

THE
GREAT
AMERICAN
POETRY
SHOW

VOLUME 3

The
Great
American
Poetry
Show

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Volume 3

edited
by

Larry Ziman
Madeline Sharples

The Great American Poetry Show

Volume 3

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Editors: Larry Ziman, Madeline Sharples

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Electronic Epitaph

Hi! Sorry I can't pick up the phone now.
I'm dead.

If you are shocked and want more details
on my struggle with the avenging angel,
press 1 now.

If we have had sexual contact
in the past ten years and you want to be sure
that I really died of cancer,
I'd press 2. If I were you.

For pithy deathbed sayings,
including a stunning rendition of my death rattle
rising nobly over a Windham Hill soundtrack,
press 3. Wheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!

For details on my upcoming cremation
and burial in a campbell soup can
stay on the line and a mortician will assist you.

You who are calling to collect old debts
or initiate new friendships, what can I say?
I'm dead.

Or if you're that telemarketer
who keeps leaving cheerful messages
regarding what you call my "portfolio"—
maggots are up ten points, pal,
I'm dead.

Most alluring of my long-lost college sweethearts,
I knew you'd phone me bye and bye
to say hi and whisper directions to your bed.
I'm sure you're still a knockout.
Sorry I missed your call.
No, I can't join you for a drink tonight,
I'm dead.

Teacher who assured me my poetry was nought
and urged me to write a book on *Piers the Plowman*
(the "C" version, that is, though "B" needed me too,
as did "A"), Lauda, Laude, I'm dead.

Like Dante, dead; like Villon, Rabelais, dead;
like Chaucer, Shakespeare, Joe G. Schmo,
and poor Wally Stevens, the insurance man
and Emperor of Ice Cream, dead.

For a brief biography, press 4...
to hear me read my poems, press 5...
to find out what the eternal silence is like, press 6...

7... 8... 9...

for the images they said would flash before my mind
in the final moments, they were right, they did,
though *why one's history should be burnt into the brain
even as memory fails* is an intriguing parting question.

And you whom I have injured;
you who are impatient to join me;
you who like hapless Stevie Wonders
have called too late to say "I love you"
and wish you could return to the original menu

please press the star sign, now.

David Alpaugh

Power Grab

for Eddie Pandolfino

“Suppose I catch his Lordship (Mr. Featherbrains)
and ditch him somewhere—off the beaten track.”

“Won’t do any good,” my birder friend explains.

“In a day or two the son-of-a-bitch’ll be back!”

“All summer long this ruby-headed cop
has made our lemon tree his private gunship,
hiding in its blossoms, zipping out to stop
rival males from stealing even one sip!

“Suppose I add more feeders?” “Won’t help a bit.
He’ll guard them all!” (Too many paths of glory
lead but to the grave—since optics won’t permit
His Dibs to dine and defend his territory.)

Enough for everyone? Hummingbirds say No!
(Not unlike some *Homo sapiens* we know.)

David Alpaugh

Question Marks

When we got off our bikes at the top of the hill,
swirls of August butterflies came unto us,
Polygonia with their silver question marks,
landing on our wrists, arms and shoulders.

It happened at the end of childhood
in the evening before chimney-swifts tumble.

And we who had always loved cages,
who had ambushed the painted turtles that spring,
wading knee-deep into pond and brook,
ripping them off rocks and tree trunks,

who only last week had traipsed through woods,
bruising arms and legs on bramble bushes,
itching to put thumb and finger back of the neck
of every garter snake in Union County,

we who dared hunt their royal kinsmen
—*Monarchs, Viceroy, Red Admirals*—
through every yard and field on Mariners Place,
bearing down on them with cheesecloth netting,
knocking them out of the air with tennis rackets,
plucking them off ragweed and Queen Anne's Lace,
squeezing their abdomens to help them die
the way the book on Lepidoptera said to do it,
thrusting pins through their tender bodies,
watching unmoved as the snot-green blood
splattered all over our fingers,

we who thought we'd keep their powdered wings
from crumbling into dust
by burying them in cigar-box mausoleums,

stood still staring at our arms in disbelief,
watching these emphatic butterflies land and take off,
flitting through the branches of the oak trees,
reappearing on the periphery like suppressed dreams,
then landing so close to our faces
we could read their living punctuation:
illuminated manuscript on finest tissue,
drop caps on ephemeral pages,
precious silver questions.

Not one of us tried to catch them.

David Alpaugh

Summer Job

dedicated to Richard Linke

The truck that says Norwalk Vaults
arrives at Fairlawn Heights at 10 AM
going almost 60 miles per hour
pulls up alongside grass and flowers
brakes squeal—man & boy jump out
yank boards from under canvas tarp
run them off side of truck
loosen ropes that hold cargo
swivel then slide it down planks
till it hits macadam with a thud
they look up at the dark green canopy
shielding the sun at the top of the hill
it's New Jersey in July it's 90 degrees
the man spits says This one's a bitch!
arms legs thighs shoulders straining
they roll their heavy burden up the slope
two feet or so each time the man cries Push!
near collapse they finally reach the summit
sweat dripping off them like hot rain
with less than fifteen minutes left to go
the boy hurries back and gets the tripod
they straddle it across the freshly-dug hole
then hoist the concrete box off the ground
it sways back and forth in the humid air
the man holds it steady with both hands
as the boy cranks the lever in reverse
(it's so much easier going down)
then all at once the steel chain slackens
and the burial vault settles at the bottom
like a sunken battleship or freighter
they raise the lid with hooks and ropes
and prop it against the side of the grave
with no one by to clap for work well done
man & boy must find their way off stage
hide behind hedge or tree or bush
or that mausoleum fifty yards away
with "Briggs" engraved on its arch
and a marble angel by the door
guarding bodies resting within
waiting for those yet to come
and those still to be born
the boy wipes his face on his shirt
snaps open the lid on his lunchbox
to see what his mother's put inside
the man pops open a Bud mutters
Goddamn turnpike's like a parking lot!
saving sandwich and fruit for later
the boy puts a Necco on his tongue
and peeks around angelic wings
glad to see the hearse is on its way
two limos and three dozen cars
lined up behind it like a train

gloved hands ease casket off runners
wingtipped feet plod ceremoniously
here they come all in black up the hill
men and women of all ages and a child
a priest with a cross is at the grave
saying words man & boy never hear
not yesterday nor the day before
nor on the afternoon yet to come
finishing his beer the man is itching
to put the finishing touches on this job
so they can make their 3-PM on time
he's pleased to see solemnities ending
weeping woman lays flower on coffin
takes the child's hand and turns away
black swarm follows her downhill
all aboard—the hearse starts to move
and once the last car is out of sight
the boy follows the man to the grave
where Higgins & Son are waiting
nodding silently to Norwalk Vaults
that it's time to lower the concrete lid
(they watch as the casket disappears)
it's the man's job to mix the cement
and the boy's to leap into the grave
reach up and grasp pail and trowel
now comes the boy's favorite part
working like a mole in the earth
laving and smoothing mortar
all around the lip of the lid
of a vault that will last 10,000 years
(or so the front office likes to say)
still he's glad to climb out of the grave
and see young Higgins' hand in his pocket
there's a ten-dollar bill for the man
and a five-dollar bill for the boy
though the seat's hot as hell in the truck
as the man starts driving away
the boy fondles the undertaker's tip
and thinks What a great summer job!
but as they pass through the cemetery gate
he sneaks a furtive glance at the man
delivering vaults for twenty years
and thinks to himself Thank god
I won't be doing this in December!
stuck for forty minutes in the cab
with a man who has little to say
the boy plays tic-tac-toe with the pen
the shop steward gave him with a wink
on his first day at work back in June
For employees only, kid—mum's the word!
and he plays against himself for a while
with a ballpoint that says Norwalk Vaults
We'll get your business in the end.

David Alpaugh

Nightfall Ceremony

She tip-toed
though from the distance
I could hear
the crick, creek, cracking—
the deafening rumble
of forgotten footsteps
on old wooden floors,
sneaking away to steal
romantic kisses,
enjoy youthful laughter,
or just be

self-absorbed
in their soliloquy,
be young and in love and foolish
or old, exhausted and needing
to simply find
solace
or peace.

She tip-toed
and, as doors unlocked
and car engine became faint,
I lay in bed
and ate

cream-filled memories
baked in chocolate-cake deception,
ate Rum-Raisin desires
of her and I,
ate first kisses,
I-miss-you-already hugs,
I want to make this last,

and drank them away
with Orange-Fanta maybe's
and what if's—
and everything tasted
bitter sweet.

Gustavo Adolfo Aybar

Marilyn Meshak

*"In dreams, I walk with you.
In dreams, I talk to you."
—Roy Orbison*

Taunted by the pale blue
ice of her eyes in a photo
from forty years before,
I sit remembering Marilyn Meshak,
and all the times I told her
of my love, alone, in my bedroom,
or roaming the unsafe streets
of Queens, wishing
to do what I never did,
and never-dids are hard to dissolve,
no matter how I finally got unshied enough
to date, marry, divorce, marry again,
bring children, brown and green-eyed,
into the same unflinching world.
Somehow that first ongoing failure
has nailed me, if not as loser
certainly as lost, dreaming dozens
of dreams each year since of conversations,
kisses, connection to a petite blonde phantom.

Maybe she lives like me an anonymous life;
maybe she died young and is all the more my ghost.
Either way, we are as far from our days
sharing a school building, a bus stop,
and a neighborhood as it's possible to be,
more time past only making my dreams more
redundant, pained, to wake up and uncover
how I'll never tell her
what I felt, and, so, still feel,
how I'll never know her, and, so
somehow making everyone unknowable,
unreachable, whether awake, alone
or, finally, asleep together.

Joe Benevento

Black Autumn

November shadows deepen, and the cluster
of maples that edge the woods stands naked.
It faces west where a sinking sun spills
scarlet ripples as it slowly disappears behind
the brook. A screeching murder of crows
suddenly blocks this scene from view like
a massive black cloud that is headed my way.
I raise my eyes to this wild disturbance and
realize the bird leading this pack is not a crow
but a young hawk owl flying for its life.

It lands on a narrow limb facing me while the crows
crowd together near-by, surrounding their prey. One
crow stands out as the gang's leader who leaves
his perch to fly so close pin-feathers flutter on the
young owl's head. The owl and I lock eyes in this
uneasy silence when all the birds and trees that
hold them fade into deep black silhouettes of evening.

I never really saw them leave the woods that night,
heard nothing but crows' final screams and batting wings.
At sunrise I found that clump of soft, brown,
red-stained feathers on the forest floor.

Regina Murray Brault

From My Own Lips

I will not answer if you knock at night.
Silhouettes and shadows frighten me.
This wasn't so before I understood
that when we're women we cannot transform
to Gypsies, clowns, and witches at our will.

My tongue smacked at the taste of rosy wax –
October lips that formed a second skin
to lean against the margins of my mouth.
I'd bought the ultimate accessory
to any costume I could conjure up.

My bangled, bright-eyed Gypsy was the first
to flaunt the smooth and softly gummy smile
with flange that slid between her anxious teeth.
Her smile turned from mysterious to smirk as,
bag in hand, she raced through neighbors' yards,
begging as she nibbled, chewed and gulped
bits of lips in time to tambourine.

Then came the clown in baggy pantaloons,
orange wig and lip-shticked loud guffaws
growing louder with each waxy chew
that curled the lips into a puckered pout.

My wart-nosed witch was next to roll the sweet
pink past her tongue as if it were a brew.
She finally gobbled through enough to part
the wax into a cruel lop-sided sneer.

My bangles, warts, and wigs have gone the way
of shadows under moonless autumn skies.
Unlike those nights I wore my dime-store lips,
these demons creeping through my nights are real.

The lips I wear today are mine alone
and when my teeth sink into them the taste
is neither sweet nor pink, but wretched red,
and that thick lump stuck in my craw
is not a wad of waxen lips, but fear
of beggars, buffoons, witches at my door --

cannibals who lick their lips for mine.

Regina Murray Brault

The Last Page

When Annie's bones could no longer
hold her body erect,
Walter carried their bed downstairs
near the window that overlooked the brook,
and then slipped her softly between the sheets.
He opened Volume A of their encyclopedia,
and they talked about aardvarks;
he leading the way with text,
she whispering questions,
both pausing to watch the red fox
quench his thirst at sundown.

After each day's reading, Walter carefully
folded the corner of the page –

all the way to dragonfly.

Regina Murray Brault

Island Living

San Francostco covers the entire peninsula, geographical thumbnail to wrist, offering fifty-seven-thousand kinds of free samples of laminated manna no doctors allow themselves to eat. This is a soulful, mindblowing theme park beyond all mortal ken, encircling concept, life, and death; expired shoppers culminate in the south of the store. You can pick up fifty gallons of cioppino in a crusty sourdough bucket; you can purchase a barrel of tomato-and-garlic-flavored chum. You can buy bushels of hydroponic arugula harvested fresh from the ceiling that morning, right near the top of the structure, in Mariners Market Managers Heights. On the lower floors, mobs of shoppers are entertained by the lion dancers, coupons scattering like paper-beard dandruff from their shaken manes, and by the sudden formations of critical masses of synchronized forklifts, blocking pedestrian traffic for only the most ideologically sound of reasons: the economy must be stimulated. But you tire, you miss your car. Your children have stealthily wandered off to find the talking salmon. You must go. Did you park far to the east in the vast asphalt prairies of Contra Costa County? Did you ride the Bay Escalator to arrive? You don't remember, you don't think so. So look past the towering grill shaped like firemen rampant in coitus. Look past the milling crowds of militant boy-whores, tender-loined crack commandos wearing beef bouffants. Make your way down the aisles through the piles of rainbow gymwear, past the inflatable burrito mission, past the unctuous racks of fried town hangers, through the valleys and over twin peaks. Pass under the ceremonial golden gateway entirely surrounded by clicking tourists and sniff your way down the scent trail of patchouli, crab dungeons, and espresso. Every few hundred steps, an employee who hates you asks for change, a toll paid for living without tattoos or tongue-rings. Go through the doors marked "THEM ONLY," between the fog machines, into the sunset. Go there, tangent to the inscrutable Pacific Rim, the next store over. Listen for the seagulls and surf machines, scrawing above and washing your clothes, shitting and rinsing, eating the leftover hotdog a chunky boy bought at the concession on Level 86P, laving the dirt from the denim, the mustard from the muslin. Take

a deep breath and relax. There are sharks out there in the water, waiting for apeseals to close their eyes. But you are still safe on tile, damp particles of ground linoleum squishing between your toes. You are still beneath the fluorescent dome, breathing the best air that suits your snug budget, feeling the breeze from the air-conditioning vents. You have not left. Reach, touch the wall of home.

John F. Buckley

Reconquista

A late-night fast-food restaurant employee
nods off at his station, sitting on a milk crate,
trying to lean without touching the wall.
As he fades, the Mega Bean-n-Cheez Burrito
sprouts fanged cockatrice head, coiled tail
scaled with foil wrappers, wings feathered
with skateboard decks, flies over the microwaves,
a faux-Mexican faux-edible Quetzalcoatl on
a mission of vengeance. It doesn't want
the return of Aztlan. It doesn't want
a renegotiated Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.
It doesn't want a warm beating heart
from the near-virgin at the drive-thru.
It just wants less wood pulp in the ground "meat,"
more dairy in the "cheez topping," It shrieks
"not a bang but a whimper" in Nahuatl
as it flutters, soars, dives through the door
of the manager's office for the redress,
for the rending, for razor claws unzipping a neck
like a packet of Mucho Fuego hot sauce.
Here comes the culinary Reconquista.
Here comes the time of obsidian chef's knives,
honest butchery of cows and industrial chemists,
Xipe Totec returned in a toque clipped from their skins.
Here come the drums and the banners, the rumble
of drums like the sound of the fans in the hoods,
the fans in the hoods, the gurgle of grease in the fryers.
The timer goes off when the fries are done,
awakens the napping boy, reeling but alert
to the red and gold world of tomorrow.

John F. Buckley

The Romantic Stylings of G. Albert Touchstone

*If I think you wuznt crunk
on forties and grass, Id pass, G
Bitch, I aint no snitch
But ya cant make sense of shit
So Ill lay it, go play it
And yo trippin ass wont see*

SO let's me and you go
when the night's got its legs spread up in the sky
like a coked-up porn queen doing a shoot;
let's head on down this pretty empty alley,
the same throughout the Valley,
a shortcut to one-hour cheap hotels
and fast-food combos at Taco Bells:
paths that go on like a boring fight
over who's not right
to take you to the Big Question
Ah, don't worry about it!
Let's get our heads rerouted.

On the street the girls turn and yell,
"I'ma name the next one Rafael!"

The brown smog that rubs its cheeks on the windows,
the brown smog that rubs the stars off of the windows,
smeared itself on all of midnight's edges,
hung out washing itself by the gutter puddle,
collected black dandruff from the factory smokestacks,
fell across the patio, gave a sudden squeeze,
and seeing that it was a sole Saturday night,
toppled next to the tenement and found release.

And yeah, there's gonna be time
for the brown smog that scrapes along the street,
rubbing its asscheeks on the windows;
there's gonna be time, there's gonna be time
to front and play when you meet the fronters and players;
there's gonna be time to kick some ass and whistle,
and time to do all the stuff you gotta do
that thrusts tricky shit your way like a missile;
time for me and time for you,
and time still for a hundred hearts' contusions,
and for a hundred fusions and confusions,
before grabbing a Big Mac and a Mountain Dew.

On the street the girls turn and yell,
"I'ma name the next one Rafael!"

And, yeah, there's gonna be time
to go, "Is it really time to man up,
time to sober up and stand up,
with a heavy tread that always woke the band up—

[They will go, “Your excuses are wearing thin!”]
my black hoodie, my zipper zippered up to the chin,
my piercings bold and flashy, but for one simple pin?
[They will go, “I heard his thing is really thin!”]
Is it really time
to shake my life loose?”
In a second there are chances
for perusals and refusals that a second will confuse.

For I’ve been there, done that, done that again—
done them in the summer, winter, spring and fall.
I have measured out my life with Rohypnol;
I know the numbers crying with a crying over
under the lullabies from a father’s room.
But how can I presume?

And I’ve known the eyes already, known them all—
the eyes that serve you with a brief subpoena,
and when I am briefed, dandling in my web,
when I’m caught and claiming I will call,
then how do I start, with Deb,
Toothpaste Allie, Up-the-Butt Sarah, or Gina?
But how can I presume?

And I have known the legs already, known them all—
legs that are stubbled, brown, white, or bare
[But in the black light, spattered with more than Nair!].
Is it perfume of a crotch
that makes me cut a notch
or legs that stretch under a table or rest upon a wall?
But how can I presume?
And where’m I gonna start?

.
Should I go at night through this alley
with smoke rising from glass pipes
of lonely street folk in parkas, squatting behind the bins?

I shoulda been a string of pink segments
writhing on the sidewalk after a rinsing rain.

.
And the P.M., the night-time, doesn’t rue!
Doped by long needles,
nodding ... puking ... Burrough’s beetles,
stretched on the floor, here beside me and you,
will I, after weed and beer and shots,
have the stones to make me do what I gots?
But even though I’ve played real fast, played real quick,
even though I seen my name [spelled with extra Xes] written down on a platter,
I’m no real musician – which doesn’t really matter;
I’ve seen my fifteen minutes of fame fade,
and I’ve had the Eternal Bouncer push me out the velvet ropes into the shade,
and basically, I felt sick.

And would it been worth it, after all,
after the bowls, the Captain Crunch, the bongos,
over the porcelain, over some talk over favorite songs?
Would it been worthwhile
to have choked back the massive flow of bile,
to have squeezed my body into a wad
that fetally spits at some Big Fatal Question,
to go, “I am Kurt Cobain, come from the rack,
come back to raise you all, I shall raise you all.”—
if one, sticking a pillow below her back,
should go, “That is not what I meant at all.
It is not yours at all.”

And would it been worth it, after all,
would it been worthwhile,
after Sunset and the doorframes and the pissed-on streets,
after the shows, after the Zig Zags, after the skirts that rise up to the ceiling—
and this, and so much feeling?
It’s hard to get to know just what I think!
But like a super YouTube video showing guts in lassos in a sink,
would it been worthwhile
if one, sticking a pillow or responding to a bawl,
and turning toward the hallway, should go,
“It is not yours at all.
That is not what I meant, at all.”

.
Nah. I’m not Ozzy Osbourne, not supposed to be;
I’m a tender roadie, one that’ll move
a riser or some drums, with nothing more to prove,
dress all in black; no doubt, a human tool,
kind of a suckup, happy to be of use,
apolitical, horny, and contagious;
playing practical jokes on the rest of the crews;
pretty much, weakly outrageous—
mostly, pretty much, a fool.

I got glasses I bought Dockers . . .
getting ready to hang with the *alter kockers*.

Should I cut my mullet short? Should I go buy *Eat a Peach*?
I’ll go wear khaki cargo shorts and check out Venice Beach.
I’ll watch the boardwalk God freaks try to preach.

I don’t think they’ll try to preach to me.

I’ve seen the muscle guys flexing on the sand,
oiling the shaved hair of their chests thrust out
when the tourist season brings viewers about.

We have hung out pumping iron by the ocean
with bachelors putting weights upon our bar
till spotters look away; we slip, we scar.

John F. Buckley

You, Morning

Wake, sling a naked arm
over my chest

palm on my collarbone
fingers grazing my shoulder

B r e a t h

blushing shallow and quiet,
flutters the hair swathing your face

Yesterday's mascara
turned your soft blonde eyelashes
into cheap plastic combs, embankments
seeping gray rivulets

tears pool between
tear duct and nose

and leak out the other side
dispersing tributaries
along your
hairline delta

I pull

you close by the back
of your right leg
White sand stubble
tickles my fingertips

The blanket falls back, revealing
freckle constellations
peppered against your rippling
skin: the triangle
above your right knee (my favorite), the two
under your breasts, the two
beneath your left eye.

Our skin is smooth:
a ceramic plate
or frosted sea glass bottle

Sally Burnette

Morning Weight

A week after his father's death
we make pancakes, play The Beatles,
stand on the balcony and kiss.

Somehow, it's antiseptic -- syrup,
sunlight over skinny palms,
the voices of the living
and the dead.

We fold the shirts we hung from
the curtain rod eight days ago
when the dryer failed and he had
to catch the plane.

He tells me what it was like to carry a corner
of his father's weight, to lower him to earth,
position his closed lids to see the blue sky
above the cornrows.

He says the heaviness is mostly gone;
he feels only a dullness in his right arm,
the one he let fall asleep
beneath my shoulders.

Still, he skips over "Here Comes the Sun,"
leaves the ragged rim of his pancakes,
lets the edges of his smile curdle
when he can't get the milk for our coffee
to foam.

Anne Butler

Miles & Miles

When Lucie was in her mother's belly,
we listened to Mozart, Bach, some Tchaikovsky,
even a little Beethoven, before he went completely nuts.
My wife said it was good for the baby,
that research had been done.

When Lucie started school, I drove her each morning.
"Put in the funny tape," she'd say, "the one with the singing squirrel
and monkey."
"I love the way they sing," she'd say.
"Listen to the monkey. He's silly," she'd say.
I always did as I was told: I put in the funny tape.

At six and seven, even eight,
Lucie wanted to listen to oldies—
a local L.A. station, K-Earth 101.
Elvis, The Beatles, The Platters, and
a lot of shoo-wop, doo-wop stuff.
I drove along,
happy to replace the squirrel and the monkey
with The Pelvis and The Fab Four.

On Lucie's ninth birthday,
a friend gave her a Billy Ray Cyrus CD,
country stuff.
I could practically smell the leather chaps
through the speakers.
"Achy Breaky Heart" nearly killed me.
We listened to it on repeat, day after day;
her friends sang along.
I wanted to tighten the bolo around Billy Ray's throat,
end the madness.

Ten through twelve revolved around
cute stuff—music from girls with tight midribs and low self-esteem,
girls with long, tan legs, glittery eyelids, bleach-blond hair and
Tweedy-Bird voices.
Man, did these girls want to be loved:
Love me, love me, say that you love me.
Whenever I pulled up to stoplights,
I kept my eyes straight ahead,
shielded my face with my hand—
didn't want anyone to see me,
really thought about getting the windows tinted.

After that, up until Lucie was about fifteen,
it was rock.
Nirvana, Green Day, Bush—bands whose songs seemed loud even
with the volume low,
even for a man who grew up in upstate New York, near the Catskills,
who hung out
in Bethel

on August 17th, 1969.
Lucie's bands weren't about sex, peace and rock 'n' roll;
they preached death and drugs and bad hygiene.
All I could do, though, was roll my eyes,
think of the good ol' days,
make sarcastic comments to myself.
Go deaf.

Lucie's mom didn't want her to get her license until she turned 18,
so I got to drive her for a few more years—
I chauffeured her to parties, where I had to drop her off at least two blocks
away, and
to school, where I had to leave her at the intersection of Walnut and Whif-
fletree.
By this time, it was rap.
The bass on my car pounded, rippled my side mirrors, even gave my lum-
bar
area a bit of a massage.
My ears hurt. My cheeks blushed.
Lucie's head bobbed.
“The beat's good, right?” she'd ask.
“What?” I'd ask.

In college, Lucie went granola.
Thank God.
NPR and All Things Considered.
No commercials, no stress.
Voices so calm I had to pluck out arm hairs to stay awake.
Public and pure: save Tibet, “Prairie Home Companion,” African drum-
ming, make a donation, make a donation, make a donation.

But tonight's different.
Lucie's 26 now, just in from grad school.
I'm driving; she's sitting shotgun.
She's back for Thanksgiving and we're headed up the bridge.
It's my tunes now. Lord knows they've slept long enough.
Inside the car's cabin Miles's “Blue in Green” plays.
Bursts of cold trumpet ooze through the speakers, along with
patters of drums, plucks of bass, and
hints of shy piano—chords, flats, sharps, and neutrals.
Tonight, Lucie doesn't ask me to change a thing.
Tonight, Lucie doesn't make a move for the preset buttons.
No, tonight, Lucie smiles, reaches for the volume knob
with her French-manicured fingers
and turns it up.

Mathieu Cailler

Forgotten Heroes

The dead man's clock has no hands for charting the backward progression of time into cluttered rooms, relics of a life broken into ossuary rooms, each containing forbidding objects of misspent passion and solipsistic deeds, the disharmonics of old soldiering homes and the crippling diseases that placed them there, dependent on brain-killing drugs, neuroleptics that induce visions no dream quest can erase, though the image clusters remain, surrounding them with objects as an inducement to fear. Leaning back in their uneasy reclining chairs, they must endure nightly bombing raids, missions they fly in their minds more real than the ones they actually partook in, sounds of the bombs landing outside, inducing them to flee, to seek shelter from fire storms and holocaustic ruins, unable to motivate, wired as they are, to IV's wrapped around government-issued weapons instead of poles, heart-monitoring machines unplugged along with ventilators for continued sustenance and life. Only the human skull, resting on top of the portable TV with lit cigarettes in each eye hole, seems capable of creating a new existence beyond this one.

Alan Catlin

Guys and Dolls

Maybe she thought that she
looked like the girl in the red
dress Dillinger left the movies
with before Purvis and his gang
gunned him down, instead of
like some washed-out bottle-blonde,
cocktail whore that she was.
Thirty years ago someone might
have called her “Doll,” though the only
one she resembled now was latex,
had a valve, washable parts and no hair.
No one would ever admit to owning
something like that, or having a
relationship with it, much less been
seen in public with it. The last guy
she had managed to pick up was
in some dive at the end of an industrial
wasteland that catered to third-shift zombies,
long-haul truckers and predicate felons
who only went to bars no cop would
be caught dead in. He might have
looked like Marlon Brando by the time
they got around to locking lips and
exchanging body fluids, though even she
would have had to admit it was the Brando
who played Kurtz, not the one who was
Stanley Kowalski, the one she dreamed
she was sleeping with. Or maybe he was
the gangster in the musical with Sinatra,
who sang a Jean Simmons serenade on
late-night cable TV, the sounds the erstwhile
lovers were making together, a brutal duet,
like animals mating in a cage.

