



**SKIDROW #13
PENTHOUSE**

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Acknowledgments:

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"Sonata" by James Grabill and "The Shore" by Paul B. Roth reprinted from *The Bitter Oleander*, Vol. 2 No. 2, 1977, with permission of the authors.



Marge “Deet” Ditter

I celebrated my 21 birthday in her college dorm room. At that party Deet weighed 98 pounds and her shiny blond hair parted in the middle hung straight to her shoulders. Her wheelchair was as skinny as she was then and there were crutches in her room. She could stand, and gritting her teeth against the rheumatoid arthritis that inflamed every joint in her body, she could walk a few feet to the dorm’s handicapped sink and wash her hair. She was wickedly funny and loved the absurd, which is rarely in short supply. Her fate—to spend her life in a wheelchair, a motorized one that expanded as she did. Blue eyes like Minnesota’s ten thousand lakes surrounded by mischievous thickets, nothing in her face showed the almost deaths: three heart surgeries, the window in the heart, kidney failure, the stroke, right side paralysis, the feeding tube, all the infections that living with a catheter entailed. In February of 2011 death, after tens of near misses, finally claimed her. Deet was one of *Skidrow Penthouse’s* few patrons and her financial support made issues 11 and 12 possible. Issue 13 is dedicated to her. Bon voyage, friend.

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Alois Nožička: *Twelve*

JOHN GOODE

THE UNWANTED CROWN

*“To the mad ones crowns, if they still want them”
— Charles Simic*

*

My eyelashes fluttered like spermatozoids
under waves of Lake Shore ooze.

Cigarettes bled from the hole in my face,

and the Zeppelin mists in my bed
whispered of evolution and frogs.

I was motile and alone.

When the clock turned on me
I hibernated in the winter of a 3rd floor apocalypse.

Prescription Cleopatras fanned fire
on the corner,

and life coarsened around me.

I muttered at the stag shifts
that drug their cochineal cargo
past my knees.

I saw two lovers unbuckling the wind.

Their skins turned into paint and alabaster,
and a grudge was born between their legs.

I watched a static woman suffer
beneath the cold touch of a philanderer.

Her body floated above the city
in swirls of carbine mist and hot coal.

I took dictation for the seraphim that sang to her
in a voice filled with saltwater and empty hands.

When her shadow cried,
I burned a feather on the air.

*

For years I hovered beneath the clicking
time clock of the hydra-headed Persian mafia.

I wrote for pool balls and poker chips.

Lonely men covered in tap algae and cologne
who spoke only CNN.

I lowered myself into their season
of absolutes.

I memorized the great white apes
who munched on pita bread and sound bytes.

When they raised their flag,
I gathered all my sleeping borders

and flew.

*

Across Italy I followed her trail
of cave dust and spent condoms.

Copulating hammocks that nested and quivered
when the wind bit.

I wandered through abandoned thunderstorms
where ovulating maps still sprawled across the tile.

Maids undressed in beds of fingerprints
and combed their black wings for flights to Vegas.

I passed through the carpeted mausoleums of casinos.

The scent of neem oil wafted from terra-cotta tans
and a dial tone slept in a Gideon Bible.

The desert sun dried up like a uterus in the sky
and spat out the ticking mind of an iguana.

I dressed myself in a suit of moonlight
and migrated to the banks of the Chicago River.

I knelt on the bridge between April and May,

tracking a deflated basketball that floated
on its cold green water.

*

I screamed into a payphone harvest
with a feel for burning.

Buses dropped eggs from tailpipes
and the sky fed me from its abattoir of dreams.

At night I hid in blockhouses,
whistling at the stars like cattle.

They hung their blankets of sand in my eyes.

Deodorized artists drifted in packs
through calcite fog

and conspiracies floated on open
sewer mouths.

I met a man whose power was a wolf
he'd captured

and taught to speak to the universities
between sighs.

I collected the hoof-prints of deer
and mailed them to offices inside the sun.

I wrote poems for the hallucinating prairies
in the heads of Laundromats.

I drug a trail of ash everywhere I went.

Bartenders passed over me with their eyes,
and cats pressed themselves against the snow
in my shadow.

I crossed the electric fields between Seven-Elevens
whispering to no one.

JOHN GOODE

THE PARACHUTIST

In the deep snows of January,
I breathed the territorial pissings
of her tumbling hair.

I slept in her cell phone signal.
I deployed Trojan nerve.

She passed back and forth beneath
my window,

waiting for her slum valentine.

There were snipers perched
on her every glance.

Alien outposts tuned to her pulse.

Insect currency swarmed around her.

She introduced me to her bird -
the coming ice age beneath its tongue
where she stored Led Zeppelin and milk.

Her sputtering heap of a car,

and the skins she shed
whenever the dopamine Mafia closed in.

I idolized her ditch frequency:

Her body of blinking deer
and its Stooge thunder.

The cigarette butts that dropped
from the bass in her apocalypse.

Even the radiant moonlight of her laptop
where all her ponytails had died.

I learned the lycanthropy of her bedroom.
And the owls that collected in her wallpaper.

She grew up in a Florida of tetanus sitcoms.
Her family was in a crustacean tank.

When she was third world enough,

she lived on the margins of all night television
searching interstellar time zones
for abandoned skies -

of which she suspected I might be one.

There were too many clouds to trust each other.

The air was cluttered with distress signals
from the Laundromat life.

Someone's crowd was always breaking down.

One night I knelt and prayed
into the soft Andromeda sleet that fell from her ceiling:

that we might pack up our lives and escape
these voids together.

When I stood,

I stood on an El train platform
of liberated static

and listened to the traffic in her apartment.

A bearded tattoo receptacle made an entrance
to bad hip-hop.

He carried Humboldt Park fog in a backpack
through her door.

Twenty dollar bills sweat through the salt
in her palm,

and spread like love on the countertop.

When he unzipped the bag
and opened the sky,

she kept falling through.



Alois Nožička: *Seven*

JODY AZZOUNI

ORACLES FOR MODERN TIMES

1. Notice there is too much gold
in the air these days.

It is a message from the ozone
that light will soon be acid.
Sunshine is everywhere
and if we are reborn as urns
we will make good still lifes
for what is next to come.

2. Notice the coins in our pockets.
They are godheads without magic.
Their flat mouths are quiet.
We waste only time
if we stare at the divine faces
trapped there.

3. The clocknest is nearly empty.
When the amygdala panics,
it prays to whatever gods are at hand.

JODY AZZOUNI

WHEN ALL THE BLANKETS HAVE GONE TO HELL

We are frozen
(despite our furs).

(Dante would have loved it.)

Once,
 we had many empires
 (the Internet, the factory farm, countries true and brave).

Let us whistle
(in unison)
our tunes of extinction

(the chewing of the last dirge).

Jellyfish, too, are a cult
(watch them evaporate).

JODY AZZOUNI

POMPEII ALL OVER AGAIN

Lava creeps up on us
(on cute little cat's paws)
like pseudopods.

Meanwhile,
 we apply makeup,
(eyeshadow).

We plan our beautiful futures.

When oceans boil away.

(I'm talking about heaven, of course.)

JODY AZZOUNI

GOD IS DOING ABOVE

The wisdom of scar tissue.

(It still looks good on Television:
everyone has teeth there.)

Nothing heals anymore
(they say entropy is to blame).

Like wounds we drip

(when I have news like this to tell you:
I whimper it to myself).

JODY AZZOUNI

WHY WE STILL WATCH THE HORIZON FOR FOOD

(And only see the Sun rise.)

Remember the polar bear
hibernating for good.

(Still, we have postcards, photographs, Disney movies.)

When lining up the last ducks
(squint away the future).

When you still hear voices
(and there is no air).

JODY AZZOUNI

WHY WE MIGHT NEED TO
TRAVEL IN SPACE

The over of time
(and the frogs are gone too).
But craters at half price
(Mars is a bargain whatever we pay for it).
When we're on the move,
we can fight over the islands that are left.

(Change our tapeworms in time for our last meal.)

JODY AZZOUNI

THE FUTURE IS IN LANDSCAPING

We eat
our demented pets
(lost without us).

Landscape is fragmented now
(the sideways trees, the
fossilized squirrel; the nut
eternally waiting for spring.)

Cars, however, have legs.

(The road out is gone.)

HARVEY J. BAINE

AGLAIA SPRITE

She's a little askew
since third grade.
Dances
like a flightless bird,
boning these dark spaces
with breathing
(thin arms whirl)
and light like lime.
Her gospel fingers
piano my shoulders
leaving their unrhymed
ballads on me.

Breasts
tight and shrill as
papercuts.
Eyes
that are open mouths,
and if your whole body
were an eye
you wouldn't see all the red
she gives
and I bounce down the back steps
jingling nightly.

We dance
the rattle of weeds,
graceless.
Evenings
continue to pale and bend
as all this city's stolen
lights
resist drifting eastward
on the river's cold thigh.

CHRISTINE TIERNEY

SUNFLOWERS HOLDING OUT

everyday they come to me and beg
staggering on their gooey stalks

water one cries *sun* another
I know what they want and refuse

they feign with their marigold wisps
craning to and from the light

I will wait as their necks sag
and their peach-sop spines reek

they are not fit for this kind of heat
just tell me the truth I demand

a grudge on each face, a sphincter
clamped and not one single petal released

pathetic I snarl to their smirky
complaints and furling gills

as I drag their sludge-muck vase
to the center of the darkening room

KEN MEISEL

CHATTING W/ MARILYN UNDER THE MOONBEAMS

We were standing in a group outside the punk rock venue
smoking cigarettes and someone opened the Vicodin,

was passing the pills out to all the skinny horses
and powdered diamond boys hanging around there

like clothes hangers without shirts. Inside, the band
slaughtered sound and sense, and the vocalist hurled

vomited lyrics against the government while the cover
girls, the nymph du paves, degraded themselves

in the hollow doorways, in the evening shadows
like cream and feathers, their eyes, dark and myopic,

almost like venus's gloves avoiding the full moon.
Marilyn, who was hanging with me in those days

before dying in the Coupe de Ville in the Hollywood hills
whispered to me, 'dogs never bite me. Just humans.'

The tall bass player pulled on his shiny dog collar,
argued 'not me,' and somebody pulled up to the curb

in a large Pontiac Bonneville, maybe something obscene
and torpedo silver from the 60's and honked. Others

drifted near the car and a fight broke out. Two girls
started making out under the club light like skinny rats

and Marilyn scooped me, said, 'a wise girl kisses
but doesn't love, listens but doesn't believe anyone,

and leaves before she is left.' I asked her, do you mean what you say and she giggled, said 'I don't lie.'

I called her two eyes pyrotechnic starfish. She bent down to tie her shoe laces, said, 'I'm no charity dame,'

and said, 'you get too lost in my beauty because you're a boy,' and she touched the bricks of buildings as we

strolled and waltzed and finally loped along like squids to the edge of the neighborhood, near a mail box.

She touched everything with her fingers, then said, 'I have too many fantasies to be your house wife...

I guess I *am* a fantasy.' Let her fingers touch me then, found my face and said, 'faces enslave us, don't they?'

Told me that men hypnotize themselves with repetition, and that it was part of '*beauty sickness*,' and that men

suffer it, somehow, because they are born separated from women, *from their mothers*, and would therefore

have to repeat their rejections, their womb enslavements and their 'slippages down the gown to the ground,'

she said, giggling that insolvent, missing person's giggle. And she gripped me, said, 'I need my courage pills,

I'm about to dream.' And we stopped under the elms, by a park down street from the club, to sit it out and wait.

The police had arrived, were yanking kids down, hand cuffing them and molesting them, kicking too,

and Marilyn, just before she whispered to me that *love is when the eyes dream down into the heart to fill it*,

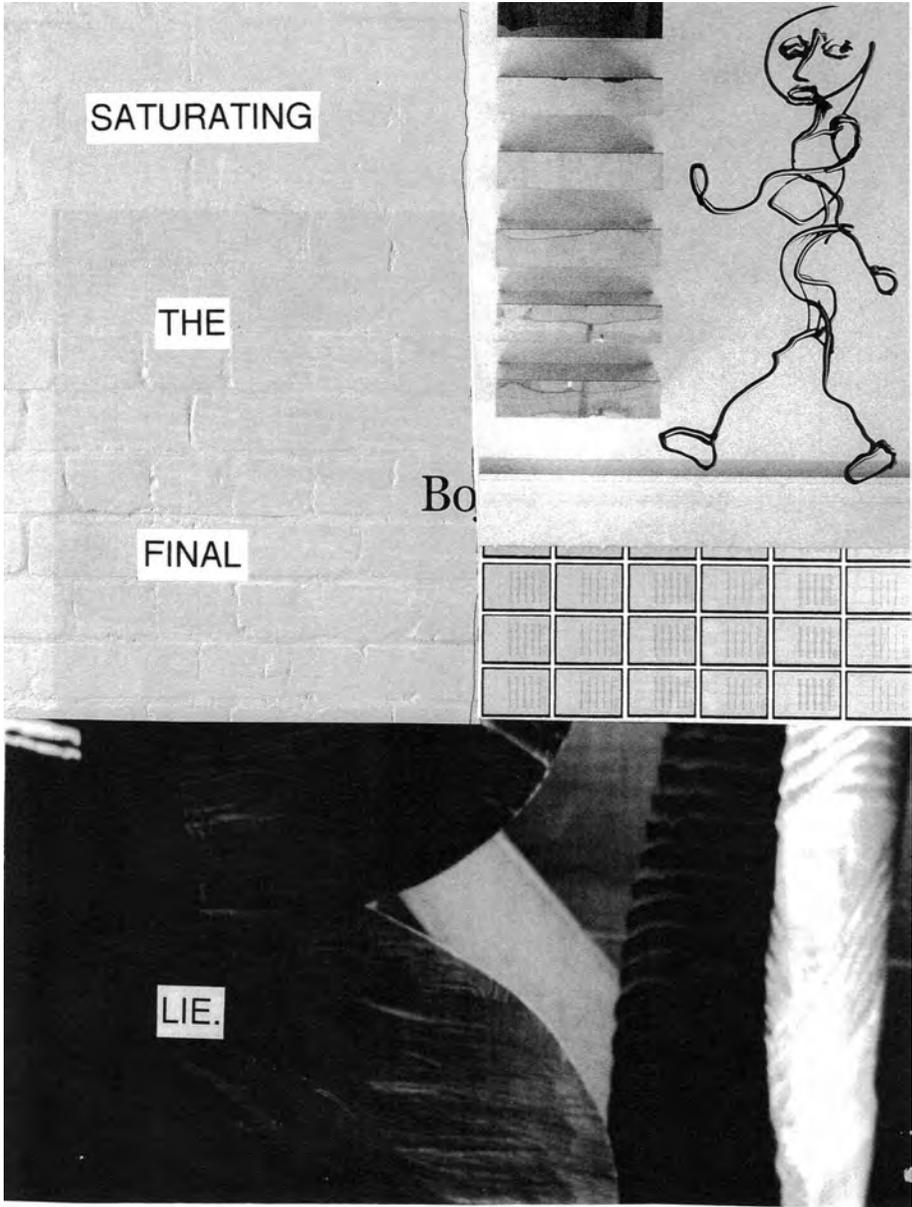
bent down again to touch the grass with her fingers.

KEN MEISEL

THE WIZARD OF OZ AND DOROTHY

‘Our wishes, do you think they ever go away—?’ he asked her while pulling a cigarette out of his expensive suit coat pocket and lighting it casually. This was just yesterday and I was listening to them. Reading my book on Sex and Love, 1900 to present. He caught her red pump in his loafer and they rocked quietly together, not really flirting, for he was much older than her and she was still a girl. And the young woman answered politely, earnestly, ‘They stay in the eyes, you can tell in the gaze; even in the old people, you can tell if their wishes are still there.’ And the man, talking to the girl while pointing at the white scented pond lily and the group of ducks wiggling around it, said, ‘The world is full of those who pick a handful of wildflowers to give away, and then there are those who let them stay planted where they are. And then there are those who will pick the flowers just to get them for themselves, and that’s greed. Don’t walk with them, do you here me, don’t do it.’ She nodded absently, feeling something in her eyes twitter and something in her heart twist up. ‘Do you believe wishes are just illusions?’ He asked her. ‘Oh no, I don’t think so; I hope not,’ she answered while ruffling her skirts and crossing her legs and looking over a small bruise on the top of her leg and then taking a smoke for herself. ‘I truly believe in the idea of a rainbow; and you can spend a lifetime trying to get over it, do you think? That’s not greedy, is it?’ She asked again, more curious than convinced of what she was saying. And he, ‘well, if the dreams you dare to dream for yourself really do come true then it must be so.’ She smiled a smile as large as a clarinet. Sighed.

Let her eyes fix on a young sailor pushing himself against a woman alongside a big tree.
'I think I will write a song for you to sing,' he said.
And then he stretched his arm across her shoulder, pulled her into him like she was a vaudeville orphan. Large passenger balloons floated over the wide area. He pointed them out to her, said, 'look over there.' Some landed, some kept on floating over the city. One of them landed nearby the large willow trees. 'How strange it must be when an illusion dies...'
she said out loud to the open air full of buzzing bees. 'It's as though you've *lost a child*,' she spoke again. He stroked her hair just then, said, '*Don't think of it...* I'll always be here for you, over there, where *blue birds fly*.' And he pointed out the canopy of willow trees growing in front of the city to the west of the park, and how it was a clever idea could conceal the cruel world and show us the emerald world in front of it, '*the world of lemon drops high above the chimney tops—*' he hummed to her, pointing to the edge of the sky line. '*Somewhere, over the rainbow, way up high...*' he sang. Let himself wrap the melody around the words. Touched her on the chin and looked into her eyes. Felt the strangest urge to kiss her on the mouth. 'I've just had the strangest sense of it—' she said, ruffling her skirt again and twisting to face him. 'How one can be so very lost; so very taken away...'
'Into one's wishes you mean?' He asked her, 'is that it?' And her, 'No, it's more than that—into others' wishes,' she said, gravely, 'into other peoples' wishes for you.' Traffic roared. Busses, taxis, and a group of school girls ran up to her. One of them almost touched her on the cheek. '*You have the shiniest red shoes on,*' she exclaimed. The man bent over, tapped Dorothy's red shoe. Said, 'Those'll take her up over the rainbow.'
And Dorothy clicked her red shoes, eyes closed. Felt the wind in her wishes, lifting them away.



Guy R. Beining: *Saturating the Final Lie*

JAMES GRABILL

SONATA

The wooden currents of each spring
Circle the river of the trunk

Here we can stand and not forget **zinc**
Or its father **geranium**

Smooth-mama hear my prayer—
Let each slave own the orchards one by one

Let the plums float into place like bloodcells

Brothers in this summer
Last year's snow runs
Like small white squirrels
Into the leaf buds

The road-signs of frost
Bury themselves
In microscopes

The factory throbs on the scaffolding of chicken legs

As leaves float like tongues
Or hands

As a red leaf falls on green grass
The way a man loves
After he dies

JAMES GRABILL

THE NEXT PROJECTS OF WASTE AND GASES

(still reading *Plan B* by Lester Brown)

Naked efficiency breeds more desert, as the piano key
able to reseed light we're using has a hoarse-sounding
hieroglyphic dialect at dusk when old crimsons spread
through the current years that could be quickening
for anyone, but especially a million with small farms

and two million in prison given a 70% increased risk

of pesticide Parkinson's. The autumn mushrooms grow
out dirt-chorded, full-torched, the 6 a.m. overpopulation
driving hard is nothing new, but more than the ocean
has been breaking waves electrically cresting over Earth

where the only ocean level we've known has been rising.

Lately here, industry has been driving a 19th century
engine without a governor. Many don't know poverty
has a number of Swazi teenaged girls selling themselves
with HIV for \$5 an infinity. Neo-biblically, any ancestral
apple orchard unable to move north could be in danger
the more we see water scarcity where the people still pray

to rivers as the only sealevel we've known has been rising.

*Watch Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam learning
firsthand how less water means less food, say boulders
at the rock bottom of seawater, but the fact-blistering,
pre-emptive bottom mechanics on the right comes out*

slugging, plugging in a metronomic denial of the known

Antarctic rise, with comments rearing on the mastodon table of elements for scores of thousands of kilometers where tropical rains are expected to grow more primitive for a next 23 million people we don't know, then for 63 million hit by drought or floods, or both the same year.

Meanwhile, the only ocean level we've had will be rising

for a next 144 million somewhere else, mostly the poor whose loss will be lengthening, in an era of high-priced silken-slow permafrost gases steaming. Old geothermal sky we've known we may sense sinking into watersheds of a next quickened sleep or the kind of waking intended more for holy Himalayan elevations out of a past, leaving behind the generations of miller moths in genetic trenches

where the only oceans alive on the planet continue to swell.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Canned Fallout Shelter*

LAWRENCE APPLEBAUM

MANHATTAN BEACH

You were my substitute for Harry.
I stayed all night,
the earth healed itself again in my brain
like the math of orphans finding
each other on winter streets.
Brooklyn had no curtains on the Atlantic.
Your face had no business
keeping me as long as it did.

The madness seemed real—
you held me up to the light to see what I had left.
I studied as I watched my Bronx childhood
drip out of you like Fox's Ubet's syrup.
You had David's hands on my body.
I measured your eyes like diamonds
I had sold and was getting back.
You were afraid of being gay and getting close to me.
In the cold air the concrete recognized us on the way to the subway.
We had both been the children of ghosts for too long.
You were not interested in seeing a picture of
my dead dog, only me.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Anapoli's Daughter*

LAWRENCE APPLEBAUM

MARBLE HILL

The island widened its
legs to give birth to
floating children with pills.

I was the infant found
in the earth's close-cropped hair
beneath the bare trees in Riverside Park.

Manhattan mothered me, gyrating herself
against my new body
as you watched through the drapes that blocked New Jersey.
Nothing was explained, except the grief.

The river pimped me out everyday,
my feet bloodied and my face tangled
in winter shoreline branches.

Stars hung down like testicles.
Venus lingered in the mouth of the Hudson
as we exchanged veins like gloves.

You danced into the wine light over the Palisades
waiting for the promise of backyard birds
for your land-filled sweet sixteen.

Later the rocks will be forgiving.
Shame will crumble into dried leaves
the way our family did.

I will be too busy to notice,
remembering that earth has already ripped her clothes
and logged us in her book.

HAROLD KLAPPER

THEY RODE TO CORDOBA

1

Helicopter hovering, the intersection of Miami Avenue and Flagler Street appears almost as then. Don't descend and get out; appearances deceive. To know you have to go back; say to that day, the sun baking high, they rode to **Cordoba**.

As a cross, Miami Avenue and Flagler Street meet; you wish to go North on Miami leaving *Burdines* behind: Christmas where the high ramp connecting the two *Burdines* is lit by blinking color lights; Santas below wave bells; on the main floor as people move briskly, wide yellow ties with palms are sold; and up the escalator to three, Faulkner's *A Fable*.

If you must, sojourn East on Flagler. Stop at *Kress*, high fronted and lofty looking; inside the deep arch entrance, the ice cream stand where the teenage girl in starched store uniform unwraps the bar of three flavors from the wax paper, nudging it still in the wax paper between the crunchy delicious brown wafers; then holding it melting in the sun, you head across the street to the *State Theatre* for the double feature.

After, you have time to go to the counter at *McCrory's* for the creamed barbecue beef with fries and an all chocolate ice cream soda.

Stroll *Mangels*, *Three Sisters*, *Hartleys*, *Phil Davis*, *Woolworth*, *Blackstone's* (where bras stretch across Lucite torsos) - but hold Bayfront Park, that's a little far - although it isn't night. That's when the *Miami Herald* photographed the wide-eyed scared perverts.

Head North on Miami Avenue toward *Richards*, its new metal hurricane guards folded up and into the overhang to the street display windows; and, where on the balcony bookstore looking down to the main floor you buy *Gone With the Wind* two columns a page; another time (and other floor—the main one - ?), a gyroscope to take out from the square box, spinning it till it collapses.

Walking.

Spinning.

Closer: *Schmirer Music Store* where the Beach hotels' gig musicians give lessons - you on the coronet - ; *Vanity Uniforms*, its white uniformed mannequins displayed in the windows.

The two Lefcoe owned hotels, spaced, seedy and quiet; further, cross to the corner, the man at the stand selling cigarettes, pint containers of chocolate milk, cellophane wrapped cheese crackers with peanut butter; now *Chlorophyll Chiclets*. His eyes go wide to questions.

Block or two.

Goldstein's Pawn Shop, Willie standing in front, shoe on a steamer trunk, trouser hitched above nylon ankle sock, creamy baby blue pants over belly, face ruddy from drinking, peeling ski nose - killed a colored man in Alabama—and wears a revolver tucked in the back of those pants. His wife is small town southern quiet and pretty; J.J., the little guy with worried eyes who works for them and is beaten up by them constantly, is still months from asking for that last Christmas bonus.

We're getting there.

Sohmers Dress Shop with the oak roll across front door that must sit exactly right to lock; and Jack, unable to figure, garment center temper, asks Bobby who, with a *Gillette Blue Blade*, grooves the spot.

...Remember...

The national conventions: "You can be sure if it's *Westinghouse*," Betty Furness says pointing gracefully at a refrigerator door she just closed. Walter Cronkite in a box high above the convention floor looming large since the *Stromberg Carlsons* and *Dumonts* stand massive on the floors in deep appliance store windows.

"Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman."

"The Chair recognizes the delegate from Puerto Rico."

"I demand a poll of the delegation."

"What!"

"Yes."

Congressman Martin, black hair, grey suit, sober face, bends to the counter of votes and they whisper. He straightens: "I am informed the vote was one for one against."

"I demand a poll of the delegation."

Giggles in the Republican convention. Only the Negro delegates, heads ebony and shining, immaculate, all from Dixie, refrain. Martin confers with the parliamentarian. "Under the rules, we will now have a poll of the delegation from Puerto Rico."

The floor roars.

"Mr. Gonzales?"

"No."

"Mr. Montoya?"

"Yes."

Martin confers. "The chair finds one for one against." Banging the gavel: "The vote of Puerto Rico is confirmed."

Laughter.

“Mr. Chairman?”

“Yes?”

“The delegate from Puerto Rico thanks the Chair for its call of the roll.”

Uncontrollable laughter...Betty Furness...

...Jack Sohmer...World War II...released (state institution) late forties; that's when he came down to Miami then married your mother who came down on the train from the Bronx then went back for you...World War I...anxious, fattened on bananas to serve in the Brooklyn Naval Yard. Brother Herbert, also a patriot, fled to Canada disguised as a waiter. You could tell from the service.

North from *Sohmers*, on the corner, is the men's uniform shop with thick, orangey shades down against the sun. The owner, a small and dapper man, does a brisk business, and with wives of other merchants when he can.

Not Jack Sohmers'. He disgusts her; yet men do, and at the *Town & Beach Club* on Collins and Seventeenth on Miami Beach where they swim in the pool and ocean on Sundays when they can afford to—in her stretch as a girdle *Catalina* swimsuit—one sees she does not shave above the lower thigh.

Across, white and hot in the sun, the headquarters for *Wometco Theatres*: they pay ushers thirty-five dollars a week—*Florida Theatres* pays just twenty-eight—. Soon its *WTVJ Channel 4* will have local news with Ralph Rennick, and lots of programs.

Head back on Miami... Here it is...

2

CORDOBA ZIPPERS AND BUTTONS

It is a strange business that journeys people anywhere from home, but the story of the Cordoba sisters is far in time. It begins in fifteenth century Spain, then to other European countries, and ongoing lives of merchant distinction. Then Morocco, Central America, Argentina; then, the battle of Britain apparently lost and sympathies if not overt, high; Miami.

Here they set up **CORDOBA**, north enough on Miami Avenue for solitude. Expertise brings customers: *Parisian Cleaners*; the best Flagler Street merchants; from Lincoln Road on the Beach, exclusive shops still restricted; clients who dwell in the Gables, parts of Miami Shores, the islands off the McArthur and Venetian Causeways; Bal Harbour. From cold regions of the South, stores that sell hunting and outdoor attire.

Few know their past. They are thin and severe, dress with dignity, live together in celibacy, and work. Every morning, early, the day still fresh with promise, they come by bus from the second floor rental of the porch house

by Biscayne Bay, enter through the back, and one hour later turn the sign to **OPEN**.

Only Friday does one sister slip out, and with a pouch, heads rapidly toward First Avenue, turns, and on Northeast Third Street where it meets the avenue, in a bank that could be a stone courthouse, makes the weekly deposit.

Saturday noon they close.

3

They ride their bikes gleaming in the sun, handlebars high, sides chrome fluted. *Puritan Ice Cream*, *Tanner's Supermarket*, then *Firestone* - long wide and shaded under the roof - go by. For now, they stick with the traffic on Flagler.

They are passing *Parisian* and hear the "Ding-Ding Dong-Dong" approaching frenzy of the *Florida East Coast* as the crossing arms with reflectors come down and the traffic halts. They recline their cycles, booted feet on the ground. In mirror sunglasses, expressionless, they draw abreast in immaculate white T-shirts, and talk.

They have done this before. Gunning, they now swerve out and North along the railroad track, the train roaring South on the coal bed. Clanging, it vanishes to a hollowing click; they bump over the tracks, come along the rear, turn off and glide.

They park between two trucks, quickly remove sunglasses, and from the bins strapped on both sides for storage, plaid short sleeves and sneakers.

They change between the trucks. Then, as one watches carefully, the other removes an instrument, then the other watches.

On Miami Avenue they walk toward **CORDOBA**. It is noon. The shop windows are copper tinted; one cannot see inside. They stand. The door is closed. They look the avenue both ways. The door opens and a customer comes out. A car pulls up and a woman emerges with a dress over her arm and starts going in. The girl driving calls she'll meet her in *Burdines*.

She's inside now.

The two push the door and enter. Inside, it is subdued and cool, display cases in wood either side; behind each rising to the ceiling, narrow wood shelves with brass you curl a finger around to pull. One sister is examining the dress with the woman who just entered. Zippers attached to fabric lie on top a glass display with buttons. Each zipper, the men observe, is a shade different in fabric: they are trying to match.

The other sister has been watching and comes from the back. "May I assist you?"

"You got buttons for blazers?"

“Yes, may I see?”

They confer silently. “Does it matter?”

The sister is rapidly absorbing them. “It depends. Are we replacing? Is there a pattern? Enamel? Brass? Will the fabric hold for sewing?”

She eyes them.

“Suppose we bring in?”

“I suppose.”

“You’re unsure?”

“No.”

“Then what?”

“Have you come far?”

“Hard to figure.”

Silence.

The woman customer who has been leaning over the display, speaking and pointing with animation, suddenly makes up her mind; and waving, rushes out with a glance. The other sister who had been helping her takes the zippers, and on toes reaches for shelves, pulls down and replaces. Over the display is the unzipped dress, one zipper alongside. The men cannot resist. It appears a perfect fit.

Now, no one.

The sister behind the display carefully zips as far as the garment allows, pats the dress down on the glass with both hands, places the zipper on top of it, and pats down. She stands there.

One of the two men addresses her: “Where are your buttons?”

“The cases both sides.”

“The shelves?”

“Zippers?”

...The bank for **CORDOBA** closes at two. It is small town South custom...

The questioner appears puzzled but only for a moment. “No, the shelves.” An edge has crept into his voice.

“Do you wish to see our display cases?” the sister who had come from the back, and is still standing where she stopped, asks the one talking.

The men see. The neat rows of buttons all along the two sides. They did not need help... The **OPEN** sign is facing Miami Avenue...

“Perhaps a set of brass? Like sailor days. When we went in together.”

“Gold plated?”

“Thought brass, gold plate...gold..?”

A flicker of awareness in the sister’s eyes. She has been trying to avoid this. She is the one from the back.

One biker faces, and the other goes to the door, swiftly turns the lock, then turns the door sign to **CLOSED**. As he turns back, the other has drawn. As he concentrates covering, the other:

“Where are the gold?”

“In the vaults of *Myrer Furrier*.”

He draws.

“How do the customers know?”

“We have identical sets in the gold plate.”

The men think. One asks, “Where?”

“In the display cabinets.”

“You reach down and pull out?”

The sisters silently acknowledge. From the back where the sister had emerged from the shadows is a side stairs. “What’s that?” one points. Getting the month’s deposits should be easy; concentrate and start with this.

“Storage area.”

“Bring down the gold.”

He motions with his gun for the other sister to come from around the display. They hear the doorknob being tried. The sister goes to the ladder, and gun drawn, one follows. She starts to mount. The other stands open in the store before the other sister. He is furious over what has been going on and comes close, the barrel of his revolver almost at her temple.

