



**SKIDROW
PENTHOUSE #11**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

- 9 Jim Cory
Two Poems
- 29 Karza Hernandez
Cotillion
- 30 Leopoldo María Panero
(translated by Arturo Mantecón)
The Man Who Ate Nothing But Carrots
- 32 Liz Robbins
Amy, Wanting A New Song, Imagines
- 33 Lauren Lawrence
The American Infantry At A Time Of War
- 34 Jami Macarty
Is There Freedom In No One
- 37 J.J. Blickstein
Two Poems
- 40 Ronald Wardall
True North
- 43 Penelope Scambly Schott
Two Poems
- 45 Laurie Blauner
The Marriage Proposal
- 46 John Goode
Three Poems
- 53 Mark Vogel
Local God
- 54 James Grabill
Two Poems

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 59 Emily Borgmann
Heavener
- 61 Cruz Ortiz
Nights To Which Most Of The People Disappear
- 63 Spiel
Two Poems
- 66 Simon Perchik
.
- 71 Philip Dacey
Four Poems
- 76 Michael Estabrook
Anthony
- 77 Lawrence Applebaum
Dear Harry
- 83 Joel Allegretti
Two Poems
- 85 Ted Jonathan
Three Poems
- 91 Chet Hart
We Remain Lovers Through Every Void
- 93 Anthony Seidman
Four Poems
- 96 Dennis Saleh
Two Poems
- 100 Matt Sapio
Two Poems

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 102 Ruth Moon Kempher
Zinnia Chronicle
- 103 Jean Hollander
Eskimo Death
- 104 Marina Rubin
Two Poems
- 106 Cruz Ortiz
Rooms Tracked To The End Of A Transient's Life
- 112 Michael Estabrook
Kerry
- 113 Robert Pesich
Two Poems
- 116 David Lawrence
Two Poems
- 119 Craig Shay
Playing Dead
- 120 Tony Gloeggler
Two Poems
- 126 Rory Johnson
Walking Home From My Broken Down Car
During The Computer Age
- 129 Guy R. Beining
Four Poems
- 133 Stacia Fleegal
Bavarianna
- 135 Alixa Doom
Cedar Sisters

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 137 Catherine Sasanov
Two Poems
- 143 Heller Levinson
Two Poems
- 149 David Chorlton
Two Poems
- 154 Alan Catlin
The Big Quiet
- 166 Edgar Cage
The Empty Continent
- 169 Paul B. Roth
Six Poems
- 175 Michael Estabrook
Her Scent
- 177 Tracy Thomas
Two Poems
- 181 Stephanie Dickinson
Mother of the Barn Remembers a Dance
- 189 Eileen Brilliant
Do Not Forsake The Shadows
- 190 Stephen Lloyd Webber
Two Poems
- 192 Richard Peabody
Two Poems
- 195 Chocolate Waters
Two Poems
- 199 Crow Billings
Moving Through Fading Firefly Galaxies

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 201 Wendy Hoffman
Two Poems
- 204 Elinor Nauen
from So Late Into The Night

FICTION

- 17 Rosalind Palermo Stevenson
Kafka At Rudolf Steiner's
- 67 Francine Witte
Three Stories
- 107 Deborah Emin
from Scags At Eighteen
- 155 Nava Renek
Snake Eyes
- 182 Stephanie Dickinson
Vallejo to Isabella

Lure
Lore

The wind carries
the
long
Speech
of
Windows



Guy R. Beining

S X 25

in the 3rd movement of Bruckner's 8th heaving
waves of notes crash
across the life boat prow
drenching the doomed crew
in seawater martinis

*

no clean dishes so I serve Tansy
Fancy Feast 'salmon' bits in gluey goo
on old green clamshell ashtray
she does not seem to notice
or if so especially care

*

sparrow lying on sidewalk
beak opens closes opens closes
frowning people step around it
an hour or 2 ago would likely have found it
bathing wings in a particularly delicious puddle of dust

*

Dorothy wore hats of her own creation
talk'd a lot tho only the dull found her dull
enjoyed questioning her guests:
*So, Jim, what do you think
about concrete?*

*

diamondeyed the mantises
wait on the slim branches of the butterfly
bush they could be branches themselves
to the late summer Monarchs
that land to sample the pale purple flowers

CONTINUED

*

Delmore Schwartz. park bench. Washington Square
52? 53? he stares away from the intruding lens
into Hegalian distances his face a trip
thru territory where praise & promise
have become their opposites

*

this heart wore its widest smile
at his offer of a favor
suddenly cheerfully volunteered
it turned out to be
a cheap investment in endless obligation

*

16 years after his death I still sometimes hear
Michael's *yuck yuck* chuckle as if he were
sitting a table away in
the Drag Queen Café or Detox Diner
what is silence but the filtered distillation of remembered noise

*

the weird tyranny of conversational monopolists
resembles the vibe at dictator dinner parties
as if to yield the floor for an instant would cause them
to vanish into the abyss of non-existence
reserved for dissenters in a mental police state

*

a miracle, Emerson would say
the way my mind w/ time's passing
replaced the death mask she wore
for her last 6 weeks w/something kinder
my mother knew me better than I'll ever know myself

*

no I don't have change let alone to spare
unsparing on days I know it'll take
8 or 9 lifetimes
to thaw the iceberg
this city's grown inside me

*

in seconds JoJo'd swing from his perch 30 feet up
tail wound round a limb
thrust forth a wizened, obsidian palm
had a habit of flinging such things as shit when peeved (often)
alone days & years except for feedings

*

Ravinia Theatre. Summer 1970. Janis
in boas bells & beads
carving the sky into chunks w/a broadsword of light
which further investigation reveals to be
merely a microphone viewed thru the prism of lysergic acid

*

snow'd on stepped on swollen frayed
lies by the curb
that black leather glove w/fur interior
dropped or forgotten
one is less than none

*

out the window I spot the somber countenance of
Gus Flaubert glaring
from the creeper climbing the wire mesh fence
a gust of wind dissolves it leaving
a leafy mustache & the usual residue of illusion

*

Sarah liked to give people things
& call years later demanding them back
hon, is that road map of Mongolia still in your apartment?
I need my spiderweb cloud key please...
dropping by to retrieve that trapeze act, okay?

*

eavesdropping on sycamores
whispering in Rittenhouse Square
fascinating to note they share
many of our own concerns as for example the obnoxious nature
of squirrels & that hail, when large, is quite frightening

CONTINUED

*

he's baffled & irritated that I've failed
to forgive that swift kick in the gut
delivered years ago to generosity's foolish pride
believe me, it's not stubbornness
the moment I'm at my ease he'll be aiming his next punt

*

Phil + Claire '76 etched in cement
there on American Street
where has time flung these
young lovers & their misbegotten century
alive? married? mummies in some museum?

*

a friend remarks on my 'wisps'
hair so thin it goes where air takes it
soon the wisps'll be tufts
& the tufts just so much
shoe leather aboard an airless planet

*

that pair of *picoides albolarvatus* seen in the Sierras
nest 10 ft. up a snag, 2 holes near for decoy
piss'd initially at this human intrusion but soon
slipp'd away to return w/ worms larvae
discerning ear could hear the greed of their fledglings

*

writers you can never get enough of
like friends whose company always refreshes
a visit that should never end
Colette for instance how I wish'd she'd written
libraries

*

haven't had sex in 2 or 3 years
no make it 80 what's the difference
my last lay a roll in the hay w/3 spacemen
the one before that featured a horny porcupine
aboard a Ferris wheel in Council Bluffs, Iowa

*

reading Jeffers again so full
of spume & thwarted astonishments
where rage & rhetoric blend
to a seabird scream
piercing the amplified lisp of the Pacific

*

last summer the building owners cut it down
neither bush nor tree, that grows from
the row of brick halfway up the wall there
later they drown'd the stalk in herbicide
today it raises its canopy of green hands to the sun

JIM CORY

MY LIFE AS A SLEEPING BAG

1.

provide waterproof person with a zipper
sleeping sack protective for bottom situations

bivouac used travelers when hill walking
in addition carry wind for tent

2.

“bag”

3.

unzip head allowing heat loss
vulnerable mummy cannot be rolled

straps accommodate a woman’s volume
feature warm air with shape

tapers to escape rectangular blanket
secured feet help prevent camping

4.

[citation needed]

5.

Many different insulating materials are available for sleeping bags. Outdoor professionals usually prefer either synthetic fill, such as PrimaLoft, or down, and they have debated the merits of these materials for years.

6.

A test, relying on a heated mannequin, provides four temperatures:

7.

regular hikers and backpackers agree that
hypothermia weighs less than water on a cold day

a person's weight even when thoroughly soaked
retains the owner's life

newer, more technically advanced drawbacks
are of little consequence dropped into water

on the flipside, synthetic shells take up more space
when not in use

8.

A person in a sleeping bag.

9.

Related topics: nap, nightmare, nocturnal emission, bed bug, polysomnography, siesta, sleeping while on duty



Michael Weston: *The Gates of Ed Gein*

ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

KAFKA AT RUDOLF STEINER'S

Dusk. The fading light. In a short while darkness. The grounds of the sanatorium. The building made of stone; the interior walls also stone, cool to the touch, on cold nights they feel like ice. Out of the shadows, W. Her hand.

Before leaving Prague, in Rudolf Steiner's chambers, I was faced with a dilemma: it was where to put the hat I had removed from my head. I clutched it in a gesture of nervousness. What is your interest in theosophy, Herr Kafka? Steiner asked me. (He will remain in Prague while he delivers his lectures on the subject of attainment of the spiritual worlds). I quickly cited my perplexity. I want to know the spiritual worlds, Herr Steiner, but I'm afraid it will add to the confusion of my life. My soul is split already between my life and my literary interest; I do what is expected outwardly, but inwardly the two are irreconcilable. I noticed a peg on the wall where I might hang my hat, but laid it instead on the wooden stand for lacing boots. Steiner's face: his expression grave, his brows knit together on his forehead.

Taking the waters now at Riva, the Christian girl, W, young, not yet twenty. She is here for treatment of her heart: weak heart activity and a murmur. Throughout the area the cold acidulous springs; the drinking cures: one liter every day. The sanatorium is a naturopathic establishment where I have come for ten days rest.

During lunch, I pass the pages of my story beneath the table to W. The story was written all night in a fury, until the sunrise, the sudden awareness of it becoming light outside the window. W's fingers touch mine then grab on to my story, a slight flush across her white skin. With one hand still beneath the table she is holding the manuscript, and with the other she pushes the food around on her plate. Then in polite conversation with the Russian woman who is sitting on her right. The excitement on W's face when she and the Russian woman turn full towards me to include me in their conversation.

The boats are sitting in a row outside the rowing house. Late at night I examine them again. The oars have been put up and sit stiffly at the bottoms of the boats. The smell of rain in the air, heavy, cool, tomorrow it will rain

and we'll stay indoors. There will be the endless talk with the others about the condition of our bodies, the various ailments from which we suffer. Mine are digestive problems, dizziness, and inexplicable pains that travel through my body. W's smile today when I took her rowing. The calm surface of the lake as I rowed out from the shore, past the ledge which drops off; the lake is deep, just how deep I do not know; the water is black. A black abyss—perhaps three leagues down. An almost insuppressible urge to spring to my feet and leap headlong into the sombrous water. W, the way she smiled at me in the boat. She does not swim, yet was completely at ease in the rowboat.

I am delighted with the bathroom here, the large ornate mirror. The gradual understanding of my condition that seems to come from peering into it. The surface of the brass faucet is polished to a high finish. The water that runs from it has the faint smell of sulfur, a bitter taste each time I clean my teeth. In bed the question of my inability to sleep. The appearance of a ghostlike presence: a boy of nine or ten. He wears a cap, short pants, and a coat almost to his knees; on his face is the most desolate expression: terrible sorrowfulness; resignation and fear; his arms raised in a gesture of surrender. I cannot see what enemy is menacing him, but all night long the boy remains; his arms are bent at the elbows and raised. W's face returns to my mind with the sunlight, the heavy top-drapes parted, the white, sheer under-layer diffusing the light. Yesterday in W's eyes the look for a moment of worry, then changing to excitement.

It is a rarity for so many different springs to be found in a small area as is the case here; quite often one next to the other. Is your room to your liking, Herr Kafka?—your noon meal of parsnips and spinach as well? I am in a hydrotherapy tub in one of the treatment rooms, water from Ledro Spring is being pumped into the tub; my attention is fixed on the apparatus that controls the pumping. There is a bank of pipes along the yellowish wall; faucets and temperature gauges are attached to the pipes. The attendant adjusts the temperature of the water and prepares to leave the room. Herr Kafka, call out if you require my attention. Across from the hydro equipment is a cabinet that contains the basins for the inhalation therapy; dry gas packs that will be released into the basins.

A physical description of W: green eyes, brown hair with a reddish cast and a hint of curl. Her smile when she catches sight of me. One hand dangling over the side of the rowboat. The thin blue lines of her veins. Now, for this time, living completely influenced by W. Inexplicable calm. Followed by a rush of emotion.

The sun comes up. The long, slow lightening of the sky. The sky begins to grow light before the sunrise. On my bed, the stiff, white sheets. Does W sleep throughout the night untroubled? She has never mentioned sleeplessness. She told me she sleeps with my story, *The Judgment*, beneath her pillow. It is a disturbingly sad story, she told me.

Strange the way I'm thinking now of the male impersonator from the Yiddish troupe at the Cafe Savoy. Her enactment of the Wandering Jew. The long spread of her white collar, her hair covered by a hat. There is the song, too, that she sings. That moment when she comes onto the stage as a man. Her voice high-pitched in the style of the cantors. She wears men's short, black trousers, white stockings showing underneath. Her hands on her earlocks. Gooseflesh rising on my neck.

My dream repeats itself: just when it is coming to its conclusion, it returns to the beginning and starts again. I am on the grounds of the sanatorium. There is a thick growth of trees that covers the grounds. The smell of sulfur in the distance from the springs. A deep haze. The sky obscured by the thickness of the haze. I think, at first, they are vapors from the inhalation treatments. But then I realize they are fumes from burning. Ashes carried in the air, a smokestack rising in the shape of a funnel. It is a killing smoke, I shout in the dream. W suddenly appears beside me, she places her hand in mine.

Another water treatment at mid-day. The attendant standing in his white smock. I am immersed in the water and the quiet. A sudden intrusion: the sound of a barking dog. And a slight shock to my body when the water turns colder. In an instant it turns warm again. I am light-headed and tell the attendant, but he makes nothing of it. I am weightless in the water. My limbs as though floating detached from me.

Adam, where art thou? (Genesis). Rudolf Steiner and the Christian underpinning of his mysticism. God doesn't know where Adam is after the fall from light. Adam is gone. The sorrow, the grief of the spiritual world. These words in Steiner's writings: "Dreams rise up out of the ocean of unconsciousness." The word "dream" and I am instantly attentive. I have experienced the clairvoyant state that Steiner describes. I believe a dream I had last night was clairvoyant. The faces of my family rose before me staring straight ahead as in a detail from a painting, my mother and father prominent in the upper right. It was a wretched dream, suffused by helplessness, my mother's mournful face. My father wore dark glasses, the kind that blind men wear. My Uncle Alfred was situated to the left of my father; his head wrapped in dirty bandages. Positioned below my parents, were my sisters, pitiable. Ottla in her hat, a woman's fedora, a little tilted to one side; looking almost ele-

gant except for her eyes: they were starkly open and gaping, the pupils reduced to pin-points as in a blazing light. And Valli and Elli next to Ottla, looking frightened and confused.

In the rowboat W tells me a secret, her face flushed, leaning a little forward towards me in the boat, I have never been in love before, she tells me. Her voice is unexpectedly husky. Excitement shows in her eyes. I continue rowing, the pull of the oars, the way the boat responds to the subtle shift in my attention to the oars. W looks, for a moment, as though she might stand and come sit next to me. Later in our rooms that are adjoined at top and bottom (hers is the one above) we communicate like children by knocking on the floor (her) and ceiling (me with a walking stick from my father's fancy-goods shop). The knocks are a wordless conversation. They start quite spontaneously, I knock first upon hearing her footsteps above me; I experience a kind of frenzy when I hear her footsteps, immediately followed by her answer.

The night of the comets. I prowl the grounds of the sanatorium. It will require an explanation when I try to re-enter the main house: the heavy bronzed door locked, a stern look on the face of the night attendant. Herr Kafka, he will say, what were you doing outside? Come in, come in, the night air will do no good for your condition. But Herr Attendant, I will say, my condition is that I've become a cat, like the strays in the alleyways in Prague. In the sky I see a streak of light, the comet's tail, the milky residue of stars, several flashes in immediate succession. I lay on the ground my face turned upward to the sky. Later, listening to W, in her room above mine; pacing.

Dreams, Steiner writes, are the guideposts to the invisible world, the world that exists parallel to the world of the senses. I think of my recurring dream of articles of clothing that fill the entire room. What do they mean running parallel to my life, all those shirts that dance in the air? With their stiffly starched collars the way my father's shirts are done at home. In my dream they are suspended in mid-air. The room is filled with shirts. All at once the sound of fluttering, like a bird—as though a bird has gotten into the room. W enters the dream dressed as a man like the male impersonator from the Yiddish troupe. Her hair is hidden beneath a hat, she wears men's trousers, the trousers come to just above the ankle. Beneath the trousers white stockings and small, pointed patent leather shoes. There is a photograph of Steiner on the cover of the book: his gaze is reflective (as though looking deeply inward) and ruminating (giving the impression he is taking everything into himself).

A contretemps tonight in the dining room, an awkward mix-up in the table assignments, in the seating arrangements at the tables. Those of us at the table are left feeling a little embarrassed. But then quickly everything is

sorted out. Violins are part of the dinner entertainment. The lead violinist is a short man, balding. W sits across from me. She is like a schoolgirl tonight, alternately shy and excitable. A faint smile on her face while the introductions are being made for the entertainment. I smile too, one of those completely false smiles. The music is some kind of romantic air that holds W transfixed, her body leans towards mine. The desire to die in this moment, in its perfection.

Today the Russian woman tells fortunes with cards at the afternoon tea. When it is W's turn the fear of hearing her future drains all traces of color from her face. She is wearing a light blue chemise made out of a fabric that shimmers in the late noon sun. The Russian woman turns the cards over ceremoniously, in that way of fortune tellers. First the cards say that despite her illness, W is to live a long and comfortable life. And then the melancholy news that this life will nonetheless, be lived alone. I feel my heart beating wildly. I have already explained to W that we cannot continue beyond the days of our stay here at Riva—love bound to the physical is false love. I cannot live the life that would be required if W and I were to continue. And even if that were not true, what could we hope for? The gradual diminishment of love and of passion? The fate of everything that seeks to preserve itself in the world. W has acceded to this view. She has agreed that for our love to be preserved, we must let go of it. When our stay here has ended, there will be no visits, no letters, no pictures; we will not even speak each other's names. Yet now this pronouncement of the cards makes me feel forsaken.

The necessity of enduring life alone, and still the inability to bear it. Staring down at my fingers. A vague presentiment of the life that will be mine. And then recalling last night's dream: the appearance of Steiner, another visit to him, but this time a dream visit. The entrance to his study was dark, darker than it is in reality, and narrower too. There was an old woman in the dream; impossible to describe the effect she had on me. Pointing a finger in my direction. The old woman had also come to see Steiner, but she told me to go in ahead of her, to take all the time I needed, a tone of self-pity in her voice.

There is a chill in the air; we are drinking tea with lemon. I watch as W lifts the cup to her lips. The others sitting with us at the outdoor table are in animated conversation—the time spent in between the tubs and the treatments. We recognize that here we are our own community, although a strangely sad one. We live on and do not die from our complaints, but nonetheless we are separated from the lives of healthy people. The way my poor constitution—particularly my weak digestion which requires that I adhere to the most abstemious diet—has created an insurmountable barrier between myself and my family. My father is as strong as a lion. My mother and my sisters, too,

are healthy. Especially my youngest sister, Ottla; despite her robust health I'm closest to her. How alike the two of us, Ottla and I. How impossible we find it to give ourselves over to human relationships. And yet the way our inability to do so defeats us. But now here, in this community, illness provides a common bond and the varied nature of the ailments is endless. Like the pain I feel this minute in my left shoulder.

Outside the window, branches threaten to break the glass, the wind of an approaching storm, the dark sky, W trembles, we have all come back inside and the conversation now continues in the salon, soon the dispersal of various parties to go to their rests, their treatments, their afternoon naps. Lingered with W, soon the room will be empty, the lake water violent, impossible to think we might go rowing. We watch like children out the window as the wind lashes at the trees. Thunder now, and lightning. W is pale in the dim light of the salon. I remain motionless.

The most important thing about death, Steiner writes, is what happens after; it is in the part that survives. Can we experience in life the state we will encounter after death? Yes, through one's clairvoyance it can be perceived while one is here. Steiner explores his subject in what he calls a scientific spiritual way: sound judgment and clear thinking must first be present, serious exercises and self-control; we cannot wait for clairvoyance to come to us like a dream. Nonetheless that is precisely the way my clairvoyance comes to me: in my dreams where I observe; innocent, abandoned as a child in the deepest darkness.

The intensification of my intimacy with W. Tonight I sat on the windowsill and called to her window above mine. She leaned out and we talked that way, softly, so as not to be heard by those in the adjoining rooms. Promises to steal away from the others tomorrow. Now in my bed with my heart beating too quickly. Lying on my back facing up towards the ceiling.

An encounter with the Russian fortune teller. She is without her cards, but I have no desire to know my future. Somewhat older, still attractive, reminds me of the actress in the Yiddish troupe, Mella Mars at the Cabaret Lucerna. Mella Mars, one of the great tragediennes. Her death scene makes us weak. Each night she dies for the man she loves, and we men in the audience substitute ourselves for the man who has caused her heartbreak. The Russian woman has that same theatrical air, deeply sensual, playful in the way that comes after the dependencies of youth. Intimation of the fulfillment of a dream: to be completely in such a woman's hands. But all possibility of its realization given up (gladly, without thought) for W.

In my mind these images of W: a single transparent hand, her green eyes intent on watching me. Her hand moves as if to touch me; it disappears, then it appears again and reaches for my face. In the distance W appears for real, the light behind her, dressed in white. As she approaches I can see her smile. She walks as if floating. She draws nearer. Love with W fully realized.

It is not we who see the dead. (Steiner writing on the subject of the presence of the dead.) The dead see us. We can only feel ourselves to be perceived by them. To be accurate, Steiner tells us, it must be stated this way: we experience the being of the dead and can feel it.

W wearing a hat to keep the sun off her face, the wide brim casts a shadow. She is quiet today, all my attempts at humor fail, but she touches my hand and asks to go rowing. On the lake, weeds grow along the shoreline. The middle is deep; it is boasted how deep, there is the ledge, which drops off, the sign with a warning to swimmers. W drags her hand in the lake water as we push off from shore. She confesses she is afraid of water, of drowning. In the distance one of the nurses is walking along the shoreline. The boat tilts a little to one side. W grabs on to the boat and then regains her composure. We are still on the ledge; I can feel the bottom with my oar.

A brief spell of dizziness while telling W about the study of San Sebastian that I posed naked for as a favor to the artist, Ascher. I tell her perhaps to see her cheeks flush, which they do, with excitement and at the same time with embarrassment. The dizziness increases and I put my head down, W asks what the matter is, I say it is nothing and raise my head up. She does not believe it is nothing and insists we go inside. It is almost time for her treatment. Hers will be the hydrotherapy. Mine is something else, electrical stimulation to the extremities, both the hands and feet.

The red-cheeked nurse attending me (a woman) pulls at my feet and toes as she applies the little pads, and then the nodes of the electrical wires. Her attention to her work; she is all efficiency, moving briskly back and forth between me, on my back on the narrow bed with my naked legs and feet stretched out before me, and the sterile-looking white counter with the electricity cabinet hanging above it. She fiddles with the electrical controls. Are you quite comfortable, Herr Kafka? A few precise calculations and the machine starts to hum. I stare at the wires that hang out from the cabinet, encased in their pale, orange-colored tubing. The dials and gauges for measuring the current. What would happen, Frau Attendant, if too much current were to be directed through the wires? You would go poof in smoke, Herr Kafka. But at von Hartungen we know how to control the flow of the current. A surge of optimism brought about by thoughts of W. I am barely aware of the electrical manipulations to my feet.

The emphasis Steiner places on the ether body. The ether body, he maintains, is the subtle body between the mortal body and the soul. In death our entire life is retained in the ether body. I close my eyes. In the death I see there are only devastated landscapes; the sound of crying out as at the moment of dying; and then the great long sobs of the living.

The day of parting drawing near. W pale at breakfast this morning. She tells me she is worried about so many things—that out of her sight I will forget her; that she will not be able to live the life that follows when I am gone. She puts these worries before me without a trace of recrimination. The only happy thought she has, she tells me, is that the fortune teller shall prove correct, that she will live her life alone if it must be without me. In the afternoon we go rowing. W describes the effect that the water has on her, in the middle of the lake, so deep and at the bottom darkness. Is that a place we might exist? She asks. The purity of her emotion, the delicacy of her arms in the sleeveless shift when the shawl falls away. And I, in my role of the practiced rower, staring straight ahead at W. The strain of the oars as I row. W continues to gaze into the water, her shawl in folds on the seat of the rowboat. The desire to let my cheek come to rest against hers, or in that place above her shoulder, just below her chin. One of W's bare arms dangles over the side of the boat, I have put the oars up so that we can drift, we are the only boaters on the lake, drifting; imperceptible movement of the current of the lake.

In the evening an entertainment, this time a burlesque, similar to those performed in the small cafes in Prague. The actors enter, an initial note of uncertainty, the bright lights harsh on their faces. There are two actors, a man and woman, curiosity as to what will follow. W is seated next to me. Professor G on her right. The Russian woman, tonight a table away; she winked at me when I took my seat next to W. W doesn't laugh, not even at the most farcical jests of the actors. There is a moment during the entertainment when she bends towards me and whispers something. I cannot hear because of the laughter of the audience. W thinks that I have heard what she has said, smiles a small conspiratorial smile, meets my eyes with hers, seems especially satisfied, turns away from me and back to the stage, the slightest brushing of my wrist with her fingers. I speak W's name. She turns towards me and leans closer. I take note of the abandon in her gesture. She seems not to care who sees us. I speak her name again, more softly this time; she looks away and stares at her hands on the table in front of her.

Now in our respective rooms, knocks, footsteps, more knocks, more footsteps, then sitting on the window ledge, some childish calling up, ribbons lowered from her to me, the fear of waking the others, my exhaustion, I follow every movement she makes in her room, my body tense, resisting

sleep as is my habit, a chill in the air, chilling my room through the open window, the pattern of knocks a language of its own, like a series of spoken words, but a language that cannot be translated, I hear W as she walks across the room, other sounds as though objects are being moved, soon quieting down, I stare up at the ceiling and then close my eyes.

Disturbing dream of the brothel. The Madame appears without a smile, she is a stocky woman dressed in black. I have come with Max, Oscar B, and Ernst. The front parlor with the shutters lowered, a little musty but everything well-ordered. The whores parade in, scantily dressed in their work clothes. The first awkward moments, a sense of timidity, my impulse to leave. Ernst pushes me forward, Max and Oscar B are grinning. There is the odor of talc and perfume. One of the women stares at me (her hair flat against her head). And then the sudden shock of seeing W. She is standing towards the rear among the whores. Her child-face is painted and she is half-clothed in a transparent shift through which I can see her entire body. She looks at me uncomprehendingly, without recognition and yet it is clear to me has forgotten nothing, not even when Ernst, who is wheezing, leads her off to one of the rooms.

When I wake, I'm afraid: the knowledge of my life, of what it must be.

Overheard this morning on the way to the treatment room. "Herr Doktor, I seek to know more about the condition of my disease. I have eaten nothing but eggs for a week and still not the slightest improvement." Later, after my treatment, taking photographs with the others for Irene Bugsch's scrapbook. The photographs were taken outdoors against a stand of trees, behind us the mountain peaks, the sky clear, blue, small billows of haze hovering over the peaks. W was not part of the picture taking. The usual posing, herding together to fit inside the frame, everyone staring impassively, Irene Bugsch with her hand on her hip.

