

SKID ROW #16
PENTHOUSE

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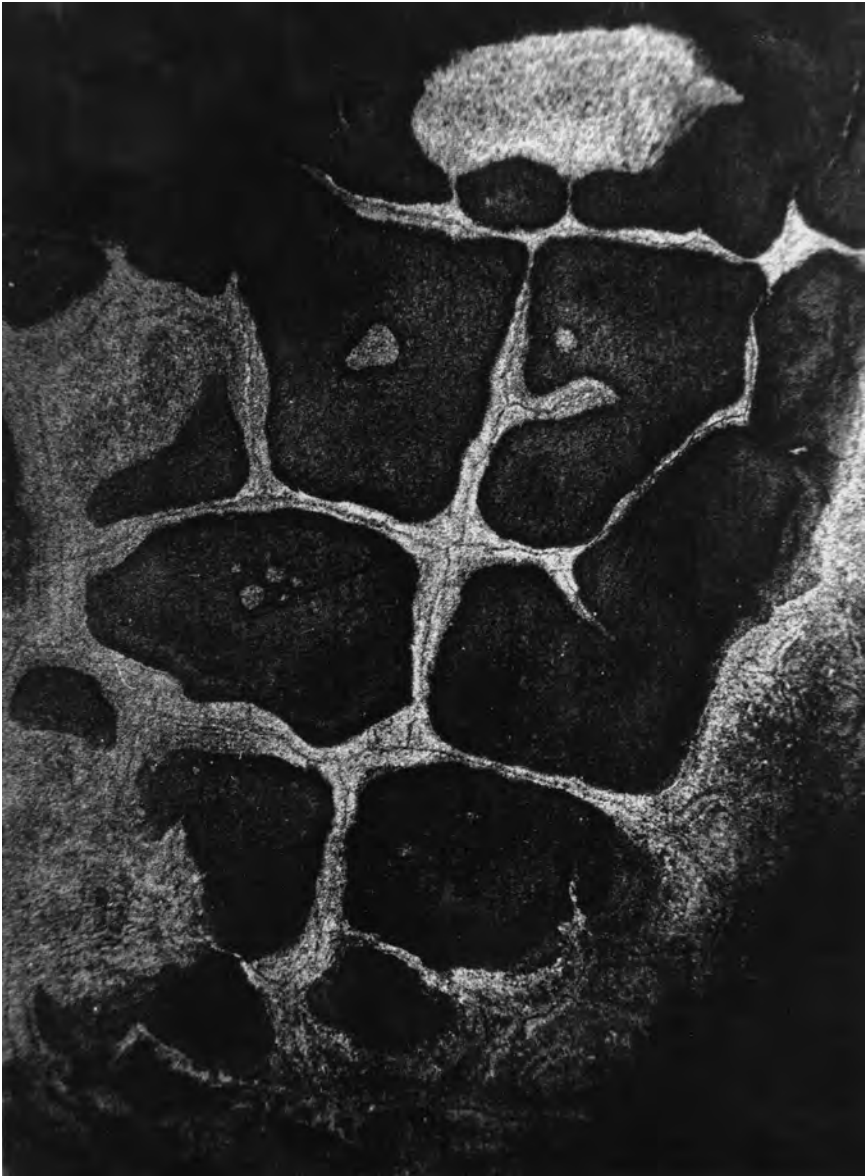
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Alois Nožička: *On the Ground 2*

ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

LILITH

They brought Lilith in today with her eyes like fire, come down to us from some mountain top, or is she risen up from out of a hole in the earth? They brought her in with her amber eyes.

The shipping crate is large and made of pine with a clean look to it, its top and one side are pried off. I can see the words Santa Fe in bold black square letters, and shipping stickers on the outside of the box. The stickers are in pale, lovely colors like mauve and sky blue and rose. I can see there is writing on them.

The workmen are struggling with a large object packed inside the crate. It is Lilith giving them trouble. When they finally get her uncrated, they put her down on her back while they install the wall mounts. The bottoms of her hands and feet are flat as boards and have an extra thickness to them which is how they will attach her to the wall.

I'm on duty at my job as a guard in the museum.

I watch the doorway for strangers, for unauthorized personnel, for anyone who looks suspicious and might come in on a pretext. I watch the room. . . the workmen. . . Lilith's eyes. One of the workmen has a twisted face which makes me start.

I hold to my station at the wall inside the 20th Century Art Wing of the museum... inside the Blanch and A.L. Levine Court. I would like to know who Blanch and A.L. Levine are. I imagine Blanch Levine as a matronly woman with faded blond hair and a small chin. I imagine her as wearing pearls like I myself would like to wear. Pearls that live inside the shells of living oysters and come up from the bottom of the sea.

A.L. Levine I imagine is older than Blanch, and very rich.

When the workmen break for lunch I move nearer to Lilith and bruise my knee on the shipping crate.

Darling, she says to me, please forgive me. I'm so sorry I hurt you. Let me bandage your knee.