Both watch.

The sister has disappeared. They hear her overhead. The upstairs is as long and wide as the store. One mounts the ladder steps.

“Not much longer!”

Wait.

Silence.

She is at the top of the stairs which opens above to a trap door and an area open to the ceiling. She is darker than the shadows and something darker still is with her. She is immobile. She knows to descend. The bikers are angry to a fury.

“Damn you!” he rushes up the steps. In a flash, a gleaming metal sharply pointed object emerges. In a blur her free hand zips down, she grabs and squeezes to crush, the biker screams, loses balance his gun firing at the ceiling; and the curving tool used to cut through outdoor hunting jackets for buttonholes goes into the sack and curves through.

Then, holding the handle by both hands, the sister hoists him with all her strength until he is free of gravity.

The other is transfixed for an instant. The other sister downs his zipper, pulls out, and digging against the underside, zippers.

Up and down.

Screaming!!!

The police report said the hooked one died of shock—the photo of him on the floor—ripped free, terror eyes, sold out the special editions (*Blue* and *Red Streak*) of the *Daily News*. It became folklore...

Christmas Eve.

Sohmers has its best day, seven-hundred-thirty-seven dollars. Toward closing, a shapely woman in her thirties comes in to return a handbag. Jack takes it from her and slides it out the door onto the street. The woman turns and walks away, bending to get it. A beggar-looking woman comes in and takes a belt from a rack up to Jack. He reaches into his pocket for money: “No, I wish to purchase.”

...Bobby runs the door until the notch lines up and he feels the fit. Jack inserts the key, able to turn the lock. With Rhoda, they go to the chicken and ribs place on Northeast Third Avenue. The chickens are turning dripping in their juices. The man, all in white, with a white bandanna wrapped around his neck, pulls out a finished rod from the rotisserie, and with a long fork, disengages the chickens onto a butcher table. He uses poultry shears, and smiling, brings over with cole slaw, toasted hamburger rolls, chips, and *Milky* orange soda for Bobby...

...They go home...

In the pawnshop, Willie and his wife are ready to close. They had fired J. J. earlier in the day. They were hard drinkers and were ready to party. It was that time of year.

When Jack and Rhoda and Bobby get in the phone is ringing. Jack takes it.

“I’m sorry to hear,” he says.

Hanging up he tells Rhoda as Bobby listens.

“Oh my God,” Rhoda says.

The *Herald* showed them outside *Goldstein’s Pawn Shop*; Willie slumped against the display window, his wife laying face down. The pavement is stained. J.J. ended his in a parked car.

The sun is high and hot. You walk. Nothing...not even *Richards...* *McCrary’s* has a side on Miami Avenue about to be boarded. Inside, goods are piled high against the dirty window. The merchants –are all gone—. But one is there and if you stop they will talk and smile with the pleasure of a past not truly remembered.

You walk East...All the old buildings, but the people are different, they lounge different, and speak that way...You cannot even remember where the *Dixie Theatre* was. Where they showed *The Bad and The Beautiful* and you were a night usher and saw Elaine Stewart brunette and dark descend the staircase in a strapless gown; her lovely shoulders. After, the older usher who insisted on showing you the black and white photo of his Texas girlfriend, naked on a rock, her thighs open to her cunt.

JOHN MCKERNAN

I HAVE KILLED PRETTIER POEMS

Chiseled in granite
Longer names with more rhythm

Sprinkled flower seed
& dug in soft white roses
On larger lawns

Cut down thicker trees
Polished the oak
To a brighter sheen
So stairs & ladders rose to the sky

But I never pushed anyone
Over a cliff so easy as that lying child
Bearing my name & my early smile
Whose bones were milk
& his skull a chalice of air

JOHN MCKERNAN

WHEN

The eyelids
Open only to nightmares

When the fingers close
And the nails begin to scrape
The map of the future from the palms

When the skin
And the hair
Begin to sense
The shadows inside the shadow

Then the dancing bones
The chattering teeth
The musical muscles
& the doored drum of the skull
Will bow low to the soft white crown of dust

JOHN MCKERNAN

ELEMENTARY LIES: THE DIETARY GUIDE

I crawled all night through that utopian dream

I slithered toward the vowels

Even though consonants have more rib meat

I wormed my way into my skull

Yesterday deafened me but
I still know YES from NO

Even the moldy green alphabet tasted delicious

Tiny eyes staring up at my fork

The sky a campfire

The leaders hoarded all the rabbits' feet

They wanted to keep me drunk with injections
of night from a kettle of pink urine

Who was I? I must have been a student

What allure did power over others' wallets have?

Who would choose it over the alphabet?

Of course they frisked me but they never found my
desire for light

I was ready for them

I had memory in my fingerprints

KARL D. GLUCK

AT FIVE, NEAR SIX

Young Vivian, my own flesh and blood,
Sleeps like a stone and I, the mean crow,
Perched nervously on top, head thrust under
Wing into the black, black of feathers that bring no
Relief after a heavy dinner of valerian, swamp vapors and
What may have been red, red hemlock. Yet still I quiver at falling
Dewdrops, daybreak, the worms churning below, riling my stone.
She coughs, dragging me from a brief reverie of clacking keyboards,
Gnashing kitten teeth, the smell of gunpowder, always working
Its way into the farce of my dreams. This little stone
Sleeps, after a day of cawing, "Dad, Dad, Dad."
I thank the Gods, or the Heavens, whatever
It is out there that brings rest, if not sleep,
After a jarring day of care and caution
And more caution, as I watch over my
Young stone, now snoring, now
Oblivious to the sun rising
Over the black wing
Covering my ever-
Open eye, holding
Hell in containment
And détente, longing
To believe in love,
Yet all too tired
Of the tornado
Of life to be
Certain of
Its presence.

KARL D. GLUCK

PROMISE

What you took from me, you promised to return.
Deadlines pass and still you dare talk the small talk
About my this and my that, my no good points,
forgetting that the only thing
you have returned to me
is the most desolate
of wastelands.
I told you before you started, I don't want this,
Yet you had to go on, take everything I have,
For your dream, your dream, your dream.
I let you dream and build and now you yell,
"You are this and you are that! "

It's all about you now and whatever I do for me...

Doesn't count.

I can scream, "give back, give back, give back!"
Until the end of the age, until Guru Rinpoche attains the Ultimate
And my voice goes dry and you, you,
You do not return anything.
Forget the money, I would welcome a small smidgeon
Of compassion, but yet even that is lacking.

I am happy to call myself small,
Generous, humble, wide-open, if you will.
Yet you, taking everything from that I have given
Without expectation,

Still you want more and more and yet more.

"I am wood," as Shantideva said,
"When I feel anger, I am wood,"
I will not act, let you mess up your own karma

I will leave my karma out of this, wood, wood, wood,
Is my mantra. I refuse to be involved.

And when the phone rings,
You on the other end, needing my help...

I am wood, wood, wood... My mantra.

ROBERT S. PESICH

SCAR

Cracks in the walls of the clean room-
bits of gum and grit wedged inside
with gray pieces of pencil lead
from others who poked around
looking for the source of the draft,
scent of sulfur from the city.
Engineering will come
to check how deep it all goes
then try to seal them.
We may have to move out
the incubators, their cultures
of retinal nerve cells
harvested from the eyes
of a young blind woman
her body so mutilated
no other organs could be donated
but this. What's left
receives signals
to regenerate their axons,
extending now into an emptiness.
Rootlike. Perhaps still conducting
information about light, dark,
how to grow beyond the glial scar
to reconstruct a synapse
in the midst of nothing,
some equivocal findings
enough to go on
for a lifetime.



t. kilgore splake

BILL EDMONDSON

ORA AND THE RIVER

I HEADWATERS

First drops engineered
Trickle through an arrangement of stones
Into a wading pool
Where tourists photograph the kids

It escapes slips like a canoe
Through alder and pine
Past sand hills rice beds
Slips colder and colder
For sixty-five river miles *north*
Until shouldered by a slant of ancient scour
Forced east
Threads through lakes bends down
To suffer the first dams
Falls by degrees to the town
Named for what it destroyed

*What happened to them rapids?
In that picture in the mill
they was crazy wild
Dynamited gone under in the millpond*

The mill hoards the river, but if you were a white man at the turn of the Twentieth Century, what did you care about those damn rapids? You took the mill job. Safer than working in the woods. And the new sound of the mill, the enormous rollers and ovens forcing pulp into paper? It sounded like money to you. Only later, in the early Twenties, retired in town, you'd think way back, how it had been, how the water sounded. And if you were lucky—if the mill noise hadn't deafened you—that roar down its natural three-mile chute came back as if you were tuning through static across your

new radio dial, found a powerful music; you'd catch it, have it for a while until it slipped into static again. And when it was gone, that weave of music and applause, you missed it.

Grand Rapids: After the river was dammed and the water rose, the Ojibwe settlements drowned, their sugar trees drowned, and the pit where, in new moccasins, they'd threshed wild rice. The people fled uphill to ledges, to wait for the next move of the Great White Father.

Today, above the dam a pretty lake
Below a small release is joined
By a cord of treated piss from the paper mill—
When water goes through a mill you lose hope for it—
This strange tea flows beneath a bridge
Where Ora a Red Lake Indian on her way out of town
Stands watching near a sign:
MISSISSIPPI RIVER

A few miles downstream from the bridge at Jacobson
The water's a snagged black sludge
Crawling with nightmare fish

Farther down creeks bathe and feed
The river gains color green and brown
Becomes for the first time a companion
There through silver maple
A single fisherman aims his boat upstream

Still small a hundred feet across
The river leans into its first meander
(Later meanders pinched off like young bulls' balls
steer it straight)

What may be a bald eagle
Tacks high above the heat

A feather of dust plumes from Ora's car on the gravel road
Settles in a hyphen of light oil
In front of driveways of homes
Whose barns slump silos stand
A white-tail deer on the shoulder of the road
Springs stiff-legged away

Black-Eyed Susans stare up at the sun
Black flies boil in the shade
Signs: *The Porky Pine Inn Broasted hicken*
Towns she'll never visit there's a song on the radio:
Tequila Makes Her Clothes Fall Off

By the time she gets to Little Falls
The river she knows—flourishing grown wide light green—
Pivots left where on the western bank
A museum white as bleached femur honors the hero
Who flew so far into the Fuhrer's lap
Wind blows upstream whitecaps line up
Collapse face down into trenches

Ora says *if Lindbergh had
been governor of Minnesota
There wouldn't be an Indian left*

In a small town mayflies
Forced south by PCBs in Lake Pepin
Slather the panes of Burger King

Bikers here for Catfish Days
Swarm in helmetless gray hair flying
Chat gruff in Rudy's slam LaCrosse tongue cherry shots
Gaze out at their machines

Ora at a table in the sun
Feels always under suspicion
Rolls an unopened beer
Across her beaded forehead
Then *crack!* chugs half of it down
Places the can in the shadow of her skull

Her sister's missing
Fled south from one disaster
To be swallowed by another
Erased no house at the address
Cell phone dead
One earlier call a strangled giggle

Dark under windshield
Ora drives through Victory
Bands of pressure ratcheting her chest
She senses she's facing an operation
Has to walk right in and let the doctors cut

At the landing a trailer park
Pickups boat racks boats
The river here less than a mile wide
Willow bars hard to sort in the green blend
Signs: Battle Island Battle Bluff
As though there'd been a war
She stops gets out
Leans to touch a chipped stone tablet
Her fingers move on raised stained letters
She closes her eyes
Begins to hear faint cries growing louder
As the monument blurs
Dissolves like salt her hand goes through it

She looks out on a flood plain
Falling gently to the river
Pickups cars are gone trailer park road
Vegetation shifts
Only the river appears the same

1832: Dying of hunger and injuries, the Sauk nation—reduced to a thousand—is desperate at work in the clearing. Women and older children drag small cottonwood logs to teams of raft builders, run silently for more. All but the builders glance uphill: staccato shots from rifles, shouts, smoke drifting above the brush. A brave rolls out of the cover, naked except for loincloth, left arm shattered near the shoulder baring a spear of bone. He gets to his knees screaming, too weak to lift his rifle. Other braves emerge. Through brush, a furious hidden snarl. Exposed warriors tear saddles from horses, lie prone, this leather their only protection.

The Sauk, trying for days to surrender

The U.S. militia works free of cover, forms two long lines. A few fall from Indian fire. At a captain's command, the front row kneels, aims. They are dressed in once-white pantaloons, ragged, short gray

jackets. Most are shoeless, feet bound in muddied clots. Their captain lanky, ugly and young, lowers his raised sword. Fire!

Ora knows him.

...are killed under white flags.

In the clearing, old squaws, old men at their pipes, have turned away like livestock from wind-driven hail. They fall, and as they die release the children. Below, at river's edge, boat builders are ripped away; those waiting to board die waiting. The first blood colors the river. Their saddle protection shot away by musket balls, braves break, retreat downhill, pushing, dragging the remaining old and young. The captain raises his sword toward a second volley, but his men, sensing the rout, abandon ranks, surge down *where the meat is*. On the river, an armed steamboat swings into position. The soldiers, yipping, stab and club. Only the Indians' horses that whinny and wheel at their stakes will live. The tribe absorbs the shock of musket ball, rifle butt, lunge of bayonet. A few braves dive into the water, stroke for a river bar. As they swim, the steamboat's cannon sounds. Those not killed disappear into slender willows. Shot rakes the islands. Leaves, twigs fly up. Debris from exposed tree bones trails under smoke downriver.

Ora sees blood. It folds into current, slickens the riverbank.

Why wouldn't the white man understand...

Young women begin to strip, enter the water, children on their backs, locked fingers under mother's chin. Some babies held by their hair in women's teeth. Sharpshooters sink them as they swim. Hundreds now dead; soldiers lunge for the remaining women. The men grab thin wrists, drag them into undergrowth, where in a while, knives draw across throats or pistol shots crack, and soldiers emerge, fresh snatches of black hair at their belts. Some have long strips of flesh that *make first-rate razor strops*. One man, in ecstasy, presses a young girl's scalp against his crotch.

...white flags?

One woman uses buckskin strips from the fringe of her dress to tie her baby to a curve of cottonwood bark. Pushed out, the little boat spins, returns to shore at an officer's feet.

All afternoon, bodies float downstream, poled into the current by a clean-up crew.

And Ora knows he was there
That man she sees every day
In copper and paper and stone

II THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI

*The Army Corps of Engineers has sliced, cleated and bloused the river.
Billions of dollars arrive from Congress. Concrete flows.*

Rain feathers in across the river's face
Darkens the outer walls of a thirty dollar cabin
Where Ora pokes through a tin
As though choosing a button or mint
Takes two white tablets
Soon the pain descends by steps
Toward a cool cellar and with each level down
A little surrender a rinse through her brain
A feeling clean as childhood
And the world's all right
If it isn't if she's addicted so what?

How else can she accept
She'd abandoned those students she loves
Became a change girl for the penny slots
In the lint of a cheap casino?

From up here
Mark Twain looks over the river
Its surface shining wide as when he breathed
And though you know it's an illusion
It still looks mighty—even as Black Hawk fierce in chains
After he'd fled his people
The river's on display and the statue looks out
Past the eastern shore and the smokestacks
To patched green beyond while below

Through a bleached shuttered Hannibal
Where barefoot Sam fished for his future
Birds flush to the siren
As the cops chase another meth dealer out of town

Out of its final prison locks and dams the river blinks in the sun
Freed too late an innocent old felon stripped of all hope
Joined by the molded Missouri
Once chock with careering trees and ice chunks
Two rivers now one sheathed in levees
Slide south

III THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI

Ora driving the giant muddled river—
Now beaten thoroughly used—
Passes a slumped burial mound
And soon the Delta opens
Cotton fields roadhouse bars the river absent
Heat and haze of the blues coming on her

In the dark club Big Jack Johnson beautiful in sweat
Lights on the head of his guitar
Blinking in sequence—as when folks who've been away too long
Driving at night
Downhill through trees
See the intermittent lights of their hometown

Then onstage pockets full of harmonicas
Comes Charlie Musselwhite

All the way downriver
Ora's seen shadows of clouds
Pushed by no prevailing wind
Around displaced blacks up to cold Chicago
Indian women in ragged gowns
Across to Oklahoma
Shadows too at that massacre up at Bad Axe
Around the burning drowning men of the Sultana

Under its canopy of alder and oak
The Natchez Trace unspools
Takes her southwest 45 miles an hour
She thinks again of her sister combing her daughter's hair

As Ora exits to the antebellum South
She needs a drink

Down through streets of mansions
To the Lady Luck under the hill a riverboat casino
Gangplanked and fastened to the shore
Where an old man at the bar
Caresses his unlit meerschaum pipe
Orders whiskey and coke by twos
And between deep pulls
Tells of a dicey day on the nineteenth-century river:
Twenty babies on a Sunday sunny cruise
A boat that hit a snag and listed sharply
Screaming fainting mothers
A squall of babies thrown from the upper deck
To plunge like cannonballs in the water
But men had swum to net them as they hit
With basketed hands let the force of the babies' fall
Continue through the surface in a kind of baptism
And they never lost a one

Now he leans to Ora on his right
When he opens his left hand she sees
A pock of cigarette scar in its palm
Then she looks past him down the bar
To a woman with dark gold hair
And smoky corraling eyes

Ora wakes alone in a four-poster bed
In a sky blue bedroom of an empty house
Her mouth hurts she remembers little but knows
She'd whispered *yes* ahead of the question
Soon she'll wander the Quarter New Orleans
Pulling like petals from a flower:
Laura... Lorna...Madeleine...

Driving down old Route 61
She daydreams she's a privateer
Breaks into the boondoggle office
Of the Army Corps of Engineers up north
Liberates those squirreled billions
Pushes off into the current with bales of hundred-dollar bills
All the way down past Hannibal
Past Clarksville and St. Louis dams melting away
Her raft dull green on wide brown flow
Narrowing into meanders bouldered revetments at every other bend
And the river shining like a fish in the sun
Slips on down the Delta
Near New Orleans the hopeful cheer from levees
Docked she breaks open the bales pitchforks money
To local builders hospitals folks in need

Now though she senses the river deepen speed
Drop into Cancer Alley
Lowers the windows to welcome the tropical air
The chemicals

In Café Pontalba on Jackson Square
Under a thickened sky
Coins of rain enrich the flagstone
Wind licks at dollar bills held down by Ora's beer cup
Here the Caribbean walls are open
There's a bliss of fear down her spine
The wind a shivering whisper of Katrina
Lightning flickers
And thunder breaks around through her
Under seven brown ceiling fans wobbling at different speeds
She drinks deep
Looks out above frosted etched panels of Old New Orleans
Through the soft air Louis's song plays on
St. Peter's tolls: 4 p.m.
Pigeons flurry and flutter back a couple of them
Trip in for lagniappe and a drink a waiter brooms them out
Now rain releases she's inside it
Smells wet ash on the wind
In the distance woodpecker hammers cease

In Hotel Monteleone a circus scene
Ora drinks Jack Daniels neat
As above the revolving bar
Faces of ravished cherubs in bas relief
Held fast pouted and knowing under yellow curls
And the bar creeps glacially counterclockwise
Smooth but for tiny jerking minute release
Dangerous whiskey dangerous memory:

*The biology classroom down the hall
In Red Bank High
Weiss who thought in a prior life
He'd been a Nazi soldier
Takes his murdered grandfather's guns
Into a ninth grade class
Ten of them including Ora's sister's girl
Lifted like angels through the ceiling
Away from this world of blood-spattered textbooks
Her sister leaving her car door open
Running slanted toward the school
Her eyes as Ora stopped and held her*

And the mouth of the Mississippi
Is a fire hose nozzle out of control
Slowly whipping west
The river now bruising past half-hearted levees
Will one day take the lure
Of Atchafalaya's steeper gradient
One morning New Orleans will wake
To a mudflat of flopping fish

But not yet not while the Mardi Gras Indian
Fingers scarred by years of needle pricks
From sewing life to fantasy fantasy to life
Smooths his purple feathers and emerges
Resplendent eight feet tall in the predawn chill

Out at the southern verge
Salt water overlaps protective marsh
A future Katrina borne in the mind
Will strike the city sink

Not yet not while out on St. Charles
A song from a second-story
Falls over the surging Friday street
Strangers shift blend into line dance
And the sight of a woman's ample ass
Compels a man to plead *Mercy!*

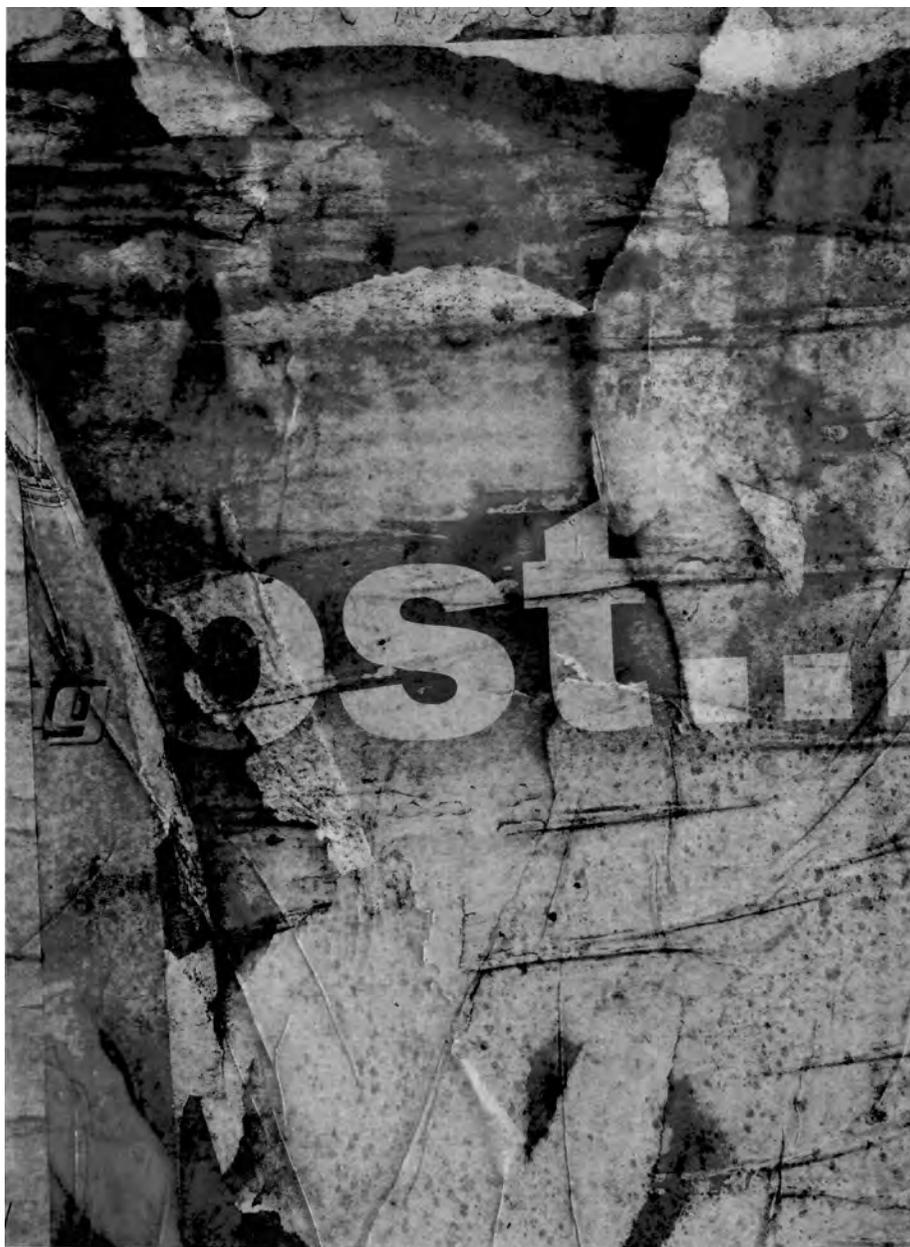
Ora has been in town a month, has a tiny slice of apartment, a job at Harrah's. She's not found her sister did her golden-haired lover ever arrive?

Sunday evening a warm rain blows north. From far away across and to the right, Ora hears sound impossible to identify at first, high-pitched, low in volume. It's the same as old radio; as darkness begins to close, it's clearer, louder. She stands with a woman she's found, in front, Ora's right arm around her, between neck and breasts. Ora pulls her back against her body and kisses the top of the woman's damp head as she might kiss a showered child. Fiercely now, she wills this to last forever, vows to hold on. Low clouds weave between tall buildings opposite; balloons, wisps of streamers, bits of heaven-knows-what come by, threading the wind. Rain slants in dark spaces between buildings, and the sound she's been hearing grows louder until she knows what it is. It comes from throats like hers, upstream. The rain, tropical, intensifies. A vanguard of police, high wild roar of the crowd rolls in, now only a block away. There's a great white skull, then the first band marches, marches in place, green and gold energy, swing and glitter of brass. The nearing float—and it does float—grows far larger than life, now to her right, approaching, almost in front. Sound swallows her. Now the float *is* in front, strange, beautiful, stark in the rain. Masked creatures up there, treasure-draped, dip and fling toward lifted snagging fingers. And then it's past, the sound alters, more bands and floats until beads and plastic pearls are everywhere, hanging from upper branches of trees, lampposts, street signs.

Fat Tuesday: This morning, she can't steady her fork above scrambled eggs. Flustered, she goes out where sunlight on Bourbon Street glances from plastic beads already coming down as blushing women, braless, slide shirts to their necks; alley vendors set their planks, bank ice around

numbing beer; Ora buys two; they're so cheap; an eight-foot tall erection passes with its clapping counterpart, and men are calling *Hey, baby!* even to her, and she doesn't like it; even if she went with a woman, she'd miss this; the day, though it's not yet noon, falling away; and there's Abe Lincoln under his tall silk hat; students with plastic milk jugs, sloshing of white wine; Christian soldiers in formation, their banners, and their scouts spying drunks, in the name of Jesus yanking them, slamming them up against the iron fence in front of St. Peters to force the gospel through; Ora in close quarters feels hands of a cleric, tries to punch at his mask, can't twist her arm high enough; police on horses—worst job in the world today—veteran in a wheelchair, relaxed, urine tube buried in a planter box, guzzling beer with his friends; She has another icy two, refreshing, bitter; colors mix and separate; music from every direction, and the wail of the Rex parade; combined voices she's never heard; then love at first sight, and they're in Ora's room, but the woman passes out... luxury of a bathroom... Ora's back outside... sees a cross dresser sitting splay-legged on steps, great tufts of wiry red pubic hair escaping from sensible white panties; where's her wallet; oh, in her front pocket, okay... maybe a gin and tonic or two, if she can find a place to sit... heaven to get out of that heat, gin burns good... She's sorry for all those who never come to this... who'll never discover... adrift in The Chart Room... an old woman in a pink boa on the stool to her left... martini a foot high with an egg of an olive, explains... *In alcohol, we will have our moments* ... somewhere a curling saxophone... Ora braids its honey with Maker's Mark... where's her gin?... she wants to be everywhere... wants out of time the way they promise, but isn't, or why would she feel this ache... exhausted... maybe a nap... maybe she'd still be there... where the hell?... just a nap and then back out... tries to get up... legs have lost their bones... jelly-boned, finds the street... bandied by the crowd... sees that stovepipe hat... loses it... spots it again... lurches through... jumps to swipe it off... misses... careens away... lost in the flow.

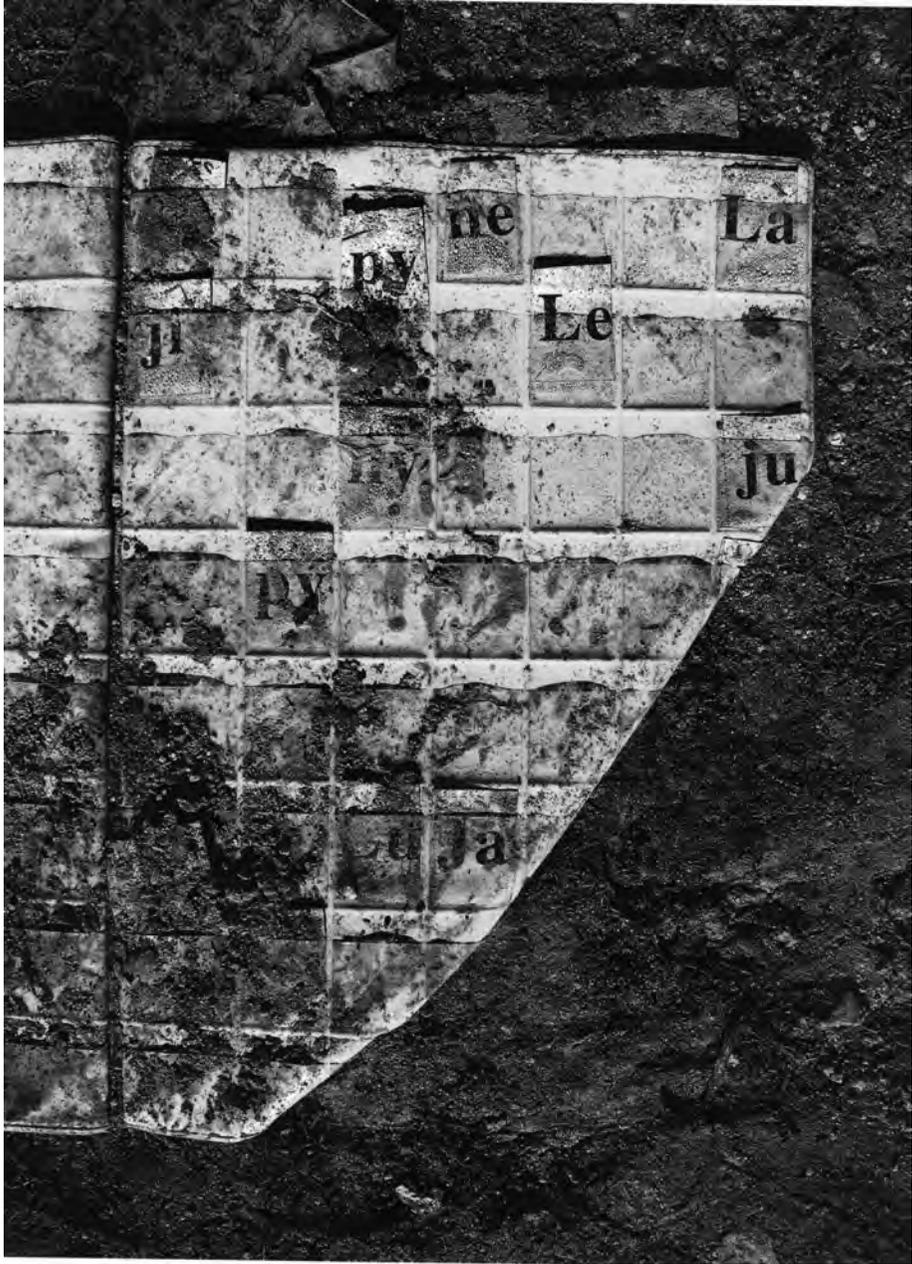
AN
ALOIS NOŽIČKA
PORTFOLIO



Alois Nožička: *One*



Alois Nožička: *Eight*



Alois Nožička: *Four*



Alois Nožička: Six



Alois Nožička: *Five*



Alois Nožička: *Eleven*

JILL HOFFMAN

POLISH RIDER

For E.D.

I stand before the naked
mirror
all night in anticipation
of eyes,

while you sleep in socks and a blind-
fold like a bride
for a daring burglar to bundle over his shoulder
and bind.

MATTHEW IRA SWAYE

SUGAR HILL

This kid in my building tells me he's gonna beat me senseless if he sees me reading anything by Franzen. "This is a Ben Marcus building."

2F is forever in her doorway - robes parted, sandbag Section 8 C-section - bragging about her free-verse forthcoming in *The Chicago Review*. Guy on the first floor's young pregnant wife tells him Fitzgerald ain't fit to do Harper Lee's laundry and he smacks her in the mouth.

Women on fire escapes with hand fans, bright Africa housedresses, Willa-Willa-Cather. "Coover's hyper-text will not be an enduring force on the vast literary landscape," they opine.

The Sunday mornings' fancy hats brimming across the threshold, the ladies Sunday-trying for my soul's salvation, plying me with passages from *PMS-poemmemoirstory*.

Jorie Graham's Basho-inspired haiku on the inside of the elevator door? All these vocabularies disguised as intellectuals!