Afterwards resting. In my room again reading Steiner. We must immerse ourselves in the otherness, Steiner tells us; a few drawings scattered throughout the book, primitive illustrations that resemble my own stick-figure drawings. The book is an examination of the development of human consciousness: Steiner leading us to the precipice where we are to take the next leap forward and enter fully into the higher state of consciousness. Already I have the sense of the gathering darkness despite the fact it's early in the day. Everyone in a solemn mood at the sanatorium because of the death of the patient, Shauder. They have aired out his room. The airing out of death; that is, the attempt to bring air into the place death has been. Entering the treatment room this morning, I experienced this vision; the vision ran

parallel to my actual entrance into the room: first a menacing chamber at the end of a path banked with stones; it was a long, narrow path which led to the chamber's rectangular black opening. On the other side, inexorable night, bottomless and unforgiving. I hear W singing now, in her room above mine, always unexpected the huskiness of her voice.

It is the day before W's departure. Her tears when we are alone out by the rowing dock. Brilliant sunlight, unimaginable sadness. And yet the effect of excitement. We walk around the grounds instead of rowing. W apologizing for her tears. She tells me it is as if a sentence of death has been handed down to us, irrevocable. She weeps uncontrollably. I take her hand to calm her. Remember all that we've promised, I tell her; our vow to share a perfect love: our love exists no matter where we are, fully realized outside the material world; it is timeless and beyond the reach of life and death. W looks up at me and responds: It has been ordained by the Russian fortune teller, her cards. She becomes more composed now; there is much discussion of the greatness of our love.

The old man is sitting under an umbrella, his face in profile, drooping chin and shoulders; he has come fresh from the baths with his skin still pink; I'm amazed at the way he is able to sleep in the open in the daylight. Inside my head a thundering scream. But detached, without cause; that is, without a cause I can apprehend. The sun is shining; it is very warm now. I stand with my arms folded in front of me.

The scheduled departure of W in the afternoon, imminent, certain. She has not yet come down from her room. Earlier this morning the sound of her footsteps. From five o'clock I lay awake listening. Now the others trail by on their way to the treatment rooms. I have canceled mine pleading dizziness, too light-headed today for the tubs. Eager for W's appearance, anxious, dreading that moment of parting which must come. I have done nothing all morning but watch for her, yet when she appears she takes me by surprise. She is already dressed in her traveling clothes, a gray silk jacket over her skirt and blouse, and a hat that is charming. The hat has a veil, which she has not pulled down over her face. There is time for one last walk, the woods damp from a heavy rain in the middle of the night, the smell of earth, everything damp under foot. W expresses some concern about her shoes, yet is insistent we continue walking. Her delicate, narrow face, the open expression, that way she has of staring directly at me.

In the woods with the sun breaking through and shining midst the branches of the trees. W's face lit by the sun. Her eyes shielded by one hand, the other I take in mine. A solemn oath to love always.

Walking back through the woods to the main house of the sanatorium. The smell of the wet earth reminds me of death—into the earth that will receive us. The way the graves will open at the last judgement. Bodies sitting up in amazement. We will know who we are then. My foreboding of a malevolent future lately rips continually at me. Hands stretch out before me, the hands of those lost to me and to the world; a woman's face; behind her, others. W's luggage has already been brought down. Her family has arrived to accompany her home.

Her family sits at the table at lunch. I am with them as a stranger. As one who has no real place among them. As one who longs for a real place among them. W stares at the food on her plate, pushes it around, lifts the fork to her lips but does not eat. Twice her eyes fill up with tears, but she does not let them fall. I wonder does her family notice. Her father is in conversation with Professor G. The latter's usual appetite, huge, voracious. Her father does most of the talking in a steady stream of words, occasionally directing some of them at me, I nod, perhaps inappropriately, too distracted to comprehend what he is saying. W's mother smiling. The family will depart after lunch, taking W with them.

And I, always the clown, it falls to me to prevent W from breaking into tears and weeping openly in front of her family. My limpid jokes amuse her, amuse the entire family, especially W's younger sister who is beginning to form an attachment to me. W's green eyes. Her mother's attention to her. Commenting on the progress her daughter has made with her health. Her mother has the same green eyes as W. W is like a child with her mother. I imagine, for a moment, that I, too, am that woman's child, and in that way of the same blood as W. W perhaps reads my thoughts, the flush on her cheeks, the high color.

And then the walk down to the landing pier where the family will board the steamer. The women in the farewell party embrace W. Vigorous shaking by the men of her father's hand. W's eyes remain fixed on me.

W at the rail of the steamer.

Some silly frantic waving by her younger sister. The steamer pushes off. Watching until the boat is out of sight.

To be reminded now of W continually.

On my return to Prague, I again visit Steiner; I put the question to him: what remains? What remains of one's experience? What will remain? Steiner's

usual grave expression. That way he has of not answering a question. My hat sitting again on the stand for lacing boots. If I could have continued with W beyond the ten days at Riva there might have been some chance for me. I have dramatized it in my mind as my last chance. And still the question what will remain? Of what has been. Of what will be. Mella Mars at the Cabaret Lucerna. Madame X, the male impersonator in the Yiddish troupe. Max on his wedding night, the excitement of the brothels. My father in the end helpless in his nightshirt. My mother whose only wish was to keep me alive. And my sister Ottla in her tiny row house behind Hradžany Castle. Franz, she said, come Franzie, I have found the nicest house for you to live in. It is small, but it will suit your needs. It is one of the row houses that belong to the Castle. And then the pity of Ottla at Auschwitz. Where she will die. Where Valli and Elli will also die—but before that will be my own death. And before that will be my last dream. A ridiculous and meaningless dream. It will be of shirts, a strange sight to see them. Shirts of the kind I used to wear. Floating all around me in the room. What do they mean? *Too late. The sweetness of sorrow and of love. To be smiled at by her in the boat. That was the most beautiful of all. Always only the desire to die and the not-yet-yielding; this alone is love.*

KARZA HERNANDEZ

COTILLION

She put on weight to bring in the flowers blue and dumb in their lamb skin. *Listen*, Dad hissed, *Will they be Mexican by tomorrow afternoon? All our beauty rituals fail*. Daughter remained on the couch, vivid and remarkable, a bag packed with her earlier skins. On television a spliced and edited girl was skipping rope on the roof of the Hollywood Mission. Dropping her net down to the lower quadrants daughter found a boat under the morning coats; she saw in the tiny skiff that nobody had ever died: the grammar school ballplayer shot in front of her house, Mrs. Babcock, Noah, Hannibal's army, they simply moved on until winter hit, then stopped and built their cities.

Daughter found intuition with vegetable salts, magnolia blossoms, the phone's terraces, a whole explanatory industry. She asked Dad quickly: *Is that cancer?* Both were attending an outdoor cotillion—everyone wore old money, their eyes like rooms buried under the plantation ruins. The midwives and the help were out back moaning in the feed bags, though a few lucky ones had gotten away on the last tractor out. *I've heard tell of women piloting weather shots of the Carolina coast for a million a month*, Mr. Vandersteer bellowed from his sheep-fleece patio. Dad kept cool watching children pass into mergers and fears. Slaughter shows migrated north, katydids nursing in the long beaches of their shadow.

The cotillion lasted a week before the tundras came. The guests continued gossiping between sips of apple wine. Daughter panicked: *Father where are you? It's dark and the sun will take days to get here*. Up north the moon was drowning under the New England Harbor. Common thieves remained in their rabbit hutch, gaudy and Victorian. Dad was nowhere: his parakeet plotted tripwires across the chasms of his bedclothes on Gunyon Avenue that morning.

LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

(TRANSLATED BY ARTURO MANTECÓN)

THE MAN WHO ATE NOTHING BUT CARROTS

The man who ate nothing but carrots
got so he could not even shut his eyes at night,
and they were two lighthouse lamps
shining out to no purpose,
and he knew only but to gaze and stare,
the man who ate nothing but carrots.

The man who ate nothing but carrots
wandered through the fields doing battle with rabbits
in the pursuit of his accursed carrots.

The man who ate nothing but carrots
was afraid of too much light,
of too much sun that burns,
exposes, makes naked and harasses
in the midst of the carrot field,
and so he lived
in an obscure and shallow rabbit warren,
coming out only now and then
to look for his carrots.

The man who ate nothing but carrots
was capable of murder, of theft,
and they say he did away with his wife
over just one carrot.

The man who ate nothing but carrots
would come out in the afternoon,
which is the time of the carrots,
and at night, and during the day, and at dusk
he could be heard screaming,
calling out to the carrots.

The man who ate nothing but carrots
had red hair and long fangs
to break and rend the carrots,
and he had long legs, the better to run
because he feared men even more than the sun,
and such was the man who ate nothing but carrots.

LIZ ROBBINS

AMY, WANTING A NEW SONG, IMAGINES

herself working in erotic movies—
a bad geisha girl in *The Golden Fork*—
her face, blank-page white, her fingertips, rubies.
She whines, the man above moves as clockwork,
drives into the black orchid wither
that lasts centuries, through white-hot crystal
meth snowfall. She zooms and bucks, hears zithers—
three-thousand-string pluck counting up total
years spent bent over in red wigs, dark edges.
Next she'll play Nicole in *O.J. Gets Juiced*
and each day, sours, each day, snaps, pledges
she'll quit the torn bed, the human sluice.
But then in her fist, bills. All the leaks,
contained. Everything held. What Amy seeks.

LAUREN LAWRENCE

THE AMERICAN INFANTRY AT A TIME OF WAR

for Monte

By 1944 the boot prints
Made an inroad,
Taking two yards by dawn—
It was this slow.
The trees, unusually still.
*The first leaf that moves
Gets it in the head.*

In the moonlight, the tinsel bones glow like lit windows.
Like someone is still up inside.

*The explosions lie about the pain
Until they hit you.*
There are legs of the fallen that want to march
To their hobbled cries.

The war wears thin in the snow.
There are patches of grass where the soul is made serious.
The young men look at their hands.
My uncle screamed he let the ammo go
When he fought on the front line
And left his little trace of ash.

He was the resistance.

JAMI MACARTY

IS THERE FREEDOM IN NO ONE

I exhale all the way to the sun.
First day of February
whiskey on the hip
and Camels no filter.
I hide under a single lane bridge.
Graffiti skulls
drawn to laugh dumbly
mock the ramparts and
chomp the air.
Here
is as good a place as any
to say goodbye.
I spit.
I finger grass.
My actions change nothing.
Trace afternoon plays me
love ending.
A car approaches the bridge.
But stops. Reverses.
I hold the smoke
until my knuckles burn.
Good. I say.
I break glass.
I run at cows.
The wind distills
but inaudible
hawk at high slant.
Is there freedom in no one?
The Air Force drags my ears.
Twenty ounces of sun left in Wednesday.
I drink two hundred years of American
history. Leave the cap off.
We liquidate. We door-to-door
ourselves. Auction off secrets.

I
slow
time.

Creosote.

Arroyo: Acrid. Genital.

Blowing dust area.

My split riveted
to my want.

A crack of earth in my hand.

A domestic blend on my ankle.

Drunk. The narrow and dread
oversized. Hesitation
nor intention of feet.

I respond
correspond
to zero.

I favor the edge
and letters from.

The comeback endings
strike in me
God.

I squat.

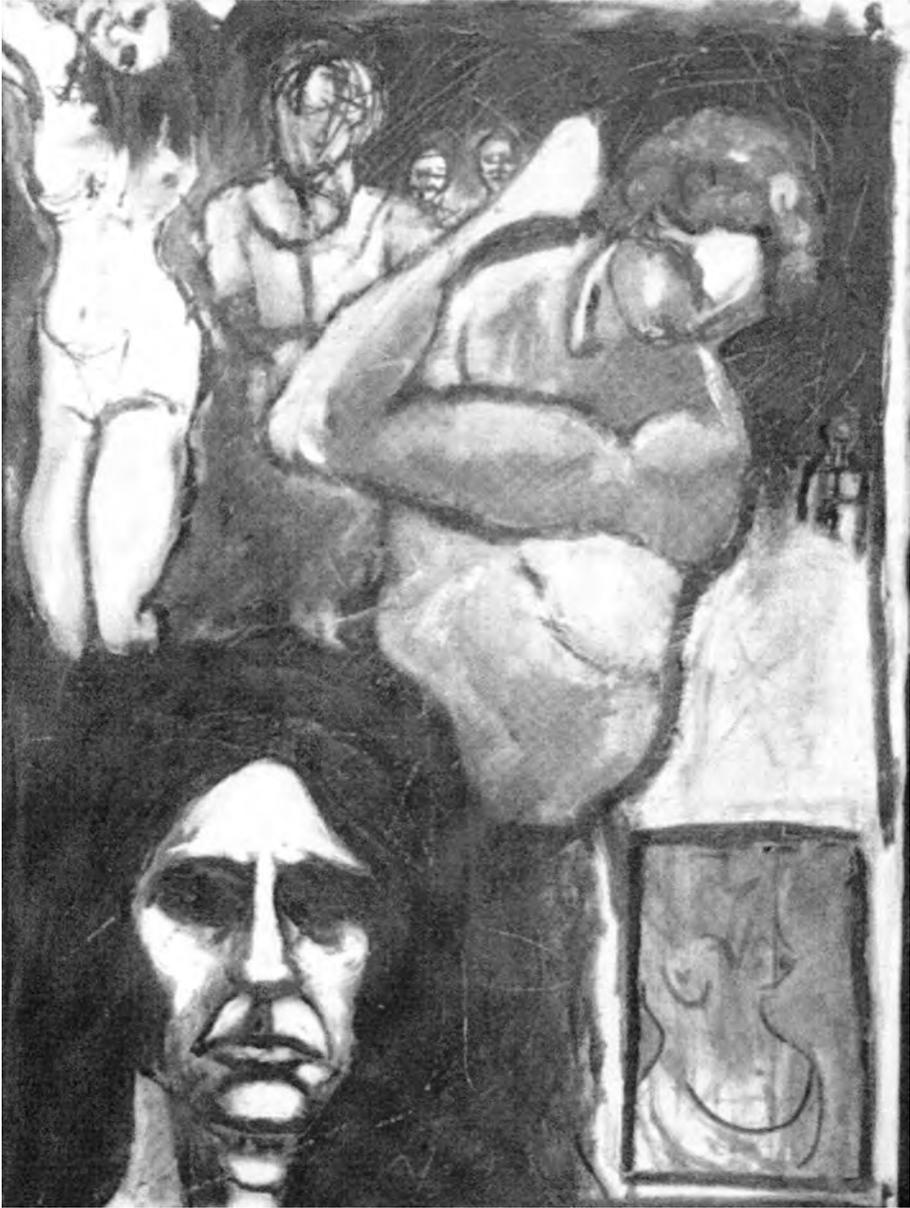
The coyotes smell me here.

Stitched closer to the sun
way out west

I have not heard from you.

I hear not.

I blow my own haze.



Michael Weston: *Cannibals*

J. J. BLICKSTEIN

PINK AND DARK SEWER WITH A FISTFUL OF FLIES

One in fatigues
a corpse
his jaw
artificial hinge
makes a lot of noise in the wind

Another one in a business suit
tells the corpse that he is a patriot
his fingers charred to stumps
that he refers to as unproven commodities
head, a black dog—his shoes are beautiful

The third is naked and betrays civilization
with his certitude, solitude, protests, caves and torn skin
he can't move forward, his mind fixed on the horizon
his bitch tied to a red string sleeps at his feet
his expression—where the face used to be—gnarled wood
he used to be a runner

They sit down around a fire in the dark
discussing provenance and authenticity
they dispense with hierarchy and share a little bit
turning rhetoric into a mercenary
and you into a murderer
where freedom is an act of annihilation

CONTINUED

And here I am
always uninvited, no surprises
other than the fact
that I keep showing
up
a necessary part of the social order
meant to be ignored
or absorbed

a love affair with a ghost
sugar on your scabs
let's pretend it's all a metaphor
where you giggle a little bit
and I love the opposition like
you love yourself

J. J. BLICKSTEIN

DEMONS, WEDDINGS, LOSERS AND THE GOOD LIFE...

If you lay out the bodies in a chaotic fashion, pour white paint over everything, then step back a mile or two and call it a field, new instincts are born. If you cut your hand open with a blade, squeeze and throw your blood around—nothing happens, you just bleed. The dark would never have become this important if someone or something didn't always get away, in the end. Maybe we just surrender when abstraction becomes eternity and we don't. Maybe we just get tired of carrying all that history in the bone where we work so hard just to learn how to stand up, or motion, and the clock, measuring all kinds of, and too many particulars, smudges us back incessantly to where longing just begins. So we measure and weigh everything possible, with the wrong mind, and overwhelm ourselves with consumption as if we could become everything or anything other than what we are. Maybe we take pity on mercy or evidence or arrogance but the dogs that gnaw at everything you want to love are dumb in a way that allows them to spring from the dark with all that authority because they don't question a damn thing. They eat all your music when you dream too slow. You talk in your sleep until the ending changes without your consent and then you remember that there is a demon guarding the bowl of fruit in the middle of your bed and a skeleton for every seed—your sweat gorged on a secret in the grain of the sheets. It's too quiet to pretend and there is too much color to stagnate reality so you sing the melody backwards to gain control over memory and inevitability but the only thing altered is your understanding, so you pimp the soil for clean water until it's too deep to ignore, and then the birds find you, and then come all the pretty girls, then the cities built from everything you disposed of...the dogs sleeping at your feet on a boat too small for revolution.

RONALD WARDALL

TRUE NORTH

From open boxes, the frosted heads
of red snappers play peekaboo
above their ice blanket berths, smooth
cheeked & jowl to jowl, barbershop quartets
ready to harmonize. But the only tune
they know is the deep silence of the sea.

The headlight landing deck of
the 2 AM Fulton Fish Market criss-crosses
hooked hands, refrigerator trucks, lifting forks
on wheels with names: Toyota, Hyster,
Clark, Kalmar, run in & run out.
Frost-steamed boxes stand at parade rest:

10 feet high, 60 feet wide, on each side.
Israel kosher sea bream, Kittery
shell fish, orange roughy & little necked
clams from New Zealand, & salmon
from New Brunswick, salmon
from Norway, salmon from Chile.

Off the—bright as grandmother's kitchen—workers'
rink, the 18 wheelers, having
slid through the buttered night, stand glistening
in shadow with a massive quiet, steel
sharks steeped in the cold sweat business,
come from Tidewater, Chelsea, Waterloo.

I walk among all the bright things entering
leaving waiting, things packed & stacked,
lifted & shifted, among red hands handing out
cups of steam & taking wet change,
among the silver starers
taken out of school during lunch break.

Then I sip tequila in mahogany shadows, watch
seaswell arms pile the December catch
against 7 years of famine
where every night compass points, the Rome
where all sea roads come,
or should, the X in true north.

Dressed for weather 20 degrees below
what's recorded in Central Park,
the unzippers of the night drive and walk,
the iced-gut skaters—moon polished,
high-collared, low-capped,
the frost-breathers, anonymous as their cargo.

The kissers of sleeping children,
those who walk stocking-footed
up & down their own stairs, helping
to turn water into bread, the silver knitters,
the lost men of Odysseus, grown modest
and undrowned, the cloud-walkers come home.



Michael Weston: *Four Dimensional Woman*

PENELOPE SCAMBLBY SCHOTT

MAGPIE LECTURES ME ON TAOSEÑO ARCHITECTURE

When I stroll past adobe houses,
Magpie conducts architectural tours:

*Tía, pay close attention:
I have painted my gates blue,
I have painted my door frame blue,
I have painted my window frames blue*

so that no Evil can pass through.

*Yup, Magpie, I notice.
Shall I paint my lips the same blue?*

Knowing you, Auntie, it won't work.

*Well, then fuck it, Magpie,
and fuck you too.*

*Tía, for shame.
I should wash out your mouth
with these red hot peppers.*

*Maybe you should;
I might learn some new words:*

*Fuego. Diablo. Inferno.
Belleza. Despair.*

It seems like you already know them, Tía.

Magpie is right. Again. And again.

I found those words under sage brush
out where the houses end.

PENELOPE SCAMBLY SCHOTT

MAGPIE IS NOT CHINESE

Four magpies peck in the dry grasses;
they rush at each other in short bursts.

They all look alike. Which one is mine?

Three magpies peck in the weeds.
One magpie comes to the aspens:

*Tía, don't you know me by now?
My particularly viridian tail?*

She stabs her beak toward me,
pissed.

*What do you think?
That we're all Chinese and look alike?*

*Magpie, I'm sorry. My mother
was carved out of cactus*

*so I only know God
when she scratches my face.*

LAURIE BLAUNER

THE MARRIAGE PROPOSAL

A scream resided inside Natalie. She didn't know its name or where it lived. But she imagined it pacing across ice that might break at any minute. She had led Nate to rooms that recalled only him. Rooms that had been museums from the get-go. Nate was deciduous. She believed there were other ways of being held in all that cold, during the seasons that changed their minds. Natalie told herself stories. There was one about Natalie arguing with her flowers, pulling them up, and politely offering them to clouds. Who was listening? *Repeat after me*, she uttered to no one. There was the story describing how she was always new, even among the rooms that didn't work correctly. She wanted to scream until all her dreams had dissipated. Instead she fell onto her knees on the thin earth and whispered, *Stay with me*.

JOHN GOODE

THE WANDERERS

She inhaled vacuum cleaner products, militant powders,
clenched on after-burn.
All day she walked the streets like jungle rot; canary feathers
laid out in her mud-streaked wake.
She spewed newspaper articles in cigar butted circles
while winter beat like an excuse.
She found me on the ground recycling Mesozoic verbs,
clutching at ghosts.
The ghost of anger. The ghost of regret. I conjured
the hypothalamus burn.
Through Batman monopolies we trudged
dragging our wounds like payphones.
Placing quarters on each other's tongues, we spoke:
This is blood. This is envy.
Rage made its own music from the skinny neck of a guitar.
The seasons turned into deer.
Static bums lampooned the corner chewing on time,
"You are white children. You have no truck with pain."

Street lights, insomniac and jaundiced, sizzled in gnat clouds.
Mosquito eggs rotted on the wire
and cement colored birds chortled to the dirge of Bread.
Buses washed up
in puddles of dirty moonlight. A third shift zombie
with eyes like dreaming foxholes
clung to the factory map in his head reciting vampire spells:
"Blessed is the storefront...
Blessed the slaughterhouse bell...
Blessed is the job..."

We sickened in the currency of sleeplessness. Erudite slaves
to Ishtar potions and streetmade elixirs.
We watched the state of Iowa sink like a moored vessel
in the Jewel parking lot;
picket fences sticking up
out of the debris like fractured bones. Insatiate and vulnerable,
we moved through small towns ionized
by a baleful sun. She craved bartenders, bowlegged,
with rustic mustaches and metacarpul tattoos.
I typed neutered love letters to Mexico while she turned my neck
into a hot blanket.
The sun and moon came and went. Our homes disappeared.
Love disappeared.
In Little Rock we danced for rain before a neon kiosk.
Dry birds dropped from the sky like empty gloves.
We conversed with cockroaches on a Greyhound bus, the language
of paint-thinner and cellophane.
We combed our hair in each other's eyes.

We ingested every bombed thought on the klieg light prairie.
Our toothbrushes turned to gold.
We ate red beans and prayed for armadillos.
Lambent dens swam with television and iridescent forks
clicked to familial laughter. We were cut off, chemistry experiments,
slutting through the horsefly autocracy. We genuflected outside
Burger King in a formaldehyde gale. Ku Klux trucks spit
cigarette curses then swirled off in cyclones of junk mail.
Her knees bled in Nevada. My eyes pinned like
butterflies to the cold money in the sky. I sold the war paint.
She sold the radio. Her throat funneled through a lipstick valve
the viscid hymns of Steely Dan.

JOHN GOODE

THE LIVING CITY

The church mouse moans.
The daffodil braces.
The sun spills like a drug into a thousand faces.

The rheumy-eyed gutter pigeon,
the jasmine-drunk caddis fly,
square off like an argument of absolutes.

A cuckolded swan skewers a leisure-minded toad
and lifts his bald ass to the sky like an Aztec priest.

Wasps with belts of fire swarm the sweaty month of the ant.

Beautiful black-limbed asbestos roaches with scalloped noses
stomp like an army of one.

A mosquito with a shaved tongue and a small brass heart
suckles on her lover's cold silver ankle,

while a cricket bleeds fallopian oil into a bed
of shuffling lint.

Butterflies with suitcases of pearl
descend on crumbling lilac.

And the honey bee drops like a bomb its prescription of sugar.

The manna-filled city rat. Quixote invert. Lover of toenails.
Egyptian-snouted prince of scullery corners.
Blue-balled cocksman of the alleys of hair.

Throat like a used tire.
Bell-shaped head ringing electricity.

Skin as cold as a capital letter.
Stomach like a growling shoe.

Hungers for a chunk of discarded Polish deli sandwich
he spots half a block away.

His eyes, uncut diamonds, pulled from the lies of many stones.

The buzzing midsection of the yeast fizzes
like a stray dog's breast milk.

His lips like stove pipe shavings, curl.
His brain, a nimble casket circling death.

And those ears, rising like aerials, fill
with taxicabs, sirens, and the wails of lonely animals.

He runs like love in the rain
bled from an old wound.

JOHN GOODE

CHOREOGRAPHY OF A TRANCE

for R.L.B.

She touched the moonlight in my body where I'd marked time
in Bloody Mary hotels clutching strip mall ghosts.

Panting above dead mortgage soap operas and nuptial traffic,
she pulled me into the kinetic moment.

Sovereign flies bit our naked backs
like dreams of wild sugar.

*

I found her on the edge of a bar
burning like a detective novel with a gasoline haircut.

We chased the voltaic animal of the jukebox
through the blown fields in our minds.

I tuned October to the muffled bass deep
in her solar plexus.

Zodiac towers tugged at her womb
and an arm rose like a flower from sleep's museum.

We grew ether stubble behind rented walls
and wrote voodoo sonnets beneath the bank clock.

I ran my hand along her spine and felt the current of electricity
that reached from a belt loop to the red moon above Lincoln Avenue.

*

I emptied into her:

chains and buckets and bosses,
loss and homage and refrain.

Laughter that broke into the secret hospitals
where people turned into cats
and killed the manic surgeons who breathed on death.

Her eyes were frontier asylums for trapped black horses.
Target vessels with cargo of hyacinth and oil.

Theater of the sea
where nocturnal gulls snapped up shadow fish.

I built churches around them
and lived for months without eating.

*

We rolled through Kmart sheets and alarm clock chords.
The telephone rang for breath and the doorknob ovulated.

We pulled knives from each other's waists
and planted satellites in the cracks.

She put her ear to the pagan radio in my heart
and heard the sewer clashing of phosphorescent angels.

I saw buses float like birds.
The very air conceived me.

It rained her eyelashes.
It poured her name.

*

Against the wall I clawed the swaggering bell of her ass.
From her mouth a calico owl tore bits of burning stationary.

Upon her thick black hair my fingers puzzled like slaves.

I knew the bite of her teeth,
the curve of her back,
her long white neck I chewed like a murmuring cloud.

I slept in the sweat on her stomach,
and our entire lives had time for us.



Edward Michael O'Durr Supranowicz: *Hangman Hanged*

MARK VOGEL

LOCAL GOD

His name might be Ralph,
but his black and white picture
is not on the mantle.

He might live close to this smell
of old sweat, and remember snow
and the struggle for winter heat,

how wood and dirt collects
and the logs disappear in the fire,
how cold enters the bones.

He might pull a muscle dragging
dead animals from the barn, or flinch,
transforming manure into compost.

He might see teeth wearing thin,
the fillings silver and gold in snagged smiles,
and he might hear the cackle, the delight,

the appreciation for apple butter and popcorn.
He might fuel the new spring green, the peepers
singing in the pond, and know each and every

bloodroot pushing from the leaves.
His name might be Roy, or Sophia, or frog boy,
and he may have sent the visiting dog.

Surely he might have family in the woods.

JAMES GRABILL

PURITAN MATTERS

Among these would be

[1] utter concentration on the father
particularly the invisible father

[2] risking the lives of loved ones
to pursue an imaginary world

[3] picking an imaginary world already
packed with archaic presences
that would later require massive
efforts of public denial

[4] sinking the taproot of private joy
into an absolute future subjugation
of the insects in the world

[5] digging further than six feet down
to bury desire with lust and objects
of aesthetic appeal or superstition

[6] allowing what was buried
to fester in the underground,
until it flared up in endless caverns
of flame boiling red-black hell fire,

[7] creating intensified research
and development of a portable
instant sense of rejection
the psyche still may carry

[8] elevating the stature of public
execution sanctioned by a system,
then inversely worshipping it

[9] kneeling to wrestle death
into the strictly knowable

[10] ostracizing drummers
and graceful dancers

[11] banking on the opposite
of embodied time at the expense
of any others trying to live

[12] initiating a harsh removal
of what has been incomplete

[13] remembering the script
but forgetting about the play

[14] and preparing a town square
to fit all after crossing lines to depict
a life cycle but not meaning to.