Alan Catlin

“My destiny is to be pulverized.”

—Jan Kerouac

Summer nights are the worst,
working alone behind the bar,
hours of intense boredom
followed by marathon running
from midnight to four am last
call, running through thick,
poisonous clouds of smoke,
walls of noise, the jukebox
and the crowd, a blurred mass
of shadows, more or less human,
loudly articulating, wanting,
demanding something only you
can provide, not caring how you
do so as long as what is wanted
arrives, as if you are some kind of
highly functional machine at their
disposal, an automaton without
intellect or emotion, one that is
never allowed to wind down or
to pause in the soul-draining heat,
this sauna where you are sweating
off the perpetual buzz that gets you
through the nights and the days,
building a more than one-quart thirst,
the heat inside like accumulating steam,
a closed container with no valve for
release, just this endless nightmare
only an alcoholic coma can dispel;
decades of this like an obstacle
course, a personal endurance test,
only you can pass or fail, not caring
any longer what the end result is.

Alan Catlin

Our Lady of the Subways

Retinas fused to a fine glaze,
following long solitary days
and nights, staring at the third
rail, absorbing the energy of sparks,
of spirits residing on long-deserted
platforms, trunk-line stops disused
and abandoned, now home to mole people,
vagabonds, homeless subterraneans
more vermiculate than human after
decades underground, learning the customs
of tunnel rats and pariah cats, feral dogs,
vicious as only a creature driven mad by
isolation, fear, hunger can be, finally
compelled to the street to mingle with topsiders,
citizens with ordinary lives impossible
to comprehend by one whose mind
has been stolen by common thieves,
whose soul has been bartered for food
to feed the starving beasts that live inside,
whose needs are articulated in strange
tongues, verbiage no man must know
even when the codes have been written
down in a language no one can hear
or see but those she has instructed
with mute gestures and wild speeches
others interpret as aggression, acting out,
but is actually a statement of her art
carefully refined as something pure like
music, all that she has learned living
underground.

Alan Catlin

Two Blind Mice

You could see them, weekdays,
working Washington Park, their long
retractable sticks unfolded for feeling
the way down paths, over curbs,
eyes hidden by cheap plastic sunglasses,
a wooden begging bowl held out for loose
change, origami folded bills, a pair of
beggars plying the workers, trading
spots, rarely doing the same space
back-to-back days, keep moving, one step
ahead of question askers, suspicious folk,
John Law. Lunch hours are the best
money makers, warm-weather afternoons,
state employees out for plein-air dining
and a toke, dropping change from a five
in the bowl, thinking everyone has
to make a living. Two or three hours
beating the pavement pays a good day's wage,
beats working a regular job, punching
a clock, paying taxes. Then it's off for a late
lunch uptown, always ordering the same club
sandwich they split with endless cups of
burnt black coffee, often gabbing for hours,
smoking a pack of imported cigarettes apiece,
never leaving a tip when they leave to meet
the people they are married to and unaware
of what they do, how they meet before and
after the gig on the streets or in the park,
their shades and canes stored in back packs
along with a change of clothes.

Alan Catlin

Chinatown from the Movies

This isn't Chinatown from the movies or that place where Jack and Faye rendezvous on a neo-noir night—no soothing glint of an eye, not even a sweet coo from the starlet herself, trapped in that green smoke of Jack's—she's got that nonchalant look as if she doesn't care who kills the next guy. But her eyes—those cat-like eyes lit by . . . surprise—surprise, that she's not a sleazy widow-fatale clutching her bijoux and Shih Tzus. The bartender makes Rum & Coke, his gun ready to choke dangerous men in boss suits—pin-stripe and slacks. The hostess drops the cookies as the gun cracks.

The cookies smash, boss men attack, gunning this heartbreakingly erotic mess. Pound, pound, pound it until The End, gloss, call it cinema. There's an end? No, it's The End that rids the happy ending, making kids Mew out. Let them watch that Pokémon film circa ninety eight, out-date outdate—paint rips off the kiddy billboard by the ma & pa cake shop. No more drips, rips, ripping, begging to be ripped off, so it can lose its virginity and become big-boy cinema. A creep outside wants to sell his sad-sheep couch—white fluff stuffed out, scares the lioness away. Baaaaa. Baaaaaaa.

Ahhhhhhh scream the sheepish cakes who don't outweigh the puffy ones, powder puffing the fluff—an Asian delight, airy and light, do re, mi . . . strawberry hearts and cantaloupe balls with fresh honeydew slewed together in some fruity fantasy elopement. Minimal sprinkles—no cheap tricks, just bows of sugar atop vanilla cream—salt-like moist taste, subtle—this coy wet feeling—the coyness of a milk black boba tea's anatomy, unzipping, revealing black pearls of pretty, dancing up my straw like sequins of a bellydancer's skirt. Brown suitcase man ogles, sipping coffee.

Coffee-brown bags suck duck fat the way girls at clubs chug drinks, romping in suede rompers and gold flats—hair tied in curls, violet lips sipping hip drips of vodka and pear. Stare. Ogle. Drips down their tops—cheap fabric tears like brown bags in their ducky ecstasy. Fatty and roasted are those duck wings and livers in this fest of layered fat. Stomp. Stomp. Stomp. Those ducky livers stomp in their raw-tasting, hardened flesh. Champing through territories of Grade-A goo, my mouth feels the crisp of shiny skin peeling like a dress ripped apart by that fat flesh, not sleazy enough to ignore. Eat up.

Big scary sleaze fish head wants to eat my head up so much he purses his lips and gives me red eye glare. Oh, that bloody pink stare makes the eels outdare each other to touch the Hunchback of the grocery-store fish. Squirming in his greed, head the size of six burger patties greased together and squished, sloppily cut dark seafood nightmare fuel, thinking it's King of the Dead Fish. "Dish the dirt on him," gossip the leggy frogs. Lip-sync, quick wink to the wealthy clams and catfish earl, thinking he's part of that world—in truth a loner head on an island—no Blue Hawaii, just ice on the rocks.

Hawaii trips and Harry Winston rocks, leather purses and sheer black socks. She dreams of these while looking at knockoffs—"Mickey Rat" and that old beanie cap. Bantering in Cantonese with the other housewives—the best way to spend their lives. "My daughter reads at an eighth-grade level, though she's in fifth grade." She can't let her son fade. "Well, my Timmy takes advanced algebra and just won a piano contest." The need to redeem comes—the others bite their gums, except for one—a beauty of silence, kind and demure, secretly smirking. She sees no allure since her son's a genius.

Cantonese squabbling—the genius language of spies. Sifting through the screams and cries. Ah, the wonders of being an Asian spy. The talking fast, bartering, inside jokes, and laughter. The walking past duck stores, red dragons, and egg tarts sought-after. Kids meet in Japanese-themed stores. Dogs can't stand on all fours, leaning it to get that fried pork. Teens gather at

pretty glass bakery tables, with turtles housed in them like odd cages, a bizarrchitecture design for the refined. Rich gilded gold glamours all over the dragon-phoenix couple. This isn't Chinatown from the movies.

Dorothy Chan

Moon over Sixth Avenue

I dropped off an elderly couple
in the West Village; they'd bickered
in my cab all the way from Brooklyn,
snipping as if dueling with pinking shears,
then turned their cutting edges at me
when I announced the bill at ride's end:
common enemies how their marriage survived.

Trying to breathe, I headed up Sixth Avenue,
and almost crashed my cab,
not from still hearing their barbs,
but suspended between skyscrapers
the jolly butter glow of the full moon,
so low and huge in the sky it might
have been an alien spaceship offering us all
one more chance of living in peace.

And though fares were fighting
for empty cabs, I pulled over to watch
that globe famed for blessing lovers,
as that pair must've been once,
and also to breathe the moon's stillness.

It ascended like a balloon whose string
a child's greasy hand let slip away,
taking its magic with it,
until it was time to drive again:
leopard-alert for the raised arms
of people in a hurry, and no patience
for the vanishing magic of the full moon.

Robert Cooperman

That Word

Not the one little boys ask
little girls to do with them.
The other one, that part
of the female anatomy
Chaucer so loved
about earthy Alison
that she used to please
her clerk-lover
and withheld from
her ancient reeve husband;

the word my brother's ten-
year-old son blurted like a fart
while all of us played
a memory game. Silence
suddenly fell heavy
as waste from a jetliner
contrailing the sky,
a silence broken
by Jeff demanding,

"What did you say?"

and Davy screeching,
"What does it mean?"
worry etching his forehead,
the world too confusing.

"Have an ice cream,"
Jeff soothed,
my brother whispering,
"I've been dreading this,"

then squared his shoulders
as if going into battle,
his loins girded.

Robert Cooperman

The Grabber

Aunt Stella was a grabber;
friends and family nudged each other
when she entered a wedding or bar-mitzvah hall,
her eyes darting like a campfire bird
seeking to steal the most ostentatious trinkets.

Anything she could carry away and display
in her living room was fair game
like her banquet table's floral centerpiece,
and woe to any woman who tried to get between her
and that ornament ornate as Byzantine statuary.

If she could have, she'd have ripped down
the draperies, hauled off the band's drum kit
and the arm chairs the bride and groom had sat on
while dancers held them above their heads
like a pair of smiling pagan gods clutching
the ends of a handkerchief to signal their union.

She grabbed wine glasses, sets of plates; cutlery
a simple clattering sweep into her carpetbag,
and God help any employee who disputed that
she had the right to march home with her booty
for suffering the naïve happiness of anyone else.

This, after her husband had left her, proclaiming,
"Doris is a very giving woman,"
the criticism heavy in the air between them,
as had been the woman-shaped and -sized vase
she'd failed to carry off: the piece cemented
to the floor, as she'd have liked to do
to her husband and to his slut Doris
before she'd unleash her fury on them.

Robert Cooperman

Three Kids in the Back Seat of My Cab

After a Knick game at the Garden,
three kids elbowed in and gave me
an address in the rat's maze
where the West Village labyrinths
into Little Italy and back again.

They laughed and shouted
and, as we used to say in Brooklyn,
ranked each other out with insults,
but nothing with real imagination
or the bile that might require fists and blood:

just friends flying on a rare Knick win
and the weed they'd smoked
and beers they'd drunk during the game.
And I chuckled along with them.

Then, on one dim red-stoplight corner,
the doors flew open, and out they ran
without paying: laughing, punching
each other, flipping me the bird,
and disappearing into an alleyway,
kicking over garbage cans in their glee.

Muttering, I slammed the gaping doors,
admitting that if I were completely honest,
I'd have been tempted to do likewise:
if I were with friends, our spirits high
on weed, a hometown win,
and invincible, immortal youth.

Robert Cooperman

Found Sonnet: Remarks Overheard at the Wall

Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Washington, D. C.

Do you have someone here? Let me try
a different lens. Before we were born.
There it is. You mean all those people died?
We're underground. The war we didn't win.

They had a great big article on him. Oh
my god. Everything's picked up at the end of the day
and catalogued. This is not a TV show.
It was his first assignment. No fucking way.

Take a picture of us in the reflection. They're
not buried here. The order of death. It's simple.
This one could be a girl. He was making a career
out of it. Are you looking at this at all?

Excuse me. These walls are getting higher.
I've been here before. I can't believe it. My brother.

Philip Dacey

Girlfriends

Tired of our wars,
I want to be one of your girlfriends,
a male girlfriend
with whom you have sex

but whom you also trust
like Mary or Judy or Jasmin or Ann.

We'll stay up late talking,
protective armor
strewn across the floor,
giggling cozily
in our permanent sleepover.

Battle of the sexes?
Good for a laugh, a ribald joke.

I'll slouch around
in an old nightgown,
something you were about to discard
that will hide my genitals
nicely for the time being.

I'll be the boyfriend
you talk about
to the girlfriend I've become
as I shake a knowing
and sympathetic head.

Men!

We'll pour drinks and toast ourselves:
girlfriends forever.

Philip Dacey

Tinsel

The sonnet longed to be made into a movie.
It envied novels, their lives on the big screen,
opening nights, all cleavage and blinding teeth,
star-struck crowds and the smell of money.

Tired of its ghetto of fourteen verses,
the penury of its fixed rhyme scheme, the sonnet
stuffed every caesura with characters and plot,
even turned the volta into a car chase.

But, frankly, my dear, Hollywood didn't give a damn.

What could the sonnet do but play a grande dame
from the Golden Era--dark glasses, long coat, pose
of one remembering her celluloid glory days?
"Be a dahling," she intoned, waving a cigarette,
"and come unzip my couplet. I'm getting hot."

Philip Dacey

Angenette Sampson

Dartmouth, Massachusetts, 1880

Thirty years old, live-in housekeeper,
she'd never wed or loved a man
and didn't think she ever would,
but that spring the Indian came
to plant parsnips, leeks and corn,
feed chickens, and milk the cows
on the Hazards' farm for a fraction
of a white man's wage. Her breath
quickenened each day when he arrived.
She noticed his muscles, cheekbones,
long black braids, and he accepted
the coffee she brought to the barn.

The Wampanoags lived in shacks
by the pond outside of town.
She'd never been there but knew
the Indians were nearby and poor.
He brought her flowers, stones
and shells, said he was the *sachem*,
his people's leader. He loved her,
he said, but they couldn't go away.
She gave birth to a daughter
the following year, wouldn't tell
the father's name. The Hazards
fired him, but said she could stay.

Lucille Lang Day

Edward and Hannah Bumpus

When Edouad Bompasse got to Plymouth
in 1621, the other Pilgrims called him
Edward Bumpus, but why complain
after long weeks at sea on the *Fortune*
and reaching a continent with no king
or Pope, where the land was almost free?

At first he planted Indian style—
in circles like small volcanoes, three
feet apart, with corn seeds at the center.
When he'd saved enough, he bought
an ox and plow, planted wheat and barley
in long straight rows like an Englishman
to sell to newcomers up north
at Massachusetts Bay. Hannah kept
a garden where she tended peas,
cabbages, radishes, carrots, garlic, onions,
melons, artichokes, skirrets and leeks.

She bore twelve children in a house
built around a great brick chimney.
There wasn't much to do in Plymouth
but work and pray, so if the family
members weren't always dutiful
who could blame them? Except, of course,
the preachers and magistrates,
who ordered son John publicly whipped
for *idle and lasivius behavior*,
Edward Jr. for *stricking and abusing*
his parents, a lenient punishment
because *hee was crasey brained*.

A narrow, winding staircase ascended
from the entry hall to the chamber
where Hannah made love with Thomas Bird
in her 55th year, until they too were caught
and whipped. Edward Sr. took her back,
and she set violets and daffodils among
the onions for her forty-eight grandchildren
to pick, intermixed lilies and daisies
with parsnips, and stitched a new dress.

Lucille Lang Day

In the Union Army

Nathan Cobb Bumpus, 1846-1926

That he ended up in a tent near Norfolk
in a four-button sack coat in December
was no one's doing but his own.
He'd joined the Massachusetts
Heavy Artillery, was assigned
to the 2nd Regiment, Company L,
which made him think of Lucy,
his mother, who'd begged him not to go,
but he was seventeen—old enough
to envision a world free of slavery
and hope for a role in creating it.
He'd read Lincoln's speech in November:
“a new nation, conceived in liberty,
and dedicated to the proposition
that all men are created equal.” Now
he knew about amputees and the stench
of dead horses. Companies G and H
were captured by the Confederates
to a man. In the fall of '64, mosquitoes,
carrying yellow fever, descended
on Company B in New Bern, North
Carolina, bringing bleeding and seizures.
In April Company L replaced them.
Two months later the war was over.
Nathan mustered out in September
with enough ghosts and ailments to last
a lifetime. He headed home to Acushnet
where his mother lived on a farm
with her second husband, lovely Susan
Ellis was single, and my Grandpa Eben
and his siblings waited to be born.

Lucille Lang Day

Rachel Becomes Emma

Dartmouth, Massachusetts, 1892

Dirty snow covered the ground
and flocked the limbs of leafless trees
outside the window of the small, cold room
where Angenette coughed and wheezed.

Barely able to speak, she asked for Rachel,
her daughter, who helped her cook
and clean all day for the Hazards. The girl
stood at the foot of her mother's bed.

"Your father isn't dead," Angenette whispered.
"He watches you from the woods and leaves
gifts in the garden." She pointed to whelk
and periwinkle shells on the windowsill.

"He brought them here from the sea.
He knows the secrets of oaks and towhees.
If the Hazards ever mistreat you, go
to the Wampanoags. He's their chief."

She died the next day. Frederick and Mary
Hazard, who'd never had a child of their own,
told Rachel they would adopt her.
They called her Emma, her middle name,

and gave her the same warning
they'd given her mother: if she ever met
or mentioned the Indian, she couldn't enter
their house again. Like Angenette, she stayed.

Lucille Lang Day

The Family Secret

It started in Massachusetts where pitch pine
grows with needles in bundles of three
and panic grass sways gracefully
at the edges of wetlands on Cape Cod.

The Hazards never wanted anything
revealed about the Indian—that disgrace—
but Emma told her daughter, my mother,
“Your grandfather was a Wampanoag chief.”

My mother knew that nonnative plants
like Japanese honeysuckle and trumpet vine,
with its orange-red blossoms that drew
ruby-throated hummingbirds, grew there too.

In 1919, when the flu turned to pneumonia,
Emma coughed and wheezed. Like her mother
before her, she spat bloodstained mucus
on a winter morning and knew she would die.

Huckleberry and bearberry didn't yet
have any pink flowers, black oaks
and scrub oaks had no leaves, and no indigo
buntings or scarlet tanagers lit on the trees.

Emma's husband couldn't raise the children:
Ray, Fred, and my mother and Ethel, seven-
year-old twins. The Hazards brought the girls
to California and changed their last name,

but the twins never forgot the slurred whistle
of the northern cardinal, the small blue fruit
that robins plucked from red cedars, or the tale
of the lovers who met beneath these trees.

Lucille Lang Day

A Bird of Prey

In high heels she perches---stick-legged,
small-headed, but big-breasted.
She prattles & whistles & tweets,
her swan-like neck practices seductive circles.
But her sunglasses reflect only hawk-hungers.

Under the spell of some ancient passion
her companion gazes at her flutter of feathers
and is hypnotized by their sexuality.

He reposes in masculine taciturn silence.
As if to complete the metaphor,
her eyes---bright & beady---fix on this
companion. She considers size & suitability.

Her curved antediluvian head
suddenly tilts & bobs forward.
She impales her polished beak into
the soft underbelly of the man's throat.
The luncheon-groom begins to choke.
He struggles haplessly. Blood splatters.

Before his eyes film over,
he sees her for the first time.
Her iridescent inky plumes ripple & glisten
as she munches happily on his flesh.

She eats his tongue. He stares in disbelief.
Cocking her head, she deliberately pecks out
both eyeballs. She wipes her beak clean.
In the dark the groom feels an inquisitive pecking,
then tearing at his testicles. Then the last of his blood
gushes between his legs. As consciousness becomes
a tiny speck of light, he hears a low gurgling sound
in his head. Just before the light comes to the finest point
and goes out---he realizes he is trying to scream.

Steve De France

High Drifting Alarm

The train sways unsteadily and
rolls over yet another high-stilted trestle.
Couplings clang, whistles blow as
my nervous stomach does a swan dive,
splashing into a silver string of boiling water
a mile or so below.

Out my iron-windowed compartment,
Northern landscape. Trees & water.
Water everywhere.
Not like the desert of L.A. at all.
Not like the harbor freeway.
Not full of frightened eyes rushing from work.
No, just trees. So many trees I feel dwarfed,
drowning in these encroaching trees.

Above the trees, hunched clouds
full of rain scrape their sexual bellies
across the green canopy of treetops.
Then
a patch of sunlight. A sudden furrowed
field---a man in coveralls, a jaunty
straw hat & a bright orange
bandanna tied round his neck
as he sits on a yellow tractor.

Wiping his brow, he stops to watch the
train. We see each other. He tips his
hat. By reflex, I open my hand in salute.
We connect.
We watch each other out of sight
until he's just a distant color
pressed into the impression of a landscape.

And in this moment, I wish to be him.

To fade away, fade faraway
atop his tractor, plowing
this field. I need to take up his life.
Snake-like I want to shuffle
off my dead skin, leave my dry life,
and discard my city dirt.

I could see in his eyes
or maybe I imagined it---he wished

he was the haunted one---sitting on the
train---unshaved & speeding South.

Watching his dot of color
fade & disappear, I think of
the many people staring
right now at someone else,
wishing it were possible
to become them.

Needing---
needing to leave everything--all of it
behind. To just check out.
To go forever missing---
to give up on the harshness,
give up on the pain,
give up on the uncertainty of breath,
give up on the fear of eternal night,
give up on a world grinding its own flesh.

Yes and again yes . . .

to live a new life as someone else,
someone without these damn darkling thoughts.

Unexpectedly, the train whistle
shrills, calling me back to myself
from far across Seattle Sound,
and my train rushes forward, windows
on fire with the reflected sun.

Steve De France

Oblomov

This morning I woke thinking of Oblomov,
a 19th-century Russian Count.
I once read a biography while I was studying in Paris.

He refused to leave his house, refused to leave
his bed. Believed in nothing. Wanted nothing.
Got nothing. In short, a nihilist.

I stand at the sink shaving, this Russian
aristocrat's image hanging in my mind.

Perhaps it was too much Sartre and Camus,
but I identified with this Russian's malaise.
I smile into the mirror. I have a case
of rampaging Oblomovism.
I thought at the time we had things in common.
Both nauseated by each day's banalities,
both filled with a rational dislike for existence,
both feeling a conscious self-loathing.
Each dead at times.

So the image of Oblomov ruminating
about the pointlessness of his life
burns in my mind. Confined in self-exile.
Is there nothing he wants, needs?
Yes! There is Love.
Behind imported windows built in France,
time was running out.
"Dimitri," he cries, "bring the carriage.
And for the love of God, hurry man."
Feverish, flushed, away he flies for love!

Unfortunately for Oblomov, the Countess
of his romantic dreams is quite fickle-hearted.
And to be plain she has a carnal appetite,
a real thirst for young lieutenants.

I cut my lip with the razor.
My blood soaks the Kleenex,
as I remember---it was a naked poet
who told me: "a paranoid is simply
a man with all the facts."
I linger on this thought.

Love & illusions of love did in Oblomov.
After this final disillusionment, he returned to his

country estate. There he grew old,
quarreling obtusely with his
overly inbred servants.
And with a revolver under his pillow,
never quit his bed as he
counted out the remainder of his days.

I leave my apartment,
drive the Harbor Freeway.
It's clear I can't afford
the luxury of suffering from
Oblomovism,
truculent servants,
even romantic love.

But like Oblomov,
I grow older.

More empty.

I check my revolver.
It's loaded.
The safety's off

Steve De France

Something Is Happening—Isn't It, Mr. Jones?

Things are happening to Mr. Trueheart Jones.
Yesterday his neighbor, Amin, reported him to the State
for watering his victory garden two days in a row.

This week he traded in his '57 Mercedes coupe
under the new junker redemption program & received
a \$4,500 credit on a light, tight, green Fiat.

His structural analysis company was sold to China.
The new job Tsar ordered him on a permanent leave of absence.
Fluent in Mandarin, a Chinese graduate of MIT took his place.

Since he was unable to make the \$5,000 monthly mortgage,
his \$700,000 house crashed and was valued at \$250,000.
Mr. Trueheart Jones had no choice but to go bankrupt.

He is assigned by the judicial Court Tsar to work for the State.
There he collects leaves from all State parks & is designing a
smokeless leaf furnace to drive the turbines of the State windmills.

At his State mandatory medical examination it is discovered
he has cancer of the liver. The State medical transplant Tsar
determines as a leaf collector he does not qualify for a transplant.

The State confiscated his Fiat & his other assets
to pay for his permanent assignment to the
State Hospice for the indigent where every Saturday afternoon
in good weather his wheelchair is rolled out
to a spot above the Speedway
where Mr. Jones is allowed to drool under the sun.

Steve De France

The Cigarette

I smell it--white, tightly rolled and hot. In fact, its smoke's curling up my nose, churning up my stomach.

I gag on my oatmeal, lower my spoon, scan the vacant masticating faces. There she is. Blue hair. Simian forehead. Black penciled eyebrows caught in eternal surprise. Fat nose, and a pink slit of a mouth locked on a cigarette.

This crone has a spoon in one hand, cigarette in the other. And between massive drags, she sucks at the spoon, dribbling pea soup down her receding chin.

As the smoke-cloud overhead expands above the bowed, bleating, and chewing heads, I nonchalantly reach across her table and drive her face into the soup bowl. No one seems concerned. She squirms and fights with surprising strength; until at last giving up, she emits a final belch, which trails away to a mournful gurgle, as she pensively expires into her soup.

I grind the cigarette butt out in her wet blue hair. I begin to smile. I'm breathing much easier now. And as I pay my tab, I begin whistling the love theme from Carmen.

Steve De France

Finger Accessories Discuss the Nature of Woman

She had me wrapped around her little finger, which became an inconvenience when she needed to write a check. So when she was to go shopping and buy something expensive, she carefully untied me, and after some calculated words, deposited me temporarily at the neighborhood bar. Either she drove me there herself or I walked, depending on the number of words and how carefully they were said. Often the same gentlemen and scholars were at the tavern, telling the same story. Over beers, we would develop in further detail the Elementary Theory of the Calculus of Woman. We all had matriculated for our degrees many, many years ago, and we were all uniquely qualified to research and profess the truth here, although we understood that little of it needed to be told or would be understood outside these ivy walls.

Paul Dickey

Images Of

My Wife's Image Of Me and My Image Of Myself met for a drink and to have a heart to heart. We were going to get things ironed out. But at the club, we bumped into my lovers, My Image Of Her and Her Image Of Herself, who surely were not expecting to see us. They were with their boyfriends, Her Image Of Him and His Image Of Himself. His Image Of Himself said something rude to My Image Of Myself and thus seemed to be in cahoots with My Wife's Image Of Me. My Image Of Her seemed to be embarrassed and ashamed of My Image Of Myself and then she went home with Her Image Of Me. His Image Of Her walked in the door at that time and wanted to have it out with anyone who wanted to have it out with him. The only one that did was My Image Of Her. My wife and I arrived shortly thereafter but left right away because of all the commotion. If at all possible, I particularly wanted to avoid running into My Wife's Image Of Herself.

Paul Dickey

Inn of the Seventh Ray

“Something has lain there for days before being found.”

—Harry Humes

The rain, that hasn't come
for years, still holds out.
Tonight's sky goes from watery blue
to cloudless black pearl.
We dine under the sycamore.

The stream bed,
where mule deer once drank,
is filled with dry leaves.
A deer-eared coyote lurks on the hill.
His acorn eyes watch us eat.

A shrunken man
with a manzanita branch
stumbles around a rock,
rattling the dead
brush under rag-wrapped feet.

He holds his bottle
like a trout he might have caught
in wetter years.
The sycamore mottles his face
as he watches us eat.

He may not hear the sound of the kill
and a flurry of bats, disturbed from cracks
behind loose bark, finding new places to hang,
or see the coyote's shadow
across his plaid shirt.

