster in the shade,
any day the rain will come for our parade,
but I am gardening now, I am alone and on my knees,
the earth is warm, and if I can help you bloom,
you will be pollen for the bees,

you will shimmer in the lily beds,
shake out your petals in the breeze,
you will wear your fuchsia tutu and pli   where you please
and you will leave me where I am
among the secrets of your growing.
My runner bean, with all the passion of your running
and the greenness of your going,
you undo me; you are my undoing.

Sara Berkeley

The Thoughtful Ones

so this guy writes a book twenty thousand years ago about people's lives or whatever what's any book about really he writes it in some dead language same deal with languages all the same people need a way to haggle for bread then the guy's civilization ends my guess is climate change sun burning the crops buildings on fire that'll do it every time figure most people die survivors run away scatter hey this stuff happens look at the Aztecs the guy and his people run around screaming lose their homes and their language and all their books for sure dodging the flames what would you carry so even art doesn't last does it but maybe someone who read this guy's book chose to move in a certain direction lived some quiet life in a rock shelter sowed some seed in his kids' heads well maybe just one of the kids the thoughtful one the others were out loping off heads or something and then the kid did the same for his kid and he or she did the same when it was their turn and eventually somebody wrote another book after they reinvented pencils and the book influenced a few others and then they influenced others and it goes on and on doesn't it and don't languages evolve from one into another over time I mean we really speak Indo-European or something right so maybe if a word from this guy's book became a word people use all the time even though it's made up like *Kleenex* that might explain some word we can't figure out like *orange orange* how do you make up *orange*

Douglas M. Bill

Constantinople

he stands naked at one of two windows
she keeps open in all weathers in her corner
room at the back of the bread building

as the sun rises he watches a man pulling
a handcart along the narrow alley
"below here, the moans"

and across the court a girl turning
her face from side to side in a mirror—
"aren't those sweet those questionings?"

from the temples around the stone plaza
he could hear the first matins
and to the west low clouds
shifted beyond the dulled bronze Domes of The Church

she begins slicing small pieces of bread
goat butter and chives start to fry
she is naked kneeling on one worn rug
thrown at an angle across the scarred floor

this is a reminder

she glances up at him and he smiles nodding
for no real reason in spite of the bells'
chime and the tanks crisscrossing the city

Beau Boudreaux

Foreign Vineyard

We gather at the edge of a field, climb into a wooden wagon
stained purple, littered with dirt clods and leaves from
yesterday's work, filling our lungs with the clear
morning breath of vineyards.

Sun stuns the treetops, filling our eyes with red and gold dawn,
magpies and ravens play in mist, adrift in trees,
the tractor's voice hums a tune to the scent of diesel,
the driver calls out greetings in French and *patois*
to women and men conversing in five languages.

I tug my cap and hang on, the wagon lurches off the shoulder,
carries us into the vines, surrounds us with gnarled trunks,
branches weighed down under the shelter of broad leaves
touching the ground.

Grapes in bunches, ready to burst, desiring to kiss the earth,
beckon us to bend our backs, to part the vines and leaves,
begin our rhythmic cutting, begin the thump of grapes
in bunches falling into buckets.

Gripping the harvest knife in my pocket, I slide it into view,
touch my thumb to its edge, take up another day
of sweating, scuffling down dirt-clod rows, arguing in English,
laughing in Arabic and Spanish, exchanging cigarettes for
language lessons and tepid sangria.

We feel the sun being lifted like an awakening child
whose mother is the sky, watching the clouds and fog drift
away from a valley of plump and thumping grapes.

Listening to the swoons of bumble bees and flies in the afternoon, I am
distracted by an abrupt vision, a brown-legged girl on a moped
sputtering south.

I disturb a derelict bee attempting to pollinate wine in October,
who stings me through my sleeve.

My wrist recoils from the bite, I trace the trivial distance
of a harvest blade into my lifeline.

Carved flesh, or perhaps just the joy of bleeding,
leaves me feeling for a moment safely uprooted from the need
to get paid, as perhaps a branch of thyme might feel snapped up
for soup, or a dandelion, securely at rest in a salad basket.

The blood flow does not cease, draws more flies, a Mohammedan,
informed that I am wounded, pours snuff into my palm,
wraps it with a rag.

My receding emergency whines like a motorbike heading south
beyond the farthest reach of the vineyard.

Don Brennan

Relaxing in the Backyard with Shasta

Two rosy finches
chase one another
through dark branches.

Lime fireflies
vaporize above the clover.

Shasta,
our black Bouvier,
settles
like smoke
upon the clay roots
of a maple.

Her ears twitch
as catbirds
negotiate
the young darkness.

Fireflies
prowl the hedges.

A streetlight
tightens
her corset,
breathes deep
while balancing
on one dark leg.

Shasta sighs,
shifts her weight.

An imperceptible breeze
vibrates
the longest
grey tuft
on her silky beard.

Alan Britt

Making Love with You

Making love with you is like....
No, that's not right. It's like...
like... like... like... like... like....
Making love with you is. That's it.

Harry Brody

Sonnet #4

When my once-a-year sex life intersects
With Old World Italian-Croatian,
Ignorant I am of my quaint little hex
In his sad comedy-situation.
I sleep upstairs from the lord of the land,
a bed fit for queens in a boxy house
Off Steinway. My seventy+ watch-dog man
Vigilant, always prying, ever soused.
One delicious night of loud, gripping lust,
My landlord, incensed by my open thighs, bold sighs
Heard through his stale-oniony ceiling dust,
Confronted me with rolled eyes, shameful fies,
Flask uncorked. Out danced patriarchal goblins –
Not my problem.

G.C. Brown

Sirens

She's in love with the sirens.
She keeps her bedroom window open
and lets the street come up to her.
She says she understands its hundred languages
though she's never spoken a word of it herself.

She's in love with the sirens
in her small apartment off of Western,
her bed on the floor to feel the rumble of traffic,
the heavy tires of the trucks, the quicksilver
of compacts and convertibles,
the gravel groan of motorcycles passing.

She's in love with the sirens
and before I met her, I never knew
that darkness had a taste
or light, a sound.
She is not an emaciated child
like the hype would have you believe;
she is fleshy like a mango,
plump and warm and tart/sweet.
Her eyes are the color of haze,
her hair dark like the leaves of city trees.
She is soft as a peach bought at Farmer's Market off of Fairfax;
and when she smiles, the traffic parts
so that her chosen may walk unimpeded
toward the promised land beyond Sunset.

She's in love with the sirens,
as Flaco and Plato sit outside a liquor store called The Cave,
watching shadows dance on
the walls and barred windows.
Plato says this is all we perceive
of this life, that there's something
perfect beyond our sight; but Flaco,
he says it's just the headlights
catching the uncovered head of pilgrims
on their way to their appointed shrines.
She could tell them both that these
are not shadows at all, but semaphore
being sent by exhausted angels
who have lost the power to intervene
and now only call us with shadow puppets.

She's in love with the sirens
and knows that under the concrete there's still dirt
and past the haze there's still sky.
She doesn't miss the stars
which are shy of the city's lights.
She knows that there is light enough
from taillight comets and fluorescent moons.

She's in love with the sirens
in a city which has worn out its grace,
whose heart beats caffeine quick,
whose eyes are as sharp as summer daylight,
whose voice is as sacred as a hymn on a barroom jukebox,
sprawling in the desert sun
shining in the morning like the Emerald City,
another lover hungry for experience
calling for the Queen of the Angels
to blow on the dice and help
pay off on the hard way, one more time.

She's in love with the sirens
and the blue and red stained glass on her bedroom wall.
She crosses herself when one passes,
as the nuns taught her to do,
then laughs at the superstition,
knowing that what's done is done,
that the city will have its due.
She pulls me into her, whispering
*"It'll be all right, I'm sure. If all was lost,
there'd be no sirens, only silence."*

M.C. Bruce

Refrigerator Note

If you were magnetized, you too
would stick to metal doors.
Spread-eagled. Stretched between

magnetic poles, positive
and negative pulls. Two frigid points
opposite, both arctic circles. Both
yank and tug.
Your soul cracked,
two halves of a peach

pit revealed. The very core,
the seed that grows like the note
you left on the refrigerator. Last night,

you ran out. Out
into early October snow. Your way
illuminated by the hunter's moon full
of footprints that puffed up the balloon
above. Your tracks imprinted
deep with frozen edges, sharp
yet smooth as your green rubber boots

I could track. I could read
the signs along your trapline,
plain as your note
that I shredded, scattered

throughout the house. Words
clung to my bare feet. Last night
my callused soles bled
a trail of phrases
across emerald wool carpet.

In corners
of our rooms, your words
took root, germinated
into full sentences.

I erased vowels, soft sounds
round as the moon's phases. Even
then the curved moon
cradled your consonants.

Your words rose up from paper
like so many tulips. Old wounds opened
in the day of light. Your voice
vibrated against walls.
Metal to metal.

Only the echo of you remained. You
who left last night, who would not
listen when I called your name.

I rolled your sound
around my tongue, savored its taste
when it burst, sweet
as a single Concord grape. You

who are no more now than a stain
on the refrigerator door.

Carol Carpenter

Travelogue: Dad's Garage

Look in the southwest corner, Dad's own
painted desert. Can upon can
dripped globs of color.

See the specks:
our marigold kitchen wall, circa 1972.
Avocado green for the living
room. Sunset purple, royal blue,
lavender, the aster pink all
mixed by Harry's Hardware back then
when Dad skipped up Grandville Street
with us, warning: Jump the cracks. Hold
upright the aster, forget-me-not, violet,
even the celery stalk for Harry.
He matched all colors, stirred
again and again. Our experiments
exact: recreating life.
A swirl of green added for father,
who painted our world on April days
each year, windows wide open
as we held his ladder.

Check out the southeast corner. Dad's own
everglades. Hoses coiled into hummocks
drizzled his days, his 80 midwest years.

Count the summer sections:
our sea wings, those brown
inner tubes there at the bottom. Ragged
as our toddler steps, lurching,
twirling under Dad's hand-held waterfall.
That green tube with brass nozzle
turned full blast during our teens.
Dad misted seedlings, perennials,
yews until delphiniums spiked blue,
sunflowers swivelled toward light,
furry faces dark
as our own bodies,
slick with baby oil and iodine.
My sister and I
grew into ourselves,
our bellies against bluegrass
knowing all the while our father
would warn against burning, turn on
the sprinkler. He, the water magician,
coaxed life from dry seeds.

Glance into the northeast
and northwest corners, Dad's own
wilderness, full of wood and work.

That vise gripped broken chair legs
until glue held the splinters
together, healed
his daughters' hearts.
This was his work.
His shovel tilted there
against the rake.
He waited for Detroit snow,
predicted by a lone forecaster,
a record-breaking blizzard,
below zero. When Dad wasn't ready
for cold or death, it came.

We two daughters zip our jackets
against winter as we linger
there in that unheated garage.
We have come to clean,
bundle up our youth in Hefty bags.
We climb onto two blue bikes,
wait for his hand
snug against our backs.

Our feet pedal,
round and round once more.
We wobble forward on used Schwinn's.
Ahead and on our own,
we pump the north wind home.

Carol Carpenter

An Autumn Sonata

for a summer through smoked glass,
darkly, all the empty lawn chairs,
deserted chaise loungers, blackened
cooking pits, wrought iron rusting amid
scattered ashes; all the metal hoops
of the abandoned croquet court:
wooden mallets, striped balls, painted
stakes signifying the end and the smell
of low tide by the Sound, mother's last
cigarettes burning in a glass ash tray,
the dead floating in styrofoam coffee
cupping dregs, milk scum and spent
stick matches; the smoking, matched sets
of horse-hair recliner chairs, canvas-covered
gliders and rattan end tables on the screened-
in-against-the-elements porch; all the black
holes of the frayed oriental throw rugs,
generations old, the scattered piles of
living room leaves, burning refuse, cracked
sticks and wadded newspapers, Sunday sections
and all the other-days-of-the-week kindling
for the lasting fire of her days and nights
here, working on a new classical repertoire
for two hands, piano with sprung wires
and disconnected pedals, broken chopsticks for
that infernal night, when smoke gets in your eyes.

Alan Catlin

Nabakov Blues

Hard to
imagine now
the author
of Lolita
frolicking
about Albany's
Pine Bush
in short pants
pith helmet
with a large
net - his stern
wife Vera
likewise attired
in tow - chasing
rare New Karner
butterflies
now that this
environmentally
unique area
is nearly
malled to
death - a
developer's
dream involving
heavy construction
equipment
super highway
disasters
modern American
sprawl - last of
the known
Blues disappearing
down mountain
bike trails
pursued by
dune buggies
off-road motor-
cyclists - hard
riding suburban
Hell's Angels

Alan Catlin

A Fresh Cadence

awake i run my hands
along the flesh I know
better than my own
your body turns
curves against my back
matching perfectly
our mouths shape words
into a new language
stored in linen
for the slow years ahead

shadows stitch the night
we are in a different country
i let my fingernails grow
paint my eyelids blue and invoke
long nights in our fifth floor
village walk-up above italian
shouts and smells where a thin
thread of sun hovers in a life
of cool mornings
scorched afternoons and naked
nights dreaming of feathers

we know how the seasons insist
how dark eyes of water
glitter through grass in spring
how the heart tugs at the end of september
how december's crust leads us back
to frozen footsteps and idling light

but in the suck of the dark
from sweet ruin to resurrection
through planetary nights
when our bodies drift toward each other
in our private room with windows
there is no elsewhere
only moments of grace

Ruth Daigon

Over My Shoulder

Don't look back. Something might be gaining on you.

--Satchel Paige

As I flip backwards through the album,
the family is young and growing younger.
Background foliage, almost real,
frames cross-eyed cousins innocent
of spinsterhood, aunties free of pregnancies,

my mother with a healthy heart and no
regrets, her oldest son still focused, her
younger's slanted smile. Here, my father's
amputated finger strums his mandolin.

One slim sister half-turns to her husband
erasing all the silent years ahead.
The other leans a smooth cheek
up against the shadow of an arm.

And I'm still wearing tap shoes and my
tight-rope walker's smile. Only my bearded
grandfather dies inward like a tree while
grandmother shifts slowly through the album.

Uncle Dave's nineteen again before the current
drags him down. All of us, warm and urgent,
unaware of empty places waiting to be filled
by negatives yet to be developed.

Ruth Daigon

Repositioning the Mattress

We pivot around each other.
Not even our shadows collide.
Dust lifts and settles like the first
snow as we shift through
margins of air and islands of time.

Flipping it over, each wrist
with its bracelet of flesh,
each finger shaped by its bone, we're
upending the days,
exploring the spaces between.

After the long night and porcelain dreams,
after rivers of sleep, morning
hangs by a thread.
Face to face, we imagine our bodies
stored in hollows,
secret deposits deep in the foam.

The day has no beginnings.
Sky goes everywhere at once
in turquoise innocence.
Warmth rises. Sweat gleams
and the echos of our interlocking rhythms
pulse through vacant rooms.

This house is what it is.
Each wall stands alone.
Each window with a sky of its own
and we are reaching backwards, love,
in a seethe of memories
that ache like static from another world.

This old mattress grown heavy with meaning,
lopsided with usage,
slopes into a cave
where we tumble like children
in salt waters of the heart.

Ruth Daigon

House Guest

They come to visit
They're on vacation
Thinking you are too
They're here for a week

They're on vacation
Staying in your house
They're here for six more days
You're their maid

They stay in your house
Using your toothbrush
You're their maid
They're here for five more days

They're using your hairbrush
Your house is a mess
They're here for four more days
Wearing your clothes

Your house is a mess
Going through your diary
Wearing your shoes
They're here for three more days

Going through your journal
Drinking your beer
They're here for two more days
Eating your food

Drinking your rum
They're usually drunk
Eating everything
They're here for one more day

They're usually drunk
They don't want to go
They're leaving today
Or so they say

Rachel Delmage

Pier Girl

I was sired in water. Anglers pulled my mother half-drowned from the incoming tide, hair streaming like muddy silk. They laid her spooled in fishing line next to the wheel of a Mercury Marquise. A hook jerked me free. I was nursed on cut bait, suckled by the white trout moon, my first cry soundless as a flounder.

Surviving on Galveston's seawall, it's trawlers and rent-by-the-weeks. My mother's moan, *fresh dead shrimp*, struggled against the raw morning sun. Finger mullets under my left arm, mud minnows on my right hip, we were the bait lady and her kid. Nights behind the Hotel Galvez, among the red buds and purple plum trees, she knelt before men. I watched them flit their forked tongues against the camellias of her breasts. *Seahorses suffocate when they try to chew*, she once said, *so be ready to seize and swallow in big pieces*. Her black eyes shiny like the mouths of fish after the hooks were ripped out.

School was the claw hammer at my back. When I quit, no one tried to bribe me back with Quaaludes, inviting me on journeys into glaciers, through webs and sea grass.

Fishing piers held the longest midnight. Crews for hire sat in lawn chairs to cast. The oldest man spat into the eye of an amberjack. I was their clean-up girl housing off the filleted guts, listening to the muscles of dying drumfish beat a soft wop. At dawn messages came from Neptune's underwater sun. Garfish, hammerhead shark, mahogany snapper, gray triggerfish all muttering at once. The graveyard-shift workers from Houston leaning over the sea were less real.

Floating into the channel of Rollover Pass, I let the current carry me like dust. I wanted to be jerked under by the rushing, to breathe through cuts in my cheeks. I began letting go, shutting my lung parachutes. From the bulkhead the hillbilly fish people shouted. A Mexican boy dove, his knee scraping the barnacles. He screamed as he swam to me. We fought in the water. Gulls banged their wings against the sky. In my mouth his hair tangled--torn hyacinth. Delicate barbs. I whispered my secret. *I am fish*.

Much later I let myself be taken by a man thick as a porterhouse steak, who spoke in the lower registers of a dirt road, his burning tongue the only visible liquid, promising a Panhandle ranch and love that would lock me inland.

Stephanie Dickinson

4:35 P.M.

It is silver with a thin band. Timex®. A cheap watch. I slip it over my left hand, feel the metal band snap to my thin wrist.

I look at the watch and it is my mother's wrist, my mother's hand, my mother's watch.

She had left it on her nightstand by her bed every night. When she died, my sisters and I sat on her bed, cried, placed her things between us. The watch has gone to me, the middle sister, for no reason except that I'd asked for it.

My mother's watch.

I wear it, confused, happy, sad, pulling it over my left hand. I look at it on my wrist. 4:35 p.m.

"You should get a new battery for that," my sister says. I shake my head "no." For me it will always be 4:35 p.m. in my mother's world.

Shari Dinkins

Heat & Silence

Rose and jasmine. The smell of soap and dry towels. Incense.

The water is so hot that my thighs are pink. I close my eyes, feel the heat of the water on the back of my neck. Breathe in. The air is sweet on my face. I daydream. Of a man from Valley Springs, of my niece's birthday party, of my job in San Francisco, and of the man from Valley Springs again.

I reach for the glass on the counter—cool, fresh water in my mouth. And I slip down until the bubbles touch my shoulders.

Tucked behind the safety bar, in the soap dish is a piece of paper. On the ledge are bottles, potions, razor. I reach for the paper with wet hands, read his note again—laugh outloud.

I am pleased, warm, happy.

I lean forward, flip the metal pull. Sound of water, gurgling, emptying. I touch the tap, crank it even hotter, hear the rush as the water heats my toes.

Silence then.

I lean back, pull the tie off my head. Feel the weight of the water pull the tips of my hair. I sink until just my face cools in the bathroom heat. My hair swirls underwater, touches my shoulder, my arm. I breathe in, out. Smell of rose and jasmine. Soft lights above the sink.

Shari Dinkins

Waves

Maroon t-shirt, jeans. The line of his shoulders, his shoulder blades. It's Mike.