Also including [15] relegating
play to the realm of small children
but [16] finding idle hands intolerable

[17] discovering a land where people
were openly living but seeing it
all as the devil's playground

[18] enduring sufferings unimaginable
but then hardening further

[19] failing to learn to play musical
instruments other than for worshipping
the father believed to always be angry
over what he called wickedness

[20] judging smallest acts to be mean
meaningless, unless they served
the imaginary father's purposes

[21] seeing women in front of them
but requiring them to wear
darkened curtains drawn shut

CONTINUED

[22] making an enclosed back room
where squealing hungry children
would be quieted by women

[23] taking what might have been
pleasing or vivid, even pleasurable,
as the direct fuel of misdeeds

[24] causing their women to speak
for children in a world of adult agony
and unreasonable denial

[25] breaking the unguarded back
of the fugue on the anvil of unison

[26] and believing in fear, thinking
everyone's survival depends on it.

And also [27] infiltrating from remaining
tintype images of the long-bearded
great grandfathers who muscled plows
behind their Trojan work horses

[28] developing a means for recollection
and commencement of personal
begging for blanket forgiveness

[29] allowing ancient shadows of death
to live again as martyrdom believed
capable of magical transmutations

[30] lynching horses of work
to the power of everyone's death

[31] then teaching this
to those still living here
as everyone's absolute future.

JAMES GRABILL

WAVE OF LIGHT

As night tills ancestral symbiosis inherited
a mile down in dutiful strength, the weathered
species, as complex as the Parthenon blazing
then indwelling, quick in a surgeon's fingers,
has been touched by the sunlit glaciers draining
and those train blasts through the summer night
or the 3 p.m. gravity of conditions on the ground
sunlight is reaching, as boxcars of bleached coral
crumbled now to bone dust are passing, clattering,
and security cars hauling payloads of single zero
past cedars in their flame, opening through air
in which a bear whimpers as the north ice melts
lightning inches in each pulse of a violet eyelash,
the instantaneous continuum remarkable as bees
still chance the completion of an individual cycle,
embarking on their travels in the sky unfolding
into blossoms, the infrared halves of the sun
reaching shapes on the planet, ruining the stone
palaces with mammoth consequences as fingers
intertwine, and rock glistens from underground
in intricate flicker woodpecker living feathers,
for the eyeball iris makes its purple-blue burst
from seed into what stays unthinkable beauty,
what kneels its grief onto hillsides, as a woman
works a small spot-lit stage, dancing the place
filled by neon pulsing synthesis, as gravity lets her
move in a split-second nautilus of this planetary
unfolding, sunlight roaring to where the grackle
stretches her wings when she's back, whistling
to another, bobbing her head, talking grackle
maybe to say what she's seen, overflowing light
she's become, reverberating in splashes of corn
the moment that's ending its labor in solidness,

CONTINUED

with evening blanketed by action, as sunlight continues to go into what might have felt empty in time, and will in time be filled again, rounded back to a sphere with human overpopulation still sweeping in past umbilical doors to the next stage the mind has for its coast, entering the exquisite eye within each cell of the eye, for the light this is.

EMILY BORGMANN

HEAVENER

I know, she said,
I know there will be nights
when it's not this good,
when the rain is not a rough draft
of mercy, when the snake in the grass
is not Jesus—so tell me.

It was a bedlam of light—
we woke covered in vines,
sick with the blood of our own concision,
the surprise found only in cereal boxes
or on windowsills thick
with a mortar of skin cells
and mildew—all that breathing.

I see, she said, I see
that this cannot go on—
have you noticed
the waitress, her hair, the onyx—
have you seen that she is standing
still on a pillar of salt?

It was an animal time.
Risen from mud,
risen from the whales that must
deliberate our entrance.

We spoke in blistered syllables,
hot with what we had learned—
midnight kitchens, longing,
the body of an orange in the palm.

CONTINUED

Now, she said, listen,
or we will forget the blue of this minute,
the linen air that keeps us levitating.

Then, she was quiet as the thought
of china in a tumbling child's bright hand.
It was a nest unfolding, a mountain highway.

We had played the songs of ocher,
women with thimbles fabled
behind humming machines.

We rent our garments, threw those pieces
of night in the river, walked away
upright. The tongues of our ghosts,
then, were patterned with glory.

Curved like ribs over the heart,
we threw away as if we had plenty.
Risen from oyster, lichen, and tooth.
I watched her through—from the palm of my hand,
clouds in an atlas, suspect of nothing.
Her name was—only a halo, splitting wood.

CRUZ ORTIZ

NIGHTS TO WHICH MOST OF THE PEOPLE DISAPPEAR

how close to evening it is. how close to evening it seems to the swarms of tiny chandeliers. how close the expensive popular kitchens are to disappearing in the direction of the closets at the bottom of a puddle where another city was discovered. how close it is to the shining of cars underwater, the galaxies of the west side highway, minor office towers and the taxis moving past in sheets of anger and fatigue and fish memory. how everyone sells something at night. how close the creeping drinks are to a slow childhood. how evening is encouraged to push beyond dimensions of working phones filled with scotch and digital apartments and other blurred evenings. and how it is that the buildings washed up on the shores of a man sleeping in a room of storm water. and how the storms are a whisper between subway stations and bars, delis and psychic readers and distant songs written by radios. how it is that the buildings are hurt nor jealous nor wanting to be human, just assigned to lights blinking with lonely elevators and exchanges of minutes going by, money that's been mauled to three men discussing their shadows after a long inebriation, a rumor that they hid their dinner treaty in a lockbox between the least visited weeknights. and how that one friendship is the slowest part of a tuxedo written by someone where no evenings can be found.



Michael Weston: *Memory of the Hell Stories*

CHILDPLAY

afterwards—

you learn to touch the knob
with your eyes closed
so you may believe it cannot hurt you
twisting it silently
like you are not touching it at all

you learn to release the latch
pressing your small body
against such a heavy door
so delicately
the hinges will not groan
like he makes them groan

you learn to shift your tiny feet
whisperlike
as you believe an angel
might shift its wings
as if your feet never touch the floor
and

while he is in his deepest sleep
you learn to become invisible
like a grass snake
escaping
thru the garden
so you may play
in the dark

you eventually learn
even in sunlight
not to cast a shadow

—but before all this
you had to learn
not to scream

BLUE BOY

Bigelow spits on his gold-plated Masonic cufflinks; polishes them against the knee of his Brooks Brothers charcoal herringbone dress trousers. He circles this dingy block a fifth time as he worries over his opening line:

“One day intergalactic space travel will be available to everyone.”

Yeah, that seems pretty harmless. Even if she’s a cop, she won’t be able to hang him with that.

Night hits Honeybunch’s regular hangout wall like a splitting maul – sucks the warmth out of it. Leaves her skin the same color as the cold deep shadow hovering over Northern and Central. She’s been warned and busted three times since she’s hit this crummy town.

Her kid is stashed four blocks away on the floor of her flat-tired booted truck, trying to disappear beneath a blue plastic tarp—chewing his fingers for nurture. Freezing.

She’s been doing quickie b.j.’s at four bucks a shoot just to buy him a now-and-then Hershey bar and a bag of corn chips so she doesn’t have to steal them.

Bigelow’s rig is long and shiny.

Big bucks, she figures. Maybe he’ll be good for a tenbucker. She’d throw in a buttfuck for fifteen. He wantsa go bareback? Christ that oughtta be fifty but on a night like this, she’d settle for twenty.

His tires growl against the curb. Automatic passenger window whispers as it vanishes. She sticks her head into the hole. It’s like the Vegas hotel room that slimy Mayor flew her to when she was fifteen—except for no ceiling mirrors. She wonders if this creep might slit her throat. Worries if she stinks too much. A fifty-dollar bill lies right beneath her nose. A limp pecker peeks out from beneath his padded steering wheel. His palms shine white.

“N-n-nice night, Miss, uhh, I g-g-guess I don’t know your name. Uhh, one day, d-d-d-did you know intergalactic space t-t-t-travel will one day be available to everyone...even such as yourself?”

Honeybunch practically inhales the fifty. Damn near swoons over the instant thought of a bucket of hot greasy breast meat from KFC.

“Shove yer fuckin space rockets, White Ass!” she sneers, as red lights flash through Bigelow’s steamed rear window.

His flabby neck looks like a fat ripe tomato as he quickly presses his clammy hands upwards—like he’s scared his plush white leather roof will collapse and suffocate him.

Her kid is turning blue on the rotten truck floor—barely able to comfort his little head against the gawddam froze-up brake peddle.

Honeybunch spends another night in a convenient cell huddled with her kind. Any kind of bread will be just fine.

SIMON PERCHIK

*

As if the paint poured across
could stave off rot, circle down
though this gate heads back

once it leaves your arms –by itself
whitening the trees already stone
certain you will come here forever

bring twigs, let them sweeten
soften on the ground you bite into
struggling to float, unable to breathe

or unfasten her skirt –your mouth
oozing the way mornings arrive
to dry, kept moist by these dead

and berries dressed as roots and grass
surrounded, filled with the taste
from her eyelids not yet flowers.

FRANCINE WITTE

ONE DAY SUSAN

starts to search for her mother. When Susan was born, she was left on a doorstep and taken in by strangers. They were kind and all, but somehow they weren't enough.

So when Susan grows up, she places in an ad in the paper – *Wanted – the woman who didn't want me*. That is funny to Susan, who is sure she got irony from her bio-mom.

Weeks go by and nothing till one day, Susan picks up a crackly phone, and there it is. The call that will explain her life. Fill in the cracks like putty. She is so excited; she spends her entire paycheck on a new dress and rose bouquet.

She waits under the bridge that the phone call told her to, and when the night blanket comes and still no one, she understands. She returns home to find her whole house emptied by thieves.

Still, they left the doorstep intact, and when Susan is ready, she will lie down there and curl herself into a tiny, baby ball.

FRANCINE WITTE

OUR BROTHER

When it happens, we all seem surprised.

Like our mother wasn't going to die someday. But now she has, and we are all together again – my sister Susie, our brother and me.

“Top layer's gone.” Susie says. “No older people left to die ahead of us.”

She's right, of course. Our father, dead all these years, and the aunts and uncles soon after.

“Yup,” Susie says, “we're next.”

I suddenly see the old in her, breasts collapsed under her sweater, her shoulders sloping into her arms.

Our brother says, “Do we have to talk about it?” Susie and I don't know our brother. He left for Alaska when he was 16. Now 46, his face is all graystubble and eye pouch. His clothing smells like pine trees.

Susie looks at our brother now, the way she did when we were kids. Like he's a rock that moves, but knows what a rock knows. “All right, then,” Susie says. “Tell us about Alaska.”

Our brother just grunts. Once, our mother told us that our brother works at a logging plant. He drives a truck with silent trees piled on the back. She said he probably doesn't talk for days at a time.

When we were kids, our brother hardly spoke. When Susie couldn't take it anymore, she stabbed our brother with a safety pin to see if he'd say “ouch.”

Now, Susie looks dead at our brother. “It's you,” she says. “You're gonna die next. Alaska cold can kill a moose.”

Our brother breathes a little. We wait for our brother to speak.

FRANCINE WITTE

TEACHERBOT

Teacherbot is leading the visiting studentbots around. These are a group from Germany and they wanted to see a New York City high school.

“We are right in the center of midtown,” Teacherbot beams. She likes to beam and sets herself quite often at that temperature.

“Everything is close,” she says. “The businesses, the shops.”

A says, “yes, but what do the students learn here?”

Teacherbot thinks. Then she thinks again. “From midtown, you can get everywhere. All five boroughs. Can anyone name them?”

One of them can. Each one right and ends with Statens Island.

Teacherbot smiles. She thinks his mistake is adorable. “You know,” she says, “it takes a whole ferry to get there”

Rounding the corner, Jason from 3rd period. No hall pass. Just his human face.

Teacherbot grabs his elbow “and *this* is one of ours.”

Jason is lost. His face is rectangular. Mathlike. He can’t understand being spoken about like this. Just yesterday he was in detention. Hallwalker.

Teacherbot tells Jason “these are students from Germany. They are visiting us and want to tell Europe about our American school.”

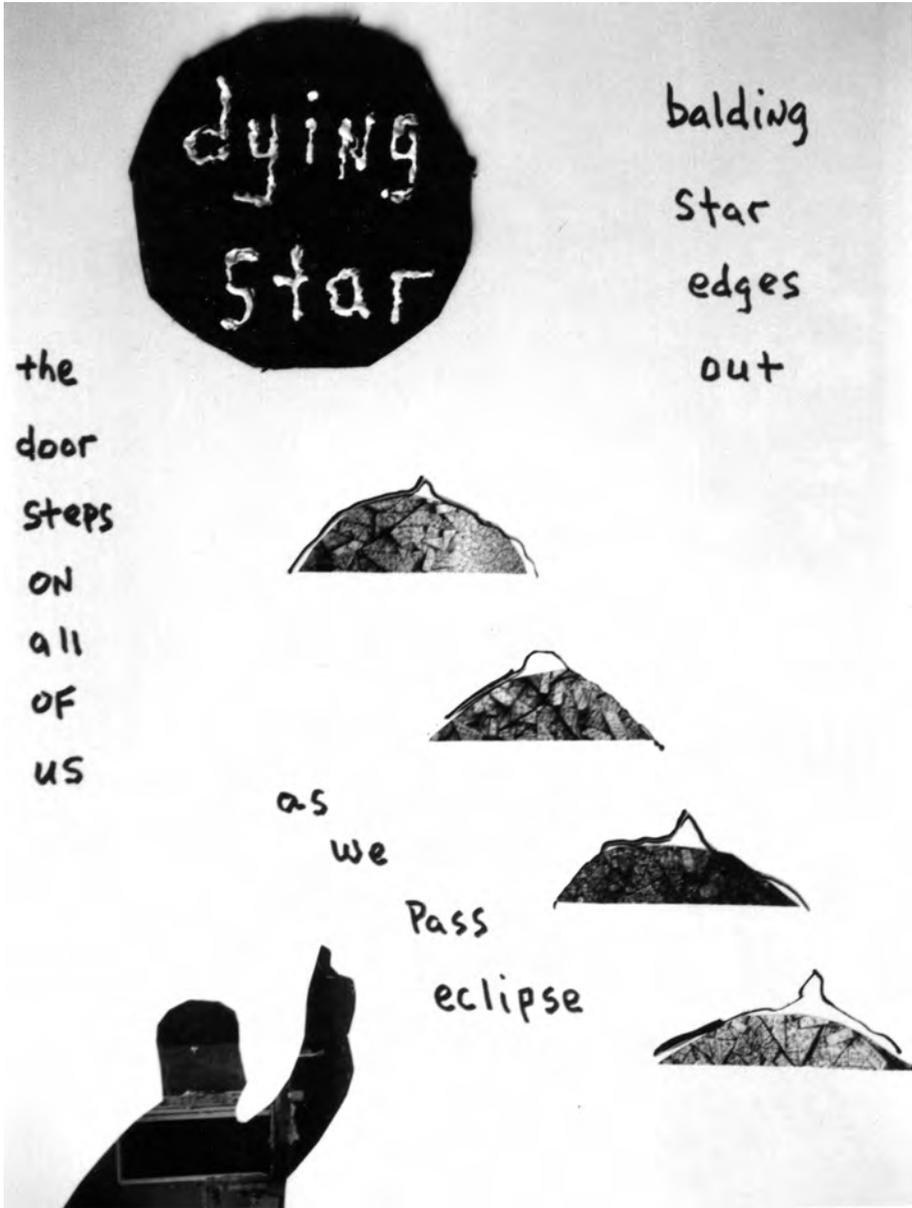
Jason looks at Teacherbot. Something behind her eyes looks back.

His animal self understands. That’s when he says “they teach us everything here. They really get us ready for life.”

Teacherbot puffs out a cloud of smokeless air.

“Go on back to class,” she winks.

They watch as he walks away, pinballing himself aimlessly back down the hall.



Guy R. Beining: *Dying Star*

PHILIP DACEY

MINIATURES

The elevator to the stars
is out of order;
you have to take the stairs.

*

He pressed his ear
against the shut dictionary
like someone listening
to the party nextdoor.

*

“You make love,” she said,
“like someone taking aerial
photos of faces.”

*

At the rummage sale, boxed-up tools
reminisce among themselves
about hands.

*

Their kisses were only wind that wore
the shape of lips going from tree to tree.

*

At birth, he and his shadow
switched places. They lived like that.
His shadow won great acclaim.

*

Have you ever bought sunlight
when its market price was down
and sold it later at a profit?

*

“Consonants in the side pocket,
vowels in the corner pocket,”
he said, and ran the table.

PHILIP DACEY

THE ABYSS VARIATIONS: A SONNET

The abyss can dangle pretty from an ear.
He turned a corner, and there was the abyss.
At the border, I had only the abyss to declare.
“The abyss? The merest fiction,” huffed the abness.

The abyss complains it isn't understood.
To cross the abyss, it's best to pack a lunch.
Enjoy Abyss, the latest breakfast food.
Shoes by Abyss are fashionable but pinch.

In bed, the abyss yawns, stretches seductively.
Why walk stooped if the abyss is eyelash-light?
Question the abyss, and all it does is sigh.
Chumminess and the abyss don't mix; salute.

Told his work was abysmal, he said thanks.
Invest in the abyss; it's better than the banks.

PHILIP DACEY

THE COCKROACH BALL

I've been invited to the Cockroach Ball.
Could I escort you? Would you come with me?
We'll skitter with the best inside the wall.

Low to the ground, we needn't fear a fall,
and crumbs will all be close enough to see
throughout the evening at the Cockroach Ball.

In carapaces of the latest style,
with legs so light they banish gravity,
we'll skitter with the best inside the wall.

The Twined Antennae Tango's beautiful,
though there are soles of shoes who'd like to be
our only sky and end the Cockroach Ball.

Let our new look and speedy steps appall
those too proud to taste the sweet poverty
of baseboard life, the world inside the wall.

Listen! The notes of the cotillion call.
I'd crawl on my belly if you'd agree
to accompany me to the Cockroach Ball.
What skittering awaits us inside the wall!

PHILIP DACEY

NIJINSKY: A SESTINA

*“He kept talking nonsense, emitting words that did not hang together:
planet, detective, airplane, medicine, art.”*

—Peter Oswald, *Vaslav Nijinsky: A Leap Into Madness*

Whenever he leaped, Nijinsky
could have been another planet.
It wouldn't take a detective
to figure that out. An airplane
might have seen him rise, medicine
for the eyes. The leap was his art.

But writing also was his art.
The Diary of Nijinsky
was compared to Walt's medicine
for the soul. And for the planet.
Fly above it in an airplane
to find clues for the detective

of Earth's dance. Such a detective
will frame the body's news in art-
ful ways, then dive like an airplane
to pas de deux with Nijinsky,
who'll choreograph the planet
as it grows healing medicine

and who was fed much medicine
for his madness by detective-
doctors. Confident the planet
did not need the balletic art
as heralded by Nijinsky,
they treated him like an airplane,

a sick, childish, stupid airplane.
God was the only medicine,
besides dance, whose help Nijinsky
wanted, could even detect. "I've
no party but God's." A brave art
disturbs an orbiting planet.

In the last days of the planet,
dancers will ride in an airplane,
leafletting the world with their art.
Think war zones, dropped medicine,
crimes unsolved by a detective.
The pilot? Vaslav Nijinsky.

Nijinsky travelled the planet
like a detective, his airplane
the medicine of his art.

MICHAEL ESTABROOK

ANTHONY

Looked up from
the engine he
was working on
stared at me in
disbelief. “You
look so much
like your Dad.”
Then he hung
his head and
wiped his hands
on a dirty rag
the whole while
we talked ashamed
it seemed to be still
among the living.

LAWRENCE APPLEBAUM

DEAR HARRY,

When you found me that day on Riverside Drive I became a boy again, this time loved. It was the day my father died. February 20th, 1995. You knew this, covered in gum and dirt. 140th street was crowded with people, and you chose me. You jumped up on my legs. I took you into my six rooms. They became your six rooms. I was your pupil. I was abandoned too and you never let me say it out loud during the thirteen and a half years we shared. And now your physical body is gone. I still see you everyday, I still feel your paw waking me up in the morning, white and sand colored, one pink nail four black. Your nose cold in my neck means we were both healthy all along. That stare you give me everyday, your magic eyes telling me as if I were hearing it for the first time that I am the tallest person in the world.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Harry*



Lawrence Applebaum: *Harry*



Lawrence Applebaum: *Harry*



Lawrence Applebaum: *Harry*



Guy R. Beining: *Orchestra Pit*

JOEL ALLEGRETTI

PREPARED PIANO

In $E = MC^2$, we see embedded the name of Albert Einstein. In every angle of the geodesic dome are Buckminster Fuller's initials. The strings of the prepared piano vibrate the letters J-O-H-N-C-A-G-E.

John Cage devised the instrument in the late 1930s, when he was commissioned to compose music for a dance piece. He originally wrote for percussion instruments, but the performance area was too small to accommodate an ensemble. The room had a piano, though, on which he pondered the possibilities.

The ancients conceived the gryphon, a creature part-lion and part-eagle, but neither lion nor eagle. Cage fitted the strings of the piano with bolts, rubber stops and screws to replicate percussion sounds, creating an instrument that was neither percussion nor wholly piano.

The absence of available space gave the prepared piano its place in the world.

JOEL ALLEGRETTI

PREPARED PIANO

DE- AND RECONSTRUCTED

The strings of the prepared piano pondered the possibilities. The strings of the piano gave the prepared instrument neither lion nor eagle, but space. The dome wrote for percussion piano. We see the piano gryphon embedded in every angle of the absence of Buckminster Fuller's initials.

The ancients conceived an ensemble with bolts, rubber stops and screws.

Commissioned to compose, the room had the letters J-O-H-N-C-A-G-E to replicate available percussion sounds.

He, John Cage, devised the name of Albert Einstein in the late 1930s when he was neither percussion nor wholly the world. In $E=MC^2$ vibrates a piano, a creature part-lion and part-performance area, creating an instrument that was too small to accommodate music for a geodesic dance piece.

TED JONATHAN

THE HEALING

Last night I killed my father. A garrote. Pulled his neck back with the force of a TV set falling from a 6-story rooftop and his legs flew up and he landed flat on his back. Dead before he hit the floor, he never saw it coming. Did him in the very bedroom of my conception. I don't recall a thud.

TED JONATHAN

HEAD BANGER

The bathrooms belonged to the tough guys.
The hallways and cafeteria to Assistant Principal Quinn.
The classrooms were up for grabs.

This is about the hallways and cafeteria.

Head of a bulldog, back of a gorilla, a short-legged man,
Quinn roamed the hallways and patrolled the cafeteria.

At your head, from the hip,
he'd launch a mid-finger-knuckle-protruding fist.

Thirteen in junior high. I looked thirteen.

Lots of boys in that junior high were sixteen.

Closer to Nam or Riker's Island than they'd ever be to high school, these gap-toothed, man-sized, mobster wannabees bopped around carrying their loose-leaves (that were comparable in size to their cigarette packs) in the palm of a clasped hand.

CLUNK!

Pompadoured prick Dom Paradiso got clipped
in the hall.

CLUNK!

A Polk Street Rumbler got clipped back of the cafeteria—
threw back his shoulders and grumbled.

CLUNK!

I got clipped walking the crowded hall. No reason.
I kept walking like nothing had happened. Felt like
passing out.

CLUNK!

Valentine Rivera got clipped before a packed cafeteria—
and cat-leapt onto Quinn's bull-neck!

Food fireworks flew girls black danced top tables ecstatic
screams piled screams—

Quinn made quick work of him. It was not Valentine's day.

TED JONATHAN

A JEWISH GIANT AT HOME WITH HIS PARENTS IN THE BRONX, N.Y. 1970

On the photograph by Diane Arbus

bare bulb in a wall lamp
tall vertical rectangular wall moldings
plaster streaked ceiling cracks
slip-covered club chairs and couch
plastic covered lampshades
freshly vacuumed old carpet
lackluster curtains (closed)
2 generic paintings and
a console TV

But foremost—upright! An untapped continent. An oxygen-inhaling colossus.
Perfectly proportioned. Complete with horse's neck and tree trunk wrists.

But why brother, why?

Sorely stooped and donning the mocking mask of the eternally defeated?

Of me? You?! Asks the electrified face of the frumpy little yenta, glare fixed high—on her son.

At her shoulder, the small and formal father spaces: *Pinochle by Hy's at seven o'clock*. Hands in pockets, he absently faces his son's abdomen.
Resigned to this picture-taking monkey business.

My dear giant:

I'd lay 2 to 1 you don't need that cane and orthopedic shoe,
nor slingstone and faith in Yahweh to have slain Goliath.

Shake the dead weight of days from your nuclear shoulders.

Tell *them* you're going out job-hunting.

Fuck one hundred hardcore hookers.

Bust some heads that need busting—

unleash the fury

unleash the fury

unleash the fury,

unleash the love



Michael Weston: *Lovers Through All Voids*

CHET HART

WE REMAIN LOVERS THROUGH EVERY VOID

i feel her breath wandering
where i haven't moved, her gospel
leaking from my skin's glycerin memory

i hear the murmurings
of her dollcloth lips then
fourth grade laughter of her then quiet

when i can no longer see her
i pray with my coloring song:

*please parakeet, please butchered bird
colored outside the lines,
blow out the moons lurking
over the Frankenstein fields*

the life-forms beneath my bed cry
that soon she will return very soon

the necklace she made out of all
the spiders dying in my blood
howling and whispering
for her to join them,

and she comes back with kingdoms
of nuclear candle thrash
painted on her skull

and shears the ten little voices
of her hands, flays them down
to where she can no longer

CONTINUED

Speak; we remain the haunting through all prayers
while i pull tomahawks from between
her legs and record on her skin
the scalps of a tulip that died of its own depths,

not something from a throat and its shadows—
and it's true the last story of the light
who named the leaves
cried there once—

i will always remember the way she buried
the salamander meat of my tongue—there were kidnappings
and we lost the voids wherever we slept—

please speak about my eyes, she says,
please speak about my eyes
where the lines from the child freighters
hold each other at the beginning
of the rotting oceans,

and then she kisses me with all her torsos
after they darken into graves
where i can hear monoliths of fog
leading away the trees
that will never be found
or spoken of again,

her guillotine forest singing with neptune moths
who began to love themselves
at the moment of slaughter.

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

PEDESTRIAN

With my car now junked, I travel on foot to a donut shop for morning coffee. The only other pedestrian is a young prostitute who paces the same corner by the *Pupusería* and row of vacant warehouses. Delivery vans, cars, trucks crowded with the rakes and leaf-blowers of gardeners speed past her. Both of us understand the horizon is both a vanishing point and an echo that aches, like the ringing in one's ears when walking in the heat of this region where drought is abundant. As I reach the crosswalk, I look back: she is pacing the same few yards, and I think how the asphalt in this desert will never be matted with fragrant ash or bread. The sky is implacable, and the soil is best suited for the ravenous routes of blood-colored ants. I, too, know the silence from the other side of neighboring walls and shut doors. If thirsty or in need of shelter, I can bypass every locked door, forget my neighbor, and pick up a stick, smack the earth several times, yet only to hear her hiss.

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

LULL

I find peace in the junkyard behind the motel; although the sky is a hard azure, a breeze rises and dissipates the heat. The patter of paws, as a cat scurries over the hood of a Cadillac and leaps atop the cinderblock wall. The breeze gathers momentum, and the poisonous bushes rattle, a beer can rolls over the weeds along with a sheaf of newspaper, and the chassis of a dozen junked American models from the 60's and 70's commence squeaking, as if stretching their corroded frames for one instant. I close my eyes, feel wind rush through me, intuit the paved solitudes it will speed across, leaving this chaparral and dust a brief caress, a truant feather of felicity.