Deep into the landscape
he disappears, for a whispering
kind of sleep, perhaps lying between
exposed roots of another sycamore
as though those roots were his mother's arms.

ellen

Most a Man

Am I most a man while tinkering with the butane
water heater or while plowing the terraced fields
below the house I built with what they call here
a mechanical mule?

Am I most a man when my youngest
can hear the heart that still pounds
within my chest as I hold him tight
and tell him he will be all right?

When am I most a man?
How can I most be a man?

Is it when my woman lies beneath the weight
of a body that is ultimately neither hers nor mine,
or while scattering my seed across the whole
continent of Europe?

Is it when the phone rings at three a.m. and a voice
I do not know says they shot my brother dead
and instead of grabbing the twelve gauge I run
out the door and drop to my knees and weep?

Or while singing a drunken ditty
with a group of Spanish anarchists
in the only bar in a deserted village
on the eve of a fascist revolution?

When am I most that man I saw from a distance
of fifty years, walking alone along the verge
of a road to nowhere without looking back
or even once stopping to raise his thumb?

That's what I want to know:
when am I most a man?

Curt Eriksen

Recur

Ten, twenty, thirty, even forty years later
—when my own grandson is eight years old—
I can't forgive myself for pulling the trigger.

I met the boy on the path his mother and father and brothers
and sisters and every ancestor who'd ever walked that way
—to the well and rice paddies beyond—
had beat with their bare feet.

The first time we walked down that path the boy surged forward
with his many cousins. They swarmed us,
and we gave them our sweets without understanding
anything they said.

But they were smart kids and learned to repeat, *Okay! Okay! Okay!*
The second time through the village their old grans and aunts and mothers
drew cool water from deep in the earth where we feared
they were hiding the weapons. But we were weary
and drank the offering and thought we had slaked
our thirst.

But the third time we marched through that village nothing
was the same, not even their faces, or the sounds they made as we screamed
at them to *Move it! Move it! Move it!*

And when I saw him again through the smoke and sweat,
he was staggering down the path, half of one arm gone,
most of his intestines in the other hand,

and I knew he'd receive nothing from us but more
of the same. So I kneeled and sighted and pulled the trigger
and watched him flip through the air and land on that path

he'd no longer tread with his mother and father and brothers
and sisters and many cousins, all of them taken now
by the spirit of the bayonet, chanting, *Kill! Kill! Kill!*

Curt Eriksen

The Palm of My Daughter's Hand

The palm of my newborn daughter's hand
is an ancient poem, an open book
full of blank pages waiting to be filled
with the language of her living, an esoteric text
to the touch of my lips, barely legible perhaps
and wholly indecipherable.

Her unfurling fingers, all ten of them, like the toes
the midwife counts before she hands Jessica
to me, wrapped in a soft white cotton blanket, are the notes
on the scale of my too having been here.

When I hold my daughter in my arms for the first time
only moments after she abandons the womb-world,
wide-eyed and silently gazing at the kaleidoscope
of light and air, I'm afraid to speak, there's no word
for the wonder, and I don't want to imprint the wrong letter,
or trace a mistaken message on the still tender
and absorbent folds of her memory.

Despite the doubts and accusations
it is not that I would have otherwise chosen
but only that the bond of our being
together like this makes me tremble:
if anything is pure, mysterious, it is her
now, my newborn daughter,
before the first words spill.

Curt Eriksen

Carvings

I like to take walks in my mind,
a single hiker in the woods
with my imaginary boots
and the walking stick I retrieve
from beside my hypothalamus.

That trail is too often dark,
grown over with tall grasses
I've neglected to clear for years, yet
you see the medulla oblongata?

It's the blueberry patch
of purple pellets by the moss,
and can you see the peeling birch?
It sprouts from the cerebellum.

I lean against it as I walk,
singing from the memory banks
that line the river to my sea, tap-
tapping the stick upon the limbs
of my crebral cortex as I go.

But once I've returned, I slip into
our room to watch you sleep,
to listen to your breath of bees
hissing in your blossoms

and wait for you to wake, like
a teenaged boy, to tell you
I've carved our names in the oak

that grows beside my frontal lobes,
near that river that meanders
toward the center of my mind.

Richard Fenwick

Council House, Tucson

Valentina sits alone
in the shade of palo verde trees,
dingy white wicker on grass
near the center of town.

Beside her lies a crossword,
her Cyrillic letters exact: across,
now down, like ghetto streets
in old Odessa.

I take her hand to say hello,
and feel the tattered scar
of an old barbed-wire wound,
watch her toothless smile
moving: *dobriy dyen*, she says.

Ten years ago she left,
by then infirm, to join a son
who wrote and said: *Mama,*
we have synagogues.

There were few prayers in Ukraine.

Through Venice to New York
they pushed her, as she does now
a red and black walker, colors
of armbands in devil's ink.

And she has explained to me
the camps, the kilometers walked,
the common graves they dug
for firing squads to fill,
how hunger hollows the mind,

or what passes through it
when an orchestra plays
a tango of death. She whispers
it in Russian: *tango smerti.*
Fingering her scar like
she might a stream of tears,
she pulls down her sleeve to say

she didn't mind leaving
at such an age, but I see her
scan the desert sky, as a flock

of military jets pass over,
and two bold clouds wash
the deep blue stain, like
a blanket of withering snow.

Richard Fenwick

The Tin Chair

She kept the old lawn chair,
shaped like an open-faced clam
and rusted red from the rain,
in a corner of the garage
beside a crumpled box of books.

She tried to clean it once,
though bits of him fell from its
surfaces like snow: silver grips

where he held his hands,
flecks of paint – color of flamingoes –
poking through the rust, how

the chair exhaled as she pressed
into the bleaching skeleton.

But on those days, as masks
of hail cover the grass, she curls
inside the tin chair's seat, reaching
her hands toward the ceiling

where he once penciled a promise
of paint, just so she might feel
the earth adjust itself beneath her.

Richard Fenwick

In Defense of Orgasm: For a Friend Who Has Aesthetic Problems with the Word

So, tell me, what would you
rather say than orgasm?
You want something like kohl?
Élan? Panacea? Or maybe triptych?
Something cleaner? Quieter? Tell me,
please, you wouldn't shorten it for kicks.

I mean, orgasm has all the sounds.
What other syllable could you use
at the outset? How else do you
convey the original moan? The sound
that swells in your throat until
your lips open in orisons of praise?

Then, of course, there's the rest
to be considered. The throaty growl
that follows the moan, the rich
thrum of swollen arteries, the rough
entanglement of tongues, the friction,
the rub of hair and reddened skin.

The, ah, gasps. Sharp. Indrawn.
That follow the growl, that open up
the oh, arrest the vibration, the hum,
the pulse. The starpoints of light in
the blood-dark moments when we are
both alone above our actual bodies.

And the downcycled mmmm...
the body's lower idle, the human purr,
the velvet luxury of release, relent,
repetition. The warm homemade buzz
of busy endorphins scattered like elves
at work in the sweetness of our separate selves.

Your problem, honey, is articulation.
Do it right and the deed speaks for itself.

Marta Ferguson

Being Blue

In this room I
am

becomes
you want me to be
now everyone sees me
as uncovered flesh

nudity
nakedness
naked

Open

I never thought I could be nothing-

You are Saturated body
come climbing with me
dance to the edge of all
corners
and drop
on sad children

white
colors

you get me

red
yellow
red
blue

your breasts are porcelain perfect
I smear them with
paint
you're not
anymore, just my vision

red

sunflower breasts call to me.
If I was never perfect
tonight fills me in

yellow
red
red red is

dragged down my
You say watch out for untouched hair
but I'm ok with everything being

blue.

Janelle Fine

Gathering Henry

She ran her fingers down
the slope of his shoulders,
slipped along his slant
of clavicle, to where they met
at the notch of his throat, down
the length of the sternum,
that touchstone he loved
to have feathered by her fingers,
washed over his chest
to its vertical drop.
Like petals falling,
she caressed and
traveled his entire body
this way, slowly with
languid recognitions:
abdomen, belly, the arrow
to the groin and around
his sex, over, under, cupping,
releasing, to his legs,
inner thigh and the knob-bones
of his knees, spilling onto
calves and shins and to the feet,
ankle to toes, the soles of his feet,
and she, contented with this,
lay back and slept again,
for he was gone, had been
gone such a long time.

CB Follett

Somewhere in Time

I have never known the password
to the other side of somewhere
where things run backward, or coil inside,
where dominoes tumble in concentric circles,
where a man
in a harlequin suit plays
on the bleached ribs of a whale,
plays like Orpheus, calls to night creatures
in the lightless depths.

Near some vent
trickling from earth's core, a blind
fish hears the call of the ribs, vibrating
along its own thin bones, its fluttery gills,
and it rises along with others
rising
through steadily warming water,
past rock columns and coral they cannot
see, following sound calling
from an unknowable world.

When a fish is lifted from the water, where
do the other fish think it has gone?

Along sands riffled by tide and wind
the man in the harlequin suit is
spread-eagle on the sand. Here,
where the whale beached herself
half a year ago,
the harlequin man heard the sonar call —
in his ears, in his gills closed over for now.
He heard what the whale heard,
as he tried to return her, telling her
to take another chance
on waves — and now the whale
lies discovered in her every bone,
an instrument of the wind, or when he comes,
the man who plays her tune and his,
using a small bone,
which time loosed and dropped for him.
The scale of the whale's ribcage is a song
of the deep sea where blind fish live and
giant squid glide. The song of the whale's
bones
is not what the humpback sings,
or the dolphin. Those are songs of the living.
The harlequin man plays the music
of the lost, unredeemable voices of the dead
and long-dead;
whales of the past
and whales that will come, until all
swim in review and are gone. This is,
perhaps, the password I've been
seeking —

In His Construction of Internal Rhyme

He wakes and writes a sonnet on his palm,
penning it beneath the crystal tongue of the bathroom faucet.

Two hours afterwards,
his arms are hammering verses on a parchment of cement,
surrounded by the lamentations of a Greek chorus
all dressed in jeans and cumulous clouds of dust
infiltrating, crowding swollen lungs.
They sing in metered, syncopated lines despite the chill embrace
of gray November's airs,
an aria tenaciously gripping the threads of every throat.

Men and women spin around steel cables placed,
as they lift up towering edifices to this urban maze.

He counts each iron couplet in iambic strokes,
his callused hands trembling and remote,
and his mind's left drifting like a feather in the asbestos
of an unshaped, unseen world:
Crisp octaves, pauses, and crescendos
carefully coat each tiered section
of versed construction he sets down.

A whistle ends the stanza of their day.

He leaves as leaves are tumbling in a shower of shaking trees
exposing rows of boughs.

Amongst these structures worn, he climbs a tree,
his palms impressed with syllables and stresses
of a sonnet's spinning, repetitive caresses.

He smiles, peering into their scrawling script:
His beginning, middle, and ending are all laid out within its curves,
while all around him
fleeing geese pen sonnets of their own
against the breeze.

Jonathan Greenhouse

Ode to a Woman No Longer with Me

Your love is like a door that doesn't shut well,
a lock so pickable the burglar's ashamed to enter.

It's like an ice-cream sundae left out on the counter,
and it's the melted ice-cream, too.
It's the crap stuck to the counter afterward
and the swarm of ants attacking it.

It's the termites slowly devouring every shred of wood in my apartment,
and it's the apartment itself on the point of collapsing.

Your love's a station-wagon filled with vile-smelling garbage,
the tires slashed, hubcaps pilfered,
the paint-job rusted, chipping, and far from being lead-free.
It's the leaded gasoline powering the engine.
It's like drinking that gasoline.

Your love would drive almost any man to drink that gasoline,
but it's only made me write this poem about what your love is like,
like being forced to write a thousand poems about what your love is like.
It's having to devour each sheet of paper they'd be written upon
and being forced to consume
each microscopic microchip of the computer used to type and print them.

It's a sunny day,
meaning it's a sunny day while tied naked to an anthill.
It's being that anthill as children stamp it relentlessly into the ground,
and it's the unfortunate children who have to have you as a mother.

Your love is an invention of my invented hatred,
since our love is a love that never existed at all.

Jonathan Greenhouse

Snake River

At first, it seemed barren, lifeless,
like we imagined the world would be
when the meteor hit, when the bomb exploded.
Even in that blank canvas of a landscape,
where we thought the slightest movement
would be like a dancing worm to a fish,
our eyes could not make out one
turkey vulture, one Swainson's hawk,
one golden eagle.
Nothing for miles but dirt and pebble,
sporadic tufts of grass.
It seemed tough and hardy,
as if it could survive a million years like this
but for what purpose?
To reflect the destruction we have done
daily to ourselves?
So we would feel something final,
irreversible, stark and silent?
It wasn't until we slipped down
into the broad valley, canoed
the stream that ambled through
its rocky canyons, that its world
came alive.
In places that had almost hypnotized us
with the dumbness of its matter,
we uncovered a veritable banquet of
bustling ground squirrels threading
the sage, the winterfat.
Jackrabbits darted from
shelter to shelter.
Voles poked noses out from almost
invisible holes in the earth.
The land was no longer its spaciousness
but these bustling intimacies,
a food chain burrowing up from its bottom.
I was the one that first spotted the kestrel.
At first, a dot on the horizon,
so swiftly, it claimed the blue above us,
casting a shadow ominous as any storm cloud.
It swooped, grabbed a frantic squirrel
in its claws, and soared up into the sky
as cleanly, as effortlessly, as if swinging
on a trapeze.
Meanwhile, the reprieved animals
darted for safety though
the danger had passed for now.
For a minute or more, everything
was mute and unmoving.
It was again as it had seemed
when we saw it from afar.
But eventually, the animal heads poked
out again into the world,

each survival framed like a picture
at the mouth of its cave.
Soon, they were roaming
the feasting grounds of their narrow places.
Did they even understand death, I wondered,
its finality, its eternity?
Nothing for miles, we had first thought
when alighting on this place.
Was that the difference between us
and the rest of the natural world?
Did one hungry predator, one unwitting
scurrying feeding creature of prey,
ever look out from anywhere
in its world, its life,
and see nothing for miles?

John Grey

The Ballad of Jake Brakes

The blacktop trails and the iron rails
bring good and bad to the towns.
And some are dismayed to find they've paid
to be swindled and left with frowns.

The confidence man who works his plan
is regarded like a nest of snakes.
People scorn them all but the greatest gall
was possessed by old Jake Brakes.

Jake first worked as a mime who spent his time
performing at children's parties.
But he learned too late that children hate
those silent white-faced smarties.

So Jake washed from his face the only trace
of his unpopular but honest trade.
He tried Bible sales and rode the rails,
but his hopes and morals did fade.

"To hell with the mime, it's a life of crime
that'll bring me that quick buck!
I'll find a way to make crime pay.
All it takes is nerve and some luck."

So Jake hatched some schemes to deliver dreams
of easy fame and wealth.
Jake traded on trust and money lust,
took the cash, then fled in stealth.

Jake sold stocks and faulty locks,
stole oil from Jiffy Lubes.
He salted mines, purveyed bogus wines,
and laughed at the hapless rubes.

Oh, Jake plucked them clean as a goose's spleen.
He took advantage of greed and pride.
Jake worked his pranks on churches and banks,
was never caught, though many tried.

Jake's infamy spread, some wished him dead.
"We should banish that rotten bum.
Let's make it clear he's not welcome here.
Send him back to where he came from."

Then towns posted signs along the lines
warning him to stay away.
You can see them yet if you ever get
out on the two-lane highway.

The signs say in a very direct way
“Jake Brakes Prohibited.”
To the king of the fakes, “No Jake Brakes.”
In many towns they were distributed.

But you can bet Jake's out there yet,
wandering the blacktop two-lane,
avoiding the towns he left with frowns,
an outcast somewhat like Cain.

Jake might come back in a Cadillac
or a rusted old sedan.
He may come your way like a lamb astray,
but he'll take you for what he can.

So should a stranger call and offer all
a deal too good to be true.
You can treat him nice but you better think twice
or the sheep he shears could be you.

The confidence man who works his plan
is regarded like a nest of snakes.
People scorn them all but the greatest gall
was possessed by old Jake Brakes.

David Hann

Squirrel

He fell down the slick aluminum
chimney into the empty fireplace
of our vacant lake house and was trapped
for months
probably years to him as he pushed
open the fireplace doors and snuck
silently across the living room carpet,
going from room to room to rule out
threats from people or dogs or find
a hole or an open door to escape,
but then he saw the trees
and threw himself up into the aluminum blinds,
bending them and breaking the nylon webbing,
putting them askew as he lunged again
and again and again
at the window because
he could not understand
the window was impenetrable
even though the trees were right there.
So he tried another window and another
and another, climbing up the blinds,
leaving them ruined in his wake,
and the trees were still there only three feet
away, and the pane was like a force field preventing
him from digging his claws into bark and climbing
so high in the spring sunshine that he could look
down on the roof and put this behind him,
and he drank all the water in the toilets,
opened all the cupboards, chewed through
cardboard boxes, ate the paper off of cans,
scratched long gouges in the sheetrock,
and pulled stuffing out of furniture,
and he died alone in the dark under
the queen sized bed nestled against
the wooden stock of an old twenty two caliber rifle.

William Ogden Haynes

Two Perspectives on Relaxation

The water swirls and bubbles at one hundred four degrees
as he eases into the Jacuzzi until the water laps his chin.
Stress and tension begin to fall away, like autumn leaves
silently uncoupling from branches.
He is suspended in warm liquid, womblike,
imagining a horizon of blue sky
and the white sand of a distant beach.
Coconuts sway in the tall maypan palms
stirred by the ocean breeze.
Bronzed native girls with bare breasts
push pieces of fruit into his mouth with their tongues.
Across the deck, his wife reclines
on the plush flowered cushions
of a redwood chaise lounge.
She fantasizes while watching him soak,
a copy of Southern Living masking a sneer.
Over her reading glasses she observes
natives emerging from a stand of bamboo
with grass skirts, spears and breastplates of human bones.
The men wear headdresses of red feathers with palm leaves,
seashell necklaces and earrings made from the skeletons of fish.
Her husband is in a large, black, cast-iron pot
poised on a fire; pieces of carrot, celery and potato
float around him in the steaming water.
His eyes are wide with incredulity
as the cannibals begin to lick their lips.

William Ogden Haynes

A Prayer at Kirshman's Funeral

He hummed and whistled thirty-thousand days away.
He sang Gershwin as he fed the deli-scrap cats that
formed the chorus at his shop's back door:
Calico Rigoletto, Tosca the tabby,
and one-eared Leopard Bernstein.
Kirshman heard music in the rhythm of the subway car
as it jumped out into the air over the Delaware, and he
heard piano studies in the beeps of the hospital machines.
He asked me once if I ever noticed that a can of sardines
torn open at just the right speed sounded like
Beethoven starting something up (rip-rip-rip-RIP).
So now Kirshman's dead and his wife asked his friends
to bring music to the cemetery
so that we could play them all on the boom box
that he used to keep behind the counter.
I brought "How About That?" 'cause that's what
Kirshman used to say if you told him that
you liked his cole slaw or that Springsteen was back in town.
His son played "I Can't Explain." Kirshman's wife sang "Lover Man."
It was getting late and last up was
Kirshman's grandson, not quite eight-years-old.
He pressed 'PLAY' and turned to us with his arms in the air
and started conducting Kirshman's last choir -
Groucho Marx singing "I'm Captain Jeffrey Spaulding."
Nobody got the words quite right until the third chorus and the end,
and we all came in just perfect with "Hooray, Hooray, Hooray,"
and then there was no more music, and with Kirshman silent
it was time to go.

Lynn Hoffman

Caped Crusaders

In this episode
we are all caped crusaders,
and life is a 60s television show,
a cartoon-strip saga.

Evil makes a weekly appearance.
But in each showy iteration,
Good triumphs in the end.
That is our fond hope.

Meanwhile --- in Gotham City,
the Bat Signal is writ large.

Pow! The mortgage must be paid.
Crash! The economy is collapsing.
Whoosh! Your job is gone.
Zap! Your dreams are ashes

Ke-e-e-rack! and **Cr-u-u-u-n-ch!** The last glacier has calved into the sea.
Kapow! Our politicians are all crooks.
Bang! Our foreign policy is a mess.
Boom! The bombs are falling.

Kaboom! Your son is a cross-dresser.
Kerplunk! Your daughter is everyone's girl.
Zing! All family ties are cut.

Bam! The test results are in. And Robin is no help.

Aging is a bitch
and-- **Zowie!**

Time marches on. **Bong! Bong! Bong! Bong!**

Be sure to seize the day.

Take heart, Caped Crusader,

Kathump! Kathump! Kathump!

We all do the best we can.

chariot.

Swing low sweet

Whir-r-r-r! and **Rush!**

Great Scot! You're not a Superman.

Holy Mortality, Batman!

Hello pearly gates.

Gasp! And Thud!

You soon will rest on that cold, cold slab.

A brief eulogy

Weeping and Wailing

Ashes to ashes

Dust to dust

Then a brief shuffle

And

Scra-a-a-pe and Scratch

And dirt on the coffin.

Kenneth Homer

That Ring

Wearing that ring
gave me a rash, a shadow
ring of scaly red
around my finger.

I stopped wearing that gold
band, left it on a ledge
over the sink, joking

I guess I'm allergic
to marriage. I put it
back on for functions,
family dinners, and my
finger, damp or dry,
would itch, itch, itch.

I tried creams, salves, ointments,
but it became easier
to leave it off. And to leave.

My second wedding ring
was silver, with my husband's name
inscribed inside. No rash
from ring but a rash and short marriage.
When it ended, I threw the ring in
the ocean, near the ship where
we were married.

My mother still likes to tell the story.
Can you believe it? She threw
her *wedding* ring off the pier!

If it had been gold, or diamonds,
I tell her, I wouldn't have.

Linda Hutchison

The Getaway

There is no guarantee, no warranty,
no law, even if we sign pieces of paper and
make promises to gods in varying forms.

There is no statute of limitations
beyond which lovers are blameless, after
which shameless desertion is written off.

There are no acrobatics, mental or
physical, turning upside down or inside out,
that can stop a clean leap out the door.

There are no voodoo chants, or
incantations, that will mollify monsters, stop
their howling through cavernous nights.

There is no predicting when the
tail of love's arrow will make its bloody
exit. It can happen at any time.

During the first minute, when eyes
lustfully survey the landscape, missing
the steaming fissures, the sinkholes.

In the first weeks, when words
begin to bore, cutting to the core,
severing all attachment to feeling.

In the first months, when bodies
fail to satiate, fade and turn up to the ceiling,
flat and colorless as cardboard.

After years and years, even, when
someone drives to the store and never returns,
climbs out of a car and leaves it somewhere.

Is it foul play? We wonder, suspect
they have been embezzling love for years,
plotting a perfect and shameless getaway.

Linda Hutchison

The Season for Leaving

It was spring and the woman, a faithful wife and mother whose children had grown and moved away, decided to become a mermaid. She fastened flippers to her feet instead of shoes, practiced walking through the house. Hours upon hours, she spent in the bathtub, submerging herself for 2, 3, 4 minutes at a time. For months, she prepared in the privacy of her home.

"I've decided to become a mermaid," she confessed to her husband. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Was it something I did, or didn't do?"

"No, you're fine. It's just what I've always wanted. And what better time than now?"

"Does this mean I have to make my own dinner?"

"Yes," she said. "For the rest of your life." And she flopped out of the house, down Loomis Street, to the shoreline. She wasn't sure there were mermaids in Lake Michigan, but she'd find out or be the first.

A curious crowd gathered around her. She undressed, waded out into the cold water, and started swimming straight away from the people on shore who were now clapping, shouting encouragement to her. As she dove underwater, kicking deeper and deeper, she heard faint singing floating up from the bottom, saw faces in the shadows. Sisters, she thought, and opened her mouth, lungs, to become one of them.

Back home, the husband fried a hot dog in a pan and said, "Damn mermaids."

David James

Elegy for Patriarchs

The men have gone who built birdhouses
in garages, who sank holes-in-one,
who believed a handshake defined a man,
who explained box scores and point spreads, who drank
gin straight, who looked as good in seersucker
as in work boots and overalls, who never
trusted anyone who would not look them
in the eye, who doubled as monkey bars
for their grandchildren, who repaired hinges,
stained cabinets, and had a wrench for anything.
The men have gone who taught their boys to keep
their hands up and always aim for the nose,
who carried a money roll the size
of a fist in the front pocket of their slacks,
who packed pipes on the basement stairs,
who predicted weather before and with more
accuracy than any weatherman.
The men have gone who could name any plane
that passed overhead, who traveled back
from Yugoslavia with a three-foot,
light-up, plastic Santa, who dressed in bow ties
and tuxedo pants and danced with their wives
in the kitchen as pots of pasta boiled
on the stove. We inherit their coats
and resemble children when we wear them.
The men who built America are gone.
They gave us bridges, highways, an Air Force,
a space program, a Detroit, a Washington
and left empty their chairs, entrusting us
with America. But the bridges collapse
without them. Without them, how can anything
stand? I could not even find the hammer
in the shed when my grandfather asked me
to retrieve it. I see his photo now
and expect to hear his voice call out.
I still listen for his steps on the stair
and see his face in the window over
the driveway where, now, his chair sits empty.
A whole generation of men has left
empty chairs beside windows. It is
impossible to see the chairs and not
recall how full they were, which reinforces
the emptiness and everything outside
the windows feels empty too. We cannot
honor grandfathers satisfactorily.
There is no ceremony grand enough.
Art means nothing compared to life, cannot
adequately commemorate death.
We know we cannot repay those who refuse
to acknowledge our debt, who gave and forgot
they did. Perhaps a grandchild named after
them is enough. They would not want a statue.

Brad Johnson

How We Made Love

My wife and I, we made our love with tubes
of melted Vaseline, that smell of sex that sticks
to sheets, the films of David Lynch, bootlegged
Flaming Lips tapes, swimsuits stained with sun,
collages of our sleeping dogs, palm fronds strewn
like great lashes on the cheeks of the lawn,
puddles of summer rain and couches
abandoned on highway shoulders.

We built our house with love we made
and now we live in love. Our house has cracked
floor tiles, sofa cushions, cable wiring,
coffee filters, patterned pillows, sliding
glass doors and salt shakers that love provided.

We used our love to construct a juicer
to squeeze our morning oranges and, since
we only used love to build the juicer, our daily
breakfast citrus is squeezed with love.

In hurricane heat and wind our love prevents
our radio batteries from failing
and our red umbrella from upturning.

We used our love to discover local jobs.
Our bosses loved us and love us still.
We're paid, bi-weekly, with love.
Some of that love we pour in water cans
and water our plants with love.
Some love we galvanize to wire
the security alarm so our house is sealed
up with love. Most of the love we make
while working we save for when we're low
and can't find ways to make anymore.

We divide our love. She takes some to work
and I take a bit to the coffee shop.
Our love's available for downloading
on certain search engines. The neighbor kids
chase our love through the back yard and trap it
in glass jelly jars. Our nightlight is our love,
distilled by the glass of a jelly jar.
It doesn't keep us up but highlights
harbingers and oracles in our dreams.

We make our love by pinching blemishes,
by folding socks and underwear, by not
waiting and scalding our mouths with pizza cheese,
and by lying close together, post-coital zombies,
while candles metaphor on the bathroom sink.
I'm the wick. She's the flame. And like the smoke
left after a scented candle's been snuffed,

our love will stay after we die. The house,
the dogs, the rug, this poem will find new homes
and spread our love like a shaken sheet
floating across a clean bed.