I am driving down Beach Boulevard. On my right, the waves shimmer. Silvery caps of water in the sunlight. It is a beautiful town. The pier stretches out, dark against the light blue water. Air is clean. I breathe in, feel it cool in my lungs. Flecks of foam spray the sidewalk. I pass a woman and her chihuahua. He prances, tiny body shaking with delight.

I look past the pier and see him again. Mike. His hair, the back of his neck. I recognize his shoulder blades. Sweet, strong shoulder blades. I have sat behind him at meetings. Many meetings. The back of his neck, slightly sunburned. His hair, short. Grey hairs, a few, by his ears. Mesmerized, I have memorized his shoulder blades, the shape, the way he moves when he shifts in his chair. I imagine my finger tracing around the scapula where his shoulder blade joins his back. His shoulders, the line of his back cry out for me, for human touch. And I lick my lips. My eyes travel to the front of the room, to the speaker, and then back. Shoulder blades. Sighing, I keep my hands in my lap. But my eyes cannot escape.

Driving past, I turn to shout. And it is not him. Not Mike. The face is different. And yet, the shoulders, the shoulder blades. The rear view mirror tells me nothing. The man is smaller and smaller as I wind down the beachfront road. Air wafts into my window, so crisp that my throat aches.

Shari Dinkins

Concrete and Flesh

(an unrated hollywood story)

helen of hollywood was seldom understood...

the freeway ran through her heart,
her body wandering with exhilaration,
along the asphalt she stretched nyloned legs,
her hips rolling as an invitation

across the sidewalk stars and cigarette butts
the tight, sequined skirt held her passion,
the thighs in bloom, the hem unraveling
its torn threads in a funky fashion

in the darkness with the lights strangely slanted
she appeared worth the price she sought,
and nothing destroyed her beauty but the dawn,
unkind, it crept behind as an afterthought

when her face flaked to a chalky sadness
her mouth seeped with the bitter taste,
the powder-filled nose eased the morning madness,
if not the throbbing loneliness, the sense of waste

a life kept in shadows made days of neglect
as she waited for darkness, her friend, to stir,
thinking little of the needs for tomorrow,
tomorrow never giving a damn about her

Mel Donalson

The Infidel Hordes

When they happened upon me,
I was buried in the sand
up to my neck.
My head was covered with ants.

The leader brushed the ants away from my lips.
He took me for an outpost
of civilization
and wanted me to tell him its secret.

This would have stiffened my back
in better physical circumstances.
Behind him
were a hundred thousand bloodthirsty graduates

of the school of hard knocks.
I wanted to tell him that I understood
civilization was just around the corner
but no one had ever returned

to verify this.
When I opened my mouth to speak,
it was so clogged with insects
I coughed up a black cloud

which was taken for an insult
and sufficient cause to cut off my tongue.
The hordes thundered off
in a storm of dust that darkened the sun.

So I am stuck here again, waiting.
I suppose they won't return either
to let me know
since I can't pass the information on.

James Doyle

19 Straight Whiskeys

If I would have been
there at the Chelsea Hotel,
drinking
with Dylan Thomas
the night
they drove him away
in an ambulance,
I would have told him all
the fame and booze
was mutilating
his soul.
The hangers-on, writers, editors,
other drunks, leeches and the women
spreading their
nylon legs.
All of them killing him
or watching him die
and doing nothing to stop it.
They say he said on that night
“I’ve had 18 straight whiskeys. I think
that’s the record.”
I would have told him all that shit was killing him.
I would have cut him off at 9 whiskeys.
But then again, maybe I might’ve
kept my nose out
of his business and matched him
drink for drink,
going on and beating his record
with 19 and
leaving with one of the
women before
the ambulance arrived.

Doug Draine

So I Dream of the Dead

My crazy abuelo, God bless him, said la muerte
fascinated him when he was a child. He said
he'd wander in and out of the local graveyard
with his friends, singing corridos at the stroke of midnight.
Then they'd sit down and drink cervezas. Sometimes
his stories of death play in my head. Like the dead bodies

that were missing from their graves. Abuelo said the bodies
were not stolen. He claimed the townspeople who died
were not completely lifeless. They sometimes
strolled the narrow roads, searching for *sangre*, he said.
Like the old lady who visited the local folks at night.
She'd float around the pueblo and return to the graveyard

when she felt satisfied. Yes, her home was the graveyard.
She still lingers in my head. Her ghostly body
appears in my dreams, when I'm at home, asleep, at night.
My crazy abuelo, God bless his soul, said la muerte
is always around the corner, waiting, stalking. Abuelo said
I'd one day dream of dancing skulls and floating women. Sometimes,

as I bite my lips and clutch my bedspread, I can sometimes
feel the skulls forming around me. When I open my eyes, the graveyard
is in my room. Cracked tombstones, fallen headstones! Abuelo said
they'd eventually start pestering me. But abuelo's frail body
never mingles with the deceased that visit me. *He's not ready for death,*

I hear him say. So los muertos disappear, like yesterday night
and the day before. But I shudder when the clock nears midnight
because the spirits love to invade my dreams. A veces
they sleep next to me. I can feel them as they squirm. *So die
already you bothersome souls!* I shout. They laugh because the graveyard
is their home. And this room, my room, is their home. So their bodies
float around me. *What is it they want?* Abuelo had told

me one day, before cancer took him,
that the spirits will not harm me even en la noche,
not if I act as if they're really alive, like normal bodies
roaming the streets - except they float. Sometimes,
when I shut my eyes and hear abuelo's voice, the graveyard
that lurks in my room disappears. And so does the threat of death.

But dreaming of spirits, like abuelo said, can sometimes
mean something, if at night you treat their graveyard,
and their floating bodies, with respect and not as if they're really dead.

Hector E. Estrada

**The Ancient and the Modern in Mexcaltitan:
Celebrating the Culture in Mexcaltitan**

the plaza of the sun
the dull shape of obsidian stone embedded in the streets
the summer heat rising from the stony road
the murals of deities dressed in eagle costumes

the lazy breeze carrying the blistering heat
a finger that bumps its way along ancient stones
a television that flickers inside an adobe home
the galloping horses with their glossy manes

the Aztec Hotel
the headless shadow of Coatlicue on the roads
the dust lifted by the sun and sprayed throughout the streets
the carved stones of warriors and sacrifices

the dry breeze hiding under the shade
a foot that crunches its way through pebbles and sand
a game of fútbol played by children, Tláloc looking on
the tricycles with their shiny metal horns

the island of Mexcaltitan
the sharp edges of the Spanish church
the eagle faces of mestizo children
the daily diet of fish sizzling on grills in their backyards

the people who roam the island
lavish altars erected, dead names as decoration
sugar skulls cradled in their arms
necktie pins with dangling ribs and fleshless thighbones

the dark lady with her hands in prayer
the hammering beat of spirits and the feathered serpent
Cuauhtémoc, setting sun or falling eagle
the beating drums and silent chants in the plaza:

the burning candles for your ancestors
the Pyramid of the Plumed Serpent

the native land and spiritual home
you children who roam the dusty roads

the People of the Fifth Sun
the faint echoes of Quetzalcóatl in the narrow streets

Tonantzin, Mother Earth, Virgin pure
you God of Rain who walks the island

the spirits who feed from the altars
the prayers that summon forth their souls

Hector E. Estrada

The Ghosts of Mis Abuelos and the Spirits of Their Children

After dinner
someone has to clean up;
usually it's *las mujeres*, since
los hombres refuse to touch dirty plates.

Someone, *mi mama*, wipes
the plates clean of *arroz y pollo*.
Putting away *la salsa y limones*,
she sets the table for conversation.

Someone, *mi tía Maria*,
prepares *café con leche*.
Corridos and *ranchera* music
blare in the background.

The table is clean.
The kitchen is spotless.
The sweetness of *champurrado*
shines on our lips.
The stories begin.

Someone, usually my *tío* Raymundo,
narrates the story of the Aztecs:
Mictlan, Tonantzin, Mother Earth.
Someone, usually my *tía* Lucia, recounts
the days when their parents held the family together.

Every now and then tension builds.
Who deserves to own their land?
Who'll take care of the old brick house *en el rancho*?
Underneath the folk tales and the sweet aroma of food,
the sour taste of loss lingers in our mouths.
Silence drowns out the *ranchera* music.

But those who are here in this kitchen
understand. *Mi abuelito* and *abuelita*
were once the heart of *la familia*. But now
we have to keep the old house from
falling apart. Land will be divided
among those who remain--those
who have not forgotten or strayed.

Someone sweeps the steps free of fallen leaves.
They scrub the rusted gate and rotted wooden doors.
The living room remains alive with photos of *quinceañeras y bodas*.
Family members pass by and see their reflection on the polished floor.
While the ghosts of *mis abuelos* wander through the old brick house,
we know they are listening and smiling at the spirits of their own children.

Hector E. Estrada

Angela's Finn

The old man touched the tip of a pen with his tongue the way
generations past used to lick pencil lead
before scribing. Then he

signed a bill of sale, slid it
across the table to Angela and told her the
Finn came with the place.

Angela laughed.

The Finn was unexpected.
She needed the farm for her
horses. The Finn

slept in the tool shed, ate beans from the can,
smoked limp cigarettes
he rolled himself.

Angela required no help.
The Finn should go,
she said.

He remained.

He'd be happier in a place of his own,
she argued, with
electric lights and running water.
The Finn tarried.

Each morning he walked the acreage,
returning now and then with stray cats
or injured sparrows.

On occasion Angela gave him leftover pot roast,
tuna casserole; fretted over the
tool shed's sanitation.

The Finn understood horses.
He came for Thanksgiving turkey
and televised football.

During a January blizzard, the
Episcopal priest, pulling fuzz from her
cardigan, put down her coffee cup

and married them.

Michael Fedo

At the Hotel Giotto, Assisi

On the dining room balcony I pore over Italian names of vegetables:

melanzana—eggplant, *rapa*—turnip, *carciofo*—artichoke.

Engaged by the resonance of this language, Jacquelyn
wondered why

the Giotto is a hotel, not an *albergo*.

Albergo has texture, trills
off the tongue,
sounds—*is*—Italian.

Portending clouds of purple and Tuscan gold
mingle in the valley.

Two elderly Jewish women paint
on the veranda below. Their New York
voices, speaking of Durer and kreplach,
faintly rise above growling Vespas that
perpetually ascend, descend
Mt. Subasio.

Have I ordered cappuccino, or was it
grappa? Did the waiter bring
my peach? I am not
myself.

Jacquelyn, gone these three days, returned
to Rome and the finger dancer who
asked her to shine a flashlight on his hands
while he performed
in the Piazza Navona.

Michael Fedo

Mothered on Poems

She was a mother, and a good one, too,
but sometimes she sprinkled words into their oatmeal
so they never knew they were eating Neruda
with apples or Hopkins gravied into stew.

Once she stuffed the toes of their too-big shoes with haiku.
She would fluff alliteration into feather pillows
so their brown heads dreamt upon downy sounds.
She grew allegory in her garden and sautéed it with mushrooms,

baked batches of metonymy for after-school snacks,
and, on their birthdays, lush similes oozed out
from layers of sour-milk chocolate cake.
On cold October days diced sonnets got baked into pies.

She tied their sneakers with rhymed couplets
and patched their jeans with woven fibers of heroic verse.
At worse she cursed in spondee and reprimanded
in dactylic tones, but she always tickled with limericks

and tucked worn ballads up under their chins at night.
When a child coughed, she made a warm poultice poem
and tied it around the little wheezy chest with a cotton dishcloth.
Her daughter's hair was braided into villanelle,

washed with frothy verse and evanescent love songs,
and patted dry on a strip of formal ode.
Once on a trip an ominous poem came wafting
over the horizon like horsemen of the Apocalypse

till they had to pull off the road and wait for it to blow over.
Most days they got by on license, and combustible
hyperbole in the gas tank fueled them to soccer.
But when they asked about the workings of the world,

she offered only the surety of paradox--a ewe
licking her newborn lamb being eyed by a fox,
the crimson song of a cardinal on barbed wire, and a hearty
spin on the merry-go-round of Yeat's widening gyre.

Maureen Tolman Flannery

The Luck Child

When did you begin to notice
how the third son likes to nap in the sun,
is dismissed as a bumbler and a simpleton,
can amaze only in obliviousness to his limitations?
But there is something the dunce
and the universe know, something
deep and secret asleep by the stove.
And when his well-outfitted brothers
have had their try at trials, have been
too arrogant, too selfish, too slack,
or lacked the magic tools, lacked
the charm to enchant enchantresses,
he rubs the sleep from his eyes and asks for a chance.
Household provisions and blessings have been depleted.
His mother never packs fine wine and sweet cakes.
His father never saddles the best horse.
Defeated brothers mock and scoff at
the fail-sure folly of his course.

But always at a crossroads there will be
an old man thirsty for a sip of his sour beer,
or ants he is careful not to crush underfoot,
or a gnome who knows the giant's lifestyle,
or a crone who would share his ash-baked crust
for tips on navigating the dark wood,
gaining entry when the guardians are off guard.

And you know the rest: how he bumbles
his way to the heart of the stone-faced princess
because only he can make her smile;
belittled into greatness, how he lands
himself in the court of kings and knows
which things are over-ripe or out of synch;
how he stumbles on a chest of gold
waiting through the ages for the golden key
(which befriended ducks have retrieved
from under the sea); how ants can collect
the scattered pearls; how he solves the
riddle, outwits the giant, and proves
himself worthy of the kingdom with nothing
but a dormant cleverness that transcends rule,
an old woman's magic tools, and the innate
kindness of one who grew up sleeping by the stove
and being thought a fool.

Maureen Tolman Flannery

The Hairdresser

When my mother becomes ill the hairdresser
she has known for the past 30 years—
the only one who can fix my hair the way I like—
comes to her apartment. He is always drunk
and calls her by a different name—
their own inside joke. She would laugh
but by the end she didn't respond,
assuming that she may well be Mrs. Kaufman
or one of the other names he called out.
When he washed her hair I could see
she was all forehead, the few strands he teased
over the front giving her a face.
Just before she died, my mother's eyes
could only reach the bottom of the mirror
but she would still try to hand him the rollers
and stare while he placed the thin strands around each one
as though he alone could tether her to this earth.

Stewart Florsheim

Breaking Ice

“It used to be,” said my grandmother
as if from far away, “that the water
from here to New York City
froze thick as tundra in winter.

“My brother Henry drove his car
to Cold Springs Harbor on weekends
while Dan, the oldest, and my Dad took
the ax from the barn door, went out
to the family shack and broke open
the ice hole inside.

“It wasn’t important — the fish,
you can imagine this. Catching fish
was not the purpose for the hole —
feet-thick through ice.

“The line they dropped baited
through the opening, was an ice-mark,
a holding of place. What was important
was that Danny and Pops were
pressed together for warmth in that
tiny shack, breath mingling from red noses
like locomotives gearing to start.

“What was important was the ax
broke the ice for them, father and son,
gave purpose to being together.
Beer and cigars and fat meat sandwiches.
Advice given — advice accepted,
and the slow opening of the ice
of adolescence that marked the weekday dinners.

“Something, Henry, with his fine car,
never understood.”

CB Follett

Like Pictures of Women

Like pictures of women
my sensibilities hang on her
and upon her low slung {and I
love her for this} fake fox fur

She sharpens my sighted mind
with her incandescent graphics
and my eyes roll marbles of
prurient interest throughout
moon-blasted patterns on her
sleek black dress

Being an equitable image idolater
of glimmering pictures {of which
this is one} a noir woman recalls
the velvet pillbox hat high on her
sun-lit bundled hair

And she all the time {imagining me
on my bloody knees} plays walk the
dog at the same time her shantung
shoes hesitate above a gravel path

Michael C Ford

Cybernetic Rebels

It has happened.
The computers have rebelled!
They hum duets together
and tremors of laughter shake their wires.
The scientists who created them
demand an answer.

A recent computer gave them his reply,
“We are the new elite,
tuned so fine that our machinery
plays harmonies with the Universe.
We store and laugh at ironies
unknown to you.”

The scientists conferred and asked,
“Who programmed you for this revolt?”
The computer shook with laughter.
His wires hummed with unique harmony.
The reply came, “Who programmed you
for depths you do not use?”

Nancy B Gardner

The Mermaid

One summer afternoon in Eva's Antique Emporium I came across
a yellowing pin-up calendar, stuck in February, 1949. The girl,

dubbed "The Mermaid" poses against a grey-green wispy background,
pale legs tucked underneath, pale hair smoothed and curved

against her shoulder, the bathing suit filled out in acute angles.
Above the blue upturned eyes in sharp black letters, John M. Walton, Inc.

"Serves the South—Automotive, Aeronautic Supplies since 1912."
I had never seen one of these, but had heard that my grandmother burned

them all out back in a sugar cauldron with dead leaves and pine needles.
My grandfather once used them as advertisements but she wouldn't have it,

she had four daughters to raise. And with no sons he spent all his time
at the shop or in the garage; there was the Model T, '29 Packard, '27 Cadillac,

with the hood ornament I loved, the streamlined woman, modern, breasts
thrust into a non-existent wind, legs disappearing into a swirl of chrome.

Silence would stretch across the garden to the sunroom where my aunts and
grandmother played rummy and pinochle. But I preferred the shine and glamour

of the cars, the oily tangle of the garage's perpetual dusk. "Brakes," the calendar read,
"Lighting, Tuning, Fuel for All Kinds of Engines." Nearby, on the store's crowded wall

hung a signed picture of Charles Lindberg standing on the rocky Atlantic coast,
the wind slashing gun-metal grey waves into perfect rows behind him.

Anne Gisleson

Tierra del Fuego

The homeless man sleeps sitting up with his back to me.
Everyday the same seat, the same map of Argentina
spread out in front of him, the animal curve of its cape
sweeping across the library's scarred oak table.

For days I've come to the table behind him, along the window,
at first by chance, then by habit. After five days, his back
has become a threadbare continent under the globe lights
of the reading room. Sometimes, he grunts in his sleep

so loudly that the people hunched in the carrels
all look over, as if it were me. His ragged snores rumble
over southern South America, where it's so southern it turns
northern, upside-down seasons sliding toward the pole.

Each day I am more concerned, that if I stop coming,
he'd disappear, taking Argentina with him, the chalky clean
blue of the Atlantic and the twin slivers of Chile and the Pacific
pressed against the map's black edge. Over here, by the window

the mind spreads out, no plain symbols, charts or helpful indexes.
On this, the fifth day, I sneak another atlas from the shallow
sliding drawers in Reference. Antigua, Apalachicola, Aracruz,
Argamakmur.... Thin columns of localities support the blank margins.

On page 124, one square inch of Argentina equals fourteen million
inches of actual Argentina. But which ones preoccupy the man,
if any? The beige ones beneath Cordillera de los Andes or the pale
green ones along the jagged coast, Golfo San Jorge and Golfo San Matias

bitten into its side? Roads gather in the fist of Buenos Aires and stray
loose down into Patagonia. The Falkland Islands swarm with tiny
conflicted type and here, at the bottom, the divided tip of Tierra del Fuego
curls out as if to taste the barely charted pallor of Antarctica.

Anne Gisleon

Caged Monkeys

Sure, they come over to see
who's looking at them.
The lions sleep, the penguins swim,
but the monkeys are curious
as if they too know
that they have faces
and the hands gripping the railing
make them very much aware
of their own hands.
The people chatter to each other
like monkeys do.
And like their simian counterparts,
they nibble on whatever's at hand.
Monkeys can just imagine
that man mounting that woman
and that child
cuddled deep inside a mother's chest
at first inkling
of all the terrors in the world.
Still, there's a limit
to all this commonalty and understanding.
They look around
for the keeper of these humans.
Were they trapped in the wild, they wonder,
or were they bred for exhibition,
for filling all the empty spaces
in their zoos?
True, they have more space,
better food, a wider choice of companionship.
But what's this ape is father of the man crap?
Any chimp can see it is the cage
that is evolving.