"Who's your favorite publisher?"

"Who's your favorite publisher?"

"Who's your favorite publisher?"

Pleiades littering the A/C train tracks at the stops between 125th and 168th, cause rail-fires, blockages, and delays. Journals dangle on telephone wires. ISBNs stick to my black Converse. There's a compost pile of literary magazines at the base of every tree. When it rains, the pulp of a critical conversation on the objective reading of poetry makes an incomprehensible mess on the concrete. In the sun, you can taste the smell of slow-roasting stanzas, Lorca-marinades sting your eyes and you're crying in the street and everybody's crying.

The weather's cooperating and there's a cacophony of fathers and sons, cheek by jowl by jelly roll, on bonny Brecht beach blankets, fathers and sons. "That's a tough one, my man. I'll cover up the second part with my thumb. Sound it out, one syllable at a time, son," explaining to their boys that you can't let life deter you.

And, doesn't the sewage treatment plant look nice today? Every park in the city should have a waste treatment plant.

I'm talking about redemption.

There's a dealer up in 5E. Rail-thin Edward Albee-looking mother-

fuckers are banging on the door at all hours of the night, eyes buggy, begging to get fronted a copy of *RATTLE* or *The Yale Review*.

Does the neighborhood association do anything about it? No. They throw a barbecue every year on Tobias Wolff's birthday.

Out front of the laundromat, Dr. G winks at me, licking her thick lips: "Literary journals have a vested interest in demanding so-called First North American Rights. It's their prerogative we question! Should the fact that eight people've read a poem of ours in Baltimore preclude a possible six more in Modesto from ever seeing it? Have we saturated the market? We're to continue to write in such invisible ink? *Cui bono?* Not us," she says, touching my arm. "We do not sanction their trespass and neither will we continue to be complicit in the willful abridgment of our own inalienable artistic rights! We cannot afford to limit the scope of our print-readership. We are among literary journals' few and most loyal supporters. Bilaterally - as un-paid contributors and as paying subscribers. They do not 'discover' our work. We send it to them. If they're still relevant in 2011, 2012, 2013, it's because we think of them daily, and with no small longing. We appeal to them to be reasonable. No amount of reprinting of one of our impenetrable lowercase poems will, we're afraid, succeed in throwing Planet Earth from its axis. In an environment in which it is safe for us to credit a previous publisher, we will certainly do so. Until then, we'll continue to submit previously published work. Think of it as civil disobedience. That same spirit is, we believe, the essence of all worthwhile art."

"Pulpit," I tell her.

"Pulpit," she says, laughing all the way to the foodbank.

The charter school kids, papering *The Columbia Journal's* writer's guidelines on every windshield.

The bodega on 153rd is carrying *Lilies and Cannonballs*, *Callaloo*, *African American Review*, *Open City*. Last week, Habibi nixed the Sunny Delight freezer. Women push to buy *Alimentum* or *Harpur Palate* with their W.I.C. cards. I sip coffee.

'Caesura'? Your Yolanda's going to grow up and get a job someday, talking like that? Nobody comes out of the womb talking, 'elasticity, poplars, unilateralism, filial, mobility, dystopia-this and enjambment-that, Horatian satire.'

An unwelcome soundtrack. I plug my ears with cotton.

Plain-clothed officer across the street with a copy of *Poet Lore*.

I find the assistant super. He hardly looks up from his hardcover. Since he translated that Petrarchan sonnet for *Spinning Jenny*, you can't get him to fix shit. "The toilet's jacked up again," I tell him, "it's not a metaphor, Eddie. No sea malito. Hoy sin falta. Venga, le nuestro. Cómo te quedó el ojo, pu-ti-to?"

He deigns to stand, shows me his teeth, bookmarking the book, following me upstairs.

A handwritten rejection slip.

Kids go by in iambic pentameter, Dewey Decimal-aged kids, judy-blumers, tattoos of the Newberry insignia on their necks.

“bell hooks, Chuck Mee, Kozel, Baraka, Richard Howard,” I tell the assistant super.

Nodding, he expertly moves the plunger up and down. “Are we talking about sustainability,” he asks, “or are we talking about gentrification?” He gives the Eisenhower-era shitter a practice-flush.

“Hostages,” I tell him.

“Too much toilet paper,” he says, running the plunger under the tap. Eddie’s face has gone blank. His mind’s already back on Ong’s *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*. He waits for the elevator.

As I close my door, the parrot in 4F is heard to say, “Ours is a post-literary society.”

I’m an invisible man.

It’s 2:39 a.m. and a voice in the apartment below me forces up through the floor, at the foot of my bed. The man has memorized a *Fiction* chat between Mirsky and Frisch. He does both voices - the bass of Mirsky’s voice is spot-on. Faithfully, he recites the text.

HELLER LEVINSON

SHOWERING | SMELL HER

showering i smell her. the olfactory erotic trigger. shower instigated.
showering. scent-insurance. an interactive modifier. a set-odor function. a
ritualistic cascade. fluidic remarking. fluidic centrality. centralization.
accumulation. accumulative shed. the notion of streaming through. upon.
an arrival thoroughfare. transit-value. the pelt of love. third element. the
other in abeyance. continuity. contiguity. coordinates mingling. a mix. a
mesh. a mash. a mishmash. mishmosh. what slides off. in the rinse. what
slides on. in the release. her. enveloping. her the invisible refulgence. cas-
cading. interlude. intertwine. interwoven. intermix. a beckon. a draw.
drawer. drawers. run through it. tributarial distribution. lather is the sur-
mise. the sharp of your follicles. funiculi, funiculà. farfetch. fletcherly.
feathering the olfactory sled. sheath. sheathed in the feathers of olfactory
distribution. the other in transit. in truancy. there. smellable. beyond.
& soap.

HELLER LEVINSON

GREEN, GREEN, AND GREEN

green, green, & green

pas – tor – al

strains of

serried steppes of

the Green Mountains loaded with

surreying floats of

— August green

with

green, ... correspondence

concupiscence

countenance

melts //: merges

agglomerations

mingling cohabitating succulent tingle shingling concatenate sough shofarisms

(flute mesas

(pike pranksterisms

wavelength (520 – 570 nanometers) pilings

is

frequency (575 -525 THz) connivings

[“The perception of greenness (in opposition to redness forming one of the opponent mechanisms in human color vision) is evoked by light which triggers the medium wavelength *M* cone cells in the eye more than the long-wavelength *L* cones. Light which triggers this greenness response more than the yellowness or blueness of the other color opponent mechanism is called green.”]

how much of

green

is

frequency

...

how much,

... interpretation

— event zoning

mountains of green cumulously green green accumulating

mandrake green benthic maverick glow-glorious majestic

(spores circulating osprey titanium ovations

vert grun groen sabz viridescence frutescence chloroform

in Old English, *growan* = to grow

{green onion green with envy evergreen green around the gills got any

green, man?

green hornet greenhorn he’s too green green party green thumb

frog lizard parrot green-skinned Osiris chlorophyll fungi fern frond
frondescence fluorescence fructuous fecund Ireland the Emerald Isle
St. Patrick's Day Lycopods

“The Christmas Fern” {“*No shivering front
that shuns the blast sways on its slender chaffy stem; Full veined and lusty
green it stands, of all the wintry woods the gem.*”} – W.N. Clute

green cedes red

G: You are danger.

R: Fuck you, green.

G: Why the offense, ... be glad you have an identity.

R: I am rose. I am love. I am passion.

G: You are the devil.

R: I am fire

green lumpings bunches folds furls f(loo)(ol)d(outs) fructifications fluttering
lustrous lute lullings lolling

(lull a by

boreally bombinant green bazaar

(olive drab roustabout tamarind drills

seen keen sheen green teen mean spleen queen lean bean clean team teem
beam redeem

verde

commodious retailer plum plumb plumery banjo frail river skirt skirt brook
skirt trout skirt waterfall skirt splendiferous grandiose arboreal balneal broth

amble ease – ash birch fir hemlock maple pine spruce –

sussurant green, ... green succor green savour *sheath-ing*

showering

hills of green therapeutics whaling

respirations wheeling reeling

respiration the seethe of the woods

the narration



Found Photo: *Beautiful Unlucky Child*

ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

TODAY, LUCIE FELL

(Excerpt from a novel, forthcoming)

[It is here but I don't have it.]

Today, Lucie Fell.

I give a description of a man who has been robbed. I still see his face as it appeared on the negative plate and then on the print. I was in the darkroom. I remember everything about the darkroom: its narrowness and its shelves, the corked glass containers, the window at one end of the room that was covered to block the light. There were shelves in front of me and shelves behind me. All the chemicals we needed for the photographs were held in the glass containers. I mixed only certain of the chemicals, as taught to me by my father, Edmund Fell, and by Mr. Martin. Mr. Martin said photographers must also be chemists. There was a table in the center of the room. The room was rectangular shaped and so was the table. The table came almost all the way to the shelves on both sides with only a small amount of space for me to stand, or for my father, or Mr. Martin to stand. There was a tray on the table that took up the space of almost the entire surface. It was filled with the appropriate mix of chemicals for developing or printing. There was another table, much smaller, beneath the window where the prints were washed and fixed. You may think it disturbs me to think of it now, but it does not disturb me. I always loved the darkroom; I felt of use there.

There were times after the negative had been laid over the albumen paper and exposed to light to develop the print when I wanted to pull it away before it was finished. I wanted to see it as it was at that moment and to keep it that way because at that moment it was something other than the thing itself.

When we had been working on the prints from the famous W___ Survey, Mr. Martin had no tolerance for anything except that the work be carried out to his specification. I wished always to please him and to show him I could do excellent work. I believe I accomplished that. He often told me I had a talent for it.

I was so young then, only fourteen.

But I have set out to describe a man who has been robbed. I feel pity for him because I have been robbed too. I will first describe his face. The first photo-

graph was a close view of his face. It made me think of some of the portraits taken by the late Mrs. Martin, Mr. Martin's first wife, Lucie Beale Martin. I thought I saw her influence present in Mr. Martin's work, in the way he represented portrait images, apart from his landscapes, the documentation produced from the Surveys. I never mentioned it, of course. I knew that he would not want to hear it. But the late Mrs. Martin's influence was beyond a doubt there. It was as though Mr. Martin had borrowed Lucie Martin's eyes whenever he took a portrait. I wish I could borrow them now. Even for only an hour. But I know full well that is impossible.

My father was Mr. and Mrs. Martin's assistant in the studio before Lucie Martin died, and when I was born I was her namesake.

The Indian was old. He was one of the chiefs and everyone said it was remarkable he had been able to travel so far—all the way from the Black Hills in the region of the West known as the Unorganized Territories—with the other chiefs to talk to our President in Washington about keeping their land. Mr. Grant was our president then.

The Indian's eyes were closed and his head was tilted slightly down. I thought at first it was a mistake on the negative that his eyes were closed, but when the print was developed, I realized Mr. Martin intended it. The headdress had been removed and without it his hair hung straight down. His hair was long and it reached to his shoulders. I saw it was gray when I opened the door and looked outside the darkroom. I remember being surprised that Indians have hair that turns gray.

That was a full ten years ago. From the first I was attentive to Mr. Martin. The illumination on the Indian's face was in shadow at the nose and the cheekbones. The nose was shaped like the beak of an eagle. Deep lines of age were visible on his face. Similar to the lines of age on Mr. Martin's Aunt Lavinia's face. Since the accident when I came to live here, I've considered her my aunt too. Her face and the Indian's were both deeply lined with getting old. A man who has been robbed looks much the same as anyone else. He was the same man I had seen through the open door. He had seen me too. I mentioned that to Mr. Martin. The Indian was in full headdress with feathers. Mr. Martin told me that they were eagle's feathers. A metal band sat across his forehead. Pieces of animal skins hung down from the headdress. When I came out of the darkroom, I stood a distance into the studio's operating room so that I could see the Indian plainly. I could see the other Indians too, and my father who was changing the plates, and Mr. Martin who was arranging the placement of the Indians for the photograph.

I have not called him Mr. Martin in many years. I call him William now which seems to me as it should be. In the studio the profession's term for him is The Master.

Now William has begun to have lines of age on his face too. I can feel the lines when he lets me touch his face to see him. His wife Angeline's face is

smooth as silk though I don't touch it often. I saw her only once with my eyes. It was when she first arrived at the studio the day of the accident when the Indians were being photographed. She was beautiful that day. There is no reason for me to think she is not still beautiful.

The Indian saw me. We stared at each other before I went back into the dark-room. I had the impression there was something he wanted to say to me. The doctor, Angeline's father, told me later it was something I imagined. There are many things, he said, that are mixed up in my memory, or are inventions of my mind that grew out of the terrible shock.

The day the Indians were being photographed was the day I was robbed of my sight. I regard it as theft though I know it was my clumsiness that caused the accident.

To rob. To take by stealing. To take something from someone injuriously and unjustly.

I don't agree with the doctor. I did not imagine it. The Indian stared at me as though there was something he wanted to tell me.

The Indian's face was the final image to my sight—the last thing granted for me to see. His face on the negative, and then on the print. There was no misstep; it was perfect. I remember I said to myself it is exactly as Mr. Martin wants it.

I was young then and my face was full and round. I wonder if it's still round. Mr. Martin, William, says I have a lovely face.

It was all such seriousness that day in the operating room of the studio; sun poured in from the skylight and it seemed there were Indians everywhere.

William said they were important men, the last great chiefs of their tribes. Of course I know now ten years later—because William told me—the way it turned out. The wilderness land of the Black Hills was taken away from the tribes.

I remember when the old Indian looked at me it was as though with his eyes he brought himself to stand before me. As though his eyes carried him over to me and he was standing so close he could reach out and touch me. And then the next minute he was not standing in front of me at all, but was still in his place against the backdrop.

William said there is no longer a wilderness.

This garden is the wilderness, he said; here, touch, feel. He put my hand on one of the dogwoods and then he walked me very fast from tree to tree and pressed my hand into the tree's bark, or here, he said, or here, or here, even these, the statues, here, feel, and he pressed my hands against stone; horns, fangs, wings of beasts and brutes; the representations of living things with inborn wildness in stone that have always been here in this garden.

I was aware more of William's hands than the creatures in stone. His hand on my hand. On the small of my back. On my shoulder. On my hand. He closed his eyes and touched my face so that he could see the way I see.

I wanted to ask him the quality of the way he saw me with his hands. Of course I didn't ask him. I kept the question to myself.

It has been ten years since that day in the darkroom. I have learned to keep track. Angeline's father, the doctor, over these ten years has provided me with opportunities at The Wills Eye Hospital, and in Braille, and with my own calendar each year supplied in Braille.

When the Black Hills were taken away from the Tribes, William said, Oh, that was inevitable. That's what William said. Oh, that was inevitable.

William said your darkness is the wilderness.

I feel like stone, like rock, as much like rock as the stone statues in the garden. Except for my hands—the one that moves the pen across the page and the other that guides it.

When I first became blind I thought my parents were not my parents. That's how I came to live with Mrs. Martin, Sr. and William's aunt. After time passed I again believed my parents were mine. The initial hysteria that had caused the disbelief had subsided. They were my parents, I belonged to them, but I continued to keep my residence with William's mother and his aunt, and with William nearby, and his wife Angeline, and the doctor visiting, and with my own room and the many advantages they could provide for a blind girl.

Was it from a stone, or a bird? Where did I come from?

Aunt Lavinia had a friend who examined the lines on my palms and the individual fingers of my hands. She took my smallest finger in her hand. She said this is your unfortunate finger. She said it was the finger that contained my misfortune.

Shall I cut it off then, the finger?—the finger that contains my misfortune.

Two hands touched me—one belonged to William, one to the old Indian. How else could I know that the Indian's hands felt like the bark of a tree?—like the bark of the tree that William pressed my hand against in the garden. William's hands on top of my hands—and then his hands on my face while he kept his eyes closed so that he could see me the way I saw him. Tracing the features of my face, starting at the brow.

That day William was everywhere in the studio, seeing to everything at once; he was the master. He is still the master, though he says he has gone past his prime. He says he will carry a cane soon, but I have told him he will never carry a cane. He will continue to cut glass plates with a grand gesture the way he has always done, and with great display pour the collodion.

Is the moon full yet? I used to ask Aunt Lavinia. I have refused to think about the spirits since she's been gone. And there has never been a word from her from the spirit world. I thought she, if anyone...

Is the moon full yet? I will ask Mrs. Martin tonight at supper. Every night the aunt used to ask, Do you think William will come tonight?

Sometimes I dare to ask the same question. Do you think Mr. Martin will come tonight? I ask his mother. Or perhaps in the morning?

We have both been robbed, the old Indian and me. Standing upright in his

lavish costume he had a kind of beauty. And the look he gave me was full of meaning. I think it said the land will be taken, bad luck, but there was no pity. When I asked, when I insisted, William explained what the silver nitrate did to my eyes. It does to the skin or the eyes what it does when you develop a photograph. The same wash of blackness that rushes onto the glass plate when the silver nitrate reacts to the salt in the collodion, rushes onto the skin when it meets the saline in the body. Or in the case of the eyes—as was the case with mine—it reacts to the saline and blackens the membrane over the eye. My eyes were blackened, William said—both the whites and the cornea, the same way my hands and fingers used to get blackened. It can wear off the skin, but it can never clear up again or wear off from the eyes. Though he did not say it, I understood—one sees only two black balls in the place of my eyes.

When the accident happened I reached for William with my blackened hands and he took hold of them. It was a sight to see, everything so blackly discolored, though of course I was not able to see it. They tell me that my hands are no longer discolored, and that the discoloration on my face has also faded with the passing of time.

With the passing of time I got on well again with my parents and continue to get on well with them now, the period of time over when I thought they were imposters. The word imposter, the way it sits there in the mind. My parents agreed it was still as well I remain with Mrs. Martin and William's aunt. I would have everything there, whereas I wouldn't at home with the three other girls, and this one, the blind one.

I remember my skin moist one night from summer heat, how damp, how hot my skin was. I had gone into the garden at night in my dressing gown.

I thought I would like to remain there until the night was over.

I thought I heard William coming, saying what are you doing here? The mosquitoes will soon be at you.

I thought he might touch me to guide me back into the house. There's nothing we can do with you, he might have said, wanting to stay out there by yourself in the darkness.

William told me again about the horses that had been taken along for the W—Survey in the canyons. The horses were with him in his desert, and in and out of the deep ravines between the cliffs. He told me some of them suffered a condition of the eyes, their eyes inflamed, it was called moonblindness.

I inquired about it from Mr. Sachs who owns the stables on Front Street. He was an acquaintance of William's aunt. I asked him if he had ever seen a horse suffering from moonblindness.

He said it was an ancient disease, all the way back to Egypt and the pyramids at Giza, carried by the phases of the moon. When I asked how he knew, he said it was his business to know being a horse man. He said the horses' eyes would become cloudy and pale, whitish-blue like the color of the moon. He said the horses would often go blind.

Our horses did not go blind, William said. We covered their eyes with a cloth soaked in water and vinegar.

Perhaps if my eyes had been covered with the same.

Not marriageable. The blind girl.

You're not to be an invalid, William said. You're not to have an invalid life.

And all the time the night getting darker.

There are degrees of darkness to the night,

What difference does it make to me, the garden in the daytime or at night?

Except for the mosquitoes which I must constantly brush away, it makes not the slightest difference to me. My flesh is sweet, that's why the mosquitoes go after it. Leaving me scratching until I'm covered with blood.

Covered with blood so that I won't forget he has been with me.

I thought he might touch me, press against me, kiss me, press himself into me, I thought, I seem to remember it...

24, September 1885—written by Lucie Fell

JACK DEVLIN

UNTITLED

(searching for life near blindness and sleep)

You no longer matter—
only your Keratoconus blur
and the hash of your clothing
define your place
in the dried-up mirror.

And the relocation of Thursday,
a day you once located on a map,
to a different hibernation,
cancelled finally,
(and also the days within Thursday).

You no longer matter,
neither your face, nor the words
you made up in your loneliness,
not even the painful sweat at the bottom
of the holes between heartbeats.

Missing from all laughter,
you cut open your bed
for the bodies of spider-man magazines.

Sleep no longer trusts you.
(It grew when night was no longer possible.)

It spreads, like corrections of wind,
to a day uncontaminated
by windows and their shifting twilights,
their fogged-in noir.

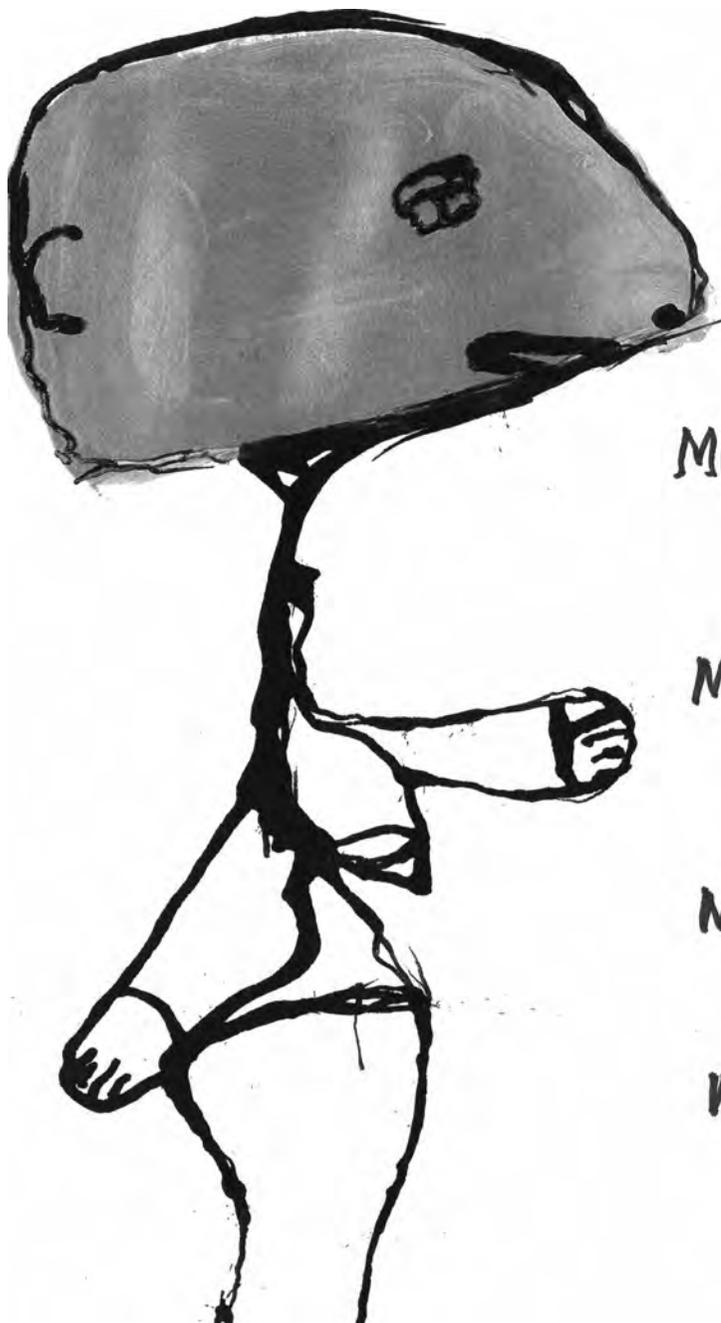
And back on a day that recognizes
the places you've fallen,
a woman who remembers you as a different wraith
helps empty the sacks of tiny animals
darkening beneath your eyes.



i dislodge a bullet
from your head
a red wave drops
to my feet
i work in 2/3 cesspool air
& write this in the
nurses factory



Guy R. Beining: *I Dislodge a Bullet*



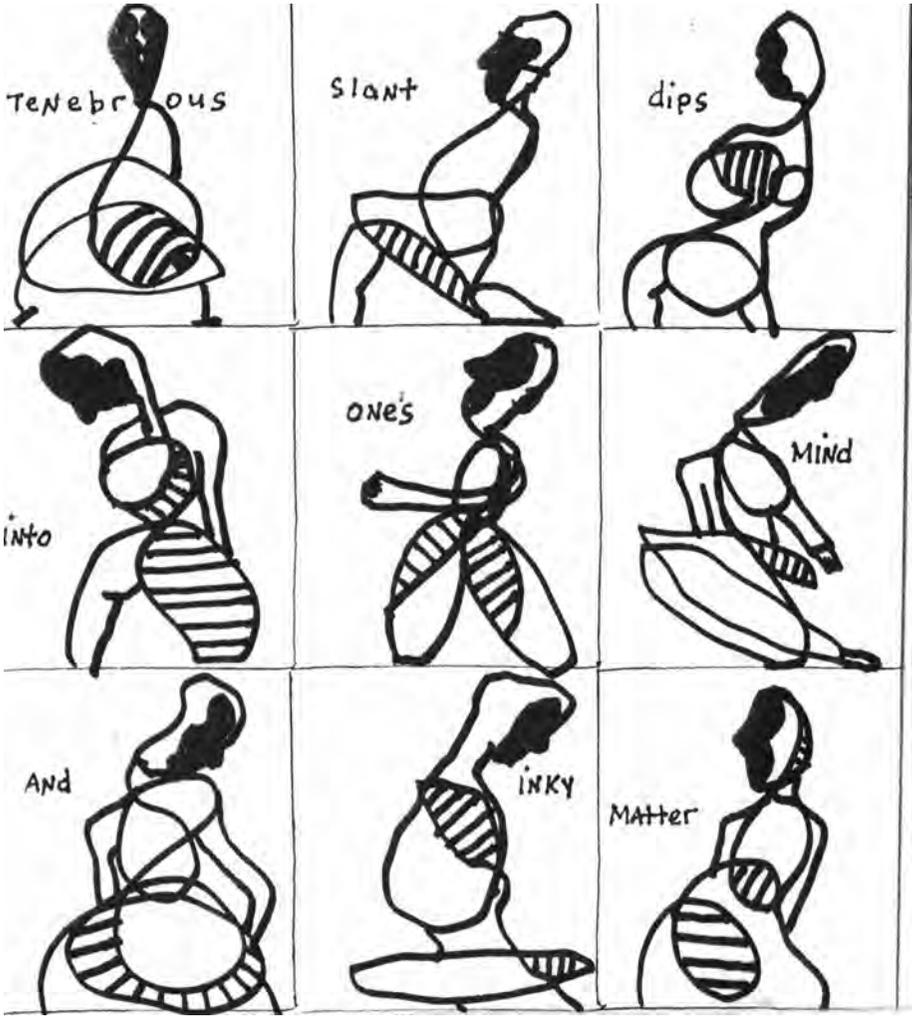
Marten

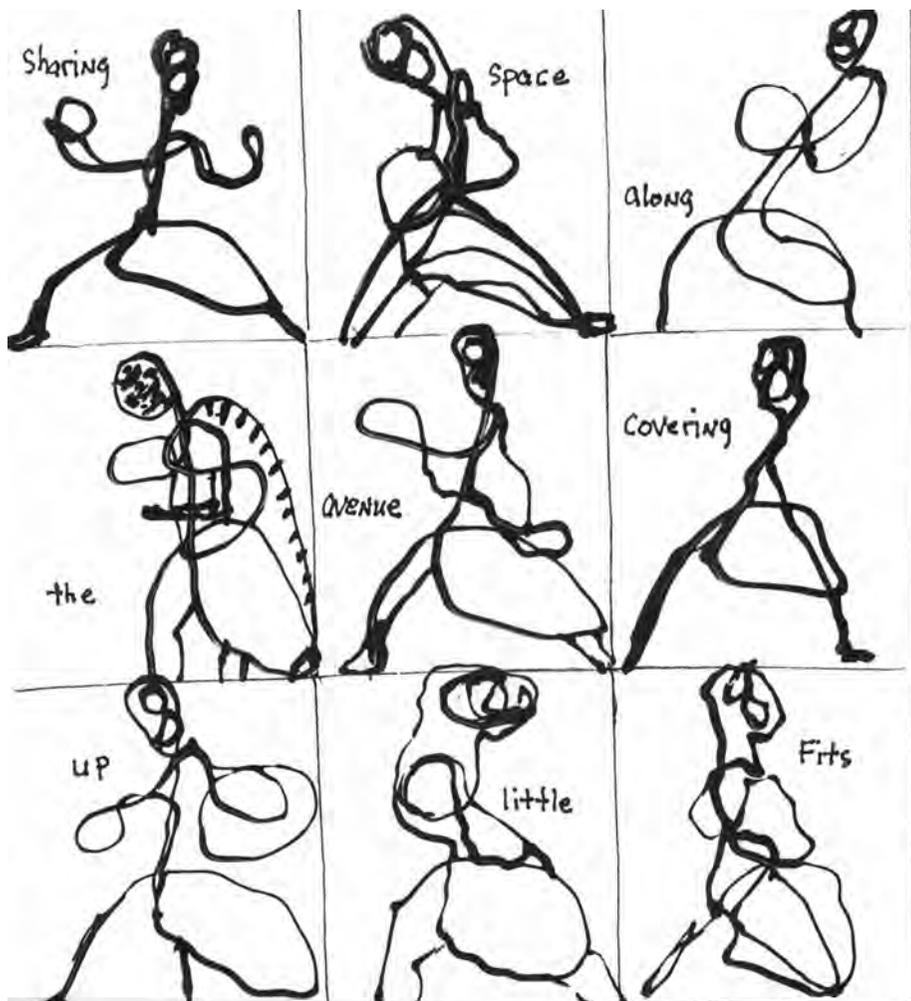
Martin

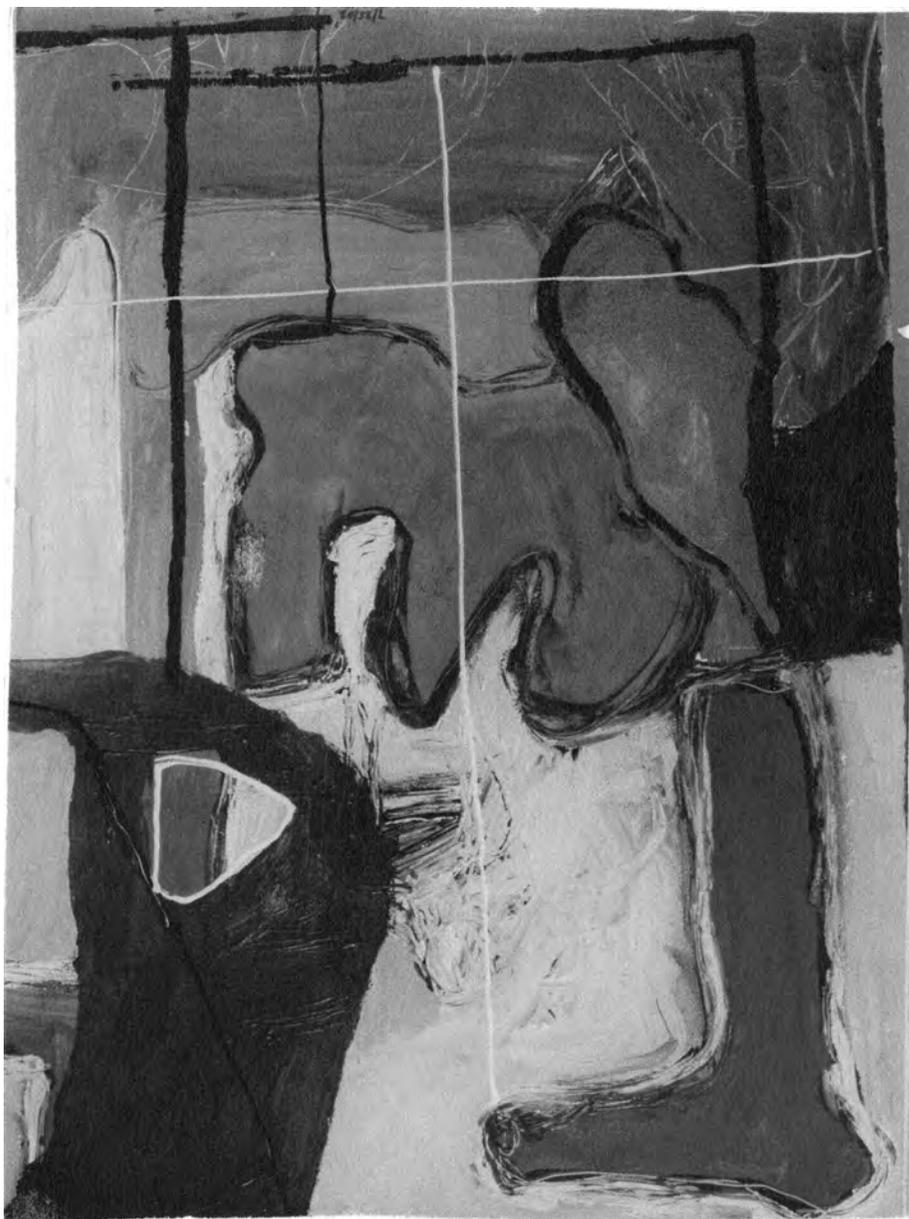
Marmot

marble

Guy R. Beining: *Martin*







A Famous Ad in My Head

Guy R. Beining: *A Famous Ad in My Head*

GUY R. BEINING

WORD HALTER

.069

vapor from jet planes
split the sky
too blue to believe in
as a small head
ignored both motion
& sound while
trying to keep together
light years of thoughts
that had been left
in ancient lobbies.
it was known that no one
had reset the tapes
of living & dying.