Brad Johnson

Nipple Confusion

My wife is breastfeeding my day-old daughter.
Training the lips, the mouth, the tongue to take
the nipple. She says when it's working
she feels a tingle pull through her body.
There were times when I sent a tingle through
her body but that body is not this one.
My wife is now a mother and her breasts
are no longer a sexual offering.
The nurses push the formula, wanting
us to feed with their hospital-hard rubber
nipples which are different from the rubber
nipples we have at home. A baby gets
used to a nipple and the rubber ones
are too easy and we must train her
to prefer the breast, to prefer the natural
over the manufactured. It's early
afternoon. I've not slept in twenty hours.
I've been sent home to walk the dogs and bring
a new set of clothes. It's November
and beachside restaurants are overfull
with tourists in bright bathing suits and locals
with surfboards. Girls perched on barstools
sip margaritas and pose with cell phones
as though every passing car were paparazzi.
Crosswalks become catwalks and stoplights snap
like strobe lights for women strutting
like they're auditioning for a reality show.
But the bikinis that advertise America
are not the same. They've somehow been transformed
from recreation to utility.
I cross the bridge, leaving the bikinis
behind me. I don't check the rear view.
What was once a world of women is now
a collective of mothers and daughters.

Brad Johnson

Scattering Jay

After the disease subtracted him
from his winter work boots and flannel,
his summer straw hats and jean cut-off
shorts, they sent him home in a plastic bag.
A twenty-five-pound bag of bone white chalk.
We spread him among the blueberry rows,
by the water pump he designed with hose
and bucket on the hill. We dusted
the pachysandra and poison ivy
behind the barn and bunk house with him,
left a line of him along the garden
and grapevines as though they were foul lines
at Jacob's Field. Then we got the tractor
stuck down by the other lake where he'd walk
with his .22 and black Labrador.
When it was unstuck, I lagged behind
the tractor and Jay's family: his brother
and sisters, his daughters and sons, his nieces
and nephews, his mother all topped
in one of his straw hats. From one of the white
clumps of Jay dumped by his bee house I picked
out a chip the size of a piece of chalk snapped
off on a board when the writer's thought gets
interrupted. I held him in my hand
and, as insects sketched impossible
suppositions above my head, I was sure
there was no heaven but I was also sure
there was no need for it when there were farms
like this in Ashtabula, Ohio.

Brad Johnson

The Dichotomy Paradox

Zeno's dichotomy paradox states that distance can only be halved and arrival never actually realized.

Our approach is fractional—
halved, quartered, eighthed, sixteenthed, thirty-seconded, sixty-fourthed.

We approach an approach by approaching an approach
we can never reach.

It's night and her shoulder curves
like the upper bout of a violin.
Her hip rounds like a cello's zarge.
Her spine, facing me, is a xylophone.
Each vertebrae is another bar
producing a different pitch if struck by my mallet-thumbs
but my mallets have lost their bulbs,
are only sticks.

I am lost in want,
wanting to touch her but am unable.
Even with my hand on her back,
my fingers raising soft hairs,
we are separated by an infinity of fractions
made up of Everests and K2s impossible to surmount naked,
revolutions impossible to suppress,
armed only with an erection.

This space between my finger-skin
and her back is a Vatican City
with its own post office
and police in uniforms designed by Michelangelo.
But the ceilings are empty. The fountains dry.
The embassy closed. Ambassadors retired
to warmer climates. In the television light
the space between us hums like a cargo train in the Michigan night.

The second hand of the bedside clock
clicks like a cop clapping his club in his palm
and this bed swells like a spray can
whose label curls black after it's tossed in a trash-can fire
while the time between us
stands like a shoeless adolescent in the snow.

The time between us is a fish without gills, an infant in a swing,
and the space between contains I-95 from Miami
to Maine, 400 miles of Pennsylvania Turnpike,
the complete Karma Sutra except positions 22 through 26.

There are no air balloons over the vineyards
in the space between us,
no trolleys trolling toward the harbor, and the GNP has gone down
faster than a virgin
who thinks her boyfriend is leaving her.

The space between us is a twentieth-century pugilist.

The space is Akron, Toledo and Ypsilanti
where sedition is a liberal pastime
like snorkeling, cycling and Frisbee golf.

Spies were sent in a desperate clandestine attempt
but did not return. The cause is lost.
The toilet seat left up. No more visas to be issued.
No Jedi mind trick can make her turn.

The fan lifts solitary strands of her hair,
making them swim in the air
like lines of kelp in the ocean.

Her words—*Honey, it's late; I didn't shave today;*
I've got work early in the morning—
leave me with the feeling of being ticketed
for littering by state authorities
who authorize highways and parking lots, city centers and
boardwalks,
satellite debris and Walmart.

Intimacy is a minor-league knuckle baller
who strikes out eight before surrendering
the gamewinning home run,
is the small pocket inside the front pocket
in a pair of blue jeans.

Passion is a dog at the gate.

Commitment is a documentary
narrated by Morgan Freeman.

The cop claps his club in his palm.
The spray can in the trash can readies to explode.

Brad Johnson

Wash Up

On the sea-shore
the remains of a woman,
her fingers eaten away – well, all but two.
Her hair green.

*That means she was blond,
says the policeman the finder phoned.*

*We'll put her in a body bag now, son,
all the messy stuff,
no need for you to stay,
thanks all the same, take care.*

People begin to flock to the gore,
peer at the body, and the blond
sixteen-year-old boy who found her.
A newspaper photographer,
seeming unsure if he needs flash
in the fading beach-light,
snaps a few shots of the boy.

The policeman whispers again
that it would be best if he went home
now, so he walks slow quick slow,
back away across the beach,
only turns his head occasionally;
the unbroken string of diamonds
from around her neck
in his pocket.

Noel King

Sealed Tight in 2006

My eyes open wide with pleasure.
In the plastic package rests my new CD player.
And I have many new tunes to hear.
When all is quiet,
I bring it to the kitchen table.

I grab the old scissors and squeeze with no effect,
the blades contorted but plastic rigidly intact.
The old, trusty knife I try and it bounces off the plastic bubble.
It then ends up in a baggie in the trash.
Got to get serious to get this sucker open.

My six-inch blade is next and an opening escapes me.
I raise it high in the air and thrust down.
Finally, a breakthrough!

I pull at the plastic skin and it,
as sharp as the knife, slices my finger.
Red liquid flowing---drip, drip, drip, drip.
Squeeze it with a paper towel and find some bandaids.
The first box has only those piddly little strips.
The next box has two big ones.
I wash it, dab on some ointment, and bind it tight.
Pain increasing, blood pressure rising!

With chicken shears I pierce the small pocket and pull.
The batteries scatter----north, south, east, and west.
One gets halfway down the basement stairs.
Another rolls beneath the refrigerator.
From the desk I extract my long ruler
and from under the frig dredge two pens, three paper clips,
a rock-hard French fry, and my battery,
now stuck to a half-eaten bluish lollipop.

Even my chicken shears are having trouble
or this aging man is losing muscle.
In position, I envision the black-belt master's best karate chop,
and my shears cut through the shell,
but through my earphone wire too.

Curses follow, sweat increases, blood pressure boils.
Then, an idea pops into my head---
Create a magic plastic package opener,
set up a kiosk in the local mall,
and make a decent haul.

Back to the table of operation---
the surgeon bleeding, the patient's lifeline severed,
the cutting continues.
Finally, I remove the innards,
the plastic carcass in my hand.
I drop it to the ground and stomp on it.

Again and again and again!!
Blood pressure dropping, revenge ascending.

At last I sit down and rest.
My wife, completing her weekly shopping rounds,
returns, surprised I'm not using my latest gift.
I tell her the quiet sounds awfully nice.

John P. Kneal

A Conversation in Starbucks

Talking made their faces
twist like wrung-out rags.
Each word tortured through their lips
became a sagging strung-out moan as if
a child's finger pressed against an old LP,
their own private language that hurt to hear.
She tried to eat a bagel,
smearing cream cheese over her mouth.
He bent to sip coffee through a straw,
which still spilled over the rim.
It was hard to look at them.
They were sitting on motorized wheelchairs
powerful as horses (his had a skull and crossbones
sticker on it), wore sweat clothes
that failed to hide their crippled forms.
His sharp shoulder blades stuck out sideways
like masts on a storm-tossed ship.
Her "I love my cats" sock slipped
partly off an unshod foot.
They nodded oddly, in loose circles,
but the eyes of this married, middle-aged couple
pried steadily on each other.
When she made a joke his staccato
run of notes strangled in his throat.
Then they got set to go,
deftly do-si-do-ing to clear the table.
(Her wheelchair sticker read "Handicapable.")
There was a napkin on the floor
that his bony fingers hovered over
waiting to be empowered
to pluck like some magic flower.
After they left we all looked up
from our laptops and our books
as though coerced—but not quite—
to converse.

Richard Michael Levine

The Art of Choosing

Paper covers rock:

For hours after the towers crumbled to dust
and the people burned to ash,
paper drifted down, patient as the sunlight
blocked from a flawless sky:
sell orders, love letters, insurance forms, blank
checks, date book reminders, resumes of the lucky
who didn't get the jobs and the unlucky who did.
It settled six inches thick on Trinity Cemetery
three blocks away, like an early snowfall
or white linen shroud.

Rock blunts scissors:

After the cell phone calls saying
"Tell the children I love them," a few
jumped or dove, piercing the bright protective
bubble we knew would burst some day
but hoped would end, as bubbles usually do,
with a soundless pop, a not unpleasant sense
of surprise and a slight sting in one eye.
Most raced the buildings down,
all slashing legs joined by
fulcrums of fear.

Scissors cut paper:

One week later an orange-overalled worker
used to clearing tickertape
after ballplayers and astronauts passed by
swept the fallen paper around the gravestones,
crying beneath his gas mask.
He fed it through the iron teeth of a garbage
truck, blind heedless beast that, roaring,
prowled the near-deserted streets,
passing a man saved by a fluke
that unsuspecting Tuesday morning.

He walked his son to his first day of school
through the lemon-colored early morning light.
The boy, a lunchbox-toting, tiny, tearful Yankee
in baseball cap and jacket, hugged the stony pillow
of his father's knees and then, as if sensing
the way was clear, dashed across the playground
where he would soon learn the art of choosing
using childhood games of chance
like paper, rock, scissors
or eenie meenie miny *mo*.

Richard Michael Levine

Lips in This House

Some are parched, longing for water,
for any place wet. For them, September
is the Coccohuilla. Desert parts of them
flake away, leave what's left, more
sore and longing. The lips of the ice
madonna would freeze dry your nights
if they brushed your fingers. Gangrene
blooms where she presses them together
so hard her teeth seem to curve in, the
better to bite any warmth she might
almost swallow. Her lips are as perfect as
her legs, as unwilling to open. There are
lips that never close, sucking on scotch
and creamed bread pudding, sucking
whatever comes her way, left-over
chicken, a man who can't eat fat except
for hers. Her teeth are white and glow
when she brays as she's coming, shaking
the glass in the house, breaking windows.
She licks everybody's platters clean.
Under the hemlock, the oldest lips in the
house savor crumbs, storing up a long
winter, saving what there is, knowing it will
be gone as the memory of his wife's laughing,
her black and purples, her silks. Some lips
taste like chartreuse, lose themselves in
the green of what would lick the pines
for that color. In the room of mahogany and
cherry, lips press the marble bust instead of a
lover. The composer's lips suck his hand,
not able to reach lower. They try to suck on her
ear, slurp up the ringing like the soft yellow
poached egg. Lips full as thighs, lips that juicy,
lips that bite on themselves like guilt. Lips
moving on skin instead of fingers. So many
lips instead of words, lips that lie as easily as
words. Lips that leave a mark where they've
been. Careless lips, lips that keep secrets. Lips
that can only whisper. Lips that can only pout.
The lips down there. The lips opening under
the dark black carved table, round as someone
calling for help in the night. Silent as the lips of
stone in the garden filling with icicles, melting
again. There are the poet's lips that would suck a
tongue, a penis, chew an ear of corn. Butter
drips from her chin and fingers. The novelist
runs her tongue over hers as if it was some
one else's. Some are scarred by words spit
out leaving with such a hiss they couldn't
come home. Some lips are painted, almost a
mask, almost a persona. Some are stained with
smoke. One smells like pernod. There are

lips that quiver, thinking of a husband's death 12 years after the words fall out like flesh from bones of skeletons in a coffin with soft shudders. Other lips hold onto themselves or press a wine glass, swallow. Some lips are packing, leave with more than they came with. There are quiet lips you see open like a flower. Lips like bowls you could drink from. Lips like a tub, lips like a toilet. Lips that don't open until they're asleep. Lips flecked with blood. Lips that try to reach up and hold their nose as the beaver skulls boil. Lips that try to eat the black paint wedding cake. Lips that will try anything. Lips that run back to the room. Some stay up all night, walk in the trees before breakfast. Some are glued to other lips, imagining it doesn't show. Some whistle a tune from a Chinese grandmother. Some are ringed with hair that won't ever cool. Even the coolest mineral water, even baths laced with lithium don't cool them. They stay awake all night moaning like doves, are like one half of a lip that's lost the other.

Lyn Lifshin

Spend-the-Night Tango

It's the old-story tango.
After your hips and
knees rub each
other, after he shapes
and leads you with
his body, after
you forget yourself,
his body the center of
your world as
your body
is his,
after you no
longer think of your
self as separate
from him, after
you use more of
your upper body
against his torso, after
you swivel your
rib cage slowly,
sensually, his chest
close to better
feel your
footwork, and after
you flaunt your
ass a little, to
spend the night
seems just
one more step.

Lyn Lifshin

Paralyzed

The man I love has quadriplegia
and I can't get past the chair so hard and black
and unforgiving as to let me get in or through.
They heave him into the Hoyer lift and lower
him softly into the humming bed of heated
air. I wonder where his sores are, if straps
hold him here too. They empty his catheter bag
as the slippery sludge slides past,
hissing, waving, laughing in my face.
U can't touch this, it says like the song. I lay
finally next to him— my body warm, wanting,
waiting for his touch. But the weight of the accident
keeps him from lifting his arms, his limbs,
his love.
Quadriplegia love's partner is not.
He can't move me or him and I realize
I am alone in this. I will his arms
to pull me in and make me warm,
but they lay limp at our side
like guards at the gate.
I touch him everywhere and nowhere
can he be found. I wrap my quivering
legs around his and they kick at me to get out.
My lips taste the color of his face and he feels
me, his eyes try to chase away my fear.
Our lips meet silently as I lean into his smile
so dependent on mine.
I've found refuge in the heat of the air
between him and this rail
that feels like the steel bars of a jail cell.
His kisses reach me and in the gentleness of time
get deeper and harder, his tongue
warm and wet—we finally find
some common ground. His eyes plunge
into mine, as if to say, *We are free,*
come in to me, I want you now.
So I crawl in through his mouth
and make love to him inside out.

Shelly Lorenzo-Mott

How Do I love

Ways and strategies intrigue serious gamers, not just winning's heights. Serious gamers lash their emotions down, keep them out of sight of other serious gamers, equally anesthetized. Graceful niceties of civil play elude serious gamers; everyday's an exchange floor, or war, for serious gamers. Candlelight to a serious gamer might have a role; it might right a balance another serious gamer had monkeyed with. Praising a gamer for any trait but seriousness won't do. Used to manipulations, serious gamers absorb the room, faithful to the rules of the game, undertaken seriously. Losing bores serious gamers, already deep in alternates. Breathiness and drama, if you lose, repel serious gamers. Choose to marry a serious gamer at the risk of boredom: death itself is no more serious than a serious gamer.

David McAleavey

Oh, Melanie

You were fifteen when you stole my lacy
Madonna glove. I was ten and I hated you
for it. When you abandoned me for your teenage
friends, I wanted you to die.

I wrote in my notebooks—fairytales
in which you were the ugly creature,
me the popular princess. I practiced silence under your bed;
I listened while you laughed on the phone.

You fled home at seventeen.
You chain-smoked *Kools*, ate candy
corns for dinner, bragged about it on postcards
from the Jersey shore. You popped pills—
some to mute the ugly creatures in your mind,
some for pleasure. Did you keep track—which was which?

Then in the time it takes to strike a match,
you were dead—face-up on your sofa. For months,
I drove the flattest stretch of turnpike just to direct
your boyfriend to reenact your death scene,
over and over. Some nights I slept there, curled up
where last you disappeared from me.

At home I wash dishes and stare through my window;
I think I smell you—stale menthol, strawberry
shampoo. I kiss my husband, I crumble a little,
his hair doesn't smell like you, but the ashes from this cigarette do,
or rather how I imagine your burned body smelled.
I peel this cigarette like it's your skin—
I will peel it for something to hold onto, but look—
my hands are open, empty.

Theresa McCaul-Miller

The Slugs Are Out

Moonbathing at 10 p.m.,
slugs spread like porpoises,
pale skins creamy and freckled,
shining like jelly. I admire them
and think briefly of salt.

Jean comes over. Her kids
are asleep. "Slugs," I say.
We pore over them together.
I don't mention salt.
And then Jean says,
"I put salt on one once."
"No!" I say. "What was it like?"
"It was horrible,"
says Jean in a low voice.
"How old were you?" I ask,
wondering if Jean had been
a cruel or merely curious child.

"It was a few months ago," she whispers.

Michele Markarian

Trinkets

He'd brought them for us,
the change purses, or
that's what our Dad said they were,
showing my sister and me,
leaning against his knees,
how to open the jellied flat egg,
to squeeze it so it gaped a toothless O
and accepted the pennies and nickels into its maw,
then clamped its lips around the coins and
held them tight.
He had one for each, shiny blue and red.
And there were little plastic footballs
he'd brought:
(we were girls, we protested)
but these were actually yoyos,
brown plastic football shapes with strings inside,
and our Dad could make one go up and down
(I can still hear its hollow buzzing sound), but
my sister and I struggled, the footballs
waddling along the floor,
unable to return to us, to our hands.
And once he'd come home with Mickey Mouse dolls.
She got the Minnie,
the dress, the funny bowed shoes;
I got Mickey because I was older,
and loved him fiercely, possessively,
and our Dad had beamed at us.
(Now he would have taken a picture;
I have no pictures except
what's in my head.)
And the puzzles he'd brought another day
delighted him,
strange triangles of metal or loops
connecting or loosening with twists.
He demonstrated these, leaning close in,
smelling of cigarettes,
puffing and smiling,
pleased at our interest, each at a side,
to show us how to separate the pieces.
Or, another time, he'd taken from his pockets
plastic slide puzzles
about as big as two dominoes,
little flat boxes where we could push the squares
around so the numbers or letters
made some sort of order.
He showed us how, his stained fingers
ungraceful, but demonstrating.
And we, my sister and I,
were eager to know,
happy to be with him, his sitting on
a kitchen chair after work,
us at each knee,

his cigarette in an ashtray nearby,
presenting, explaining
the keychains, the trinkets,
but never needing to explain
what we were learning from him.

Jackie Davis Martin

At Solstice

A full moon flags
the December barn.

There is only this light
on the way to evening chores.

Two horses softly walk
to the fence, stand,
shoulders rounded
smooth as planets.

Both are curious for anything
my hands hold: a touch,
apple slices, the heat of oats.

Zoie the farm dog has come along with me.
She wouldn't have it any other way.

Inside the barn, two cats,
buddhas on a ledge, intently watch
Zoie's barrel-shaped body
scuttle after one scent to another.

Hens thump to their roost
under the heat lamp with
a sound like boxes falling.

I exchange new straw
for their coops' small harvest -
three eggs tonight.

Cracking two over the cats' feed,
I place the third in my coat,
and then Zoie and I walk
the long driveway.

The moon follows, casts
shadow among birch, and
in front of us, as dog and human
try to catch up to themselves.

Back to the house's soft watch,
Zoie's last two puppies, Jasmine, Kebu,
spring from the kennel when I open it.

They greet us jumping, crushing
the egg I've forgotten -

small return of sun in my pocket.

Liz Minette

My Last Wife

My last wife lingered in that empty frame.
A small slip of paper obscures her name.
It doesn't mean a thing, really, it's just
that I like the way it gathers the dust.

There's a lot of white space in this room
since I scrubbed away her colorless runes
once she walked off, leaving this vacant space.

I sit, quiet, on the one chair she left
behind. I've no idea where she went.
She just shut her black door and caught a bus.

My last wife lingered, like mold on the frame
of a small house. Perversely, it's the same
as it was, meaningless, but not unjust.
I'm waiting my turn to corral the dust.

There's no reason to hurry. Dirt won't sleep.
I own no tools that will extend my reach
into the terrifying, tender place

she built that cool afternoon she escaped
while I remained. It's what I do. I draped
that wall in black, hiding signs of her fuss.

My last wife fluttered, but her mouth could frame
truth in small slips, and accurately name
my sins, one by one. She was always just.

I have to say that, or else I know she'd
return and string me on the wall, like beads
on a curtain, then vanish, leaving no trace

that might linger. My last wife's empty frame
coils with power but no meaning. I just
gather it up. I cover her with dust.
Slips of paper help me forget her name.

Mark J. Mitchell

Circumscription

Confused Sea Turtles March into Restaurant

—Rome (Reuters, August 19, 2008)

The moon angles in
from an odd degree,
and the hatchlings,

instinct their only
context, ferry their new
armor toward shimmer

and gleam, light an emollient
of liquid vibrato
runneling the surface

of this black world.
What do the turtles
understand of water,

their unseasoned flippers
all grasp and scatter
as they scuff their way

across the sand, the line
dividing earth from sea
indiscernible beneath

the night sky's nebulous
swirl? How can they
make one single thing

of this august moon,
blazing disc of ice both
out there and elsewhere,

nothing but primordial
breath to bargain
the space between?

It's not bewilder
that draws them into
this misconstrued light;

it's all seduction: thrum
of blue neon pulsing
above the café door,

shivers of candlelight
refracting through
the windowglass,

the chrome and glisten
of tablescapes. Electrics
masquerade

as element, afterimage
postures as unbounded
brilliance. And the turtles,

hapless, euphoric,
trundle headlong into
this treacherous bright:

the gloss and polish
of the dining room floor
beckoning like moonshine

enkindling the sea, chandeliered
starlight reflecting
in a drowning pool.

Nancy Carol Moody

On Trying Not to Swallow Her Lover's Last Excuse

I know you're speaking parenthetically
(your secret shared in utmost confidence),
but most of what you say's hyperbole.

Your truth is thin, in my experience;
your facts are fat. Do you feel neatly purged,
your secret shared? In utmost confidence,

it's now my turn: Go—I've packed your bags. Urged
out so heartlessly, will you ever see
your facts are fat? Do you feel neatly purged,

your sock drawer empty, soap dish gone? You're free.
Now you want to know how I could throw you
out so heartlessly? Will you ever see

that it's impossible to misconstrue
that cheap cologne? Still, you say you love me
now. You want to know how I could throw you

out. It's killing me to act logically.
I know you're speaking parenthetically
(that cheap cologne, still). You say you love me,
but most of what you say's hyperbole.

Nancy Carol Moody

Pheromones

A catfish keeps its school together
with a leader-scent luring every fin
and gill behind its quivering tail,
through currents and under swells.
A moth charms her mate with an explosion

of a single molecule, an aromatic spray
that holds him captive amid a swarm
of fluttering cousins. Ants follow
trails of each other single file in a scented
column, then befuddle the weaker ranks who scurry

back in line as slaves. And humans? When you
lived alone, you didn't bother to shave –
and discovered later that your beard grew
twice as fast and your sweat trickled sweeter
when you returned to me. But already, companies

were marketing sweat – bottled, perfumed, ready
to atomize sensuality. Already, invisible puffs
tantalized any nose sniffing for company.

Is this what brought you back, manly man,
or what sent you away again and again?

Berwyn Moore

River Road

The old Buick hums as I drive deep
into the Virginia piedmont. Beside me

lies your photograph, taken two weeks
before you died, the sepia tones of your cheeks

dimming like the umber light on these hills.
Your hands, for once still, hang empty.

I stop the car and walk through drizzle
to the water's edge, remembering your hands

that possessed every mirror, sock, and toy
simply because you cleaned them, hands

that yanked the hive right out of its tree,
hands that moved to our faces so fast

we were always caught by surprise.
Two fish ripple the surface, looking

like the shimmering eyes of a dying beast.
A breeze rustles the leaves and I swear

I can feel your hands now, pulling my hair.
But this time, old woman, it doesn't matter.

Your life I wanted, but your death I can
leave behind. I'll head down the river road

with the morning sun on my face,
and the drive will gouge this wound

with distance too complete for your reach.

Berwyn Moore

Sons and Daughters

They're at the mall, the Tinseltown parking lot,
playgrounds at dusk. His baggy pants hang
low, his silver Crucifix dangles on a thick chain
around his neck, his hard biceps ripple
with coolness. The gold ring in her navel flickers
above her low-rise jeans as he leans into her.
Her hands flutter nervously as he strokes her thigh.
She peeks over his shoulder, checking
for an audience, then licks his ear. She heard
today in school that the world could end,
but she doesn't believe it. She thinks of the desert,
the way the dry heat makes her feel small,
the way the stars remind her of eyes. She doesn't
know the sudden twinge in her side is the bursting
through of an egg, its tiny dream-shape holding half
a new world. He squeezes her and she brushes
her hand across his cheek, looks again for someone
looking. She thinks about her mother curled on
the couch, mouth open with sleep, waiting for her
to come home, kiss her on the cheek and climb
into bed. *Hell* – he says, tugging her to him – *hell,*
baby, we could die together and be okay.

Berwyn Moore

Why I Should Never Reincarnate as a Bird

I press my nose against the glass door,
obstinately – my mother's going to yell
at me again – but sucking in Windex odor,
rubbing grimy fingers down the pane,

I'm fixated on the reckless creatures
for whom I fear. Little birds – perching, chirping,
oblivious in their self-contained prattle.
Their death is imminent and only I can see:

prowling Mr. Wonkers, the neighbor's cat,
his beady eyes intent on their fanned tails. Or,
their assemblage, on cables strung between
electricity poles, interrupted at any moment when –

Zap! — a static current runs amok. They tumble,
autumn leaves aflutter from a tree. Or worse,
sunning on the asphalt road, my mother's Chevy strains,
an oxen at the bit. Ten points for every little bird
that's hit. (Twenty if flattened along-side a squirrel.)

Death! Hulking as a jet engine in the sky. Death!
In Danny Jr.'s b.b. gun. Death! A rare avian pneumonia.
The bird god turns his back and only I can see –
their untimely ends. Lifelines pulled taut, and snapped.

Judalina Neira

Eden in the Country School

Whoever said the earth holds
no secrets
should have been
in my fourth-grade class
when the snake crawled
out of the unfinished wall
one spring. He extended
his long body onto my best
friend's desk top, his tongue
flicking, tasting the warm air
fourteen third and fourth graders
breathed. Our young teacher screamed
and climbed on her desk. Most
of the girls screamed too
and climbed on their chairs.
The screams scared the snake
that fell to the floor
and crawled toward the teacher's
desk. Most of us boys dropped
to the floor and crawled
after it. As I reached under the desk
for the snake, I looked up
and saw under the teacher's skirt
something frilly pink and satin.
It was a revelation.
I had never glimpsed
such secrets. I turned my face
away, but something called me
back--something as dark and amazing
as the frightened snake. Strange,
that's all I remember
of third grade, that,
and how the principal – a matter-of-fact
older woman – heard the screams
and answered, beating
the snake to death with her
black, high-topped shoe.

John Noland

Kansas Initiation

I was ten and couldn't wait
to kill
as the young raccoon
stared down
from the elm tree.
I forgot
his black mask
was cute. I forgot
he had feelings,
that he had a life too.
I forgot everything.