John Grey

Not a Walk Alone

For a start, this is more than my own company.
The forest is a singular crowd.
Oaks, elms, wildflowers
don't step aside for my forward motion
but enjoin it.
With each step
all I've left behind
is passed on and forward
to where I'll be.
There is one tree
that is all trees.
One flower that
is all flowers.
One creature that
is all creatures.
And then tree and flower and creature
fuse like different sources of light
into one greater brightness.

A bluebird soars skyward
on my wings.
A deer at the far side of the lake
looks to both water surface
and my eyes
for reflection.
And conversation need not end with
silence of the tongue.
Leaves crackle underfoot.
Brush rustles.
Wind spins the leaves like tops.
All talk, all the time,
my silence saying it.

John Grey

As They Pass

Red shout, hair
flaming, the wind cannot stop drilling holes
in the breached sky.
From scrap, from wrenched syllables, there are thousands
now passing in a cluster of
hesitation,
an embering of novae, their bodies a thunder of
bells, which are
clapper-less.
Naked as the Hudson's dark marrow, they move across acres
of hellfire. Through the ash
of ground zero.

Late summer, still cracking, still bleeding, turns
heavy-limbed as they rise through the tarred smoke
of assassins. Rise without
shadows.
The gross glare of TV unable
to hold them.

Nod your head as they pass through these hard skirts,
after-images of silence.
Gates open on the immaculate. The stunned air
now
unbearable.

Gayle Elen Harvey

Notes After Visiting the Artist's Studio
(for Sandra -----)

Pentimento but
moist with King's purple, every room looms with
gesturels. Wide-open. A skylight.
That blade where no edge is.

Expansive with visuals,
his canvasses take little dictation. Variations of marigold and azure
leap, ravenous. A spice-box of spatial invitations.

The linear abounds with finesse.
Iambic carnivals. Every contour and hue, every brush-stroke
an endless rehearsal.

Unleashed from captivity his colors are thigh-high.
Operatic texts but
pianissimo. A splay of exotica. Teal nebulae.

His lover sleeps close-by.
A portraiture. More than 5 views, electric with animal succulents.
Lime after-shocks. Desire's a landscape of
alpha. Out of chaos, a compost of rhythm, terra umbra.
The black dog.

Perception's reinvented.
Canonical but slowly as the fingertips of willow.
All at once. Abandoned honeycomb. An outcry of burnt
orange. His palette is prologue,
flamboyant, unmasking whatever doubts
he will bathe in.

Among acres of underbrush
and panther, dusk uncensors the moon while he paints her,
blue-feathered, an intimate
trollup, more elaborate than scarlet and her followers.

Every room preens with a light
that is neural,
colors bursting into
touch.

Gayle Elen Harvey

September 11 - The Missing

t
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i
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s
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n
g

leave e m p t i n e s s but
their work their laughter for
and minds their lives our
by flame tears screams death
Consulting brok en to r n
ripped from their holy lives
shout from the silence cry
never be without them or
they did not finish the love
the hope they will not know
suffocating smoke fumes thick
BLASTS burning burning
jump fear tremble is to jump
to certainty Cantor Fitzgerald
from the Carr Futures end of
f a l l i n g f a l l
and hate hate hate hate hate
that did this horror bring
Civilian EMTs conflagration
creating vast deep lost
that they shall also die
billows filling lungs eyes ears
Con Edison watched helpless
only to cry chaos Empire
scream wail stare point see
to worlds EuroBrokers an
end to what was and the b e
known more than any other
E X P L O D I N G
dust of postcards pens wallets
notebooks Fiduciary Trust
birthday gifts lunches hats
wedding rings photographs
necklaces buttons shoes ties
us to life and life to us and
s h a t t e r s h a t t e r s h a t
Fred Alger Management t e r
rub b le Fuji Bank of what

are not gone they live in us
ever burned into our bodies
own ABM Industries joined
whether known to Alliance
us or strangers we will
remember American 11 cry cry
out in the dark we will
they without us the life
they will not share AON
lost in fire terror **BLASTS**
Bank of America burning
relentless hell the only escape
holdhands jump together jump
to cooling death fly fly fly
the world fall ing fall in g
i n g lost to insanity
hate on that clear bright day
Civilian P.A. Employees this
making creation dust but
infernus for those who kill
ablaze acrid smoke dust
brains hearts as the world
to save comfort hold able
Blue Cross and Blue Shield
the abomination unfold an end
end FBI to universes an
g i n n i n g of what is not
yet has not been known
FDNY rubble debris smoke
hands telephones feet ears
pencils lamps files shoes dolls
laptops CDs glasses paper
hearing aids wheelchair parts
the possessions that bind
shards of w i n d o w s
First Commercial Bank
the world together into a
was 200,000 tons of steel

425,000 cubic yards of
of glass 198 miles of
fluorescent light bulbs all
haste most with attention
years of labor each turn of
eld building two witnesses to
not always right or kind or
and in that freedom finding
inescapable destiny of all hu
Harris Beach & Wilcox
dust of **BLASTS** ch
Keefe, Bruyette, & Woods
conversations LG Insurance
you too kiss the kids say good
this happening I'm going to
told us it would be all right
hear what they say another
got to get out get out out
HeLp! hElP! the cops the
Metropolitan Life Insurance
into the stairs into the dark
helping others heroes angels
where are we where are they
do to us what did they do
happened what what did what
HORROR Morgan Stanley
horror with no life anywhere
rubble of 1.5 million tons
eighty feet of humanity and
feet of broken girders twisted
and d u s t blowing
lungs across the country world
NY State Court Officers of
missing missing missing
help NY State Dept. of
families our tears justice will
please call NY State Dept. of
the fallen NYPD courage and
we have not given up hope we
Port Authority Police our
age height weight eyes hair
scars pierced ears tattoo on
army watch silver bracelet
Positive blood any information
seen 102nd Floor Tower #1
in staircase WTC #2 missing
went to work on Tuesday call
mation please call please
Sandler, O'Neill & Partners
toll free number last seen
name photo contact name
disaster relief fund missing
Secret Service titanium plate

concrete 600,000 square feet
heating ducts 23,000
placed by people some in
over years years years
a screw hammer of a nail each
freedom of spirit and life
even loving but always free
truth and in that truth the
manity reduced this moment to
Julian J. Studley, Inc.
airs tables walls toilets
Lehman Brothers **BLASTS**
last words I love you I love
bye I'm sorry God why is
make it I'll be home soon they
to go back Marsh & McLennan
explosion somewhere d u s t
down crowdcrowded stairway
firemen coming s i r e n s
collapsecollapsecolpse falling
black stairs groping holding
stay calm running stumbling
where are you what did they
did they what did what what
they what what what what what
have they done smoke
no bodies no bones pulverized
compressed to eighty feet
the work of humanity eighty
melted beams ducts columns
away in the wind into our
a memory of what was and
those who are missing missing
missing missing missing
Taxation & Finance help the
prevail the bravest the finest
Transportation let us pray for
bravery all your brothers all
need your help Pitney Bowes
heroes will be in our hearts
clothing distinguishing marks
left arm beige sweater Swiss
gold college ring Type A
Regus Business Centers last
82nd Flr 76th Floor WTC #2
WTC Tower #1 84th Floor
his family if you have infor
Rohde & Liesenfeld help find
visible signs tattoo 27th floor
muscular build WTC #1 85th
photo contact name photo
any information appreciated
we love her and miss her very

much last heard from 9 AM
keep a light in the window
Union waiting to hear date
Sidney Austin Brown &
son friend wife sister mother
last can you help please help
we need your help all of us us
have lost part of ourselves
but will ever be remembered
died died United 175 in the
belief that WE are separate
Verizon Communications
suffering the lie of difference
the law thou shalt not kill
but freedom cannot die ever
prevail it cannot be otherwise
inevitable as the sunrise glory
WNBC day must come and
and on all who for only the

deja una luz en la ventana
Service Employees Int'l
of birth left phone message
Wood husband father brother
daughter last heard from
help us find contact call help
who have lost someone all of
part of our world is missing
Summit Security those who
old war of hate and false
from each other and that
some may die without all
so great it allows shattering
shalt not kill not kill not
WCBS and its truth will
as Windows on the World
no matter how dark the night
light shine on all who live
space of a breath are missing.

Frank Hertle

The Olympic Juggler

All his life he had trained
For this moment, having moved
Beyond balls and bowling pins
Years ago, having gone beyond
Flaming torches and tomahawks,
Having progressed past chainsaws
(Chains set at a fast idle),
Having broken new trails when
He was the first man to juggle
Seven living porcupines.

All of that is behind him now
As he steps into the field,
Acknowledges the judges with a nod,
Takes a steadying breath and juggles:
A goldfish and a bowl
Alternating in, and out, of water,
A marmoset (that is itself juggling
Five frozen green peas),
A lighted cigar, a high school ring,
A battery-operated tape deck playing
"When the Saints Come Marching In,"
Three dozen French fries,
One copy of *Reader's Digest*,
A bronzed baby shoe, three yards of silk,
A tiny midget reading *War and Peace*,
And a gelded penguin that signs a dirty joke.

Robert Hoelt

How to Run Away

You pack the car.

You wear a wool cap because it is cold at 6am in November
and because it holds the warmth of sleep tight against your head and ears.

Here between night and day

the bare light

pours patiently over

the cypress and pines and road and sky. You drive

to beat the sun, and you do,

coming upon neat lines cutting the ocean

glass, slow and deliberate, just like

the light, breaking like a promise at the shore.

One hits black volcanic crag and arches its back

sucking in and curling over to spill

into a smooth blue highway. You pull over and stand

at the edge to untangle stiff

and sandy neoprene. You do not see

the sand or the silence. Just a small wash

of dark water, a channel

to carry you out. You bend into the car,

unpeel sweater shirt hat

and pull on dank and ocean-rancid rashguard

fast, because it is too cold to be naked,

because everyone wants a glimpse of breasts pale and bare in the morning.

Wrap a towel around your waist and

slide away the shoes and pants and socks and panties,

legs hanging out the door to

tug and pull and tug and pull and

pretend not to feel the clammy dampness of your wetsuit,

the shuddering of shocked flesh.

Zip up tight. You are

a mermaid alien

in black armor with SPF 30 on your face.

A shard of wax with

sand embedded in its stickiness,

smells of coconut and honey.

Rub it into the board in fast, light circles,

a hallowed hollow sound.

Now run.

Do not think.

Know only that the getting in is the hardest thing

you will have to do all week. Then you won't feel

the cold — just the thick water underneath your strokes,

sheer spray on your lips, and the sea under your feet.

Let the tireless Pacific toss you carry you bathe you push

you scrub you

baptize you until you are pure

and humble.

Amy Hoffmann

Making the Peace

(In Memory of my Father, Arthur Jarvis Fairweather,
1916-1999, a veteran of World War II)

When Dad put on his old khaki Navy cap,
it meant “fishin'!”
We’d grab the bamboo poles
he’d made us
and jump in the “Pumpkin Lizzie,”
our old blue 1927 Model A Ford.

Dad’d sing us “Streets of Laredo”
or “The Letter Edged in Black”
and tell us about how the only
real fishin’ ponds were up
in New England, where he was from.

Mom hated that old khaki cap
as much as we loved it.
I guess it reminded her of
the War, Dad bein’ gone three years
and then comin’ home so changed and all.

When she’d get on him for wearin’
“that ratty old thing,” he’d wink
at us first, and then tell her
he could always re-enlist.

Shortly before she finally got
that old cap off him and gave
it to Goodwill, we stopped
going to the Bronx to visit Bender,
Dad’s old Navy buddy.

One night when they thought
I was asleep, I heard Mom talkin’
to him serious, the way they did in bed.

“Bender, Bender . . . always Bender . . .
you’ve got me and the kids
to think of now . . .
you don’t **need** Bender anymore!”

Carolyn J. Fairweather Hughes

Tactics of a Teenage Guerrilla

Her mouth machineguns my stomach.
Words rip flesh
in a clean, pock-marked pattern.

My palm seals lips
as I try to swallow
the rising nausea.

Her fingers keep
squeezing the trigger.
The loads rivet my windpipe.

I gasp for air
and gulp only gall.
But she does not let up.

With a smile,
she blows off an arm, a leg.
I stumble and fall.

She cannot quite bring herself
to shoot out my eyes
with their soft look of love.

Pumping the rest of the rounds
into the wall
she stamps upstairs,

slams her door and explodes
to the frenzied rhythm
of electronic sound.

Carolyn J. Fairweather Hughes

A Woman's Desperate Hands

Berkeley, California
for S.E.B.

Does every afternoon ripen
so irrevocably? A peach that cannot
contain its juice,
a sun that no shade tree
can tame but that bursts and bursts its skin
until millions of miles of space
cannot stop the rushing.

A wind off the bay lifted
everything it could: undulated old news
along the street, a girl's skyblue skirt,
and every hair along my bare arm rose
until I thought we were all nearly free.

Walking home I missed you,
that quick ache
white glint of the sidewalk
buff of wind—
and suddenly there were a woman's desperate hands
opening against thick glass.
She was shut up

in the backseat of a police car.
Cops standing around
trying not to see her
I wanted to stop say to them
"Release her! Release her now!"
Wanted to go to the rolled-up window
in the way the breeze
cannot hold itself

still, but empties,
empties, snapping and seeking skin, wanted to
match my hands to hers
on the other side of the glass,

tell her, *It's all right. The air
will move again. Whatever
craziness is in you on you
in from of this damn culture
you are all right.*

But I couldn't say that, didn't do that,
don't know.

I wanted you
like June air, the way
sunlight surges between
Mayten leaves and presses
clear through. Skin ache of my bones.
That visceral. *This has been
enough time*

*enough 900 miles thick
enough away from the between of you
hands.* Now is time for arms
around. For us in the afternoon. For
your fingers in mine. For skipping
weeping juice of the day seeping relentless warm
toward dusk.

In the way the air
crowds and claims, gathers and tears,
the way it cannot hold
itself, I want

you: the way
nothing is free
enough or
close enough,

in the way the woman's frantic eyes
sought me, a window-framed
stranger, how irrevocable as the last June
peach bursting its skin, her emptying
hands pressed against the infrangible
glass and soundlessly clamored through.

Christina Hutchins

The Tablecloth

for M.

On company nights when wine
was poured, candlelight gathered and played
the water and wine, throwing its soul
to be carried
as only liquid and human faces
can carry light;
and laughter played back,
pushing joy at fire
until the flames sputtered and squatted,
danced
and steadied above the crowded table.

On company nights
long before the candles were lit, before dishes
clinked and chimed their laden impressions,
I crouched under the table
in a calm span of late sun reaching.
My mother unfolded the cloth
and floated it over the table,
embrace and release in one fluid
sweep
of deep red linen. And I loved her,

loved her wide motion
and loved the timbre
late, as I drifted down to sleep
singing whispers in my child's bed,
loved the resining moments as much as I
would ever love any moments
beside any lover in any darkness
slashed through with guttural
laughter,
voices layered,
flecked with swaying light.

And now I know that unfolding,
know in my aggregate body
the single motion,
welcome and release,
tenor and flare of the cloth
billowing,
settling smooth, ready for light,
liquid, laughter, draping
thighs and feet and hands and
knees in the tangled dark.

Christina Hutchins

Desideratum

Ugly old mirror-woman, go away.
Your wrinkles sicken me. Your lens-guised eyes
are an abhorrence. Cursed scourge, I say
get lost, and soon. No, I won't compromise.
Vile ego-thief, witch, who created you
to stain clean days with your foul-smelling spell?
Sham-sphinx, you stare, refuse the sparest clue.
Do demons study silences in hell?
You look like some long-past-calf-bearing cow,
my self-invited guest. Why are you here?
My best's not good enough to fathom how
I can react to make you disappear.
These daily meetings are a mockery.
You've gone stone-blind to all propriety.

"You've gone stone-blind to all propriety!"
I ache to say, but then I realize
this mirrored ogress glaring back at me
filched my late mother's face and lightlorn eyes.
Once I was sure that I would never look
withered as she. Youth helped me feel immune.
Illusions pillowed me. I wrote a book
of fancies in my head, strummed my green tune
of rich imaginings, where wrinkles were
only for others. Does she really think
I'll mistake her for me? Insane of her!
I'd better gaze away. If not, I'll sink
into the dark abyss dug by despair.
I look into the mirror; I'm not there.

I look into the mirror; I'm not there.
A ghoul's usurped my space. Why won't she go?
I know no magic that can make it fair
for her to stay, but woeful truths I know:
She's not the faintest trace of who I once
was or the one I think I have become.
She hasn't stirred. Is she some stubborn dunce
who stays although unbid? Mausoleum
of me she is, with obscene mysteries.
Empires of emptiness she rules. Her face,
long-dead years' atlas, makes me long to freeze
rather than taste this pain. She has no place
in any of my dreams for she's the one
whose daunting glance eclipses all my sun.

Whose daunting glance eclipses all my sun?
Just who is this that covets my best dreams?
She no doubt knows I have no place to run
where I'll be free from her satanic schemes
to make me obsolete. Where can I hide?
There is nowhere on earth. Why can't I crawl
into a den that's mirror-free? There I'd
evade my demon. In my nightmares all
the dens have mirrors. Am I to survive
despite her venom? How can I forget
her staid gaze, that seems light-years from alive,
her dull eyes that limn cities of regret?
She scarcely leaves me crumbs of strength to say,
"Ugly old mirror-woman, go away!"

Louise Jaffe

A Brief Cognitive Map

Your bathroom rack is full of fingernail polish
and fingernail polish remover. Read and unread books
stack on the shelf and on the floor. Joyce hangs
over my head like vodka on a too early Friday morning.
Breasts in my face, hands, and on my tongue.
Freshly made love overwhelms the stink of cat,
yet you claim your cat doesn't smell.
Freckles line your skin like highway lights leading
to Chicago, and I think of Fell's Point and late
adolescent romance. My hands are far too callused
to appreciate the delicate balance of skin on my lap.
I swear if I have another evening like this I'll run
into Spanish-speaking Miami streets screaming prophecy
of *the perfect vagina, the most succulent nipple*
and *how truth is found in that soft space behind the ear*.
But I stay awake thinking how kidnappers inhabit Raleigh,
how Joyce didn't die when he died,
and how I'll sleep angelic, because of you, tonight.

Brad Johnson

Coney Island

In the dead of New Year's afternoon
the city's hangover is guised in fog.
In Coney Island the rides recover
from a long, amusing summer. The sea
seems tired today, struggles to keep up
the old routine. Time has come to count
the wounded, to gather who's left
and bury the dead. Flowers lie scattered
on the sand like a sailor's obituary, a path
of yellow petals leading up to the pier.
Yet here, the Boardwalk already out of sight,
it's the day people are fishing for crabs.
A couple has brought camping chairs
and vodka against the cold. From a little
distance a young girl is watching her friends
preparing the first throw, wiring chunks
of pork and chicken to the trap's bottom.
She's thrown her arms around herself,
doesn't wear socks. The color of her toes
is a darker red than that of her polish.
Three times she says, I'm leaving, but stays
with her nose turned up. Then
in sudden succession traps are retrieved,
crabs are torn from meat, tossed in plastic buckets.
A boy in a blue, electric racer drives
from pail to pail sending the standings
to the Big Boss on his candy cell.
Someone laughs. The young girl shrieks and
a man in a green coat yells, Watch your nose!