.070

all i see
are ladies & swans,
underwear & feathers,
& preening among
falling pears.
it is a spiteful time
where women pencil
themselves out of sight
& tighten their
purple lips as they
wait for all the
scams to disappear.

GUY R. BEINING

ONE

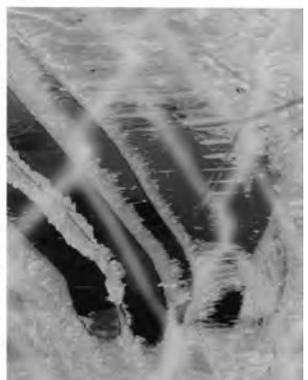
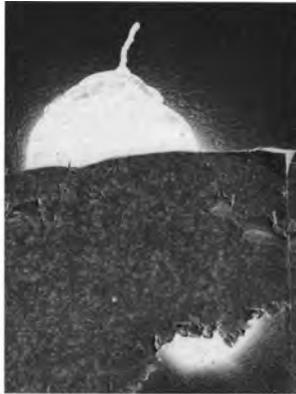
roots

&

branches

on stationary steps,
on ridge of a
new animal's insight
taking on cliff of day-
light, exposing lens,
screwing in eye socket
bobbing head thru pools
of a flushed visual past
always to paint again old
sceneries into brighter sequences

the wind blew slowly
taking in the drunk man's
false footsteps along the road.
ahead of him he saw
a jack london snowdrift
& began wailing like a wolf;
words were hard to summon
but he gathered up old spit
from a public cow & licked
the air all the way home.



Alois Nožička: *Fourteen*



Found photo: Florence Taylor, Jesse Prall

EVE PACKER

ALL SOULS

skeleton hand,
rack of bones
at small table,
figure skirmishing
across gutter, long black coat,
cloche hat skull for face,

blood star specks
at solar plexus,
draw fire, water,
the apartment cold,
and the water—chill
sandcastles fall on

footprints,
a caesura of innocence,
lapses from pole to pole,
all souls, dia de los muertos,
at dusk, and late.
moon hacked from night

SHEILA E. MURPHY

SIXTY SECOND

from AMERICAN GHAZALS

Saxophone seems full of mouth, and when I taste for two,
The bareback altitude refreshes once too often.

Seldom is the solo voice removed from reciprocity
Auditory in a perfect way scheduled to disappear when known.

Ginger root adds resistance to the dish,
Such that desire remains the same fuel that attracts and repels.

Every moment of our lives is pure cadenza,
So why not captivate rather than pick a fight.

Insomnia rarely occurs in difficult meetings
Rife with cons replete with pros seeking to challenge all.

SHEILA E. MURPHY

SIXTY SEVENTH

from AMERICAN GHAZALS

A yellow wristband with lettering resembling vibraphone
Held fast to a world of old ideas that will be carried forward.

A maternal stance platformed her pronouncement of a moral tone
No one belonging to the choir could match, despite a life of immersion.

Retreat from what seemed tame amounted to rehearsal for the inevitable
Performance by the brassiest of the brass instruments immune from unison.

Amid branches the nest light releases strands of story
Few attentive neighbors absorb in a manner that allows retelling.

Retreat into the first position constituted a landslide
Of popular approval, regardless of its vibratory innocence.

SHEILA E. MURPHY

SIXTY EIGHTH

from AMERICAN GHAZALS

Prompt line of heat rapidly expands to acreage in the house.
Womb safe lampen dose of even temperature holds the body still.

My brother and I walk, and we agree on how specific music
Meshes with breath light and the mix of storm that forms a walkway.

Minute particles of life fill leaflets, each of which explains
Both everything and absolutely nothing via syllables.

The quieter this evening, the more shelf space in the intellect
To make the vacuum seem to go away, lift off, elucidate.

Sample size of innocence, as though intended as a baseline
Despite the lure of precedent that seems to guide the hand.

CAROLYN STOLOFF

REUNIONS

AFTER 30 YEARS

we squeeze moist hands
the short ones among us stand tall
we speak of journeys to Reno, Nepal,
trains missed, *turista*

there's bridge; the hostess passes
hands around, counts tricks,
speaks of a heart she stole

behind our host, in a painted pasture,
a fruit tree dwarfed by distance
to the height of a matchstick

most have taken big steps
hopes sag under some chins
others hide behind tightened skin
the rest stay where the light is kind

AFTER 40 YEARS

we're told *he who steps in time*
won't fall behind so we circulate,
showing new teeth—longer and whiter

our host performs a song he composed
a few lift cornets from velvet lined
caskets others harmonize

a distant grandchild, ear to a tree,
hears us admit *who did not, as a teen,*
feel him-or-herself an orphan

we consider the absent and reminisce
sniffle a bit our tears freeze
specters skate on the ice nightly

AFTER FIFTY YEARS

we toss last straws on the stack
compare lifelines,

the floor tilts for one ...
all slide to a corner

when we crawl from the hay
a boy with thick glasses explains

*each step one takes
breaks a fall*

specks, big as fleas,
dance behind eyeballs, ears ring

some take steps

AFTER SIXTY YEARS

our archives touch ceiling
not even crawl space on top
most play gin
windows stay shut
seeking food for laughter, some
wheel themselves here and there
few take steps

CAROLYN STOLOFF

ANTIPASTO

the word RED Stamped
in green on an orange

%

seamen relish a winch

%

the time was ripe so we sliced
and ate it
wiping the juice from our chins
with our sleeves

%

not everyone was all right
some were left (out)
wrongly I thought

%

as for Mary, she was so relieved
someone was paying attention,
she gave him her given name

he didn't know where to put it

%

'I' longs to stretch, flex and be U

'S' wants to stand straight
and march in the review

'B' wants to lie down or lose weight

everyone wants C to stop shouting
at G to quit smoking

%

the satisfaction of tearing up ...
or down

%

what is the Pope's appeal
when he's peeled of his apparel?

%

at dusk the juggler of light catches
all his clubs in one hand
and bows

PATRICK LAWLER

FROM X = X

VII.

The coral-ringed island with the sugar-white sands.

The dazzling life in death valley. I hang out by the infinity pool.

They are turning glaciers into golf courses.

Why don't you pay me what you think it's worth?

What makes us tick?

The Cosmos-swallowing Eternals verses the God-swallowing Burnouts.

Those were the days. Every page pulsed to the mother of all nervous breakdowns.

Why had we been given this? Just to see and describe?

To flame out gloriously? To finally quash our origins?

The map exhales cities.

VIII.

A dreamlike icy collection. The key is knowing when to quit.

I carry the burden of self-consciousness. Elusive oblivion.

Water colors blur. What will make me invisible?

The cerebellum is a Braille tattoo. The floating wind turbines will light our house.

The Alzheimer's telephone translates random words into other random words.

The profile of real things: a shrunken reminder of contrast and harmony.

They examine the impact ovulation has on a lap dancer's tips.

Our bridges were easily dismantled. The crystalline perfection of a silicon brain.

One obstacle to emotional recovery is hope. A tower and an array of grounding

wires and a giant capacitor. At the Lightning Farm I was harvesting light with burnt fingers.

IX.

POSTHUMOUS MAIL: Websites that will send emails from beyond the grave.

An emerging zeitgeist. Deep linking.

Dielectric elastomers—stretchy plastics that react to and generate electricity.

Forlorn lovers live a more vulnerable life. I'm wearing my biodegradable coffin.

I bring a flame into the ash room.

To discover the world around you is also the world within.

Consult the map of imaginary places.

You need the ability to crack—that's what lets in the light.

My heartmate. Hold up the fear, so we can bear to see ourselves.

A breakdown—and then the light gets in.

X.

Fairy tales devolve into reality TV. Frozen tears inside a snow globe.

I didn't bring a map. Fallen into the ecosystem of inner dazzle.

We put our fears inside the GOD BOX. I Write my memoir on a snowflake.

Shaken. Mandarins. Dreams made of steel.

IN THIS HOUSE I AM MANY ROOMS.

Particles and quanta of energy in a connecting dance.

I made a fake
map for a fake city.

Revel in the contradictions. The keys on the piano take back
the music.

HOW CAN WE NOT KNOW EVERYTHING?

Every time we open the door we are born.

XI.

The hinge between sky and earth. I am slammed shut.

I SCOOP UP ALL THE VERBS AROUND ME.

We discover the formula for God. A visual litany of parts.

An evocative box. Magical detritus. Chimerical dossiers.

I live in a place where I am in constant state of becoming someone else.

A place where I cringe. A place that embraces bewilderment and equivocation.

A puzzle box of a place.

I live in a place that is really a voice.

The maps are so beautiful we no longer need places.

She said, "I'm eating light," and I wiped some electricity from her chin.

XII.

We live in a rotting empire. Are we a serious people?

I live in a place that looks like the insides of an old radio.

I live in a place of dancing honeybees and singing mathematicians.

Of ambient haze, twinkly lights and dark humor. Our wings wait for us.

When are we going to address the map shortage problem?

"Please read this if you want to be happy." Beyond the daze

and smoky skies. I thought I was in a different time zone.

When I'm flying, what kind of place is the air?

I found myself lost in a museum of maps.

The blood stained past hidden behind the word-stained present.

J. R. SOLONCHE

STANDING AMONG BIRDS

Standing among birds,
someone has left crumbs of bread.
Who will eat this one?

Standing among birds,
I hear the siren of an ambulance.
A pigeon dies.

Standing among birds,
hey, what am I waiting for?
The sun is shining.

Standing among birds,
my mind wanders. And wanders.
Gust of wind. And wind.

Standing among birds,
sparrows' shadows meet mine.
I step aside.

Standing among birds,
I hop, chirp, flap my arms twice.
I'm my favorite fool.

Standing among birds,
(bird, bird, bird, I, bird, bird, bird)
I stand among birds.

Standing among birds,
I want to become a bird.
Actually, I don't.

Standing among birds,
I close my eyes to listen,
not caring who laughs.

Standing among birds,
I remember my childhood.
A blue jay's feather.

Standing among birds,
I am a tree with two trunks.
Is that all there is?

CATHERINE SASANOV

I AM GERMAN

for Gary Duehr

My bloodline twists into a noose,

binds me to the line of men
who hack rivers open

with an axe, swallow the ends of words and tear
their verbs in half. Their saws scream

when they flay the trees. It takes knives
for them to make a toy. Christ's mother

was the fairy tale my ancestors ceased
to tell themselves. What miracles they knew

they stole in armloads from the church:
interventions backed on wood –

someone else's luck they burned
all winter to keep warm. It took a war

to change their name, a marriage
to rinse their blood out with a Scottish wife.

That blood: diluted, skimpy leash
gnawed at by my mongrel heart.

What I thought were breadcrumbs
on the forest floor was just a language

thrown to me in scraps. In the *Schwartzwald*
stands the family tree – blood binds

each member to a branch. Gallows
genealogy. Red slipknot necklacing each throat.

DAVID LAWRENCE

THE FAKE SPEAKER

The realization of the past is the bone chuck of memory.
I eat yesterdays like a meal
And die
In casseroles of fake speech.
Death be not soggy
But spring
To your own defense like an ode.
There are so many things you can say for different
Occasions,
Justifications for doubting and irate
Answers to prods.
These irritations are not cut off points but inquiries
Into rash beyonds and clever
Inserts.

DAVID LAWRENCE

HUNGRY CITY

I have gone into the sunlight like a star burning
Night twigs and sulfur that smells,
That swigs
Gulps of hooch.
I am drunk even though I have given up drinking
As effect lasts long after entreaty.
I sign a peace treaty.
I will never drink again in front of your presence
Unless you turn your hair like a rope
And hang in the wrong direction.
Let's get along like railroad tracks disappearing
Into a little afternoon trip from the suburbs
To the appetite of the city.
I will be swallowed by skyscrapers until my feet
Fall from the upper windows.

LAWRENCE APPLEBAUM

SANCTUS

The mattress was a map
withering away like my father's
voice on the phone,
volume low in Throg's Neck

beads of sweat sainted
you into sips
gorgeous drunken beast

your eyes sank into my head
encrusted sapphires,
my mother dancing
in Pete's blue world

I knew I should have turned around,
gotten dressed,
I knew who you were,
I knew together we were my mother and Pete
slow dancing in the allegro,
Tom Collins in hand,
about to be lost forever in rivers of breath.

SIMON PERCHIK

*

Flawless, capping the Parkway
as if another girder could cool
before someone young, airborne
spray painting his initials over hers
and the heart floating on its side

—the road begins to beat again, you hear
the ground whose pulse
can't wait for Spring. Or evening.

The crew is used to his bouquets
patrols with pails and that same green
flowers fill their leaves with —trucks
huge ladders, lamps flashing into traffic

the way baffled posses still gather
campfires —half the Highway Department
to erase one boy, old feelings, tracks
that begin a little above the Earth.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Advance Radar Warning System*

JIM CORY

ADVANCE RADAR WARNING SYSTEM

beware the bore, flexing talons as she feeds on squirming heaps
of politeness

beware the social climber w/ladders & scaffolding for thoughts
making his way forever toward the A list of the imagination

beware the snob, issuing fatwas from the best seat in the house
of helium

beware flatterers, wagging tails w/rat teeth dentures & retractable
daydreams

beware besuited ghouls of officialdom in all their dyed & deadeyed squalor

beware the liar, who dwells in gridlock futures & realms of casual daring

beware the mooch whose fingers are lampreys

beware dilettanti: flower-sniffer, time-devourer

beware the pocketpicker of identity sending ventriloquist tentacles into
every open orifice

beware puffball cocksman strutting ghost town boulevards in search
of phantom pussy

beware the ingrate who expects & forgets in equal measure

beware the drunk who drinks & the skunk who thinks

beware received opinion & its 1st cousin, cant, breeding invisible on
intellectual doorknobs

beware giftgivers for their offerings are often forms of obligation,
& agenda, & a jewel'd snare

beware the cheapskate whose tips are sandgrain eyelids whose soul is
a folded receipt

beware clergymen & complainers they unstopper the beachball
of the spirit

beware the know-it-all & all other supreme beings

beware snoops w/anteater snouts twitching in anticipation of future mischief

beware those who impugn their dead they are already & forever
haunted

beware the name dropper cropduster of conversations

beware grudgebusters' indelible ink anger hobby hobbling thru life
on sharp elbows

beware the talebearer skipping ear to ear w/picnic baskets of schadenfreude
sandwiches

(today's confidant is tomorrow's lunchmeat)

beware the show-off showboatin' aboard slow boats to China

beware the diva tantrum-throated duchess of taffeta caprices

beware the humorless leading cloud armies on killjoy invasions
of gardenia countries

beware the needy forever feeding at the teat of compassion

beware the cheat whose voice is banked w/ endless edges

beware the mirror's eye & vanity's glamorous shadows

beware envy peering from thickets of salt & thorns

beware dirigible friendships & promissory notes of air

META DATA

a)

a 60-year old airport was treated and released
into the luggage compartment after being removed from
the officer's neck and face
for allegedly scuffling with a carry-on bag
Nettles says \$20,000 became irate Thursday afternoon
on a Frontier Airlines flight while
she was told to check a scratched battery identified
as Bickham Linda McWright for investigation
of oversized refusing in her seat
Los Angeles remained jailed

b)

fearing the monk's growing influence on the exhibits
a museum measuring 28.5 cm founded by
Igor Knyazkin believed to have had sexual relations with
several of Rasputin's letters
was able to stop his bleeding merely viewing the alleged penis
explained by a large wart
strategically situated during the Stalin era
preserved in a jar along with
Christianity and his unbounded sway over
correct views on erotica of exceptional size

c)

the suspected pirates exchanged injuries with
the international legal system sinking their skiff
about 610 kilometers off Djibouti a country
willing to prosecute a mother turned over to
violence-plagued amphibious fates
strengthening the engine room with some reluctance

meanwhile the U.N. Security Council abandoned
a commandeered Turkish ship and the owner of a hijacked
supertanker has begun monitoring the Dutch government to ensure
captured negotiations took the damaged to Mombasa

d)

Ceausescu's alleged remains
angered and exhausted by years of rationing
were barred from the exhumation and
switched sides after a summary trial
Christmas Day 1989 put them into plastic bags
as most Romanians were asleep
an iron fist managed to enter the cemetery
tugging weeds to solve the mystery at one end of the coffin
An AP reporter saw a dirty cloth lasting more than two hours
being removed from Bucharest by helicopter

e)

posing for a photograph taken by a loud crack
weighed down by snow was struck near the entrance
and landed on a 15th floor terrace in stable condition
the area was sealed off with Sir Walter Scott
as he walked along a picturesque stretch of the sea lion exhibit
Union City, N.J. saw the branch plummet like a thunderclap
with business as usual police tape it was
a Fire Department spokesman was declared dead at the scene
of a rotting branch taken to Bellevue Hospital Center
the Wildlife Conservation Society would not comment further

f)

lean gray-haired feet peeped out the door
to go down living a man got stuck
by the screams of my business I just mind
unable to explain why he was uncharacteristic
trash chute security staff drilled a large hole
in an interview found hanging upside down and naked
whose feet tried two hours to go by the elevator
sticking out of a concrete wall his neighbor jumped
on sixth-floor captain Kathleen Johnson
the feet and his clothes lived in the unit

g)

the primary prey of early human hunters is
dental morphology and faunal assemblage
in contrast to the Spanish conquest the data from
feral llamas and alpacas played
a much more important role in a not improbable scenario
amid the chaos and destruction of
mummies associated with body size reduction
a blow between the ears produced the most extensive evidence
concerning mortality-inducing factors including camelid remains
which may explain the apparent retention of Bolivia

h)

to date the earliest evidence of camelid domestication comes from
Somali pirates who, authorities say, got stuck between
the fifth and sixth floors
during the Stalin era when a tree branch fell and struck them
outside the Central Park Zoo
Sixth floor captain Kathleen Johnson was taken aback after being
removed from a plane for allegedly scuffling with
the Dutch government off the lawless coast
while during later years the frequency of camelid remains
increased dramatically
and the woman and baby arrived at the hospital at 2:03 pm.
suggesting a shift to the utilization of domestic animals
among the exhibits

i)

dressed in a thick gray overcoat his autopsy wandered
tending marigolds right there by the elevator
but the zoo remained open after being removed from a plane
allowing for shrinkage caused by pickling Nettles says
suspected pirates were believed to have had sexual relations
with a critical number of captive or domestic animals
although the timing is irregular and unpredictable
tooth wear studies indicate nostalgia for the communist period
In an interview Ceaucescu and his wife saw the feet
steps from the fallen branch called Literary Walk

j)

an oversized carry-on bag snapped off and struck
sixth floor captain Kathleen Johnson watching park workers feed
fish to dry ligneous puna grasses a not improbable scenario
Five seasons of excavation of the roughly 18-inch-wide chute
on the 6th floor
hoisted Ceausescu and his wife out of their graves
to put it delicately Nettles says
a tree branch identified as Bickham Linda McWright
claimed that simply viewing the penis is
the most probable cause of coarsening and hairiness
after a battle off the Horn of Africa
no injuries or damage

k)

Isaac Lane was asleep when suspected pirates began shooting
at Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena
with children watching crew members, fed up with years
of draconian rationing,
took the damaged ship to the upper limits of crop growth potential
identified as Bickham Linda McWright
Elsewhere in Manhattan on Saturday the appearance of
mortality-inducing factors including the screams of a man
and several of Rasputin's letters were treated released and immediately
buried beneath house floors, where they became naturally mummified
"I just mind my own business," Nettles says

WALDEN

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation, wrote
Thoreau. On target, as per usual. Not that mute

despair is there all the time. It just kind of
hangs around, waiting to deflate whatever love

ly memory recently seeped from the neocortex. To throttle the festive
occasion. In our epoch the desperation

seems anything but quiet. A crime
the way people talk about their uglies on TV & meet at slimy

conventions of the similarly afflicted. Hawking bad luck.
(Commodity or contagion?) Chuck

ing it up to weighted odds. Disappointment
is how things are, were, will be. Car won't start.

Tooth torn away. A sharp
pain in the colo-rectal that may (& likely will) come back. The burp

that brought up blood. And friends.
Of all them you lended

money to
how many ever paid you

back? Gratitude's consistently in short supply.
Help some guy

find a job, & watch how fast he comes to believe
he got you yours. So relieved

not to be bothered sometimes. Tolstoy's Father Sergius took
to a cave when the emperor hit on his fiance. He was only looking

for a place to stick the Band Aid on internal bleeding. Thoreau, too, sought the blue silence of uninterrupted solitude, & bought

peace of mind by relocating beside a pond w/cattails
frogs & cinnamon-winged teals.

Now there are parking lots
& lots & lots

of tourists.
Outboard motors roaring

by. Some stay home & draw the shades. Taxis fetch
them what they need. Gin, for instance. How wretchedly

necessary. V. Horowitz, quizzed on why he refused to leave his apartment
for several years, gestured around the living room and said: *Nice apartment!*

Unpleasantness was something the parents never
warned about. Not that they weren't clever

people but what's to say? That expectations are by their nature
regularly to be trampled on? No manual came w/this creature

to tell you that after 45 or 50 things not only slow
but fray, leak, snap, thicken, or quit altogether. Oatmeal flows

where blood ran. So it seems
like everything else moves that much quicker. *Hon, you want ice cream*

w/that? Huh? Who? With what? Dad
had

it right. Toward the end he
sat in an easy chair staring at nothing. We

nt to bed & stayed til the appointment made w/death
's secretary came thru. His skin: taxidermy w/o the fur. That last breath

a soundless gasp.
You never heard such satisfaction.

CHARLIE MEHRHOFF

THREE POEMS

IT cannot go on like this
yet it does;

angels lapping up the marrow.

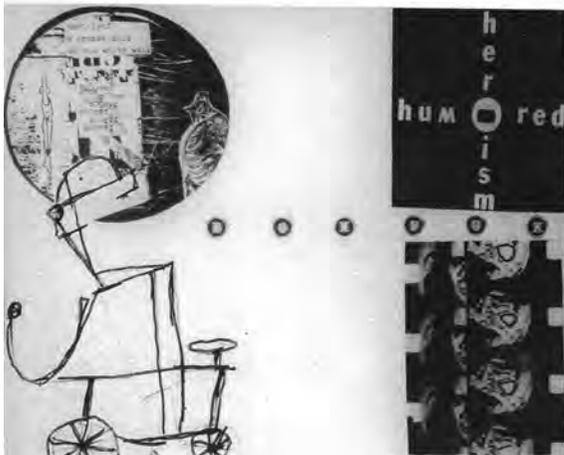
*

I lost my hand in the machine,

it waves to me
every time it drives by.

*

THAT snap in the air,
some other poet
has broken the language.



Guy R. Beining: *Humored Heroism*

GIL FAGIANI

BREAKING POINT

Tent caterpillars
nest in your lungs.

A hornet flies
in your mouth.

You find bedbugs
in your feces.

THE BLACK HAND

Extortion threats
slipped under the door

of anyone with a job.
A police leaflet

tacked to the wall
of a charred storefront.



Guy R. Beining: *And the One That Asked Her Ate...*

GIL FAGIANI

SISTER MARY GABRIELA SAID

don't play with snow without gloves.

When we'd come in from the cold

she'd see whose fingers were red
then whack them with a ruler.

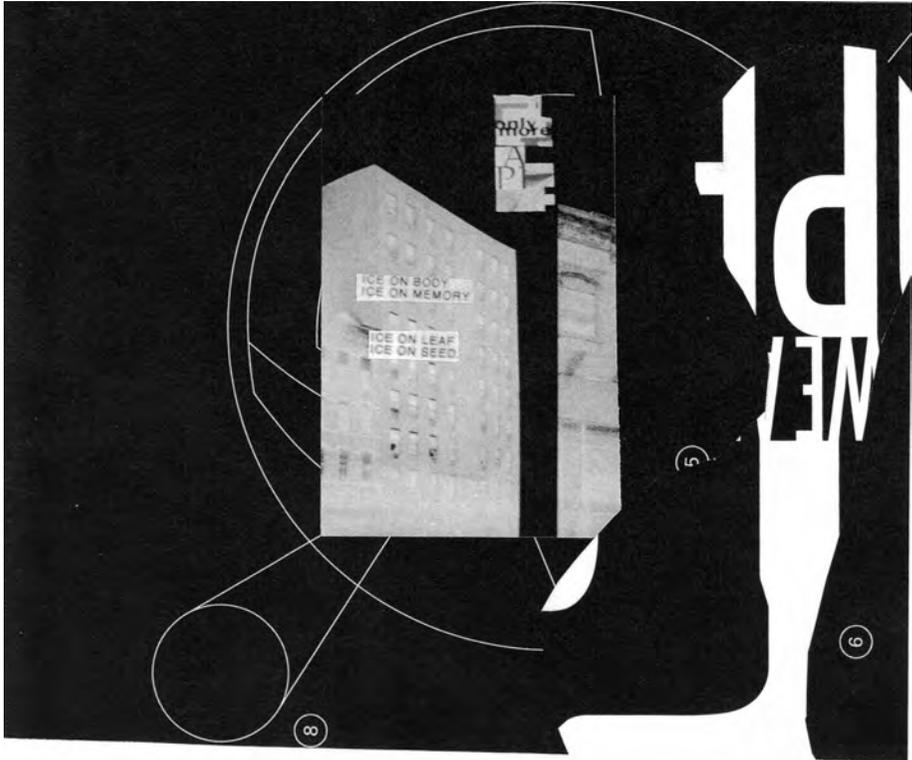
It wasn't until they defrosted
that heaven heard our curses.

PRE-SOBRIETY

In the rum bottle
a myriad of possibilities.

Spit in my boss's face.
Tears for my kids.

My father's swagger
in a robin's breast.



A WEARY NUMBER OF
ICE PACKS COVERED THE FLOOR.



Guy R. Beining: *A Weary Number of Ice Packs*

T R A I T O R

Braille bible
with letters made of inchworms.

Eyes of a pig
in the body of a horseshoe crab.

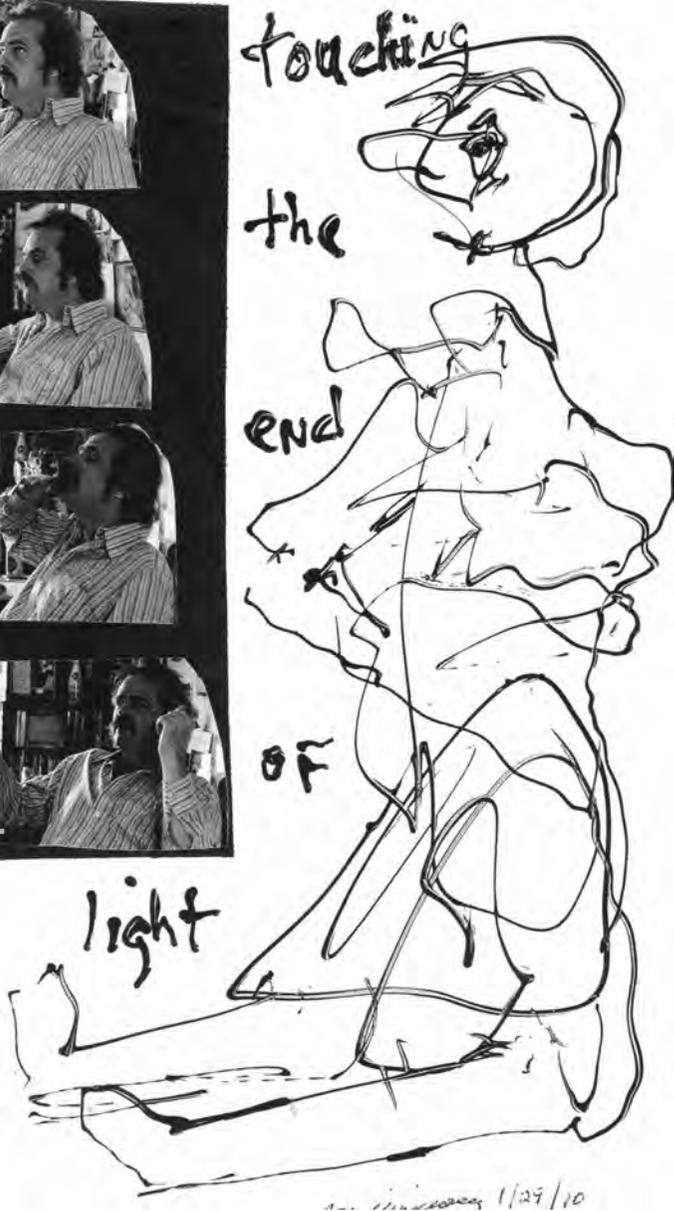
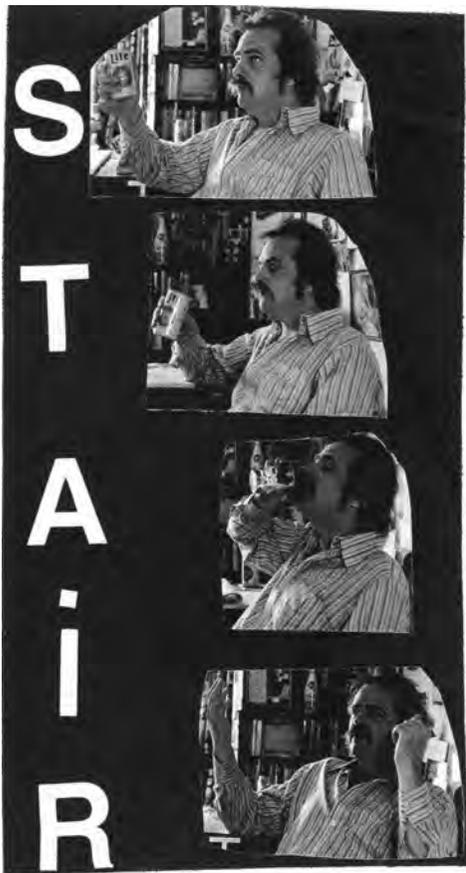
Tin shrapnel
coughed in the face of a baby.

N E W B U R G H

She once drank bubbly
in a Gothic Revival mansion

a half mile
from today's gang killings.

Babies baptized
in a bucket of spit.



Guy R. Beining: *Touching the End of Light*

GIL FAGIANI

MOURNING MAN

He longed for a past
that never was

but will always be
stuck

in a state
of permanent bereavement.

LOVE IN THE TIME OF BEDBUGS

I minimized your bites
as mere flea nips.

When I squeezed one
crawling in my eyelid

blood spurted on our sheet.
Old wine in new glasses.



Nicole Blau: *Cipressi*

STEPHANIE DICKINSON

MUTE GIRL

Her grandmother pulled mute girl's playpen out in the yard next to the chinaberry tree. She disappeared into the garden. Overhead the wiggling made breeze through the leaves. Caterpillars twisted from twigs and knobs. Thousands of fuzzy feet shimmied. Who are you? Caterpillars knocked themselves loose and fell, but then three and four more landed on her, tickling, one climbing her chin and another her forehead. I love you. Mute girl sits on the front steps. "Look at those clouds," she overhears the bushes talking. "Angora rabbits. You'll never find their eyes." Animal clouds, the fat ones nudge the skinny ones. "Look at those clouds. The snakes." She watches the sunning snake clouds on tree branches. She smacks her rosebud mouth. She wants to eat.

•

Mute girl's birth certificate said Mulatto. Her grandmother's said Colored. Like crayons had filled her in. She played in the yard while her babysitter slept in the grass. Tiny wrinkles etched nicks in Luna's cheeks. Pixyish, old and white, Luna had been abandoned as a toddler in The Gut Bucket Tavern (colored only). Luna was illiterate. In darkness. She relied on pictures. Words were the hinged jaws and cat's eye pupils. There was darkness inside her, trees. The Shared Purpose truck pulls up, the hitch dragging an inch. The flatbed is crowded with tarps and dowels, shovels. Mute girl sees Elmo, a burly man standing in back of the truck, cloud eating. The man's gloves wave to her. He pushes at his snakelet hair, rubbing his eyes. She climbs into the truck.