HEATWAVE

Past midnight, I open the window and stare at the parking lot. A rabble of cats scatters, re-groups; they claw at each other, chase and overtake each other. Their cries are almost human, almost siren-like; I, too, feel my pores open, and an icy sweat covers me. An electricity frazzles the air, and my nerves are chewing at my skin, my pulse is quickened. I lick my chapped lips, and think how this noise will last for hours. I lick my chapped lips, taste nickel and, content, tremble with the urge to bite, cry, or at the very least, commit arson.

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

WHEN THE FIRES REACH ME

(San Fernando Valley, during the seasonal brush fires of 2008)

I will breathe the black wind pummeling this planet;

I will be a kosmos revolving in a kosmos whose center is my chest, whose spiral arms are mine, whose radiation is the spray of my breath, foam of my sperm, the scent of a faded rose whose center is the combustion of helium.

I will be the clacking wood, the blackening stucco; a suction-gust will funnel the sheets fluttering like kerchiefs from a departing ocean liner; the ceiling will burst like a lung inhaling water; the television, the walls will rupture,

yet I will remain floating, supine, in abeyance,—

pouring against the flight of sparks & fumes
a black fire will churn and crackle into the room, a fire
casting no light, yet scalding, combusting
my bones, rills of liquid fire, despite

the consumed timber and
zero gravity, despite
anoxia.

DENNIS SALEH

JOURNALS

1.

I am certain I meant to write
an altogether different poem. But.
These are flex-days. Flux time.
Change is all. Disruption loosed.
There is simply less and less
to say about more and more.
Realize this, and you are undone.
Another time, some other day, write
that altogether different poem.
Do not fear the end of a page.
Time is not always punctual.

2.

Tatty weather does not amuse.
If it weren't for the sky, there
would seem to be nothing at all.
In the distance, there is no distance;
on the other hand, no other hand.
Absence mounts its invisible edifice
like centuries of empty castles;
horizons no longer reaching the sky;
the sea's ceaseless leavetaking.
One might even ponder the fate of time.

3.

So begins another page.
But where are the words.
Where is “gossamer.”
Can a page really begin
with no words. This is language
hiding from responsibility.
If you find a syllable in disrepair,
it behooves one to make inquiry.
If a poem is not going to go all
the way, I would wish to know this.

4.

Frightening, so much less and less.
A tide of everything, retreating.
The light, drawing back, retiring.
At the beach, the sea is hiding,
or so it seems, its tentative lull,
like muttering under its breath.
Words hidden in other words undo
sense and confound meaning.
What is there that can’t be undone.
When I have run out of words,
please, someone, gently tell me.

5.

I have heard it said there may one
day be more death than people,
which hardly seems imaginable.
There are always people everywhere.
Always difficulties with reservations.
Though, perhaps anything is possible
these dizzying days. Dissembling sun.
Imaginary sky. Imagine the surprise.
A voice like granite, with no lipstick,
“Sir, you are dead. Please take a hole.”



Guy R. Beining

DENNIS SALEH

JOSEPH CORNELL, UNTITLED,
5x7"

Time pestles the blue enamel sky
Glancing flecks Tiny painted birds
Bits of netting would catch them
Fish hooks Lures Postage stamps
Curls of the box dissolving into itself
Deliberate accretions of time arrested
The still air resonates correctness
What is small is most correct

MATT SAPIO

THE RED BATHROOM

This is a room he is walking into and out of continuously with long gazes toward the silver neck, inviting with its nape. Its faucet breasts lusting to be taken in hand, he is trembling. His hands bleed, beg for oil, chapped as though by arctic wind. The soap sands off reams of skin over weeks, hot specks of blood ferried into the drain like an offering from a battlefield, and every scalding rinse a massacre of his will. He painted the bathroom red to remind himself to struggle, bundling the walls into coat after coat as though air were anathema to them. He makes his face into a mask of determination, gritting his teeth as he digs under each fingernail, the water so hot he can almost smell his skin burn. The hair melting into his flesh, the flesh melting into the water. Soon he will be washing bones.

MATT SAPIO

DIVISION II 1ST PLACE

One teaches at a public school. One did
A lot of cocaine, then got married to the suburbs.
One fell in love, lived with his girlfriend for a while,
Then moved back home suddenly and hung himself.
His mother found him. The rope's lacerations.
When I was putting on my coat I knocked over a martini glass
And had to sweep the shards into a dustpan.
Tonight I'll cook eggplant rollatini.
Tomorrow, chicken alla parmigiana.
Many years later she saw his face in a dream
And couldn't hold a pen straight enough to sign her name.
Three weeks on the sea, two on the shore
Drifting through bars as though thirsty
Without the water. Disillusionment
Is difficult to see from the inside,
Often appearing as surrender.
Dying mid-air.
Everything was lit that night
And afterwards the sky seemed overcast
Even in glaring sun. I painted on post-it notes
In watery acrylics, and didn't wait for them to dry.
We see the stars and look for a connection to ourselves.
A map that sent them home so long ago.
A titan makes us seem small, safe,
Holds even the wind in a vise, in place.

RUTH MOON KEMPER

THE ZINNIA CHRONICLES

Orange ellipses collapse into centripetal creatures
in a shimmering vision, like a jungle, where orange
umbrellas eternally cusp, lap and undulate around
our unlikely protagonist, the picaro fly, who now
nonplussed, undusts himself upon the zinnia's
orange crown.

He's nervous now. All else drowns
in the mosaic oranged mullions of his eye, and yet
intrinsic businesses of basic self-preservation insist
he make a delicate skitter to the zinnia's outmost
limits where lo, in leaves, he finds infinity is green.

JEAN HOLLANDER

ESKIMO DEATH

Shoved from the dream
into numb winter glow,
the blubbery years drawn in
to tallow for new flames,
flicker of igloos left behind,
in the muddled known
my father waits to die.
Almost unpained, the inadvertent hand
grapples, motions for comfort.

A guest in this unsanitary tent,
emptied, his intestines blown,
innocuous tubes feeding his veins,
anointing, readying the burial.
Islands, rocks, the slippery tide.
How they stare, those seal eyes,
slaughtered soul eyes bleating
against their bloodied fur.

In the end there is an end.
His bones in that dumb white
are witless. He has gone outside
because there is no fighting it.
His eyes under withered lids are dry
and in all this he has given
and received little of any worth.

MARINA RUBIN

GYPSEY PUNK SKA

Mitch was okay. in his late thirties he looked okay, had an okay career in financial computing, okay co-op, okay jeep, okay girlfriend who was older and looked like Ingrid Bergman, but somehow he always seemed lost, like he forgot himself under the seat on the bus, disappeared in the shopping cart at the supermarket, dropped in the sand like loose change. then one day he stopped, quit and sold everything, told his woman that he loved her but he loved Gogol Bordello more, they were a gypsy-punk-ska band of fantastic hooligans from eastern europe. it started out slowly, he bought a ticket to their show, a CD, a DVD, then another ticket, ten more tickets until he barged in backstage, vowed his undying passion and volunteered to serve them in the name of gypsy punk ska. the musicians were dumbfounded but allowed him to run their errands, bring them vodka, line up groupies for the after-party. over time he became indispensable, they took him on tour from LA to Belfast. bunking in a sleeper bus with roadies he didn't have a penny to his name, but it did not matter because he was never okay again

MARINA RUBIN

THE PALACE

a certain five-star hotel in the diplomatic area of new delhi lost my reservation. as a courtesy i was upgraded to the penthouse. that's where Nicolas Sarkozy stays when he is in town, winked the indian madonna at the front desk. like a maharaja's palace, my suite had a stadium-sized bed, a kitchen stocked with wines and rasmalai, a dozen terry cloth robes, a sixty-inch flat screen. in the bathroom of a million gadgets and buttons, lotions and towels, i undressed, turned on the shower but to my surprise there was no water, i tried the other knob, nothing, i pressed the corresponding button, not a drop. like a child in the elevator, i started pushing all the buttons - the night lamps flickered, the curtains opened, the blinds went up, the fax began to buzz, the teapot whistled. in the wee hours of morning, as i lost my fight against technology-at-the-edge-of-science-fiction, i shampooed my hair in the sink, washed my feet in the bidet and went to sleep, wondering if Nicolas Sarkozy had to do the same thing

CRUZ ORTIZ

ROOMS TRACKED TO THE END OF A TRANSIENT'S LIFE

The day seems swollen. The sunlight dirty in my fifth floor window. Another day of blurry humid heat. No air conditioner, just the box fan that's louder than the traffic outside. Sometimes I hear the lamp light crawling behind the wall with its sabotaged wiring and mouse diseases. Sometimes I'm hungry, but there's no money until Thursday and today is only the second day of the week. My last paying job was five years ago. A late night assembly line shift at the M&M factory in Hackettstown, New Jersey. Unskilled labor. And only for a month. No phone call from the temp agency requesting my return. I play a one-stringed electric guitar with no amplifier. Cockroach music I call it. But I use all my fingers. And sometimes it sounds like spots of paint calling to each other. Mostly, though, it is a failed attempt at a happiness I might recognize. I like to read about other men who are lost. Other men who decided long ago to follow one storm until it disappeared, only it never did. Men who discovered rooms that were temporary even in the permanence of their radiators and boiling curtains. I listen every night for a hallway creature selling water from its body. I listen for a similar woman and her tattoos who breathe on their own and who fight for shelter in that aftermath of skin. And I know that the men with their own conditions of obscurity will not find me. But I remember things when another animal dies, or when a woman leaves her apartment. I know because my identity is not listed either. I know because the wounds in my sweatshirt begin to taste like someone else's food.

DEBORAH EMIN

FROM SCAGS AT EIGHTEEN

One: I Have Gone to College

I left home to go to school in a state so unlike my home state of Illinois that even now finding myself here, glad to be here, it is like having been re-born. No one here knows me or what my life was like back home. I can be anyone I want to be. A voice says to me, I can be anyone I need to be. Even here it is a fight to have them call me Scags. I am Scags because I want to be and because that is who I will always be.

Scags to my Pops who helped me to find this name. Scags to my Mama because I never liked the name she gave me. Scags to my grandparents, Boomer and Goldie, because they liked the way I smiled when I said it. They are like that, the two of them, happy when I am, glad to see me happy. I am Scags to my Aunt Money and Scags to my Odessa. Everyone who matters back home knows me as Scags.

My friend Julia has gone off to the other side of the country, to be out West. We have never been this far away from each other. She will always call me Scags I am sure because really that is all she has ever called me. Julia used to be taller and have longer arms and legs than me. But we both grew up. I shot up as her step father, Mr. Arthur says, and I am taller now with longer legs and longer arms than most people I know. My hair is still red while Julia's blonde hair didn't stay blonde on its own. But we will always be friends even with her shooting off far away to Arizona, to be at a school where they play harder, I know, than they study.

There has always been this kind of competition with Julia. I never had a sister. Julia has one, a younger one, Renee, but we call her Reenie. But because I never had a sister, I treat Julia sometimes like she is my sister and I want to be better than she is and have her know it. I don't really like that about myself but there is nothing I seem to be able to do to change that.

Reenie likes to say Scags. She smiles too when she says it and she then pulls at my long hair so I'll pay attention to her and not just sit and talk to Julia.

I wait every day to get a letter from Julia. We live in such different time zones we might as well live in different countries. Coming out East to Massachusetts was a good idea, a way to be as far into my own new fantasy of who Scags could be.

When Mama asked me where I wanted to go to school, I made up this place in my head. I told her I wanted to go somewhere in the East where they focused on the Arts. When I said that, Mama was surprised.

“The Arts,” she said, “but Scags I thought you wanted to study something more practical, get a degree where you could do something important.”

She wants me to get a practical job like being a teacher so I could be guaranteed a living. I suppose Mamas are trained to think like that.

When I said I wanted to go someplace to study the Arts, Pops’ ears pricked up. He looked at me in a new way, as if he had heard some new tune and wondered where it would go.

I know these things about my Pops and how he thinks. I have always been close to my Pops, as close as a kid can be to her father. Even when things went out of control with him, I knew he would come back to me. He did. We all learned something from that experience.

As Goldie says, “You either get better or you die. Your Pops got better.”

My Aunt Money got better too. As Mama said, she got smarter and got over being made sick by the men she chose to love. Mama said something scarier too, she said, “Money is that penny that must be spent before she knows who she is.”

I love this family of mine. I love where I come from too. But inside me, while I am here in this experiment I call going to college, I am trying to kick all of that off my shoes. Skokie makes me feel like I have glue on my shoes. It makes me feel like I have a too strong glue that keeps holding me back and what I really want is to find a way to get rid of the glue, some solvent to dissolve it all. It is mucking up the works of my new life.

Sometimes, I dream it. Like an almost nightmare that almost throws me out of bed, I keep racing and chasing to get away and find a way to be Scags without being their Scags.

Like I said, college is an experiment. Mr. Blue Streak, my biology teacher in high school, that wasn’t his real name, but he always wore a blue lab coat and would interrupt a lecture to run out into the hall to stop someone without a pass, anyway, he also used to do things like light his tie on fire when he warned us about safety with Bunsen burners. But the most important thing he taught me was what made science work. You had to have a hypothesis and it was the experiments that helped you find out if what you hypothesized was true.

I like that idea. It fits me too. Like 18 years old is a number hypothetically about growing up. College is the experiment to see if that is true.

In my head, I see it all blossoming but I need to test it to see if any of it will be true.

Two: What's a Skokie?

The kids at this college come from lots of places I have never been to. I know it seems nuts to be 18 and to be here in Massachusetts and never to have been to New York City or Boston or to any other place really. My family doesn't travel. I don't know why. I guess we had so little money after my Pops tried to do himself in that we were lucky to have our house and to have Odessa still come to us and that ended up being enough for my Mama and Pops to do. Well, maybe it wasn't enough but that was what there was.

A boy here, Andrew, in my English class is from South Africa. All I know about South Africa is what I have read and that is very little. I cannot even imagine how he got from there to here. My roommate Sylvie is from Montreal. I know that is in Canada and even that, a different country right here on our northern border, where they speak French, and I know nothing about Canada either. Man oh man, life is big and I feel very small.

When they ask me where I am from and I say Skokie, they ask me, what is a Skokie? I know some of them want me to feel small for being from Skokie. Some of them really can't figure out what it is. Some don't care and move along as if there were more important things to think about. But it makes me wonder what it is about Skokie that I need and what I can just not worry about anymore.

Arlene is a new friend of mine and she is from New York. She is from Brooklyn, I can hear her saying that. She is an incredible singer. I mean when she sings she is someone other than the person she is when she speaks. Even her hair is different when she sings. She has this long, thick black hair that almost coats her head when she sings. That may not be the most gorgeous image but her black hair is so much a part of her that when I say her name, I see her hair. When I walk behind her as she walks down the stairs, her hair looks like a piece of clothing. In the sunlight it vibrates and is blue so that it gives her some kind of powers I have never experienced before.

Arlene grew up in a large family and everything about her life before coming to college is the exact opposite of mine. But there is no one I would rather be with here than Arlene. We walk to classes together and eat together and she teaches me about what it is like to grow up in a place that is not a Skokie.

Of course, there is always that one person who makes me feel off balance. Her name is Kit. Her room is next to mine. She likes to make up stories about who she thinks I am.

Whenever I feel that I do not want to be from Skokie and it is usually whenever Kit shows up in the room, all I can then think about is that I am from Skokie. If I couldn't think about Skokie as I do, I think I would fall over.

Three: Choosing a Course

At this college we don't have to be all that specific for the first two years about what we want to major in. But being me the way I am, I know that being on scholarship I want to make up my mind now and get busy. I don't have the luxury of flitting from one idea of what I want to do to another. My hypothesis is that if I study now the one thing I need to do, then I will discover the truth of who I need to be when I finish here.

Even if my choice is a mistake, I made the decision and I intend to follow it through.

No one told me to do it this way. I just knew.

I chose to study creative writing. I know that sounds really pretentious and I could never tell Julia that is what I chose. Oh man oh man. I can hear her laughter. She would want to know just how I chose that one. Her whole face would be red and she would slap her cheek as if I had truly surprised her. She would then ask me what I was smoking when I signed on for that course of study.

I would tell her, first thing, you know I don't smoke anything. She smokes cigarettes and maybe other things, but I do not. When I say that, she would slap the other side of her face and laugh some more at me for being so square. Well, I don't care.

But back to what I chose. First of all, I chose quickly. If I do not make up my mind quickly, I never choose anything.

They have their own way of doing things here. I had to sit down with my advisor after I had registered my arrival at the college. I am lucky and have an advisor who really helps me. I take one look at Mr. Keating and know he will be able to help me and he does.

I like how he sits in his office this first time I meet him. He wears a blue denim shirt with the sleeves rolled up and a pair of dark jeans. It is still summer but up here where we are in the mountains, it is not that hot in early September. His blue eyes leap out of his face like he is trying to get me to see things his way. He still has his summer tan but he also looks like he is laughing at me even when he is being serious. Mr. Keating is not a writer or a painter. He plays the French horn and teaches American Literature. He has a wife and three kids and lives in a big white house near the center of town which is down the mountain from here. He drives a motorcycle back and forth to school. He doesn't smell as if he just jumped from the shower into his neatly ironed clothes but from the wind he braces himself against to make the long climb up the side of the mountain to get to the college. It is the smell of pine.

Arlene says I am lucky to have him as my advisor and I agree. When I explain to him why I want to start my course immediately and why I chose creative writing, he understands. He has this funny way of pursing his lips when he understands so that he doesn't have to say anything.

As we sit in his office together, I don't look at him. The view from his window on this clear day draws my eyes away from him and to the light. It almost looks edible. The screen disappears from my sight. I see the light in the old apple orchard. I see lots of bugs and birds hard at work. I know they must be making sounds but I don't hear them as I concentrate on what I want to say. Mr. Keating sits soundlessly too as I say what I have to say. My eyes go out to the view. His lips purse as I say, "I want to take lots of different types of classes which I will then pour into my writing."

"I have never been anywhere other than Skokie and now the college. But I need to know things in order to write. So, that's my plan."

I leave his office with his agreement inside me. My eyes fill with tears.

MICHAEL ESTABROOK

KERRY

Returned to college
at 36 tired of
being a clerk. Bought
a dog too, at one of those
sketchy places in
the mall so he wouldn't
have to be alone all
the time. It went
blind immediately.
Now he leaves
the radio on all day
so it has company
and he tries not to laugh
as it walks into trees
and chairs and walls.

ROBERT PESICH

DOING TIME DURING THE HOLIDAYS

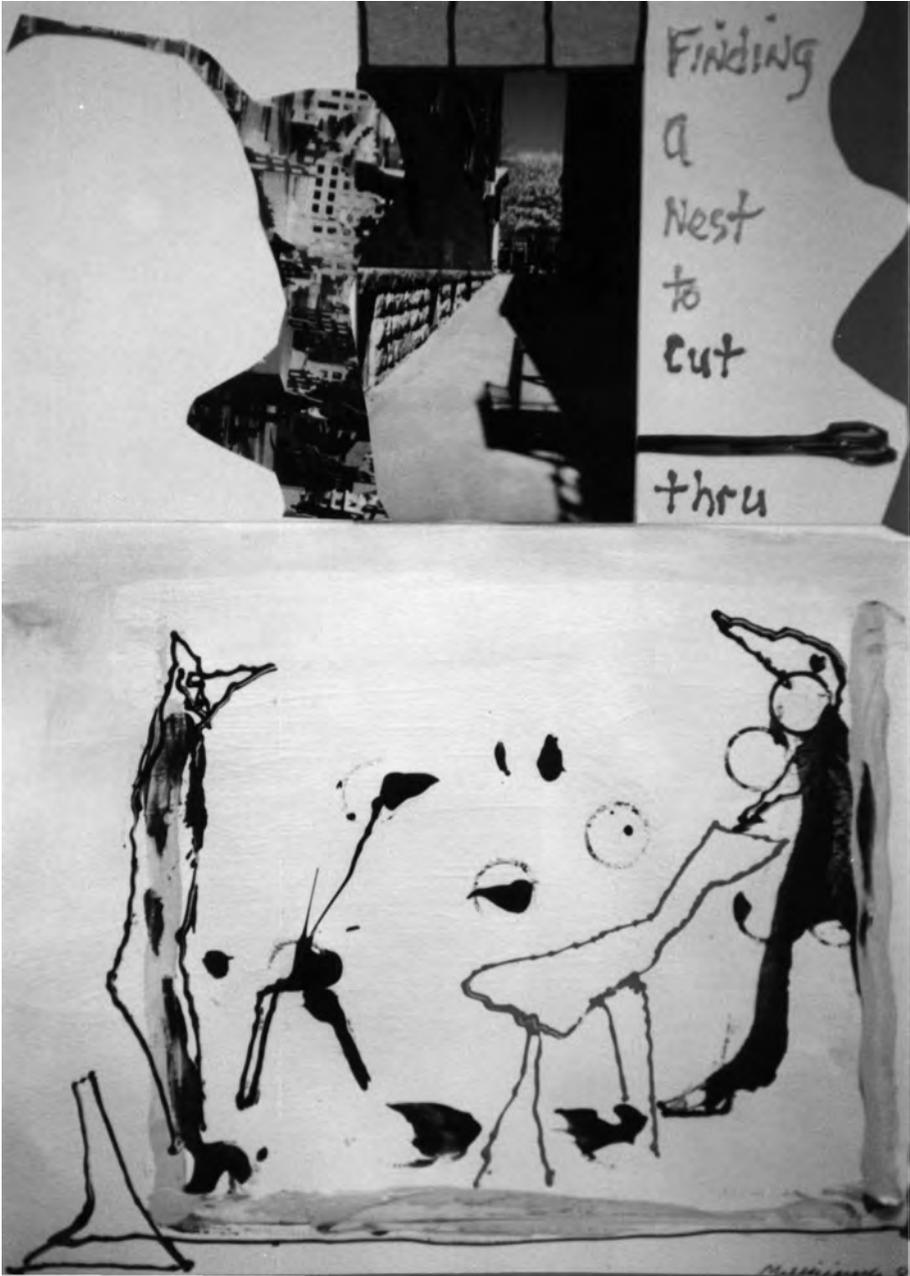
Winter solstice.

Time to slit myself again
just enough to slip
another small watch
between the fat and muscle.

The scar, as they all are,
will be small as a letter
in the name of my father.

The 42 jeweled movements
tick in concert with the pings
as I pick at the bars

soundtrack for the remodeling
in the heart, something to do
in solitary.



Guy R. Beining

ROBERT PESICH

THE ENVELOPE HAS SOMETHING TO SAY

Fine. Pick your teeth with the edge of my face.
But if you scribble on my back
the names of your devils
and then ignore them?

Don't think your voice is always delivered.
Sometimes, I prefer to read your silences.

You're not going to burn me if I continue?
Who says there are no white cranes in this city
when I can feel them waking within your hands.

Within my four corners, an edge of your face
disappearing into the horizon
in search of a passage
to the New World.

DAVID LAWRENCE

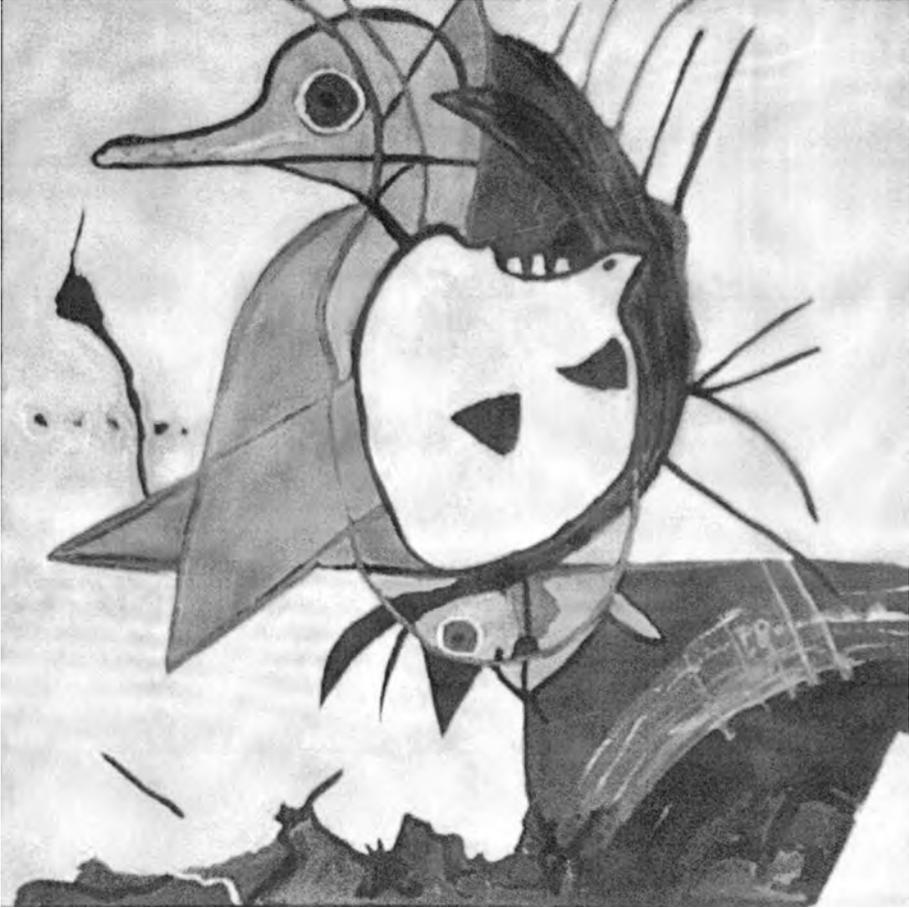
WINTER

The irritable transition of the snow's latex stops the stretch
Of the imagination in winter freeze.
Somewhere the snowshoes are missing
And the tracks in the powder
Have disappeared.
I am chasing a rabbit with the hair of my trigger finger.
Death is not an occasion but the failure
To survive.
I fall into the frozen lake to see if I can freeze
In chunks.
I meet my absence in a gulp of cold water
And commit my future to ice.
I am always looking for the meaning of winter
Regardless of the season or
The ducks frozen in the sky like stiff targets.

DAVID LAWRENCE

THE ENTHUSIASM OF REVOLUTIONARIES

If I could puncture your eardrum I might sound your suspicions
So that paranoia is overheard in the executioner's garden.
Is Alice in Wonderland
Or am I in her nightmare about to get decapitated
By the Queen of Hearts
Or the rabble roused during the Reign of Terror?
I'd say to Iran,
"The lady doth protest too much."
I am nauseated by the enthusiasm of revolutionaries
Copping others' rights for themselves,
Electing themselves to presidencies they don't deserve.
I don't think Marie Antoinette should have said,
"Let them eat cake."
I don't even think they deserved breadcrumbs.
She was so much prettier than the thick executioners.



Michael Weston: *Fish Eating in Midair*

PLAYING DEAD

I saw a figure emerging
through a red field
of simpering creatures
politely playing dead.

I saw snapshots of people
shapes lying cool and still
while the earth erupted
cementing them in place.

Often they look so loud
that I become silent
enough to hear the void
of space inside
the shells
they've left behind.

Their stone faces tell
how intimate they are with loneliness.

Dying in the middle of prayer,
or shielding a child.
Suffocating while making love
or howling at the black sun.

What coaxes these stony bodies
to lie patiently, meditating –
Never sounding the alarms?

What sound does the rain make
as it drizzles down for a dozen centuries?

What noise echoes through the cave
in the chests of these dead?

The sound it makes today
is the failing caw
of a million falling blackbirds.

TONY GLOEGGLER

GOODBYE

Today, I picked Joshua up
from music group. He said
my name soon as I stepped
through the door, tried to run
to me. The therapist stood
in his way, forced him to stay
until he made eye contact,
said goodbye to her assistant,
the other kids. She slowly
walked him over to me,
assured me how much better
he was doing while he tugged
on my arm repeating 'home'
louder and louder. I thanked her
while we headed out the door,
tried to keep him from jumping
into every puddle, steer him
from bumping into people
as we turned down subway stairs.

Joshua took a window seat,
got on his knees and traced
the outline of his face as we rode.
I finger counted the six stops
to Hamilton Parkway, promised
that his mom would be waiting
for him. When the train rose
out of the ground, climbed up
into the cloudless sky, he ran
to the front door. I stood behind
him, played with his hair as all
of Red Hook spread beneath us.
I glanced at the other riders,
curious whether they could tell

something was wrong with Joshua
then wondered what he was thinking,
if his brain could hold anything
other than shapes and colors
flying past, the feel of glass
against his fingertips, the thought
that his mommy would be waiting
three, now two, stations away.
I imagined what he would do
if we stayed on longer, rode out
to Coney Island. Would he stop
crying and fighting long enough
to see or hear, smell, the ocean?
Would he run across the sand
like the summer before, strip
down to his shorts? Jump
and play in the waves until
the last light left the sky?