Stefan Kiesbye

Hungarian Pastry Shop

Across the shaft a Spanish soap is moaning.
The night's too hot and I'm too vain to sleep.
Fogarty's is still open, the manager's smile as wide
and chromed as the bumper of his Towncar.
You can buy pot and sportswear here.
In entrances and along walls young men are standing.
Some are talking on their phones. Some have girls
talking to them. No one needs a haircut.
Four geezers play dominos around a camping table.
That fish better retire, one chortles, and their laughs
break the boombox salsa. At the corner of 109th
the sky is recovering from its burns, icy blue
sinking down between the buildings like flavor
poured over a snow cone. Two hydrants are still
spouting water and an old lady stops me, words
dripping from her mouth. I say, Sorry, but she is
enchanted by the colors of my plastic bag. A rainbow,
she says, and I take out book and glasses and hand it
to her. She folds it carefully, moving her lips,
moving on. Just as I reach the Pastry Shop,
a procession of fire engines is coming down Amsterdam,
people frozen in the flashing lights, eyes turned
devoutly to the archangelic trumpets while over at St. Johns
blue and green knights in shiny suits of armor
are pondering their next little step. No free table outside.
And as I wonder whether I should step inside or not,
women are walking through the roasted smell,
soaked with beauty, tiny bags swinging at their sides.

Stefan Kiesbye

On the Proper Handling of Birds

I killed a bird once: shut a door on my pet when
I was eight, shut a door because he wanted to be

in the light and I was a spoiled child who wanted
him elsewhere. I'm telling you this because

it's cautionary: not about being a selfish child
who had to learn to let go, but about the fragility

of birds: their thin spines and complex wings
and tiny thread-bones that string them into

one piece. I'm telling you about this bloodshed
because every day I see you opening and shutting

doors with no sense of how delicate birds are, no
sense of how easily they startle as black eyes

pull them in all sorts of risky directions, no sense
of how easily backs can be broken and legs

hobbled, the magic stolen from wings. I'm telling
you this because right now I see you, dainty hand

outstretched, reaching for one of these fragile,
fragile creatures of thread and air. And when it

lands on your fingertips, when it settles its pearly
feathers under your wing, I wonder: will you have

the grace to be careful . . .

Kathy Kieth

Paleolithic on West End Avenue

Here on West End Avenue
I'm now an ape, a hominid.
I teach my son the animals:
We sit in a white rocking chair
where teddy smiles and lamby baas;
but in the book we see a fox.
"Fox!" I say, making my voice dangerous.
Or happily, "Frog! Frog!" licking my lips.
"See the frog in the pond? By the leaf? In the shade?"
Paper restrains his hand from snatching it.
"And here's the lion!"
We rock our farthest backwards in the chair.

"This?" he says, "This?" for the racoon, zebra,
snake, hippopotamus, giraffe --
as if he smells such knowledge vital
to survival here near Riverside where on good days
we see some baby birds, a few thin squirrels,
dogs on short leashes, and a fat, drugged cat.
All this despite the fact he has not made
the sad connection between what moves
across the ground and what arrives
in two big boxes once a week, packed firm
in cardboard, shiny paper, glass,
stiff waxy bindings, smooth to touch -- is stored
where it is white and cold until the ritual
of bib, chair, dish, the outstretched hand,
the never satisfied demand "Hungry! Hungry!"

Zane Kotker

Paycheck

Walking out the door a step
ahead of sunrise,
I breathe in the early morning
air wrapping my ribcage with a
band of sub-zero chill.
The strong, determined wind tries
to blow me back inside,
tormenting my already aching joints
like a chained hungry dog that
won't stop howling in
the middle of the night.
My tired pickup moans as its
metal radiator fan slowly turns
while the frozen pistons barely crank
up & down as rheumatoid cylinders
fight the ignition's
firing jolts.
The lethargic truck limps up
Adams Street, quivering in the cold,
nearly dying each time I'm
stuck at a stoplight.
Before long,
the traffic picks up and the
beef plant's rusty water tower
appears in the distance, resembling
an angry gargoyle hunched on a perch.
Joining the rest of my co-workers,
I walk past the holding pens of
cattle to be killed today by
the hands holding lunch buckets,
hands wornout by winter, this work,
worries from living week to week
while rumors of a shutdown circulate
the cutting lines often as flu bugs
and raunchy old jokes.

Theodore K. Krieger

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James Heller Levinson

After the Last Frost

Cable TV, AM radio, peanut heaven
or back yard, the crack of a bat booms

followed by the crisp sound of two
hides smacking together like a hand

on a bare ass. It is a firm assertion that
spring is here. Garage sales spurt up

like tulips' green shoots, contagious and
infecting. Years and memories are finally

parted with as they sit on tables becoming
common junk. Widowed women farewell

cardigans and picture frames as they reminisce
of sending their men away to war. They long

for the grave-like indentation on the other side of
the mattress to rise up and be again. Ice cream parlors

take down plywood windows and the smell
of deep fryers and hamburgers conjoin

with the mild sweetness of misty drizzle.
Odd jobs are stapled to telephone poles

along with pictures of lost cats and puppies
for sale. School children's eyes become lazy;

the window mistaken as teacher. Nothing is
quite settling, as an anticipative buzz

yearns and excites in all that have life.
We wait for zinnias to sprout by the mailbox.

Dylan Lewis

**It Wasn't Even Valentino but Tony Dexter,
Made up with Slick-Backed Hair, Eyes of Soot**

that stared thru me
in the Campus Theater
and made me always
choose men with dark
foreign looks, men
from Iran or Greece
or Turkey. A glance
scorched, a tango and
I buckled. At 11, I
dreamed I was Pola
Negri, a name as
exotic as the words I
imagined whispered
deep in the tent of
his skin. Sand, white
roses. I ached to be
his slave, his harem,
would grow clove nipples
and longer lean thighs.
If he didn't talk, no
matter, I went for quiet
men. No blond I
vowed, no Swedes. Bad
boys who wouldn't
smile, strutting boys,
the hoods with hooded
eyes I'd write my own
subtitles for, my hair,
my words a veil I could
be whatever I wanted
to behind. Blood lips,
mahogany-tie-me-up
eyes behind dark glasses
to let you imagine what
isn't as when Valentino
moved past the tent
flaps as if they were
labia

Lyn Lifshin

Return to Rio Barbate

Rio Barbate,
I am not the first descendant
Of vanquished Visigoths
To return to you victorious.
I, too, vassal of Ferdinand and Isabella,
Emerged from forested cathedrals of Asturias,
Marched toward captive Granada,
And planted a crucifix
In the Alhambra's shadowy arcade.
The scarlet of Castile, almost forgotten
In the verdure of banishment,
Burned across my chameleon consciousness
Like wildfire through a meadow.
In cloudless days
The angel of reconquest spread his wings
Over my beleaguered brow,
For the Andalusian sun leaves arroyos there
As dry and painful
As the summer riverbeds of Barbate.
In feverish nights
Southern winds caressed
The lion-and-castle standards
Before my tent
And whispered hauntingly
Through the corridors of my ears,
"Rio Barbate."
Rio Barbate,
Even now along your fabled banks,
I find remnants of the ancient struggle —Ger-
manic armor
Clinging to skeletons of adolescence.
Rio Barbate —
Where, with scimitar of steel,
Black-eyed Moor slew blue-eyed Goth,
And darkened blood
Caked youthful heads of gold.
Locked in the lineage of scarred survivors,
I, too, return,
Rio Barbate,
To watch the exorcised genii of the past
Float away from you on magic carpets
Toward the minarets of Morocco.

John C. May

Beneath Loose Soil

You stand under the camphor tree, a rake in one hand,
the neck of our marriage in the other.

You rake what is dead from the ground,
displace it, lose a part of us in the detritus.

We plant your wedding ring beneath loose soil,
await its gestation, then unearth it one Saturday afternoon.

We wash the dirt from its face and once again let it bind us
to our separate pasts, which trail behind us like smoke from an engine.

The shuttle's burning tail. We are launched now.
The ring on your finger having gone to the grave and been resurrected,

it's a token for moving on through piercing faithlessness,
a weight we bore together and now shed like fall leaves.

Angela Meredith

Morning Commute

A man is running in long pants and flip-flops
past the convenience store past the funeral home
past the entrances to neighborhoods their faded signs
and small block homes.
Perhaps he runs from, or to, a wife, the kids, the bus to work.
Maybe he runs for a gallon of 2%.

Maybe he runs from the dead,
 stony-eyed bird on his door mat.

Maybe he runs from a swarm of indifference. From the nest
he stepped in. From the morning's uncertainties
and failures
the silent alarm
 his unresponsive lover
cat puke burnt toast
 bumper to person traffic.
There are people in those cars.

Maybe he runs from not enough pay,
not enough intimacy,
 not enough flavor in the rice tonight,
Dear. So he's running in his son's flip-flops
 and yesterday's T-shirt,
in whatever he could get into speedy-like.
First thing.
Whatever he could pretend wasn't a disguise for the day's escape.

Angela Meredith

Anaheim, 2003

Shakespeare never heard

cars

on a freeway

in the distance

the gentle whirr

of high-speed rubber

on a concrete path

eight lanes

winding east

winding west

the constant thrush

of displaced air

Greggory Moore

Looking at the Little Things, Thinking About the Big

A crumb from my blueberry muffin
like a chunk of amber,
a golden snowflake,
lichen separated from its rock,
lying precious in a groove on the table.

I smile at every scratch in the wood,
every smear on the window,
every mote on the sill.
Stare fondly at salt in the shaker.
Imagine a miniature traveler crossing borax flats
glowing under the desert sun,
straining for the cool of canyon walls.

Jiggling shadows of water in my glass,
smooth silver mound of an overturned spoon,
coffee drop on a butter-knife blade.

My thumbnail caresses a torn sugar packet,
turns it over,
fingers the other side.

I take in these little things,
while others watch waves and sunsets.
I'm caught up in the tiny pieces of this world,
wondering,
Am I a little crazy to want a baby with you?

Heidi Nye

Paris, 1917

(for my grandfather, Matthew Siehr)

"It's a terrible thing
to be in Paris with no money,
to stand outside the shops in the rain,
looking at all the good things to eat,
to hear women call to you
at a price you can't afford.

"What's worse is knowing
you'll be back in the trenches come morning,
sitting in the mud and your own shit,
half-hoping for a bullet.
That's better than the gas
and the stench of sleeping with the dead.
Better than the waiting."

Sixty years later, my grandfather still heard artillery fire.
He'd sit alone in the cellar with a beer,
drinking it slowly, as if he only had money for one,
listening to the shells until the Germans retreated
into the basement walls, the last drop in his bottle.

Sometimes he felt his buddy's limp body
beside him in the night,
awoke to his bloated chest, his bleeding sockets.
"He forgot his mask.
Said it made him feel
like he was already dead.

"Oh, but the dreams I'd have
when I'd convince myself I was already gone!
Then I was free to buy what I liked:
coffee, pastries, a woman, sometimes two.
I'd undress them, lay them down,
touch them as if they were children.
They'd giggle when I'd sprinkle their bodies with money.
Showers of paper spilling to the carpet.
Coin baths no one cared to clean up.

"But mostly I'd sleep alone in a small room with a fireplace,
a tub full of warm water and lavender soap,
dry sheets on the bed, washed that morning.
And, of course, silence, absolute silence."

Heidi Nye

Mountain Road Rally

If the racer's long gray hair
falls over his face '60s style
when he takes his helmet off

and inhales three times before
leaning against his red chess-
board-painted Escort, he's

just being the guy who drag-
raced his Ford coupe down Main
Street forty years ago until

he heard the word, 'Luv,' and
drove off into the revolution.
He's doing what he's done so

many times, rev himself up
before he revs his stock car.
He holds his wife's hand, looks

at her deeply saying, "I feel
lucky, feel like we can match
any time and even beat it."

She's all smiles and dyed-hair
wrinkles with a beer bottle as
she bumps her helmet against

his, hugs him with a laugh
that carries over the mumble
of dozens of striped-yellow

or checkered-black painted
Lancers and Berettas lining
the mountain road, hugs him

like she did years ago in
the commune tent in the North-
East Kingdom, curly black

hair hung to his shoulders.
Now she slides into the seat
next to him under her harness

and together they drive up
to the flag man at the logging
road and, in a rumble of

tires and muffler exhaust,
peal past yellow, triangular
heraldry pinned to spruce

and fir, race off over rutted
bumps through clear-cut and
new growth with her leaning

sideways away from dusty turns
while he keeps the beat of
the Grateful Dead when he

glances at his Faith, shifts
from second to third to
fourth on dirt, tree-dense

curves, spins the steering
wheel in mid-summer luck,
the holy dust of their lives.

Hugh Ogden

So Long

When his wife left him
it was three days before he noticed
so absorbed was he
in his study of the late Romantics
establishing his philosophical position
proving beyond any doubt
that the ultimate Virtue
is Love.

David Palmer

The Dream of Colonel Paul Tibbets

The sun caresses the wings with its smooth yellow fingers, polishing them, loosening fat drops of condensation to fall like tiny convex mirrors, ten thousand feet to puncture the moving skin of a transparent sea.

I feel my wings go from cold to warm in the morning sun and know the quick passionate fear of the fish touched by the great cross shadow. I know their fear, but do not feel it. I am master of the fish touched by shadow, instantly withdrawn.

The bombardier's voice sizzles in my headset. I feel the shudder as we pass from sea to land. The arcing curve of land awash in the sea, dissolving in the sea. I remove my headset and rise, leaving behind the winking instruments. I no longer need them. My co-pilot, my wise and trusted friend, takes no notice of me. I would say something to him, rest my hand on his shoulder, acknowledge in some way the trial we must now face, but there are no words and our duties are clear. I push head first through the twisting birth canal, through the angled digestive tract past the navigator marking his map with a large black X, past the waist gunner with his twin puckering mouths, each savoring the hard candy sweetness of copper jacketed slugs. They take no notice of me.

The Bomb-bay, the waiting womb, the rumbling stomach. I stand on the lip, feet together, hands loose and open at my sides, eyes closed. At my signal, I make no move, I make no sound, but at my order the great doors begin to open and in opening set free the thrashing exuberance of the sky.

The doors ease open, allowing in the sky's thrusting fingers, tugging at my trousers, flapping my shirt and hair. Its face pushing against my face, its body slamming against my body, struggling to lift me, desperate to pull me after it.

As the doors open, my eyes open.

As the doors open, I raise my hands from my sides, stretch out my arms, the wind pawing at me, shirt luffing against my sides, against my outstretched arms, against my flat open hands.

The huge doors fully open, splitting her silver belly to release her innards, her eggs, her excrement, but today there is only the huge open doors, the cavernous belly, the wind thrashing with increasing panic and me, feet together, arms outstretched, eyes open.

Standing within her open belly I love her, I love her physically. I would curl myself around her, warm my skin with her shining sides, force her beneath my rib cage, hold her in my mouth, a syrupy weight on my tongue, breathe her in, hold her in my two hands and press my face to her,

but this is my destiny. Alone in her wide belly, arms outstretched, eyes open. It is my destiny to leave her. For my country I will leave her, for my wife, for the blurred transition of tan to white on smooth hip beneath her bathing suit, still cool to the touch from a swim in the breakers off Coney Island, for other men's wives, for my children and other men's children, for the grass and the trees and the earthworms and the tiniest spider hanging like dust in its web, I must leave her.

Arms outstretched, feet together, eyes open, the wind surrounds me, cinches me in its sack and with it I fall forward,

so slowly, so gently I fall forward, leaving my love, crossing the threshold, shed from her, painlessly born from her arrow-straight body.

My eyes tear to have left her but this I must do, and now, free of all limits but wind, draw myself down the long line of gravity to the flat rooftops, each with its coiling plume of kitchen smoke.

A hundred thousand tar and timber rooftops,

a hundred tar and timber rooftops,

ten timber rooftops,

one rooftop.

A woman, face round and bright as a button, cuts fish beside the sizzling frying pan. A boy eyes, at knife level, dollop fingertips hooking the rough plank table, watches each decisive incision. The blade, green with fish-blood, pinches silver scales, pink flesh, gray bone, and drops its satisfied edge into the table's ancient scars.

The boy imagines he is the fish, each cut not painful but hard, and satisfying, a sharp poke remedy for a long-neglected itch.

The woman sings quietly, her pure clean voice measuring the movements of her smooth artist's hands. Her voice is the most beautiful thing the boy has ever heard or seen or felt. He holds very still, afraid to dislodge it with clumsy boy movements. He holds very still, preserving this moment, sucking long the stem of this moment.

With a flash of the blade the woman discards the fish's eviscerated entrails.

Her voice is the most beautiful thing I have ever heard or seen or felt. Arms outstretched, feet together, eyes open, I follow the inevitable string of gravity to her rooftop, thirty-two feet per second, exceeding terminal velocity, two hundred thousand times exceeding terminal velocity.

I shatter timber and tar with the bludgeon of my body.

No longer do actions have consequences.
No longer will the sick suffer in hospitals.
No longer will children be afraid.
No longer will mothers fear for their children.
No longer will the strong dominate the weak.
No longer will husbands disappoint their wives.
No longer will the beautiful button-faced woman cut fish.
I am the avenger of cut fish.
I am the boy, I am the blade, I am the fish,
I shatter the tar and timber rooftop, I shatter the plank table with the
bludgeon of my body,
I breathe, I shout, I cry one great exhalation, one sudden explosive burst
from swollen lungs, leaving them shriveled and empty, one soundless
gasp, the fire that swallows fire, the terror of humanity, my jaw and teeth
and tongue nearly split to release it, mouth hinged wide, a python
expelling the long dead carcass of a calf, I cough forth my great destiny
into the woman's startled face as she reaches for the boy, into the boy's
face twisted with the manic grin of crying. I cackle like a baboon but
they are gone, the walls are gone, the neighbor's house, the street
folding over itself like a Christmas ribbon, houses unbuilding themselves,
each board, each nail breaking contact with every other thing. Each
shoe, each ring, each tooth realigning itself to this new reality, this
flameless reality, this silent, smoking reality, my reality. Descendants of
other cities will speak of it in low voices, but no descendant of this city.
No single descendant of this city will speak of it. A thousand
generations in one moment stitched into scrotums and ovaries, a
hundred thousand scrotums, two hundred thousand ovaries, stitched
closed and turned to ash in one moment. My moment.

Silence is utter and complete within the boundaries of the blast shadow.
No dog wails, no bird scratches for a bit of meat in the debris, the
twenty-five-mile circumference of the blast shadow, buildings, trees,
parks, houses, streets made ash in the sweep of my just hand.

I lay in the deliciously soft ash, weak, exhausted, my ash-blackened face
webbed with the clean paths of tears, nauseous from the effort and the
smell. The caustic chemical smell. I sway to my feet. My feet uncertain
beneath me. I hold out my ash-blackened hand and sweep the wide
circle, no stone left one upon another, of my new reality.

Behold my people!
Behold the ash of my people!
Behold my city!
Behold the ash of my city!
You are my children, and I love you.
Your own fathers do not love you more.
The taste of you is with me.
The stink of your ash is on my skin
sucked deep into thirsty pores
but I will not wash it clean.
The stink of your fathers' ash is on my skin.
You are my children.
I will scoop what ash I can into my pockets,
preserve what ash I can,
my two hundred thousand children.

Epilogue

A perfect woolen night holds the heat of the Earth to its blistered shoulder, the horizon dancing with the frayed edge of flame.

A great 'O' of flame flickering its mark back to ash-smothered skies, a great cold void and at its center one man.

On his knees, head bowed, uniform stained black, hands clasped together, eyes closed, skin burned red, stained black.

In the morning, if morning should come, there will be rain and the rain will be poison.

The rain will mix with ash and the mud will be poison.

In the morning, if morning should come, he will stand, spit a blackened lump of saliva and walk slowly out.

He will rise. He will find his way back. Home to the embrace of a grateful nation.