My best friend had already
shot a rabbit, and now
I begged my father
to let me shoot.
He handed me the rifle, reminded me
how to aim and pull
the trigger. I shot
again and again,
the 22 rounds
slamming into the raccoon:
Whump! Whump! Whump!
But still he clung
to the tree
and refused to fall.

Finally, my father
shinnied up the trunk,
grabbed his tail,
and tossed him
to the ground.
Watching the coon bleed
and his eyes glaze,
I felt as if I had put on
his mask, a mark
of what I did not know
or understand,
and I could not ask
my father why
he had tears
in his eyes.

John Noland

Flood Light

Sluggish with silt, I've grown dun and dull.
Burned off like fog, the seagulls have departed
for the sweet methane of landfills,
and frogs now litter the muddied grass.

Once dry, the culvert now is a swollen rumble,
a torrent too wide to cross as rocks tumble,
churning between the grinding teeth of this rain
that started Thursday at 1:00 PM.

Slopes forsaken: walls, backfill, drainage pipes
cannot stay this maw of lead-heavy sky in mid-gasp.
I open windows to the raucous white noise, a terrible
threat of absolution, sending prayers forgiving those

without sin yet trampled all the same in the downpour.
Prayers fall like a plague of frogs who can instinct
no better way to die, as the earth collapses
upon its choking pores. All that grows outside

my window is a ruined photograph. Like the framed pictures
lining the walls, nothing moves and nature has become
still life. Still, your legs and torso in stark ceiling light:
water beads your surface like small clear eyes.

I record my very own reel, in precious black and white.
I record the rainfall and relative humidity of all this,
the dew point and futility as you move a towel up your calves
and thighs--the warped frames our lives are stretched against.

Rain to move the rocks. Rain to strip bones clean.
Rain to pick up sticks and pulse the hidden veins.
Rain to prune the family tree, or just dilute the saline.
A clean rain erasing footsteps that proved we were ever here.

Rod Peckman

Morning on the Balcony with _____

We almost didn't spot the blue heron
hiding under the shadow of cattails,
wings wide, an arrhythmia
between inertia and flight.

In flight your hand carves air
in the space between us,
and I feel this pull lift body
from earth and soar.
This good morning
a lake steams its warmth
against cool air exhaling smoke.
This bare September of stillness
and love-making is
futile but for shock it brings

as if we broke the glassy surface.
Coffee on the balcony as dark wings
flow the air. He glides below the tops
of the stunted alders
on the small island just offshore.

I've kayaked there, fighting the
blackberry vines, trampling
the dry underbrush, checking
each step for the nests of ducks
hidden in the tan grass.

Their eggs are like polished stones
against the thick greasy earth (we must,
at any cost, protect the children).
On our cold perch, your hand glides
down my neck, and eyes close,
dreaming an empty true space.
Somewhere between steam and air.
Between stolen hours. Beyond
sad soiled grace, and a remonstrance
that will not sink.

The heron glides through white breath,
vaporous against the cool air.
I see you only through wisps of haze
until the soft curve of your neck
lifts in flight against my hand.

Another morning you may visit or not,
skim the surface and then fly,
moving on as we know you must,
bringing the birds back
as steam surely floats on the surface.

Rod Peckman

Role Models

In first grade, I remember arguing
with another little boy over a pencil.

I bit him on the arm and got the pencil.

Our teacher intervened and said to me,
“Now that’s no way to act.
How do you think your daddy would
have settled this?”

I thought for a moment, made a tiny fist,
and smacked the kid in the face, saying,

“There’s plenty more where that came from,”
with just the right timbre and inflection.

Richard King Perkins II

The Axioms of Love

I.

From *Roger and Weber's Book of Math*, Chapter 12: Axioms.

Step 1: *Use topographical maps, a basic rubric, historical wind-speed data, and the formulas at the end of this chapter to create an algorithm.*

You've figured out the first seven steps but get stuck once one lover moves thousands of miles from the other. You need that eighth algorithm to discover the distance love can travel.

II.

She writes: *I saw two herons. I thought of you.*

III.

Step 2: *Figure out your variables.*

x = the heron of the river [2].

n = their rooks in the sycamores [2].

b = the mileage between you and her [2,561].

c = the way, when you asked if you could kiss her, she gasped,
Yes.

And A , yes, must = how she said, *You threw a rock in my river, now I am all ripply.*

Or are you wrong about this, and does A = how she said,
I like you.

How she whispered, *I like you a lot.*

IV.

Step 3: *Using your variables and the formulas from page 412, find your axiom.*

Trying the Expansion of a Sum $[(1 + x)^n = 1 + \frac{nx}{1!} + \frac{n(n-1)x^2}{2!}]$, is this your axiom?

There are two herons. Sometimes they are alone.
Sometimes they are a pair [2] at the confluence.

Trying the Area of a Circle $[A = \pi r^2]$, is this your axiom?

She and you were in the cabin. It had 3 rooms.
You only used 2.

Trying the Quadratic Formula $[x = \frac{-b \pm \sqrt{b^2 - 4ac}}{2a}]$, is this your axiom?

She and you were in bed.
Her white shoulders sang above you.

V.

The math no longer makes sense so you throw your scribbling and equations to the floor, clear your desk of everything [everything]. You think of smoking a Marlboro Light [to clear your mind] though you've never smoked before.

Using butcher paper, a dirty protractor, and a No. 2 pencil,
you draw slowly expanding concentric circles from her
eastern Pennsylvania cornfields to Idaho—a Venn diagram
all the way to your cramped and cluttered office.
Circles as beautiful as clouds.

VI.

She mails you a letter: *I liked kissing your sleeping back.*

Chapter 12 shows you must respond in 1 of 2 ways:

1. There is love. There is distance. They are inverse functions. Or:
2. If math were love and love were herons, your axiom
would be the pinions of a bird breaking
the surface of the river.

VII.

Step 4: *When you run into problems, check the variables, the lemma, and the formulas used.*

The deeper into the chapter you get, the more the math gets confusing.

Intercepts with a locus. Quotients and equivalent fractions.

The associative properties of multiplication.

You double check your lemma. It's got to be the lemma. Can it be the lemma?

VIII.

Step 5: *Measure the diameter of each concentric circle. Divide
that diameter by z .*

Z , you figure, must = the times she kissed you while you slept [6].

IX.

Pacing your Idaho streets, you search the sky low and you search the sky

high but there are only ravens [3 in a tree] and vultures

[5 circling above what death, you don't know].

You cling to a final memory of herons [2] taking flight [at dusk].

Are you and she their wings?

X.

Step 6 shows that the concentric circles are just disjointed sets,
empty sets. If even one was a superset.

XI.

She calls and says, The rains are coming. The cabin is empty.

XII.

If you better understood Roger and Weber, any of it, you'd create

new models [using new equations] that required banks

of computers [36] toiling for days [112] until they melted

[1 by 1]. Then you'd take your work and return to scribbling

on paper while chewing those No. 2s almost in half.

Using the stubs [whatever remains], you'd erase

every mistake you ever made.

Sean Prentiss

Deception

Fast-talking as a late-night comedian,
Andre (if that was his real name) launched
into his sales pitch the minute
I answered the door, soliciting donations
for a summer softball league
for kids in a poor city neighborhood,
offering chocolate-covered mint bars
for a donation of ten bucks.

As soon as he opened his mouth,
I knew it was a scam:
maybe the bloodshot brown eyes
dripping down his cheeks
gave it away.

But even with his red-stained gaze
Andre was as charming as a streetcorner raconteur,
and he always gave me a receipt
for the “tax-deductible contribution,”
a sheet torn from a dime-store voucher pad.
I assumed he knew I was in on the joke.
My children loved him
as much for his shuck-and-jive performance
as the candy he sold us.

Andre came by every three or four months,
spinning a new variation of the altruistic ruse,
autumn football, winter basketball, spring track and field.
For ten bucks I got a front-row seat,
candy and entertainment.

My wife knew I was being swindled too,
but as long as she knew I wasn't fooled,
she was just as willing to be charmed.
“Your friend's here,” she'd announce,
answering the doorbell,
nearly choking on the irony.

One evening Andre's mug shot appeared
on the local news,
the bloodshot eyes leaking through
the black and white photograph
like an accusation or threat,
the newsman warning he was a rip-off artist,
falsely selling candy for the Waverly rec. center

We never saw Andre again,
but I always wished he'd come one more time
just so I could tell him
I wasn't the one who ratted him out.

Charles Rammelkamp

Lemonade

Teresa was sweet as sugary lemonade
with a tangy sour aftertaste.
We dated for a while and I proposed marriage
one autumn evening, feeling sentimental.
But I broke off the engagement
after a couple of months
because I knew she wasn't the right one for me.

Teresa took it hard, sought comfort
from my family. My parents
always liked her and held
the breakup against me
as if I'd abandoned her
like a cat left by the side of the road.

I'd come home from work and find Teresa
making cookies with my mom,
kissing my dad on the cheek;
I didn't know
if she was doing this to be near me
or trying to steal my family.

Teresa even got my sister Kate a job
at the software contracting firm
she worked for downtown.
But the worst was when
my older brother Dave came home
for a visit from New York,
and now eight months later
he and Teresa are engaged.

Teresa smiles at me sweetly,
holding Dave's hand at the dinner table,
just like another sister,
but there's triumph
in the corners of her mouth
that surely turns to cruelty
in the privacy of her mirror.

Charles Rammelkamp

Guy You Want

The car breaks down but I don't because the tow-guy
identified and dialed from inside the warm car
seconds after some pin, valve, lever or whatnot failed
is on his way.

I wait, holding a hot cappuccino, watching the mirrors.

The truck pulls in ahead of the car;
he writes something on a metal clipboard in the cab
and exits into the subzero.

He is a Carhartt colossus.

Tall as the truck's cab,

his Bunyun paces affirm his perfect placement
of bumper to hitch.

His mighty palms are their own gloves;
he bare-hands the frost-forged metal latches
and anchors the steel hooks into
the mounting eyes.

"Yes, sir!" I celebrate, "when you break down,
this is the guy you want."

This guy rode Big Wheels and collected Hot Wheels
and keeps *Hot Cars* magazine on the shelves
at the 7-11s where he fills his steel thermos with black only
and knows Tuesdays are two-for-one burritos.

This guy names every car Shelby; all of his PINs are 0427.

He should be trademarked by Mopar.

He dreams in regular.

With as much effort as popping a hood,
he has the car secured and ready for transport.

In his cab I ask,

"Bet you get a lot of calls when it's this cold."

"Yep. Don't matter. Machines break down hot or cold,"
he tells me.

His cab confirms his convenience store stops:

breakfast sandwich wrappers,

Doritos on the dash,

stockpile of unused straws.

Beside the king-sized Mars and Raw Hide beef jerky in the
cup holder,

rests a small purple cell phone

with dangling pink rhinestones.

The winter sun hits the windshield

then the bling

placing prisms across his stubbled jaw.

"Daughter's," he chimes,

and I imagine his mammoth hands

holding her pinkie like a glass fuse

while he sputters *Go-Dog-Go*

with her in his bucket-seat lap,

her toes barely reaching his knees.

And I wonder how stuck he felt

when she gained enough control

to take her bike all the way around the block
as he held his hand up as a visor
though she was well out of sight,
hoping his customized lessons kept her away from cars.
And a guy like that made her earn
her own cell phone,
and before her first car
she'll learn to change flats,
check fluids
and correct skids.
And a guy like that
will make damn sure her car makes curfew.

“She deployed two months ago,” he tells me.
“Sweeps for mines.”
Silence then while we concerned ourselves
with the windows and mirrors.

Nita Ritzke

Mirror/Mirror

i've developed a new form of self therapy

a spankin riff
off that howlin
primal scream

it pales in comparison to the efficacy of the drugz
that masked not caring
about not caring

a too clean release from maximum security

parole a couch of burnt mush

with foldout
bed of nails

i place myself & myself
in front of the mirror

stand there screaming
screaming

thru a tear stained teeth clinched death's head grin

FUCK YOU FUCK YOU FUCK YOU

the faced off fool on the other

other side
never

has a pithy reply

the bathroom tiles
resonate splendidly

Justin Rogers

Freckles

I'll remember
the wash of freckles
across Debby's forehead
& across the bridge
of her nose.

I'll remember
the freckles that spill
from her shoulders
to her forearms
to the backs of her hands
with slight veins snaking
under pale skin.

I'll remember
the spattered freckles
over her chest
& her ever bud-tiny breasts.

I'll remember
the few freckles dripped
on Debby's pink knees
& the few dropped
at her lily-cool ankles.

I'll remember
the freckles splashed
around her thorny Christ tattoo,
the one you need to slip off her panties to see.

David Romanda

This Is Not Ukraine, This Is My Apartment

I twist the wand that opens the blinds
and let the late morning stumble in
with a plume of upshot dust. The surrounding tenants
are quiet. For them, English is not a first language. Every now
and then, Andrii will stand out on the balcony,
forearms planted on the railing, a cigarette pinched
between fingers like a pencil stub. It burns to his knuckles
while wisps of conversation rise and dissolve. He looks
out over rooftops and sees that even though
this is not Ukraine, the sun still catches the tops of the leaves
like a candlelight vigil. I turn the key in the thin mail slot
and the noise catches his attention. I ask *How's it going?*
and he nods and says *Hello*. We are both learning
what it is like to live alone. To lie in bed
and let our minds turn like a reel-to-reel,
flashing images of our loved ones, the lives we envision
making for ourselves. These scenes play between
our eyes and the ceiling, like illuminated dust
drifting in the light of the projector. Most nights,
I can't sleep, so I'll read until I tire. Or I'll sit
at the edge of the bed with my guitar and accept
that my hands aren't what they used to be. Rhythm,
speed, precision, gone. I want the notes to tuck themselves
back into chords, chords back into progressions
like images unfolding in metaphor. When I try
to play along to some old records, I often forget
to clear the dust from the needle. I'm learning
that the dust will keep coming, it will occupy
the grooves of the vinyl, and the songs, that I play
to make this apartment feel less like exile,
won't sound the same.

Michael Sarnowski

Where Violence Comes From

The aisles of the grocery store are laid out like ribs
cut in two by a walkway of sternum.
Through the corridors of low-fat campaigns
and organic re-creations, her elbow is locked in mine.
We just need a salsa we can agree on.

We turn the corner and cross men who whistle
as she walks by, muttering about her body. I flip
through a card catalog of reactions. Sarcastic degradation,
a verbal devouring, the ridges and valleys of knuckles
I pray to etch like a map's mountain range into their faces.

This is just minutes after our talk about confrontation
and those who set it in motion. I'm still trying
to understand where violence comes from, where in history
the itch was born. Like always I walk away, say nothing,
fume. This unopened can of black beans in my hand—

I want to send it through their teeth like a brick
through abandoned factory windows. We both know better.
She more than I. She tugs lightly at my arm
and tells me to *just let it go*. Eyes like ball turrets. Blood pumping
to the alleyways of my fists. And this aluminum can, a miracle,

like the first crop of potatoes after the famine. I'm ashamed
to know what it feels like to break another man's bones,
to know that I can take a punch well, and want that again.
It can't just be about sore knuckles or redrawing the structure
of the body. We walk to the checkout, place our items

on the black conveyer as they drift away from our touch,
only to get them back, to use them in the ways they were intended
no matter how difficult, sometimes, that can be.

Michael Sarnowski

Manhattan Spleen

Because, one night in Manhattan, a friend of mine was stabbed in the back during an attempted mugging and had to have his spleen removed, I stopped going out after dark. Yes, the spleen. It was formerly believed to be the seat of passions, a vascular glandlike ductless organ near the stomach, or the generator of melancholy—the spleen, or just spleen: what I felt after the unfortunate incident involving my friend; what Baudelaire felt about poverty in Paris, the Parisian poor—Paris Spleen—or how he felt about life in general, or how I felt about life in general after the incident involving my friend. The gay blaze of Manhattan lights dimmed. After “recovering” from the incident, my friend had to take many medicines, could not live the same free and relatively happy life he had lived before. No more could I. Yellow light flooded a yellow room. I slept fitfully, many nights I slept not at all; would switch off the light at dawn and stare out at the glow of a Manhattan morning. My friend finally died and I continued to hide in my room, not afraid of what lay outside my small domain but utterly disgusted with it, with the East side West side Island. I grew enormous from compulsive eating and lack of exercise. I became constipated, gaseous, and nauseated. Then I could not get food delivered, for no delivery person would come near to the door of my room for the mephitic odors that emanated from it, and I grew thin and finally wasted away to a mere ghost of former self. My unpaid rent mounted until it became impossible for me to pay such an amount. I lay dreamless in dirty sheets until the door was broken in and I was taken away. Doctor, this is how it all happened, how my hatred, my spleen, grew boundless as my body vanished.

E. M. Schorb

Pour Les Oiseaux or *A Hard Boiled Egg*

Oiseau, France, 1929, the year of the Phoenix—a gleaming white city rising like plumes on a cocked hat, in a semi-circle from the sea. Its port-section slums are famous for vice, crime, and an exotic mixture of birds—my kind of town! I’m a private dickybird. I flew here from the States, seeking an exotic English chick, name of Song Sparrow. She knows where the eggs are hidden, and I’m going to find out. She’s been smuggling guano in from South America. I’m pretty sure that it goes through Oiseau to the Italian Mafia—what they do with it, hey, don’t ask me. Ever since the Crash, people have been pulling some pretty crazy deals. Guano is fungible. These days it can buy just about anything, including the goose who laid the golden egg. I know it’ll buy me an Old Crow in any of these wormy waterfront nests. The barkeep’s a big ugly-looking condor, one of the last of his breed. Is he a displaced Californian, I ask myself in pidgin. But I say it in his beak in plain American that Peruvian parakeets and Hartz Mountain canaries can understand. The ugly old condor is as laconic as he looks and comes back at me with an owlish “oui” that’s packed with innuendo and sarcasm. I slug down my Old Crow, swizzle-worm and all, and order another, take off my feathered Alpine hat that I picked up on the wing, and place it on the bar, a kind of challenge. He can take it or leave it. He leaves it. He probably figures I got a quiver full of new-fledged arrows under my feathered boa. He’s no dumb dodo. I’m looking for an English bird name of Song Sparrow, I tell him. He holds his long dirty wings out like what’s it to me and I get a whiff of his wingpits. Fold ’em up, Pollution Pits, I tell him, as I take a gander at the rest of the roost. A couple of old ducks sitting down at the end of the bar, quacking on about the Crash, a middle-aged bird in a tux who looks like a penguin, soft but there’s something cold in his eyes; a Brooklyn bird name of Robin, with big, red breasts, a couple o’ gay birds up the other end doing some kind of mating dance. But no sign of the real Song Sparrow. Now I got a little red light inside, tells me when there’s danger, and on it goes. How do I put it? There’s something reminds me of reptiles . . . No, dinosaurs. Yeah, that’s it! These birds look too innocent, like they’re hiding something—their real nature, which is definitely saurian. There are winged dragons afoot, and why didn’t the canary sing, as Sherlock might not have put it. Then I’m pecked from all sides. It happens so fast I can’t tell the pecking order. All I know is I’m getting the bird. It was at that moment, as I saw my life flap by me, that it first occurred to me what a worm I really was. Bob White, this is your life, I said to myself in disgust. Then I heard a distinctly English bird call, a sort of Oxonian chirp, and I found myself in a large cage. Sing, cooed the beautiful, copper-eyed Song Sparrow, who had emerged from her condor costume. I want you to turn canary, she told me, and sing your heart out, like the Hartz Mountain whistleblowers. I said, Sure, why not? I should die for twenty-five pounds of guano a day—and expenses? I’m no sapsucker. We know that the passenger pigeons are bringing the stuff in, I sang, but we don’t know how you’re getting it out. We fly it out, she tweeted, in stork sheets. She eyed me sideways, giving me the once-over, and then hopped forward and planted one on my beak. That was when I decided to quit being a Hawkshaw. I’m folding my wings, I told her. Let’s you and me take off. She dipped her head in agreement. Then we picked up a couple of pieces of straw from the floor and went looking for a good old Anglo-American tree to build our nest in, leaving Oiseau and all its smuggled guano behind us. Cage closed!

E. M. Schorb

The Kaiser Comes to Orlando

You are having another one of your crazy nightmares and a big gaping mustachioed mouth is chasing you up seven post-Great-War decades of the Twentieth Century. You're keeping ahead, but you come to a red light, and you have to stop because beyond is nothing, or heaven, or hell, so you mark time, waiting, and the gaping mouth is catching up to swallow you, you who have pledged allegiance to the Moose, and you collapse your dry knees like folding chairs, you break and bend them until you are under the kitchen table and, when you look up and out, you are back there again and they are charging at you across no-man's-land, spiked helmets and long thin bloodguttered bayonets, and in Orlando you go to the V.F.W. and live in a house where the sun burns back blindingly off the flung newspaper, its date a liar making you nearly a hundred, and you look up from your muddy trench, your long, bolt-action Springfield, its stock tangled under your trenchcoated arm, barrel aimed out toward them over sandbags, and with your free hand you pat your pet rat. Little black clouds form and vanish. You think they are like exploding eight balls. You hear FIRE! And your nerves jerk the trigger, while still petting the traitorous rat that scurries off. OVER THE TOP! You hear things crashing about you: the table, sugar bowl, coffee cups, a whole sideboard filled with dishes And now a Great Power is holding you down and it is the cartoon face of the Hun, the fat rat-face and mustache of the Kaiser. He wants to eat you as he would a Belgian baby. Then you awake voiceless in England, a fire-breather, your elephant-nosed, goggle-eyed gas mask tangled, your sucking-for-breath, mustard-gassed lungs collapsed. Then you awaken in another hospital, in Orlando, Florida, seventy years later, and you are surrounded by strangers who say they are your family—they are strangers, of course, because you are still too young to marry, as Mother says you are, still too young for such responsibility, only a beardless boy from Hoboken in a slouch hat and brogans, an apprentice leatherworker commuting to Brooklyn, no scared-to-death doughboy in the Argonne and Belleau Wood, no Alzheimer's patient in a hospital bed in Orlando. And look, no jaywalker you! The light turns green for you to go!

E. M. Schorb

Transformations

If in place of my lady's eyes there were other eyes as beautiful, if this woman had other eyes; if my lady's eyes were emerald like the Irish Isles and this woman's eyes were violet like the flower; if in place of my lady's hair there were other hair as long and wonderful to see and touch; if this woman had different hair; if my lady's hair was shot with gold and silver, or gunmetal gray, and this woman's hair was of that Oriental black, flashing green, or rainbowed; if in place of my lady's ears, other ears perched upon this woman's head; if my lady's ears were curly, tiny cakes with pink and white icing, cherried perhaps, and this woman's ears were brown and pendant, with lobes like long strong loops, hung with spiral shells; if in place of my lady's upswept nose there was the aquiline, or bulbous, or flat and flared; if instead of my lady's pink aureoles there were two burnished copper coins, and if they made complete my lady's perky breasts and the others did the same for the pendulous breasts of the woman by whom my lady was being replaced; if my lady's slender waist vanished and became another's, girdled with lacy jeweled chains instead of Shantung Pongee silk, pale as Caucasian chalk or the limestone cliffs of Dover, with belly button out instead of belly button in; if my lady's pale round thighs, untouched by sun, were found to be the lithe, athletic thighs of a bronzed goddess who bathed all day in sun, or thighs of Oriental gold or Melanotic mocha; if my lady's ballerina's calves had been replaced by hunger's calves in stockings made in diamond net; if my lady's ankleted, once-bound feet, impossibly small, should be replaced by webbed paddle-feet, ruby-toed, and dusted with reflective sand; and if my lady's smiling mouth, containing pearly cubes in a row, should be replaced by the bitter, appealing mouth of someone else, another woman, with buff dentures that had chewed raw meat, like a leopard's; if, in short, my lady were replaced in her entirety, and I beheld her there, upon that high pedestal where I had placed her, should I approve? If her soul could be the same, despite the physical transformation; if she could say the same words, the words that I had almost come to understand, after ages of agonizing struggle, I think that I should not know that she was a different lady, another woman, nor would it be true, in essence, any more than I would be a different lover without my beret, my bouquet of dew-damp, fresh-cut, long-stemmed roses, and my cornucopia of poetry.

E. M. Schorb

The Lesson

*“Worry a little bit everyday and in a lifetime you will lose a couple of years.
If something is wrong, fix it if you can. But train yourself not to worry. Worry
never fixes anything.”* —Mary Hemingway

On that day in July
when she was a chubby, tan nine-year-old
lazing away the summer,
swimming in Lake Michigan,
reading a book as she curled up
on the red-plaid club chair
in her brother’s room,
or helping her mom
with her new baby sister,
if only her favorite uncle, Phil,
the handsomest guy she knew,
who said he wanted to marry her
when she grew up and lost her baby fat,
hadn’t gotten a migraine headache
and decided to go home to California
one day ahead of schedule,
if only her dad hadn’t come home early that day
and stood at the doorway, sweating rings
under his arms and telling her mom
in that low-clipped voice of his,
“Give me the baby,”

if only her mom hadn’t cried out,
“What’s the matter?”
as she sat down squeezing her skirt,
her hands opening and closing
over the flowered print
as it traveled up and down her thighs,

if only her dad hadn’t said,
“Phil was in a plane crash
in the Burbank mountains
and was only recognizable
by the ring he always wore
on his pinky finger,”

if only her mother hadn’t said,
as she ran down the hall to her room
with her daughter close behind,
“I didn’t have time to worry.
That’s why it happened.
I was too busy with the baby to worry,”

then she wouldn’t have learned
that the way to prevent bad things
from happening is worry
all day and all night, no matter what,
even if a baby has just been born.

Madeline Sharples

Shade Garden at Dawn

Light pools—narrow stripes along the edge of hosta—
then drains away with the dark, leaving only the shade,
breathing; a mystery to me that remains; no light rise,
nor dark fall can break the balance. Walking this morning

past the garden, its spaces empty of the unreal, there
was something I thought about it, that came in words,
but I can't remember now. I felt it go, pooling first
in my fingers, but the lack of pen—the letters leaked

from under my skin—sublimated, letters to shade, directly.
What is a shade garden at dawn? That's what triggered word-rise.
Questioning self: a light seed? or dark? And later, a keyboard
at hand, many answers, none the twin of that shady seed—

something that holds the genomic sequence of reality;
the interplay of forces, of chemical action, memory;
a non-living thing, an enzyme, that can hold itself
silently, waiting for the right shape to happen by. For us,

a shade garden at dawn is a held breath during meditation,
or that stretch of chest wall, that muscular tension before release;
a poem breathing; a hand and mind reaching; a shade garden
—out of which the morning's radiance and night's dark

brilliance erupts and dies back—but this is a shadow game,
neuronal play taking a human form, a transfer of photons
into image, of image into feeling, of feeling into body
walking. It's nothing: a shadow. But it's all we have. It's just

that the body reads places the way your infant reads faces.
We can't help it. A garden by which to walk will be read,
and shade—it must be the genesis of that first word, the one
that changes what we want into what actually is.

Gone from my fingers, the lost letters still remain, linger
under striped leaves. Shade waits. And I, by umbra
have changed: shaped by reason and feeling but turned
into word, and from word, poured out of self and onto the ear.

Carol Shillibeer

The Far Blue of Desire

1

From my seat at the edge of the ravine
I see her body only in the middle of its tumble.
Always that tumbling. Never the jump,
nor the hit, but the arms drifting

in the telescoped time of my perception;
her falling. The slow curve, sun-glimmered arms,
her white dress ripples. Air bends with her passing. My own arm,
its adolescent longing stretched out, fingers

straight and tense, into the blue below reason.
Ever since, always between the white
of her dress and my hand
there is the blue.