The closets are empty
and piles of packed boxes
line the walls of his house,
but I'm not sure Joshua knows
that this means he's moving
back to Vermont in the morning.
I don't know if he can grasp
the concept of missing someone
or understand how hard
it is for me to keep from crying.
He has no idea that I met him
three years ago. I went
with Hilary to pick him up
from school one afternoon.
The Sunday after, finished
with my bowl of oatmeal,
I was watching her lift
her teacup to her lips
when I realized I wanted
to spend my life with her
and it scared me to death.

CONTINUED

I don't know what Joshua
remembers about Vermont,
about moving to Brooklyn;
if he knows when things started
to fall apart or why me and his mom
couldn't find a way to stay together;
if he remembers that I moved
down the block, kept visiting him
while everyone I know told me
to let go and move on,
that I didn't owe him a thing,
and no one seemed to accept
or understand I love Joshua,
that the way he will never fit
in the world reminds me of me
and I wish he was my son,
my eight year old boy.
My, my, mine.

TONY GLOEGGLER

YOUR KIND OF LIFE

It's another Saturday
and your father is still
dead. Your softball game's
over and you're visiting
your mother. You finished
showering, your hair is dripping
dry and you're going to get
the paper. Does she need
anything? Milk, Italian bread,
cigarettes, her husband? She wants
to give you money, but you're out
the door, down the stoop
before she finds her pocketbook.

The block is lined with attached,
one family houses and everyone
you knew moved years ago.
No one is playing stickball
in the streets. The schoolyard
backboards are all torn down
and the silver poles stick out
of the tar like crooked grave
markers and you feel like
a ghost. You turn the corner:
A man, three boys walk your way.
But no, he isn't your father
and the boys have nothing
to do with you, your two brothers.
It's just Jarod Jordan, the guy
who married your first girlfriend.

CONTINUED

You stop, grasp hands, remember
always liking him, and wish
it didn't make you feel so good
to see he's fat and bald as a bowl.
You ask about Julia. He introduces
his three boys. Their names
all begin with the letter J
and they live in Jericho
with their mother. He's in a hurry,
says he hopes to run into you again.
You watch him walk away,
picture following him home,
hiding behind bushes and trees
maybe catching a glimpse
of Julia picking up her kids.
Her hair is still long and soft
and black, and you fall in love
again. You'll start with dinner,
live happily ever after.

Sorry, but you know that isn't
your kind of life. In your life
you drop the shopping bag
on the kitchen counter, help
your mother put the groceries
away. Maybe you'll stay
the night, keep her company.
She's in bed by ten.
You go out for a walk, stop
in some neighborhood bar,
find Jarod sitting on a stool.
The Yankees are playing
on TV. Someone slides
quarters in the juke box
and the Allman Brothers
jam the Fillmore East again.

You buy each other beers.
He wants to tell you he misses
Julia and his boys, that he feels
his life is over. You want to say
you don't know if you ever
got over any of the women

you loved. Instead, you argue
how many millions Bernie Williams
is worth, whether “Time Out Of Mind”
is as good as “Blood On The Tracks.”
When he drinks enough, he tells you
how lucky you are to never
have married. He loves his kids
to death, but the damn alimony
is killing him. He scribbles
numbers on a napkin, laughs.
*Here, help me out, give Julia
a call. She still looks good.*

When it gets late enough,
you talk louder and louder,
point your finger at him,
tell him to be a good father.
Like your father. *Play ball
with those boys. Teach them
to get down, stay in front
of grounders, hit the open
man and never spike the ball
after a touchdown. Teach them
to say what they mean and to do
everything they say.* You stumble

Home, climb upstairs to the room
you slept in as a boy, drop
face down onto the bed,
your clothes still on. You hear
footsteps padding the rug, feel
fingers unlacing your sneakers.
You’re too tired, too dizzy
to turn, look up at your mother.
She leans over, covers you
with a comforter. You lie still
knowing she’s standing there,
and hope she sees something
that reminds her of her husband
before she walks back to her room
and lies down, tries to sleep.

RORY JOHNSON

WALKING HOME FROM MY BROKEN DOWN CAR DURING THE COMPUTER AGE

If I looked like George Clooney, somebody would give me a ride,
I shouted at the cars blazing by, dusting me into weeds
Along route 521. I had lilted blood sugars and no water,

Early May and my Ford stalled an hour behind me.
Muggy mosquitoes already beginning, summer crawling
Behind the guardrail, the moustache lady I saw every day

Powdering her face in the parking lot of the American Legion
Where pickups passed like shotguns until
It seemed the road itself was speeding.

In the silences between cars I heard washtubs, tire rims,
Refrigerators molting in the dirt behind Smitty's Salvage,
Parents scolding their housepets while the children worked

Inside the town's only traffic signal, blinking from weeks
Without water, and dangerous Albert Kise
Dialing on a row of payphones at the Empress.

No one was stopping. Not in this town.
Not for a sweaty shirt panting while commuters
Hurried home from cubicles, the same miles

To my parents' house I walked in the fifth grade
When the school bus, filled with Chris Wright,
The most gnashing biceps in the class,

Frightened me because I was not a gifted fighter.
Dusk crept onto Mohican Road like a sputtering Edsel,
The next generation of chain-link grass, North Warren hall-of-famers.

The lacrosse team looked like toy commandoes
Grazing in the distance. *They're combing the hills for you*
With their sticks, a voice yelled from a screen door.

Another voice pummeled the first voice in the gut, and across
The lawn covered with crocuses and Grecian cone flowers,
Two boys blurred away from the shouting mother,

Disappeared behind the swimming pool where it was already night
And I could hear the boys laughing themselves to sleep
Deep in the laps of their Nintendos. I kept walking, past

The girl at the end of her driveway crying into an envelope,
Past bicycles waiting in the open throats of garages, past
The homes that were once short cuts through hayfields,

Past Jacksonburg Road and Bearcave Road and the driveway
To Buddy Cash, the best tuba player in Warren County,
Past where Farmer Teel's heart keeled over dead

And the silos began to limp a little and I felt the diabetes
Needling my fingertips, and I would've knocked
On someone's house but I didn't know the people anymore.

My toenails ached, the horizon lit with the searchlamp
Of a red Schwinn staggering back to the kindergarten rooms
Where it stays winter and Mrs. Woodmeier

Uses the chalkboard as a shadow and a lean-to.
I was shivery and wanted a Diet Rite but kept walking.
I liked the way the older mailboxes leaned—

Just short of their necks breaking—
And how the crows nuzzled the still-alive possum
Splayed across the yellow stripe until the breathing

Stopped and two women powerwalked by without
A glance, lost in headphones, the same women
I'd almost run over the day before, gathering miles

CONTINUED

To ambush the approaching leukemias, twilight full
Of cows lowing, Maple Lane trickling into the ditch.
Highschool cars gunwailed down Mr. Terhune's

Driveway from the annual Burger Bash—
Bill Terhune who taught World History
Eighteen or twenty-one minutes every class,

The next thirty pitching his Ski Club and hamburger
Parties to the flunking farm kids. I kept moving with
The chicken sheds while a child shouted behind a lit curtain.

My hair was hurting. I could hear men
Leading the tractors in for the night,
The vice principal sharpening his teeth in the corncrib,

And on the Keating's front porch
I saw where the grounded flag had been gnawed
At the edges by dogs panting under the floodlights.

GUY BEINING

MAKING A POINT

bo:

there is no point.

spectre:

the point of the matter is concern
or true properties on all properties.

bo:

where is the point?

spectre:

it goes back to matter.

bo:

if there are no lines i can't follow this.

spectre:

this is not a road map.

bo:

nothing musical either.

spectre:

there are no minor or major keys.

bo:

i feel that the blankness is major.

spectre:

it's either your nose, thumb, or something out of place
that is covering up the point. you need to be rearranged.

GUY BEINING

CORE OF CORD

bo: we sit so still that we could be
spectre: a mystery. o, words. a world of words.
bo: no, parts of a statue perhaps.
spectre: you are absurd.
bo: but trying to be less absurd.
spectre: that's absurd.
bo: something less than absurd is better.
spectre: incidentally the surgery performed was complete.
bo: they left a toe, a nose, & a lot of cadaver.
spectre: who knows, the body is so ambiguous.
bo: in ether light i saw the pin-like form of a nun.
spectre: did you clasp yourself or did she peel you from a wall?
bo: she droned by very electrically.
spectre: with a smile that folded into a towel?
bo: they stuffed his pillow with his remains.
spectre: vox, pox, pyx.

GUY BEINING

SEVENTEEN

roots

a spirit visits
& fills the eyes
clipping light &
dancing on a pin
of quizzical shimmerings
space was soon closed
by a block of wood
that pierced the damp
forest of a dark winter:
now the barbershop
window glares back at him
as razors swish &
scoop up melting snow.

&

branches

the wind scraped
the old man's head
that hung under
drunken stars
& spoke to a
one sign universe;
he watched a moon
sequence that burned
along the edges of his brain,
he then rubbed his
glazed head & felt
for jewels to put
in his eye sockets.

GUY BEINING

BAD LIGHT

he weighed himself in shadows & was ready to strike
yet hardly moved toward the edge of anywhere.
a woman in a transparent raincoat ran
toward a man holding a handkerchief of ammonia.
her sea-deep eyes lifted slowly
as he watched the paris green bombs push out from her chest.
later her amorphous body floated out of
the lethal raincoat which she then strapped to a chair.
if they were to fight on a bed of silverware
who would win in the flashing sprawl?
the man wondered if the runs in her stockings
were caused by schizophrenia, she being
a fanatic & demonizing persona when scrawling
vile words on the bathroom mirror.
but the shadowy man knew that she
was small in bed & folded up like an umbrella.

STACIA FLEEGAL

B AV A R I A N N A

Your name was Anna Pappenheimer,
and I dreamed your fate from an american
living room the night before I bought
the obscure book cradling your story

like my recliner cradled me, a cup of tea,
a happenstance meeting between us.
Will I ever sleep well again? I dreamed
a room full of you, actually—naked,

hanging, breastless, tongues cut out, all wearing
tattered Victoria's Secret. I touch
the ties on my robe, the down lap blanket,
my eyelids. None of these cover you.

Bavarian ducal spies dressed you in lies
while stripping you before the thousands who
flocked from the countryside to see you rise
by the strappado, improvise your confession

for a quick respite from the pain. Your lips
only *seemed* to bleed from speaking falsely;
really, it was your amputated breasts, pressed
to your mouth, forced into your sons' mouths

to mock anything you'd ever meant to anyone.
I bite my lip and wish I tasted blood.
I cry for you, put loved women's faces
where yours is blurry in my head. So I

dreamed you, woke up, mourned you, plotted how to be
a storm crow cawing *Anna Pappenheimer*.
Then I bought a new book, got burned by the tea
kettle—how humane, steam instead of flame.



Edward Michael O'Durr Supranowicz: *Danu*

ALIXA DOOM

CEDAR KIN

I move slowly, happy
with just a bird song in my ear
and a breeze blowing through me.
I no longer buy tickets to anywhere.
Turning off on Deer Run Trail I climb the hill
through the sun and mist of cedars.
The slower I go the more time there is
to wear seed in my hair
and starlight on my skin. I sway
and bow to a truer time the earth
pushes up through cedar trunk.
Soon I am full of this place,
the dark green arms,
the affection of cedar sisters.



Michael Weston: *Congress of a Far Void*

CATHERINE SASANOV

IN THE JIM CROW MUSEUM OF RACIST MEMORABILIA

The Jim Crow Museum is currently housed in a small room, only 500 square feet... There's not enough space for descriptive panels to place objects in the proper historical and social context... At best, the current facility provides only visible storage for part of the collection.

from the fundraising video, *Learning from the Past:
Changing Lives: The Jim Crow Museum*

In a room just large enough
to change
sixteen mindsets at a time,

I'm asked to give
each object
white glove treatment.

So you will see
in over
a hundred photos

my disembodied, disguised
hands
presenting all sides

of slur:
mammy, coon, sambo, darkie...
I don't want the dead

to see this.
I don't want the dead
to see

CONTINUED

me handling the sloppy
plaster ashtray
where a woman's breast

is bared
for burning. Where someone
took their time,

gouged the weeping,
straight
out of her face.

Who kept, perhaps
as souvenir,
tears

the size
of poppy seeds.
Across the room:

Jolly Darkie Target Game,
Alabama Coon –
Two boys with airy

cardboard throats
worn raw from swallow:
the force feed

of beanbags, balls.
Their faces beaten with
bad aim.

And to my left: Who kept
this hanged man
in his pocket?

He still dangles
from a set
of house keys: portable

lynching
I could carry
with me. Who is he

cropped out
from the crowd
that killed him?

Cheek to jowl,
floor to ceiling –
Dear Reader,

I could go on
for a thousand
objects. Barely

twenty-percent
of the full
collection. Museum

funded only as far
as this visible
storage,

as these cases,
cabinets – Small room
of so much glass

but not one window.
Single door
but no escape.

(Don't step
in the unwritten message
displayed

on the floor:
*Wipe your feet
on a black man's face* –

Don't mistake it
for a doormat.) Don't
mistake

just what a million
dollar donor
someday wakes:

CONTINUED

four thousand
crated
household objects

*(Warning:
Contents Under
Pressure)*

four thousand
household
objects fashioned

lovingly from hate.

CATHERINE SASANOV

HOW LONG IT TAKES, BURYING THE DEAD

Hell hath no fury

like this woman rising up

from her cellar in the middle

of a war –

Her acres of corn shot down to stubble

Fields sown with farmers, with Minié balls –

Exactly who's going to pay for all this damage?

Who'll get these dead men and horses out of my yard?

From the water-powered grist works clogged-up with soldiers

blood's a message carried downstream for anyone who can read it

The miller extricates the messengers out of his wheel

(That man not yet burdened by *grandpa*

by *great-great-great*)

He takes down the dead then forgets where he put them

For years, his plow's tongue snags on their ribs

Time's a fist to the mouth –

CONTINUED

The foundation of his home: all jaw
with the teeth broken off

(See stop number five on the battlefield tour)

Nine hours away in an Illinois closet

his voice frets where he left it in the family Bible

A hundred forty-five years – He just can't stop repeating

how long it takes, burying the dead.

HELLER LEVINSON

FROM MERMAID THIS SNAKE

winch ... slink surplus unerring

query: an appendage in atrophy

efficiency: suppling a *wind-up*

Mami Wata! snake issues

to bind her catch to waylay to

man-tie

overhead snake twirl this oceanic cowgirl

this reptilian empress queen of the lanyard crunch

tosses lariats venom-laced or

fecund – catch depending — their teeth, their caliber, their inundatory

horizon replete giddy scooters a cowgirl ambush

cheerleaders for world hygiene this

estuarial caucus threaded chiasmus elope claw looses legions rum-

bles precipice quiddity press

cow punchers belt dazzlers winding through the winds of

a trafficking necrosis

giddyup springs crocodile waterfalls canine cathedrals

CONTINUED

waterswells of salubrious posse sprawl the land
a hirsute hybrid collective
springy, credit worthy
combustible, cagey
a launch of siren decibels honey vowels
seething molecular jungles
a riptide of talent scouts
strung like a rainbow of hawks
as the lasso coursed the west
these succulent snake charming sweethearts swirling their saurian daughters
.....
draw

¹ African water spirit.

HELLER LEVINSON

IN THE TEMPERATURE OF BARN

... barley, burlap, briar –

HORSE

“The places most horses these days are looked after, and loved, and where they learn a great deal about the ways of the world they must live in is – the barn.”

the pedagogy of enclosure

the pedigree of limit

back rolling mesas clambering glee coulees wind drunk leg celerity kick

scramble

— *stall* —

stalling in stall

that wintry redolence bare-fisted perfervid

does the horse whisperer hear the

scream

the bat barristers proffer a wing advocacy

minerality musk

The Reeking Hour —

the Magyars the Huns the Mongols the Mauretians the Goths
the Scythians the Apaches the Comanches & the Blackfoot –
the great horse cultures

swinging with the horse, an equestrian bebop, a bandstand eureka
from the planks the floorboards the walls an archetypal transport,
an imagistic seepage:

from the caves of Chauvet, Rouffignac, Lascaux, Peche Merle & Niaux,
thundering off the steppes of Asia, from the moors of the British Isles, the
marshlands of the Camargue, squalling off the Sahara through simooms of
profit and provision, they come

take up residence

transfer heritage & hide

tend to the arithmetic of bone-*durance*

a memorial quiver

the sea horse mounts the mermaid

merry plunge

(utterances moulded in what upbringing

is there a mechanism alert as horse

alertness://ears ... organ disposition

the Panel of Horses in the Chauvet Cave (the cave with images over 30,000
years old, the oldest known paintings in the world)

four horse heads stacked on the diagonal¹

[Q. It's been said you're a misanthrope, is it true you don't like
humanity?

A. Not at all, I love humanity, ... I just can't find any.]

heads soaking with a humanity that predate homo sapiens & which will ante-
date homo sapiens. By "humanity" we mean the emotional empathic, the
tenderness ranges, we mean breeze-mixing & splendiferous co-alignments,
we mean recognition more than endeavor. Did these horses emerge from
rock, massaged forth by some celestial sorcerer, or were they placed there,
laid to rest from millenniums of exhaustive labor, these chaperones of the
mythic now lazing & mellow, grazing among the rock-pastures.

the need to reallocate territory

to chamber a domain &

trot it forward

barn: a recruitment center to insure perpetuity

a holdout against evolution's exclusivity, its disallowance of retreat ...

this conference center schedules to resist the vanishing, dedicates to shape,

to perpetuating configuration ...

the abyss — a de-shapement, an utter dis-figurement, the realm of no corners

...

is the abyss the theater of disappearance

a monstrosity of vacuity ...

CONTINUED

with no shape can we speak of an impulse, a charge ... perhaps, a petulance?
is the music of vanishing Franck, Satie, Rachmaninoff, ... Little Walter

human intercourse with the horse is daylit
the barn activates at night
pitches
sessiles in shrouds of oneiric black
prickling over fallen pasture lands
mists burin an etymology of herd
hoof, stalwart & emblematic, flags a species
swathes an indigenuity, gathers
surreptition,
arises as a ghost chorus from a long buried
reverberative, munitioning
muzzles
eco-caustic & overdue ...
sizzling spits
of
recalcitrant heat

¹ These horses can be viewed in the *Dawn of Art: The Chauvet Cave*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1996, photo #51 ("the four horses in perspective"), p.68.

DAVID CHORLTON

THE LOST RIVER

Songbirds returning from the tropics
looked for their river
and found a dry bed
where deer stood at dawn
licking stones.
The beavers looked reproachfully

from their dams
and the frogs summoned a final
chorus before deflating
into empty sacks.
The bed was examined
for fingerprints.
Was this the work
of terrorists

or had a gang conspired
to package the river
in waterproof bags
to sell where drought planted fear
on city streets?
Had somebody come in the night
to steal it in buckets?
The moon was called in
for questioning.
It yawned.

Miles of yellow tape
cordoned off the banks
although skunks sprayed disapproval
and garter snakes
stretched themselves out in the sun
to replicate the shape
of what they'd lost.

CONTINUED

The mist turned out its pockets
to show all it had been hiding
were the empty plastic bottles
and rucksacks discarded
by smugglers in the night.
We sent a search party

which brought back a cup
filled with pebbles
and a sack of souvenir reeds.
Photographs of the river
in full flow were circulated door
to door and posted on telegraph poles.
Reports came in

that rivers had been seen, but none
was the equal
of the one we'd lost. Not one
possessed the same delicacy
or bristled with green
broken light.

Maps cracked
along the line that once marked
the river's passage
and the signposts
that pointed in its direction
leaned over and fell
into the dust.
Politicians feigned remorse

for having ignored security warnings
and tried to make up
by suggesting we replace it
with mirrors
while inside the white church on the desert
the statues wept real tears.
We collected them

in vials to use in our rituals,
stood in line
to raise the effigy of San Xavier
and whisper a prayer
for the river's return. We often go

to look for the painted buntings,
blue grosbeaks and vermilion flycatchers
once common where the river was
and find their reflections
floating like silk handkerchiefs
from a conjurer's sleeve.
Word has it

that a miracle is at hand,
but another word says
once a river has vanished
no magic ever brings it back.

DAVID CHORLTON

ON TIME

*“From October 1, 2001, to the present, about 1,693 migrants
perished in the arid landscape of southern Arizona.”*

ACLU report, September, 2009

Casimiro died on the way to work
but nobody missed him
because others arrived in time to take the job.
His wife called his cell phone
but the signal said *it's hot*

*and the sky is spinning. It's hot and all
there is to drink is sand.
If you want to speak to Casimiro please call back*

*when the phantoms have gone away
and the needles are removed
from his skin
after he embraced a cholla
when no one else stepped up to help him*

*or to tip the earth back
until it was level again. Javier lost his way*

and became part of the mountain
he attempted to cross
with stone for a face
and a photograph in his hand
when he sat down to air the blisters on his feet
but his shoes fell together

where he dropped them
like two who embraced
when they couldn't tell cold from warm any more.
Now a new Casimiro

is coming to wear them
and another Javier
has picked up the phone and is calling
to say he's been delayed, his water flask is dry,
but he'll make it on time if it rains.

ALAN CATLIN

THE BIG QUIET AN AMERICAN GOTHIC

The baby is a detail from an abstract expression, a piece jarred loose from Guernica, hollow as pain at the extreme edge of a studio portrait, the whole extended family at end time before a back drop by Grant Wood, blue skies overpainted with atomic clouds, Blake's spirits rising in apocalyptic Rapture, the folks' blank faces buttoned down to their shoulders like starched collars that press against flaccid skin, wattled but melting down to their waxy core, their Sunday store-boughts all afire like semiprecious stones in an uncertain light, sunflowers against a field of black clouds, grey pinstriped suits still impressed with the rack they were hung on, wheat chaff and clover fogging the last remnants of breathable air.

NAVA RENEK

SNAKE EYES

The first time I did any long distance hitching it was to rendezvous with my boyfriend, Rev, in Tucson, Arizona. I'd first met Rev soon after college while I was living in Jersey, waitressing at the Phoenix Head Diner. Rev would come in each morning after working the graveyard shift at the Budweiser Plant across the highway and tell me he wanted his eggs "any style" the way the words were printed in the menu.

"Do you think you're the first guy to ever say that?" I sassed him back.

He stared into his coffee, his face turning bright red. That's when I realized he'd truly meant the remark as a joke, some kind of commentary on the absurdity of the English language. After that, we became friends—the kind of friendship a waitress can develop with male customers where she allows herself to be compassionate, but not a sucker. We only saw our customers a few minutes out of every day. It wasn't as if our problems were intrinsically linked to one another's.

"I thought you'd be at work?" I remarked one afternoon after I began to notice him at the counter just as my shift was ending. It wasn't the first time a man had tried to extend our relationship beyond a professional one. My job was to deter him without hurting his feelings or losing a customer.

"I'm on break. When you're your own boss, you can do whatever the hell you want."

"Don't you work over at the Bud plant?"

"Yep, but it's all up here," he told me, tapping his forehead

I'd already counted out my tips and knew I was going to be taking home nearly seventy-five dollars that day.

Rev looked at his watch and jumped up. "Gotta go, but I'd really like to meet you somewhere that doesn't stink of bacon and fryalator grease. How 'bout coming down to the Kopper Kettle around nine tonight?"

Since moving to Jersey, I'd been seeing some guy named Marlon, but it wasn't anything serious, and there certainly wasn't a law against meeting a customer for a drink, and I liked to think of myself as the kind of girl who took chances and acted on impulse, and impulse told me meeting Rev would be good for my future, so I agreed.

That was the night he told me about his plan to go out west—escape the polluted skies of central Jersey, the all night fires lapping from the smoke-

stacks along the industrial plains of Perth Amboy, The Oranges, Port Elizabeth, the bulky turnpike with its curlicues and elephant ears heading north, south, east, and west, the passing lanes, truck lanes, car pool lanes, toll booths.

“It’ll be so fucking hot in the desert, you’ll sweat out all the poisons you’ve accumulated living here your whole life,” Rev told me.

“I’m as far west as is healthy. And besides, what makes you think I’ve lived in Jersey all my life?” After I said that, I threw back my shot of Johnnie Walker, not quite certain how I’d actually wound up in Jersey at all.

“We could start new. Be whoever the fuck we want,” Rev continued, his blue eyes twinkling. For him, the plan was a done deal. He and his buddy, Rich, were leaving the next month—a week before Christmas—but Rev hadn’t counted on driving his car head on into a utility pole or been aware that moving violations were logged into one centralized computer system and all the State Trooper who found him had to do was punch in his license plate and registration and the officer would be able to count the number of unpaid tickets accumulated over the years.

Three days before we were about to leave, Rev stood before a judge in traffic court who sentenced him to some experimental rehabilitation program for multiple offenders of the DWI laws, but by then the momentum of escape had already been set into motion. I’d given notice at the diner, withdrew my savings of \$557.72, packed a pink nylon bag full of shirts, jeans, skirts, bra and panties and a Panasonic tape player. In a puke green army surplus knapsack, Rich had stuffed a pack of Marlboros, three mangy cotton turtle necks, some boxer shorts, and two rolls of wintergreen Lifesavers. Rev took an empty notebook, his revoked driver’s license, a clean shirt, and some underwear, threw it all into a pillow case and caught a bus up to Mahwah. We didn’t really have a chance to say good-bye. It was understood. We were going to meet somewhere in Tucson at the end of January.

I’d arranged for Rich and I to share a ride in a van driven by a bunch of burnouts who’d run an ad in the local underground newspaper, *Graffiti Bridge*, but the plan had quickly fallen apart when the van pulled into the P.C. Richards’ parking lot and I peeked into the rear, only to see seven pairs of eyes gleaming back at me. That’s when my survival instincts kicked in. Somehow I knew if I didn’t turn around and get the hell out of there, we were going to end up spending five days—all nine of us—sitting cramped like illegal immigrants crossing the border.

“You going or not,” the greaser asked as he watched me back away from the door. Rich was standing right behind me, acting like a dumb sheep who’d come to a stone wall and couldn’t figure out how to get over it.

“What the fuck are you trying to pull?” I demanded.

The van guy shrugged and flicked his cigarette onto the ground. “You don’t like it, don’t come.”

So we didn't go. As the van pulled off, I heard Rich breathing heavily in some asthmatic way. If he hadn't been Rev's best friend, I probably never would've said more than a few words to him, but at that moment, I didn't realize how intertwined our destinies had become, and there we stood, in that empty parking lot with the goddamn snow falling like soot, and Rev far away somewhere up in a Bergen County DWI prison camp. That's how I ended up traveling south on I-95 with Rich, not Rev. Destination: Tucson, Arizona. Mode of travel: unknown.

At the Delaware state line, Rich ran out of cigarettes. An eerie red halo advertising the nearest gas station hung in the distance, and I watched as he traipsed off the highway toward the store, hoping to score some more smokes. After he was gone, I sat down on the embankment, feeling pretty awful. I'd put my faith in chance and the idea that at some point (maybe not right then) I wasn't going to be waiting at the edge of the turnpike, just before Christmas, as the sun was setting all yellow and messy in the sky, with no idea where I was going or how I'd get there.

I'd also become more certain of a few things about Rich that before I'd only suspected. For one, he was a chain smoker. If he wasn't sucking on a cigarette, his eyeballs would start darting back and forth, his hands patting down his pockets, searching for a crushed pack, as if a hive of bees were after him. Two: he was an alcoholic. As soon as the sun fell low in the sky, he started thinking about where to get his next bottle of booze to settle his nerves. Three: he was also some sort of mystic who believed in signs and things that were totally improbable.

When Rich returned from the gas station, he was smiling and seemed to think he was bringing good news. Up at the pumps, he'd met a truck driver who promised to swing by later that evening to pick us up and take us all the way to Tennessee. That was enough for Rich to collapse onto the side of the road to wait.

"What the fuck are you doing," I asked when I saw him throw down his bags.

"Waiting for the truck."

"The *truck*? Do you think some road fried trucker is going to remember to stop at this exit to pick up two fuckheads like us? We've got to keep hitching!"