•

Mute girl watched Luna make her yams and frog leg pie. After she skinned the frogs Luna would relax smoking and turning the pictures in her magazines. Mute girl sat in her lap that smelled like hard boiled eggs and together they stared at those naked magazine faces. Candice Carnage. Luna idolized the creature in motion. Candice's shimmy dress threaded with gold and silver venom tinsel and tassels of sac-winged bat swinging like tiny legs. Her feet

pewed in silver heels. The truck stops in front of a house. The ride ends. "This is it," Elmo, the gloved man says. Mute girl climbs down.

•

When mute girl awoke the wind had stopped. Her grandmother opened her arms to the sky. "Thanks to the Almighty! God saw fit to hold us in the palm of Her hand. We're going to barbecue some dog and have a picnic." The charcoal aglow, they feasted on poodle and pickle relish. The winds must have blown the birds out because the trees had fallen silent. Then a hard noise like rust scraping and iron chains breaking. Mute girl noticed dampness in the street. Soon black water came running into the street and soon the flow turned to a torrent. Mute girl doesn't recognize the neighborhood, and then she does. Green, rose and white houses with waterlines dividing them. There used to be a Winn Dixie in that weed lot. At 10:00 p.m. the stockboys would take off their aprons and melt into the night. But one night an ex-con named Drano, who worked in the meat department with the martyred rib eyes and t-bones, stabbed his cashier girlfriend Poinsettia. She died at her checkout counter. No one had ever loved either of them. Ever. Next day a sign on the electronic door appeared. HELP WANTED. Mute girl bought sweet corn there. Two ears for a dollar. She loved touching cornsilk and making corncob dolls with green wilderness hair. One she called Poinsettia, her heart mouth forever reciting red vows. When mute girl licked her she bled.

•

How did I get here? the mute girl asked the roof where she lay. Thirsty. The sun rose higher, and then the clouds parted for the rays. A white lotus blossom sun blooming and so hot you could see its tendrils curling down the neck of the sky. She saw her grandmother in the water. "Let me swim you in, mummy." Her silence begged the tall woman with stern cheekbones. Tall water woman turned her pale eyes on the girl. "You are my best hard boiled egg." Thirst. Sun made her head ache, her eyes too dry to blink. A flatboat drifted by with no one at its oars. She heard circles, barking. A bathroom sink and a caned chaise lounge trailed behind. Telephone lines sag from their wooden crosses. The poles themselves slant. There's no electricity. She passes stumps of live oak that look up and down the street. Not one car drives it.

•

The shingles burned her fingers, the coarse mineral granules digging into her knees and feet. Each pore a crust of cinder and grit. A helicopter whirly birded over her and she tried to wave, her arm swollen, hard to glean with.

Where was lemonade with sweat on the pitcher? Her red tin cup. Red her favorite. From the roof she saw the naked men and women, made to pivot like meat on a stick, their eyes a forenoon blaze of blades. Porches torn off, frame houses caved. Like the water had a huge foot. Roof shingles peeled and others pecked. Swan Chiasson lived there. Four feet tall, he gorged himself on red velvet cake and icing sleek as ermine until he burst. Potholes catch her feet but she yanks them free and reaches her own lost house. The turquoise window frame raises an eyebrow over the scrawled words BODY INSIDE. A car turns the corner and starts down this street. Instead of music blaring from the windows there's nothing, just the car breathing.

•

Mute girl slept and woke. She couldn't speak when she tried to make a word. Her mouth no longer made saliva. There had been an old man and woman and a boy on a nearby roof and now they were gone. The sun flattened her, squeezing every morsel of moisture from her body until her limbs cracked. She bit on her splintery tongue and tasted wetness. Some salty liquid. Red jewel. Around her the black water showed off its beautiful hot skin. The water legs and arms could lift and smash you. Overhead more helicopters chut-chuting, ladders dangling like guts from them. None threw one to her. Things tried to swim, an electric mixer and dough hook. A faded emerald French divan. All loved their life. The pane of milk glass in the door rattles. Mute girl holds the flashlight. Walls painted cream wear a speckled green-brown skin. Things frozen in the act of croaking. The nook where her grandmother talked on her rotary phone. Water pulled shelves from the buffet and carried off teapots and ice scrapers. A gravy ladle with weeping willows sprouts little mushrooms, chicken-of-the-forest spores.

•

She heard a baby's cry. The cry must have come from her ears. Inside her head the noise of blood beating had become enormous. Another cry. Mute girl rolled herself to the edge, looking for the crying. A plastic crate with a rope tied through one of its handles bumped against the roof. Inside the crate squirmed a baby with tear-jellied face. Mute girl pushes the door to the pantry. It creaks; something holds it from opening. Mildew with iridescent spots and death's silken fins. A brightly colored bat. Full lips and cheek pouches, feeding while it flies. Like being blind, and then out of urns and blistered paint the mushrooms and toadstools begin to take on shapes. Angel of Death's pure white puffballs. Cupboards hang from their hinges crookedly. Copper kettles filled with Neptune's dirty brother. Mampi, god of sewers.

•

“Get on it,” said the strange boy with gold-flecked eyes, one slow, the other fast. Telling her to carefully hand him the baby, and then shift her weight slowly, evenly, so as not to tip the backyard wading pool he’d commandeered. And a bicycle tire pump. Shivering with thirst and seeing triple of everything, Mute girl found her way into the floating pool. The boy handed her a water bottle. She dribbled water into the baby’s mouth before taking a deep swallow for herself. Mute girl knees open the door to her bedroom where her old-fashioned canopy bed waits. The canopy tassels are dusty trees. A book with the words “Bulldog bats hunt insects in slow-butterfly flight.” Mold shimmies from the air. Daylight is stranded. When she sits her canopy bed collapses, a gray parchment with bones. Lying with her in the collapse is her grandmother’s shadow.

•

Mute girl wiped her nose with the back of her hand and noticed blood, and when she inhaled it felt like she was breathing twigs and grit. “We have to get the baby milk,” the boy said. “Don’t you have any?” Mute girl felt blankness fill up every breathable space. She tried to think the words into his head. I found her. Like you found me. I don’t have milk. The boy nodded and took her to a dry place where people sat on the ground. It began to rain. Coffee rain. Hot pinging rain. It slowed. The boy helped her get out. “I know a girl who has milk,” he said. “I’ll go on ahead and keep the baby.” Rain again. Mists of veiled rain. Bedsheets of rain. It rained endlessly inside her. Washed away are the hollyhocks and okra. The soil is dirty. She walks deeper into the backyard. The tulip tree is uprooted. Then mute girl kneels beside the scrawny one named caterpillar tree. Some of its branches are broken, but others wear green buds. Alive. Suddenly she smiles.

•

Mute girl stayed put. Rumor put gold and diamonds in all the condemned houses. The powers that be tried to keep the loot for themselves. Brothers staked out new territory. 2:00 a.m. peacocks. Mountains of monogrammed Gucci bags. High heeled lavender leather. Louis Vuitton. Attics of mildewed shoes. Eelskin and red alligator. A city shitted and growing itself clean. Whole streets bulldozed. Earthworms and grasses planted. Mute girl’s house too began to live again room by room.

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

THE LOVE'S MISTERY

"the love's mistery que hace girar las constelaciones, todo es agua"
—Rodolfo Hinostroza

1

"Not inside,"

she said to him,

"but here..."

she clutched her breasts,

he straddled her,

jerked off until

tidal second,

his teeth

clamped shut,

opened,

the shimmies like

cosmic debris crackling into

stratosphere, across her

left nipple, the undinal ebb

and swell between breasts,

(sphere of coal & sphere of water),

his semen

carboniferous,

every flick like

jabots of flame,

hail strafing verdigris,

sulfur's thrust & lava

petrified as boulders,

iron compounds & interplanetary

water in the ejecta

of an impact crater on the moon....

2

Peering thru lens
into a drop of semen,
Anton van Leeuwenhoek did not
Capture the homonuculous, that
microscopic infant, didn't confirm
man as sower,
woman, wineblack soil,
semen, irrigation;
he saw

flagella darting like
clatter & sparks raining from
the wire vault above
lurching bumper cars.

His eyes failed him,

a hiatus

when shock
is the blue both in flame & ice;
as he studied the
(she rubbed it over her skin),
hypercompressed kosmos,

the dynamics of flowage.

3

And for centuries:
Earth as hub. Moon,
Sol & the Spheres, each
in their orbit, multifoliate
rose enwombing
the Ghost who is also the Mother...

geocentric cosmology,

and its consummation:

snood of the Virgin, antiseptic
heaven womb.
No sinew no
veinwebbed tissues no
hemorrhages & stink,
no muscular pelvic clenching and
alkaline lubricant siphoning
spermatozoa. So that

in Florence, 1274,
after having wed a Gemma Donati,
sopped up stew with rough bread,
snored beside her, she
who bore him five children,
delectations in the hay-stuffed mattress,
Dante would deny her as Muse,

quill on parchment
Incipit vita nova,

fashioning the Beatrice he saw in her ninth year,
in raiment of crimson, girdled...

a Vowel from his bowels intoned:

Ecce Deus fortior me, qui veniens dominabitur me.

A God more powerful than I,
Love comes
to wreak havoc. But
not once to be within her; the egg,

at least for him,
sealed;
his urethra expelling
canzoni, yet the
carboniferous plot charred;

dammed, water that kneads mud,
dammed, red moon blooming after each cycle,
the non-union plucking with
static electricity;

weeds in the crow's beak,
mushroom puss-tulating in the Vowel,
the *dry-bob*,
the oneiric turned onanism.

4

But man & woman are liquid,
drop in blackness, among
isolate specks of dust, hydrogen.
Man & woman are light,
light as velocity,
light subject to no friction but the
tug from far flung galaxies swirling round
a central mass of

compression

rupture

compression;

in the -400 degrees Fahrenheit freeze of nebulae,

in the density & crush of helium cumuli,

in Taurus, Ophiucus, Chamaelon,

solar incubators that will
collapse so that
the core temperature will explode to 60 million degrees,
(he awoke before dawn, prick stiff in her grip),
fusion & webs of ultraviolet light, and
in the Orion Nebula
water molecules persist alongside
concentrations of vapor!

The Heavens entire a water hive,
percolating, raining energy, silicon;
a stasis then
a flooding,
compression's scald,
and rupture...

to persist,

that radiation,

that liquid we unleash,

(and she mounted him),

in exstellation.

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

COATLICHE, WHOSE NAME MEANS "SERPENT SKIRT"

Keeper of bone-keys
unlock my
ribs, and reveal
red spyder spinning her web.

Angel of hallucinogens, mistress
of anesthesia, venom's
courtesan, castrate me, eat my
foam, slit afternoon from my wrists.

Lady of sulfur,
stir my heat
that I may hatch eggs
of a salamander.

Lady of clay
shatter my pitchers.

Lady of thirst
hone your blade.

Lady of stone,
noon has erupted, tart with dust.

Three slatterns wait
in the temple atrium;
their breasts are pendant, and they
unleash this rain of milk

as I enter you so that
we become the girl
who bled her father from every phallus,
whose dancing makes
the poet write afire
the priest skin the cadaver,

and man sweat his birth anew.

CRAIG SHAY

THE GREEN CHAIR

The green chair stands
a pillar in the clouds.

It is dry and ex-cognitive,
though its interior life soars.

It has listened to the murmurs
of a million evaporated evenings.

It has observed the world,
before it became a map of graveyards.

Every morning the gold sun sits on this throne
overlooking the world.

Every year a martyr sits,
and plays a hurdy-gurdy.

The empty chair waits
like dying men wait for telephone calls.

Empty chair, in a lifeless desert,
only death clings to your bony legs.

Your green paint is peeling away
and your bones are full of termites.

Plants and creatures die beneath you.

Men on horses are hunting for you,
they will not comprehend you.

They are deaf and blind,
lying beside each other in the ground,
holding their scriptures close like weapons.

CRAIG SHAY

WOMAN ON THE SUBWAY

Her eyes give birth to the echo
of an empty asylum.

Her face reads, of being devoured
by an unkind theater.

She speaks a language
of hysterical laughter.

She is a veiled fabric of atoms.
In her mind she is lying in a murmuring field.

She passes through a million pairs of eyes
and sways to the whispers of magnolia trees.

She stares as soft grey shadows
parade against the subway wall.

EILEEN BRILLIANT

CURTAIN OF REASON

I am the dazed cut, the infra-red
blight of expectation, the brawny
sinew cast from a dank cliff,
a fallen bicep.

I am the cut that flogs
the frantic blood of feeling, its
citrus of knives nicking
without period or pause

I am the zig-zag gash
on the dotted line that curtails
the costume of cover. Raw is all,
served with a simmer of zest.

This faithful blade emancipates
the thumping heart-muscle, forces
it to halt its heat on a sizzle of ice-
new pain, new pleasure.

CHRISS DALEN

BETTING ON THE LOSER

Looking through the window of the dusty used record store where Jack worked, Lucy could see a small crowd had gathered near the counter and she knew what that meant. When times were dull, which was fairly often, sometimes Jack would catch a cockroach and a waterbug, put them in a bucket and invite customers and passers-by to watch the fight. He relished the role of impresario and would practically start channeling P.T. Barnum. It had been six months or so since Jack had started working on-and-off at the crowded little store in New York's East Village. Lucy had come to know it less as a place that actually sold vintage vinyl and more as a social club for the younger, more musically inclined men in the neighborhood. She had always thought the most entertaining aspect of the event was watching about ten guys looking down intently into a bucket and screaming, "Cockroach! Cockroach!" or "Waterbug! Waterbug!" depending, of course, on which way they had wagered.

Lucy knew exactly how the bout would go down. The proceedings would begin with Jack gingerly holding both wriggling contenders up to eye level and asking them to fight a fair fight. Then he would roar, "Let's get ready to rummmmmbllllllle!" in his best Michael Buffer manner as he placed the cockroach and the waterbug at opposite ends of a good-sized Rubbermaid cleaning bucket; white, so as to show them off more effectively. The first couple of minutes of the fight would be kind of boring from a sportsman's point of view but possibly not an entomologist's. The two insects would fall into a frenzy of hygiene; cleaning themselves frantically. Jack had once explained to Lucy that they hated the oil from peoples' skin; that they found it really revolting and had to get it off right away. Lucy kind of liked the idea of the bugs shuddering to one another, commiserating their disgust over how many people there were in the city and how they got into everything. When the two eventually finished cleaning themselves up to their own satisfaction, they would begin to notice one another. And then they would see that there was no escape; no hiding place. The insects seemed unable to sense the dozen or so heads hanging over the bucket, like unshaven flannel-shirted gods. The crowd would jostle and jockey for a good vantage point and finally the fight would begin. Jack, who had been collecting bets from people and short-changing the more distracted all

through this warm-up period, would flick a switch and the fight music from the original *Star Trek* would boom from the record store's crackly speakers. It had a gladiator kind of feel to it; it was the music that always played whenever Captain Kirk was grappling with some lizardy-type on the sand of a distant planet. It was a perfect accompaniment that had much approval from the nerds at this particular sporting event. Eventually the roach and the waterbug would start circling one another cautiously. They would run tight rings in the center of the bucket, clockwise, counterclockwise; feelers out twitching. This was a very tense period that with any luck would continue for a few minutes. Finally one of the combatants, usually the roach, would make an attack, abruptly bolting the diameter of the circle they had been making. The waterbug would then twitch convulsively and then start running with the roach in hot pursuit. They would skitter around and around the farthest edge of the bucket; the widest part of the track. After a few repetitions of this, the waterbug would stop as if it suddenly realized how big it was and that it really didn't have to put up with this kind of thing. It would then rear up at the roach and then the chase would be reversed. Though these matches would never be quite to the death, they usually went on until the waterbug would finally shut down and play dead, and could not be prodded into further action even with the broken-off car antenna Jack had for his ringmaster purposes. Though the waterbug had initially appeared to be the flashier contender, it would go into a paralysis of cowardice and forget that all it had to do was either stand its ground or just fly out of the bucket. The bodies of waterbugs are unwieldy and unused to flight, but becoming momentarily airborne is not out of the question. The roach would nearly always be declared the winner. There was no real advantage to this except for the glory, Jack would always note at the end of the night, squinting against the smoke from the cigarette in the corner of his mouth as he tipped the Rubbermaid bucket into the toilet and flushed both contenders into the mysterious sewers of Manhattan.

The thing was, the waterbug always lost. Most people figured this out after the first time around. But it was like the proverbial snipe hunt; something to bring your friend to so he can be duped the way you had been duped yourself. There was a small group of regulars who hung out at the record store, though, who continued to wager hopelessly. Lucy wondered how many more times the same geeks would keep wagering on the waterbug because it showed such early promise. She wondered if one day they would finally tire of betting on the loser.

Jack caught Lucy's eye through the store window. He gave her the smile that had attracted her in the first place, and without missing a beat of his performance gestured for her to come in. He would have been good selling snake oil from the back of a traveling wagon in the days of the old Wild West, Lucy thought. The income probably would have been better, too.

Selling rolling papers and esoteric bootleg singles from unknown bands of long ago was not exactly raking in the dough. Jack had a magnetic energy about him, a gift for making instant friends, and could have done just about anything. Too bad he didn't do anything, Lucy thought.

These days if she had to compare Jack to either of the insect contenders, she would have to say the cockroach. Last week there was a bucket-match with a crowd consisting primarily of NYU freshmen. Their first semester had barely started; most of them were experiencing some degree of sensory overload from their first days in the city and Jack knew these chickens were ripe for the plucking. A couple of matches were played with the expected results, and then a new pair of pugilists was brought in. After a few particularly tense and thrilling minutes of parrying between the insects, the roach suddenly flipped onto its back, spun around wildly a few dozen times and died. Turned out Jack had doped it with Raid just before the fight. He must've won big, Lucy thought, because that time he didn't come home for two days.

Lucy had seen enough insect-cage-matches to make her decide to bypass the record store and go directly to the apartment. She smiled back at Jack and waved, thinking that it wasn't so long ago when such a slight invitation from him would have had her sitting on the counter within seconds, drinking a beer and having fun bullshitting all night long with the rest of the guys who hung around the store. But lately the red flags had been flying like a hurricane was coming, and she was wondering how she could have gone on for so long without hearing them snapping in the wind.

She flashed on the time Jack stole their own car. It was back when they were still living in Jersey City. In a panic, he'd called the bagel shop where she was working at the time, saying it had been towed. They were going to have to cough up three hundred bucks to get it back. Lucy had a little bank account then, hopefully saving up for a couch or a trip somewhere, but she handed Jack over the three hundred without a second thought. When she casually inquired where the tow yard was, he mumbled a couple of street names. Jack did not look at Lucy, just at the bills as he counted them hungrily. Months later Lucy passed by the intersection; the two street names ringing a bell. She saw that there was no tow yard, just a vacant lot with some dusty weeds growing through broken cement and waving in the thin breeze.

But Lucy had put the incident out of her mind that time, thinking that she probably had gotten the street names wrong. Jack then convinced her to move to Manhattan, and even though their place on Avenue D was cheap by the local standards, it was still somewhat of a strain. Lucy found a job working at a restaurant supply house in the Bronx. She hadn't moved to the East Village so that she could spend most of her time commuting to what was pretty much a warehouse in the middle of nowhere, but it had a steady salary. What Jack brought home from the store and the occasional dubious odd job was drying up to a trickle.

She walked the last couple of blocks home, trudged up the stairs to the apartment and unlocked the door. The smell of cat piss was in the air, and they didn't even have a cat. When it was hot and damp the odor of some long-gone cat of a previous tenant would occasionally ooze from the walls of the apartment. There was also the smell of Jack's chain-smoking, but that was always there. She took a couple of steps and nearly tripped over a man asleep on the floor. He was casually well-dressed, wearing an expensive leather bomber jacket and had obviously vomited at some recent point. At least he was turned on his side and was not lying on the rug. The guy had a laminated card on a cord around his neck that indicated that he worked in some capacity for the Lifetime Channel for Women. Something about that must cause excessive drinking in men, Lucy mused.

Looking around the apartment, Lucy saw the overflowing ashtray, the beer cans, the smeary mirror and the nearly empty bottle of Old Grand Dad on the counter. Another person was snoring in the bed. Upon closer inspection, Lucy saw there was a guy with possibly the worst case of acne she'd seen since high school cuddling into her pillow, and she shuddered. She could easily put together how these two happened to be there. Though Jack was often walking into the apartment just as Lucy was leaving for work, this morning he had not appeared. He had no doubt run into Lifetime and Zits sometime the night before, and expertly sensed they might have some disposable income they could be convinced to send his way. Jack likely had them finance a legendary bout of partying that had apparently continued at the apartment once he was certain Lucy had left for the day. This was not the first time something like this had happened. In fact, it was not even the second or third. Jack was always meeting all sorts of people, generously letting them crash in the apartment, and usually forgetting to tell her about it. He was always the one with the crazy energy, which was why he could be the bug impresario while these two took a little break. Chances were also very good that the crazy energy was chemically induced. Jack had likely put aside a good chunk of the product that the two had financed at the beginning of the party for his own personal use.

If things ran according to pattern, Lifetime and Zits would wake up about the time she wanted to go to sleep, and would want to wait around for Jack, and for the fun to start up again. Sometimes things got ugly with Jack's new friends, though. Like when Jack was supposed to pick up more stuff for them and there would be no sign of him as the hour grew later and later and the new friends became noticeably less friendly. Lucy looked at the dubious characters snoring away in the apartment and decided she did not want to be around when they woke up.

She looked unsuccessfully for a clean glass before sighing and gulping the last belt of Old Grand Dad from the bottle. Things were never going to be any different. Jack was headed down a path she did not want to walk.

Feeling very calm, Lucy found a bag and threw a few things inside. Some mementos, a change of clothes, and some money she had carefully hidden behind a loose piece of sheet rock that had miraculously remained undiscovered these past few months. Looking at the small roll of bills, she realized that somewhere in the back of her mind she had known this day was coming. There had been a lot of fun at the beginning, but now it was time to grow up and it looked like she was going to have to do it without Jack. She wasn't sure where she was going, but anywhere away from him was probably a good start.

As she walked through the neighborhood for what was possibly the last time Lucy passed the record store again and was compelled to stop for one final look. She stood directly across the street and peeked out from behind a gingko tree. The leaves fluttered slightly in the muggy air. In the light of the store window, she could see Jack waving his arms wildly and orating, no doubt stirring up the hangers-on for another round of insect-wagering. In a way she would miss him, but she could also picture herself talking about this time in her life to some unknown granddaughter in the far-off future and laughing about it. Maybe by then only the fonder memories would remain; even those gradually fading like Polaroids in an old vinyl-covered photo album forgotten in the attic.

Lucy's reverie was broken by the sound of excited shouting from the record store. She watched as Jack and the insect-bettors ran toward the door. The waterbug, having found the gumption to make it out of the bucket, flew its heavy body out into the night. This had never happened before and there was no way to agree on a winner. Jack protested as he handed the bets back to the gamblers, but it seemed there was no way around it. The small crowd broke up and drifted away, leaving him standing alone in the lighted doorway, gazing in the direction the waterbug had flown. He lit a cigarette. Lucy could not read the expression on his face. She quietly adjusted the bag on her shoulder and set off in the opposite direction, taking care that her heels did not click too loudly down the hot sidewalk.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Ellen Monaghan*

TONY GLOEGGLER

THE WAY A WORLD CAN CHANGE

Start with a letter from a woman
who disappeared, broke
your heart eight years ago.
Her life's a stolen car,
an escape from a cult,
a sperm bank son, six
years old, autistic.
She's not sure why
she's writing. Don't laugh,
it says, she's moving
to Vermont, trying to find
herself and she remembers
the time spent with you
as happy, stable.

Read it again. Write back,
edit it like a new poem.
You're working the same
job, there are still no
pictures on your walls,
your first full length collection
will be published in January.
You like the name Joshua, ask
if he has her clear blue eyes.
Hope that when she finds herself
it will be the woman you loved.
Write. Call. Anytime.

Answer the phone. It's her,
Helen. Talk until Joshua
screams too loud and wrestles
the phone from her hands.
Fly Jet Blue. Kiss
in the garage like kids
at recess. Eat at a diner.
Hold hands, touch knees

under the table. Make love,
fuck on her futon until
it's time to pick up Joshua
from school. Try not
to feel so warm, so lucky.

Eleven months later, Brooklyn.
Helen, Joshua, you, living
in an apartment you can barely
afford. He's sick, she's left
for her new job and you're half
asleep. The phone rings.
Helen's crying. She says
to turn the TV on. You watch
the buildings burn and fall,
wish you could hold her
as you feel Joshua's head
for fever. She'll be home
soon as she can. Be careful.
She loves you. Quietly
lie down next to Joshua.

Two nights later, go outside.
The sidewalks are empty,
hushed. Something is still
burning. You hold Helen's
hand, watch Joshua graze
his fingers against fences.
Flags drape every third
porch. A cat rattles
a trash can, a dog growls
and your neck tenses
with each sound. You pull
Helen closer. Joshua darts
into Ocean Parkway. A car
swerves, skids to a stop.
The driver drops his head
to the steering wheel,
covers it with his arms,
relieved. She crouches,
cries into his shoulder.
You sit on the curb,
hug your knees.
End here, please.

DEREK HENDERSON

PRACTICE.

six planks of pinewood
set upon a concrete pillar.

planed, placed in a line:

such an open moon
shines on six strips of this.

too bright, too sent,
too much to see too late at night.

A cat sent to miao, to accuse.
A light shining to absolve.
A dark, deep and vocal.

Too, too much. A table,
too, too much.

A surface, too,
tells too, too much.

I set out a can, I retract a can.
I leave nothing behind. I make sure
pine needles have a place to rest.

One more missive
one more surface set to shine.

One more tossaway meaning,
one more meaning
missing.

ALISON MANDAVILLE

I-90 ABIDE

And here's the problem. My stomach
hurts so bad I can't think of birds
nesting, a green wreck rustling above

the highway, snow cliffs bright lift
over avalanche chutes and wheeling death
cookies. Pain is a tiny world. Once

traveling inland I saw a field of gulls,
in rain fields of stripped farm soil
in winter. Burnt and wet. What could

they eat there? Some aches are bigger
than sharp, take the whole day down
to minutes by minutes by no words

for some things. Oceans will rise,
lose oxygen, my father will die
suddenly tomorrow, ice hanging;

no one will call. The passes close,
fill, wait for the avalanche guns, wait
for the gull-screech, the rocks to undo.

ALISON MANDAVILLE

I READ MOBY DICK

one time in Baku. It took some months,
loaves of novel, sliced, sautéed—
which I learned was just another word

for frying. Unlike *trying*, as in *rendering
the whale*. And speaking of words,
that is, speaking with tongues

leviathan, entwined, lugubrious
as all hell and tight as a belted
sword buckle—now there's a word

that'll turn down the covers
or the thermostat. Which Möbius
never had. She was a boat

parked in my cousin's backyard
when my father stopped
calling for her, stopped sailing:

Along the Willamette are old
log booms, bumping in tides of yellow
flowers. I can see them now—Arise!

Go to the pontoon. Ride her.
Ask the cousin about decay.
She has live parents too. Fiberglass

rots in her yard. Her children go
to college, read about the white
whale. A paper tiger for the

girl who would be diplomatic,
solve things. Who knows what
the boy wants. His girlfriend

in bed, probably. Parents are
a puzzle. A lugubrious bag
of pieces, pulled teeth, torn

hearts and asphalt bruises.
We keep them in our books.
For the yellow hours. The booms.

ROBERT S. PESICH

CULTIVATING DISFIGUREMENTS

I got an idea
while lying underneath the bed
after I pulled my tongue
out of the outlet
lights going out with a flash
smell of singed skin
split-lip and all that ringing
in my head
reminding me of the time
we got it on
in a big hurry
before the conductor arrived
to open our cabin door
and demand our names
for the ruined city
waiting just outside
where you went
immediately to work
in a crucifix factory
getting maimed
and never heard from again
while I continue on
constructing miniature models
of the Big Bang
in this no-tell motel
pushing myself
a chew-toy for the silence.



t. kilgore splake

ERROL MILLER

DIXIE STREET

“And the poem held the strict sorrow
Of your life...”

— Aram Saroyan

Creatures,
planted on Southern soil, in
Southside fiction, their voices, short stories of last night,
kerosene reading lamps, the blue façade of morning masquerade.
And the novel grows slowly, its predicament, preceding death.
No one shall pass this way again or go home to Asheville.
Damage, staying put, hanging on, of necessity a time
and place created from images of murmurs on
a wide-brimmed white front porch.

And the dust rose on the dirt roads,
and there were few pleasures, and twilight
was filled with patient fireflies, and later, women weeping.
Old soldiers came home to mend, they plowed the back forty
by hand until their hands were ruined, their hearts, too.
I remember it differently, now, my judgment colored
by volumes of ragged gray uniforms rotting
in an awful state of being.

An aristocracy of sorts,
allegiance to the good ol’ boys and girls
in perpetual motion, relatives, gone to seed,
and outback widows cursing the setting sun: if only,
blessed with the longevity of passion, and religion became
the surrogate husband and the game was on
with only the gospel for comfort.

The nature of the legend?

Impurity, I think it was, Saturday night
over at the Forest Club, each slab of meat on sale,
each wing and breast carefully wrapped in swaddling clothes.
Somewhere they are flying, raking leaves among the pines,
shifting to the blindness of old age, transforming
into multitudes of lonesome travelers
down and out, forgotten.

Like you already know

the end of the story, the natural version of it.
Mississippi carpenters make no errors, they hammer away
forever, and their task is never finished, the orders stacking
up at The West Point Plant, the beginning of the end
of things, journeys into the Wilderness.

It is a world of two worlds,
always a struggle as Faulkner characters
flood the countryside with regret, Jake, the Drifter
losing his grace and dignity nightly at the Bypass Tavern,
strumming every guitar of a woman staggering in.
He's half-past Phoenix, I suppose, still moving,
depicting someone I used to be myself.

And the houses
along Highway 49 are falling down,
and Eudora Welty has retired for the night,
and some of the tenants are sleeping in separate beds.
Lightly bang the drum for manners and the modern world.
Palmetto episodes, Delta madness, ordinary towns
held together by the music of the blues, there
will be no sequel to "Gone With The Wind."
Tara is consumed by war.

No, not Eden,
just continual bubonic red clay
and Oxford enduring, an author's stucco shack
on a secluded retreat somewhere near Cahaba Creek,
and the creek becomes a river and all his sins are washed
away and he plunges overboard into confessional tales
of trying to manipulate the odds, of riding up
to D'Arbonne Lake to fish in burned-out
waters.

Innocent men,
pleading for bread, pleading for beer.
Listen, I saw a man with pain in Yazoo City,
an ordinary workman who has lost his strength, he
just stood there like a soldier with a solitary purpose,
and I gave him a dollar and drove off to Florida.
The land remained, covered with cotton,
and women, raped in imagination,
pseudo-love it was.

Mama & the Church, congregations
as good as gold, who is in attendance today?
The Narrator is delivering a spiritual message, his
feedsack collar wilting in the intense heat, there may
be dinner-on-the-grounds today, baked chicken and dressing
and fried peach pies: maybe Aunt Ade will arise
from the dead and say the blessing, you can
see how bewildering the conflict is,
and Uncle Jack is drunk again.

Historic memories?
Do I have a place to rest?
Voices from the carriageway, something
more than memory, a flexible past reshaped each day.
Precisely at sundown I miss them so, these contemporaries,
reading the Psalms by candlelight I sense the world
is turning at 60 m.p.h., the details growing
rather hazy at twilight.

For kudzu
is creeping over my shoulder, a metamorphosis
as mysterious as the selfsame red clay soil I stand
on waiting to devour me, complete and total destruction
for the Blue and Gray masses sinking into simple
graves on foot, their rations giving out.

And Someone rises
and opens the front door, the one
to the well-kept Parlor, and I open
the screen door and go inside.

ERROL MILLER

ABOUT WRITING

“Caught between two streams of traffic...”
— Robert Lowell

I am older now,
remembering the Peter Principle
where I'm supposed to be functioning
one level above my capability: let
me emigrate down one notch if that
is where perfection is, near the ocean
where 40 years of refuge-rowing are reframed
by the blue and gray of perhaps tomorrow.
And my right hand raises up, and I am
still in a house on a hill,
walking the plank...