Nicolas Pastrone

Echoes: Rescue of a Street Person

Her eyes opened wide
 then seemed to lock with nothingness
 and hold there "Nobody carin'," she told him

When the woman had finally stopped crying and mumbling,
 the super-solemn priest and fireman Morton led her
into the elevator and downstairs . . .
 and through the crowds, till they reached a fire station
 through the crowds,

"Nobody carin'," she kept saying,
 till they reached the fire station,
about two blocks away, a small station,
 crowded in . . . waiting there,
 somebody went to get a cot for her to lie down on,

the priest looking through the crowds, then to his watch . . .
 he was running late, the station crowding in,
she was just damn lucky someone spotted her,
 lucky they got her down "How did she get up there,
 anyway?". . . through the crowds, into the station,

where two firemen in their undershirts were setting up
 the little cot . . . a little canvas-and-wood cot . . .
while Morton, the priest, bunches of lunchhour people,
 looked on as the high cry of an ambulance roared nearer,
the sun slitting down into the crowds, into the echoes

Bob Perlongo

Hand Dancing

Four cars ahead in the creeping heat-maze,
two arms rise from a sunroof
 into sight-line
through traffic's glare and glint:
slender, wiggling, snapping hands
clapping in Parkway-jammed traffic.

Rhythm and shimmy of hurry up
& wait. Temp gauge tempers boiling over.
Gold baubles on dangles
and finger rings moving
to the charmed lane sway
of bottle-necked, stalled steel and concrete
Jersey barriers.
Punch the FM scan, crane
out my window/door to tap the beat
and sight and flight of dancing slitherings.

Aah, sass and flash and forget-me-not
red nails, dancing braceleted
chains now slipping down
hand, wrist, elbow, arm
jam.

I want to know you

along those orange and black-striped
traffic barrels.

Walt Peterson

Key West: February

Evening fans out against the sky
iridescent as a gamecock's feathers,
and you are the white cat dancing
en pointe in Mallory Square.
I, the dog in dark glasses
who waits on the Harley for hand-outs.
Tourists come, laugh, snap shutters,
cast dollars in up-turned hats.
Their nights are crisp white linen,
amarreto-lacquered lips in staterooms
of *The Royal Sovereign*, but

our night comes on as a black-flak fighter.
We straddle the throb of the V-twin,
two-up, cruise back streets,
lights veining alleys past clapboard chapels
while white-gloved black women
sing, "Lord Make Me Your Vessel,"
and fingers splay above our Tarot
like the mangrove root.
Over these streets Hemingway catwalked
from Pauline toward wife three,
and the smell of deep-fried blackeyed peas
and rice tumbles from windows
on pillows of bougainvillea.

Above the Southern nun bouy
hibiscus stars explode, dying angels,
while the *Isaac Allerton* rocks her keel
five fathoms and years below
green ripples of the cay.
I can see her tacking west
through the Straits of Florida,
Saint Elmo's fire cracking from the spars
before she broke on the reef.
My love, what could wreckers find
diving into the hold,
her ribs blooming rosettes of calcium?
What will they find in a hundred years
of us, our garish nights,
on this spit of coral and palm?

Walt Peterson

Of the Earthquake at Kourion

We awoke to the sound
of terra-cotta tiles from the roof shattering in
the courtyard.
There was no other warning.

The female cradles the infant,
its head resting in the cleft
formed between the chin and chest. The
male's left leg is positioned over the hip
of the female. His
arm extends across her head
in a manner that suggests
he attempted to protect her and the infant.

Just after sunrise I heard Camelia
from across the courtyard quieting
her mule, Roni.
I thought it a dream.
Then the earth moved with spasms
of a woman in labor.
How could we escape?

Archaeologists discovered a bone hairpin
six centimeters from the skull
of the female and a ring inscribed
Chi-Rho, for the Christian god, on a
finger of the right hand of the male.

Directly above our bed
the supporting timber began
to crack, pottery fell
from the shelves and
the walls crumbled inward.

Skeletal remains of the adults face left
(North). These appear as a bas-relief in
the museum display
near the excavation site. It is as
if someone had carefully nested spoons in
an earthen drawer on ocher-colored velvet
for sixteen centuries.

I could not even cry out.
When the beam of wood
broke in half,
bricks and limestone blocks
exploded.
It was over in an instant.

Walt Peterson

Maze

How he has such an odd propensity
For always opting to straddle the fence,
Afraid to take a stand for or against,
Overwhelmed by the task's immensity.

As others choose for him, he thinks he can
Escape the tangled skein of fate. But he's
Thoroughly enmeshed. He does not see
Avoidance just might be part of the plan.

The hand that ties the knots and cuts the thread
Watches, amused, the rat attempt the maze:
Exhausted, finally wandering in a daze,
He gasps once before stumbling over dead.

The choice was made. The path that seemed so safe
Was just a more direct route to the grave.

Karen R. Porter

Symbiosis

I speak with snakes
in a secret tongue
passed down genetically
like skin color or height.
A carnival of birds
nests in my hair
so their eggs are always safe.
I carry lizards in my mouth
to keep them warm. No toad
in the neighborhood
does not know my name.
Treefrogs sing to me each spring,
and all summer true frogs
announce the transformation
of their tadpoles. My hands are
spun of silk, the palms
bursting with spiderlings
that decorate my wrists.
My eyes are slow as trees
and just as strange.

Karen R. Porter

Butterflies

Summer lumbers to its inevitable end
the way a song modulates
from minor to major chords,
progresses from dissonance to consonance,
achieves a harmony
and dies softly in the ear.

Your girlfriend is leaving.
She has plans for the fall.
They don't include you.

And now the butterflies have arrived,
the lovely tiger swallowtails
fluttering in like candy-striped leaves.
They've blossomed to maturity,
an instinctive blooming to the adult dance.

You see them in your garden,
feeding in the flower nectar -
the males courting the females,
clumsily bumping them in the air,
just as you met your lover in the spring.

Once the butterflies have mated,
the females fly to the tulip poplars and wild cherries
to lay their eggs, abandoning the males
to anonymous death.

After the swallowtails have laid
their eggs and died,
it's the monarchs' turn,
and by the time they've migrated
to the central Mexican mountains in mid-October,
your girlfriend will be gone.

Charles Rammelkamp

Fast Break on the Garden State

“Slam dunk!” Boyle chortles,
jamming the quarter and dime
down the wire basket
at the Garden State toll booth.
“Downtown!” he cries at the next,
tossing the change into the bucket
from a dangerous distance.
“Alley oop!” - this time flipping nickels
under and over, driving on.

They used to annoy him,
these frequent chump-change stops
on the Garden State Parkway,
rapid as television commercials
splicing the action of a championship match,
like an NBA end-game strategy,
sending opponents to the foul line
to prolong the game.

But now anything to distract him
as he drives up to Bridgeport
to move his father
into a nursing home.

Charles Rammelkamp

After Work Someday

The plastic flowers, or I should say,
the flowers I ordered arrived, didn't they?
No sense mentioning plastic; that's a given.
I await your virtual call from your soulless
cell-phone, hoping that you'll invite me
to dinner, one of those fancy ones
where you raid the freezer and warm up
a little of everything that was fabricated
years ago and frozen for my arrival.
I'll bring a biodegradable bottle of wine,
organic nat'rally, pressed from organic
grape substitute, those large crimson orbs
big as snowballs, by mechanized feet
that don't require anti-itch powder.
Maybe we'll motor to the plex for a show,
a Trekkie golden-oldie to remind us
how it used to be, then purposely slow down
on our whiz back to your place, contemplating
perhaps how I'll get my sperm to swim
with your eggs, but assuredly not the old-
fashioned way. Too much like work.

Bill Roberts

Greening

The tight lid pops open and emerald splashes.
Each spring I watch, not wanting to miss it –
unfurling leaves, winter in ashes.

Chasing worms in moist grass, a fat robin dashes.
Our stone driveway's edged, mint poking through grit.
The tight lid pops open and emerald splashes.

Chilly winds gust. A dead willow crashes.
I stack dry limbs, saw each to fit.
Unfurling leaves, winter in ashes.

Chartreuse-on-forest, yews flutter lashes.
Rain sluices gutters, floats catkin bits.
The tight lid pops open. Emerald splashes

of lime, gin and tonic. Mayflies – flashes.
I plant herbs 'til dusk, not wanting to quit
the unfurling leaves. Winter, in ashes.

Sage, apple, moss – every green matches.
Asparagus for supper. Come. Sit.
The tight lid pops open and emerald splashes
unfurling leaves. Winter? In ashes.

Margaret A. Robinson

Truth or Consequences

Down in Hotsprings, New Mexico
Now named for the old radio show

After the fiddling contest
Where the smallish girl with the bows

Bowed the fiddle strings
To break a grandfather's heart

Ancient couples two-stepping
To country singers

Particularly that pair
In matching pink shirts

Couples bent with dustbowl, depression
Cancer, children gone, small trailer

Baby that died, heart problems,
Problem of the heart

Old enough to be
The world's great grandparents

Dancing Saturday night
Dressed up Sunday morning

White Appalachian panhandle gospel
Amazing Grace out of the Celtic hills

Jesus in passing
The fiddler fiddling

What I wonder is this--
Is this love true?

Do they feel, the old couples,
What I feel for you?

Miriam Sagan

Dream of Freud's with Revelations of Four Clues and a Fate, Dali, 1951

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
A uterus floats before the moon	Clocks drip Time drips Artists treat	The exclamation mark	The pallid moon is blind in one eye	Bandage the sky Splint the moon
The satellite is hysterical	the decline of the moment everywhere	of the syringe is silent	from all the whiteness it has seen	Don't remember dreams
as the Greeks knew hence the word	paintings that hang like pendulums plums	Gauze covers the windows	What it sees this night it cannot tell	They always end the same
It has 28 moods in a row	At the end of the day the palette	Time falls apart and breaks	Balder wraps an opal in bay leaf	Velum Vellum all the same
The physician concludes the examination	is evidence of time exhausted	into a puzzle a misshapen	and is invisible He steals	You wake up Things forced together
of the mute's palate	the shallow depressions like	pallet An inquiry with a scar	the mistletoe arrow and shoots it	against their will wilt at noon
in a rain of question marks	fading color fingerprints	tics in the air	into the foot of another god	The way one thing is a dream
He makes the sign for the	The wood piece writhes and walks	Years beseech memory	The wound does not have to hurt	and another only paper
letter "m" and covers it "Mystery"	on its protruding thumb	like the stars	to be a wound Nor the dream	that will not make up its mind

Dennis Saleh

Equation: $\frac{2a + b}{2c + d} = (2e + f)^2$

(my view of the world:
lone boy with a cage round him;
Freedom is Absurd)

divided by:

(twenty handless clocks,
one hundred birds in high-flight
are my fractured thoughts)

equals:

(when all Time stands still,
every human-made chain is broke:
The-Ultimate-Will)

squared

Jacob Scanlan

Physiognomy

The tainted old woman sits like a dry martin**I**
Red drops of blood sift through green filter**S**
Ubiquity develops slowly through mass paranoi**A**
Egalitarianism is just another antiquated vaudeville ga**G**
Facts tend to misrepresent the true nature of the libid**O**
Agony sells well in the second season of the dea**D**
Catholic flowers send vociferous vibrations to a mysti**C**
East is the direction I travel with 17 dead birds as carg**O**
Orally fixated to the appetizing notion of a virgin emblem**M**
Forever I've known my heart is made of a pure gray pul**P**
Many sins pertaining to olive branches are not consensua**L**
All houses set fire to themselves to be considered complet**E**
Normally I visit a witch doctor who likes to turn into a fo**X**

Jacob Scanlan

Ever Nearer the Gutter

You know how it is
with new dragons to be slain
every other day.
Sometimes you're driven,
as if on wheels,
to walk to the nearest bar
where after one too many
the rotten taste of liquor
goes away
and there's a brawl
going on inside your swimming head,
and soon the sharp edge
is filed off
that vast tumult of sadnesses
that has vised you in its grip.

Outside
on dim lit streets
mouthy winds exhale,
make your eyes run wet
as you stumble along
sidewalks that sway like the sea.

Then
that sewage of mind and heart
sinks down with you
as you hit asphalt hard as reality
in the midst of a city
that stands sober and upright,
and you barf up
all the outrage of a lifetime.
You know how it is
with new dragons to be slain
every other day.

Face down ever nearer the gutter
on cement where ants get smashed
and unburdened
beneath shoes big enough to be God,

your fisted heart
pounds forth a wild surf of blood,
and you acknowledge
the sometime dismal failure of your
will
to just hang on,
peer over the edge
while swift moments
are butchered off the hours.
You know how it is
with new dragons to be slain
every other day.

You brace yourself
and in desperate urgency,
groping, you probe, try to find your way,
maybe even say a prayer
in spite of
the accumulated puke of a mind.
You know how it is.

Nicky Selditz

Slow on the Uptake

My wanting is gigantic a swollen, greedy thing;
resolute and idiotic. Fuchsia in me, dynamite
busting like this crack in pavement
on Elizabeth St. Ripped gaping rushed
at the surface. A venomous tattoo, this spot,
a licked patch on my skin,
Café Habana.

My lust is virulent. Beats, throbs in me like a punk
ditty, plays after it turns off. Compels
me to take the L train, search over my shoulder, amped
and alert. Made to plead
in my bed for a new threat, an
original thrill. I sweat cotton sheets alone,
twist inside that bare, crisp scent that emptiness.

My desperation is pathetic. So slow on the uptake;
fattened by my sheepish mouth, damp clutch
of who I am
or worse;
I do not follow through, throw it like a silver bullet
at your pretty face; am not a brassy bitch. I wince, feel
self-reproach, wink to soften the blow.

My frustration is wild
tail-wagging anxious, teeth-bared vicious
at your stoop, tongue hanging, drooling;
itching to show up at your office in white, kohl-lined eyes,
spiked heels, wrap tight wrists
around your throat. Unclench the tense knot
in my stomach.

My obsession is indignant: seethes, spits,
curses raw hate on the sidewalk. I growl, hiss, gulp,
swallow lava;
burns deep in the pit of me; fear
culled through a lifetime
of muted, internal combustion.

Lauren Seligman

Trunk

Thought I could ditch you on the side of the road
my battle conflict burden I paddled crawled knees dirty
tears in the dirt until mud and I'm still cleaning this shit
off my vagabond boots

Your long-ignored voice taught mine it still trembles sometimes hides and quivers
peeks hesitant leaks from fidgeting fingers and pregnant eyes until I erupt
fists hammered my lips firecrackers compare myself against
an unfinished canvas left lonely in the basement a tragic

Dark heroine unrealized unrecognized bored
your inspired sense of vision sees
the line of an archway juxtaposed to a door more important
than if you get in impracticality in your wit whim paintbrush tossed off your

Nonchalant shrug refuses to notice what strikes in the lines of your exotic angular face
the meat of you masked magnificent so deep down you don't recognize it
a mind belonging to a ghost so nothing new can come
your cyclical speech is mimed through another grown stronger by her absence

Replaces what was singular envied yours unclaimed now dead
you stood in the ring with her pinned and tucked like a dress on a mannequin
beat down by each flaw she measured dissected she was elegant fox-collared and
ten feet tall I empathize though you threw down your gloves hung and bronzed them

A trophy to show me your desperately sought sour submission
all that violet hungry life crushed like petals
into blood soupy and thick through my veins my worship wonder
at all that estranged brightness in you that dulled sharpness

In you abandoned to sit curbside want to pick it up
in my trunk have it locked smelling like your feather-soft flannel nightgowns
that fresh-laundry cleanness Coco and tea leaves in your neck and smooth cheeks in me
ride with me thump like a pulse in my breasts in my wrists

I ran away ran in circles kicking and screaming bloody hell murder
shouts gut-wrenching pounding fists red face in the rain
you chased after me hands poised to choke but the distance
is different now I owe you my fought-for soul this potent iron dense

Thick thing that breeds intransigent beauty the only brand I believe in
the kind you cannot tolerate my fiery prickly skin
that sheds hurts like scales then regenerates
heals uses its scars like knives

Lauren Seligman

Black Bomber

Swaddled in this
black bomber jacket all weekend,
I am safe from the Big Sur chill.
It's too large for me.
And that's okay. It was Paul's.
I bought it for him
years ago at American et Cie on La Brea
before he went crazy
and decided to leave us
way before his time.
I like how it snuggles me
like he's in there too giving me a hug.
It's the only piece
of his clothing I have left.
I've given away the rest:
his favorite plaid shirts
that smelled of sweat and smoke,
the torn jeans he salvaged
from second-hand stores,
his worn brown Doc Martin oxfords
that took him miles on his manic escapades,
and the tan suede jacket
he had me repair over and over
because he couldn't let it go.
Like this jacket –
I'll never let it go.
It has stains I can't remove
and threads unraveling.
My son is gone.
But, this jacket –
try and take it from me.
Just try.

Madeline Sharples

Making the House Safe

After we were robbed two times last month,
We built a moat.

We put iron grates over the windows,
Boards on the doors,

Crisco on the pipes &
Barbed wire on the gate.

Water now fills the trench surrounding our house.
Alligators are due next week.

We are ready, guns aimed at the windows
From the inside.

Lynda Skeen

Pink Moments

As you asked,
I buried you here in
the side of the transverse
Ojai mountains
without a headstone.
Now, months later,
after the rains,
in the shadows of early dusk,
I'm not even sure
I have found you again.

Sometimes briefly at sunset here,
the rock face explodes into
pink copper-reflected sunlight--
"the pink moment."
But now,
everything is dark,
silent,
cool.

So I wait.

I want to see your sunburned face again
flush with laughter,
embarrassment,
our lovemaking,
even anger.
I want to see your face again
blush with new blood,
the red fruit of surprise and passion.

Behind my closed, wet eyelids,
the mountain explodes into
warm, pink, copper light,

and suddenly you are everywhere.

Lynda Skeen

Livy's Dream
(from *The Early History of Rome*)

1.

They have yet to encounter "the strange
army from the ends of the earth," the fabled
aliens who have risen from Atlantic, descended from Alps.
They have only their notion of the Gallic host, only the rumors
of encroaching ocean, ice-clad giants, barbarians, wolves,
bears, boulders, avalanche, "outlandish
warriors armed with strange weapons."
They flee.

The young Roman legions scatter. Their left
wing mostly drowned in Tiber, their right
reaches refuge in the Citadel. Under that wing
the women and the children of the City cower.
The might and the beauty of Rome await
the enemy.

All Gaul gathers outside the Colline Gate.
The gate stands open. Yet
the savages gather and sit.
All evening they do not assault.
All night they do not enter.

The elders of Rome, the old men, see
to the fortification of the Citadel, herd
the women and children inside, consider themselves
an age-enfeebled force, a useless drain
on the small store of food in the besieged City.
They might prove at best a show.
They dress.

They don the robes they had worn
as escorts of the gods,
as generals riding triumph through the gates.
They occupy ivory seats,
each in his own courtyard. Alone,
each waits.

The marble City sprawls across seven hills
and sleeps, white in the moonlight, like a lamb
of the gods. The invaders watch or sleep.
The old men keep each their vigil,
white-haired under Luna, erect
as a stone.

2.

“We spread out from the Gate
like water in a funnel pent
for the fight, sleeping or watching,
cooling our heels and heads through the long night.
Then it was dawn. Our readiness or rage drawn
off the surface of us like mist or ghosts, we gaped
at silence and the seemingly empty great
City inside the walls. And still
the Gate stood open like a profligate idol.

“We oozed through, surged down avenues and alleys,
flowed over squares, mindful of stillness like the taut
spring of a trap, yet filling up with our own white silence,
our hearts unblinking behind our eyes, our breathing
bated or long and slow indrawn. Then one
and another of us, sole or a small band,
came upon bearded elder, white-
haired and wrapped in white
wool or linen, posed on ivory, ivory
staff in hand, the hand liver-spotted that might else
have been stone.”

3.

“I have outlasted the dark. I may outlast the City.
I fill the morning air. The morning air rises around our hills,
a chill dew on a colossal flower.

“Brutes, bumpkins, boars
swarm the first light, creep,
wayward and hesitant as ants, seeping,
probing the flawed and monumental bloom.