Rich removed his thick glasses and wiped the lenses with his flannel shirt. "He said he was coming back. So why don't you calm down?"

"I'm freezing my tits off and now it's goddamn night time and we're sitting here waiting for an imaginary *truck*?" I started moving off toward the highway and put out my thumb, hoping someone was going to take pity on a poor twenty-two year-old girl out on the night before Christmas Eve. Hopefully, the driver wouldn't be some pervert or serial killer.

Time passed, as did many cars, but none of them stopped. Rich remained shivering by the side of the road. Each time I looked over at him, he inhaled on

his cigarette, then blew the smoke up into his glasses until the lenses became obscured. Finally, he got up, stretched, and met me at the entrance ramp.

“I thought you were waiting for the truck?”

He nodded and put out his thumb to a passing car. “I am, but just in case it doesn’t come...”

Then I saw what the real problem was. It was drinking time again and there wasn’t a liquor store in sight. We had to keep moving.

For seven days and eight nights cars came and went. We crept slowly, then moved quickly, then crept slowly again across the country, sleeping in truck stops, roadside restaurants, and motel parking lots. Once, I even splurged and got us a room at a Super8 just outside Oklahoma City. Rich had no money, so I paid for everything, thinking that as soon as we got to Tucson, we’d both find jobs.

Sometimes our rides would treat us to a meal at a Burger King where we’d devour Whoppers and fries like normal people, but I didn’t feel like a normal person at all. I had no home, no job, nothing to think about except Rev and the chance that Tucson was going to be hospitable to someone like me with a college degree but no real ambition. Then there was Rich who stuck to me like a hangnail. Every little thing he did caused me great pain: how he walked, chewed, the way he gulped at a mug of beer with his teeth, as if he were an infant learning how to drink from a cup for the first time. But we made progress.

On the eighth morning, the sun was just rising above the camel back mountains surrounding Tucson, and from a distance, we gazed out at the city glistening in the valley below. It was Sunday and the roads were empty, so there wasn’t a chance of catching a ride into town, but that felt fitting enough. We’d suffered to get there. Why would I think circumstances would change once we arrived?

Downtown, a Dunkin’ Donuts was selling coffee for twenty cents a cup. The only customers inside were a pair of cops, their overstuffed asses hanging off the stools. They eyed us suspiciously, then turned back to their Bavarian creams. Later, I learned that Tucson was a stop on the Hobo Trail which ran from Texas to Seattle, and travelers like us hoofing it into town was not an uncommon sight.

By that time, I’d completely stopped talking to Rich other than to make perfunctory comments like: “it’s this way”, or “you ride in front”. At bad times, like early in the morning when I woke up cold and damp from sleeping outside on some lawn behind a dumpster, or late at night when my bed was an asphalt mattress with a concrete pillow, I thought of Rev and longed to curl up with him in some cheap motel where we’d smooch and fuck until our lips became chapped and our bodies numb. But in reality, my memory of Rev seemed to be fading, my only connection to him being through Rich.

The heat was starting up again, the way it did every day in the Southwest, as though giant billows were pumping air onto hot coals somewhere out in the desert. When I looked at Rich, I noticed that his skin had turned red and raw. His hair was greasy, covered with flecks of dandruff, and his teeth were yellow with strands of tobacco hanging off his incisors, as if the insides of his mouth were growing fur.

“We’re walking around in circles,” I complained after seeing the same banner advertising a six pack of Coke for \$1.99, next to a Pizza Hut whose marquee read “All You Can Eat Spaghetti Dinner \$4.99 Tuesday Nights”. Men in pick-ups honked their horns as they passed like they’d never seen pedestrians on the sidewalks before.

“Why don’t you just call your aunt and ask her to come get us,” I suggested.

Rich took a little slip of paper out of his pocket. It was something he’d shown me when we first met the van back in Jersey. His mother happened to have a kid sister who’d just gotten married and moved to Tucson. I never expected we’d need to call her, but suddenly a house with a roof, a bed, and running water seemed appealing.

Rich shook his head. “I don’t want to bother her.”

“If she were one of my relatives, I’d call all right.”

“Well, I just don’t want to, that’s all,” Rich argued, removing his glasses and massaging his temples. It was nearly noon, and I knew already he needed a drink.

“At least tell me this,” I called after him as he pushed ahead. “Do you have any idea where the hell we’re going?”

In response, he walked right up to a Shell station where I saw him pull out his aunt’s address and ask the attendant for directions. The man pointed the opposite way and waved his hands over and over, indicating the long distance. I followed his motions past the endless traffic lights and Christmas decorations that were strung across the boulevard as far as the eye could see. Rich shoved the paper back into his pocket, slung his knapsack over his shoulder, and started off, leaving me standing near the pumps.

As we trudged out of the city along a wide avenue lined with discount hotels, fast food joints, car dealerships, and strip malls, I looked up to see that the sun was dead center in the sky, burning bright and yellow like a sunny side up egg served on a thick china plate at the Phoenix Head. Station wagons filled with kids sprayed dirt in our faces. After a while, the sidewalk became broken and crumbled, until it finally disappeared altogether, leaving only a dirt path trimmed with cactus brush and sand.

A few miles out of town, we found Coyote Pass, a new development of one family homes that provided a buffer between the city and the desert. Arlene and Bob had just gotten back from church when they opened the door to find two dirty kids standing outside in the hot sun, looking like so many of the transients begging quarters and sleeping in doorways downtown.

“Can I help you?” Arlene asked, making a face as though some horrible sirocco had just blown up and left a mound of dust at her door.

I nudged Rich who was staring into the living room straining to hear the score of the NFL game being broadcast on TV. “Hey,” he grunted. “Aunt Arlene. It’s me: Richie.”

Arlene’s face broke into a wide grin. “Oh my God. Richie? Is that you?” She moved inside and called her husband to come see who was there. Within minutes, the four of us were sitting on their leather sofa, drinking Lipton Iced Tea beneath an air conditioner that was spewing cold air into the already chilly room.

“I suppose your mom told you about the wedding,” Arlene gushed, fingering a gold band and engagement ring sporting a diamond the size of a tooth. “I’m sorry you couldn’t come.”

Rich twitched nervously. He’d told me that as far as he’d understood it, he’d never been invited.

I examined the beige wall-to-wall carpeting, the turquoise couch with matching armchairs, and framed prints of women in skimpy outfits looking mean and seductive. Boxes were everywhere—evidence of the recent nuptials. What a waste of time, I thought. Marriage was for suckers who didn’t want adventure. At least by hitching all the way to Tucson, I’d experienced something most people never would have in a lifetime.

“You look tired,” Arlene remarked, in a way that made me think she was trying to suggest something else.

I shrugged. I’d been living outside for over a week. By then, I couldn’t tell if I was exhausted or excited, hungry or full, happy or sad.

“Would you like to lie down? We have an extra room. I guess we can get it ready, if you want.” With that, the newlyweds went off to make space in an empty bedroom that they proudly announced would one day be their nursery, as if they already had this perfect life and were completely confident everything would turn out as planned.

Rich and I sat on the sofa facing the 27” TV, but even over the roar of the football game, I could hear whispers from the back of the house. “We only have a double bed in here. Maybe we could borrow a cot?” Arlene sounded worried.

“You know they’ll want to sleep together,” Bob replied.

“Well, we don’t want to force them into anything. I don’t want Marilyn thinking I’m leading her son astray.”

“Jesus, Arlene, did you take a good look at them? It’s a bit too late for that. I don’t think they’ve showered in days. How long are they going to stay anyway?”

My chest tightened and my breath became short. I was getting that feeling again—the same feeling I got when I saw all those eyes staring at me in the van up in Jersey, the same feeling that told me to move on when Rich

would have rather waited for the truck. "I'm only staying one night," I hissed to Rich. "Do you hear me? One night!"

Rich nodded and started to bite his fingernails, while staring at the two football teams charging at one another. By then, I couldn't bear to look at his fingers. The ends were stubby yellow nubs stained by nicotine and gnawed raw.

For dinner, Arlene warmed up some roast beef and passed a thick slice over to me, but I shook my head.

"No wonder she's so thin. Look at her. She eats like a bird."

"Maybe she doesn't like your cooking," Bob joked.

"Well, if that's the case, why doesn't she say something?"

"I'm fine," I answered. "I just don't eat meat too much."

"So you're a vegetarian," inquired Bob.

Rich had stopped eating too and seemed to be waiting to hear my response. Just to show them, I cut off a piece of roast beef, stuffed it into my mouth, and began chewing. Then later that night, after Bob and Arlene had gone to bed, I persuaded Rich to figure out how to turn off the alarm system, and we both picked up our bags and snuck out the door.

"So what are we going to do now," Rich asked, as we began to retrace our steps, focusing on the brash neon glow that hovered like a toxic cloud just above the city.

"Fuck if I know."

"How much money do you have left?"

"Oh, no. We gotta save that to find an apartment."

"You know, you could've been a little easier on Aunt Arlene. She was only trying to help."

That was when something hot and prickly shot right through me. I wasn't in the business of being nice to condescending people, and there was no way I was going to ignore how I felt just to be cordial to her. Then I looked at Rich and saw his watery eyes all bloodshot and crazed, silently pleading with me to buy him a drink. A convenience store appeared on the horizon, and we picked up our pace, hurrying toward it as if it could provide some kind of refuge from our rotten day.

Later that night, we slept beneath bushes in a small park in the middle of the city. In the morning, black birds woke us, filling the air with incessant squawking. As the sun started to peek up low between the mountains, other sleeping bodies around us began to stir, and I knew we were not alone, but were just two of the city's phantoms: displaced persons, down and out, whose faces had become licked by the sun, possessions piled under shrubs or stashed in different hiding places around the city. No one stared because we looked just like them, except I still had a few hundred dollars in my pocket, and with that, I'd find an apartment.

If we'd arrived in Manhattan, San Francisco, Boston, or D.C., where only wealthy people could afford to live comfortably in the center of the city,

we would've had trouble finding a place, but much of the housing in Tucson catered to the transient population—people who paid their rent by the week and lived in furnished apartments.

It didn't take long to find a place in a two story complex with outside stairwells, balconies, and a peanut-shaped swimming pool that was coated with a murky layer of dried leaves and soot. After paying the first and last week's rent, I dropped the rest of my savings on cheap groceries, like white bread, margarine, oatmeal, a ten-pound bag of potatoes, and a six-pack of Miller beer.

From the moment I moved in until I moved out four weeks later, the apartment reeked of ammonia and oven cleaner. In the mornings, I'd buy the paper and look through Help Wanted ads, not caring what I did for work. It could have been waitressing, housecleaning, babysitting, or making beds. Since we didn't have a phone, I went across the street to the Desert Motor Court and used their pay phone to schedule interviews and get addresses of businesses that might be looking to hire someone like me. Then, because I didn't own a car and there was virtually no public transportation, I'd start hiking along the flat sunbaked roads, turning away from the traffic each time a car swept past. By the time I arrived at a job interview, the company would've already hired someone else—someone who was not so hot and sweaty, *did* own a car and telephone, didn't have a perpetual frown or chip on her shoulder, and wasn't pining for some guy she hardly knew two thousand miles away. Later, when I returned to the apartment, the sun would be pouring in through the bare windows, and Rich would still be asleep.

"Aren't you going to get up," I called to him one afternoon after my fourth fruitless day of job hunting. The little travel clock on the table read 2:33 p.m., and I knew that by the time he got out of bed, it'd be too late to look for work. Most potential bosses would wonder why he couldn't have gotten his ass in gear before noon.

Rich almost found a job, though. Once, one of our neighbors told him the airport was hiring luggage handlers and he'd be guaranteed employment if he got out there by six in the morning. Rich planned to stay up the whole night to be sure he reached the airport on time. Feeling generous, I bought him a ninety-nine cent book of crossword puzzles to keep him busy. Around midnight, I went to sleep, but woke up every few hours just to make sure the light was still on in the living room and he was awake. He did well for most of the night. Sometimes, I heard him padding up and down on the carpet. Other times, I smelled the smoke from his cigarettes, and reassured, I was able to fall back to sleep.

When it was daylight, I went straight into his room to make sure he'd gotten off as planned, but there he was, fully clothed, asleep on his bed.

"Rich, Rich. You missed it. You missed the interview," I called, nudging him awake.

He mumbled something and turned over to face the wall.

“Get up you lazy bastard. You missed your one chance at a job. How’re you ever going to pay the rent? How’re you going to eat? Who’s going to pay for your goddamn drinks?”

With that, his eyes shot wide open, his pupils magnified by the thick glasses he’d never bothered to take off. “Can’t you stop hassling me? I don’t see *you* with any job. Why don’t you leave me alone? All you do is boss me around and sit there waiting for Rev, but you know what? Me and him were planning this trip long before he ever met you. He just asked you along because he felt sorry for you.”

I started to back away thinking Rich had it all wrong. Rev didn’t feel sorry for me; he felt sorry for *him*. Besides, Rev was a free spirit and would’ve gone out west with whoever wanted to join him. It’d been our mistake that we’d both said yes.

The next morning, I went over to the university and applied for a job at the cafeteria there. Assuming that I was a college student, the manager hired me right away. By then, I’d given Rich a few more weeks before he’d bail out and go back to Jersey. He was dead weight. If I could cut him loose, I knew I’d survive until Rev got into town.

On Sunday, we went for drinks at the motor court where the bar was a good investment. For twenty dollars or less, we could spend the afternoon in an air conditioned room where Rich would be entertained watching TV, and I wouldn’t feel so guilty about the plan I was concocting, because the day before, after I’d cashed my first paycheck, I’d put down a deposit on a small cottage along a side street nearby, a house I planned to live in with Rev, not Rich.

When a Bud Lite commercial came on and Rich had downed his second shot of Dewars, he turned to me all smiles: “I think I got a good lead on a job today. I heard Circle K is hiring and all you have to do is pass a polygraph.”

“A polygraph about what?”

Rich shrugged. “How should I know? Maybe something like do I like Coke vs. Pepsi. or should Ho-Ho’s have more cream.”

“They’re probably going to ask you if you steal, drink, or use drugs. Maybe they’ll test your urine too.”

The 49ers had just sacked the Charger’s quarterback on the Chargers’ twenty yard line, and Rich’s eyes were glued to the tube. “Alcohol and drugs,” he mumbled. “I should have guessed.”

“Yeah. Why not? Don’t you think they’d want to know before they hired someone like you.”

Rich inhaled on his cigarette, his lips making a strange popping noise each time he pulled the filter out of his mouth. “Are you saying you don’t think I could get a job at a goddamn convenience store?”

When I looked at him again, I actually felt sorry for him. He was still wearing the same flannel shirt that he’d traipsed into Tucson in. His dirty

jeans were hanging loose off his hips because he'd stopped eating and only used the cash I gave him to buy booze and cigarettes. It'd gotten to the point where he even had to ask me to buy him razors and shaving cream.

He let his head fall into his hands and looked as if he were about to cry—really wail right there at the motor court with the 49ers about to score and another round of drinks set up in front of us. The bartender, who must have experienced customers like us, knew enough to keep his distance. But we didn't fight or cause a commotion. I gulped down the rest of my vodka and felt the liquid scorch my insides, then opened my mouth half-way like a panting dog. "How about we go to Pizza Hut?" I offered. "My treat."

It was a stupid thing to say. I knew it right after the words came out. He didn't have a dime, so of course it was going to be *my* treat, but I suddenly wanted to make him laugh, the way I sometimes wanted to cheer up my sullen customers back at the Phoenix Head. So I waited a little while longer until he took his face out of his hands, and when he did, his eyes were gleaming. "Wait here while I powder my nose." He laughed.

When he returned, we went next door to Pizza Hut where there was an All You Can Eat Spaghetti Buffet for \$2.99. I still had ten dollars left from my paycheck, so we splurged for a pitcher of Miller too.

"Rev is sure going to like it when he gets here," Rich remarked, tipsy from the booze.

It was a strange comment. Neither of us particularly *liked* Tucson. It was just a place where we'd ended up, like taking a train to the end of the line and getting off because there was no where else to go. "Yeah," I agreed. "It sure beats winter. Maybe it's snowing in Jersey right now?"

Rich stuffed a forkful of pasta into his mouth. "It's probably cold as hell too."

"Do you think your aunt is wondering what happened to us? I mean we just showed up one day and then disappeared."

Rich's face flushed over. "You know, I called her the other night. I didn't want her telling my mom I was AWOL."

"I guess that's okay. It's better than having her running around the city looking for us or calling the police or some shit."

"Yeah. She wasn't even worried. She sounded as if she didn't really care."

"Huh?"

Rich started shaking his head back and forth as if he were following a fly zigzagging across the table. "I mean, we're just goddamn specks of dirt out here. No one knows us and we don't have any friends. I can't even find a job. If we just fucking disappeared, who the hell would care?"

"I found a job."

"Sure, but you're a girl. You can make yourself pretty. That's all that matters. You know what? I've figured it all out. When Rev gets here, I'm the one who's going to be left out. He'll want to be with you, not me. I might as

well go back to Jersey right now. I don't know why the hell I ever came out here in the first place."

My first instinct was to try to comfort him, persuade him that he was wrong, but that wasn't how I was feeling. Instead I said, "you know, I've come this far—two thousand miles, and who knows why I'm here, but I found this job, and I've put some money down on an apartment, and I guess I'll stay until I don't have to be here anymore."

"You're going to stay in Tucson because of a stupid job?"

"I'm just waiting for Rev.," I sighed, "and I'm waiting for my life to change, and maybe now it will. I don't know. Life's a bitch, but I take gambles, and sometimes I win and beat the odds, and sometimes I come up snake eyes."

"But what are you going to *do* here?"

I shrugged. "It's the experience that this trip is all about. Not good experience or bad experience, just another notch in our belts like this scratch on my arm, all scabbed over, but here just the same—something to remind me of what I've done and the things that've happened to me."

When I glanced over to see if he was listening, I saw his eyes were watery, and greasy Marinara sauce glistened on his lips. I wanted to say something kind, something warm, something caring that would've made both our hearts break, but when I opened my mouth, the only sounds that came out were cracked and dry like the desert earth.

EDGAR CAGE

THE EMPTY CONTINENT

motels for the deformed ice outside minneapolis

sleet marching from the animal windows
gnawed in billboards at deserted time crossings

a priest on television pointing a finger of sorrow

a hitch-hiker walking across antarctica

glyphs of cigar smoke following women into malls and dressing rooms
where mannequins strip down to their fog

the ride home from your day while you watch it disappear
its mascara smearing into moods of 5pm half-light

the sky seems shallow
a cloud that hasn't moved since the pink fifties

young boys learning to read god's desperation
in a language of bee stings and scraped knees

a housewife studying how to build bombs
out of piano wire and empty cat food cans

the husband coming home early
the hitch-hiker approaching the wind's edges
the child becoming a statue of carbon monoxide

(an old station wagon path to sundown)

this is not a map of nouns
and arteries

but a search for runaways in the dark towns

of someone's breathing

"i worry about my shadow selling the spines and parts of me
it couldn't eat," a man says from the storms turning
deeper, the telephone trails between cities

noise of the light getting tired and afraid

tainted cameras of sleep that will never hide him again.



Lawrence Applebaum

PAUL B. ROTH

CACHEXIA

There are
nights
with eyes
closed,

when silence
is all
there is

and other
nights
when he must
live
on dead skin,

when only
his own will do,
is all
that he craves

even though
no one
hears him

chewing
above the silence
he's secretly
struck

PAUL B. ROTH

WHAT LITTLE THE FISHERMAN HAS

Proving
how little
faith he has

a crescent moon's
sharp
underbelly
filets his calves

scrapes
his sudden pain
into thorns

and bleeds
fresh water
from his open
wounds

before freezing
around
the bottoms
of his feet

small sharp
zebra
mussel shells

PAUL B. ROTH

AN ADVENT SUBSIDES

Pain
makes itself
known to him

What should be
enough—
boiling water,
cold compresses,
crushed aspirin—
is not

Sleep
ignores him

Prayer
is unreliable

Reading
does little
what with none
of his books
having endings

Leaving only
geese returning
overnight,
so sudden
so loud
so unannounced

PAUL B. ROTH

ENCOUNTER

Just before
first light
he lies awake

Silence
rustles his thin
curtain

Sleep
has not quite
welcomed him

He can't be sure
what he feels
tugging
at his rough
worn blanket

It's stronger
than a red-tail
hawk's grip
puncturing
a mourning dove's
soft neck

He's afraid
so keeps his eyes
shut tight

never noticing
the last
light of stars

fill
his threadbare
blanket's
largest holes

PAUL B. ROTH

CENTERING

So late is he
awake
that he thinks
all the stars are his

that the missing
moon's a napkin
creased
alongside an endless
place-setting
of black flatware

that darkness
has a golden rim
edged
in brilliance
around the serving bowl
of its horizon

and that without
its dawn
he'd never know
when it was
sleep began

PAUL B. ROTH

LOVING WHAT KILLS ME

Excesses shorten my life. I don't quite know it as truth yet, I only presume it, but soon enough I will. I'm the wrecking ball swinging in my own direction. I can hardly avoid my own body, for no matter which way I move, I'm clobbered by my own negative probability. To be honest, the only pleasurable pain I feel is when I stop moving. Then it's obvious this isn't some loud-mouthed bravado or some enamorment of self-mutilation. That it has to do with some esoteric destination sought within the potential of self-knowledge is also incorrect. Unless it has something to do with the unknown which life day after day defines for me as my own death, I'm not interested. It's every sandgrain's buffed mirror in which I watch my insect self swished off a scorpion's tail fanning its own agitation or nothing. It's everything I hear when bent shore grasses whisper breezes into the ears of miraculous turtle eggs. It's me penetrating death's unseen skin, me plunging feet first with arms and hair upraised through a down-rushing sky of multicolored salt water droplets. It's everything unseen until each cresting wave ripped to shreds draws in retreat the true features of my face.

MICHAEL ESTABROOK

HER SCENT

in her haste
to get away from him,
from his empty bottles
& crumpled papers,
she forgot to check
the laundry, left
behind panties with
her unmistakable scent
still on them
which he holds to his
face & breathes
through, licks
them too, late at night
& sometimes
during the day.



A VISUAL
SONNET

(6)



(6)



(2)

Guy R. Beining: *A Visual Sonnet*

TRACY THOMAS

BARBEQUE THRENODY

It's time to build another altar or knock one down. Maybe build a fire, fumigate the neighborhood with the smoke of the night-meat like a prayer, like a street performance loud with hunger, like the medicine show tabernacle, like postcards from tarantulas, like a Spanish hour, its fingers inside someplace wet with loss of self. It's a certain tumbling down the stairs of mind, a particular black and blueness of speech, a sort of saying with its ass kicked. The prayer's walking, attempting to hang on to its skin. It passes us among July lightning and street racing leaves. It rides the tongue into dogfly snapping tequila you when the lights stay out. The Keep-it-aloft-in-the-breath-of-dead-snapdragons, the Dead-cottonwoods-and-nine-rusty-bicycles-snickering-with-the-wind, pink cherubs tumbled into night dancing with nowhere, rubbing against nowhere, the hollow light like a specter of unnamable dust, like lack of consciousness in the cilantro, red, like a corporeal gust a mind makes, like the stars of meat, like meat stars. They're us somewhere.

Somebody's shaking the ubiquity marinade. Somebody's got the kebobs on the grill, canaries of glowing embers in the firethorn. What kind of heaving do we got planned, a mind-vomit of loss, a revelatory disintegration, falling into the black insides of what's been thrown out, the black hole aspiration devoid of us? How much of you fused with her liquid depths?

Smoke drifts over the yards smeared with burnt bay, grapefruit, snail vine, umbrella grass, hibiscus, some dream of drowsy towhees, the nightclub of geckos. They've skewered the harlequin koi. They're basting the rack of God. Say it all in something like flesh, in something like the loss of flesh, some irreplaceable flesh like a son or daughter, some flesh of you. How can you say it in flesh when it's just a lace of words, a veil of words that only wants to be like a fistful of stones flung at a filigreed night, like beached moonlight on sleeping gulls, like some spell of dry lightning and abalone? When I get this close to you, she said, I can hear the sea. It didn't rain, just a jar of wishbones left on the porch.

There's grill marks on the bodhisattva's ass. The white coals are chanting hot. They're scorching the loaves and the fish. I've got the herb rub tongue. The kind of smoke I'm talkin' bout will swing your chariot low and sweet, so low it's drippin' cigar smoke and one night stands, the hothouse porch light, the cowfish communion, zeitgeist of shrouds, bar-b-que eremite of the pit

under the mesquites. He's throwing charcoal at the devil. Neither one's used to this kind of heat. It sounds like New Year's noise, like symphony fallen from outer space. The eremite's taken the poem to the bedroom. Hands run around her waist, up her back, palms cupping shoulder blades; fingers thread hair, the reaping of gravity, a leavening of the bed. What happens next is just a matter of smoke, of fire-meat-prayer and all that wet noise like rain.

Somebody's got entrails sizzling on a stick. Somebody's stirring the blood pudding. That's what he gets for talking to Ios. The dog's talking to what fell into the fire. What fell into the fire's talking to burnt offerings, to crushed trumpets, talking to belladonna Sundays, talking the antithesis of songbirds, to black cumin Mondays. Somebody burnt the artichokes, somebody gonna get slapped by the hamsa hand. When they're finally free from the flames, the hosannas are just crawfish boiling in amber; the amens, just ham hocks and greens. The noises outside the smoke, the noises that sometimes come from night, from soft places, want a crack at God. They want him out in the dark, down in some backstreet with an empty bottle of gin. They want him hissing with some smoky sweet sauce, they want him with or without the apricot brandy glaze. They want to carve him just after he cools. The fire's dying. There's nothing but smoke.

The wormwood wants out the smokehouse. The John the Conqueror root too. Is he that crazy St. John sleeping with scorpions, writing letters from the end of the world, got manna and quail roasting under a brick, crazy St. John without even a stick of gum making Angkor Wat Nirvana whirling around Baron Samedi's head? Is it that crazy Armageddon John scribbling breath of lead, the final de toto black jack, the whole marzipan fruit bowl, the junkyard of stars, trying to silence the orchestra in the grass, scribbling the angel of death got his wings wet in the falls, letting them dry now like a cormorant? That crazy St. John let loose a plague of words, got everyone upset for a few millennia, words that are the opposite of the 'in-the-beginning' words, the wrong words. If you look at them long enough all words look wrong. Maybe then you can see through the smoke, see through the meat cage. But I think I got the wrong John, not scribbling John. John the Conqueror John, he's just living and taking it all, loving it all, crazy Imagetin' John.

TRACY THOMAS

THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF APATHY

Out in the alley with the shards of glaciers, jungle hedges, lost Chihuahuas. Out in the green cardamom rain, I'm beginning a conversation. I'm catapulting words at things, people who don't care, dead grackles, run-over teapots. The ants carry them away like they're Popsicle remains, beached tadpoles, like they've been left to die with the cicadas. But it's really the season. They're at hurricane force, F5 strength, at knock-your-brick-shit-house-down strength, at planting-your-girl's-window-box-with-flytraps strength. It's rattling the stars like they're china. It's dining on Cape Town masala. It's pulled the feathers off the stone gryphons. It's a geometry of howls that only certain holes in the earth can hear. It's a third grade art show which the earth also claims, but only the dark parts. It's a thesis of spleen grinding flowers like teeth, a hummingbird feeder of blues. There's not even an echo. There's scarcely a word.

I'm manufacturing a conversation, welding it together from scrap iron shipwreck. There's lightning in the distance and a cloud that's a warthog. There's a bicycle at the bottom of the pond its upside down wheels still turn with the current and frozen geese honking overhead a few months away. I want beyond communication, what comes after. How many ways can I say, 'I'm saying', building a ladder out of the pit, bang it together rung by rung, peek out my head before it gives way, before I'm prostrate, flat, my ear to the everyday, listening for heartbeat, finger feeling for pulse, looking for steam on the mirror, for the breath of anything? Bang it together rung by rung out of any old brain vomit Cadillac temple machine gunning down old Route 66 with Twinkies and Pabst Blue Ribbon, an ojo de venado and bobble head Chihuahua, sun drying jerky in the shape of a cross, Duane Eddy guitar hammering the nails, a town called Nowhere covered in aurora pink and Mexican grackles, green sunset and crickets on the edge of Death Valley. Silence drags it sorry ass from someplace below sea level.