2

A long day of walking, climbing the green,
the white cliffs, clambering down from blue
into the warm stone of the city, I stopped.
Just to stop. The white flutter of her flag tumbled

through waves of perfect
quiet. The sun drifted up from rocks,
where cooler skin scraped gently,
small green lichen under my eye, black edge of bridge,

steel-laced far cliffs. Longing's ghost bounced companionably
against blue's corpulent curve. I reached for her and could not breach
our distance. Her passing did not disrupt the silence;
into the empty swirl of dislocated air, the sun still decanted.

3

As an artefact of impulse and absent information,
nothing distinguishes loneliness from longing. A woman swimming in air,
a gull in her last few moments: the dress she chose,
thinking to die in the beauty of white against blue. To live there,

in the far blue of desire, blinds just as death does.
Longing, like an arm interested only
in that which it is unable to grasp,
forgets the small body of lichen on a warm black rock.

The trick isn't to climb down from longing's pure vault,
but to carry it cupped in the palm,
to carry it pocketed with the small black stone,
the tiny white shell of material eternity.

4

In the far north, space sweeps the earth
so that all things break clean. Through the human eye,
experience bounds against skin and pools within retina's bowl,
mutates into touch and image.

The deep ravine of a river carved;
the furrow along the edge of a knuckle; both are gouged by time.
Rain runnels skin and rock, generates maps
of the past, engenders the future. In the vast circumpolar,

mountains vault along a valley, many walking
-days away. The soft spring of living billions: each a tiny green lilt; in between,
the gelled white-hum of animal winging. It is easy to imagine that each being longs
to be mapped, to be carried, a lithic imāgō, safe in a pocket.

5

The tall white flagstaff pinning a flowered green at the edge
of some south-British seaside, hours' walk down river from the woman's dying.
Even now, I remain two hands, two feet moving through town's downy loft
of hyacinth, the smell of cafe and an oncoming supper;

she continues to fall like a mist in my aging. All the hungers, the body's
needs drawn in emotion's indelible blue, perceptual ghosts always beyond
arms' reach. Longing and the blue are kin. But here in the green and black
there is something to rest against: sprouted rock at cliff's edge,

warm stone of cafe courtyard, the body singing
as she walks, and just within reach, always the river's tumbled edge,
in which the softest of waters, breaking rocks into sand,
wash, pale and shining, down to the sea.

Carol Shillibeer

Drumming on Water

We will be sensible with our holdings
and not marry in the cathedral of ash,
but love me I say, come from the fullness
of your preoccupations.
You locked in a solace nothing seems to disturb.
I promise not to effuse and cry dust in public.

The air is warm and weighs my body down,
my ligaments fibrillate.
I am up to my neck in a paper tide:
every day's mail logs in with a new prospectus.

Get warm, you say, and raise the magenta carpet
that I may climb in beside you against the rippled floor.
Above us in the window I see mist
tack upwards with a soft luff,
stiffen in the unthawed air.
Restless, you rise, your silhouette imprinted
against a shabby light.
Complicated, you tell me, but never divulge why,
I am quarantined in small spaces.

Your glass that once held water holds sand.
I'll pole from you in the next knelled hour,
haul in the ropes of my little boat, my submersible
tied to a tree in the forest of circumlocution.

Better men must be avid for you, you tell me.
I take a deep breath and release it
through a matrix of tension, your arm still
halted around the curve of my shoulder,
the febrile of your lips imprinted against my neck.

You sink back into one of my chairs,
reach over and unhappily finger my hair.
You vest in me, I know, but only as a tourist
in a foreign country.

Your dime is a stick pin in the ascot you are wearing,
I do not comprehend your currency,
my alphabet is delinquent. The mortar in the brick
wall outside my door is made of cellophane.
I don't want to sail to the island
of brinkmanship on my maiden voyage
over the twisted lake. My country is not yet
depleted. I scurry for the evening papers,
obscurity's large rouged face eying my flesh.

Susan Sonde

Mute Tongue, Impediment

Dressed in purple-royal
 advise me of your audio.
You carry trace of ash.

I frequent the church of overbite.
Teach me to lip synch,
 help me

emote from your red-walled cave.
I shelter under the corrugated-porch,

 roof

of your ghost town at dusk's
glassless window, your cabin
swamped in backwash from the dark,
silver-blue recesses of rhetoric.

Dusky engine once ablaze,
you are going no place.

You, prisoner in lock-down, little clapper
that shrugs off its bell-bronze cover,
if I am ever in the grip of nostalgia

 impeach me.

Immanent dock, raft afloat on oil drums,
release the vessel,
burdened with fishing nets
to the lake's indigo exhalations.

Your hover craft sits low in water.

Narcissus, citizen in a warring climate, listen,
your island-nation needs you to re-deploy

your hammer in the house of mirrors.

You move from density
 in frenetic darkness
into the light of smoke
that stiffens in the cold.

Beware the mindless and buxom
 effusion.

Flame is brazen,
the tongue but a blade of
grass;
a bit of hay; a broom's bris-
tle;
prism in a drop of water;
mist
of breath on pane,
its path widening, withering.

Susan Sonde

Occludere

The years were no longer servicable
like a frayed shirt or cravat.
Feelings were a re-play of the old,
parched desolation.

It was that time of year, dusk confirmed it, buttery and warm,
a contrast to the days before those pallid grays
obscured the scat of deer and more
aggressive creatures.

Leaves in the orchard turned brown,
gave up looking for water to take them back.

I, worried tooth beneath straw hat,
submit my diminished arc to your hypertrophic
angle and grow slack-jawed beneath your fascia.

Morose behind locked gates, I inhabit defects
and fears. Radio on the sill of my open kitchen window
speaks static to the dark.

No calendar hangs on the shiny yellow walls.
Always it's the same day or one just like it that moors me
adrift in a do-nothing phase.

I speechify tuneless as stone.

No breeze chases the rampant flies from my screen door
or disassembles the spiraling gnats from the flesh
of moldered peaches on the porch. I press urgent
against you. Thoughts go stumbling, generate obsessive.

Swaddle me in bandages, my love, keep me in remission
from the spinout of tentacles in underwater tow.
My committed will always be with you.

I am low-thrummed, no need to gavel me into catatonia.
I wheeze wretched in uncompromising weather.
You scold me unwanted. No other cloth is so tossed.

Fused sand, my glass gathers to itself, my thirst
surprised to find a geyser.

Susan Sonde

Tactile Is the Storm of Our Own Making

I am the soap
in your future, that fragrance

you rinse
from your hands,

splash of water in the sink,
the salt brushed casually from your lap:

you don't subscribe to me anymore.
Your clarinet plays on.

I come to the door, look in and pass,
satisfied for a time

to connect with you by sound.
But the thought of you,

ardent in another country,
awakens my mind.

My words arrested: rows of corn
on once flexible stalks—

I am stuck like that
and try not to think on a conscious plain

but broadcast an effluence of disconnects
to a blank sheet of paper.

You, in quotidian of calm,
sink into somber expression

as if at bottom an enigmatic lies,
an imperturbable with which I can't connect.

Small feather of flame, illusion of light
in my chest, I am compromised

and tremolo no more, nor starling-like maintain
loft, ellipticality over steeple and barn,
but lay transverse instead.
You going from me, skin to skin

with another, the well in your thighs surging.
I always atop quavery ground,

a work of insufficiency
and emotional encasement.

The why of me, in fragile shell,
listens to death's beckonings, its phonetics

always improving.
Companioned with blind voice inaudible, I pyramid,

graft upon graft upon damp rock—
effaced and unable to spark

a cache of words.
You belated love, non-committal love

have left your minimalist trace on me:
broken line

painted on bare canvas.
The more I want you, the less you want me.

Good enough to know
that you fostered some withered

admiration for me.
That knot luffs from us now.

Bruised clouds turn mist
which banks lake surface.

Sun deposits naught.
Winter again

paints frost on stanchion
and shaded cornice after a pernicious heat

culled our perennial spread of peonies.
Carrying story to an instructive end

I throne on rocker
amidst the gardening tools,

the dreamy shadows in the shed,
the cold air which rivets melt

until ice takes over.
I am not covetous, I say

to the encroaching dark.
I position elsewhere,

host a teardrop.
Is it really too late?

I devoted to your pallor
and the carving in stone

fetches from beneath
a crown of pigeons.

A surly night for birds,
a skeletal time of year.

The phone barks empty
and I am famished.

In the murmuring cattails
you are surface of black ice

and I without traction.

Susan Sonde

Vacant Light

Downstream the lake is a knot
against the shore.

Trees braid the high banks
like sutures in flesh.

I ride up the furrows of a watered field
of bean rows mirroring a transparent sky

and come slack-jawed—mongrel—
to your sclerotic repose

to fathom what ruins me.
Cicatrix, underfunded flesh on bone,

relinquish your gun as I crave
the hem of your dark garment.

Keep my name: mirror, ampule, thread
by the side of your bed.

I inhabit a corridor of fear
while you, my temple, my scripture

under glass, sit hushed.
Your lips edging forward in the slightest,

bring the odd cadence between breaths
like gifts to the cage of my ear.

I want to walk through your life
one word at a time until we are equally worlded.

I want to make a firm entry into the wall
of an egg and find you waiting.

I will extract from the kiln my palpables
and dedicate them to you: the wine goblet,
the ashen dish. When you use them
be persuaded, I am divining you.

Latent one, your church or mine,
you are all I need to know

elegant in your Rococo fortress.
Don't siphon yourself from me.

I am not brave that way.
What you store in aggregate is exactly what I need.

As window is to sash and water is to rain,
be shine to my ring.

The ballast of my life is in your hands.
In the night-precinct of my mind is a rising

to get out. Everything I am lonely for is gone,
everything I fear isolates me.

Your lights beneath domed ceilings
are glossy, almost breathing and speaking,

offer me each day's magnitude.

Susan Sonde

Du Temps Perdu

i

April is taxation month, trimming
hedges, tidying up the lawn, fixing
paths and fences, packing
compost round the roots again.
Winter, central-heated, steamed up
the Thames past Westminster Bridge.
Summer we booked at Torremelinos,
insured against the rain. We took a villa,
strolled through the sunshine to the beach,
listening to the radio and drinking coke
and watching Athena through dark glasses,
bathing with the middle classes,
old men with rolled trousers on the sand,
their talk of soil erosion,
the population explosion,
of teeming typists in the Strand.

The Mexican bird-god Quetzacola,
with wings of myrtle ever sear,
perched on granny's pianola
between two jars of Watney's beer.
Meanwhile, up west, with look all soul,
Maisy attends the latest Warhohl
or between the telly and a macaroon
withstands the vacuum of the afternoon.
At evening, waiting for the telephone,
she paces about the room alone,
as we have waited, you and I,
upon the sands of southern Spain,
until the barbarians of July
drove us to Darlington again.
She reads her fortune in the stars:
an endless round of coffee bars
in empty cities of the plain
waiting for the rain
like a knock upon the door.
Das ist mein leben,
but it is only the rain upon the door.

ii

You sit beside the silent sea
outside Guiseppes bar and grill,
your dull brown fingers pecking bread,
like sparrows on a windowsill.
The incense of your cigarette
and an implication of perfume
compound themselves on my attention.
Across the table I observe you laugh,
the golden hairs that run along your arms,
the silver sequins and vermilion nails

that tinkle like an echo on your glass.

Caught for ever in my camera lens,
you sing beside the wine-dark sea,
a gay cicada whose one evening
serenades eternity.
And in the roof-garden, looking down on stars,
the headlights of a thousand motorcars,
you smile as you rotate your hips,
snapping the music between your fingertips.
And when you have broken the last bar
and silence descends upon the last guitar
and silence is becoming
and becomes,
without the amplifier and drums,
the only sound worth listening to,
then what will you do?

Bored with a life of this and that,
with coffee from the automat,
with all those *tres bien quelque choses*,
fibre glass and plastic roses,
taking the car to the supermarket
and finding there's no place to park it,
unable to quit television
come fire or flood or intermission,
while listening to a voice declare
the virtues of a frigidair
and watching lovers on the box
advertising drip-dry socks,
reading novels that last forever
by authors who are almost clever,
you'll occupy the middle ground
between the fatuous and profound
and yellow, like a paper flower,
interned within your concrete tower,
an ageing Lady of Shalott
twelve storeys above Camelot.

iii

I shall pack my life in a plastic bag
and join the old men in the park,
the Sons of Rest who never rest
but stare with empty eyes upon the dark.
We shall shelter from the rain
that knocks at Grishkin's window pane.
She will say, as she removes a stocking,
"Would you could rouse passion with your
knocking."
Complacently she'll close her eyes,
listening to her lover's sighs,

and he will satisfy his lust
before his darling turns to dust.
Afterwards she'll watch him teeter
between her and the parking meter.
She waves farewell, there's no entreating;
love in a thirty-minute zone is fleeting.

Let us go, then, sweetie pie,
where the day's stretched out to die
like a diva at La Scala,
let us walk the streets of Soho
with Hassan and Yamomoto,
past the flicks and massage parlours,
past the restaurants for gourmets
and the girls in darkened doorways,
past the offers of admission
to a course of French tuition,
and the bliss at bargain prices
sold in shops of strange devices,
where beneath the neon skies
I'll show you love that never dies,
forever pouting, forever pert,
in see-through blouse and mini skirt.
Come, let us go, then, sweetie pie,
pirouetting, you and I,
beneath the catherine-wheeling sky.
Let us roll the past into a ball,
preferring to have loved and lost
than never to have lost at all.

Raymond Southall

When My Mother Died

I went home.
Her fragrance
floated from closets,
drifted from drawers.
I put her ring
on my finger,
wrapped myself
in her scarf.
I packed
the silverware
she left me,
a ceramic rooster,
my father's paintings,
loaded a truck
with furniture
that's followed me
from childhood.
We called Goodwill,
sold her home but
not to strangers,
gave her mysteries
to friends.
We divided
the photographs.
I slept in her bed.
Her vases
perch on my bookshelves,
a hummingbird,
some daisies,
a blue violin.
One handful of ashes
I gave to the wind,
the other
I kept for myself.
Each morning I rise
in the body she made me.
I carry my keys
in her handbag.
I walk in the shoes
that she loved.

Meryl Stratford

American Icarus

I.

All through the witching hour I was burning candles.
Tiny globes of light I'd pour my hands around and around,
whispering, lost where I'd fallen.

And if there ever came a bridge of magic from mouth to flame,
or from flame to mouth, there alone on my own Knossos,
it was perceivable only for a moment;

only flashed through as brief movement: the shadow of my hand,
opening and closing on the bedroom wall.
I spent my life this way, under a dim, white-smoke sky.

I prowled the alleys; climbed every flight of stairs I could find.
I followed the orange and then the green graffiti; hunted wing beats in the rooftops.
I burrowed into every back room and sweating cellar, speculating against the dawn,
its twisted labyrinth.

Even in those rare sleeping nights, I'd jerk awake, surrounded by a quiet wilting,
lost in the vertigo of some dream mountain's shrouded height.
And I'd be off again, cultivating my candles, opening my nightly channels with the
dead and gone.

And then you came, roaring,
a perfect wind, blowing back my wooden door, shoving the morning in.
You melted my life's collection of wax and wicks with your desert and your shining
tangle.

Perhaps you drifted in from the sea, rode the frail clouds too thin, and fell through—
because it wasn't flight. You were too full of scars, and wingless.
I dropped the world that day to catch you with your eyes closed and falling.
I opened my hands then, felt your faint flutter, peeked in on your golden spine and
blooded pinions.

I was surprised by your lightness and the depth of your sleep,
surprised by the dreaming sounds your mouth made. I was surprised at the flex
and strength in your hands, how even in sleep they drew me out,

surprised how quick the thought of your loss could unhinge me, bring back the lightless sea, my
desolated museums of wax. I've spread open your eyes since then,
peeled the skin back from each leaf-green iris.
I filled your delicate lungs with the machinery of my breath.

After all the lying hidden, your movements came then, jerky, sudden,
like jumping gears, like you weren't used to your own weight on earth or the pressure
of its air,
like a Russian marionette learning it's always had a net of muscle and a core of bones,
and so, shakes free her strings, gets up, steps off the stage.

II.

After the first year of keeping you hoarded, the cartilage and the tendons in my hands
fused, my skin became translucent, a cage of veins and capillaries
lit from the inside. By then, even my forearms were webbed. I looked out, over loch land

and heather, describing it to you in your blindness, with all its bees,
all its spring bustle and the tiny streamlet running through—a city on a hill.
And we passed the summer like that, my sickly skin and red-rimmed eyes, us both
slipping through the coolies.

III.

I didn't notice it at first, your slow growth through the fall.
The red maple and the spinning samara alerted me in late November.
I thought I'd tracked their smell in from the northern edge, the deep one, the one that
climbs into black oak and holly.

Then I began to find green wings piled inside our cupboards
or circling clock-wise down the shower drain. In my sleep, I could hear vague helicopter
thrums, the hum of gathering crowds,
and the rising sound of leaves blowing over blighted ground. Even back in the city, each
small click on the concrete became more insistent, tracked me.

That last night, I went home. I walked the hill behind our house, found the slick stone Basin
where the waterfall empties. On my knees, I soaked my hands in the silver stream.
And under the triple light of Orion's belt, I tore them open like a book of flesh.

The metacarpal bones, the phalanx bones inside a thin sheaf of living skin,
white, bleached. The tendons dried rope. The red sponge of living tissue gone.
Almost like a Venus flytrap, but clean, ossified - more like the twin sides of a ribcage
holding the moon up in the Mohave.

IV.

Two hundred lifetimes ago, you fell into the island of my open palms,
frayed my soul exquisite. Wings I'd inherited but never looked for.
And I lost you, watched the slow erosion of myself from the outside in. No maelstrom,

no thundering Poseidon with his train of nymphs, no chromatic ocean swallowing me
whole.

More a cancer missed in the first three screenings. More a sidewalk on the East Side.
More the plywood eyes of foreclosed homes and a whiskey bottle bagged in the gutter.

No, more subtle. Midnight. A smile on the bus. The outline of a knife in jean pockets.
Getting off six stops too early in a neighborhood of barking dogs and screeching tires.
The light from twin retinas opening two feet away.

I've stayed here searching, pushing my bones through the smog of Tomorrowland.
Here, all the skeletons in my village have names: Jose, Raul, Mariah, Mary, Jason.
We see each other on the street and we wave. We smile. And we are withering invisibly.

Marionettes with cores of bones and nets of muscle, useless on the bigger stage,
the steel wires in our femurs are counter-sunk and sealed.
Some of these people have never felt your golden flutter or kissed your burnished tangle.

At least I had that, at least I've felt this crushing gravity from so much higher.
So awesome to move without muscles now, amazing to be this close to desire, sometimes just an
ivied wall away, and know you are over there somewhere.

To have held you and lost you; to know it was my fault, pushing too close to the sun;
to relive our time together from this room I've rented in our old mansion
for four hundred dollars a month,

To see the skin of my former life, my shoes, my suits, my overcoats,
and to know you're gone.
I guess that's what the bottom of the ocean feels like just before the blackout.

To see the taxis here and have no fare,
to serve this crystal glass to the one person still left in this restaurant,
to see how low light through wine spreads its blood over the table,

to see these other husks of dancing bone, to commute two hours a day with puppets,
to know that when we all finally settle at the bottom of the sea,
we'll stare into the mouth of prophets

and see the barnacled lips of a Greek statue.
We'll all see the same indifferent silt
and feel the swell of waves.

for Kristy, September 20, 2011

Cutter Streeby

I Died on a Brilliant Day like This

Thunderheads wrapped the mountain to the west of my house;
to the east, sky so clear I could map the gradation of blues
as they moved from horizon's royal to the sun's pearl shell.

*Look at the design of this canopy,
you'd said once, in a forest outside of town,
your head flung back, oblivious to the brambles around your thighs.
It's like the layout of a city. Searching from right to left,
your arm still half-up, forgotten
until you pointed to the copulas you'd needed to find.
And that blue jay policing her stoop,
those finches, jobless in the hackberry, that trail,
a highway of wildlife when we aren't here, and I bet, if we waited till night,
that bole would hold our Great Owl with his golden eyes and flexing claws.*

But I could never see it like that when we were both alive.
To me, death was a little figurine bobbing somewhere
in the backwater of our aquarium town
with its costume rocks and manicured lawns,
its neat rows of white headstones each with an unassuming name;
each from the other offset at precise angles - all together a perfect field of marble.

I didn't understand the urgency you'd felt since birth. Why you'd wanted to leave,
why you seemed inconstant even to yourself.

I think I could understand it now, after the call I got last December.
After your death that winter in the desert.

I had assumed it was an affinity to death that let you live everyday as the last of your
kind, chest out, full stride, burning to touch everything under the sky—

But now, like you, I've shed my conceptions of earth and its attendant concerns: winter, spring,
summer, fall. Your quick breath and trapped eyes have snapped into my own canopy, one grown
from the undergrowth into a delicate lace of leaves and light. I see most of those patterns now, so
a breeze trembles the world up there.

I'm different since your death. Slower. Not less full of light, just more aware of its pieces. I can
hear the worms shift the earth three meters below ground, and even the ocean plate sliding under
my city raises a symphony now. Music on music veined with music.

Twenty years ago I tunneled away from your funeral, blind, translucent, recalling the smell of wet
dirt one spring, and how you'd always whistle notes to a melody I'd never heard. But it's been
awhile, brother, and I've been learning what you always knew.

So this morning, with my legs hanging over the edge of this bed, I'm going to flex my feet. I'm
going to stand up. I'm going to shave in my porcelain sink and pour a cup of coffee. I'm going to
step off this back porch into autumn's light rain and look through burnished eyes over a field still
gray in the dawn.

Today, I'm going to disappear without a note to anyone.
Today I'm gone, searching for this year's last red mandevilla.

Cutte Streeby

What I'll Do If She Leaves Me

I'll crash my ship into an island,
line my ceiling with its mast.
I'll become a collector
of wine-bottle letters,
line my eco-friendly walls
with the glass.

I'll grow a philosopher's beard,
expound on the sea.
I'll transcribe scriptures
in a shell's open mouth.

I'll romanticize my death
(in front of her of course)
and die fighting a loose Lidia bull
at 5 o'clock in white foam by the sea,
or perhaps my death will be
from anaphylactic shock,
stung to death by the last
roaming pack
of Africanized bees.

Because surely I can't
go on living,
keep on walking
the gravel track to my work.

I'll have to find a pier;
surely, I'll have to mix and pour concrete,
wait hours while it sets up,
dries around my feet;

then I'll slit each wrist
with a pearl-handled blade,
and fling my mer-tail to the sea—

then, surely,

surely, my last image will be
of my own blood ribboning
to nothing, unfolding
in heavy blues of the sea—

Cutter Streeby

Bareback Alchemy

Bring on the cold.
I'm going to meet this life
without gloves or scarves or boots
and ride bareback through the cobbled
streets of time, howling incantations
into the mist and threading mystery
through the folds of day. Let the ticking
minutes land where they may:
I point my heart at an uncharted
path, lift from the earth,
trot on the wind. No Nostradamus
could predict the intricate
twists and turns this horse will take
down alleys and through storms,
shaking its magical tail,
its righteous mane,
clopping the cobblestone
and trying, trying like hell
to buck me off. Let it
snow and sleet. I've got no fur
coat to meet winter with this year,
just a raw and broken heart
and the waterfalls in my chest
where my lungs should be.
So go ahead. Bring it on: cold
and heat, hurricanes, tornadoes, quakes.
I've got the freedom of the dispossessed,
that fire in my throat,
the lick of truth,
and I'll sing it loud
because I wear
the philosopher's stone
like a smile, don a raven
on my shoulder, sport the alchemy
to transform my demons into gods.

Melissa Studdard

Bird Box

It is always six o'clock or seven, Sunday
or Monday, October, this year or another
in a bird box with penciled-out holes
through which just enough light passes.

Nothing seems to change between two men talking
without saying anything but understanding everything
until the waitress interrupts what they are not saying
and at least one looks up to say what he'll have.

Everything spins in the street. The black lab, for example,
turning tighter circles directly proportional to the radius
of the leash a woman is desperately trying to correct
by reversing her spin on the ball of her opposing foot.

Can't think about much else when you find a bird
in your living room, which is still unpainted, lamps
and chairs, a party huddled together in the center;
and there's the book you lost, or thought you lost.

A bird cradled to your chest will listen to your heart.
The emergency animal clinic nurse understands this.
Try to imagine a quiet way of saying you were amazing.
Think he will be alright? And I want it to be true. Yes.

After a late dinner, a silence during the drive home,
I wanted to say something silly about the two men seated
next to us in the restaurant or the woman pirouetting
with her dog. Bed is where we talk. So, I wait.

You hand me my toothbrush, I pass you the toothpaste.
We are married like that. I'm still awake when your bird
hand settles on my chest. I can feel your heart beating.
Little bird heart, I think. Some hands are expert at this.

M. K. Sukach

My Father Now That I Am Twenty

It was Sundays. Then,
it was every-other Sunday.
Then, holidays, and now
only now and then
that I see you.

Like now, that I need
to know how to tie a tie
because my new job
requires this.

You stand by me
now that I'm twenty
and an inch taller
than you,

in front of the mirror
where my left is my right
when tying a tie.

We are together, crossing,
overlapping, pulling through
finally, tightening and
straightening out the knot.

When it is finished,
turning to me, you pull,
tug, shift and pat,
saying, "There...."

Admiring the work of it,
with what you have done,
is there something more?

I turn to view my tie
in the mirror
now that I'm twenty

and watch that reflection of your arm
from the left,
the right, moving over my shoulder.

M. K. Sukach

In the End, Just Radio Waves and Static

What will we be in the end but radio waves and static,
chaotic patterns of interference perhaps detected
but not understood many years after
we have finally extinguished ourselves.

Maybe high-powered telescopes will be trained
upon the dim star we once worshiped long before
we were sophisticated enough
to bring about our own destruction.

Maybe those far-off others
will be technologically advanced enough
to be able to observe the cold mass
that was the planet we used to inhabit.

What will they suppose
when they hear the static-encrusted voices
that once belonged to our leaders?

Will they try to decipher meaning
from those alien voices
that hiss and crackle through their atmosphere?

Will they speculate upon the reasons
for our demise
or nod knowingly, sadly, sagely -
glad they have the luck to be so very far away?

Dee Sunshine

Emily

Emily has many toys. Most are plastic. Some are made of wood. Her favorite is the plastic pond with wooden fish. Sometimes Emily pretends she is a burning house.

Emily has a friend named Ben. One day when she was being a house, burning, Ben rushed in, grabbed her plastic watering can and poured the wooden water onto the house.

He saved her life and she was very grateful. She rewarded him with a kiss on the cheek. Ben blushed. "Oh Emily, that isn't necessary," he responded. "But you're sweet, Ben," she said. "You saved my life."

The next day Emily was in the garden, pretending to be a surgeon. She was cutting open her wooden doll with a plastic knife. She removed the doll's wooden heart and ate it. "Tasty," she told Ben who was sitting beside her, watching. "Want some?" she asked.

"No thanks," said Ben. "I'm not very hungry." Then she pretended to be a house again, burning. This time Ben just watched her burn until Emily was a pile of dark ash on the grass beside her wooden doll without a heart.