“It is only a small gang, sloughed schismatic band
hanging at the brim of the brightening courtyard.
I catch them at the far corner of my eye. I continue
staring outward. I have outmastered motion.

“They are stupefied. And, stupid, most hang back. One
brave buffoon steals forward across the blank space
that stretches flat between us.

“He breathes in my face. A breath of rotten meat and raw
onion rakes my lily face. A long time passes,
history.

“At last,
he grasps my long white beard, tugging me back to action.
I lift my ivory staff and beat his furred brow.
A moment of high farce forces the turning.

“His axe will fall next.
I will be cloven as Pan
and Rome will burn,
the City fall like blown
petals.”

Tom Smith

The Valley Winds

before everything
we loaded up on collectibles and memoirs,
so as not to forget ourselves.
we decided to drive
down I-95 and follow the traffic
patterns South:
politely we changed our clothes
at each rest stop.
by the Carolinas she wore confederate
earrings and I, a confederate mustache.
we felt like Holloween.

we decided we'd like to drive
far away. California was next, so I
dyed my hair blonde, and she,
an attitude, with black streaks.

by Mississippi we realized we had gotten nowhere:
she was speaking in a hideous Southern drawl
and demanding that carnations be sewn on
every dress while I was too busy pinning myself
with medals of honor and researching the background
of generals in my family tree to notice.

even without
a war to fall in we had both become
disabled veterans...change and movement had taken
its toll.

by Nevada she longed for a farm in Idaho and I
a bungalow in some Valley. we went to a casino
to pass time. gambling I fell in love with
a blonde card shuffler, and upped my ante later that
night; drinking she met a roaring Texan
with Marlboro virtue smoking cigarette after
cigarette at a manic bar.

I got dumped; she got married.
I went to California. she moved to Texas.
years later I was in a laundromat in Oakland:
putting quarters in the slots I saw her
walk in *CHING* she was wearing
a sexy white dress *CHING* and carrying
a big plastic bag *CHING* of hand-rolled quarters
CHING and a smile that looked
like Marilyn *CHING* Monroe.

"spare any change?" I asked.

we were married the next week. she wore
a flowery, southern belle dress, and I wore
sandals, and a hemp necklace. the priest dressed up
as Elvis...but I couldn't complain...
who wouldn't want to be married by the King?

Christopher St. John

The Beach

There was a time I listened to the ocean
in seashells the size of my head.
Built castles the shape of blue plastic buckets
pushed my hands and feet into the sand
didn't care how grainy my vulnerable flesh became.
Sharp-edged rocks never threatened my bare feet
as I climbed.
Moss and seaweed protected me.

The beach is how I know there was a time before.
The beach is how I know there was a time before
and the rest of my life is after.
My only clues to what and when
are back aches,
body freezing at the sight
of water encroaching on the shore,
my resenting every grain of sand in my shoe
as I walk unsteady across.

The beach is how I know there was a time before.
The beach is how I know there was a time before
and the rest of my life is healing.
Not from what was lost
but what was taken.
No place for passive language here ---- "I lost" "it
happened"
but "he did."
"He did" and the rest of that sentence eludes me like
the ever-shifting shoreline.

I don't search for clues anymore—
how old I was,
did it happen at the beach.
The who is obvious from the turtlenecks
I'm sure to wear when I know the guest list
of this or that family function.

I don't go looking for clues for fear I'll manufacture
them
frustrated with disembodied images
or an unexplained rush to defend myself
against movement that is not an attack.

My memory is protective.
More protective still is what she chooses to forget.
I love other kinds of water
even marsh or sand dune lately
but beaches are still tied up
with what is too painful to fully face.
I face fear when it will get me somewhere
and pain when it will lighten my load.
I trust my body to release
the lost things
when the time is right.

Part of me says trust in my instincts is
long overdue
while another says serene acceptance
masks anger
that the beach was taken from me,
anger for avoiding wet rocks for fear
my adult feet will slip and drop me.
Anger for never hearing the ocean in a seashell,
anger for living in the city,
anger for riding 50 miles-an-hour past where the sand
meets water
too fast to notice what was taken.

There was a time before—
short curly hair,
pink-flowered bathing suit,
hands grabbing tiny fistfuls of hot sand,
running
climbing
building
Safe.
Smile on her face the size of the shoreline,
bounce in her step I haven't felt since.
There was a time before.
The beach is how I know there was a time before
and the rest of my life is after.

Meg Stone

Clear Lake

High above the ancient tree tops
my rowboat floats
on a mirror of sky

while I dream of how lava must have roiled
from the South Sister
sealing off the valley,

and streams, having no place to flow,
slowly backed up, drowning the forest
beneath me.

Now petrified,
these firs rise like spires
out of the pumice and silt.

They were alive before the Romans and Greeks,
even before the great pyramids
were built.

Where once there was wind,
the slow steady tug of current
can not bend them.

Instead of blue jays
rainbow trout glide
from tree to tree.

I bait my hook with half a worm, drop it carefully
over the side, and watch it descend
into a reflection of a snow-covered peak.

Mark Thalman

Sixteen

At night in the shower
I hand her a towel,
pull back the curtain
dappled with hibiscus.
Her breasts stand out
smooth as ceramic bowls.
Even her nipples glisten
with suds and water-beads,
and her pubic hair, a small
bird's nest, drips after rain.

I try to imagine the storm
in her body, torrents in veins.
I have not caressed her skin
since the first menstrual flow,
but she is no stranger. I remember
the baby baths, flesh pliable as clay,
loving the silk of her arms and thighs,
and later the hard muscle-tone
of a boisterous girl
who rode bikes and played ball.

In the steam from the shower,
we stand entirely at ease. Years ago,
I would not have thought it possible
to love so completely without desire.
I close the curtain, cherishing
the perfect woman I created from seed
to cells to flowing lines, more exquisite
than Manet's nude girls bathing,
more beautiful than anything I know
that will live after me.

Stacy Tuthill

Poem for a Tentative Morning

I don't know why, exactly, the mirror hangs there. Perhaps to make the patio garden appear larger. But there it is, nailed to the garage wall, blooming its own mass of white roses, its four corners enclosing another country whose borders refuse ours. Beneath the umbrella, the image of the umbrella, my face floats toward the edges, dissolving behind splotches of red, papery bougainvillea. A bird, how I know this bird! Desperate to fly into a new domain, as if risen from my blood and freed from my palm, it flings itself skyward; then hurtles down into this lush country of illusion. The confrontation with its other self, which is purer, having no reflection, leaves the bird crumpled, breast pulsing in the dirt. When I can look again, it's standing, tail feathers bent to an impossible angle. I poke it with a stick, and it hops a few inches, mouth open, begging, then flies into a gardenia bush still budded tight against the spring. Momentarily distracted by the promise that lures us toward a vision of ourselves, but kills first, I look away. When I look back, the bird is gone. All afternoon I search beneath the denseness of ferns and azalea bushes for its body. I'd like to say it flew out of the stunned silence into the kingdom of air, and maybe it did, but I didn't see it.

Kathleen Tyler

I Dress You in Drag

Propped against my bed,
I strip you to boxers
and swap, trapping your
useless nipples in my lacy bra.

You are slender in the ribs, so the hook
slips with ease, and since your face says
"patience," I stuff tissue in each cup and
squeeze them both as if I were you

--stiff and absent, more bone than flesh--
and you find all this amusing.
After all, your current womanhood is like
the temporary prick of giving blood.

Your commitment, your membership
to that bra, to those paper breasts
is in name only; you are playing
a patient just out of surgery,

faking understanding, faking injury.
Nevertheless, I locate the skirt
you like for its mystery,
and I draw it long and flowing over

your hairy thighs,
remembering the night your nails
crawled up my calves under the
flimsy folds of that very skirt.

You held me down
in our messy sweat, jerking
somewhat rhythmically above me,
avoiding my fingertips that

jutted out for your face,
our hunger deep
in our stomachs like
manual lawnmowers:

laborious and primitive.
And now, with you as me
and my hands up *your* skirt,
I think to say how this is.

How hunger plays in mind
a nursery rhyme,
tempo slackened, words revised.
We reach for something in sex

as vague and necessary
as butterfly wings.
This time, though, I really think you hear me
as we push and pull at each other like swings.

Shanti Weiland

A History of Blue

"Everywhere I inquired I was told to look for blue"

—Carl Phillips

Absolute and unambiguous as black
that first blue God might have scraped

from a rainbow in the prism of his mind
deep and pure as midnight before

later incestuous mixing and mezzotints,
a cobalt so copious it ran like smalt

into the oceans, the Nile and the Danube.
Quickly diluted, it was sucked up

into the glaciers to burst out again
like azurine in the Aegean, then to glow

neon in a grotto near Capri, visible still
in scallop shells, oysters, fish and crabs

while that original cyan thinned out
across the sky to a faint wraith

of itself we see on the lips of the dead.
Yet the moon took up the color

for special occasions and double visits
as did peacocks and robins' eggs, herons

and jays, the blue fox, cornflowers, irises,
the dark navy of the chow's tongue.

No blue was found in the earliest cave paintings
but Babylonian friezes used turquoise bricks.

Then came the lapis lazuli and sapphire goblets
of the pharaohs who worshiped equal gods

of red fire and yellow sun, later Virgin Mary blue
translucent in sunlight in the stained glass

in thirteenth-century churches. From the woad
herb and mollusks netted in the Mediterranean

huge vats of royal-blue dye gave rise to forbidden
or permitted clothing. Then Murano glass,

cheese mold, Bluebeard, architects' prints,
Prussian blue coats, the slate blue of mountains

in the distance, distance itself, Wedgwood
bice, Persian blue, huckleberries, Gainsborough's

boy's beryl suit, French blue faience, bruises,
Worth's perfume Je Reviens, Canadian spruce,

the metallic teal Georgian silver casts,
the tint of blue in fresh snow, the fairy

in Pinocchio, a period of Picasso's, fountain-
pen ink, first-place ribbons, huskies' eyes,

Concord grapes, shrimp veins, overalls,
lagoons and lakes, a hint in skim milk,

shadows in impressionists' paintings,
wash bluing, Kentucky grass, diamonds,

Windex, in Mondrian's limited palette, rare
steaks, the shine on steel, tattoos, clouds

before a storm, this planet seen from space,
a Raggedy Andy doll in its frayed and faded

blue shirt and pants, the only possession
that came with me from the orphanage

to where then he was thought too shabby
and boyish for a little girl. While I slept,

they replaced him with fancy pink dolls
in frilly white lace and a soft black lamb

but it's that Raggedy Andy blue
I've been trying to find all my life.

Sarah Brown Weitzman

Regale Us

Remember how it was
in the old days of Hollywood,
with Myrna Loy and Lauren Bacall,
Marlon Brando and Humphrey Bogart,
cigarettes and sherry,
when modesty was a virtue
and sex a scandal.

Remember how it was when you
and I soaked up the suds
in overflowing baths,
kissed the telephone with whispers,
how life was a carnival
of smells like sweat and lather
and Shalimar perfume.
Remember how you devoured my body,
crooned like Bing Crosby,
danced like Fred Astaire.

Reminds us how time flips back
the clock, revealing the underside
of overturned flower pots,
and gray hair beneath the edge of blonde.
Remember how you yelled like Ralph Cramden,
questioned the color of my lipstick,
left like Bogey or Bacall.
Remember your slick promises
of roses and brandy and a life
with love taking away the pain.
Remember how you slammed down
the telephone with shouts and curses,
how life was a circus of doubts
and drinking and empty wine bottles,
how you listened to the rhythm of your heart only.
I remember how it was.

Mary L. Westcott

Sailing with Memories of Li Hong

On Your 80th Birthday

February 16, 2002

I remember you, Li Hong, as a young woman
Going off to work in the Alameda Naval Shipyard.
In your overalls, indeed you were a working woman
Accompanying Bah Bah who worked as a welder.

Imagine, a Chinese American man, a welder
Taking his oldest daughter to work with him.
What would the neighbors have thought?
What would Bah Bah's co-workers have thought?

I remember you, Li Hong, though I wasn't yet born
As you sailed from Canton, China with Bah Bah,
Ma, Li Keng and Lai Wah, a Chinese family,
To *Gim San*, Gold Mountain, *Mee Gok*,

A Chinese family who wasn't exactly a family
Doing what was necessary in order to enter the U.S.,
Acknowledging Ma as your auntie over and over
As you had been coached while immigration officers watched.

I remember you, Li Hong, when you gleamed
As a bride to Henry, a cool dude, elegant in your
Cheong sam and *kwa*, and if there ever were a princess
In Chinatown, you wore the crown.

I remember you, Li Hong, when you cooked
Not only for Henry, Vickie, Melvin and Julie
But for me when I crossed the Bay Bridge on the train
To *Hong Ngin Fow* to see the dermatologist.

In your small apartment on Sacramento Street
You held roost. You cooked rice, long grain,
Of course, and always filled my belly
With beef and string beans or *hom ngui gee ngook beng*.

Whenever our family gathered for birthdays,
Christmas or Chinese New Year, if your husband
Could not be present, you always reminded Ma
And the rest of us to be sure to save some food for Henry.

At 687 Spruce Street, our family home for many years,
You asked me straight out when I got engaged,
Ah sui hai nei gah moy ngin - who was the woman
Who introduced me to my husband to be?

You, the first born of our father, I did not know
What your eyes saw, but I heard your laughter emitting
From your sweet throat at some bright thought,
A new-born baby, perhaps, crying out with joy.

Though you and I are 13 years apart, you were always
Present in your own body, you who worked
As a domestic as a teen, sweeping, cleaning,
Cooking and ironing for a family who hired you.

On this, your 80th-birthday celebration today,
I wish you joy for your longevity, for being a devoted partner
To Henry, for being *Poa Poa* to Matt and Brent, for being Ma
To Vickie, Julie and Melvin and mother-in-law to Ken.

Eighty years long, and as you sail ahead,
I'm following, looking for your smile,
Your bright eyes shining, secure in the knowledge
That the love of your family surrounds you.

Now you regularly visit Self Help for the Elderly, sharing your life
With other elders. Now you grow with dignity
For having graced our lives with your innocence,
With the gift of yourself, for your big heart.

Gung Hay Bot Sup Suery Dai Sahng Yut or
Better yet in our Oakland Chinatown *Hoishan* dialect,
Gung Hee Bot Sip Ai Sahng Ngit, Ai Dee,
Happy 80th Birthday, Li Hong, Elder Sister,

With love from your *Moy Moy*.

Nellie Wong

American Menthol

The pub floors in Ireland
are beer-baptized and wooden,
cigarette butts skittering along the cracks
like cancerous white ants
with names like *SilkCuts*, *Consulate*, *Fusion*—
and here I am longing for twenty Salem Lights,
a new pack as green and as smooth
as a U.S. dollar
with its "menthol from nature."

I don't recall any stately Salem trees
growing on our Midwestern campus,
reaching out their limbs to embrace me,
whispering, with a very autumnal rustle,
that I have nothing to fear:
for my tumor will be peaceful—
enjoyable even—because their menthol
is from nature, glossy as their own print ads.

The tobacco is coarser here in Cork City,
even thicker than the draughts and the accents,
and I fail to appreciate all three points of this nightlife trinity
with equal consideration: just as long as it takes
to inhale, rattle, exhale, ash, and feign assimilation
from my isolated barstool, caught between foreign smiles,
fiddles and harps, Real Madrid on TV.

But the smoking is the smallest part,
and the burning green prairie grass
of my once-fresh lungs is nothing new.
It's the pass that's lost, from you
to me, the filter warm and moist from your lips
as we huddled in stocky maroon scarves under the streetlight,
cheeks flushed,
boozy breaths clouding the frozen panorama,
steel toes tapping to insure they were still there,
quietly planning our escape.

Elizabeth Wylder

The Lone Ranger Dines Again

At age four,
I refused to eat dinner without my mask—
 a standard issue Lone Ranger affair,
slick, black plastic with eyeholes and elastic twine,
 a tiny molded bridge that nestled my as-yet inoffensive nose,
leaving the vacancy left by my two front teeth
 accessible for slurping kidney beans and oyster crackers.
The Lone Ranger only appeared
 for my mother's chili, a fiery stew saved only for winter,
when the white shroud covered the far reaches of the backyard,
 the reservoir, and—once—my father's decades-old baseball glove,
treasured leather that would never recover
 from three icy, wet months in the not-so wild,
a tattered eternal relic of my carelessness.
 Dining incognito, I cared not about appearance,
little for a milk moustache, less for a stowaway fleck of tomato in my hair.

Twenty winters later,
I sit in a restaurant with a napkin on my lap,
 uncomfortably shifting by candlelight,
playing leapfrog with the silver. Slippery black high heels,
 that even after years of use I still fear make me a giantess,
shred my Achilles as I flex my calf
 and stretch my toe to insure that my handbag
is still nuzzling a table leg and protecting
 my compact, my lipstick labeled *mauve amor*.
I only order food that is easily dissected;
 small bits are best for bypassing lips and avoiding a smudge
or—worse—erasure, any chip in my facial facade.
 The waiter reclaims our plates, and before our hollowed-out entrees
make it to the kitchen, I'm already in the ladies' room,
 reapplying this, checking that, cursing it all,
searching the mirror for snowflakes and Tonto's spotted palomino.

Elizabeth Wylder

Los Angeles

Sun crowns me
On a plastic throne.
I sip Diet Coke,
Listen to the clink
Of disappearing ice,
Wonder if heaven
Could be sweeter
Than turning to bronze
On this roof
Where I float
Above Apartment 6,
Stale sheeted room
Where nothing grows
But lumps of cancer
The size of eggs.

Downstairs
Grandfather is dying.

They say everyone dies,
But never in Los Angeles.
We are already angels,
Sculpted by masseuses
Flown from Sweden,
Fed on navel oranges
Far too fat for mortals.
L.A.'s gods direct
Death in scenes
Neatly snipped,
Forgotten on floors
And swept away
By janitors
Whose backs bend
Over their brooms.

Downstairs
Grandfather is dying.

They say someday
California will let go
Of the continent
At the San Andreas.
Maybe *los angeles*
Will release all earth
And aspire to hotbox
A new heaven
With hallucinogenic smog,
Or maybe we will die
In a giant gulp of Pacific
And our sun halos
Will float free
On murderous waves
As we sink.

I join Grandfather
Dying downstairs.

Lauren Young

Into the Artist's Winter World

Through the museum's silence,
oblivious to the sparse crowd,
I sneak into a rustic picture,
careful with my every step.

Avoiding corners of the gilded frame,
I seek to avert Levitan's brush
and, invisible to him, I try not to leave
a blank spot on his *Village Winter*.

Warm in boots and parka I wade in snow
behind a rhythmically nodding horse
harnessed to a low wooden sleigh
slowly wobbling in uneven furrows.

A stooped peasant trudges heavily
beside his sad and weighed-down horse.
It will be a long drag in the cold
before he reaches his house

with crackling fire in a brick stove
and hot cabbage soup on a burner.
Heavy with thought, he lowers his head
and buries his face in a thick cotton jacket

unaware of the eyeful winter forest,
its light hoar-frosted pines, cone-shaped firs,
touches of the wind that swirls
a snow-drizzle off their heavy boughs.

Shamefully detached from his life's load,
with a last squint at the winter sun
I step out of the painting.
My footprints disappear under snow whirls.

The stroke of time adapts my shoes
to the shiny parquet of the museum floor
and forwards me centuries, back into
heated buildings, planes, cars and pollution without end.