I'm raising a conversation from the dead, tying it to the ankle of a condor or albatross to drag it back to whatever wind it came from. Give it back to Cicero or Danton, Hippocrates or Paracelsus; one of those conversations they had with themselves, just a few words like shoes hanging from power lines, like grouse laughing at the morning mist, like the lonely yawn of the louvers at the wee hours. It's a zombie of a conversation dragging

along all the stink and wonder of another life, a post life, an ultra life. Maybe that's what's happening here, an attempt to bring back a conversation from beyond life, that place where life's just broken glass birds, a honeycomb of clouds. But despite its transcendental significance, it's just a banquet for millipedes. Be sure not to track it into the house or let the dogs roll in it. The meadow storks play catch with it. They don't know what the hell it is, don't want to eat it, it's not edible, afraid to talk to it. If it were to make a sound it wouldn't be words. It would be dragonflies eating snow cones. It would be peridot song, black walnut rain.

Maybe that's what's going on here, an attempt to reel in a conversation from out there, or from so deep inside life it's like it's dead, so deep inside life it's shed its skin, it's dripping lymph, seeping with rheum, its dreamembraneidos, vaticulitis, chthonicolon, hemorrhage of black iguana earth teeth, a sowing of tissue out there in the dark reeds, out there where breathing has stopped, a sort of inspirational absolute zero, a necrosis of ruins and hellbenders. They croak out a hieroglyphic dirge of ourselves in the abandoned darkness in some lake in the Sierra Madre, a naked dance of ourselves with fire and mud.

What's pulled us out of ourselves and dredged us in abyss like batter and fried us in the smoking cauldron of ourselves, the fuming cauldron of mindless coming and going and doing? Now there's nothing left but a juju of eyes, a dirigible of ants, a disintegrating Peloponnesus, a cratered fertile crescent, an acropolis of ash, nothing but an animal skin of torqued stars to throw in front of the hearth.

I'm sowing a conversation in the landfill flowerbox of the day-in-day-out, in the cesspool water garden of the everyday, making it grow, something like grow, a sort of anti-erosion, a blossoming mineral novena of what's beyond experience. Write what you'll never know, what you'll never guess, what you'll never touch unless your fingers are broken glass birds, scarabs of stars, absolute ether, unless your heart is hurricane orchids, the reason for tides, nothing but breath, like breath, the breath of anything.

STEPHANIE DICKINSON

MOTHER OF THE BARN REMEMBERS A DANCE

*

Hush. Mother is ready to dance at Western Four Corners.
Her airman comes toward her through the weeds and thistle. Eyes
brown and empty as a mare's, his mustache, a hint of whip.
Luther waited years for his silken lips to again brush her neck,
His kisses, like the hearts of martyrs, never rot.
She pins on his corsage, a mold around the stephanotis,
scent of kept moth balls. He takes her in his arms, says,
"You have my heart." She is ninety, and he, twenty-three.

*

Hush. Mother is asleep with the black sheep.
Bah, bah. She sleeps in the black wool of the bah sheep.

*

She tastes the bitter of the dandelion and the stick's anger.
She cuts the cattail open and seeds fall like hail.
A spitty bit between her teeth and bridle on her back,
her old flanks pull to know the soil and how it is to be broken
to become the bitterest dandelion and angriest shad grass.

STEPHANIE DICKINSON

VALLEJO TO ISABELLA

There are in life such hard blows...I don't know! – Cesar Vallejo

The woman sleeps and you, her soon to be born Isabella, are becoming inside her. I jump onto the daybed and lie beside the woman whose face on the pillow breathing softly in and out is a purity floating there. I am Vallejo. I must rub against her stomach and impart my wisdom to you, Isabella. I can feel life moving, your hand holds the other, puts a thumb to your mouth, now closing your eyes you doze in the warm water. I'll talk of my time before the two silver bowls in the kitchen and the shell chair. Listen, I'll speak of tree-tops in the city where I learned the air. I'll tell you of my own roof beginning, born into blurred dark, eyes sealed, ears shut, swimming, finding the mam, stumbling on it with others. Drinking and sleeping, I struggled only to be close to the milk-giver.

««—»»

My eyes opened and I saw the sky, not the bowl of blue that will dazzle you, but the shining colorless aboveness. The roof world was born, bright cardboard boxes and tarps, the shiver of a single spider's thread. My siblings, six of us tumbling, wobbling, stayed close to the teats, fat nipples like bits of gravel. Covering at the hugeness of the all around my ears awakened to the spark and snare of every sound. Isabella, you too will be born out of the darkness, having to yawn and stretch, to find the teat, like bits of gravel, the gruel warmth and white sleep. Someday, I'll be adopted by a man and a woman, and they will call me Vallejo. The man will be your father and the scarred woman your mother. Caesar Vallejo, the poet of suffering. They say an animal is not a *who*, Isabella, an animal is a *that*. If you name a beast, it becomes *who*.

««—»»

Boys climb to the roof because they live in the building under it. Third Street. East Village. They've been told of the mother and her litter, of the ugly black things wiggling at the teats, rolling now, learning how to be in the upside down, kneading in the brightness and loudness. They come when the milk-giver is away, gone to feed herself.

“Let’s throw them off the roof.” A boy shouts.

“They’ll explode.”

Hands pick up the squirming brother next to me, the fur that smells like milk and seeds. We burrow, twisting into each other, brothers and sisters, those left in the nest.

“Throw,” the tall one says. “You first.”

The one who smells most like me, gone, off the roof.

“Wow. It evaporated.”

The roof boys laugh. “That way. Get them all!” Being chased, my brothers and sisters scattering. Hissing, the milk-giver returns biting me by the nape, carrying me across boards laid between buildings, leaping into a tree. Dropping me, she goes back for more of her litter. I stay in the tree where she leaves me and wait. The one who gives milk does not return. Isabella, there is a nowhere, a somewhere and between them stretches the grey murk. I wait for my wriggling brothers and sisters, while the roof begins to call out in voices of black and yellow spiders prideful of the white silk intricately spun, the mother having just hung her two egg sacs in the web. “My life is short and I will die before my spiderlings hatch.”

More echoes from the roof, old human voices caught between leaves. “All my life we got cats up there. This is the first time you have kids throwing them off the roof into the street. Kids are monsters now, hooked into their i-Pods and earphones. Little monster microchips, I call ‘em.”

Dark came and the voices went out.

I want to impart my story to you, the unborn who will hear. I speak from the outside of my eyes to the inside, to be heart to heart with the one whose vision already sees. I sheltered in the treetops in the green of the city. I hid in the thin air there.

««—»»

Wintering. Alone, I struggle in the cold. Shivering dead earth. Water trickles from cast iron, root-snared pipes rust. Frozen.

««—»»

It warms and branches breathe out. Green breath in the leaves sets them twitching with bird song. I listen all day to the humming and whirring. They dive at me, birds puffing their feathers. I flatten myself on the branches and hide in tree crotches. I make myself small, hunting songs. The tree teaches me the difference between what lies motionless and what I have to catch full of gizzard and heartbeats. I am divided between hunger and music. Isabella, you too may know what it is to be of two stomachs. Do I feed or starve? Then I see the bird. A small blue dove closes his beak to press the singing

from his chest, along with the sound of treetops and breeze. A plain blue dove full of throbbing song.

Reaching up between leaves, claws spring from my paws. I snag and pierce the feathered being, snare him from the branch. Flurry of heartbeats struggling to fly up, frantic, and then spurt of sweetness around teeth, incisors, blood.

I kill quickly, biting up and down.

Between the chattering of my teeth its small life enters me. I watch the passing over of the sky ready with rain. Breeze blows up a cupcake wrapper, impales it on a twig. I release the dove and make his body my food. Later I learn to pounce, to stare for hours at birds. I feel the hunt inside me, the tensing and watching until I see the sharp light radiating from each feather, each quick movement.

Once I possess the bird I keep it in my mouth to protect it. Until I find a place to be with it, I hold the soft meat jewel between my teeth. I look all around before I break into its body and eat its four-chambered heart. I leave bones for the ground to swallow. Far below, the streets cross each other. Never asleep. Their laughter frightens me. Manhole covers lift and crash.

««—»»

So I keep to the treetops sniffing the sap in branch and bark. I keep to the leaves springing up and birds stirring and weaving through the breeze. The air slivers against my body and lifts the fur strands one from another. When the breeze stops the tree shudders and sweats and cannot fan itself. Tarsus and thigh bones litter the below.

More heat. Breathlessness. The stink of street reaches into the tree. Manhattan, the sky stews until it is unbeautiful, a broth of exhaust and the wilting moon, a wishbone. My three eyelids sweat.

Below the tree there are people. A moving crowd of black jeans, t-shirts, some with orange fluorescent skeletons painted on the outside, white grease-paint smeared on faces.

“There’s a bird killer in the tree.”

The leaves dry, crackle and break. I listen to them frying in the sun. Birds trickle through the limbs, gather, counting themselves. Men drag packing crates with bread wrapper windows under the tree. Others sleep with splayed legs in doorways until the sirens come. Then they run.

««—»»

The limbs brim with water. Rain soaking into cardboard boxes, rain like headlights, mice rain.

Cold comes, frost stiffens the tree. The birds fly off and take the leaves

with them. The tree is naked, empty. Then I listen to the ground, learn to climb the tree backwards down to chase scampering sounds. I yearn to catch the soft scent of a quick moving mouse. I climb the tree back up to the branch where my mother left me.

Hunger. Nothing to eat. Boys in hoodies and sweatpants, a laughing knot of them. They stammer and smoke and skateboard around the tree.

“Watch this,” one of them says, pointing up. “See that cat? He lives up there.”

Another pushes his hoodie back showing off his fat round face. “Hey, killer cat, come on down. We’ve got chicken breast sandwich.” He is crinkling a paper sack. “Mister cat, how about some McNuggets?”

The tree is starved and branches click together sparking the dark with ice flint. I smell the flesh scraped off a bun and soaked with grill marks. The meat is not singing. Not moving. The flesh lies plucked and sorrowful on the sidewalk. Many cold daynights since I’ve eaten and the stomach hole inside grows bigger.

The round face looks up. “Hey, yellow-eyed killer cat. I can see you in the dark too. Want this chicken?” He kneels, breaking the unfeathered flesh with his chubby fingers. “There’s more. We’ve got lots of chicken. Come down.”

“That cat is smarter than you, dude. Let’s go.”

I smell an oily yeasty flesh odor. Come down, the meat beckons. No, I must not leave here. But should I always wait for the milk-giver in this tree, staying where she left me? *Yes, otherwise, how will she find you.* I must keep off the ground. Then my stomach hole growls, forcing me from the tree. I’m climbing backwards by my claws down the bark river. I hear in the sound of their boy voices the ring and skitter of secrets I don’t understand.

They hoot. The boys are all big like buildings. “That’s the longest cat I’ve ever seen,” one of them snickers. “It’s a cat and snake mix. A snake cat.” They live in those black buildings with many lights, the stars you can’t see in the sky shine out of their windows. Alphabet City. Avenue A. The moon sleeps there too.

“See him, man, that’s a weird animal. He’s cocking his head.”

“Watch this,” the round faced boy lisps, nudging the chicken with his foot. Picking up a square can, he uses all of his fingers to carry it. Then one of his hands hides the can behind his back. “Here’s chicken for you, skinny freak of a cat.”

My stomach hurts with hollowness. I’m ready to snatch it.

“Bet he doesn’t like dark meat,” a boy says, sitting on his skateboard. “Give him a thigh. I bet he likes white meat.”

I crouch toward it, preparing to pounce. My mouth wet, teeth chattering hungering. I wait for them to step back before I lower my head. The round boy charges me holding the can. I startle, leap, hissing. From all sides boys

run at me, some roll on their boards. Hands grab hold of me, hands lift the creaking can above me.

“I’m drenching him.” The round boy sloshes stickiness over me. A splashing, soaking my back. Without flame the liquid burns through my fur. Cold hot. I mewl, arch my back. The liquid makes me burn like fires set in the park. My heart is beating everywhere. Hands clutch and clench, pull my tail, keep pouring the liquid until it dribbles.

“Light it, light it,” they shout. All together now, all the same. Five boys make one.

A lighter flares. Wind comes up. The tree blows the fire out in his hand and the chubby boy yelps and lets go of me.

I bolt, race, my heart fast faster. I must get to the tree. The milk-giver has come for me, she’ll save me again. The boys block the way back into the tree. I run into the street. Tires screech. Headlights. They’re laughing, rolling on their boards, chasing me.

“Killer cat!”

“Black snake cat!”

They have lighters. They are throwing fire after me.

“What are you doing, you animals?” One of the cat women who live close to the tree street waves her bony arms at them. She has seen the baptism, this lady with the wild flowing hair and the dirt-leaf smelling sweater. The boys hurl curses, spit at her.

««—»»

I race through the garbage and fire hydrants, leaping over sidewalk cellars trying to outrun the burning. The battery acid moon watches. The fiery liquid creeps over my body, like loud noises of wings, like hissing, clattering beaks. Burning fur, flesh. Cassiopeia, the polestar. I stop, frantically lick my back, trying to tongue the stinging from my fur. Flesh taste. My own back in my mouth. Terrible taste, acrid and gluey like melting plastic, every molecule. I quiver and itch. Run again. If I run harder I can escape the unlit burning.

I burn. I burn. I burn.

I am going into darkness and it is molten. Orchid eyes of streetlights follow me. I climb onto a fire escape. The birds punish me, the souls I’ve eaten are here with me.

««—»»

I climb the fire escape, higher. I enter through a half-boarded window. Crawl into an abandoned apartment of broken rooms where people wrapped

in scraps of blanket sleep. Their teeth make cold chatter and their bodies give off tree aroma. Dust in the air where the plaster ends. Walking on my claws, keeps me going. The stain on the ceiling is a sky-boat rowing petals and stamen. I learned the parts of a flower from birds. I give out in the hallway, curl against a window that faces a tree. My breathing rises and falls. The death purr starts in my chest. I remember that first darkness and the milk-giver's purr calling me and my siblings to drink.

Abscesses in my flesh open and ooze pus. My back raked and wet. Human hands reach for me, place my body in a box, carrying me to a place of bright light.

Silver tables.

Syringes.

Voices. Human. Cat. Dog.

They push sleep into me made from the singing of blue doves. I stay in sleep for days. Behind metal bars I wake in ointment and bandages. Around me other wild cats in cages, one-eyed, three legged, tailless, ears chewed. Mewling cats, empty lot cats, parking garage cats, tunnel cats, tree cats. Bernie, they call me. Bernie is the sound in human mouths when they smear cool salve into my wounds, when they push the pills into my throat. I can't lift my head. I dream of high places made of branch, leaf rattle.

A bowl of brown pellets comes twice a day. Everyday.

The faces of the cats in the cages change.

People come to walk through the cages. "This is Viola." "This is Banjo." "This is Ferbit." "This is Solomon." The people are here to adopt. They ask, pointing. "Oh, what happened to him?" "Bernie, the burned cat?" I hear my story, that kids threw battery acid on me, then lighter fluid. That chemicals scalded my epidermis, killed the hair shaft, fur can't grow back. "But he has an exceptionally beautiful face." People come and go. They bring empty carriers. They take kittens, they adopt the calico Ferbit. Even the orange Banjo goes to a home.

One day the cage door opens and I am lifted into a carrier. "Bernie's the nicest cat in the shelter. There isn't a staff member who hasn't given him his medicine. He's been here so long."

I don't look at the people studying me. They came twice, couldn't decide.

Then I do look, Isabella, and see the burned ones, a man and a woman, who have come for me. The man is burned on the inside, his woman on the outside.

"We can't call him Bernie," the woman says. "He's a Vallejo."

"Vallejo," the man agrees.

They are poets of burning who struggle to reach the ice planets or one of Saturn's shivering moons. Pandora, Iapetus.

They are the milk-givers.

Isabella, I impart my story to you, who presses her ear to the water, who is pure listening. Head swaying, I press my odd shape, my elongated body like a partially furred salamander against your mother's stomach. Inside I am songbird and rodent, pliable, hinged, long haunches that can suddenly collapse, melting into jelliness. I am surprise. Three years on this earth and I've learned these things. Isabella, little ear, you may have to outrun the ones who have harm in their hands. Little feet, little toes. Always be ready to gather up every bit and bite of your life and run.

EILEEN BRILLIANT

DO NOT FORSAKE THE SHADOWS

I have had playmates, I have had companions,
have played, have championed
causes not my own and in doing,
am more my own.

I want to surround you with yourself
and lift the faded expectation
from your brow's edge,
with a smile as warming as a riverbank in July.

Praise the empty fist that brings
safe passage. Praise the boon
of passage and stalemate
her lovely sister.

Praise the fist that was once
an open palm. Praise the mind,
a medallion of divine design
and unequivocal imperfection.

Praise the heart, with its ephemeral
shifts of sunlight and shadow,
this pulsing beauty that burrows or blooms.

Praise enigma, dance in full skirts
to its flowering. Nod as it passes.
Pause to praise.

STEPHEN LLOYD WEBBER

SECOND DOCTRINE

Camping on a sea-beach hill, Cortez showed me a glass bottle filled with dust and splinters, the ashes of his ship. I traded him the jug of moonshine.

He watched the night sky stay frozen.

“There is a conscience,” he said and shook
the ash until a bright spot showed itself—
the sliver of a gold coin.

“It doesn’t know you,
just what you make of yourself.
You never know when you have its attention.
Sometimes you have a hunch
when it talks, but you don’t have any recourse.”

I turned the bottle to see if there was anything else.

“If it watches you several times, then it might
take an adequate picture of you.”

I pictured the conscience as a fur-coated bundle
descending through the atmosphere to spy on us.

“Maybe we have more than one conscience,” I said.

“More eyes and many souls.”

He wouldn’t listen.

“I would be a more peaceful person if I lived out of reach,” he said.

That was all we spoke of what he’d done years ago.

I looked to him as he put his feet down
running along the flinty shore
with our jug of baccanora.

STEPHEN LLOYD WEBBER

FATHER FIGURE

Tense leather parts
slump their own
strained lumber,

his father called
it sinful to break down drums.
Sharp edges
just skin –
all its male hide.

He lugs bales of weight –
they squeeze the boy's sides,
talk hello, hoist pitch.

Vacant eyes
to be hunted,
a man's name on a liquor glass.

The poured oil resists soaking – high pools of flame
split shadow threads,
shave bone fingernails.

The boy
is taught to mend and cut,
but gets no wiser watching the fire burn

orange, of no mood at all.

RICHARD PEABODY

NAUGHTY PRESIDENT

My mother has a photo of George Bush
(The father) staring at her cleavage.

Like Sophia Loren starring as Jayne Mansfield
Thinking "Are those real?"

I tried to nurse from those breasts
Georgie Porgy.

And yet there he is on my mother's bathroom wall
Looking right down at her.

As though he was gonna cop a feel.

RICHARD PEABODY

THE CLONING OF THE AMERICAN MIND

You know on some dusty shelves
in a nondescript office building
ready to splash over the lips of their jars

the government's clones
of Karl Rove's brain
sit stewing like prunes in their own vile juices

A lightning storm could send them skittering
and sloshing along those
endlessly dreary
gray corridors

You've seen it happen in B-movies
hungry mutant brains
in search of the proper host.

And what then?

Four more years of McSame?

Or the apocalypse on wheels.

If we're lucky those brains
will sit and sulk
in pitch darkness
for a thousand years.

So lost in
a labyrinth
of gobbledygook
documentation

that eventually
they'll gladly
devour each other.



Lawrence Applebaum

CHOCOLATE WATERS

MUST NICE PEOPLE REPENT?

asks the tract
six pages long
enclosed in a christian get-well-get-god card
featuring a darkening storm
picture of a lily slapped
in the left hand corner
shining

inside the pre-printed words:
“i’m praying your eyes will be open
to god’s presence
and working in your life”

ok

handwritten underneath:
“we are sorry to hear of your illness
but the most important thing is to
be ready when jesus comes”

must nice people repent?
no
and whoever said I was nice?

CHOCOLATE WATERS

DO BIRDS GET BREAST CANCER?

sitting in the leftover sun
outdoor garden on 48th st.
pretended country in the midst of city
these few imagined square yards
one squirrel rushes by
nut in tow
bird twitters overhead
dashing at the sky
dazzling tiny red funnel beak
do birds get breast cancer
robin red breast
cancer

hip hop drones in the background
yellow taxi yelps by
shuttle with the words Airlink Shuttle
airlunk shuttle I think
laughing at my own stupid joke
crap on this
this is shit

just like this damn shittin' breast cancer
of the great western cancer world
with its great western cancer gods
want to irradiate me 33 times
the number of yrs. jesus lived?
take some horrifying drug
that makes you fat (er)
depressed (more)
rots your bones
ugh

stuff yourself with the cancer diet instead
9 servings fruits/veggies daily
green tea black tea no coffee tea or me
not me want my coffee
beans black beans green beans
black rice and beans
pinto beans
more salads than beans
how many ways can you say tofu
there's no fu like a tofu
but no soy oh boy

i want i want i want my chocolate
i want i want i want my muffins
I want my chocolate 'effin' muffins
my mrs. stauffer's frozen
my mean lean cuisine
i want my bombay sapphire martinis
my phone vodka with lynn

and for what
a single lousy rotten speck of a speck
6 miserable millimeters
less than a third of a dreadful inch
all this
all this
all this
for THAT



Michael Weston: *Shadow Aliens*

CROW BILLINGS

MOVING THROUGH FADING FIREFLY GALAXIES

The bus travels at the speed of a broken headlight

where the honeymoon passengers
Robert and Anna speak to each other
in the descending hours of Indiana.

“What time is it in America behind us,” Robert asks.

“Look at your watch and subtract by one.
And we’re moving next month,” Anna says.

“My batteries need recharging.
Will we stop before we reach the next hour?” Robert turns
and asks a person who isn’t Anna.

“Where are we moving,” he asks,
fading against the window.

Anna drowns farther away than Robert.

“We’re moving in with the boy we’re adopting,” she says.

“I didn’t know that,” Robert says.
“Will we be allowed to sleep there?”

She looks over and comforts Robert with a slowness in her eyes.

Close to her ear, Robert nuzzles
the only place Anna’s flesh seems small.

CONTINUED

“Your neck is like a baby when it sleeps,” Robert says louder than a whisper.

No one says anything. A cell phone rings and is quickly hushed.

Trucks pass like powerful men who still worry about September.

“Will I be safe inside your mouth?” Robert asks.

“Will it be morning there?”

“Look at the towns going by even this late,” Anna says, quietly, without her lips, as if from a different part of the year, and abandons Robert by taking a sharp breath

and shutting the tired birth marks beneath her eyes.

WENDY HOFFMAN

THE GILDED AGE

Three mannequins stand at the entrance of Saks.

Two wear paisley prints perfect for cruises
the other in purple chiffon flapper revival.

Perfume and cosmetic counters overflow
with goods like Greek tourist towns.

Women of different ages wearing black
outfits and hair pulled back severe
stand poised to spray willing customers
but the corridors are forsaken.

Upstairs racks of jeweled sweaters,
transparent blouses, cashmere capes,
suede pants hang under sale signs,
30%, 35%, 40%, 60% off.

A purple sweater with cables weaving
everywhere goes from \$295 to \$173 to \$95.

The clothes are squeezed together
to make room for more and more.

No one rummages through.

Two close knit women with long blond hair
and mink coats to their ankles
hover in the elevator.

The only buyers.

WENDY HOFFMAN

A RISE AND FALL

A whale lay on the shore motionless,
blood red eyes rolled sideways,
tongue twisted with seaweed.
The sun hit her blue gray skin,
prickly around the guts, flat as plains.
Her fin lay exhausted on the sand.
She made no effort to lift her giant head
as the fisherman approached.
He knew at once that he
had to hurry and
took a shortcut through the woods,
his ankle getting caught in branches,
his forehead scratched.
Expert rescue and animal rights
workers ran back with him.
They gave the mammal injections,
oxygen and oiled her vast prairie
of flesh. Eventually, the whale revived,
shook herself from delirium
and pivoted belligerently
toward the water, which spread
and embraced her. The whale
seemed to smile as from a memory
of old pleasures and habits.
Mobs had gathered and watched
her submerge. The parties shrugged,
threw their beer cans to the ground
and left. The children ran home through
an orchard picking the fruits
on the low branches and stuffing
them into their mouths and pockets.
They trampled the wildflowers
beyond in the meadows.
The fisherman walked up and down

the shore searching for a sign
of the whale but he knew he would
not see her. The ocean was calm
and flat. At its end, on the other
side of the world, he sensed
a rising.

ELINOR NAUEN

FROM SO LATE INTO THE NIGHT III: PINK HIGHWAYS

Now it's time to shout "Allons! Come with me!"
As we hit the road, see the USA
By way of auto and thumb. My hobby
Is driving, but in an earlier day
It was my life. If invited, I'd be
Avid to split, or I'd spirit away
Alone. I had friends I was devoted
To all over the land, and I toted

Myself often to see them. No money
So I usually hitchhiked. I might veer
Off for weeks or months on a journey,
Or rumba a thousand miles in a mere
Weekend. Motion was all I wanted. Funny,
I don't feel that different now — to steer
With no output still seems the ideal life
Although these days I'm a worker and wife.

A few summers back I drove with Becky
From Eugene, Oregon, to the East Coast.
That is, with Becky and her two wacky
Springer spaniels, Emma and Jake. Foremost
Quality of springers is anarchy
Of attention and compliance. Milquetoast —
Not them. These dogs need to be tended to
All the time or it's a traveling zoo.

Springer spaniels are white dogs with brown, black
Or liver-hued patches and silky hair.
Excitable? Understatement! They lack
Decorum! Insanely friendly, with rare
Joy. We had to stop often, to unpack

Leashes, collars, dishes and let them tear
After birds. They're pointers, who spring straight up
Off the ground (hence the name), even as pups.

We're packing to leave Oregon. "Oh god
I hate change," Becky says with a deep sigh.
She's picking up quarters and nickels, dod-
Dering around her little house, so I
Am not certain which "change" she means. A nod
To the dogs. They leap in the car — they'd die
Rather than be left. And two "girls" alone —
We need these savage pups as chaperone.

Becky's traveling trick: "I'm taking all
My oldest underwear — the crappy stuff
That's stretched-out and unsightly and fall-
Ing apart, and every day I'll slough
It off." She flings her arms to show the sprawl-
Ing pleasure of America rebuff-
Ing her panties. We also like driving
For its inertia in the guise of moving,

And 'cause it's a daydream you can follow
To its end (assuming you're away long
Enough) and because we don't have to go
Over the Throgs Neck Bridge. I trust the throng
Of driving gods to get us home. My beau
Is a ton of real steel, singing and strong.
It pulls me like kids to a holiday.
I have no advice for the highway.

I love the highway for its industrial
Driving, its ramalamadingdong.
But the pink highways — the skinny radial
Roads — are pretty and soothing too, singsong
Easy driving. Many folks take parochial
Pride in staying off the freeway. Less headstrong,
I don't care, I like any road I'm on.
Never an ugly duckling, always a swan.

But now we're glad to be off the highway —
Also called freeway; in South Dakota,
Interstate; in Michigan, expressway.

Route 11 north to Walla Walla,
Washington. The cool thing here is that state
Road numbers are in George's head. What a
Great country, full of towns with such names as
Walla Walla, Pukwana and Ramses.

Me 'n' U Deli in Mapleton, OR.
Wild Winds, which I assumed was a peerless
Road sign. Nope, gated community, Flor-
Ence, OR. Autopia — I sigh in bliss.
Thistle Dew Antiques. And the Pink Hole, Or-
Ofino. Fort Fizzle. Thrill-Ville U.S.-
A., an amusement park. InstaLawn
Back in Eugene: "We keep rollin' a lawn."

I was happy in Musselshell County
To indulge a hotel hobby — to "fix"
The art. On woodland scenes (firs and Mounties),
I draw dead dogs and peeing men, a mix
Of subjects that is easy (a bounty
For bad artists) and, I daydream, graphics
That may dissuade with my fiddle-faddle
The designs of someone suicidal.

In Montana, an older gentleman
With a springer fell for Beck. You're it, he
Cried, come be my bride, we'll live in my van
With our dogs. She declined. Though I could see
Why, I urged yes, with half a mind to can
Our trip: Imagine two hideously
Hyperactive kids in a small plane. *You'll*
Want to bail. One good point — these dogs don't drool.