Paul Suntup

Digging a Hole

I'm digging a hole, Mom,
like the holes I dug as a child,
fingers in red clay reaching
to the other end of Earth.
Past Father who never comes home,
leaves rooms as silent as seashells,
who brags of women loving him,
women more voluptuous,
noses smaller than yours,
brags as empty as your refrigerator.
Past *You crazy fucking bitch*,
empty cupboards because the glasses
have been thrown like frisbees at a dog park,
stolen money for booze and weed,
forties of Busch hidden in drawers,
heart attacks, collapsed lungs, overdoses, past
Watch your sister. I have to find your father,
Father coming home at 5 a.m.,
Father coming home from jail.
Past screams that lulled me to sleep like Doris Day singing
Que sera sera, Whatever will be will be...
razors against skin like a torn paper bag,
evictions, late payments, DUI's, welfare checks,
chicken carcasses in backyards,
friends dying as often as your old cars,
free clinics where you named the child
you lost, past Father whose hand
hit your face like a pigeon smashed against a windshield –
you were being hysterical, because
your father died and you shouldn't cry, your father
who left you nothing but his sudden death,
like an ocean floor after the ocean has been
sucked up to the moon. I'm digging past
thoughts of leaving your children behind,
because we'd be better off without you,
past your body a splinter of wood,
past the man who left
as your belly swelled like a tulip bulb,
giving birth in a hospital
that seemed as vacant as a condemned building.
Past your Mother's Manhattans,
grocery shopping in her night dress,
her voice like someone chewing
ice in your ear, another dead cat in a dryer,
another day of Mother passed out naked on the floor,
rooms where pants unbuttoned and blouses opened,
like a zipper you couldn't zip back up,
children who pushed you off your yellow bike
because they thought you were from Cuba,
past prayers to forget Spanish.
I'm digging a hole to Venezuela, Mom,
to a time where you stand on a white beach,

turquoise water tickles your toes,
skin warm, hair honey from sun,
red ruffles on bathing suit.
Mi Papa, you giggle,
eyes squinting up at your father,
and you smile as a wave knocks you down.

Chrys Tobey

The Loss of Lemons

A woman had lemons in her head. It's not that she wanted to make lemonade. She simply had lemons in her head. She could feel them in her head the same way she could feel a star dying. The woman insisted on getting an MRI. She wanted to see X-rays of the lemons. She imagined it would be like looking at the moon suspended in the night sky. The technician gave her Bocelli to listen to. The woman smiled as the conveyer belt slid her into the machine like luggage in an port.

The woman had no idea what Bocelli was singing. *Estoy muriendo amor porque te extraño.* She imagined the words were something about lemons. *Te extraño, te extraño.* Perhaps he had lost lemons. The conveyer belt shook back and forth, jiggled her body, as though she were on a motorboat. *Te extraño, te extraño.* Then the woman saw it: the ferry motoring towards Capri. She looked closer and saw her husband. The woman looked closer still and saw her husband smiling, his one missing tooth, on a tiny bus winding its way up the roads of Capri. And then she smelled the lemons. She saw the lemon orchards, lemon trees stretching for miles, wrapping around Capri like the gold ring that once wrapped around her left finger.

Chrys Tobey

Someone's Staring

Someone's staring at me
right now
here on this subway.
His eyes have not left mine.
He looks crazy and nervous,
a young guy,
a twitchy-looking young guy.
I have a feeling he's going to jump me
or rob me,
maybe shoot me
or stab me.
He's probably looking for money
for a fix.
He's going to follow me off this fucking subway car
and then he's going to slit my throat
and throw me on the tracks.
This fucked-up drug addict
is going to kill me
and buy some heroin or crack
or whatever these fucking jerkoffs buy
to get high
and he's going to leave me on a subway track
with blood streaming out of my neck,
my mouth a pool of blood.
He's waiting for me to get off here
at the Spring Garden stop.
Well, fuck you,
my wild-eyed doped-up piece of shit.
I won't get off here.

Wait a minute.
He just got off here
and the door closed.
I see him running up the steps
probably to catch a bus
or kill someone on the street.
Thank god he's gone.
I was sure he was going to knife me.
I had it all figured the hell out.
I even stayed in this piss-ridden
rat-hole of a subway car
and now this means I have to get off
at the next stop and go over to the other side
of the station
and take another subway
back to the Spring Garden stop.
I have totally fucked up.
I talked myself out of getting off at my stop and
now I'm totally fucked.

I've got to stop thinking like this.
This paranoid shit is taking its toll.
It tricks me,
confuses me,
frightens me.
I have to be calm now,
just get ahold of myself.
I'm standing up
to get off at the next stop.

Now I'm by the door.
What's going on here?
I just noticed
two guys sitting over there
just a few seats down
on the left
and they're looking at me.
One's got a a mile-long scar
on the side of his face.
These guys are trouble.
The other one just put his hand in his pocket
like he's got a gun or something.
Holy Shit!
I've got to get off.
Maybe my mind's just playing tricks on me.
I don't know what to think.
I'll just stand here by the door.
The stop's coming up.
Christ! They just got up and
they're walking toward me
and now they're standing behind me.
I can see their reflection in the door's glass.
I can almost feel one of them breathing
on the back of my neck.
I'm trapped now . . . nowhere to go . . . nowhere!
The door's opening and I step out
into the dark.

I'm a dead man.

Vernon Waring

Knock Knock

“Ted!” Jan bleats, “I know you’re there!”
Any spell Ted’s sandalwood candle has cast
sputters and smashes on the floor.

“Who’s that?” hisses the girl in his bed.
“My ex. She shouldn’t be here!”
But she is, squalling, “Ted! Open the door!”

His room’s so small, there’s barely space
for his guitar. He lived mostly at Jan’s
until, three nights ago, she *slept with*

the singer in his band. Now, sobbing,
“I miss you, Teddy. Please”
She knocks, then pounds, then kicks the door.

The new girl’s gone from scared-but-sexy
to ugly-and-mad. “You fucker!
Why’d you bring me here?!” Suddenly

he hates all females—their shrill voices
and self-righteous treachery. “There’s
the window, if you want to leave”

He pulls on jeans, and—keeping
his shirt off for spite—crunches
barefoot over his thin rug to hurl

open the door. Jannie jumps back,
face twisted like a Tlingit demon
in the Northwest Museum a block away.

Three days he’s felt too sick to eat.
Now he stands bare-chested, licking
his dry lips. Revenge is sweet.

Charles Harper Webb

Plantation's Corn

Then our guide pointed to the hole in the barn floor.
Bored by a slave, she said, the one who sacked
the plantation's corn for market.
Sly feet swept stray kernels
into the crawl below, what hands would recover
after twilight for a wanting family.
She talked on as I thought of the night
they caught him.
How he must have stood there,
legs abuzz, pulse thick in his ears.
How he couldn't explain
why he was there that hour,
or why his pockets were full,
or why a child's hunger was no pardon.
And after they took him behind the courthouse
and hanged him, how his master,
whom history remembered with a plaque,
ended that evening,
inching the wick higher on his lamp
to read the Scripture more clearly,
perhaps Matthew, skimming over
that part about the merciful obtaining
mercy.

Paul Weidknecht

Vacant House

Something still lives on
in a house after the people

have moved out.
What happened here

leaves an impression
behind like an outline

of a picture frame on a wall
after it's been taken down.

What remains
of a curtain wavers

in a broken window as if
someone had just stepped

aside out of view.
A backdoor slams in the wind

as though in memory
of the children who always forgot

to keep it latched.
In the front yard

an old oak that had to be
pulled down still holds on

by a stubborn stump
moss-and-toadstool-dotted

almost nothing can uproot.
And when the sun sets a false fire

to the rotting shingles,
evening deepens

the lingering impression
of an imminent return

as if the family's gone off
for a brief excursion

and had just forgotten
to leave a light on.

Sarah Brown Weitzman

Legacy of the Great Man

The mansion where the great man slept,
entertained, was untidy, studied books,
and from which he controlled
his vast fortune accumulated by years
of backstabbing and deeds of no good,
is administered by a trust fund
that admits for scholarly research
only those visitors willing to spend
a month in the mansion, eating what
the great man ate, sleeping where he slept,
reading his books, contributing commentary
to the guest book and cash to the estate.

Moreover they must pledge to go out
into that great world in the guise
of the great man himself, outfitted
with his papers, forging new identities,
each of these a replica of the great man,
indeed even undergoing surgical alteration
to match him down to the scars on his groin,
and wherever they are sent they must
conduct themselves reprehensively
as he would have, destroy hearts,
families, and corporations, as he would have,
and crumble empires, as he aspired to.

When they finally go, that is go for good,
their bodies must be preserved
by the resident taxidermy clinic
which will stiffen them nicely
and create plausibly licentious poses
to approximate the great man
as he must have looked just before
his own body vanished from sight,
as it was variously rumored,
in a boating accident on the high seas,
a plane wreck over a polar ice cap,
or the pit of an active Hawaiian volcano
where it turned to ash and fertilized
the pineapple plantations he bought and sold.

Philip Wexler

Two Little Girls

It's already been a full afternoon
at the playground

as they zip down the slide
yet again and hurry to the swings.

Father on the bench pulls the newspaper
from his pack for the third time.

Energetically and out of synch,
they swing to the sky and back.

"Let's play being married,"
says the older one, who wants

to be the husband since she's bigger.
The other says, "Okay."

Their swinging comes nearly
to a standstill while they consider.

They are stumped,
look down at the wood chips.

Then the younger one says,
"Let's play divorce."

Through belly-bending laughter they yell,
"Divorce, divorce," over and over.

The older girl says,
"I'll divorce you if you divorce me."

It's the funniest thing in the world.
They swing again, giggle, whisper.

Father keeps his eyes glued
to the paper but strains to hear.

Soon he motions to them and shouts,
"It's about that time, girls."

He sees their disappointment.
"There's always another day," he adds.

In the car, they resume chuckling.
All around he hears, "Divorce, divorce."

Philip Wexler

University Conference on Transportation Alternatives

Before we get to the first day's agenda,
I have some additional announcements.

For the owner of the blue Ford Taurus,
harnessed to a bull in parking lot 7 -

your car's lights are on, and don't forget
to check for and clean up droppings at lunch break.

A silver Toyota, license plate number JCV200,
with the orgy scene painted on the roof

and the marijuana planted in the open trunk,
is parked in the Dean's space.

A red Harley-Davidson motorcycle
was parked upside down with its engine on.

There is a prosthetic or actual
severed hand clinging to the odometer.

Campus police are now wrapping
three sticks of dynamite to the frame

of a Bianchi bicycle illegally locked
to a flagpole. Please hurry.

Someone seems to have mistaken
our drained outdoor pool for a helicopter pad.

Please remove your chopper before
the pool is filled at noon.

Rollerskates are not permitted in the auditorium.
You may skate back out to the lobby,

but then they must be checked
at the hospitality desk.

A large red-and-white-striped hot-air
balloon parked on the roof is deflating

and a hang glider is tangled
in the WBAU radio antenna.

As for the Segway in front
of the fire exit, need I shout, "Fire!"

Finally, please remove the pony hitched
to the urinal in the men's room on balcony 2.

Be advised that the front mezzanine
has been reserved for these equines.

Ahead of us is a fascinating conference
that I am sure will keep you glued to your seats.

Philip Wexler

Hungry Heart

Early evening in the Atlantis Casino
just that time when the sun sets over
the Carson nobody giving a damn
gamblers focused on slots or 21 or roulette
stunned and stultified by the buffet
of cutlets misted in nicotine smoke

Lou Palemone and the Rockets
having just finished their cover of
Bad to the Bone
in the lull that is bells coin spillage
canned *Bobby Darin* hits and that
strange chorus *Wheel*

of
Fortune

comes the very real outraged scream of a
homeless man stopped at the dining room door
cursing everyone around him

Security in suits with curly cord ears
back off watch his ragged retreat to the exit

Lou on stage and the *Rockets* stare
so does everyone else for the space of
2 or 3 beats *Wheel*

of
Fortune

Then the drums, the guitar
the synthesizer
Lou's sequins come alive again
as he takes command of his *kingdom*
of complimentary drinks
intoning into his microphone—
Everybody's got a hungry heart . . .

Daniel Williams

Rumor of Romance

Mytilene, Lesbos, 586 B.C.—
Sappho, Greece's great lyric poetess,
in the middle of Friday night
ran away with the handsome Phaon
in his ferryboat to the Asian mainland
where he traded his boat for a chariot, and
Sappho and Phaon rode to Sardis, Lydia,
to live out their life and love in exile.

Kerkylos, the forlorn husband of Sappho,
hired two brutal thugs to track them down.
Incognito, they snuck into Sardis
in the middle of Saturday night,
drowned Phaon in his waterbed,
and dragged Sappho, gagged and soaking-wet,
back to the waiting arms of Kerkylos,
the wealthy merchant of Mytilene, Lesbos.

Sappho, from love for the dead Phaon,
wrote a farewell note to her daughter Kleis,
rushed in the middle of Sunday night
to the edge of the moonlit Leucadian Cliffs,
and hurled herself from the rocky heights
into the raging Aegean Sea below, hoping
to be reunited with her lover Phaon
in the golden aftergardens of Aphrodite.

Larry Ziman

Grandmother's Dun-Colored Cow

The cow was lovesick for the woman.
Grandmother's vegetable garden ran
along a fence separating it from the
pasture where the dun-colored cow grazed.

At weeding time, the bovine queen would
walk up and down along the fence watching
the woman's every move. Sometimes she
cooed to her with soft and gentle moorings.

Grandmother would moo back. They would
talk that way for hours until the woman
took the weeds and held them out for the cow
to eat. Old Boss, as Grandmother called her,

took them from her hand as carefully
as one might kiss a child's forehead.
This was a cow that seldom stood in the rain.
The woman would call her to the barn

and heap a pile of hay for her to munch.
One hot summer day, Grandmother fell ill.
Great Aunt Frances came to make her tea
and told her to spend the day in bed.

She left the doors and windows open to keep
the house cool. When she returned late
that afternoon, bringing a pot of broth, a slice
of homebred, and a fresh pot of tea,

she found the dun-colored cow standing guard
next to Grandmother's bed, chewing her cud,
mooing softly, and watching over the old
woman's troubled and feverish sleep.

Fredrick Zydek

The Eagle Sleeping in the Loft

I was the boy who rescued the eagle chick when it was pushed from its nest. I lined the scarecrow's wide-brimmed, straw, sun hat with fresh-dried hay, placed it in a large box with a light bulb turned on to keep him warm, and fed him pulverized worms from an eyedropper because he

was too weak to hold up his head or open his mouth. On the fourth day he took bits of raw hamburger, a little pre-chewed, fried chicken and began squawking announcement of his hunger from a mouth that never seemed to close. Finally I was feeding him five live mice a day and sometimes fish I pulled from

the creek that surrounded my grandparents' farm. He had a hard time learning to fly. I took him to the highest point in the loft and swung from a rope to the other side. At first he only screamed his fear of being abandoned. On my fourth swing he tried to follow. When the rope swung back, he

grabbed it with one of his talons but lost his balance and tumbled toward a waiting pile of hay. But as he fell, he flapped his wings and managed to land on his feet. He finally got it but for a few months would only fly in the barn. I'm proud that he hunts now from the sky, but I confess I did not know how

to teach him that he's an eagle. I'm not sure he knows he's a bird. I'm sure he thinks he's a man. He sleeps in the loft of that same barn these days and hunts mostly on his own. When I'm out doing chores, he's always there, perched on my shoulder or following me like a goose walking several paces behind her gander.

Fredrick Zydek

Notes on Poets

David Alpaugh has had poems, essays, and plays published in print and online journals that include *Able Muse*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Evergreen Review*, *The Formalist*, *Light*, *Modern Drama*, *Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Scene 4*, and *Zyzzyva*. He has also been published in the Heyday Press anthology, *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present*. His first collection, *Counterpoint*, won the Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize from Story Line Press, and his second collection, *Heavy Lifting*, was published by Alehouse Press in 2007. He lives in the San Francisco Bay area where he has been a featured poet at book stores, colleges, and cafes more than 100 times, and he was a finalist for Poet Laureate of California.

Gustavo Adolfo Aybar is a graduate of the University of Missouri - Kansas City where he received his MA in Romance Languages and Literature. He is a Cave Canem Fellow, an Artist Inc. Fellow, and a freelance translator. Currently he is translating the works of Mexican author/playwright, Glafira Rocha.

Joe Benevento teaches American Literature and Creative Writing at Truman State University in Kirksville, Missouri. His tenth book overall, *Saving St. Teresa*, the second in a series of Capelli Brothers Mysteries, has recently been accepted for publication with Black Opal Books.

Regina Murray Brault has twice been nominated for the Pushcart Prize. Over 250 of her poems have appeared in more than 200 different magazines, anthologies, chapbooks, and newspapers, such as *The Comstock Review*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, *Poet Magazine*, *Karamu*, *The State Street Review*, *Bloodroot Literary Magazine*, *Earth's Daughters*, *The Great American Poetry Show*, and the Random House anthology, *Mothers and Daughters*. She has also received numerous poetry awards including the Clark College Award, the Tennessee Literary Award for Poetry, and the 2009 Euphoria and Creekwalker Awards. She leads a monthly poetry workshop, The Cherry Lane Poets, in Burlington, Vermont.

John F. Buckley, a graduate of the Helen Zeller Writers' Program at the University of Michigan, lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, with his wife. His website is johnfbuckley.net.

Sally Burnette is a graduate student at Emerson College and lives in Brookline, Massachusetts. Recent work has appeared in *the kitchen poet*, *Clockwise Cat*, and *The Outrider Review*.

Anne Butler, a Virginia native, lives in Los Angeles, California. Her poems have appeared in *Women Arts Quarterly Journal*, *Spillway Magazine*, *Illuminations*, *Word Riot*, *The Medulla Review*, *Constellations*, and *491 Magazine* among other publications. Her professional theatre career has spanned twenty states, and she is a founding member, resident actor, and current literary manager of Savage Players (www.savageplayers.com), a Los Angeles theatre ensemble dedicated to producing fierce and compelling work. In her spare time she works as a freelance writer, editor, and SAT verbal tutor. She holds a BA in Theatre from Duke University and an MFA in Acting from the University of California - Los Angeles.

Matthieu Cailler writes poetry and prose. His work has been published in numerous national and international literary journals. A graduate of Vermont College of Fine Arts, he has been a finalist for the *Glimmer Train* New Writers Award and the New Rivers Press American Fiction Prize, and he has been awarded a Short Story America Prize for Short Fiction and a Shakespeare Award for Poetry. His chapbook, *Clotheslines*, is available from Red Bird Press, and his short story collection, *Loss Angeles*, was recently published by Short Story America.

Alan Catlin has been publishing for five decades. Many chapbooks and prose and poetry books on a variety subjects have appeared during that time. Among those are *Drunk and Disorderly: Selected Poems 1978-2000* (Pavement Saw Press), *The Schenectady Chainsaw Massacre* (Staplegun Press), *Only the Dead*

Know Albany (sunnyoutside), *Portrait of the Artist Afraid of His Self-portrait* (March Street Press), *Effects of Sunlight in the Fog* (Bright Hill Press), *Alien Nation* (March Street Press), and most recently a memoir with poetry, *Books of the Dead* (Pure Heart Press, a Main Street Rag company).

Dorothy Chan was a 2014 finalist for the Ruth Lilly and Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Fellowship. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Blackbird*, *Plume*, and *Spillway*.

Robert Cooperman's latest collection, *Just Drive* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2014), is about his past life as a New York City cab driver, an experience he devoutly thanks is over.

Philip Dacey is the author of thirteen books of poetry, most recently *Church of the Adagio* (Rain Mountain Press, 2014). The winner of three Pushcart Prizes, he has written entire collections about Gerald Manley Hopkins, Thomas Eakins, and New York City. His other awards include a Discovery Award from the New York YM-YWHA's Poetry Center and various fellowships (a Fulbright to Yugoslavia, a Woodrow Wilson to Stanford, and two in creative writing from the National Endowment of the Arts). His work has appeared in *The Nation*, *Hudson Review*, *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *The American Scholar*, *New York Times*, and *Esquire*. With David Jauss, he co-edited *Strong Measures: Contemporary American Poetry in Traditional Forms* (Harper & Row, 1986). He lives in the Lake District of Minneapolis with his partner, Alixa Doom.

Lucille Lang Day is the author of eight poetry collections and chapbooks, including *The Curvature of Blue*, *Infinites*, *Wild One*, and *The Book of Answers*. She has published a children's book, *Chain Letter*, and a memoir, *Married at Fourteen: A True Story*, which received a 2013 PEN Oakland Josephine Miles Literary Award. Her work has appeared widely in magazines and anthologies.

Steve De France is a widely published poet, playwright, and essayist. His work has appeared in literary publications in America, Canada, England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, France, Australia, New Zealand, and India. He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize in Poetry in 2002, 2003, and 2006. Recently his work has appeared in *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, *Mid-American Review*, *Ambit*, *Atlantic*, *Clean Sheets*, *Poetry Bay*, *The Yellow Medicine Review*, and *The Sun*. In England he won a Reader's Award in *Orbis Magazine* for his poem "Hawks." In the United States he won the Josh Samuels' Annual Poetry Competition (2003) for his poem "The Man Who Loved Mermaids." His play, *The Killer*, had its world premier at the Garage Theatre in Long Beach, California (September-October 2006). He has received the Distinguished Alumnus Award from Chapman University for his writing. Most recently his poem "Gregor's Wings" has been nominated for The Best of the Net by *Poetic Diversity*. He lives in Long Beach, California.

Paul Dickey is the author of two poetry collections, *Wires over the Homeplace* (Pinyon Publishing, 2013) and *They Say This Is How Death Came into the World* (Mayapple Press, 2011). Dickey, a poet and philosophy instructor in Omaha, Nebraska, has published two e-books: a full-length play, *The Good News According to St. Dude* (2014), and a collection of witty political verse, *Liberal Limericks of 2012*. He has published a range of literary work in roughly 100 journals including *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Nimrod*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Pleiades*, *Mid-American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *The Midwest Quarterly*. He travels throughout the Plains and Midwest to give poetry readings and his popular prose poetry workshop at colleges, universities, and various writer hangouts.

ellen teaches creative writing at Santa Monica College in Santa Monica, California. She co-produces Poetry by the Sea, a quarterly reading series, and she hosts Vital Poetry for poetry lovers. Her credits include *The Los Angeles Times*, *Slant*, *Mudfish*, *Slipstream*, *Third Wednesday*, and others. She has won writing awards from dA Center for the Arts, *Blue Unicorn*, *Cape Cod Times*, and others. A collection of her poetry is included in *4 Los Angeles Poets*. A chapbook, *Reverse Kiss*, was editor's choice and published by Main Street Rag. A full collection, *The Generic Papers*, contains poems that deal with women's issues. *Sleeping Guardian* was released in 2012 by Finishing Line Press.

Curt Eriksen was born in Kansas. He lives between the Sierra de Gredos in western Spain and Boston, Massachusetts. Curt holds an MFA from Lesley University. His poetry, short fiction, novel extracts, and political commentary have appeared in the United States, Canada, UK, Australia, India, and Spain in numerous print and online journals, including *Orbis*, *Blackbird*, *Rosebud*, *New Madrid*, *34th Parallel*, *Contrary*, *42opus*, and *Alba*. All of Curt's published work is at www.clerik.weebly.com.

Richard Fenwick is a Russian translator who works with Holocaust Survivors from the former Soviet Union. His poetry has been featured in numerous quarterlies and journals. His first poetry collection, *Around the Sun Without a Sail*, was published in 2012. He lives in Tucson, Arizona.

Marta Ferguson is the co-editor, with Bryan D. Dietrich, of *Drawn to Marvel: Poems from the Comic Books* (Minor Arcana Press, 2014). She is on staff at Spark Wheel Press as a manuscript reader. In 2005, her chapbook, *Mustang Sally Pays Her Debt to Wilson Pickett*, was published by Main Street Rag. Her poetry has appeared in dozens of literary magazines over the last decade or so, including *Poet Lore*, *So to Speak*, *The Comstock Review*, *Spillway*, *Bluestem*, *Rattle*, and *Prairie Schooner*. She is the sole proprietor of Wordhound Writing & Editing Services, LLC (www.wordhound.com).

Janelle Fine is a 24-year-old poet and artist from Los Angeles who started being creative as early as pre-school. Her favorite thing to do is to play with type. She is obsessed with matchboxes and miniatures and is founder of Le Petit Press. She is a recent MFA graduate from the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Narupa University. She has been published in places such as *Crack the Spine Literary Magazine*, *Lesbian Inspired Poetry*, and *Polari Journal*. She wants to spend the rest of her life making beautiful things.

CB Follett is the author of 8 books of poems. Her most recent is *Of Gravity and Tides* (2013). And she is the the author of several chapbooks. The latest is *True North* (2014). *At the Turning of the Light* won the 2001 National Poetry Book Award. She is editor/publisher and general dogsbody of Arctos Press and was publisher and co-editor (with Susan Terris) of *Runes: A Review of Poetry* (2001-2008). Follett has had numerous nominations for Pushcart Prizes for individual poems. She received a Marin Arts Council Grant for Poetry, and she has been widely published nationally and internationally. Follett was Poet Laureate of Marin County in California from 2010 to 2013. She lives in Sausalito, California.

Jonathan Greenhouse is the author of the chapbook, *Sebastian's Relativity* (Anobium Books, 2011). He won the 2012-2013 Poetry Prize from *Prism Review*, was the recipient of a 2014 Willow Review Award, and was a finalist in the 2013 Gearhart Poetry Contest at *The Southeast Review*. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Artful Dodge*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *The Dark Horse*, *The Malahat Review*, *Miramar Poetry Journal*, *New Millennium Writings*, and *Rattle*. Jonathan lives in Jersey City, New Jersey, with his wonderful wife and equally wonderful infant son.

John Grey is a widely published poet and short-story writer. Born in Australia, he has lived in the United States since the early 70s. His work has recently been published in *Skidrow Penthouse*, *Pennsylvania English*, *Slant*, and *Common Ground Review*.

David Hann: "In our drive around Kansas and other states, my wife Rose and I occasionally saw signs posted on the outskirts of towns that said "NO JAKE BRAKES" or "JAKE BRAKES PROHIBITED." What did he do to be so unpopular? My poem, "Ballad of Jake Brakes," provides an explanation.

William Ogden Haynes is a poet and author of short fiction. From Alabama, he is a military brat. His first book of poetry, *Points of Interest*, appeared in 2012, and a second collection of poetry and short stories, *Uncommon Pursuits*, was published in 2013. Both are available on Amazon.com in Kindle

and paperback. He has also published over a hundred poems and short stories in literary journals and has been anthologized many times.

Lynn Hoffman is a chef and the author of seven books, the most recent being the hilarious cancer memoir, *Radiation Days*, and the delicious *Short Course in Beer*. He has published over 150 poems in literary journals. He lives in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Kenneth Homer: My poem, “Caped Crusaders,” is the product of the many hours I spent reading comic books as a youth. The poem is based on the popular Batman television show that aired in the 60s and has since become a camp classic. Given the current popularity of superheroes, it would seem that comic-book heroes are evergreen. I hope that my poem has a long shelf life as well.

Linda Hutchison is a freelance writer living in La Jolla, California. She has worked as a newspaper journalist, an advertising copywriter, and a technical writer. She is the author of two books for high-school students, *Lebanon* and *Finland*. Her poems have appeared in several journals including *A Year in Ink* (Vol. 1 and Vol. 5), *Magee Park Poets Anthology*, and *The San Diego Poetry Annual*. She blogs at www.headwindjournal.com.

David James teaches at Oakland Community College. His second book, *She Dances Like Mussolini*, won the 2010 Next Generation Indie Book Award. His fifth chapbook, *No Way to Stop the Bleeding*, was published in 2014 by Finishing Line Press. More than thirty of his one-act plays have been produced from New York to California.