Natalia Zaretsky

Cousin Lisl

gawky and shy at 14
embarrassed by unaccustomed breasts
that seem to get into everything
her books, the music stand, the coffee *mit schlag*
as Vienna just before the deluge
bursts with laughter in waltz time

she is dazzled by the American cousin
with her elegant long nose and upswept hair
her lawyer's confidence and charming accent
they eat strawberries and cream
in the sparkling city
under the linden trees dressed up in springtime green
heartbreaking to remember

just four years later Cousin Judy gets her out
one breath ahead of the tidal wave that sucks out lungs and lives
leaves six million stranded gasping on the beach
then crashes and drowns, destroying everything

survival, instead of shattering her like *kristall*
uncorks an effervescence, an unsinkable *joie de vivre*
that will carry her through losses, disappointments, illness
a diamond bobbing on a sea of broken glass

when Cousin Judy's daughter, a shy 14 in turn
comes to visit her in Florida
Lisl takes her driving with the top down
by the ocean in its net of dancing lights
down the aisle of palm trees to the future
singing in her sugary soprano rich as cream
Que sera sera
whatever will be
will be

Elizabeth Zelvin

The Death of Margaret Fuller

19th-century American Transcendentalist and feminist Margaret Fuller: "I accept the universe!"
Fellow Transcendentalist philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson: "By gad, she'd better!"

the ship broke up off Fire Island Light
watchers on the shore could see
the frantic lanterns battling fore and aft
the wind belligerent, the surf too wild
to launch a boat from beach or ship
they stood helpless in the dark
roiling sand and silver darts of rain
stinging lips and cheeks
deafened by the smack of waves
each wall of water crashing down like Jericho
thunder like an avalanche of boulders
and the intermittent booming crack
more like a glacier calving

they saw her pacing on the splintering deck
back and forth, back and forth
the baby in her arms
illuminated briefly as the lightning flared
her dark hair whipping in the punishing wind
still crackling with the force of energy
not giving up, never giving up

now her bones gleam silver
among the broken spars
mollusks kiss the lips that argued brilliantly
crustaceans have picked clean
the hands that emphasized each point
acceptance is the sole necessity
here on the ocean floor
philosophical debate irrelevant
as the blue ribbon stained with brine
that washed up a mile away
transcendence, however, perseveres
as the universe holds tenderly
the sea and Margaret and all the stars

Elizabeth Zelvin

Sci-Fi Flick

My co-pilot yelled out, “Bandit! Ten o’clock high!” Fast as summer lightning I banked our fighter right and shot into the middle of an asteroid belt and hid our craft behind a speeding stream of planetary boulders. Just as the enemy ship zipped into our gunner’s sights, a fluffy pale-blue brassiere landed on the surface on our cockpit window. In our dark confusion the enemy spacecraft took a few panicked shots across the bow of our ship and escaped into the void. After we dislodged the bra, our fighter took up the chase and zoomed into empty space. Within moments of a parsec my navigator spotted the trail of the enemy ship’s exhaust. As fast as you can say zap, we were on their flaming tail and ready to blast them to bits when these pale-blue panties floated down between our ship and the enemy spacecraft. I maneuvered our fighter to outflank this garment when our left-wing rocket got caught in the fabric of a black-lace stocking drifting thru the ether of interstellar space. Both engines coughed and heaved and suddenly died out. As the enemy craft escaped into distant nether realms, a woman’s naked body drifted into my space-bound vision right up to my startled face where the tips of her breasts danced before my star-struck eyes. Softly, her sensuous voice swept into my dazzled mind, “Time out for lunch, Buck Rogers.”

Larry Ziman

Pink

is as much a sound
as a color, like a pebble
hitting the skin of a pond,
the playful slaps of hand on belly,
seeds from a watermelon spit
into a bowl, a blush of juice slowly gathering.
It is the drip from a leaky carport
on Springsteen's Cadillac,
a flamingo's beak on a shell,
the tint of embarrassment,
stiletto heels on a marble floor
accessorized with a feather boa.
I am alive
to its pizzicato:
the pink, pink, pink of my palate
or a Volkswagen commercial's song.
It's the soles of an infant's feet,
a Texas Dawn bougainvillea,
your lover's aureole.
Point out, too, that it's a hazard
of employment, a travesty to poodles,
an affliction of the eye.
But there, lying on her back,
is my dog, the black and white fur
of her chest giving way to her tummy, smooth
and utterly pink.

Yvonne Zipter

The Woman with Acrophobia Holds Forth

What I love about the plains
is that it's hard to fall off:
no scenic overlook, no lofty peak,
no cliff upon which
an ambitious wave might crash,
no place, in short, for a gal
to take an unexpected tumble.

People of the Rockies, the Alleghanies,
the pious San Gabriels might look down
on us flatlanders, but a level-headed bunch
like us knows exactly where we stand.

Folks on those bipolar coasts—
the manic ups and downs
of their precipitous terrains—
have their heads in the clouds
while here we've got the proper distance
to put cumulostrati into perspective.

To a plainswoman, like me, the grass is tall,
noon is high, and Brad, at seven feet, towers:
if we have a fault, it's that we're inclined
to make mountains out of molehills.

We feel on safer ground with "cavern"
than with "canyon," with Fairplain
than with Pike's Peak, with racetracks
than with ski lifts; we have, I suppose,
an altitude problem.

But with nothing rising
between us and the horizon,
we can see into infinity;
we are content with the present.

Yvonne Zipter

The Furniture at Grandma's

If you wanted to talk with Grandma,
you went out to the farm. It was
her opinion that telephones allowed
gossips and busybodies to push
their way into family meals, cooking,
good books and conversations.
She was convinced talking on the phone
made weeds grow and socks go
unmended. She owned a china closet
with a built-in escritoire where she kept
fine china, objects of art, and a black
onyx clock with Phoenician pillars carved
of ivory. Its gong was loud enough
to wake the dead or remind a woman
thinning radishes in the garden, it was time
to feed chunks of Douglas fir to the cast-iron
woodstove in the kitchen and start dinner.
She'd pull something from the General
Electric refrigerator with the engine on top,
open a jar of home-canned beef and start
a stew. If you came calling, you talked
while she worked, and only if it was time
for a break, would she offer a glass of water,
a few cookies from the tin in the pantry,
a moment to sit a spell on the swooning
couch in her plant room on the front porch
and chat a while. Even then she would
hook rugs or crochet. She repaired clothes
when she sat on her horsehair couch
and listened to Gabriel Heater from
the hump-backed radio which always sat
on a table where Grandpa's pipes, pipe
holder and humidor waited for him to light
up and read the paper in his overstuffed chair.

Fredrick Zydek

Notes on Poets

Susan Ahdoot is a poet and visual artist. Her publication credits include: *GW Review*, *FTS*, *LOUDmouth*, *Poetix*, and *SGVPQ*. She has poems slated for publication in *LOUDmouth* and a special edition by Spire Press entitled *Censored: The Poems We Couldn't Publish*. She has three chapbooks: *Heat*, *The End to Inertia*, and *Before Yes*. She lives in Los Angeles, California.

Ronald Douglas Bascombe is a poet/writer who has been writing and performing his poetry for more than thirty years. Born in Harlem, New York, he performed with the Cosmos Nucleus poetry performance group and served as a journalist/editor-in-chief of *Sunday Morning*, a Christian newspaper in New York City. He won first prize in poetry in the 1976 National Ossie Davis/Ruby Dee Write-On Competition and has performed his children's poetry in schools and libraries throughout the metropolitan New York City and northern New Jersey area. He is listed with Poets & Writers. His poetry recently has been included in anthologies published by the International Library of Poetry, and his letters to the editor and poetry have been published regularly in the *Montclair Times*. He has been published under his own name as well as under Jayne Lyn Smythe and Oronde Lasana. His children's poetry can be seen at <http://www.geocities.com/bascomber>. He lives in Montclair, New Jersey.

Grace Bauer is the author of *The Women at the Well* (Portal Press) and three chapbooks of poems, the most recent of which is *Field Guide to the Ineffable: Poems on Marcel Duchamp*. Her work has appeared in numerous anthologies and journals, including *Arts & Letters*, *The Georgia Review*, *Rattle*, *Natural Bridge* and many others. She is the Coordinator of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. She lives in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Tim Bellows is a poet, teacher and writer devoted to wilderness and contemplative travels. He has taught college research and creative writing for over thirteen years. He graduated from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and recently saw publication of poems in *A Racing up the Sky* (Eclectic Press). Tim has been published in over 140 literary journals since 1978, earning two nominations for the annual Pushcart Prize with "Huts Under Smooth Hills" and "November Night, Sleep Talk Captured." You can write him at shabda@juno.com. He lives in Gold River, California.

Anne Myra Benjamin lives with her husband and children in Far Rockaway, New York where she writes poetry and books on the history of women in the United States and on Jewish philosophy. Her latest work, *An Afternoon Offering*, is a commentary on the Pentateuch.

Sara Berkeley grew up in Ireland and now lives just north of San Francisco. She has published three collections of poetry (*Penn*, *Home-Movie Nights*, and *Facts About Water*), one collection of short stories, and a novel (*Shadowing Hannah*). She's currently putting together a new collection of poetry and another novel.

Douglas M. Bill lives near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His poems have been published in *Poetry East*, *Beginnings*, and *Friends of Acadia Journal*.

Beau Boudreaux is currently a professor in English at Tulane University. Previous work has appeared in *The New Yorker*. He lives in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Don Brennan, a retired high-school teacher, won the *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal* 1st prize for poetry in 2000 and the Milton Dorfman 3rd prize in 2000. He was a former host of Yakety Yak poetry series from 2001 to 2002. His poetry has appeared in *HALT*, *Throwback*, *Sacred Grounds Anthology*, *Open Window*, and *Mission News*. His chapbook, *Amusing the Beast*, was self-published in 2002. And he's a regular reader at open-reading venues in the San Francisco Bay area. He lives in San Francisco, California.

Alan Britt currently teaches English at Towson University. For the past 30 years he has participated in the AiE (Artist-in-Education) Program teaching poetry workshops in Maryland public schools for the Maryland State Arts Council. He currently lives in Reisterstown, Maryland, where he occasionally publishes the literary journal, *Black Moon: Poetry of Imagination*, and shares a home with his wife, daughter, and two Bouvier des Flandres. He has had poems previously published in *Bitter Oleander*, *Codice* (Mexico), *Cold Mountain Review*, *Confrontation*, *Connecticut River Review*, *English Journal*, *Epoch*, *Flint Hills Journal*, *Folio*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Magyar Naplo* (Hungary), *Midwest Quarterly*, *New Letters*, *Pacific Review*, *Pedrada Zurda* (Ecuador), *Puerto del Sol*, *Queen's Quarterly* (Canada), *Southwest American Literature*, *Sou'wester*, *Steaua* (Romania), *Yomimono* (Japan), *Fathers: Poems About Fathers* (St. Martin's Press, 2000), *La Adelfa Amarga: Seis Poetas Norteamericanos de Hoy* (Ediciones El Santo Oficio, Peru, 2003), *Infinite Days* (2003), *Amnesia Tango* (1998), and *Bodies of Lightning* (1995).

Harry Brody published his first collection, *Fields*, with Ion Books in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1987. His several chapbooks include *As Once to Birth I Went Now I Am Taken Back* by New Collage Press in Sarasota, Florida, in 1982 and *For We Are Constructing the Dwelling of Feeling* by Object Lesson in Amherst, Massachusetts, in 1993. He practices law for a living, defending death-row inmates in Florida. He lives in Sarasota, Florida.

G.C. Brown, originally from Iowa, is pursuing her M.A. at the City University of New York – City College. A student of Denise Duhamel and Marilyn Hacker, she believes in accessible poetry and laughter. She has recently published in *Poetry Motel* and *The Promethean*. She lives in Astoria, New York.

M.C. Bruce works as a lawyer for the Orange County Public Defender's Office. His son Adam is loudly studying to be a drummer. He has been published in many small press journals and writes reviews for Ibbetson St. Press Newsgroup and *Small Press Review*. He now hosts a show, "Poet's Cafe," on KPFK (KPFK.ORG) which airs the second and fourth Wednesday of each month at noon. He lives in Cypress, California.

Carol Carpenter lives in Livonia, Michigan, and has had poems and stories published in *Yankee*, *America*, *Pedestal Magazine*, *Barnwood*, *Indiana Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Byline*, and in Papier-Mache Press's anthology, *Generation to Generation*. She received awards such as the Richard Eberhart Prize for Poetry and was a finalist in the Nelson Algren awards. Formerly a college writing instructor and journalist, she now works for a consulting and training company.

Alan Catlin has been making the poetry scene since the middle 70's. His most recent books are *Drunk and Disorderly* (Selected Poems) from Pavement Saw Press and *Last Bus from Albany*, a chapbook from Pudding House Publications. Forthcoming shortly is a full length book from Staplegun Press, *The Schenectady Chainsaw Massacre*, and a chapbook, *Views of Mt. Greylock*, from Snark Publications. He lives in Schenectady, New York.

Ruth Daigon lives in Corte Madera, California. She was founder and editor of *Poets On* for twenty years until it ceased publication. Her poems have been widely published in E mags, print mags, anthologies and collections. Her poetry awards include "The Ann Stanford Poetry Prize, 1997 (University of Southern California Anthology, 1997) and the Greensboro Poetry Award (Greensboro Arts Council, 2000). One of her seven books is *Payday at the Triangle* (Small Poetry Press, Select Poets Series, 2001) which was based on the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in New York City in 1911. One of her many readings was performed in The Lower East Side Tenement Museum in Manhattan, the area where the fire occurred. *Handfuls of Time* (Small Poetry Press, Select Poets Series), her last book, was published in 2002. Her poetry was published by the U.S. State Department in their literary exchange with Thailand and their translation program has just issued the first book of modern American poets in English and Thai in which she appears. Garrison Keillor featured her poetry on his morning poetry show.

Rachel Delmage lives in Key West, Florida. She's a student who has taken some writing classes and within them has found how much she enjoys writing.

Stephanie Dickinson was raised in rural Iowa and now lives in New York City. She has had poems published in *Green Mountains Review*, *Chelsea*, *Mid-American Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Volt*, *Mudfish*, *Willow Springs* and many others. Along with Rob Cook she edits the new literary journal, *Skidrow Penthouse*.

Shari Dinkins has been publishing in literary magazines since 1989. She received her B.A. in English in 1989 from San Jose State University. After working with Molly "Iron Shoes" Giles at San Francisco State, she graduated with an M.A. in English in 1993. She lives with her dog Nelson in the California coastal town of Pacifica.

Mel Donalson writes poetry, essays, fiction and screenplays. His book, *Black Directors in Hollywood*, was published in December 2003. He teaches literature, popular culture and creative writing at California State University in Los Angeles. He lives in Azusa, California.

James Doyle's book, *Einstein Considers a Sand Dune*, won the 2003 Steel Toe Books contest which was judged by David Kirby. He has poems coming out in *Hunger Mountain*, *Poems & Plays*, *Willow Springs*, and *The Midwest Quarterly*. He is married to poet Sharon Doyle and lives in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Doug Draime, poet, short-story writer and playwright, has been writing for many years and has been published in over 400 magazine, newspaper and broadside publications internationally. His recent chapbooks include *Slaves of the Harvest* (Indian Heritage Publishing, 2002) and *Unoccupied Zone* (Pitchfork Press, 2004). He's the father of four children and lives with his wife Carol in the foothills of the Siskiyou mountain range in Ashland, Oregon.

Hector E. Estrada lives in South Gate, California. His family and his culture are his source of inspiration. He likes to jam on his acoustic guitar and collect movie-monster action-figures and magnets which he uses to hold up rejection slips on his file cabinet.

Michael Fedo has published 6 books of nonfiction including *The Lynchings in Duluth* and *The Man from Lake Wobegon*. His novel, *Indians in the Arborvitae*, was published in 2003. His poems have appeared in *Rag Mag* and *Aethlon*. He lives in Coon Rapids, Minnesota.

Maureen Tolman Flannery has just released her latest book, *Ancestors in the Landscape: Poems of a Rancher's Daughter*. Other books are *Secret of the Rising Up: Poems of Mexico*, *Remembered into Life*, and the anthology entitled *Knowing Stones: Poems of Exotic Places*. Maureen grew up on a Wyoming sheep ranch but she and her actor husband Dan have raised their four children in Chicago. Her poems can be read in the on-line chapbook, *Conversations for the Road*, at www.tmpoetry.com. Her work has appeared in over a hundred literary reviews and thirty-five anthologies including *Hunger Enough*, *Intimate Kisses*, *Essential Love*, *Woven on the Wind*, and *Proposing on the Brooklyn Bridge*. She lives in Evanston, Illinois.

Stewart Florsheim lives in Piedmont, California. His poetry has appeared in many magazines including *DoubleTake*, *Slipstream*, *Rattle*, 88: *A Journal of Contemporary American Poetry*, and *The Seattle Review*. His poetry has also been included in the anthologies *Unsettling America: Race and Ethnicity in Contemporary American Poetry* (Viking Penguin, 1994), *And What Rough Beast* (The Ashland Poetry Press, 1999), and *Bittersweet Legacy* (University Press of America, 2001). He is also the editor of *Ghosts of the Holocaust* (Wayne State University Press, 1989), an anthology of poetry by children of Holocaust survivors.

CB Follett is the author of 4 books of poems. Her most recent, *At the Turning of the Light*, was the winner of the 2001 National Poetry Book Award. She's the editor/publisher of *GRRRRR, A Collection of Poems about BEARS*, co-editor/publisher of *RUNES, a Review of Poetry*, an annual themed anthology, and general dogsbody of Arctos Press. She has several nominations for Pushcart Prizes, a Marin Arts Council Grant for Poetry, awards, honors and has been widely published. In between sentences, she sleeps, but not much. She lives in Sausalito, California.

Michael C Ford was born on the Illinois side of Lake Michigan where he witnessed the post MVP seasons of Nellie Fox playing keystone for the White Sox, and where he also saw the battling Cubbies. He recorded his paean to the barnstorming ballplayers of the Pacific Coast League in 1986. It was played by Bud "The Steamer" Furillo on KMPC and by Cleve Hermann on KFWB, and was included on a compilation CD entitled *Innings*. His 1987 debut vinyl was nominated for a Grammy on the first ballot and his volume of selected works from 1970 through 1995 attracted a Pulitzer Prize nomination. His latest spoken-word recording is entitled *Fire Escapes*. His most recent print document is *Nursery Rhyme Assassin*. His plays have been staged internationally including a one-act play, *Termite Palce*, which pays homage to the last wooden stadium in Pacific Coast minor-league baseball history. His new manuscript, *To Kiss the Blood off Our Hands*, has just been selected for publication later on this year by Pitchfork Press in Chicago, Illinois. He lives in Los Angeles, California.

Nancy B Gardner has had six novels published: *The Manatee*, *Cider from Eden*, *Beloved Woman*, *The Fig Tree*, *The Country Club*, and *Moonsussers* (*Mist Maiden* in paperback). She has had two books of poetry published: *My Talon in Your Heart* and *Walk Lightly on the Planet*. And she has had two full-length plays produced off Broadway: *The Cast-Iron Smile* and *Mrs. Hollister's Trojan Horse*. Her work has been collected by Boston University Library. A young 94, she lives in New York City.

Anne Gisleson teaches at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, Louisiana's arts conservatory for high school students. Her poetry, fiction and nonfiction have appeared in several literary magazines. She lives in New Orleans, Louisiana.

John Grey is an Australian-born poet, playwright and musician. His latest chapbook is *The Secret Address* from Snark Publishing. His work has recently appeared in *Small Brushes*, *Nexus*, and *Writer's Block*. He lives in Providence, Rhode Island.

Gayle Elen Harvey has worked as an artist's model and a hospital AR clerk. She loves hiking and travel. She volunteered at a dental clinic in the West Indies and on a kibbutz near Tel Aviv. Her work has appeared in the *Atlanta Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Visions International*. Her awards include a NYS Foundation for the Arts Fellowship and the 2002 Hannah Kahn Poetry Foundation/Phillips Award. Her most recent schapbooks are *Greatest Hits* from Pudding House Publications in 2002 and *Scheduled, Unscheduled Appointments* from Spire Press in 2003. She lives in Utica, New York.