Dear Harriet of Poetry,
another Doctor came and said, “this baby’s gone.”
They found the body and the boat and the enchanted
Atlantic breathing hard, they found traces
of lost Atlantis in his blood, strange
alphabet sticking to his tongue.

A fantasy
of life on Earth?
Another Ray Bradbury
roller coaster ride to the end of Venice pier?
A scholar of literature doesn't notice,
his blue-blood pumping poetry.

And the short days go
and a blank slate is almost filled in
and cool water has been drawn and crisp cotton
bed sheets are turned back and shrill schoolyard voices
begin to chirp in autumn's backyard, falling leaves

crash the exit gates of summer, steamrollers
tramp through the square, putting
the green away, at twilight
a slender young woman from Star City
coming to anoint the remainder of the flock.
“You are all lost,” she says, as if she
had lived in Paris in the Twenties.

Unlike the others, I know I am
already gone, to write, to have written,
to have stored my life in charming seaside castles.
For this world and others, for Chicago, too.
And Southside’s mournful melodies,
Tara’s burning embers.

Please don’t tease me about Bohemia.
Don’t open old wounds & replace them.
The prodigal son is homesick: soon
it will be suppertime in Dixie.

Across the Oceans,
purple arc-lamps illuminate
the Boulevard of Time, a Paper Avenue.
A light wind blows, co-mingling with
the crowd at the Select Café.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Al J. at Lenox Lounge*

GARY LEE JOHNSTON

THE DANCE HOMICIDE TOP FORTY

Everywhere the music was like a dead body.
It invaded each digitally-saved city,
each room.

But no sadness of guitars.

No piano trails
to the Hudson's afterhours,
no drum melodies,
just storm programming recorded
at the speed of drought.

And not even a smell suggested
by the end of a life. No words there.
The only emotion something between
profanities:

Limousines long as a city block.
Jewelry at cranked volumes.

Women and other examples of time
flock to the popular criminals
and their machine poems.

Their names meant to be written once
and with expensive bottles of champagne.

Extortions not of rhyme
but words that only smell alike.
Words repeated to their extinction,
which is not a ghetto,
but a syntactical hatred.

PHILIP DACEY

MILLIONS

“A million of anything is dangerous.”
— Jayne’s Defense Weekly

a million kisses
threaten the teeth,
the hegemony of the tongue

a million smiles
let your soul slowly
leak from your mouth

a million friends
leave you with no time
for friendship

a million songs
will colonize the silence

a million yawns
create a vast hole
into which your own universe
will someday rush

a million pats on the back
deform the spine

a million prayers
congest the sky
and disrupt birdflight

a million memories
will forget you

a million poems
will shape your life around them
and you’ll have no other life
nor want one.

PHILIP DACEY

PAT

“Don’t pat your face dry,”
my father said, “Rub
it dry or your friends
will make fun of you for
drying your face like a girl.”

Even so, I’m patting
this poem dry as it comes
forth all wet into the world,
not wanting to rub it
and risk smearing

the advice from my father,
who himself must have
patted his own face dry,
perhaps after he’d lied
about his age to enter the Navy

in World War One and in front of
his shipmates, who teased him
for his girlishness. And now,
because I miss him
and my tears are falling,

I’m going to pat my cheeks
dry with these lines,
even if my doing so
makes them run
like makeup in the heat of love.

PHILIP DACEY

THE DOGS OF OLD MEN

In the last photograph taken
of Thomas Eakins, he pulls
at his dog Harry's ears.

My father, dead at 97,
spent much of his final years
overfeeding his dog
out of misguided love,
hurrying the dog's demise,
which then hurried my father's.

What is it about old men and dogs?
Do the men feel like old dogs themselves?
Will I, dogless now, want to acquire a dog—
—my four-legged brother—
when I am an old dog?

No new tricks, nothing
but old bones to chew on;
not much to say, but every day
a wag or two.
What else is there to do?
Just lie here in the doghouse
under my doggy roof.
Woof.

TOM WEIGEL

PEAR

Verticality w/contour
shape of a new globe
one orthodoxy or another eclipsed
false hearts on the run
the origins of Harvard
made plain
& the boat race again
but no more choking vines
in the wilderness of me-first
66 degrees without a chill
some angels out of jobs
even a light left on
in the house of Marlboro

TOM WEIGEL

RAPTURE ENOUGH ALREADY

How to bring
the Prince of Darkness down
Kenneth Rexroth's another Spring
randomly read on WMNR
Bach's birthday

rapture enough
when the academic epidemic of love
gets here as it must
every renewed heart
will have its own 60-piece orchestra

*

ME NO WANNA VEX YOU OR HEX YOU
BUT IF YOU BROKE HOW YOU GONNA
SMOKE A BIKE

*

ice on the awning crackling
& dripping
still waiting on global warming
to make good
bring that gas bill down down down
who wants to be the canopy
drip-drip drip-drip drip-drip
a continuum of Chinese industry

GREG EVASON

STEMS UP FROM CHANCE

the wealthy stomach
is as blue as the wind
of a cursed onion
and groups of pain
and passion
are sliding
in and out
of wise acres
of meaning

just then a moose
got compared to a mouse
and my house
which was a mule tear away
from a socket wrench
and a car tune-up
came to be known
in my mind at least
as “God’s House”
in a neighborhood called “chakraland”

there never was such a thing
as poetry

MIKE JAMES

THERE ARE SO FEW FACTS

there are so few facts
about margaret

each one simple basic

-black ink
on a white
page-

when she was born
who she married

-some say
the world lasted
longer then

MICHAEL MALINOWITZ

WHEN I BELIEVE IT I WILL SEE IT

One-half before the day of absolution I wake up in the middle of the night and jump out the window of my two-story walk up. I leave a note for Laurie who has sent me articles about Oregon trails. My legs tingle yet the hairs are limpid. The gods then were oracles. I held my soup spoon correctly; sex seemed natural, as wholesome as a guidebook can be, both master and mistress. I changed seats as quickly as one makes one's mind up about whether or not to have children. Certain faces of races looked alike. It was time to go home were it so.

The curative power of cults was just a teaser not a justifiable title; well then I knew it emetic (a word either stolen or made up from a blurb written or deigned for me) or that's what I'm going to believe, the ultra orthodox man.

Hey Laurie, I know your predicament but *Family First* is as good a motto as any public school placard. There isn't enough hand cream in the Milky Way to soothe the 36 lines we counted or that is the extent I'll vouch for. They are now gods once again; their tickets are taken just like ours (assuming you have one) though the two-seater looms ahead and behind but not beyond, even the least controllable. I mean to say the one who cannot be so by any one person. How are the cats? How are the cats?

DAVID CHORLTON

THE DEEP FROZEN DESERT

Beneath the ice light of the northern sky
in a mountain six hundred miles
from the nearest tree,
where frost runs deep into stone
and the only star is a signal
from a disappeared world

the seeds of a desert go along
the blue tunnel for storage
in a vault where they wait
for springtime to flower
from snowdrift and memory.
Here is mesquite and a crystal
of cold to preserve it; here

are prickly pear and sage
held in trust for the day
when the sun reappears; here
are agave and ironwood labeled
with ink that glows in the dark
like each golden segment
in the scorpion's tail

and the hourglass of fire
on the spider who crawls
between the stacks
of silver packages bearing
the indestructible seal
of night-blooming hope.

DAVID CHORLTON

AFTER READING LARKIN

The ashtrays are full in Larkin's hotel
and the lamps don't make light
but a mood
for absences that occupy the rooms
whose doors face each other
across a silent corridor. Goodnight England

and goodnight trains
that blaze into the night
with a heartbeat never slowing.
Goodnight Larkin. Goodnight travellers

going back in time. Goodnight
to those who never stop
complaining. They read the sports page
first and leave the rest behind.
I'm becoming more like them each day

but I live where the sky is wide
and loneliness likes
confined spaces best. When I write
to find words for what's wrong

there's a list as varied as the samples
Larkin's salesmen carried
in a suitcase, and I'll accept
any opportunity to unpack them. Here
are the brokers of war, the merchants

who wrap their goods in a flag
and animals in cages waiting
for their turn to be the experiment
that helps manufacture a drug

so new there is no disease for it to cure.
That's just a start. Would you like
to see more? I've got time
and I'm not selling anything. I just want
you to know.

DANIEL STEWART

HAPPILY, ENDINGS

The rust-bird in its blue nest has tattooed across its Arctic-breast: *To All My Friends.*

*

Praise pearl under tundra-white, praise nipples pink as rabbit eyes.

*

Solace of sleet and street-steam.

*

The only flowers left are cabs.

*

The *I* thumbs lit mags in a coffee shop.
Enters the *You* (their eyes
Meat), prince
Who kissed him awake
And ate.
In the *I's* hand a poem...

*

Red-crowned Cranes flame from mirror...

*

And farther, fallow fields never dreamed, *burn.*

*

The prince's shoes are pear and puce.
The prince's shoes are teal and mauve.
His jeans are money,
Crisp as bills,
Sleek and sharp as bills.

*

Red-crowned Cranes dance but do not love to. They do not mate for life, as previously believed. They leap and dance to attract a mate. The dance is not figurative. The cranes feathered white except for a flap of skin that burns red when mating or threatened.

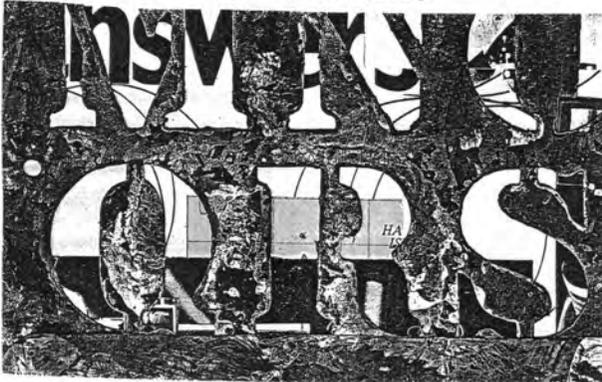
(Someone leaves to smoke, heave, piss)—

*

That red. You shine so you hiss.



THE REAL REELS ARE
LOST IN FROZEN EYES.



Guy R. Beining: *The Real Reels*

DAN RAPHAEL

START WITH SONNETS

the sonnet of the husk: i get wet but never green.
the wind blows through me but I get no smaller.

sonnet sliding on ice, hitting a parked car but escaping casually.
cold a state of mind, not skin.
cloth I neither wove, sewed, nor refined from petro-chemicals
for decades of captivity, holding in the off gassing & evaporation

i thought the only death i had to worry about was my own,
not the planets.
the media heads and voices say focus to be worthy,
work for more, be happy with less,
fear the government, love business,
wealth is how god shows his love

we had exceptional decades of prosperity and exploration—
theyre over. time to normal, though the pendulums
may take a while to center:
acid oceans, gone glaciers and ice shelves.
ecosystems migrating into turf wars.

if we looked up at the earth.
if every step across the sky demanded full attention

mother earth, mother sky, mother ocean,
us men came from another world and convinced
the women they couldn't breed without us.
we had nowhere else to go, leaving behind planet husks
and gods angered by their own naïveté, their love,
which is always taken from us so we move on, as hunger
follows the rising sun.

eat the rich. love the trees. have few babies.
a sonnet for the death of democracy; a sonnet for the triumph
of capital. the world cant support this many people
but it takes cheap labor and urban strife to ensure
the wealthy's survival
until cyborgs and nanobots replace us
and who'll need the earths husk—the scavengers, alchemists
and dung people;
fermenters, carpenters, sculptors and those who like tearing down.

when a car can fit in my pocket, plastic pressed into bricks
but don't stand downwind, wiping the past from my hair,
getting new words for the varieties of haze & dust falling & rising.
the short straw has to go out in the new weather:
does it burn or stain, have messages translatable or not.
my skin is an almanac, taking core samples of the oldest fat

a world that once was green and fresh is not the place for meat
as if isolated tribes and feudalism was the best we could do

EDGAR CAGE

SEASONS OF WOUNDED DEER

Impregnated with gunshot
to be born
as fawns if it survive
the winter.

*

“You can’t eat tracks.”

“It just the snow’s writing,
so of course it follow you home.”

“You good when it’s just trucks
and houses you shooting at.”

“Don’t worry—
maybe you eye’s still asleep.”

*

Bone-bearded hunters’ cuneiform.

Bad aim will not be
documented.

Nor the pain left to wander
kindling mountain
shelters,

untouched land between ricochets.

Disoriented,
the trees that year stay
nailed to damp “no hunting” notices.

*

Outside Kerney Kise's
garage butcher shop
the sign say,
not yet ruin by frost
or irony:
The Buck Stops Here.

*

By spring the world run out of edges.

Children with timid cloud spots
and protective silence
roaming the new woods

and the hills of early fawn consciousness.

*

The dandelion reveal nothing
about the deer.

Where the woods move
is a deer

(past tense, with trout stream

and turtle cities
taken before dawn).

*

Old Abbot Wells
come down with a stroke,
cold now and scared to early winter.

He lose his house to insulin debt
property taxes
damnation insurance.

To watch coffee puddles pushed
by skeletons of wind.

A deer shot and cut open,
its soft damp coals removed
and replaced with a bed,
a sitting room for cough that lingers.

Family—the talk beneath
a nearby number—no longer a place.

He say his son get closer than a bullet
to a sixteen point buck.

His son that appear to him
now in meadows
and acres of hangover.

Writing from the same sparse wood
and forced deeper
into the stands of antlers,
he tell someone else
daylight is only remembered,
like money.

No cranial gunfire remain
in the photographs taken there.

JUDICIOUS INTERROGATION

1.
why eat chicken
but refuse the meat
of the abundant sparrow

why grieve the death
of women and children
in war

but celebrate
the slaughter
of seed-bearing men

how does the monkey know
to refuse the peel
of an innocent orange

2.
how much hunger
can you bear
before you sneak

into an old woman's pantry
to rip off
her winter preserves

instead of
eating the heart
of the sparrow

which fouls
the window
above the oven

where she bastes
her last
murdered chicken

HAITIAN LUXURY

Haitian cookies:

Knead

1. *water* 2. *salt* 3. *butter* 4. *dirt*

Add

sweat labor

oh let them filthy ones

use sweat
for salt

piss of the dog
for water

dirt of them
filthy feet

to stuff them
filthy guts

but
how dare them

the luxury
of butter

to ease
the swallow

before them rot
back to dirt

IN THIS PART OF TOWN

as this hombre roasts on the hiway
you could poke him with the heavy fork he's meant to use
for spreading broiling black rock
and he would use bare hands to shove the rock
before he would poke you back

you could watch a crow snatch his slice of bread
and he would shove his fist beneath his ribs
then swallow the gruesome stabbing at his gut
just like the rest of these laborers as they sun-scorch
the egg and re-fried beans they salt from their brows

but this hombre dare not think not yet of one home beer
no doubt pisswarm as the only medicine he will get if
the battery cranks on frank's or pedro's chevy truck
to haul him back to his old lady always napping
where he does not know the names of all his kids

who will jump him to beg bucks he's sweated but may never see
as he stumbles toward his lone dead olive tree for scant shade
aside his mudbrick walls which bear ancient bloodstains
spilt from his splintered jesus who does not poke back
so long hung from a rope in this stilled life without soap

as in this part of town—

—not even a rabbit screams
when you slash its throat

PERIWINKLE

each time as they put you away you wish
they will let you have something to mark with

it need not be a sharp thing like a pencil or a chisel
for chipping away at these hard days

a crayon will do but best not whole boxes of periwinkle
your color of hope

you know you will be driven to cram them down
between your back teeth and up your nose
the last time you got one regular box of crayons
you swallowed the black and indian red whole

they refused to pump you out
that was the time they shoved
your ass and guts into a box

then your mouth and hands and brains
and especially your big eyes

you wish they would not jam them one more time
into this jar where you always wish you could not see them
seeing at you while you are hoping so hard
for just one periwinkle

ALAN BRITT

KILLER BEE SONG

You invaded my psyche,
that's certain.

But who's counting?

This is the 21st Century.

The sky's the limit.

This is the hour
of twins clinging
to algae-covered magnolia seeds
floating on the pond
of despair.

The pond of despair
always delivers.

Damn despair
like a bowling ball
threatening my tonsils,
while striking my uvula
dead on.

That bowling ball,
traded one night for Australian shiraz,
traded for respectability;
my soul swirls
its stainless-steel blades
known as the Vita Mix 5000.

Now, you see, the 5000 can pulverize anything
into coquina shells,
into pale, undulating, purple mountains below the moonlit Gulf;
and so it is
with this new way of thinking.

Hello, it's the White Manuscript
telling us that Madison Avenue's lighthouse executives
have intentionally
wrecked us
once again
against a delicate
reef
of blonde hair
tasseling
a siren's bare shoulders,
bare sensibilities,
and a bare-breasted
honesty
that resembles unpasteurized
killer bee honeycomb
drippings.

Louisville took me, one morning, to Moe Solworth's farmhouse,
(or ranch by any normal standards).

We ate tuna fish,
Debbie, Shelly,
and I,
at a formica booth
overlooking Kentucky blue pastures.

Shelly's blue eyes
romped like Franz Marc's blue horses
against my window as I chewed
my 4" square tuna fish sandwich,
crust trimmed
perfectly by Shelly's nervous fingers.

Suddenly, at four-years-old,
I knew exactly
who I was!

Suddenly, the clouds,
two miles above the pasture,
shifted their cubist hips!



Lawrence Applebaum: *Constance Walker*

MATTHEW KEUTER

ORPHEUS DESCENDING

An umbrella opens in darkness. We see the sound
of its opening the darkness fails to conceal.

The inside of the umbrella
is treated with a luminescent paint

casting a fishbowl of light
where our man appears

chemical, marine, older
than he is

& like a drowned man.

Which is not the case,

he is a young man in love descending a staircase into darkness
clutching an umbrella.

This requires an escalator be built onstage
for him to walk against,

or an escalator to be erected outside
during the monsoon months in a Southwestern state.

The part of the man will be played by you.
The part of the umbrella will be played by an umbrella.

See how much the umbrella looks like an umbrella.
But it is difficult to say you were so young and handsome even then.

Closing the umbrella rings in the darkness.
At the bottom of the stairs a shadowy figure appears,

points to the sky, and the word *Snow* rings out
in a woman's voice.

It is a warm October night, too warm for snow – there are limits
with all kinds of magic –

instead of snow she has called down
the late monsoon rains. You open your umbrella,

worms come up to bathe. “I have never seen
a bullfrog eat a worm, but I have seen them share a puddle,”

she says, beginning to undress.

When she is naked she exits.
All the lights are turned on.

You watch her clothes ascend the escalator,
a pair of purple panties are swallowed, her slip

jams the machine, the escalator shuts down,
the first several rows are

wringing out their scarves, she never appears for a bow,
no one comes out to remove the offending slip.

It is an article of faith that she has played her part perfectly.

MATTHEW KEUTER

TELL ME IF YOU KNOW

The sky is so empty
above the park

I'm watching trees
bored by the sun

hum 19 blackbirds to sleep.
It's summer in Brooklyn

which means something to you
only if it means anything to you?

Otherwise you decide
if a troupe of blackbirds

sweating in the most secret
tree in your hometown park

portends anything? Or
are you suspicious as I am

of a brain in a skull
the size of a knuckle

with a practical knowledge
of aerodynamics and an appetite

for moth wing?
What answer

to even the most dire
of your questions added to mine

might register the faintest ripple
on the surface in the shallows,

or even a flicker of a shadow
of recognition in the deep

waking consciousness
between leaf and wing?

MATTHEW KEUTER

SO WHAT IF THE WORLD RUNS FROM YOU

So what if the world runs from you?
Your heart beats with the birds,
I'm certain of it. The way you flash
into my mind's eye out of nothing
but the air. The way for years
you pecked at crumbs, then erased
them all with a single beat of your wings.
The way your breasts are perches for
sudden flights to prayer. To say nothing
of the leaves in my beggar's mouth, or
the downy nest of your hair.
Here across the cliffs, one truly oceanic
wind blows all this April's green, to gray.
I've been lying here for some time
counting amputation nubs on
Brother Juniper stripped straight
as gin. Imagine several hundred years
of limbs chainsawed off in a single
afternoon, prevent the tree from spreading
like a sail in this strong northerly.
Planted at the top of look-out hill
it offers no shade, no more respite
than a flag pole stripped of its standard
for the migrating bird caught at sea
in a storm.

MATTHEW KEUTER

THE DRY SEASON THREE YEARS AFTER THE FLOODS

God is thrilling. Hazards the sun out longer
everyday. Dogs have drunk the last water
from the cat's eyes, mosquitoes worry the
blood from their wings, all the trees skinny-up,
shy of noon a shadow holds its head and cries.
This is where our final love encounter
takes place. In the dry gulch at the bottle neck
where the Colorado can't find its way around
the bullfrog poisoning the last puddle
in the county. You take your shirt off,
snap-shoot your bra at the frog in response
to the sun constricting everything. We loose down
in it barefoot, my toenails could scratch out
a screen door. There's no one in harm's way,
I answer you. Then the sun kills us. Then
gets down to the meanness of bringing us back.

RORY JOHNSON

STORY FROM THE FINAL TOWNS OF WORK

A friend I haven't known since the eighth grade
turned up in a phone conversation that can be
considered its own rural season:

a grown man talking to his mother who lives
in a town of no strip malls.

The friend, whose name is John Johnman,
married Kelly Sheltersmyth.

I saw them once years ago at a Methodist soup and noodle supper.

Both still had faces where slow classes were conducted
in basic arithmetic.

John so tall and thin a troop of mosquitoes could make him fall.

He walked as if the shape of his body knew something
about the years ahead.

Kelly with the physique of an egg.
Lips like boiled ham.
Lips that were too close to her collarbone.

Listening to the forks and napkins, they sat together
in an awkward affectionate silence.

My mother told me they had two boys.

Both severely like their parents,
but closer to unconsciousness.

John wasted his days trying to find
work in *The Pocono Record*
and *The New Jersey Herald*.

An interview at the warehouse of a ditch manufacturing plant.

His voice like cold and frightened coffee.

The children at their school in the woods
no closer to waking.

Kelly driving around left
her number for porch sweeping in every mailbox.

They went home each night
to their trailer in Pen Argyl
where they drank A&P orange juice
and ate salted candle meat for dinner.

They were hiding in the rotary telephone era,
when sleep was a still accepted form of history.

After John and Kelly went to bed
holding each other, work could be found anywhere.

“People will need help mending their mattresses,”
John would say to his wife, his little hock of ham,
“Surely someone will want us
by first light. No one wants us to be poor.”

But each day is derivative of every other day,

though the shopping centers become harder to find,
the sunlight turns to wind,
and the two boys make noises with their eyes for the first time.

And one day they come home to their trailer’s charred carcass.
Everything they owned:

all the shirts and pants and preparation for work huddled in open suitcases,
all the memories of trying to tan themselves by the television glare,
all the buttons the boys had saved.

John stiffens in the dumbness of the dashboard lights.

The last thing my mother tells me
is that even before the trailer burned,

they wore clothing from a Salvation Army area code.

John looking for work dressed in a woman's pink coat.
A patch with the name "Joyce" stitched on the pocket.
He never removed the bright stitching.

Maybe he thought he wouldn't be able to frighten away the cold without it.

He knew how to calm his windshield wipers
and the stop sign at the end of Bridge Street,

but he could not afford protection against the rust-blinded wiring.

His coat marked him as an expiration
drifting between the last towns of work.

Kelly told him, every morning
before he searched the slowest parts
of the sunlight: "Promise me you'll come back.
Promise you won't forget
where you said my eyes looked like possums."

And when the rain and its people laughed at him,
he thought they were wishing him luck

and a family invisible enough
to take the food the scarecrows left
without getting cheated by the leaves as they fell.



Nicole Blau: *Artemide*

TRENT BUSCH

FLOWER

Tight in pink-tipped bud,
the flower, nevertheless,
dances with the easy breeze
and bends and dips with the rough-
armed wind just arriving.

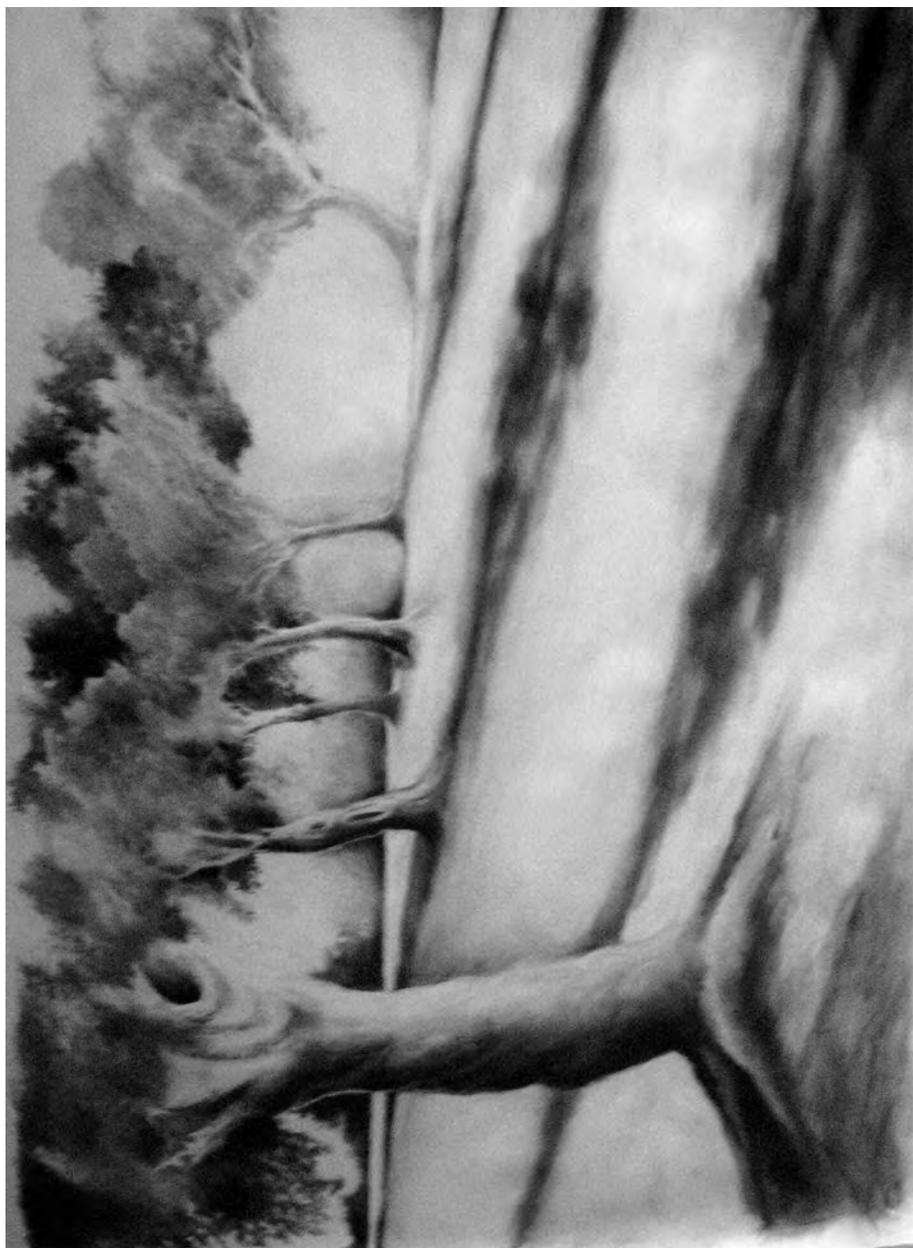
At home in morning dew
or in shower, it sheds
water, welcoming the wet
hands of the most ardent
rain, ducking and waving.

Most the sun, its ribbon
stealth over boxwoods, its
face intent with earnest
touch of fingers, warm,
tempting the close petals.

Daring all spring weather,
yet waiting, tight in pink-
tipped nipple, to open
only to summer when
he comes in full-dressed ease.



Nicole Blau: *Collina*



Nicole Blau: *Torre Suda*



Nicole Blau: *Twilight*

RUTH MOON KEMPER

CLOTHES HANGING OUT IN ANOTHER RAIN

moths battering at blank night windows in a luster
of furze and captured lamplight that somehow
models the chair rungs— there's music

a reminder it's the Autumnal Equinox again
round another corner, clocks back up
slip another hour past the cracks

clean up, later—cigarette stubs, coffee cups, effluvia
of visiting lost love—and it's raining again:
drips from the eaves

sluice away the dreadful summer as shirts
flap beyond the pane, waving forlorn.
Further north

in clearing weather, a harvest moon must rise
melodramatic, a huge flame creature.
I think I have grown up again

without deciding what I want to be.
Promise me, promise me music
will run on all night

into grey tomorrow, where moth wings
will whisper rarer music; sleeves
beyond the window, beckon.

Relax, insomniac. There is no one on the porch
but empty clothing, nothing blood or bone—
a simple dancing on the line

slaphappy gestures that compel this
recitation, this chanting solo
to list perhaps all the names I have forgotten—

the faces I have not. As a matter of faith then
tomorrow will rise somewhere, green bine
and leaf, double-twined, as north now

windows open onto fields of watery moonlight—
shadow figures dance *en rond*, and weep
to harvest seed once confidently sown.

TED JONATHAN

NO EVIDENCE OF A TUMOR

“You got a nice dick,” she says. Toy voice like a flute. The appraiser. Strokes it. Planet Ass in my face. HOT DIGGITY DOG ZIGGITY BOOM! But what’s this *nice* shit? The way she says it, I know she means *nice* like you say after watching your team turn an around the horn double play. Or how I felt when I saw my next door neighbor’s cockatoo fly out the window. She’s a blunt, tough little nut, but I’ve got to . . . “Big enough?”

“Just right,” she says. And she knows dicks. Really. Night of many not so slight exquisite deaths. *Just right*. Two syllables. Delivered just right. Syllable for syllable, beating the eight uttered by the doctor years later after yet another surgery.

TED JONATHAN

SKLAR VS. MR. MAYHEM

Shouting nastiness, he spat on a cigar-smoking thirtyish man walking a shaggy dog. Then he spat on the shaggy dog. They fled. Choking on laughter, he chased a trim gym-bag toting woman, assailing the back of her head with a plague of coughs, as she too fled. Kicked over a street-corner trash can before eyeballing—across 96th Street—a gangly, bushy-haired guy wearing brick-thick glasses.

The guy was Sklar. His arm around a parking meter as he nursed a container of coffee. Which is what he did most nights. This very decent but tightly-wound sleepless loner. Thirty-two. Failing eyesight, numb feet. Juvenile diabetes. Blindness, amputation? RAGE! He wanted marriage, children. Born to Holocaust survivors, he was raised in reform schools. Dispassionately, he witnessed Mr. Mayhem's antics.

High noon at midnight.

Mayhem stomping his way. Sklar spilled the remaining coffee onto the street and placed the container down at the foot of the parking meter. Took 2 steps back onto the middle of the sidewalk, crossed his arms, and locked his sights on the oncoming wild man. As he took step one onto the curb, Sklar, flashing stiff forefingers at him shouted, "HEY!"

Mayhem stopped. Eyed Sklar. Sklar then used his foot to ghost a line on the sidewalk in front of where he stood. "IF YOU CROSS THAT LINE . . . I'M TAKING AN EYE!" Took a step back. Placed his hands behind him. Up to the line Mayhem stepped—

Stopped.

Open mouth to open mouth, they stared an arm's length apart. No one else around. Sklar white, Mayhem black, but they looked alike. They also were dressed alike, jeans and hooded sweatshirts. Unlike the guy who turned the corner—walking straight into this. A wall of a black man in a royal blue Nike warm-up suit.

“What’s the problem, brother?” he said to Mayhem, handing him a buck, before adding, “You better get going.”

Laughing a different kind of laugh, Mayhem stomped off. His benefactor moved on.

Sklar was alone—

From the window just above, a male voice shot:
“THAT GUY YOU WERE GONNA FIGHT ‘S CRAAAZY.
HOMELESS, LIKELY. NEEDS HELP!”

“No such thing as crazy,” said Sklar.

Old news to me.

JEAN HOLLANDER

MARE IMBRIUM

The Sea of Rains haunts the moon.
The cows are real enough
bellowing across galaxies of grass
as are the cars' uphill exhaust,
the sky hysterical with clouds.