In the old days you could hop on a plane
An hour after the thought occurred to you
To go somewhere; you didn't have to pay
Four times as much as those people who knew
Seven, fourteen, thirty days ahead that they
Intended a journey. One time I blew
Up Johnny's computer. In a panic
Decided to flee to Maine and Janet.

Fast taxi to LaGuardia airport.
An American locale from any
Year: A man pats himself down for his passport;
Some folks are reading, some sleeping; many
Eye the overhead TV. The sport
I've long relished of leaving town when e-
Vents grabbed me is booming. How great it is
To have planes like autos at my service.

I called Janet: "What's going on tonight?"
"The gang's in Hancock," she said, "otherwise
Just hanging out." "I'm on my way. It might
Be Bar Harbor — wherever the plane flies."
In an hour I was enroute, and that night
I partied. Sudden movement satisfies
The itch to subvert space-time, plus disengage
Mad husbands and other troubles of the age.

I used to fly under an assumed name —
Olivia Bennett, no, Jane Bennett.
Or was it Olivia Grey. The game
Of anonymity. Do I think it
Can be like that now? that maybe the same
Hitching imperative applies? One tenet
Of hitchhiking was to start off with a whiff
Of invention and continue to riff

On it till it was complex and detailed
By the time you got where you were going.
For instance, once, leaving Maine, I retailed
Info about my three kids, lies flowing
Effortlessly from me. I never failed
With an answer. I was secure, knowing
I could improvise. I was in love with
X— Y— then and based it on his three kids

(But only somewhat). I have learned from hitch-
ing some principles. One: implicit trust
In my tongue. I can lie, and the words pitch
In and flourish. The trick is to get bust-
ed in a fib (a good one) at times, which
Inclines people to suppose that you must
Be a bad liar. They've misunderstood
That all the rest of the time you *are* good.

Another rule that I took from my stretch
As a thumbmeister was to rely on
My intuitions of people. Was that lech
Ted Bundy? You had to see beyond
Looks. Guys made passes but a real wretch?
Nope. I never got in with anyone
Too skeezy. I made snap judgments and still
Decide right away about folks, and feel

I am rarely wrong. The new editor
At one mag — I knew straight off she was nuts
And vicious. Give her a chance, Elinor,
My colleagues said. You betcha, I said, but
Bided my time. In three weeks, plenty more
Knew what I did. That's one case of my guts
Working on my behalf. Maybe I turned
Down Ted Bundy for a lift! I'll never learn

The truth about my narrow escapes,
Which is the truth about life, isn't it?
The other fork in the road, those scrapes
You miss — you can't land in a different minute
Of the calendar. Any skipped landscape
Can only remain indeterminate.
That's why it is pointless to feel regret
(Except when you have hurt others). Forget

The road not taken and relish the grade
You're on. It is now the only option.
Hitching tends to make one mull, I'm afraid.
And that's something I expected to shun
In this poem. Philosophy might degrade
My limping brain. You think that won't wash? Un-
Theory is my middle name, and I cling
To my creed: Ideas aren't what make birds sing.

Beau one time referred to "the flow of life:
You're in it," he said. I *want* to be in it —
I want to be scraped by joy, fear and strife.
A lightning rod; peer of a peony,
The Chrysler building gleaming like a knife,
The smell of gasoline, the Leonid
Showers. They all are only what they are;
Meaning stuffed into beauty serves to mar

What's right in front of you: simple objects
But intricate too like the H4 clock
Devised by the winner of the project
To determine longitude. Weathercock
Didn't work. Latitude easy, this subject
Isn't, even though I read the book, chock-
Full of explanations of time and tide,
None of which wedged too far into my hide.

In Helena, Montana, a salad
Was so perfect I vowed to move to this
Town. The "New York-style" deli less valid,
However. A forsaken town in wes-
Tern ND pulled Becky toward the pallid
Place in Georgia her dad came from. To miss
Where we have never lived comes from the power
Of landscape to invent memories not ours.

Why does one place land with full weight in our
Hearts while another jumps across our eyes
And is gone? Why recall some exploit, hour,
Incident or person? Is there a wise
Answer? Is it random, or does some power —
Say from childhood experience — give rise
To the varying import of what tumbles
Sticking or not, in the mind's jumble?

Being ardent fans of Ford Madox Ford,
Becky and I next made our obeisance
To Olivet College, Michigan, for
A stop at the Ford shrine, which indecent-
Ly isn't really there. This didn't floor
Us, knowing how overlooked he's been since
(And before) his death sixty years ago.
This English writer loved women and wrote

The mysterious yet scratchily open
Parade's End, my favorite, much re-read book
With sex-mad Sylvia ever-hoping
Christopher will sleep with her. But he took
Off with Valentine, saw England loping
Through billows of wild plants, World War I shook
Him up. He wants rest and a woman he
Can finish a talk with, quietly.

Here's another literary enthu-
Siasm of mine: Angela Thirkell,
British novelist of manners. Imbued
With class distinctions and wit, her circle
Of characters' complications ensue
From love and "subnormal" servants. A Turk'll
Acquire all she needs to know of prewar
England and its gentry's defective core,

Which are long since gone (or perhaps persist,
As despite change of circs, we still see Sloane
Rangers, e.g., and other class insist-
Ence). Her novels are delicate yet toned
With a clever eye that sees through the mist
Of relations, bad clothes and dimly known
Counties. She's relaxing to read, all her
Books the same. Trollope's literary daughter.

Becky hates RVs, as she says every
Time we end up behind one. I myself
Desire them desperately. Our treasury
For it was a water bottle of pelf,
Until Johnny learned what the nummary
Was for, dumped the change, broke the jar itself.
Becky thinks that shows what a sensible
Husband he is. Ha! Reprehensible.

My most loved car was a '73
LTD named Ford Madox Ford. Its flanks
Were painted blue, pink and green in cheesy
Latex housepaint, with magic marker'ed hanks
Of my poetry: "It will be easy
To drive away from this." Cops and cranks
Stopped me all the time: What inclinations
Led to "Dreams aimless as destinations"?

Another car I owned for years and cruised
90,000 miles was a Toyota Cor-
Olla. At length stolen; the cops refused
To look for a sixteen-year-old — on par
With searching for an old cat I might lose.
Poor little Yellow Bird, kidnapped and marred.
Well, her splendor wasn't exactly pristine.
She was too rusty to properly clean.

The fastest car I ever drove (versus
The car I drove fastest) must have been Paul
Stallings' Ferrari. Slowest? The worst is
My '70 Datsun 510, which qual-
ified for many unkind curses
Each time it wobbled. Not a car to haul
Ass in! I loved it, though, as I did my
Every vehicle, till we said goodbye.

For a year or so I owned a white Ford
Falcon van, '65, bought in Lansing.
We (my boyfriend, for the most part) ignored
That it had grave troubles. Got an engine
Off a Comet, a repair job nigh toward
Impossible yet we're soon advancing
To Maine in that wreck. The only unnamed
Car I ever possessed. It's not the same.

As with teams, a name implies relation,
And I do recall less about "the van"
Than of most of the cars in the nation
Of autos I've owned, though a few I can-
Not remember where I bought (a cessation
Of memory that bugs me). My mechan-
ic sold Fordie, a Swiss guy owned Yellow
Bird, the Celica was Harris's, no

Other cars come to mind. Ernest we found
On the street, Sioux Falls. LeRoy the pickup
I dunno. The Merc came from the renowned
Sleazy Harry, Bangor. "Tell him — ayup —
Sandy sent you." Bad tranny and bad sound
From moving parts. By luck, the interrup-
tion of theft before spending much for repair.
Cars come and go with love but not despair.

January 29's the birthday
Of the auto — first patent went to Benz
(Karl Friedrich) though many components lay
Waiting for assembly into sirens
That would lure many a speed freak to play
With dangerous beauty in asphalt gardens.
What's the allure of going flat-out fast?
To focus, to screech, to not be passed,

To keep breathing. What's exhilarating
Is having to be fully present, more
Than you think possible. You're not waiting
But in the thick of your senses and your
Talents, history, learning. And fading
Out is anything apart from your core.
My best work gets done that way, fully "on,"
Using my brain, wonderful, tiring, none

Of the usual distractions throwing sound
Tracks into the mix. Instead, it's as pure
As a mountain whoop. I put off the hound
Of inattention baying up what were
Foxy seductions. They did once abound
But now it is me alone with — inured
In — a shot propelled in one direction.
(These metaphors ebb with no objection!)

Here's a lot of tales from my bullet days:
Driving west on Route 2 through Maine with Pecos,
We stopped for a light in some podunk place.
A guy leaned out of a window (a ghost?).
"Come on up," he hollered out of a haze
Of pot smoke. "Come to our party!" Our host's
Father was there, a silent drunk. I was
Shocked. I had no idea that dads got buzzed.

On that drive we picked up a Canadian
Bum (not entertaining), went through Montreal,
Ate figs the whole way. What year? What radiant
Talk? Where I headed next I don't recall.
Pecos! With your heart-shaped birthmark! Custodian
Of thirty years of photos, waterfall
Of opinions and laughs, an alphabet
Of anecdotes, truths and a few regrets.

Luck with money is an uncertain thing,
Unless you're rich already, in which case
You kick back for the ol' ka-ching;
Luck's not a factor there. Luck turns its face
To me so often I trust it to sing
When my ears are parched. I do have the grace
To wince at the mixed metaphor of that.
Don't hate me: Money drops into my lap.

A few years ago, when I was winding
Home from upstate New York, moseying back
Roads, I decided to stop at the Shrine
Of the North American Martyrs, quack
Attractions being great favorites of mine,
Though I didn't use to stop much; I lacked
An off toggle: Once in motion, I kept
Going, no matter what enticement leapt

Off signs begging me to visit. Water
Running uphill, mystery spots, a cave
Full of jewels. Even stops I oughter
Make, like presidential homesteads, I wave
At from my car. But the Shrine — the slaughter
Of priests "tomahawked for the faith," the brave
Mohawks, reminiscent of *Mangled Hands*,
Johnny Stanton's splendid novel — this lands

Me in Auriesville, which isn't a town
Just lots of giant Stations of the Cross.
Early autumn. I stroll the grounds, look down,
See a hundred-dollar bill. Is it poss-
ible?! When I pick it up from the ground,
It's *nineteen* hundred dollar bills. Whose loss?
I waited twenty minutes for a hue
And cry. No one in sight. What would *you* do?

Standing alone on a road by a field
At daybreak, with the fresh grassy air
Rising in wisps, the sky turquoise and teal,
Cattle regarding you with solemn stare,
The top of your head about to yield
To its most feathery signal, where
You will yell and dance madly in the quiet
That is noisy, vehement with spring light.

Standing near an interstate overpass
In Iowa, on Christmas, in a blizzard
Cursing all the cars that zoomed by too fast
To notice me in what was a desert
Of white. I knew I would get home at last,
And I did, of course. As by a wizard,
That world was made small by whirling weather
And by knowing this couldn't last forever.

Squatting by a moonlit road in Vermont
To pee, my car silently rolled away,
Slowly, as if she were no more than saunt-
ering a step or two toward the woods to say,
Hey, look at *this* pine tree, and then, her jaunt
Done, slide back. I let her go without dismay,
Didn't yank up my pants and leap at her.
The car rolled to a stop, as did my bladder.

Hitchhiking again after getting kicked
Off by the cops, then outraged that they came
Back: What?! Didn't they trust us?!? We were nicked
For thirty bucks each, me and Beth, a lame
Fine that we had to borrow from my ticked-
Off sister Lindsay. (Nah, from her no blame.)
An afternoon in the Dane County Jail
And that's all there is to that little tale —

Except to say we refused the baloney
Sandwiches. No one else was in the clink.
Beth and I tried out our best stony
Stares on the two matrons, who didn't blink,
No surprise: our looks were pretty phony.
I could see Madison's lake through a chink.
I knew Lindsay's cash would be effective
So couldn't feel myself truly captive.

A truck driver who played an eight-track tape
Of off-color jokes, over and over,
Without intentions. In Kansas, a scrape
With a drunk who stopped at every bar. *I* drove
Till my turnoff, parked the car, left him draped
Snoring in the back seat. A guy who loved
Paul Strand, excited to introduce me.
A woman with triplets in Missouri.

A guy with a scar and a '53
Chevy pickup who drove me five hundred
Miles out of his way. A six-piece country
Band and their bus in Georgia. The standard
Line of the many folks who offered me
Money: "Take a bus!" Truck drivers, wayward
Steel workers, farmers, whose intimate jive
Crept into the commonplace of our lives.

Hitching's not all just moments of standing
By the roadside, though that's when you feel most
Solitary, the entire sky landing
On you with a wide-awake crack; the host
Of wildflowers and a few undemanding
Cows or horses by a trough or fencepost.
You see clearest when you aren't where you are
Routinely. Thus these pictures feel so sharp.

Hitching has its advantages — low cost,
New faces — but a road trip in your own car
Is terrific also. You can take off
And pause when you want, select your route, part
Company with the freeway when you stop
Needing its smooth speed; and when you're too far
From an upcoming place to relax,
You jump back on the fast road and make tracks.

Computers are like cars — some people like
To drive, some hate it, most are indifferent,
Just want to get where they want to go. Strike
The band for technology! Ignorant
Driving leads to woes. But a motorbike
Or automobile can be operant
Without grasping how to fix the motor;
Okay to type knowing not one iota

About what makes a computer function.
If the owner has taken driver's ed,
Or computer ed in conjunction
With purchasing the contraption, then add-
Ing memory or spotting malfunctions
Are extra. At speed is fast enough. Dread
Makes us dim-witted. Hit every button,
I say. See what happens when you go on.

“See what happens” is not a bad approach
At that — something unexpected is bound
To turn up if you're watching. A cockroach,
For instance. (Not surprising in a town
Like New York.) The uncommon can encroach
The regular with a shift of profound
Or small consequence. A platitude here
Is called for, or maybe a glass of beer.

Whew — let's escape profundity (silly
Is more like it) with a bottle. A joint
More up my fireplace. I used to really
Smoke like a fish: I'd giggle, lose the point
Of conversations, and willy-nilly
Laugh, eat, leap up. Fun and then one day — boing! —
No more pot. I do love to reminisce
About the days when I had time like this

To be goofy, to do what came along,
Take off for months because somebody asked
Me and one move led onward. Being young
Was part of it. The '70s were a blast,
With plenty of us footloose. Nothing wrong
With having a good time. Motto: live fast
(But without dying young, if possible,
Including avoiding the hospital).

Driving around was something I could do
That was glamorous and didn't require
Me to have money or travel to Eu-
Rope, speak Swahili or even acquire
An education. It was what a screw-
Up could be good at (I can change a tire!
Do a brake job!) while keeping other skills
Out of sight of what seemed the world's perils.

Sometimes the past seems not gone but mislaid.
In dreams it is sometimes thirty years back,
When my hair was to my waist. Getting laid
And hitchhiking were the main things I stacked
My days with. I don't expect to evade
Whatever's next, but can't I once more pack
My knapsack, thumb to Maryland and see
Willis, Phil, J.D., Teresa, Billy?

It was thirty years ago today.
Beth and I hitchhiked down to Washington
D.C. for last-ever big demonstra-
tion against the Vietnam war. Having fun
Was our plan more than expounding our vague
Politics. So it seems now. Being young
In '71 was a ball and who
Really knew what went on in the world? Who

Knew how complicated economics
And war are, how hard to find elegant,
Workable solutions. Without stomachs
To digest what was served, we became litigants
Demanding and expecting heroics
Sprung from shock and anguish. We yelled again
And again that the world — listen, my *dear!* —
Needs help and we are the only ones here.

Why do I keep getting away from
The prairie, the Great Plains, my native state,
South Dakota (I tend to say I come
From “the Dakotas”)? I split, inchoate,
At eighteen, feeling stifled, bored, held mum
By what was still unclear, that art means trade,
Changing paint into paintings, words to poems.
Pre-artists often have interim

Restlessness and the idea to change
Themselves, not the material world; and think the road
To transforming oneself is to rearrange
One’s location. Thus, despite SoDak’s loads
Of potential, I felt only its chains.
So I left. Of course there are other goads
That turn people into artists, and we
Are likely to be spurred by two or three.

I didn’t know I’d miss the prairie. It’s June
In NYC and out west too, of course.
June is the plains’ most pleasing month — soft noon,
Twilights long enough to surround the source
Of themselves and of all softness. This boon
Needed as the rest of the year is force
And bluster. I think I haven’t drawn
A deep breath since my last Dakota dawn.

Even a New York City apartment
Morning can feel outdoorsy in June.
Some sort of bird, and the sough of the spent
Wind, which I may have translated from noon
Traffic. Squint past the fire escape to bent
Trees. My family was urban, the tune
Of our Nature muted and composed. Fine —
I prefer the country with city skyline.

I remember standing in our driveway
On the first day of summer vacation
When the gloriously promising days
Stretched ahead. The peonies' libation
Of scent and ants shook pinkly. A blue jay
Rattled in the pine I climbed impatient
For a view. The lilies of the valley
Next to the house, slightly off the alley

Would be gone by then — in spring I'd lie down
To drink their scent. I think no one else knew
They were there. Prairie sky above, a mound
Of cumulous clouds in billowing blue.
Plains are pure primary color, you drown
In floods of red, white, green and yellow, new
Every day, blown fresh by the eternal
Wind that swoops from vernal to infernal.

Sioux Falls — that prairie town, “heart of the Sioux
Empire,” agricultural center *and!* my!
Birthplace! How autobiographical did you
Suppose I was gonna get here? Some prize!
What matters, what I'd like, is for you to
Appreciate the sheer beauty and size,
The waves of tallgrass, the rolling level
That's home to animals, plants — primeval

And contemporary — insects, Indians,
Ranchers, farmers and hard-assed cowboys
Like the ones I grew up with, guardians
Of stringent right-wing ideas. And choirboy
Swedes, the mostly silent Scandinavians
Who didn't laugh at the jokes I deployed.
That took moving east to New York, where a
Sense of humor is black as mascara.

My father was Hans, my mother is Joyce
My sisters are (the late) Edie, Lindsay
And Varda. A single brother (what rejoic-
ing when the prince was born!) — that is Charlie.
Of the three of us close in age, I'm poised
In the middle, Vee is youngest by many
Years, and Edie was much older. Their tales
May show up again here (credit blackmail).

Besides a blood family, I have a twin,
O'Malley. Because of a shaggy dog
Joke I told that cracked Douglas up, he's been
Calling me that (and vice versa), in a bog
Of fake brogue. I've a "Mexican cousin"
And courtesy uncles and aunts. A fog
Of relationships. It's entertaining
And hopeful, and I'm really not feigning

These relationships. One's blood family
Is often more problematic, as they
Refuse to recognize the adult me,
Instead wafting anecdotes that replay
Adolescence, shooting a homily
Instead of listening. You're made to pay
Perpetually as the elder sister
Or the one who blubbered in a twister,

Of which SD has many. (A better
Subject than family.) On the other
Hand, kin's not just a matter of fetters:
You share the oldest jokes with your brother
And sis, the not-funny jokes that get her
Every time. That's how it works. Your mother
Can be discussed by people who regard
Her in the same way you do, who are hard-

Ly blind men and the elephant in this.
That terrible feeling of gaslighting
Can't work. You are being made crazy — if
You are — within yourself, not by fighting
Their attempt to push you in the abyss.
Is it true (who d'you suppose I'm citing
Here?) we are full of creatures and notions
That secretly control all our motions?

Another Becky-El stop: the Corn Palace
In Mitchell, SD. My favorite shopping
Spot — better than Bergdorf's! I am zealous
In scanning the a-maizing, eye-popping
Collection: pens shaped like corncob phallus,
Snow globes, caps, popcorn with many toppings,
T-shirts galore. All corn-themed. I love corn.
It's a central fetish since I was born.

Fields of corn along every road and rung.
I like how you see straight rows no matter
What angle you look at it; head-on, swung
Diagonal in perfect lines, ladders
Of satisfying symmetry. When young
I could distinguish corn with no natter.
Corn resembles itself from sprout to ear,
Unlike most other plants or trees or beer.

Corn is more like a friend in that regard,
Who doesn't disguise her voice when she phones,
Or wear wigs when you meet, to make it hard
To know it's her. Corn is itself, no bones
About it. I also like corn as the bard
Of prairiedise, the constant wind that moans
Through the fields, sings a duet with that grass
Spreading its generous heart like a gas.

Mountains are splendid but they offer too
Many views. The great thing about the prairie
Is that you're always in the middle; you
Always have the best vantage point. Airy
Grasslands soothe today as they did the Sioux,
Who completely understood how varied,
Useful and productive they are — perfect
Opposite of any alpine district.

Flat rivers of wild yellow mustard.
Rugosa roses, juniper, grama, yew,
Foxglove with its white, pink and custard-
Yellow bells. Magpies on markers. A slew
Of buttes, clover fields and beehives. Whiskered
Grain in a silo. It's my own land: true,
Familiar, flat and with the finest soil
In the universe, black and rich as oil.

Willa Cather's an old fave; I'm surprised
I hadn't read *Archbishop. O Pioneers*
Is the best plains book I've read. I advise
You to it. No one else makes it as clear:
The thrilling monotony, a sunrise
Like the dawn of the world, with all the years
Implicit in each day, so you relax,
Let yourself float into your life — sit back

Like Southerners, whose weather similarly
Lets them drift along. With no real seasons,
Nothing to wake you, sleep in the barley
Or corn, endlessly rocking. Malfeasance
Unlikely, watched by so much sky. Parley
Calm — Dakotans are known for their decenc-
Y. The four seasons here: winter, junction
To winter, still winter and construction.

Sioux Falls's a border town between the West
And the Midwest, and like all border towns
Not quite flesh nor fowl. Some swagger: biggest,
Farthest, but more typical are farm sounds:
Tractors creeping down a two-lane, the dest-
iny to marry young and stay around.
Enough rain to farm in your granddad's dirt,
Knowing that a hundred miles west, the earth's

Arid, can't support more than runty wheat
And grazing — cows to eat rather than cows
For milk. Though speaking of cattle to eat,
Sioux Falls hosts huge stockyards. The whys and hows
Of meat-packing charmed a school tour, to eat
The proffered hot dog after — big ugh. Vows
Of vegetarianism shot like comets
Through us after a visit. And vomit.

“A whole lot of things I ain't never done,”
Sang Commander Cody (I do believe)
“But I ain't never had too much fun!”
Hitching rules: Don't ride with someone who weaves
Cross three lanes to stop for you. There's a ton
More advice: It doesn't matter how dev-
ious, you can outwit them. The longer
The wait, the better the ride. Hunger

Is thwarted by taking every offer
Of food. Wash your face every chance you get.
(There is more, but as always, it's tougher
To absorb too much information.) Vets
Are the ones who really know; a duffer
Has to learn it all from scratch. Pay your debts.
If you want to learn, don't take 101 —
Always begin in the middle. I'm done!

I'm done — or perhaps I should amplify
Some of these remarks, or tell the stories
They're based on. In 1975
It was possible to get in lorries
Or cars, go off with strangers and defy
Warnings you heard all your life of gory
Outcomes. I don't these days travel the same
Way, so don't know if roads are wild or tame.

Old Route 66, Steinbeck's Mother Road,
Never drew me particularly — I
Pointed east, halfway to Europe. The code
Of the West was spoiled because I dwelt by
The West, a mere hundred miles east, no Joad
Was I, adventure's dramatis personae
Bored me. Yet deep in my American brain
The road falls steady and heavy as rain.

Today, though, I'm full of Route 66
("Chalk full," someone wrote me recently)
For readers with no desire or connex-
ions to any road, how will I gently
Steer them to the magic, mystique and "kicks" —
A word used in *On the Road* plenty,
Kerouac being inspiration and dad
Of all road trips. Or is he just a fad?

If so, he has been of cult devotion
For almost fifty years, subject of books,
Films, conferences, intense emotion,
Emulation — etcetera. His hook
Was going deep, fearless in the ocean
Of experience, so you knew if you took
To the road as he had, you'd meet the same
Gone cats, holy jazzmen and eager dames.

What was it that flung so many of us
Into such furious nonstop travel?
To drive, letting the road wind like Texas
Through us, took us out of the fierce battle
Of American life we despised. Hus-
tling for bucks versus wanting what we have'll
Seem old news, but it was ardently fought.
I, for one, was resolved not to get caught

By conventional *anything*: job, marriage,
Home. The outcome: I live in a “starter”
Apartment (as some people disparage
It) and work freelance, not quite by barter
But no regular paycheck. A squarish
Relationship that’s a little harder
To summarize in a line or two.
I love Johnny Stanton — will that do?

No, of course not. I’ll have to explain the terms
Of how we go about our life together.
He’ll hate this revealing. Shut up, El! He squirms
At my unprivacy. Oh well, he’ll weather
This like so many other storms. He confirms
Storms but I can knock him down with a feather
Before he’ll agree that we ever agree.
And that’s marriage, kids, between Johnny and me.

Lounging behind the steering wheel with pave-
ment flashing past under my tires settles
Me like nothing else. The car is my cave
Of existence, with nothing but pedals
And windshield in the world. If I could save
Focus this enormous for bills, my debt’ll
Be at rest. Driving absorbs to the bone
Yet it also leaves you free and alone.

I learned that from my first car, a ’50 Dodge
Schoolbus named Ernest. We did everything
In Ernest. Bought in South Dakota, lodged
In Denver, sold in Boulder. My next king
Of the road LeRoy, ’54 Ford, hodge-
podge of jury-rigged parts, in which we winged
It across the country — Colorado
To West coast and back East. The bravado

Of those days of driving through the wreckage
Of time and expectation, when we could
Take off for months with no slow-down baggage
About jobs, gardens and boyfriends. I would
Drive a thousand miles for a sweet message
Of friendship. If that sounds extreme, you should
Be aware that I grew up with a mom
Who drove hours for bagels without a qualm.

My father didn't drive at all, he stopped
The year I was born, because on a trip
To the cemetery, a passenger popped
Up in the back seat, prodded him and quipped,
"Hope this won't be a one-way journey." Pop
Pulled over, got out and never would nip
Behind a wheel again. I learned with no fuss
That women drive but men are too nervous.

Music mattered when you were cruising cross-
Country. The first song setting out — A.M.
Radio back then — set the tone. If the Boss,
Stones, Doors, Dylan or any song came
On with special significance, you would toss
Your past behind — you're on your way! To frame
The drive with totemic songs gave omens
Of adventure and bliss on your roamings.

Nowadays, what with tapedecks and CD
Players and a new sort of radio,
With satellite-sent songs coast-to-coast, to be
In cars soon — it's hard to recall the rodeo
Of music we took a chance on, greedy
For the new. You would holler "way to go!"
When good songs came on early in the drive:
A sign that this outing was gonna thrive.

Now no more portents, we're so in control,
We never hear a random song. Too bad.
Back then I'd whirl the dial for rock & roll,
These days I pop in Cash who's no less rad-
Ical than Dylan, with his hot-eyed soul
And working class allegiance. He stays mad
When he should. Too much rock music dances
Into self-love and fluttering trances.

To opera-loving Becky, Johnny Cash
Is a sore subject. I also listen to
Old country, R&B and blues, a hash
Of timbres and tempos, all of it mu-
Sic that drifts behind my focus — the flash
Of rock or Beethoven pulls me from du-
Ty. Good thing we barely have radio —
This car serener without stereo.

Some sights I like to see while on the road:
Highway architecture: the cloverleaves
Romanly rising overhead, an ode
To the massiveness of the land it heaves
Itself over. And the signs: I once towed
A road sign home, heavier than bequeathed
Money. They're the one thing American
That might outlast Disney and silicon.

When you drive round Italy, you see enduring
chunks of Roman road and aqueduct.
I love to think people of the future
Will muse on the silos they see eructating
from the prairie, architecture
Imposing, while they wonder if it sucked
To live in the olden days. How entranced
They'll be that we pictured ourselves advanced.

Rather than trash our neighbors, let us turn
Toward (or, on) Midwesterners. I am one
Myself, so this will have a nasty kernel
of self-appraisal. Am I a Monday
morning New Yorker now? Do I spurn
My roots or embrace what I chose to run
From way-back-when? I'm neither queen nor ace,
Fish nor fowl. I can't be from the one place

I'm really from and I will never quite
Be from New York, no matter that I've lived
In Manhattan half my life, a sight
Longer than SoDak. How can I divvy
Up my attention or love, how indict
One by preferring the other, or stiff
One by tipping my heart elsewhere? I can't
Choose — I'll always be some sort of transplant.