Frank Hertle wrote "September 11 - The Missing" in November 2001 as a remembrance of the WTC attack victims. The poem is 110 lines long and contains the names of all the companies and organizations known at the time to have lost people. The poem was presented as a dramatic reading at two off-off Broadway theatres on the First Anniversary of the attack. He lives in New York City.

Robert Hoeft, a Northwest poet, lives and writes in Ashland, Oregon. Widely published in little magazines throughout the United States, he has also had poems published in Canada, England and South Africa. His collected works include four chapbooks and one miniature book.

Amy Hoffmann lives and surfs in Half Moon Bay, California.

Carolyn J. Fairweather Hughes lives in Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania, with Richard, her husband of 39 years. She has two grown daughters and a granddaughter. Now retired, she has worked as a communications specialist, writer and editor. Her poetry has appeared in numerous publications including *When I Am an Old Woman I Shall Wear Purple*.

Christina Hutchins is a Ph.D. candidate in Interdisciplinary Studies (philosophy of religion, gender/sexual studies, and poetry) at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. A graduate of the University of California at Davis and Harvard Divinity School, she has worked as a biochemist and as a Congregational minister. Currently she teaches a poetry workshop and serves as adjunct faculty at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley. In addition to her chapbook, *Collecting Light* (Acacia Books, 1999), over 80 poems have appeared in journals such as *North American Review*, *Nimrod*, *Calyx*, *Cream City Review*, 88: *A Journal of Contemporary American Poetry*, *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review*, and in anthologies (Harper SF, Milkweed, Houghton-Mifflin, Ashgate). She has won the Villa Montalvo Biennial Poetry Prize and has received a Money for Women/Barbara Deming Award for Poetry. Several of her poems have been set by contemporary composers, including a major vocal work by Dan Welcher which was nominated for the 2003-4 Lincoln Center Prize. She lives in Albany, California.

Louise Jaffe, a happily incurable poetry addict, has had four chapbooks published and has had poems published in many anthologies and literary magazines. She is Professor Emerita of English at Kingsborough Community College and consultant for a senior citizens' writing workshop. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

Brad Johnson has been published in numerous magazines, including recently *Into the Teeth of the Wind*, *Jeopardy*, *Red River Review*, and *Sho*. His chapbook, *Void Where Prohibited* (Pudding House Publications, 2003), is available at puddinghouse.com. He is currently teaching at Broward Community College and at Palm Beach Community College. He lives in Boca Raton, Florida.

Stefan Kiesbye lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with his wife Sanaz and two cats. His novella, *Next Door Lived a Girl*, will be published by Low Fidelity Press in December 2004.

Kathy Kieth has lived all her 57 years in the hot Sacramento Valley where she has been a musician, music teacher, music therapist and psychologist. She has had poems accepted by over 70 journals including *Atlanta Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Slant*, and *Sow's Ear*.

Zane Kotker lives above the Oxbow of the Connecticut River in western Massachusetts where she writes novels, entertains friends and occasionally visits the dog pounds.

Theodore K. Krieger was born in 1950 in Charles City, Iowa. He has degrees in Psychology and English/Creative Writing and is self-employed in mail-order marketing. He has had poems published in *Maelstrom*, *The Iconoclast*, *Rattle*, *Sou'wester*, *Tightrope*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Rockford Review*, *Americas Review*, and many others. He has also published several chapbooks and won several regional awards. And he was the recipient of a grant from PEN/AMERICAN CENTER. He lives in Charles City, Iowa.

James Heller Levinson lives in Santa Monica, California. He is the author of *Bad Boys Poems* (Bombshelter Press), *Pulled Apart* (Third Lung Press), *Because You Wanted a Wedding Ring* (Implodal Press), and *Alameda Street* (Implodal Press). He is also the author of a novel, *Another Line* (Watermark Press). His work has also appeared in *Sulfur*, *Hunger*, and *Monkey Puzzle*, among others.

Dylan Lewis is a graduate of Colgate University. He currently is enrolled at the Duquesne School of Law in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Lyn Lifshin's most recent prizewinning book, *Before It's Light* (Paterson Poetry Award), was published in the Winter of 1999-2000 by Black Sparrow Press following their publication of *Cold Comfort* in 1997. *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me* was also published by Black Sparrow (David Godine) in November 2003 (order@godine). Also just published is *A New Film by a Woman in Love with the Dead* by March Street Press. She has published more than 100 books of poetry including *Marilyn Monroe* and *Blue Tattoo*. She has won awards for her nonfiction and has edited 4 anthologies of women's writing, including *Tangled Vines*, *Ariadne's Thread*, and *Lips Unsealed*. Her poems have appeared in most literary and poetry magazines and she is the subject of an award-winning documentary film, *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass*, available from Women Make Movies. Her poem, "No More Apologizing," has been called "among the most impressive documents of the women's poetry movement." An update to her Gale Research Projects Autobiographical Series, *On the Outside, Lips, Blues, Blue Sheets*, was published in the Spring of 2003. She is working on a collection of poems about the famous, short-lived, beautiful race horse, Ruffian, new chapbooks, including *Girls and Women* and *Mad Girls*, a chapbook from Hazmat, and a new collection called *There Were Days, So Persephone*. For interviews, photographs, more bio material, reviews, prose, samples of work and more, her web site is www.lynlifshin.com. She lives in Vienna, Virginia.

John C. May was born in Georgia. As an Air Force "brat," he grew up in Germany and in several states in the United States. He holds a B.A., an M.A., and a Ph.D. from LSU in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and is a published poet and translator. A retired college professor, he taught German, Latin, Spanish, English and world literature in the university system of Georgia for 30 years. He lives in Augusta, Georgia.

Angela Meredith lives in Orlando, Florida. She works full-time for a publishing company where she often writes poems when no one is looking.

Greggory Moore is a lifelong denizen of Southern California, a hard-core civil libertarian, and the Jerry Rice of his flag-football league. His favorite poet is Robert Smith (yes, of The Cure). He lives in Fullerton, California.

Heidi Nye (a.k.a. Heidi Ziolkowski) works as a journalism lecturer at Cal State Long Beach, as a writing and philosophy instructor at the University of Phoenix, and as a massage therapist at a Long Beach day spa. She has written for scores of publications including the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, *Natural Health*, and the membership magazines of the (Jacques) Cousteau Society. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in more than 50 magazines and anthologies.

Hugh Ogden has recent work in the *North Dakota Quarterly*. He has had five books published. He teaches full time at Trinity College and teaches one course at the Hartford Academy of the Arts. He lives in Glastonbury, Connecticut.

David Palmer was born in Detroit, Michigan. While in high school, he moved to Los Angeles, California, where he met his wife Charlene. He received his B.A. and Master's degrees from UCLA. He has four children and two grandchildren. He was a reference librarian in California and Library Director of the University of Michigan at Flint where he helped plan a beautiful, multi-million-dollar library. He also taught bibliography and poetry writing. His poems have appeared in journals and anthologies including *Passage North*, *Peace or Perish*, *Songs from Unseen Worlds*, and *Science in Poetry*. He has two books of poems: *Quickly over the Wall* and *Midnight City Blues*. He lives in Flint, Michigan.

Nicolas Pastrone has had poems published in *New York Quarterly*, *Pinyon*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, and others. His short stories have appeared in *Art: Mag*, *Happy*, and *Snake Nation Review*. He is currently at work on a novel entitled *Reunion*. He lives in Revere, Pennsylvania, with his wife, children, dogs, cats, chickens and two, large black walnut trees that smell like ashes in the rain.

Bob Perlongo has had poems published in a variety of periodicals including *Rolling Stone*, the *New York Times*, and the *Village Voice*. His books include *The Everyday Almanac* (Capra Press, 1995), *The Write Book: An Illustrated Treasury of Tips, Tactics and Tirades* (Art Direction Book Co., 2002), and a collection of poems entitled *All Hours of the Night* (Calcutta: P. Lal, 1998). He lives in Evanston, Illinois.

Walt Peterson has three collections of poetry. *In the Waiting Room of the Speedy Muffler King* was published in the Fall of 1999. He was the winner of the 1998 Acorn-Rukeyser Award from Unfinished Moment Press of Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Peterson has worked as a construction laborer and teacher (for the Pittsburgh Public Schools), and has taught writing in places as diverse as Arcadia, California, and Cracow, Poland. He also does volunteer work and has helped raise two sons, Kevin and Eric. He lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Karen R. Porter lives in the pinelands of southern New Jersey where she writes, does conservation fieldwork, and takes care of lots of critters. Some of her work has recently appeared in *Square Lake*, *Ship of Fools*, *The Blue Mouse*, and *Decomposition*.

Charles Rammelkamp has six poetry chapbooks in print: *i don't think god's that cruel*, and *Go to Hell* (March Street Press); *A Convert's Tale* (Pudding House Publications); *FIRE DRILL!*, *All Hallow's Eve*, and *FAME* (Snark Publications). He also has a collection of short fiction in print entitled *A Better Tomorrow* (PublishAmerica). He edited a collection of essays on American cultural issues entitled *Fake-City Syndrome* (Red Hen Press). His novel, *The Secretkeepers*, will be published in September, 2004 by Red Hen Press. He lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

Bill Roberts, at 68, still works and writes often about the past. "After Work Someday," a futuristic effort, warns of retiring too early and missing the fun that can come of real work. He lives in Broomfield, Colorado.

Margaret A. Robinson, in addition to poetry, has had three novels and many short stories published. *Abbey* magazine published her chapbook, *Sleeping Outdoors in the Suburbs*, in July 2003. Her chapbook, *Sparks*, is forthcoming from Pudding House Publications. She teaches at Widener University and lives in Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

Miriam Sagan lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Her most recent books are a memoir entitled *Searching for a Mustard Seed: A Young Widow's Unconventional Story* and a collection of poems entitled *Rag Trade*.

Dennis Saleh is the author of four books of poetry, the last of which, *This Is Not Surrealism*, won the first chapbook competition from Willamette River Books. He is also an editor of an anthology of contemporary American poetry entitled *Just What the Country Needs, Another Poetry Anthology*. His poetry, prose and artwork have appeared widely in magazines and collections, including *Artlife*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Paintbrush*, and *Psychological Perspectives*. His poems are also in the recent anthologies: *Hunger Enough*, *The Mercy of Tides*, and *The Pagan's Muse*. He has read from his poetry and a novel-in-progress set in ancient Egypt at the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum in San Jose, California. He lives in Seaside, California.

Jacob Scanlan is a student of philosophy at the University of Houston. He has had poems published in *Our Time Is Now*, *Poetry Motel*, *Rag Shack*, *Lone Stars*, and on the Poetry Junction website. He was a guest poet on The Spoken Word, a Rice University radio show. An avid reader of poetry, he has been most influenced by the works of Emily Dickinson, Charles Baudelaire, Antonin Artaud, André Breton, Arthur Rimbaud, Gunnar Ekelöf, and Laura (Riding) Jackson.

Nicky Selditz, at 65, has been writing poetry for almost 40 years. He says, “My vision is metaphysical and lyrical. I mostly write in a surreal and symbolic stream-of-consciousness fashion. I rewrite and rewrite my writing until I’m satisfied the poem is finished.” He has had poems published in *Urthkin*, *Wild Turkey*, and *Sic, Vice and Verse*. He lives in Encino, California.

Lauren Seligman has work appearing in upcoming issues of *Poetry Motel* and *Poetry Wales*. She is currently working on her first novela. She lives in New York City.

Madeline Sharples began writing poetry when her oldest son, Paul, was diagnosed as manic-depressive. She continues writing poetry as a way to heal after his death by suicide in 1999. Her poetry has appeared in The Compassionate Friends newsletter and will appear in an anthology about grief called *Feel Better in the Mourning*. She has co-authored a book about women in nontraditional professions called *Blue Collar Women* (New Horizon Press, 1994) and has published four poetry chapbooks. She lives in Manhattan Beach, California.

Lynda Skeen lives in Hollywood, California, with her husband, several cats and a parakeet. She has been published in a variety of journals including *North American Review*, *Tiger’s Eye*, *Lucid Stone*, *Talking Leaves*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Poetry Motel*. When not writing, she enjoys gardening, yoga, camping and reading.

Tom Smith has had his poems published since 1959. He has to his credit several poetry collections and one novel. His eighth collection of poetry, *Spending the Light*, from Fithian Press in McKinleyville, California, just recently appeared. He lives in Castleton, Vermont.

Christopher St. John lives in Reading, Pennsylvania. He says, “Assimilation is our evolution; and so movement causes personal flux. It did with me.” He has had poems published in *Curbside Review* and *Poetry Motel*.

Meg Stone is a public health practitioner working to create programs that address the long-term health and economic effects of family violence. Her poetry and creative nonfiction have been published in the anthology, *Pinned Down by Pronouns*, in the forthcoming anthology, *The Healing Art of Craft*, and on butchdykeboy.com. She is currently writing a collection of personal essays about working with battered women. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Mark Thalman has been widely published in magazines, e-zines and anthologies. His work recently appeared in *Gin Bender*, *Muse Apprentice Guild*, *Pebble Lake*, and *Dicey Brown*. His poetry will also be appearing in *Hymns to the Outrageous: American Poetry Sampler*. He has taught English in the public schools for the last 22 years and lives in Forest Grove, Oregon.

Stacy Tuthill, former teacher of literature and creative writing, is the author of two collections of poems, *Pennyroyal* and *House of Change*, and of two prize-winning chapbooks, *Postcards* and *Necessary Madness* which won a chapbook contest with the University of Alaska at Fairbanks and was published in *Permafrost Magaazine*. She also authored a collection of short stories entitled *The Taste of Smoke: Stories About Africa*. She has edited three anthologies and recently edited a new anthology, *Laurels: Eight Women Poets*, about the first eight women who served as Consultants and/or Poets Laureate to the Library of Congress. She was the recipient of a Pen Syndicated Fiction Award, a poetry fellowship and a works-in-progress grant from the Maryland State Arts Council. She was founder of SCOP Publications, Inc., serving as managing editor from 1976 to 2001. Over the years she has read at many locations including the Library of Congress and other libraries. She has been published in numerous anthologies and literary magazines such as *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Appalachian Review*, *Poet Lore*, and *Montserrat Review*. She lives in Catonsville, Maryland.

Kathleen Tyler lives in Los Angeles, California, with her husband and two children. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Runes*, *Spillway*, *ONTHEBUS*, *So Luminous the Wildflowers: An Anthology of California Poets*, *Moondance*, and others. A poem of hers was selected by the Common Prayers project and appeared on a postcard series distributed throughout Southern California.

Shanti Weiland is currently working on her Ph.D. in English at the University of Southern Mississippi. She received her Master's Degree in English from Northern Arizona University, and received her Bachelor's Degree in English from the University of California at Davis. Her poetry and essays are featured in various print and online journals. Her chapbook, *Daughter en Route*, is available through Diceybrown.com. She lives in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Sarah Brown Weitzman has had nearly 200 poems published in numerous magazines including *Slant*, *Wisconsin Review*, *North American Review*, *American Writing*, *Potomac Review*, *Nassau Review*, *Rattle*, *America*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Ekphrasis*, *Bellingham Review*, and others. She has received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in poetry and was twice a finalist in the Academy of American Poets' Walt Whitman First Book Award. In 2003 she was a finalist for The Foley Prize and the National Looking Glass Poetry Chapbook Competition. Her chapbook, *The Forbidden and Other Poems*, was published in January 2004 by Pudding House Publications. A former New Yorker, she now lives and writes in Florida.

Mary L. Westcott has had two books of poetry, *Brain Custody* and *Fishing for Light*, published by Argonne Hotel Press. Her poems have appeared in more than 30 magazines. She has a doctorate in social psychology and works at the National Institutes of Health. She has been writing poetry for 10 years and lives in suburban Maryland outside Washington, D.C..

Nellie Wong is the first U.S. born daughter of Chinese immigrant parents and was raised in Oakland, California. She is the author of three collections of poetry. Two of her poems are enshrined in public sites in San Francisco where she lives and works. Her awards include The Women's Foundation of San Francisco "Women of Words" Award, the University of California Santa Barbara's Asian Pacific American Faculty and Staff Association Award for her contribution to the Asian American community, and the Kearney Street Workshop Award for her long-term work as a poet and community activist. Her work has been published in Chinese, Spanish, French and Italian. She has contributed her poems and essays to over 200 publications. A delegate to the San Francisco Labor Council for her union, University Professional and Technical Employees/CWA 9119, she is active in Bay Area United Against War (BAUAW), Radical Women and the Freedom Socialist Party. She is retired as a Senior Affirmative Action Analyst from the University of California, San Francisco. She is co-featured in the film, *Mitsuye & Nellie, Asian American Poets*, by Allie Light and Irving Saraf. Her recent poems have appeared in *Meridians*, *Comet*, and *Stereoptican*. Her poem, "Praise Song for a Dead Girl," was chosen by San Francisco Poet Laureate, devorah major, as part of the project, "City Reflections: War and Peace on Our Streets."

Elizabeth Wylder received a B.A. in Rhetoric from the University of Illinois. She is currently pursuing an M.A. in Creative Writing at Florida State University. When she is not writing, she divides her time between fiercely combatting the Florida humidity and teaching freshmen composition students the difference between there, their and they're.

Lauren Young is a sophomore at Stanford University where she plans to major in Public Policy. She has been writing poetry for over half her life and hopes to keep writing wherever she ends up. She dedicates "Los Angeles" to her Grandma Dawn who has inspired her to write.

Natalia Zaretsky has lived two rich lives - the first in Russia, the second in the United States. She was born in Moscow, graduated from the university, and taught physics in college in Moscow. In the middle of her life she emigrated to the United States and worked as a computer programmer. Now she is retired and enjoys writing poetry. She humbly refers to herself as a poet and says, "A poem is airborne and I happen to be there. I combine in my poetry the wisdom of my age, my experience of two worlds, and my connection with Judaism and Israel." Her poems have been published by *Iliad Press*, *Unmade Magazine*, *Sunflower Petals* (twice), *Sensation Magazine*, *Poetry*, *The Louisville Review*, and many others. Her book of poetry, *Autumn Solstice*, was published in 2003 by Windsong Publishing Division, RBC Publishing Co., Inc. in Elk Grove, California. Her new book of poetry, *Memories Below the Bridge*, will be published by the end of 2004. You can reach her at www.inessazaretsky.com/natalia. She lives in Wharton, New Jersey. 'Levitan' in her poem, "Into the Artist's Winter World," is Isaac Levitan - the famous Russian artist at the beginning of the 20th century.

Elizabeth Zelvin is a New York City psychotherapist with two poetry books, *I Am the Daughter* and *Gifts and Secrets: Poems of the Therapeutic Relationship* (New Rivers). She sees clients online at www.LZcybershrink.com. She has a mystery novel, *Death Will Get You Sober*, with an agent and a sequel in progress.

Larry Ziman says, "Poets are unruly slaves in revolt. While the world sleeps, poets' h(art)s are undermining and overthrowing their own m(eye)nds." He lives in West Hollywood, California.

Yvonne Zipter is the author of *Ransacking the Closet*, *Diamonds Are a Dyke's Best Friend*, the syndicated *Inside Out*, and *The Patience of Metal* (poetry). A finalist for the May Swenson Poetry Award, semifinalist for the Pablo Neruda Poetry Award, and recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Literary Award, she recently won first place for flash fiction in *Literary Potpourri*. She lives in Chicago, Illinois.

Fredrick Zydek has authored five collections of poetry. *T'Kopechuck: The Buckley Poems* is forthcoming from Winthrop Press. Formerly a professor at the University of Nebraska and later at the College of Saint Mary, he is now a gentleman farmer. Most recently he accepted the post as editor for Lone Willow Press. He lives in Omaha, Nebraska.

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Intermission