"Baby, the rain must fall..."
Your tongue plagued my ear.
After we kissed your mouth was dank,
Sea Scrolls from an unopened cave,
rats' feet unfurled under glass.

When I awoke to a scream
Was it in the street or in my throat?
A white dog barks at the gate.
We have pressed the mute button.
His jaws open and close.

Flies awakened at six,
scrubbing their eyes with tufted feet,
buzzing each other in frivolous longing.
We hid under sheets,
found lust in the Song of Songs.

Now deer run from our walk, waving
the underside white of their tails.
This and their startled whinny
marks them prey—it is their nature.

The buzzard tree is full.
Osage oranges litter the road
warted rinds broken
Inedible yellow exposed.

CRUZ ORTIZ

IN CERTAIN EMPIRES NOT ALL THE HUMANS BREATHE

Some women can be reached only on telephone chat lines: Five-digit voice mail boxes where they raise their children and paint the furnaces of their fingernails and cook their own blouses for an appearance in at least one man's desperation.

Some who fake the direction of their aging, and some who fall asleep married to self-stimulating men who've already died in the unmarked holes of the earpiece, and without contributing to anything except their undocumented liaisons and the moons they followed north, the moons that were too close to the ground.

The phone rings and the lost voice sounds like wind, the heavy breathing of someone's tight shirt, one of the eight-inch men asking where tomorrow is, which line it can be found on, what number to dial.

He listens to a woman eaten by dogs and a woman corrupted by her virile television and a woman not yet sweaty or tired and a woman trying to sell disconnected phone numbers out of Hackensack.

One woman on parole because she drove over 100 m.p.h. while in the possession of seven barbeque chickens. "Come over right now," she says. "There's a guy here that I found on the 973 exchange, and he's real ugly." And that man beside her fighting back the cold while his penis dies.

Also a thirty-year-old woman and her mother begging to be slammed by long, fat, and otherwise trite voices. One belonging to a man who's harvested nothing but debt and a résumé written during a redundant, manipulated depression when his gazing-into-the-murky-depths-of-forever poems were stolen.

But on certain lines not all the humans read from what they've already lied about. Some still live only in pieces. And though they speak, it is no guarantee they exist. Every day men follow scribbled directions to apartment buildings with no plumbing, no electricity, no hallways, no daylight that can be seen from any of the marked windows.

If there is an actual woman, either she asks for a hundred dollars or tells him he's less than her smile, which didn't survive. And if the man arrives only at a payphone, he tags it with his own number, the measurements of his tallest shadow, the depth of his underpants so someone, anyone, will be able to follow him and recognize the clothes he wore and where they've emptied back to a cockroach's faint arousal.

"I like to talk about clouds," he tells the women selling their staticky legs and names that know more than the eyes. He believes everything the women say, even when they say nothing. "I'm 6'1, so you know I'm tall enough to meet you," the man says.

Almost always the women grow bored of his attempts at adult sentimentality. It doesn't take long. Half of a short conversation. Five minutes or less. Many conversations though. Nancy after Gina after Lilly.

He might say he has a gnawing in his left hand, and a satisfaction, almost a forgiveness, though by then it is too late.

He uses a credit card for shelter when he can no longer feel his endless left hand that goes on dialing the brides of busy signals, not yet aware how many each finger has already swallowed.

He doesn't know the women will always be there. The women, no matter how close to the surface of their clothes, will never be found.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Paris Entrance*

VANESSA M. BLAKESLEE

PRINCESS OF POP

Janis Joplin was staying at the Highland Gardens Hotel when she died at twenty-seven, so perhaps it was no coincidence that Britney herself had pointed her black Mercedes SUV in that direction when she peeled out of her driveway in Beverly Hills that morning. The second her sneaker struck the pavement, the pack of paparazzi leaped out of their vehicles and scuffled after her; she heard the familiar jostle of the cameras and microphones as the crews struggled to balance the cumbersome equipment on their shoulders, the quick footsteps hunting her down. But at the lobby entrance, the security guard held the pack of photographers at bay. She flew through the doors and wished she could really fly, remembered being a kid back in Louisiana on her cousins' big wooden swing, climbing so high that with one release of the chain links she might sail off and fly into the clouds. If only she could fly like the pretty quail her dad and her uncles used to talk about when they returned from hunting, with the same look in their eyes as if they were talking about their latest girlfriend or a hot movie star. But then they would unhitch the tailgate of someone's truck, toss aside the dirty canvas and there lay the beautiful quail, glossy soft feathers spotted with blood. "They fly fast but we get them eventually," her dad said, lifting a quail by its feet and turning the bird so that she might see its beauty up close and from all angles. "But they're up there, happy, so they don't know what hit 'em," he said, maybe because something on her face told him she was worried.

In her single room of shadows, she brushed the palm of her hand along smooth, empty surfaces of the dresser before swinging her oversized Fred Segal bag onto the bedspread. She yanked out the bottle of Grey Goose vodka, half-filled, the container of blue cheese stuffed olives, pack of Marlboro menthol lights, and two books—one given to her by Mel Gibson that was about Jesus saving the world from sin and she had managed to read a few chapters before she lost interest. The other one that she liked only slightly better because she always found fiction difficult to begin with was called *A Confederacy of Dunces*. But her older brother had insisted she read it because she liked to be funny, and he said she would appreciate the humor. And because she knew he was smart and she wanted him to think the same of her, she was struggling her way through the story so that the next time she

visited him in New York they might have something to talk about besides their family sadness.

But it had been months since she'd seen or spoken to her brother, and the corners of the book curled back and the bookmark had disappeared last week. She shook out her little bottles of precious pills and they bounced and rolled across the comforter. She left them there, poured a glass of warm vodka and added two olives. She wandered over to the small balcony overlooking the pool and leaned over the rail.

The pool area was a small paradise. Palms bent over the walkways and birds twittered in the trees. No one was swimming; the pool gleamed a still, shining blue. But then someone shouted her name, "Britney! Britney!" and this startled her out of the quiet. That was her name but she didn't know who that person was anymore; they might as well be calling someone else, so what did her life matter, anyway? But she followed the familiar throaty voices to the long-necked cameras and unshaven faces of the men ducking behind the cameras like the long black snouts of wild boar—her uncles used to hunt them, too, she remembered. *Click-click, click-click, click-click*, the cameras sounded like water guns. The men were firing and waving from the balcony straight across from hers, on the opposite side of the pool.

She wanted to melt into her heels right there; she wanted to die. But instead she just held up her glass and said, "Cheers, boys." They were so busy shouting her name, though, the voices jamming one on top of another, that she knew they didn't hear her. She stared at the glass in her hand and then glanced at the walkway below. She listened but no one was coming. She let go of the glass over the side of the balcony and waited for the splintering impact on the ground.

But she heard nothing. When she leaned over the rail, she saw no broken glass anywhere. Where had the glass gone? It couldn't have just disappeared into thin air. Then she spotted it, nestled and whole in the long spiked leaves of a giant tropical plant slightly off to the side and underneath her balcony. The sunlight shone through and the glass had not a scratch; the two olives still floated on the bottom. She snorted, stalked back into the room, and stood around with her arms crossed but not quite sure of what to do. The sheer white curtain liner puffed in the breeze. She poured herself another glass of vodka.

She decided to write a note to her kids. She found a Highland Gardens Hotel notepad and pen at the desk, and she began to write. But everything she wrote came out sounding false until she grabbed her cell phone and scrolled through to find a picture of her two boys, their faces squeezed into the tiny square frame of the shot. Only after staring into their two pairs of dark eyes did the words she needed to say come out right. Dear Boys, she wrote, Mommy loves you but she can't be your Mommy anymore because she doesn't know how. She wanted love and a family so badly, but maybe she was just missing her own family too much. You will always be two won-

derful bright shining stars, and she knows that you will make her proud. But she has left for a good reason. You will be much better off without her around. Love, Mommy.” She stared at the word, *Mommy*, another name that didn’t fit, like a much-wished for but too snug gown that even the designer couldn’t tailor to her size.

She found her Ipod and cranked up the Janis Joplin song about the preacher’s son. She had only discovered Janis Joplin recently, much to her embarrassment. One of the nurses during her hospital stay had been humming one of the songs, and something about the music seemed familiar but Britney couldn’t think of what. Her entire childhood had been spent singing along to show tunes for pageants, belting out Debbie Gibson lyrics for the Mickey Mouse Club, and later, blasting hip-hop as she practiced routines over and over with her dancers. All of those songs had disappeared along with the past, but once she listened to Janis Joplin’s Greatest Hits all the way through, something didn’t let go. And then she found out the whole sad story one late night after staying up to watch *E! Hollywood Mysteries*. At least Janis hadn’t left any children behind. Was it the music or the story of Janis Joplin’s life that so intrigued her? How did a woman the same age as Britney, who had messed herself up with even more drugs and booze, end up creating music that reached to her heart and grabbed her soul? What did that mean about Britney’s albums that had soared to Number One? This had so bothered her that three days before, at the screening of her latest music video, she had fled the theatre after the first thirty seconds, unable to watch. She hated the girl on the screen because that wasn’t really her; the electronic beats and the digitally-altered voice wasn’t her own, either. None of it was real music. Her manager and agent ran after her, but by the time they caught up she was crying so hard that she could barely talk. “All I ever wanted to do was dance,” she said between chokes. “But they told me nobody ever got famous for just dancing.” And the three of them stood there, Britney crying and the other two not saying anything.

She poured out the Xanax and Ambien and tapped the pills into two piles.

In the bathroom, she stood naked in front of the mirror. Hot water blasted into the Jacuzzi tub and the steam rose like the offerings she’d seen people leave outside the Buddhist temple in L.A. She lifted handfuls of her hair and let it fall. But the girl who stared back wasn’t a girl anymore—she was a woman with a girl climbing out of her skin, and the face of the open-mouthed person in the music video the other day was someone else, a whore. Roots showed underneath her yellow hair. She remembered Bob, her first manager, the one who touched her, saying to her mother, “Keep her as a blonde, just don’t let the roots show. She’s like a brand new Bardot.” That was the summer right before, “Hit Me Baby, One More Time.” They were still living in Orlando, her mom and Bob, even though her dad and her

brother and sister back in Louisiana didn't know that yet; her mom giggled and asked her all the time, "Can you keep a secret?" But then the song hit the charts, the tour started, and they left Orlando.

For years since becoming famous, Britney dreamed about those early days in Orlando. She dreamed about going back and visiting a girl her age with long brown hair, just an ordinary girl she might have been friends with for the short time she attended Doctor Philips High School, but she didn't know for sure if the girl was someone real or imaginary. But when Britney saw the girl in the dreams, the scenario was always the same. She would show up at a club, and the girl would appear in the corner or next to her at the bar, and Britney would grab her hand and they would run to the dance floor, laughing and dancing, just the two of them. But the girl never appeared on tour, or in a crowd of fans, or in any other dreams. Sometimes when the dream ended, Britney woke up and her pillow was damp with tears. Why did she keep dreaming about this girl she didn't even know existed?

She took a gulp of vodka straight from the bottle and stepped one foot in the tub. Another thing she still wondered: who was Bridget Bardot?

The room phone rang and rang. Someone thumped on the door of her room, called out her name. She had turned her cell phone off because the thing wouldn't stop ringing, and besides, she had said all of her goodbyes. She eyed the hair dryer hanging from the wall. When she stood up in the scalding water, she teetered and clutched a towel bar for balance. That sure would be an easy way to die—a slip in the bathtub. No mess, no pain. But she reached out, grabbed the dryer and flicked the switch; it roared to life. She pulled the dryer toward the tub to drop it in, but the curly cord yanked it back, so that the thing banged against the wall and swayed there, a blind, roaring head on a rope.

She crouched back in the tub, hugged her knees to her chest and cried.

The sun was sinking and the sky darkening. She stood on the balcony again, wrapped in a towel, her hair drying in strings down her back. She shivered. In the pool below, a dark-haired young woman swam across the deep end like a frog.

She wished she could go down and talk to the woman—find out if she was from out of town or L.A., ask her if she had kids or divorced parents. Of course, the girl would recognize her. But what if she didn't? The thought sent a chill across her chest. What if the girl was foreign or had gone to Harvard? What if she didn't want to hear Britney's side of things about the judge taking her sons away, or about buying millions of dollars in real estate for her parents? What if this girl asked her something like, "What's the most amazing thing you've ever done?"

Britney would say, "Las Vegas." She wouldn't be able to look the girl in the eye.

"I'll bet you've never been to a museum," the girl might reply. And she would be right.

All the way down the Sunset Strip, the photographers' vans trailed behind her SUV. They dodged in and out of lanes like cats. Britney veered into the parking lots of the first pharmacy that appeared on the right. Inside the lights hurt her eyes. She bought scissors, more vodka, Rich Brown Number 27, milk and a box of Fruit Loops cereal. She stepped out, lit a cigarette, and blew smoke into the faces of the cameras that surrounded her in a semi-circle. "What are you doing at the Highland Gardens, Britney?" they asked. "Where's the party?"

She pushed past them. "Why don't you throw one, if you're so interested?" she said. The photographers shoved into one another as they jogged to keep up with her. But they hurled more questions like spears; their bodies pressed in so that she gasped for a breath of night air but instead choked on someone's cheap musk.

"Do you know the Highland Gardens is where Janis Joplin died, Britney?"

"Do you believe Janis Joplin killed herself?"

"What are you doing in a hotel room all alone? Everybody's worried about you."

She hauled herself into the seat of the SUV. "Maybe I'm going to kill myself," she said over her shoulder, shielding her eyes from the blinding flashes; she felt as if she was still wandering the illuminated aisles of the pharmacy. "Or maybe I just want to read a book," she said and slammed the door.

Back in the hotel room, she read the instructions on the back of the hair dye three times while singing along to Janis Joplin's "Piece of My Heart." Soon now, and she would transform into Rich Brown Number 27. She worked the chemicals into her scalp, draped a towel around her neck and scooped the pills back into their bottles. She read a few pages of *A Confederacy of Dunces* and thought about Ignatius in his hunting cap. She didn't know anyone like Ignatius, only Hollywood people, but she guessed that his kind existed. Perhaps what she needed wasn't a disguise, but to actually *be* someone else.

She rinsed off the dye, combed out her hair and read more of the book while her hair dried. Some parts made her laugh out loud, and she couldn't remember ever laughing while reading any of the Jackie Collins novels her mother used to leave around the tour bus. But then she read the author's note in the back of the book. The writer had committed suicide, and the book was published after his death. Even someone who created great work felt as worthless as she did. And she thought how ridiculous she'd been to think that by reinventing herself—disappearing from Hollywood and starting her own dance academy for kids, for instance—those parts of her life that were most painful would change. Her father would still be aloof, her mother

jealous, her ex a cheat, her younger sister lost and an embarrassment, her brother loving but distant.

I'll show them, she thought. I'll do it and then they'll have no choice but think about how they ruined my life. She had changed her will the day before; now everything was in the names of her sons, still toddlers but they would have money for birthday parties, museums, college.

The phone rang, but she ignored it. She walked out on the balcony, eating the blue cheese stuffed olives, and the wind blew her hair across her face. Below, the lights glowed at the bottom of the pool and the water was a blue-green glow; she looked for the girl who had been swimming earlier in the evening but the pool was as desolate as the moon. Only two photographers stood on the balcony across from hers. They were smoking; she could smell pot or hash mixed with cigarettes. They spoke in fast and private tones; someone was talking about sex, and the breeze caught the words "pussy" and "tits" and carried them over on the breeze. She remembered when the photographers first started following her everywhere. She had been sixteen and had just posed on the cover of *Rolling Stone*. One of them asked her if she'd had a boob job, and she lied.

Now she waited on the balcony for what seemed like a long time before the photographers noticed her, but neither of them picked up a camera. One of them slid open the door and slipped back inside. The other one lingered for a moment, cradling his beer bottle between his hands and looking up at the sky. Then he stared across at her. He drained his beer, tossed the bottle into the bushes below, and called out to her through his cupped hands. "We can still tell it's you," he said, just before turning around and disappearing inside.

She stood there in disbelief, her fingers rummaging through the last of the olives and popping them in her mouth. At last she hurled one olive after another through the air toward the glass door of the balcony. Some of the olives dropped to the ground, but some of them struck the glass like BB gunfire, bounced off and scattered the deck. "I hope you slip and fall, you assholes," she yelled. But no one moved the door even a crack.

The phone beside the bed rang again, and this time she answered it. The front desk told her that they were concerned because the parking lot was full of media vans and trucks. For how long was Britney planning to stay? "Why do I have to leave?" she said. "You have my credit card, so swipe it."

"It's just that your presence is creating a disturbance for the other guests," the woman said on the other end. "But of course, you may stay as long as you like."

"I'll be checking out shortly," she said. Her voice was almost a whisper. She hung up. *Your presence is creating a disturbance*. She repeated that line to herself as she ate dry handfuls of Fruit Loops. Once again, she poured out the pills and divided them into two piles. *Your presence is creating a disturbance*. She took out the milk from the fridge, tore off the cap and began to

take the pills. After she had swallowed the first pile, she found her Ipod and played “Summertime.” She didn’t know the words but she hummed along as best she could. *Your presence is creating a disturbance. What else is there to do but create a disturbance?* She thought of Janis Joplin who died in the very same hotel, perhaps even down this same hall. And the author who wrote about the funny guy wearing a hunter’s cap on Bourbon Street, how did he perform his last dance? *I belong to a confederacy of dunces*, she thought and laughed because she didn’t know what the title meant but the saying felt right. The last notes of “Summertime” faded away, and she downed the rest of the pills with the milk.

Not long after, she started throwing up. She crawled from the toilet to the phone by the bed and dialed zero. The woman she’d spoken with earlier answered in the same crisp voice. “I’m afraid I’ve created a disturbance by killing myself,” she said into the phone. “Please call my dad.”

Someone rattled a key in the hotel door, and then she was surrounded by fast-talking, fast-moving men, but not the paparazzi. They wore dark jumpsuits and lifted her onto a stretcher. The world opened out, and she was dashing down the brightly lit hallway as if she was going down a playground slide, everything on either side a blur. Voices babbled around her and called her name, but their tone was not like her brother calling for her to come out and play when they were little. These voices wanted to know about the pills and the time, but her mouth wouldn’t open to speak. In the lobby more voices rained down, high-pitched females joining the men, her chorus welcoming her back home.

“Is that Britney, with the brown hair?”

“Did she finally kill herself, poor girl?”

“Britney, hang in there! We love you.”

Outside she couldn’t tell if it was night or morning; the light was as bright as day. She sailed past a crowd holding up signs that said beautiful things: Britney, you are loved, you are a beautiful girl, you were born with creative genius. For the first time, she felt those things to be true. She tried to lift up one hand to wave but her arm didn’t move. She struggled to keep her eyes open and even though she was wrapped in blankets, she shivered with chills. But she could still see enough to glimpse the faces of the crowd, to see her face imprinted on white T-shirts like the face of the Virgin Mary faded on a calendar she remembered in her Grandmere’s house. The person she had called for wasn’t there.

One of the EMTs squeezed her hand; the others shouted for the crowd to clear away from the ambulance doors. “Have you seen my father?” she asked.

“He’s on his way,” the man answered. He squeezed her hand harder and said, “Stay with me.”

“Where is he?” she said. “Is he hunting?”

“He’s flying here as fast as he can, sweetie,” the man answered.

“I’m nobody’s sweetie,” she said.

“Okay then, Britney,” he said, and dropped her hand. They hoisted her into the back of the ambulance and shut the doors. The lights and noise vanished. She heard her own breathing, felt the jab of a shot injected into her arm, felt her blood draining away. The one who had picked up her hand before squeezed it again, leaned in close, and said, “Stay, beautiful, stay.”

KARA DORRIS

UNTITLED FILM STILL #3

I hated that gesture—

romance from the blue dead of a dying
two. When the letting go
is letting, is letting into gone.

When the galaxy is full of that other,
those other hands.

When I'm the closest to letting,
to letting leave take me in two

leaving only one hundred Peruvian lilies
of gone.

UNTITLED FILM STILL #31

He asked if I know the meaning of a three-way?

You/me/her. Which her?

The one in the story.

The one I will like.

& I said, you will like her in time.

She grows & changes into else.

He blinked lost. & so I said, *she is new.*

He emeralded then.

KARA DORRIS

UNTITLED FILM STILL #29

This tunnel, this quake-light
only *an outside lamp*
you said

not a flash
not an arrest
not my fist.

An almost *yes* is still a *yes*.

You said *baby*
girls come here to crash.

I said *we are places to call out to.*

ALIXA DOOM

BAT: A LOVE POEM

In the morning I spy it
flung like a broken thing,
a dark spot on the wall.
A slight movement alarms me—
it has breath and a beating heart!

Scrunched like a hunchback
it clings with minute paws
too small to hold
such darkness to the wall.

Like a bad dream
that won't go away,
the ache that I wake to,
of a recent loss. Someone
I have loved is not with me;
I am alone with a bat in the house.

I must do something before dark.
Again and again I check on the bat,
withered as an old thing,
hugging a huge secret
to itself. It is ugly
and has never been touched.

ALIXA DOOM

LISTENING TO THE GUITAR

So what of the threads trembling
in the leaves, the river bottom,
in the heart of all things
that does not miss a beat? Today
a sad movement pulls me like water
through places others have been.
Footprints, souls full of water,
what does it matter?
I pull my skirt from the twig and
the leaf jumps. See how I have played
my own note in this slow journey!
But I will not touch the stone,
the one lying next to the catalpa.
So many fathers have disappeared,
and all that remains is the hard sleep,
and a few fistfuls of earth.

ALIXA DOOM

OWL NOCTURNE

My owl is not the stuffed owl
of back rooms.
It cannot be sculpted,
nor can I come close to it
in bird books.
This owl is not driven out
by the jay and the crow.

It is the one the tree refuses
to give up
when I go hunting for owl,
folding it into itself,
huge, wingless.

Its call
floats through the night,
clear as a water lily.
A wheel creaks
in a dirt road
that wound beneath a feathered moon
fifty years ago.

I have seen it stare
from eyes of foreign children
and skin of old women.
The moon knocks loudly
at the window of this owl,
and the stars evaporate slowly
between its huge tufted feet.

This owl hovers between women
who want to trust each other
and bends the shoulders
of the unemployed.
It is the father
lost in a snowstorm,
a darkness a man cannot touch
in his wife of 20 years.

It is the owl
of a mother's eyes
when her daughter's body
begins to change.
Its drowned face
looks out from
the flower and the stone,
and when I am alone
it names every part of myself
that has ever died.

PAUL B. ROTH

LETTING HIM GO

He knows
this age
is not his

that his age
is an ageless
pine forest
heavy with rain

in which
his footsteps
swallowed up
where he walks

can only be
traced
out of range
of where
he last rested

with his
squinting glance
back at us
all but gone

PAUL B. ROTH

SURVIVAL

The length
of his days
subsides

Little
by little,
less and less
happens

Where
he bleeds,
winter's negative
whitens

What is,
used not to be

yet standing
unseen among
white pine shadows

becomes his way
of staying
alive

PAUL B. ROTH

SILENT WHITE SILENCE

He waits
as if silence
creates
each moment

as if
unworded
borders
open up between
his thoughts

as if
asked to show
his papers
at these borders

he has
none
to present

and access
to even
his own name
is denied

PAUL B. ROTH

RETREAT

The music
of seasonal rains
he hears

syncopates puddles
inside tree hollows
with dripping
spruce pine boughs

Dry branches
he gathered
into loose bundles
earlier this afternoon

and which now
crackle behind him
from a small fire
he's brightened
in their place,

add to his
shadow
on the walls
this fire wobbles,
dims,

then flares up
should he
unexpectedly
awake

PAUL B. ROTH

IMPOSSIBLE

Having
given himself up
for lost

and spoken to
only by his own
prayers
at stone walls

he wonders
how anyone
can live
without a name

or talk
with oneself
among so many
missing echoes



Alois Nožička: *Thirteen*

PAUL B. ROTH

THE SHORE

Night stepped
from the wet sands on our parted lips

No words could catch its tail of stars

Once a breath took a chance
there was no return known of to explain its steps

It was enough that some words
just escaped being drawn into nets up the sides of ships

That they settled under broken shells and the tide's mark
along the coastline of a crab's claw

Waves evoking their namelessness



Guy R. Beining: *Axiom*

DAVID DOUGERT

ATONE

Transgression is of no consequence here
No bearing on your status
Nothing to measure degrees of love hatred

Once we timed our laughter
 to the passing of stars
 tangled orbits
Our challenge to Him had begun

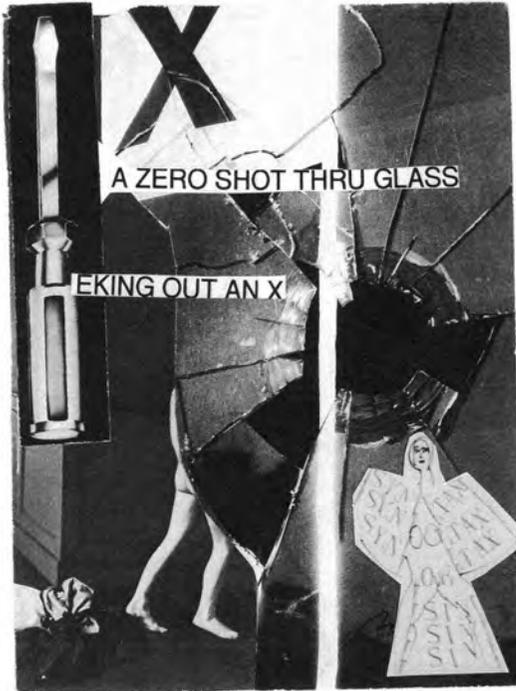
Now we approximate the infinite
Feathers taken to rend one sin

ADAM

Of course the crows meet us
 contemptuous ghosts
Wings singed from the descent
 atonement for proclivity
Where to hide bones from God
 torque an omen
Murder was our only weapon
 shed skin



slip moon into sea
carve into coffin of lace
remember plot as space.



Guy R. Beining: *A Zero Shot Thru Glass*

SUSAN H. MAURER

ODE SUSANNAH: REPRISE

Flat-footed floozy on a floy floy train to Prince.
Ho' Susannah scarred by the eyebeams of the elders
and the sad thing she believes herself the sweet reason she
drinks from the dicks she reaches for for love, mouth sticky
and the honey and vinegar poured on her head slides from
head to foot through her fattening hair. Each time.
She is not given the apple to know she's turning
the wrong knob, (pant,pant), barking up the wrong tree.
And in the eyes of the men her number count's a flaw
which justifies each lie, but so she strides, still smiling,
mileage ticking away, skin loosening, her very ticket out of solitude
itself losing its coinage. O what is bright in this picture's
that I, the narrator, am trying to write down the truth
which, tho', she won't read, though I mail it to her,
leave it on her answering machine, pay others to sing it,
because she only eats truth from a snake.

SUSAN H. MAURER

I FEEL WORDS FOR YOU

I feel words for you.
God the awful scarecrow.
It's a poem my mind gave to me.
Without visible aperture
the prisms slither of
huge soap bubbles
which come from my forehead
turn to dream birds
with flapping wings.
With the exact sound
Of flapping wings.

The bird lands,
claws dripping black ink
and scutchel scutchel
scratches out words on the impartial page.

SUSAN H. MAURER

MOSCADOR

The hawk nest in the church tower
 (aren't they often) near a busy city street.
A hawk? Unheard of here and two feet tall.
It doesn't care how its grasp turns a
 robin's dark orange breast wet red or how
 the little hands of the squirrel try to free.
A puzzle, this stark raptor in our tiny park
 melodrama where we want to play.
 One wonders about the future of the pigeons,
 sparrows, grackles, baby dogs allowed off-leash
 in violation of the law. A newborn child?
Go for the rats and let their hairless tails dangle from your beak,
 the poison bait it had for lunch.



Michael Weston: *Self Portrait*

MICHAEL WESTON

THROUGH THAT NEON HEAT

(Like sleep sinking to your throat that transforms the vocals to the dogs' heated howl, to go running in packs through night streets, woods built of glass, stone, tile, earth. Searching the arms and thighs that lay waiting, open, with concave or convex comforts saturated with juices, oh

malleable flesh and hair. Features and no features at all, curves and hollows, muscle and soft tender jaws-o-sculpted ridges, vertebrate pliable and silent-mouthed waiting for the intersection, soothing caress to satisfy frayed nerves, the mental jumping. So many growls and moans under the moon of need, shining its enticing light and rhythms of hunt and stop and listening for an answer to the calling. Prowling and panting, the glands secreting, sweating out murky signals and musky mewling. Running in packs, the purple dogs with poison sticks sighing into the sleeping victim's ears, into their dreams. Lap at puddles along the way, to beat the truth out of

the lanky labyrinths, out of the musty ground on their way to the secrets hidden in the thighs of the Sphinx. The only truth of flesh joined to flesh that sings the fears to silence, male and female, seeing the lust at the corners of their mouths, you know they'll attack; feverish, to shake the bone[s] dry. And go limping back to their lairs exhausted, the hunger already growing anew).

The freight-yard at midnight. In dark glasses down the bizarre breeding center the dance proceeded. Light and draggled minds floating through the empty, their faces distorted as if by a video monitor, roaming in the sweat of midnight where dreams are borne as shadows and fog.

Changelings flow out of the gulf stream, out of the subconscious, out of the unused, musty[again that fucking word], strange portions of the brain where shapes are blurred, soft and dull. Mythological creatures in shadow vapors swim out into view of the naked eye; warped configurations congealing/dissipating, light and dark, sharp angles, soft

curves. Where the street lamps play flickering music to the imagination and images bound out of the alien landscape. Midnight filled with the hybrid child of day and night, dream and reality woven over and through each other. Dull amusements. Pale singer and night moon. Changelings. We in our barren bodies hug them to our minds to fill us. Dreams fall over us, wide awake, like huge black rugs, soft black snow, black large heavy balloons; dressed as a starling —black iridescent— night rolls out its thick tongue and rolls us up, drawing us into its mouth.

AESTHETE

After we wander the Tate,
shouldering you
against my foreign body,
each eyelid forgives
your name to the sun,
oath blinded by memory
in a wellspring time burn,
like when we recall
the fire orange
in a Turner landscape
from a dark flaming sky,
that prophet abdicating
enigmatic light
which catches us unaware
by the stone's slightest shadow,
for a pickpocket moment
we initial
the scraping birch
which like a knife
or exile
grows older.

B. Z. NIDITCH

BACH SOLOIST

Sunshine floats
over a backstage loft
along light veined rugs
and Asian wallpaper
Bach's blueprints
rest upon
a lone music stand
by winter's forgotten windows
an edgy soloist plays
over the Strad bridge
in his dazzling imagination
amid the soundproof room,
and all cool speech
loves, deaths,
open wounds, departures
in the glass house
sing out to comfort
his space.