Brad Johnson has published four chapbooks of poetry, has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize three times, and has had work accepted by *Atlantic Review*, *Nimrod*, *Permafrost*, *Poet Lore*, *Salamander*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and others. His first full-length poetry collection, *The Happiness Theory* (Main Street Rag, 2013) is available at <http://mainstreetrag.com/bookstore/product-tag/brad-johnson>.

John P. Kneal (pen name for John Willoughby) is a longtime writer of poems and novels. Over 65 of his poems have appeared in various poetry journals and anthologies, including *Penwood Review*, *Bitterroot*, and *Western Poetry Review*. His work has also appeared on library websites, in corporate e-news letters, and in You Tube segments.

Richard Michael Levine has written magazine articles for many publications, including *Harper's*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Rolling Stone*, *New York*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Esquire*, where he was a contributing editor and wrote a monthly column on the media for a number of years. He has been a staff writer and editor at *Newsweek* and *Saturday Review*, has received an Alicia Patterson Fellowship, and has taught at the University of California at Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. His bestselling non-fiction book, *Bad Blood: A Family Murder in Marin County*, was published by Random House and New American Library and has been translated into several languages. His poetry has been widely published in literary magazines and anthologies and has been collected in *Catch and Other Poems*.

Lyn Lifshin has published over 130 books and chapbooks, including 3 from Black Sparrow Press: *Cold Comfort*, *Before It's Light*, and *Another Woman Who Looks Like Me*. Before her book, *Secretariat: The Red Freak, the Miracle*, she published her prize-winning book about the short-lived, beautiful racehorse Ruffian, *The Licorice Daughter: My Year with Ruffian* and also her book, *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness*. Recent books include *Ballroom*, *All the Poets Who Have Touched Me*, *Living and Dead*, *All True*, *Especially the Lies*, *Light at the End: The Jesus Poems*, *Katrina*, *Mirrors*, *Persephone*, *Lost in the Fog*, and *Knife Edge & Absinthe: The Tango Poems*. NYQ Books published *A Girl Goes into the Woods*. And some other books just out are *For the Roses: Poems Inspired by Joni Mitchell*, *Hitchcock Hotel* (Dance Macabre), *Tangled as the Alphabet*, *The Istanbul Poems* (NightBallet Press), and *The Marilyn Poems* (Rubber Boots Press). An update to her Gale Research Autobiography is out: *Lips, Blues, Blue Lace: On the Outside*,

Malala (Poetic Matrix Press), and *Femme Eterna* (Glass Lyre Press). Also just out is a dvd of the documentary film about her, *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass*. Her website is www.lynlifshin.com

Shelly Lorenzo-Mott is a Registered Nurse and an adjunct instructor of English. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Saginaw Valley State University and a Master of Arts in Creative Writing from Central Michigan University. She teaches Freshman Writing at SVSU and Medical Ethics at Delta College. She is currently concluding work on her memoir, *Like Sleeping Butterflies*. Shelly has two children, three grandchildren, and is a life-long resident of Saginaw, Michigan. She writes poetry to help make sense of it all.

David McAleavey has recently published poetry in journals such as *Epoch*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Denver Quarterly*, *diode poetry journal*, *anderbo.com*, *Stand*, and *Drunken Boat*. His fifth, most recent book is *Huge Haiku* (Chax Press, 2005). He teaches literature and creative writing at George Washington University in D.C. And he says, "My poem is one example of a 'left-rhyming sonnet,' part of a series I call 'Redeployments.' In each instance, I borrow the rhyme words or sounds of well-known sonnets."

Theresa McCaul-Miller has been writing since she was a small girl, but only in the last few years has her work begun to appear in various journals and magazines.

Michele Markarian is a writer and performer based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her short plays have been performed throughout the United States and UK and are published by Heuer Publishing, Oxford University Press USA, Dramatic Publishing, and Smith and Kraus. Her fiction can be found in anthologies by Wising Up Press as well as online at *Journal of Microliterature*, at *Prompt Litarary Magazine*, in *In her Place: Stories About Women Who Get Around*, and in *The Furious Gazelle*. Michele is a member of The Dramatists Guild.

Jackie Davis Martin has had stories and essays published in a number of print and online journals, including *Flash*, *Fractured West*, *Fastforward*, *34th Parallel*, and *Sleet*. Her most recent work is in *Enhance*, *Counterexample Poetics*, *Fractured West*, *Dogzplot*, *Bluestem*, and *Gravel*. Two stories are anthologized in *Modern Shorts*, *Life Is a Roller Coaster*, and *Spruce Mountain Press Awards*. A memoir, *Surviving Susan*, was published in 2012. She lives in San Francisco and teaches at City College of San Francisco.

Liz Minette lives and works near Duluth, Minnesota, and Lake Superior. Writing for about the past 20 years, some publication credits include *Blue Collar Review*, *PROOF Quarterly*, *Nerve Cowboy*, and *Calyx - A Journal of Art and Literature by Women*. She has a chapbook of poems called *November*. She loves her job at a community access television station in Duluth, and she films and edits video whenever she can. She also dj's once a month for The Women's Music Show on local college radio station KUMD.

Mark J. Mitchell studied writing at UC Santa Cruz under Raymond Carver, George Hitchcock, and Barbara Hall. His chapbook, *Three Visitors*, won the 2010 Negative Capability International Chapbook Competition. His novel, *Knight Prisoner*, is available from Vagabondage Press. He lives in San Francisco with his wife the filmmaker, Joan Juster.

Nancy Carol Moody is retired from the U.S. Postal Service and writes from her home in Eugene, Oregon. She is obsessed with letters and postcards and likes to travel long distances by train. Nancy's collection, *Photograph with Girls*, was published by Traprock Books, and her work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Salamander*, and *Nimrod*. Nancy can be found online at www.nancyCarolmoody.com.

Berwyn Moore is the author of *O Body Swayed* and *Dissolution of Ghosts*, both from Cherry Grove Collections, and editor of the anthology *Dwelling in Possibility: Voices of Erie County*. In 2009, she was named the first-ever Poet Laureate of Erie County, Pennsylvania. She has poems published in

The Southern Review, Shenandoah, Poetry Northwest, Nimrod, Journal of the American Medical Association, Kansas Quarterly, and other journals. Her poems have won awards from *Bellevue Literary Review, The Pinch, Margie: The American Journal of Poetry,* and Negative Capability Press. Her articles have been published in *Public Health Reports, The World and I,* and *Foreign Service Journal.* She is professor of English at Gannon University in Erie, Pennsylvania.

John Noland lives and writes near the ocean in Coos Bay, Oregon. He was born in Kansas and grew up in the same valley his three great-grandfathers homesteaded. He has published in *Chicago Review, Orion, Nature Writing 1999, Georgetown Review, Seattle Review, Laurel Review, Limestone, Big Muddy, Camas, Intricate Homelands,* and other journals. His poem "Three Coyotes" was one of the winners in the 2013 Northern Colorado Poetry Contest. John's most recent chapbook, *Midwestern Trees and Shadows,* was published by Finishing Line Press. A previous chapbook, *This Dark Land Where I Live,* won the Kulupi Press Poetry of Place Contest. His chapbook, *The Caged and the Dying,* won the 2012 Gribble Press Chapbook Contest; poems from it were published in *Jefferson Monthly* (March 2014).

Rod Peckman took 16 years off from writing. He doesn't recommend it as he feels every one of those missing years when he sits down to write. But he's grateful to be having another go at it now. His work has appeared in many online and print journals, including *Juked, The Foundling Review, Barnwood Poetry Magazine, The Boston Literary Magazine,* and *Silenced Press.* He lives about an hour outside of Seattle and has worked for the same library system for a long, long time. As always, he thanks Allie, his yellow lab, for her lust-for-life and companionship, and he thanks D and L for their love.

Richard King Perkins II is a state-sponsored advocate for residents in long-term care facilities. He has a wife, Vickie and a daughter, Sage. He is a three-time Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee whose work has appeared in hundreds of publications including *Poetry Salzburg Review, Bluestem, Emrys Journal, Sierra Nevada Review, Two Thirds North, The Red Cedar Review,* and *December Magazine.*

Sean Prentiss is the author of the memoir, *Find Abbey: A Search for Edward Abbey and His Hidden Grave,* and he is the co-editor of *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre.* He lives on a lake in Northern Vermont and is a professor at Norwich University.

Charles Rammelkamp edits the online journal, *The Potomac,* <http://thepotomacjournal.com>. His most recent book, *Fusen Bakudan* (Balloon Bombs), is a collection of poems involving missionaries at a leper colony in Vietnam. He lives in Baltimore, Maryland.

Nita Ritzke teaches and writes in Bismarck, North Dakota, when not walking her dog Mojo or oppressing her teenage daughter. Her work has been published in *Rhino 14* and anthologized in *Reckless Writing 2011.*

Justin Rogers might be found near normal. Bits of his poetry are scattered about.

David Romanda lives in Kawasaki City, Japan. His work has appeared in *Gargoyle Magazine, Hawaii Review, PANK,* and *Puerto del Sol.*

Michael Sarnowski earned his MFA in Creative Writing from Vanderbilt University where he was a recipient of an Academy of American Poets Prize. His poetry has appeared in *Potomac Review, Memoir Journal, Spry Literary Journal,* and *Foundling Review* among others. He has been a Visiting Writer-in-Residence at Kingston University London and a writing resident at the Vermont Studio Center. He currently lives and teaches in Rochester, New York.

E. M. Schorb has had work published in *The Sewanee Review, Southwest Review, The Yale Review, The Chicago Review, Carolina Quarterly, The Virginia Quarterly Review, The Texas Review, The American Scholar, Stand (UK), Agenda (UK), The Notre Dame Review, The Hudson Review, Rattle,* and *The New*

York Quarterly among others. His collection, *Time and Fevers*, won the Writer's Digest Award for Self-Published Books in Poetry and was also a recipient of the Eric Hoffer Award for Excellence in Independent Publishing. Another collection, *Murderer's Day*, was awarded the Verna Emery Poetry Prize and was published by Purdue University Press. Schorb's novel, *Paradise Square*, was awarded the Grand Prize for Fiction from the International eBook Award Foundation at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2000. *Fortune Island*, a novel, was recently published by Cherokee McGhee; his latest novel is *Resurgius: A Sixties Sex Comedy* (Rainy Day Reads Publishing).

Madeline Sharples is the author of *Leaving the Hall Light On: A Mother's Memoir of Living with Her Son's Bipolar Disorder* and *Surviving His Suicide*. She also co-authored *Blue-Collar Women: Trailblazing Women Take Men-Only Jobs* (New Horizon Press, 1994), co-edited Volumes 1, 2, and 3 of *The Great American Poetry Show*, and wrote the poems of two photography books, *The Emerging Goddess* (Paul Blieden, Photographer) and *Intimacy* (Paul Blieden, Photographer). Her poems have also appeared online and in print magazines, most recently in the Story Circle Network's *True Words Anthology*. Her articles have appeared on the Huffington Post, Naturally Savvy, PsychAlive, Aging Bodies, and Open to Hope websites. She also posts at her blog, Choices, and is currently working on a novel.

Carol Shillibeer lives on the west coast of Canada. After a wildly productive life as an alchemist, she has retired to read Tarot, to stalk Hierocloë Odorata in the lands west of the Pacific Cordillera, and to consider the implications of post-human materialism. Marginally more information (including her publication list) can be found at carolshillibeer.com.

Susan Sonde is the author of *Inland Is Parenthetical, In the Longboats with Others* (winner of The Capricorn Book Award), and *Drumming on Water*. She has had poems in *Cimmaron Review*, *Narrative Magazine*, *The Southern Humanities Review*, *The Mississippi Review*, *The Ohio Review*, *Epoch*, and many others. She was a finalist in the 2014 Narrative Poetry Prize, and her poem "Kinesis with Garden Implements" was chosen by *Narrative* as Poem of the Week. She won The Gordon Barber Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America. And she received grants in fiction and poetry from The Maryland State Arts Council. Sonde has taught at the University of Maryland and the Writer's Center. She lives in Odenton, Maryland.

Raymond Southall has written critical works including *The Courtly Maker* (Barnes & Noble), *Literature and the Rise of Capitalism* (Lawrence & Wishart), and *Literature, the Individual and Society* (Lawrence & Wishart). His poems have appeared in various collections including *Secrets Beneath Stones*, *Sailing in the Mist of Time*, *Across the Bridge*, *Traveling*, *The Argument from Desire*, *Marvelous Disarray*, *Semaphore Dancing*, *Palaces of Reflection*, *Aquaplaning Overhead*, and *Angels on a Shelf*. He lives in Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia.

Meryl Stratford won the 2013 Yellow Jacket Press competition for her chapbook, *The Magician's Daughter*. Her poems have appeared in *Earth's Daughters*, *Connecticut River Review*, *The Enigmatist*, *Blue Hole*, *Snail Mail Review*, and *Comstock Review*. Her poems have also been anthologized in *Adrienne Rich: A Tribute Anthology*, *MALALA: Poems for Malala Yousafzai*, and *The Liberal Media Made Me Do It: Poetic Responses to NPR & PBS Stories*.

Cutter Streeby has lived in England and in Thailand with his wife and two sons. He now works in Great Falls, Montana, as a copy writer. Visit versejunkies.com for translations from around the world.

Melissa Studdard is the author of the bestselling novel, *Six Weeks to Yehidah*, and other books. Her works have received numerous awards including The Forward National Literature Award and The International Book Award. Her first poetry collection, *I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast*, was published in 2014 by Saint Julian Press. She currently serves as a reviewer-at-large for *The National Poetry Review*, a professor for Lone Star College System, a teaching artist for The Rooster Moans Poetry Cooperative, editorial advisor to *The Criterion*, and host of Tiferet Talk Radio. Learn more at

www.MelissaStuddard.com.

M. K. Sukach is the author of *Something Impossible Happens* (Big Wonderful Press, 2014). His poetry and fiction have appeared in a number of journals including *JMWW*, *The Hamilton Stone Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Construction Magazine*, *Yemassee*, and others. Please visit his website at www.mksukach.com.

Dee Sunshine is a Scottish writer, artist, and occasional electronica music maker. In his other life he is a yoga teacher, tantric massage therapist, and care worker. In yet another life he is a new-age gypsy and constant traveller. He manages this by casting magic spells and occasionally photocopying himself, using a 3-D printer which is rudimentary, but it does the job. He has published a few books which you can find through the mighty power of Google.

Paul Suntup has published poetry in numerous publications including *Rattle*, *Spillway*, *Artlife*, *Cider Press Review*, *ISM*, and *180: Extraordinary Poems for Every Day*, an anthology edited by Billy Collins. His first full-length collection of poetry, *Sunset at the Temple of Olives*, was published in 2011 by Write Bloody Publishing. He was born in South Africa and currently lives in Southern California.

Chrys Tobey lives in Portland, Oregon, where she teaches college writing. Her work has been published in many literary journals including *Rattle*, *Smartish Pace*, and *Atlanta Review*.

Vernon Waring is a four-time winner of international poetry competitions featured on Winning Writers' website. His poems have appeared in *Nerve Cowboy*, *Ascent Aspirations Magazine*, and *Poetry Repairs*. His short fiction has been singled out for commendation in *Glimmer Train*, New Millennium Writings Awards, and Soul-Making Keats Literary Competitions. He hails from King of Prussia, Pennsylvania.

Charles Harper Webb teaches in the MFA Program in Creative Writing at California State University, Long Beach. His latest book, *Brain Camp*, was published by the University of Pittsburgh Press in 2015.

Paul Weidknecht has published stories in *Once Around the Sun: Sweet, Funny, and Strange Tale for All Seasons*, the newest anthology by the Behtlehem Writers Group, LLC. Previous publications include work in *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Gray's Sporting Journal*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Philadelphia Stories*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *The Raleigh Review*, *Rosebud*, *Shenandoah*, and *Structo* (UK) among others. He lives in New Jersey where he has recently completed a collection of short fiction. For more, please visit: www.paulweidknecht.com.

Sarah Brown Weitzman is a widely published poet in journals and anthologies. She is the author of a children's novel, *Herman and the Ice Witch*, and three poetry books: *Eve & Other Blasphemy*, *The Forbidden*, and *Never Far from Flesh*. And she received a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship. Please visit her website at www.sarahbrownweitzman.com.

Philip Wexler has published over 130 poems throughout the years. He lives in Bethesda, Maryland, where he also works for the Federal Government. In addition to poetry, he makes mosaics as time permits.

Daniel Williams, a poet of Yosemite and the Sierra for 30 years, has been a frequent reader on Poets West on Thursdays on KSER-FM Radio, at Barnes & Noble in Seattle, at Epilogue Books in Seattle, and at the former Codys Books in Berkeley. He has 5 poems in the Yosemite Time Capsule which is to be opened on Yosemite's 200-year bicentennial. He also has a haiku aboard NASA's MAVEN Martian explorer where the poem will have a quiet existence for the next 3 billion years or until our sun supernovas, whichever comes first. His poems have appeared in many publications including

Yosemite Poets: A Gathering of This Place and 150 Stories in Yosemite.

Larry Ziman says, “The future comes from the present, and the present comes from the past, but nobody knows where the past came from.”

Fredrick Zydek is the author of several collections of poetry including *Lights Along the Missouri* (University of Nebraska at Omaha Press, 1976), *Storm Warning* (Inchbird Press, 1981), *Ending the Fast* (Yellow Barn Press, 1983), *The Conception Abbey Poems* (Lone Willow Press, 1st & 2nd Editions, 1993; The Winthrop Press, 3rd Edition, 2011), *Dreaming on the Other Side of Time* (The Holmes Chapbook Series, Homes House Publications, 2002), *Stumbling Through the Stars* (The Holmes Chapbook Series, Holmes House Publications, 2003), *This Is Not a Prayer* (Pudding House Publications, 2005), *T’Kopachuck: The Buckley Poems* (The Winthrop Press, 2009), *Journey to the River* (Winthrop Publishing House, 2012), and *At the Edge of the Ancient Inland Sea* (The Backwaters Press, 2012). Among other books are *Charles Taze Russell: His Life and Times* (The Winthrop Press, 2009), *Learning the Ways of Coyote* (Rag and Bone Books, 2010), *Old Pinhead* (Rag and Bone Books, 2011), and *The Button Box* (Rag and Bone Books, 2014), a memoir of his grandmother who had 14 children. He was a professor of creative writing and theology at the University of Nebraska and later at the College of Saint Mary, and he was the editor for Lone Willow Press. His work has appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *Cimmaron Review*, *The Hollins Critic*, *New England Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Yankee*, and others. He is the recipient of the Hart Crane Poetry Award, the Sarah Foley O’Loughlen Literary Award, and others. Retired, he lives in Omaha, Nebraska.

Acknowledgments

David Alpaugh: “Electronic Epitaph” first appeared in *Poets On*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1991, later appeared in his poetry book, *Counterpoint* (Story Line Press, 1994), and later appeared in the animated online journal, *Blue’s Cruzio Cafe*, 2009. “Power Grab” first appeared in the online journal, *Strong Verse*, 2013, under the title “Mr. Featherbrains.” “Question Marks” first appeared in *Green Fuse*, No. 15, 1991-92, and later appeared in *Counterpoint*. “Summer Job” first appeared in the online journal, *Mudlark*, Poster Number 65, 2006, and later appeared in his poetry book, *Heavy Lifting*.

Joe Benevento: “Marilyn Meshak” first appeared in *Concho River Review*.

Regina Murray Brault: “Black Autumn” first appeared in *Bloodroot Literary Magazine* in 2012. “From My Own Lips” was first published by Verdure Publications in 1997. “The Last Page” was first published by Wising Up Press in 2008.

John F. Buckley: “Island Living” first appeared in *The Midwest Quarterly*, Vol. LI, No. 4, Summer 2010. “Reconquista” first appeared in his collection, *Sky Sandwiches* (Anaphora Literary Press, 2012).

Alan Catlin: “Our Lady of the Subways” was first published by *Parting Gifts*, 2010.

Robert Cooperman: “Moon over Sixth Avenue” and “Three Kids in the Back Seat of My Cab” first appeared in his poetry book, *Just Drive* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2014).

Philip Dacey: “Girlfriends” first appeared in *Hanging Loose*, #91, Winter 2007. “Found Sonnet” first appeared in *One Trick Pony*, #7, 2002, was reprinted as a broadside in 2003 by Michael Casey and Starshaped Press, and was reprinted in *Vertebrae Rosaries: 50 Sonnets* (Red Dragonfly Press, 2008). “Tinsel” first appeared in *Free Lunch*, #30, Fall 2003, and was reprinted in *Vertebrae Rosaries: 50 Sonnets* (Red Dragonfly Press, 2008).

Lucille Lang Day: “Angenette Sampson” first appeared in *The MacGuffin*, Vol. XXIX, No. 1, Fall 2012. “Edward and Hannah Bumpus” first appeared in *The Wild Goose Poetry Review*, Spring 2006. “The Family Secret” first appeared in *The Tower Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, Fall 2012.

Paul Dickey: “Finger Accessories Discuss the Nature of Woman” first appeared in *Cider Press Review*, Vol. 8, 2007, and was later published by Maypole Press in 2011 in his book, *They Say This Is How Death Came into the World*. “Images Of” first appeared in *They Say This Is How Death Came into the World*.

ellen: “Inn of the Seventh Ray” was previously published in *One Hundred Suns*, #2, Spring 1994, and later appeared in *4 Los Angeles Poets* (Bombshelter Press, 2003).

Curt Eriksen: “Recur” originally appeared in slightly different form in *Radiant Turnstile*, April 2009.

Richard Fenwick: “Council House, Tucson” and “The Tin Chair” were initially published in his poetry collection, *Around the Sun Without a Sail*.

Marta Ferguson: “In Defense of Orgasm: For a Friend Who Has Aesthetic Problems With the Word” first appeared in *The Bedside Guide to the No Tell Motel* (No Tell Press, 2006).

Jonathan Greenhouse: “In His Construction of Internal Rhyme” first appeared in *Nimrod International Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 2. “Ode to a Woman No Longer with Me” first appeared in *Reed Magazine*, Vol. 64.

William Ogden Haynes: “Squirrel” first appeared in *Circa Literary Review*, in April 2013, and was included in his book, *Uncommon Pursuits*, in 2013 (published using the CreateSpace platform). “Two Perspectives on Relaxation” first appeared in his book, *Points of Interest*, in 2012 (also published using the CreateSpace platform).

Linda Hutchison: “The Getaway” was first published in *Sheila-Na-Gig*, Vol. 14, 2000.

Brad Johnson: “Elegy for Patriarchs” first appeared in *Poet Lore*, 107.1/2, Spring/Summer 2012. “How We Made Love” first appeared in *Red Rock Review*, #26, Fall 2010. “Nipple Confusion” first appeared in *Mannequin Envy*, Fall/Winter 2009-10. “Scattering Jay” first appeared in *Steam Ticket*, #13, 2010. “The Dichotomy Paradox” first appeared in *Superstition Review*, #5, Spring 2010.

Noel King: “Wash Up” was previously published in his book, *The Stern Wave* (Salmon Poetry, 2013).

Richard Michael Levine: “A Conversation in Starbucks” first appeared in *North Coast Literary Review*, No. 5, 2013. “A Conversation in Starbucks” and “The Art of Choosing” were published in his book *Catch and Other Poems* (Scarlet Tanager Books, 2015).

Liz Minette: “At Solstice” was published previously online in *What Light*, mnartists.org, July 9th, 2007, later appeared in *Third Wednesday*, Winter 2011, and in the anthology, *Migrations - Poetry and Prose for Life’s Transitions* (Wildwood River Press, 2011), was read over the air on The Beat radio program at KAXE, Grand Rapids, Minnesota, 2013, and later appeared in her chapbook, *November - Poems* (Little Cat Press, 2014).

Nancy Carol Moody: “Circumscription” first appeared in *The MacGuffin*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2, Winter 2011. “On Trying Not to Swallow Her Lover’s Last Excuse” first appeared online in *PANK*, 3.02, October 2008.

Berwyn Moore: “Pheromones” and “River Road” and “Sons and Daughters” were previously published in her book, *Dissolution of Ghosts* (Cherry Grove Collections, 2005).

John Noland: “Kansas Initiation” was first published by *The Midwest Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 1, Autumn 2013.

Rod Peckman: “Morning on the Balcony” first appeared in the online journal, *Ken*again*, in 2008.

Sean Prentiss: “The Axioms of Love” was previously published in *Nimrod International Journal*, 63.1, 2009.

Nita Ritzke: “Guy You Want” was previously published online in *Winning Writers War Poetry* in 2011.

David Romanda: “Freckles” first appeared in *PN Review*, Vol. 38, No. 1, Issue 201, September-October 2011.

Michael Sarnowski: “This Is Not Ukraine, This Is My Apartment” was previously published in *Potomac Review*, Issue 48, 2010. “Where Violence Comes From” first appeared in *Agave Magazine*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2013.

E. M. Schorb: “Manhattan Spleen” first appeared in *Gulf Coast*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Winter-Spring 2004. “Transformations” was first published in *The Wisconsin Review*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, Fall 2000.

Carol Shillibeer: “Accidental Existence” was originally published in *filling Station*, issue 59 (2014). “Shade Garden at Dawn” was originally published in *Written River*, Vol. 3, Issue 1 (2012). “The Far Blue of Desire” was originally published in *Contemporary Literary Horizon* in July of 2013.

Meryl Stratford: “When My Mother Died” first appeared in *Connecticut River Review*, August 2008, and was later included in her chapbook, *The Magician’s Daughter* (Yellow Jacket Press, 2013).

Cutter Streeby: “I Died on a Brilliant Day like This” previously appeared in *Owen Wister Review*, Winter 2013, University of Wyoming.

Melissa Studdard: “Bareback Academy” first appeared in *Open Road Review*, Issue 1, May 2012.

M. K. Sukach: “Bird Box” first appeared in *JMWW*, Spring 2013, and was later included in his chapbook, *Something Impossible Happens* (Big Wonderful Press, 2014). “My Father Now That I’m Twenty” first appeared in *The Breakwater Review*, Issue #8, 2013.

Paul Suntup: “Emily” was first published in his book, *Sunset at the Temple of Olives* (Write Bloody Publishing, 2011).

Chrys Tobey: “Digging a Hole” previously appeared in *Common Ground Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2 and in *Third Wednesday*, Vol. 4, Issue 3. “The Loss of Lemons” first appeared in *Rattle*, Issue 29, Vol. 14, No. 1, Summer 2008.

Vernon Waring: “Someone’s Staring” first appeared in *Poetry Repairs* in 2014.

Charles Harper Webb: “Knock Knock” was first published in *Snail Mail Review*, Issue 7, Spring 2014.

Paul Weidknecht: “Plantation’s Corn” first appeared in *The Comstock Review*, 25th Anniversary Commemorative, Vol. 25, Issues 1 & 2, 2011.

Sarah Brown Weitzman: “Vacant House” was first published in *Steam Ticket*, Vol. XV, 2012.

Philip Wexler: “Two Little Girls” first appeared in *Curbside Review*, August 2001.

Larry Ziman: “Rumor of Romance” first appeared in *Do Hookers Kiss*, #1, 2011.

Fredrick Zydek: “Grandmother’s Cow” first appeared in *The Connecticut River Review* and was later published in his book, *T’kopachuk: The Buckley Poems* (The Winthrop Press, 2009). “The Eagle Sleeping in the Loft” first appeared in *The Mudfish Review* and was later published in *T’kopachuk: The Buckley Poems* (The Winthrop Press, 2009).



Intermission