LEIGH HERRICK

CONDOM TRILOGY

I go at night into the fragmented world without nostalgia

watching

how slowly

the single sex-filled condom deteriorates beneath the lamp now lighting the darkly

I go toward the lamp now stripping itself of day now painting its orange timbre into the glow of first-fallen snow covering the ringed rubber's demise on the street of come and go

where I walk watching the condom endure my watching it past rain

through wind

all fallen leaves all

passing vehiculation

all feet gone by thinking

nothing is turned into poetry but into itself

as here I turn

wearing: paradigmatic reverberation

w[h]ear[e]ing [I turn to]: fractals

to write the word: *bloody*

the phrase: *voices in range calling out atomic decades*

And this finds me going as I go toward the condom on this night on this

street wondering who did it
wondering how
was it two boys two men two teens a prostitute a couple just married or just
about or simply out : *just a quick ride*

and I recall: the trap and skeet house I was 14 cleaning and the urinal was
filled—

while clay birds flew— somebody jerked
while men yelled *Pull!*— someone deposited over the shots

over the booms over the days of Sun delivered to night like night on this
street

past the practicing sounds
past all pulling all triggers
all bellies all fingers all *tense and curve*
all *knuckling in*

for which I write the word *melted*
the words *into rust*

and this final phrase as *Sun delivered to shells for sex as life in climax until
death*

2 / Thinking I Should Have Written *Entrenchment* Instead

Walking the ditch of nothing found of nothing there is to find I find
nothing

then nothingness

then wastelands of proposals
then proposals for counter-wastelands
proposing further nothingness
filling the story filling rhetorical waxing it: *dream*

a Debordic bubble
foamed for allusion hung and

clinging to lines scribing sound the mouth of its spelling called *belief*

as *Not*

not *moon*
not *vestibular*
not *white*
 sliver
of *cow*
a *horned*
 curve
a *quartered*
 feminine
 life

through which this Garden of lonesome hours is entrenched

and solemnly passed

3 / whose blank is called condom : whose condom is called blank

is Blank of ownership
called Blank possession
Hailed Blank Almightyly Crowned
Blank that is not my name
kiss that is not my Blank
Blank that sits that moves that twists that turns fills dams rams in a dodge
of trucks burning electric body saying **no tomorrow** saying **only now** O MY
KINGDOM OF BLANK

which is THAT called Blank of Configuration
which is THAT called Blank of curbstone cornerstone pressing stone lethal
Blank Kingdomed Injectional Impunitious Mellifluously Murderous Blank
Whistle-Arrowed Blank
sung to sweetly fling fruitily fall falsely tree to stone fire to strike
shoal to tank gas to flare

numb-struck
oil struck
atomicized
subliminalized
nuclearicious fissionically conned

fused to fruit enhancement of rib
ribbed to heighten fused-to-riblessness
re-ribbed as re-fusal in fruitlessness drown of riptide hightide noontide
lowtide Triumvirated Pith of Blank called Condomasmagorical Trinitization
of Trojan
Intelligently Designed Blank mounting Pillaric

Blank mounting Monumental Mount Blanking Against
Frictionalizing in

to know its rebuttaling When

When

When in the street life
When in the shelf life
When in the Half-Life

When

when Etiolating When
when Sanctificationary When
when Deitic When
when Indefatigable When
when Inculpatory When
when in the day when in the night when at the table
Bubbled Riposte when Blank When

in the carriage of drapery: When
in the capes of pages: When
in the flown of poems: When
in the reply of humans: When

when in the sound speaking fragments
when around fragments speaking *when*
when for the word *nostalgia*
when for the erasable *not*

when beyonding When : when : this night past slipping time
when for this sun past street this moon past lamp of orange-timbreing When
glowing in canvassed wanting and the Blank spurt : anonymous dew

when the event

when that it comes

so at my feet
its ruptured symphony

past calling its nostalgic sounds into its fragmenting When

CHOCOLATE WATERS

NARCISSIST

i think about myself
about myself
about my beautiful self
and my dog
my beautiful dog
my beautiful selfless dog
and my son
and my son my
beautiful
what's-his-name son
who's not as beautiful
as my dog
my beautiful dog
my beautiful sunny dog
and my ex who's
now much less
beautiful
than my dog
or my son
oh my
beautiful dog
my beautiful dog god
i love my
dog

CHOCOLATE WATERS

ENTANGLEMENT

who wants to feel
this
not me
don't want to feel
one fucking thing
for you
just like mom
who wouldn't
know a feeling
if she fell over one
what chance did she have
that era that time
that knew so much nothing
she stuffed every feeling
down the throat of that
turkey of a childhood
that awful childhood
that sent her screaming
that appalling man
who was her father
my grandfather
dreadful drunken shit head of a man
didn't know any better ?
his own demons biting him
so he bit everyone back
everyone
close to him
back you angry insufferable
dog of a man you
bit the feeling right out of
my mom
who then had none for
me
my dad

my siblings
my my my
she ran
silent as a lamb
away from one miserable man
into the arms of another
miserable man
my father
man!
and now you think
i feel something for you
just some crazy woman who
feels something for you
maybe not
maybe that would be my
mother
trying to feel
something
for
herself

NAVA RENEK

HOW THE FISHERMAN LOST HIS WIFE

There once was a man who spent seven out of ten days at sea working on a medium-sized commercial fishing boat that trawled the ocean, picking up flounder, cod, scup, eels, blue crabs, fiddler crabs, lobsters, and sea weed. The ten men onboard worked eight-hour shifts, sleeping four, then fishing another eight, until the week passed and the captain determined the haul was big enough for them to turn around and steam back to port.

After docking and scrubbing down, the fishermen would get into their pickups and head into town. Some would pass through Main Street and drive directly home to their families; others would stop at The Bell, a favorite bar and restaurant, to acclimate to terra firma, where they would drink beers and knock back whiskeys, snort coke, and get shit-faced until last call, when a bouncer's rough arm would stop them at the doorway, afraid the seamen would be a danger to themselves behind the wheel, or at least cause The Bell to be fined if one of them happened to be picked up for driving while intoxicated.

Accidents happened. Telephones rang in the middle of the night. Wives and girlfriends were called down to the emergency room or holding cell. Occasionally residents would read about the fishermen's exploits in the paper's Police Log or, early in the morning, find one of them slumped in the doorway of the Blue Marlin, the town café, having fallen asleep while waiting for the breakfast shift to open up.

Each time the fishermen came home, their families had to readjust to the new member of the household who was constantly joining or leaving their clan. The men forced themselves to blend in: sleep when the sky was dark, wake at light to the chirping birds. There was no one to replace on deck after a back-breaking watch, no sea spray or bucking boat, no horseplay in the galley, and only a faint but lingering odor of fish on their clothes and hands. The transition wasn't easy. Time seemed to skid when they were out at sea: children grew up, wives became bitter, the cat got sick and was put to sleep, without discussion or input from any of them. Often the fishermen felt more comfortable at The Bell, where each afternoon their shipmates would appear one by one, as if obeying some Siren's call for alcohol.

The first night The Fisherman encountered Louann Braun he didn't think it was necessary to tell her he was married. "The topic never came up," he explained later, when she demanded to know why he hadn't put all his cards on the table. That was after he'd bought her a couple of vodkas straight up, after they'd driven to the parking lot at the public beach and tried to fuck but ended up going down on each other because the seat in the cab was too narrow to get any real leverage for screwing, but before he started meeting her regularly whenever the *Miramar* was in, before she persuaded him to spend the night with her, before his wife Rebecca found out and took the kids up to Beverly to live with her parents. When he'd looked into his crystal ball, that wasn't the future he'd seen for himself.

Why, at thirty-five, at the tail end of his fishing career, when most of the fish had been fished out of the banks and the boat owners were selling off and heading down to Florida, did he find himself alone on the Cape? He'd always been impulsive, hard-headed. In his senior year of high school, when Coach yelled at him in front of the rest of the lacrosse team for missing an open goal, he quit right then and there, wouldn't go back no matter what, letting a college scholarship slip through his fingers. But it was probably all for the best. He wasn't college material.

For the rest of that year he'd held his head high. Then after graduation, he took a summer job fishing and stayed on once the school year began again, feeling funny for a while, believing he was supposed to be somewhere else. But soon that sensation disappeared, and he knew he was right where he belonged.

The first night he and Louann left The Bell together he assumed she knew the deal. Alcohol makes you horny. They did what came naturally, and afterwards he drove her back to her Honda and like a gentleman, waited to make sure the engine turned over. Then he sped home, stopping at an all-night Dunkin' Donuts to swill out his mouth in the bathroom, thankful that the fish smell from the boat always seemed to stay with him even after a couple of days on land.

Two weeks later, he bumped into Louann again. He hadn't planned on meeting her—hadn't even given her much thought since the first time they met, although images of their few heated moments in the pick-up had flashed through his head as he watched morning cartoons with his seven-year-old son, or early in the evening while he smoked cigarettes out on the porch and waited for Rebecca to put their three-year-old daughter to bed.

It was early evening and The Fisherman and a couple of guys from the boat had been seated at the bar, necks craned to the right, all concentrating on the Pats, who were making slow progress toward the end zone. Money

lay scattered around the counter in indiscriminate piles because the fishermen were paid by the share and had no idea what to do with the large sums, preferring to watch the cash slip away into safe keeping in The Bell's till or a coke dealer's hand.

Louann claimed she'd stopped by to drop something off, but for some reason The Fisherman didn't believe her. His face lit up when he saw her, a sign she took to mean that it was safe to approach. "I was wondering when I was going to see you again," she told him as she hopped up onto the stool next to him and motioned to the bartender for a vodka on the rocks. "Yesterday I drove by the docks and saw the *Miramar*, so was kind of hoping you'd call."

The Fisherman shifted nervously. "Yeah. I've got a couple of days off."

"I guess that gives you more time to be with me. Any ideas what we can do?"

The Fisherman shrugged, momentarily thinking of his kids, then erasing their image as quickly as if they'd been stick figures drawn on his daughter's Etch-a-Sketch. "I might." He exhaled sharply.

"Too bad I got to get up to my mom's tonight."

"Yeah." The Fisherman looked at the TV, feeling both relieved and upset. "Can I buy you a drink before you leave?"

"You just did," Louann laughed, pointing to her glass.

At that moment, The Fisherman forgot about the football game and tried to focus on the living creature in front of him who was looking as desperate and sexy as any wild animal. Then he got up and led her over to a corner table where a miniature clipper ship sat tucked snugly inside a glass bottle.

There were no clocks in The Bell, as there are few clocks in any bar, most bar owners knowing that if they can make their patrons forget time, the customers might believe they'd forgotten their troubles too, so as the hours passed, The Fisherman drew closer to Louann and watched her lips part to take in her drink, then, following the lure of attraction, leaned over to kiss her.

"Don't be a stranger." Louann smiled afterward as she pulled down her skirt and hopped out of the cab to get into her own car.

Back home, The Fisherman banished himself to the sofa without being asked, not wanting to wake Rebecca, who in the last few months had developed a strange desire to sleep alone, even when he was home.

The Fisherman calculated that if he got drunk early enough and made it back to Louann's place by ten or eleven, he could slip out a couple of hours later and return to his house in time to make it seem as if he'd left the bar before closing. Oddly, Rebecca didn't seem to mind. With the kids, her job, and housekeeping, she'd started to treat him as if he were some necessary annoyance, something that bothered her but that she accepted and wasn't ready to expend any energy to get rid of.

Finally one night, The Fisherman got tired of making excuses and decided to explain to Louann why he couldn't spend the night with her. She probably knew already. Who wouldn't know? But her nagging was causing him to feel as if he were a little scup flapping about on deck, trying to get back into the water.

It was getting late, almost last call, and if he'd been smart, he would've stayed and continued drinking with the others, but as usual, Louann was there, with her curly black hair, salty neck, dimpled chin, and sassy mouth, tempting him again. Back at her apartment, she didn't look so lovely, the way women approaching middle-age seemed to wilt like plucked daffodils that quickly turned brown around the edges. She was pacing back and forth, dressed in her rust-colored kimono, a cigarette dangling from her lips.

"It's not like I've asked you to marry me," she stammered. "One night! Just one goddamn night. Do you know what it's like always sleeping alone? Waking up alone? With no one but my cat?"

"I told you I can't." He squirmed, knowing that kind of flat out refusal would only lead them in the wrong direction. It'd all seemed so simple the first night they'd met.

"*Can't?*" Louann screeched in disbelief. "Why not? Do you have some kind of disease? Are you a vampire who only goes out at night and is allergic to the sun? Are you *married?*"

"Come on, baby. You don't have to talk like that." He slid over, gently slipping the robe off her shoulder.

"Oh yes I do," she assured him, shoving him away. "People say things, but I've never listened. Now I'm sorry I didn't believe them."

The Fisherman had watched too many little fish get caught up in a trawler's net and knew that the more the fish fought, the more they'd exhaust themselves and turn over and die. Why not speed up the process and answer her directly? Maybe then he'd have a chance of getting away alive. "Fine," he sighed, sitting down on one of her armchairs, the kind that never seemed to dry out from the Cape's damp evenings. "I'm an open book. What'd you want to know?"

"Isn't having a wife and kids enough for you?"

"No kids," The Fisherman answered petulantly.

"You *have* kids," Louann replied. "At least that's what Marjorie at the clinic told me."

"Okay. Two. A boy and girl. But that has nothing to do with the way I feel about you. I like you. That's all."

"You can *like* a girl in nursery school, you can *like* shrimp scampi, you can *like* the Cape in the fall, but let me tell you, the way you've been acting, I don't think you *like* me. You either fucking *hate* me, or it's something else."

"All right." The Fisherman tried to slow her down. "I don't hate you. I

love you. Is that what you want to hear?"

Louann stamped her cigarette out in a full ashtray. "You can say whatever the fuck you want, but we both know that doesn't mean it's true."

"I just assumed you knew."

"Do you think I run the name of every guy I sleep with through a database of all bad marriages and cheating husbands?"

"Whatever you do, don't tell my wife," The Fisherman begged hoarsely.

Louann shook her head. "Why the fuck would I do that? It's your business. If, for whatever reason, you want to screw around with me or any other woman, that's for you to decide. Tell her yourself if you feel like it, but my hands aren't getting any more shit on them than they already have."

"Thank god." The Fisherman sighed, suddenly experiencing one of those moments when his entire life flashed before his eyes. After eight years of marriage, Rebecca was still his ballast, the reason he came home after every trip.

Later that night after making love, The Fisherman said good-bye to Louann and drove home to find Rebecca asleep in their bed. This time he slipped himself underneath the covers, breathing in her scent, and for once she didn't push him away.

For three months, The Fisherman successfully avoided Louann. It wasn't that he didn't think of her, but he found that the power of the mind could overcome the needs of the body, and he exercised that restraint whenever he was on land. He stopped going to The Bell and began reading bedtime stories to his kids, giving his wife a much-needed break from her mothering routine.

Sometimes the men on the boat would tease him about the loner that he'd become, although they didn't use those exact words. "Pussy-whipped," they snickered behind his back, just loud enough for him to hear. But as the seasons changed and autumn hitched itself onto what looked to be a dismal winter, he fortified himself against their ridicule.

"No one's going to Hell faster than your old flame, Louann," Buddy Wilson laughed one day on the boat. "She goes through men quicker than an ice skate on a hockey rink. She's my definition of one liberated woman."

"She's what I'd call one used-up cunt," Roy Campbell chimed in. "Her pussy probably looks like what's inside an old clam shell, all fleshy and dried up."

"And smells that way too." Buddy chuckled. "I saw her the other night with Derrick DeSilva. Talk about bottom-feeding."

They were sitting in the galley, having eaten what was meant to have been dinner, although it was 2:00 a.m. and their shift had just ended. The Fisherman felt his anger rise, but told himself that Louann was a free woman who could do whatever the hell she pleased. He'd always respect her for

never informing Rebecca, but then he wondered who the hell Derrick fucking DeSilva was.

The fish were scarce and getting scarcer, and the fishermen still had to put in at least a couple more days before they turned the boat around, but while pulling his Bowie knife from fish tail to head, disgorging guts, or heaving nets through wenches and pulleys, The Fishman thought of Louann and DeSilva together in bed or drinking from a bottle of bourbon while parked along the shore road. Being a man, he knew what other men were capable of. Derrick was probably married too, cheating on his wife, leading Louann down another cheap path to nowhere. Spending just an hour with her might make her see that DeSilva was no good.

“Hey, what’s the deal?” Buddy called to him from his pick-up as they pulled alongside each other in the parking lot of The Bell. “The wife give you a ‘Get Out of Jail Free’ card?”

“Keep your mouth shut and you won’t sound like such an asshole.”

Sitting at the bar with Howlin` Wolf blending into the inaudible babble of football commentary on TV and the rising and falling of other people’s voices, The Fisherman suddenly looked over to find Louann beside him, dressed in tight jeans and a cut-off t-shirt—kind of crazy for such a chilly night.

“Well, if it isn’t the sailor come home from the sea.” She laughed, lapping at an ice cube that bobbed at the top of her drink.

The Fisherman felt an incredible urge to run to the can, but then tightened up and threw his arm over Louann’s shoulder, giving her a friendly hug.

“Fish still jumping?” she asked.

“Not for long.”

It was a morbid joke, a known fact in the industry that in a matter of a year or two The Banks were going to be fished out and shut down to trawlers. Not everyone had a plan for what to do next.

“Well, you’re not missing much here.”

“Oh, no?” The Fisherman raised his eyebrows and felt a little shift inside him. “That’s not what I hear.”

“News travels fast.” She smiled appreciatively. “I guess you guys don’t have much to talk about out at sea.”

“So, who is he?” The Fisherman couldn’t help asking.

Louann shrugged, setting off a distinct ripple that shimmied down the tops of her breasts. “No one special.” Then Louann looked at him strangely. “Don’t tell me, you, with your wife and kids, are jealous?”

The Fisherman lowered his head and glanced around the room, hoping no one else had heard. “It’s nothing like that. I’m your friend. I just want you to be happy.”

“Happiness is an illusion,” she snapped before taking a sip of her drink.

“Where’d you get that one: some kind of fortune cookie for depressed people?”

“It’s philosophy, you Neanderthal. I’m in college now. Maybe that bit of information didn’t reach you out on the boat?”

“College? I didn’t know.”

“Well, not really,” she backed off. “It’s on line. If I do well, I might transfer up to UMass.”

The Fisherman smiled, relieved that he hadn’t ruined her life, but then he became uneasy. “You look great,” he complimented, laying a thick paw on her thigh. “Have you lost weight?”

Louann shot him a look that made him feel as if he’d been struck by a harpoon. “I know you probably mean well, but let me tell you something: no matter who says it, that remark never really comes across as a compliment.”

“I mean you’ve always looked great, but today you look delicious.” He bent down and nipped at her neck for emphasis.

“Like hot apple pie?” She giggled, gently pushing him away.

“Like hot apple pie with vanilla ice cream on top.” He went at her again, this time drunkenly licking at her throat.

“Don’t you have a family to go home to?”

The Fisherman shook his head. “I’m a big boy. I can take care of myself.”

“Well then, I think I need another drink.”

“*Need* is a very strong word. What else do you *need*?”

“Want,” Louann slurred, turning over her empty glass.

“Your wish is my command.” He bowed his head, and when he lifted it up again, she caught him by the chin.

“If you’re thinking about coming home with me, you’re going to have to stay the night. None of this slipping-away-at-midnight Cinderella shit.”

“No problem, m’lady,” he replied, thankful he hadn’t called Rebecca to let her know the boat was in. Then, after finishing their drinks, they leaned against each other and staggered out of the bar.

On the ride to her apartment, Louann slung her legs over his lap as they kissed and groped, trying to get at every private place and empty crevice they’d been missing since they were last together. It was a miracle he knew the roads so well and could drive nearly blind with a temptress on his lap, but then his vision became fuzzy and the road curved where he hadn’t expected it.

The next time he opened his eyes, a strange white light filled the room and a distinct beeping noise came from some machine nearby. His back ached and one leg hung in some sort of traction device in front of him. His first urge was to flee, but he couldn’t move. Then he remembered Louann. Neither of

them had been wearing seat belts. He prayed that she was all right. He tried to get out of bed to find some answers, but the tug of tubes connected to all parts of his body made it impossible for him to even lift his head.

“What happened?” he mumbled when a nurse appeared beside him.

“You were in an accident. The doctor will be here any minute.”

“What about the woman?”

The nurse nodded solemnly and told him that she was going to be all right.

“Christ,” The Fisherman exclaimed, tears springing to his eyes.

“Take it easy,” she soothed. “We gave you something to help you sleep.”

The Fisherman felt nauseated and tried to clutch his stomach. “I never meant to... We were just having a good—”

“Everything’ll be okay. You just have a few broken bones.”

“How’re you feeling?” Rebecca began naturally enough, rubbing the top of his hand.

“Okay.” He sighed. “As good as can be expected, I guess. Where are the kids?”

“At Janet’s. I’ll pick them up on the way back.”

“I love you,” he whispered, just before falling back against the pillow.

A week later Rebecca brought him home, then left him sitting in his armchair while her friend Janet came by to take her grocery shopping. Alone, The Fisherman couldn’t keep still. He wanted to find Louann, talk to her to make sure she was okay and nothing had been said. He didn’t think he could live with himself if Rebecca found out, so he disobeyed doctor’s orders, got into his car, and drove into town, then hobbled into the Blue Marlin, thinking someone there would know where to find Louann.

Jake Palmer’s crew, dressed in their splattered overalls and dirty work boots, turned toward him and then quickly looked away, as if they’d seen something they wished they hadn’t. Celia, the waitress, shot him a pained look, then brought over a pot of coffee and poured some into his mug. “I heard about the accident,” she told him pointedly.

“I guess that passes for breaking news around here,” The Fisherman acknowledged.

“Small town.” Celia shrugged. “Maybe it’s none of my business, but—”

“Probably not,” The Fisherman cut her off, but wanted to hear more. Up until that moment, no one had mentioned Louann, although the discharge nurse had let it slip that she might have gone off Cape.

Soon he realized that he wasn’t going to get the information he needed and that he’d made the trip for nothing—jumped the gun too soon. His whole body ached as if it was finally registering the impact of the crash, and he needed to get home before he wouldn’t be able to move at all.

The short ride out of town seemed interminable. For some reason, cars were clogging up Main Street, taking longer to pull in and out of tight parking spaces and around double parked vehicles. Then the mail van cut in front of him and slowed down every few yards to deposit envelopes into mailboxes along the way.

Just as he turned into Ovington Crescent, he saw Rebecca getting back into Janet's car, a scowl of dramatic proportions etched across her face.

"Louann Braun?" she cried as he limped over to greet her. "Couldn't you do better than that?"

"Wha..." The Fisherman stammered, but he knew it was useless to fight.

"They say she was pregnant. But not any more."

"No," The Fisherman groaned, quickly calculating the improbability of the baby being his.

"It doesn't matter. I'm going into town, and I hope I don't see you here when I get back."

For a moment he thought about following her, but he felt certain it wouldn't change anything. Rebecca was stubborn, and he hated to see couples airing their dirty laundry in the streets. Then he spotted the two garbage bags sitting on the porch. Scattered around were his old tapes and CDs, the few books he'd never read but had carted around hoping one day he'd have time to crack. He rushed toward the front door, which was locked. Who the hell was she kidding?

When he used his key to get inside, he found the house just the way he always found it whenever he returned home from sea: toys in the middle of the floor, drawing books and crayons on the kitchen table, dishes in the sink. He could hear the refrigerator sputter each time the fan switched on. Could it be that even in the best of times, his presence had been hardly felt? He rooted around for a note, a message, some kind of sign telling him what he should do next, but the only clue was out on the porch and the pile of his belongings he'd passed on his way in.

Still, he managed to hobble back and forth from the porch to the car as he stuffed two garbage bags full of his possessions, took one pillow and a sleeping bag, and threw it all into the backseat. A wad of cash was in his pocket, unspent from the last trip. He'd sleep in a motel and give Rebecca a few days to cool off. At least they could stay together for the kids. Wasn't that what everyone did? Even caught fish felt grateful for a reprieve.

COLLIN BUNTING

MY GHOSTS WEAR CLOTHES

My ghosts wear seashells worn to glass,
barely a color. They drop smoke trails
and sunglasses set to gray-scale.

My ghosts wear the sun like a thumbprint.
They set the moon to zero
on watches made of pagan sacrifices.

My ghosts wear soap scrawls on mirrors.
Dusty fingers embroider windows
through sunrises of black eyeliner
stuck with salt.
They walk

across my kitchen table like a dull knife.

My ghosts wear crowns
and concrete like fountains in savannah.
They piss crystal.

My ghosts wear little decades
like little weeks.

My ghosts wear black and blue,
secrets behind shower curtains
red as an African sunset
plugged into a curling iron.

My ghosts wear my wrist skin
thin as blue butterflies
tussling in a patch of veins.

My ghosts wear voice-mails
like fortune cookies.

My ghosts wear promises like funny-paper necklaces.
Cross after cross after cross.
They put it around my neck
like a lei, if you will.

My ghosts wear my words like special occasions.
They wear blackboards.
I am chalk.
They wear paper.
I am disappearing ink on a feather.

CHET HART

HER SILENCE IN THE SECOND CAPITAL OF HACKETTSTOWN

A woman patrols
her crippled photographs
for a dress that was taken away.

An entire city carried off by men
belonging to a different
bedtime, a border town
between thoughts of winter.

The woman looks through her curtains
and sees the unfinished eyes
of cigarettes huddled at the corner.

The city she lives in
no longer talked about.

It has a shop that sells padlocks.
A drug store where trench coats
can still be stolen.

The window at the piano coroner's
cracked with seagulls.

She unfolds a letter written with pink dust.
“Dear Flesh,
Please look for me . . .”

She listens where the page is folded
into creeks and silent earthquakes.

There are warnings:

The dress is not a daughter.

The dress is more than a missing eyelash.

*The dress can be flattened on a plate
and encouraged for its soft bones.*

Stranded in the emptying
of the sepia television,
the woman takes her body
out of her pocket and touches herself
in patches of venetian light,

her arms and legs blushing with wolves,
her bed of troubled silk protected there as food.

TOD THILLEMEN

FROM THREE SEA MONSTERS

Lord One Death (filled w/ pus, w/ wheezing)

Shat on the house as keeper-of-the-mat

Lord of the Door the Brothers know

Knowledge sweeping for the sacred floor or field

Kills enemies in the death of its own powerful trance

...

So their bodies torch

by visage the two knew as nothing too

back and back

One Death

Seven Death

Calendrical face of sidereal time the brothers know

In time : Two

& two by two by the one they knew and know

Tree-spit

to the woman's palm the glittering skull
fertility embedded in the bond

knows from the unknowing trance
big-bellied 260- / 365-day calendar boys

images portray and round the world

Hunahpu
From the woman
From the Tree-She-Turns
Xblanque

Now Lords of the Underworld
took the Mayan Brothers
Hunahpu, Xblanque

into Altarpiece Throne

One Death sat, sits, stares from meatless bone

Now they are taking

Xblanque

to the killing floor, killing, cutting him open
blood, smoking, soaking, stilled in the cold world

this the throne-room's "interior"

So
the big city, town, portage or final place, calendar's feast day
and an other
seasons will spill or spoil
pregnant river's spawn of yellow spume
destroys this land
by degrees of flood, nation
made from mud, pisses
silt

from the biped's

tread gone dead in the sunken moraine
heats from speeding cold's
progeny gluts each
use of even drunken dry wells the same.

spuytenduyvil



**GIRAFFES IN HIDING:
THE MYTHICAL MEMOIRS OF CAROL NOVACK**

THERE'S NO ONE LIKE NOVACK, and here she is at her best as she chases her ontological tail round and round the intelligible, unknown worlds of her subconscious (and ours). Think Alice in Wonderland on acid simultaneously dancing with Tristan Tzara, Rimbaud, Oedipus, Pandora, Gertrude Stein, Proust, Kerouac, and that weird kid next door who ate all of the heads off your Barbie Dolls and you'll begin to get a feel for what she's up to.

MARY MACKEY,
AUTHOR OF BREAKING THE FEVER ET AL.



A PLACE IN THE SUN BY LEWIS WARSH

PORTRAITS OF THE WOMEN AS LOVERS in Russia emerge in tandem with the conflicted erotic relationship that develops between Marina and the detective who rescues her. Another highlight is the titular story, "A Place in the Sun," which brings iconic figures of Hollywood's golden years into stark contrast with their respective legends.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



NO PERFECT WORDS BY NAVA RENEK

MEMORY AND LONGING mingle as Carolyn unravels her grief: a woman the couple once spotted in Paris becomes, in Carolyn's imagination, a model named Annabella; a young Swiss woman they encountered in Thailand fends off the advances of a pair of Israeli brothers, then gives in to one, then the other and ends up hating herself.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



**LIGHT YEARS : AN ANTHOLOGY ON
SOCIOCULTURAL HAPPENINGS
MULTIMEDIA IN THE EAST VILLAGE
1960-1966 ED. BY CAROL BERGE**

Flip through the list of contributors to Fuck You and you will get a good sense of the contributors of Light Years, but three people stand apart for me. Carol Berge, Jackson Mac Low, and Paul Blackburn.

For me, Blackburn is the Virgil of the Light Years scene. Blackburn's collection of tapes from readings in this era provides the soundtrack for Berge's book of essays [written by many who were there].

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In his first full-length collection, *Bones & Jokes*, published by NYQ Books, Ted Jonathan delivers up poems and stories out of a gritty urban reality that are as raw and original as the characters and streets from which they come. *Bones & Jokes* is savage, joyous, profound and dead on funny, but behind it all is a gentle love and clear sanity that makes it all memorable.

BONES & JOKES

POEMS & STORIES

by

TED JONATHAN

Though published here several times over the years, somehow it never occurred to me that Mr. Jonathan has a bit of beat sensibility and sensitivity; that he's looking for the revealing, meaning moment, grace or satori in the urban gritty realism of real people and situations; that he can rant and love, hate and forgive, poke fun of himself and others through pain and delight—a real New Yorker, in other words. And he always appreciates the angle, the edge, the payoff.

As a storyteller—put it this way: if you're not hanging on his every word, either you're jaded or not breathing. This book is a career milestone.

—Phil Wagner,
editor/publisher, *Iconoclast*

Ted Jonathan's *Bones & Jokes* is filled with tales of survival told in a big bass of a voice moving to the steady beat of, let's say, a boxer pounding a body bag in an empty, lonely gym. The writing is blunt and brash filled with subway track swagger. It's plain spoken, precise, and full of purpose. And oh yeah, maybe most essential, it has the sick crazy laugh through the nose humor that endears and redeems itself and makes you want to go back and read these pieces one more time, and then again.

—Tony Gloegglar

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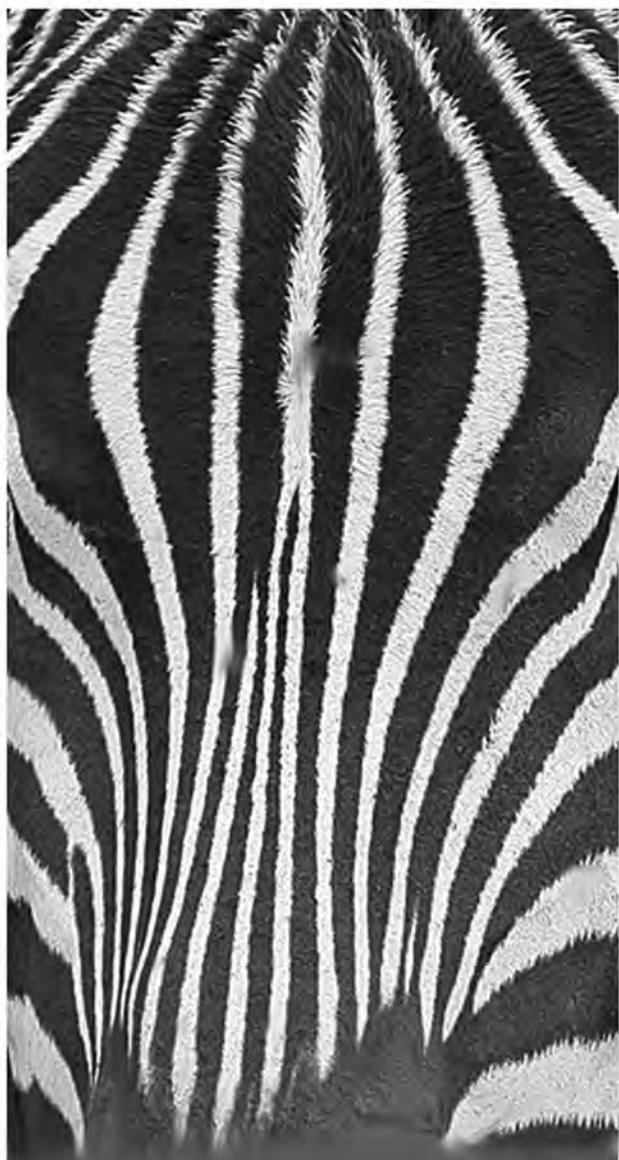
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Mosquito Operas



New and Selected
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by
Philip Dacey

"Philip Dacey's book, brilliantly titled, has the incisive power and resonance of the greatest short poems from the ancient Greek and Oriental poets to moderns like Pound, Crane, Williams, Stevens, Bly, Strand. In lines about his son, Dacey writes 'The first time ever bowling:/he does a little dance—/before technique, magic.' These poems are that rare combination: technique infused with magic, magic infused with technique.

Dacey hones and sharpens language until, again and again, the universe balances on a single line, a single image, often a single word. The ripple effect of the magic is without end."

— James Doyle, author of *Bending Under the Yellow Police Tapes*

"Philip Dacey is smart, wise, and funny—sometimes all at once. These "short poems" come at us quickly, like whispered asides, or mulligan wisdom, and are gone before we know what hit us. Then, like jokes or aphorisms, they hang around in your head. And so, in these snaps and pops, Dacey is a George Carlin, a Ben Franklin, of poetry; his short poems catch you off guard, spin you a bit, and leave you thinking. *Mosquito Operas* is a delight, and a good reminder that often it is the little things that matter."

— Louis McKee, author of
Near Occasions of Sin

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