But I refuse to be consoled and return to my station at the wall.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is perhaps the finest in the world, clean and white and sprawling. Each of the wings is enormous and there are many corridors and hallways and each one is graceful and has a purpose. There are small white cards that describe the paintings and sculptures; there are glass cases with jewels and artifacts locked inside them and each of these jewels and artifacts also has a small white card.

The visitors stand mostly silent, staring at Lilith... I can only wonder what they're thinking.

Some approach clumsily and stand in awkward positions to view her, others circle around and examine her from every angle. The visitors drift into the wing continuously throughout the day. Most don't stay long, except sometimes a student sketching. Some move away quickly when they see her, as if repelled. Others stand stiffly, straining to see what is there.

She has been mounted with precision to the wall. Her hands and feet are clamped in metal cleats and she is crouching. She has a fetal look, or like a frog, amphibian.

The small white card that describes her says: Bronze with Glass Eyes.

I'd like to fly up in an airplane, I tell Lilith. I'd like to fly to Spain. The sky is so dark and the moon is so lovely.

Darling, she says to me, I will take you traveling. Is it Spain you want to see? They have narrow streets in Spain that have been walked on by Moorish kings. Pack your good things and take them along, we might stay a while, there is so much to see.

In my mind my suitcase is already open, my clothes laid out on the bed, folded one upon the other in piles, my blouses ironed, the collars starched, my underpants in little squares, all neat and clean alongside my skirts and dresses. I imagine Spain as a golden place, bathed in the gold of sunlight and with golden fixtures on the buildings. I imagine dancing ladies with jet black hair and long white fingers, and young bullfighters sleek in narrow waistcoats. The bullfighters have handsome faces, handsome as movie actors.

A young man comes into the wing. Lilith prickles at his presence. I can see her nerves rising on end, a tightening across her chest, a constriction that takes hold, pressed, pressing, pressed. I can feel the irritation in her bones; her glass eyes appear to grow wider. He enters innocent and goes straight to her, and does not look at me at all, not even to acknowledge I am present. His stare is fixed. He bends like a swan to see her.

There have been other men stopped in their tracks by Lilith. I've watched them approach at first unmindful, glancing carelessly at first, and then they are suddenly struck.

But this young man is struck at once. He cannot resist touching her, runs his fingers along the dark, strong creases of her bronze shoulders.

Darling, she says to me, when we get to Spain I will buy you a dog.

His fingers pressed hard against the V-shape of her sitting bones so pretty just below her spine.

V like my name, V ira.

How furious my mother used to get with me when I was a child because I would confuse her with my grandmother. Mama, I would say and it would be my grandmother holding me. Grandmother, I would say and it would be my mother. Sometimes I would say mama and it would in fact be my mother. But then my grandmother would come into the room and I would reach my arms out for her to take me, and as I did I would call to her, mama, mama.

The young man has finished with my Lilith.

I hold to my station at the wall. There are times when I am holding there that I feel my body stiffening, becoming hard as stone like Lilith's, and the stone creeps over me like Lot's wife in the Bible. Though she was a pillar of salt. Nonetheless, I believe that salt is a kind of stone. The hardening of Lot's wife began in her feet and rose upward to her calves, the rest of her body soft and warm with the blood flowing. That is how the stone rises up in me, in my feet first and up to my legs, and upward still until it reaches my head and all of my body is calcified except my heart inside my chest beating. I imagine my heart pulsating in and out like a blinking light.

Darling, she says to me, in Spain I will teach you how to dance with castanets. You will be beautiful in your high heeled shoes with the special little nails on them. You will snap your heels on the floor click click to the rhythm of the music. We will dye your blond hair black and you will wear a red dress that clings to your hips. All the hombre caballeros will stand at the bottom of the stage with flowers and dinero and reach up to you with their arms. And the dog I buy you, we will name it Spain.

It must be a poodle, I say, a large white poodle with a long nose and delicate forepaws. In Andalusia, she says to me.

I've been told there are Gypsies who live in the caves in Spain, like the cave where Lilith was born out of earth, direct from the earth. They know the future. They can make a man fall in love with a pig.

My lover had one blue eye and one brown one. Come with me, he said, Vira. He was the eater of my life feeding on me. He was the sharp-edged piece of a broken glass. I was too young to understand the danger.

I dream I am to go on stage and sing a famous song. My lover stops me on the street as I am walking to the theater. Come with me, he says, Vira.

His face was twisted. It was the way his face was shaped. Twisted like paralysis.

I remember the face of another man, a man who was not my lover. His name was Adam Henry and he was an old friend of my grandmother. His face was gray like the plain rocks scattered out behind the house, and the flesh on it was pocked from an early sickness, and his eyes were the color of slate, and they were dead, destructive eyes, dead, dead, without color, to show his soul was dead, but hungry.

I remember once when I was five or six years old I had no shoes or socks on my feet and he was studying my toes, lifting my legs up to his lap and taking my feet in his hands. His hands were coarse and I could feel a withering in them. Adam Henry was playing with my feet as if they were kittens, I remember the way he had them in his hands caressing them, and pretending to my grandmother that it was all innocent. And my grandmother believed it so blinded by him as she was. But Adam Henry and I knew he was playing with my feet and in some way bruising them and getting pleasure from it.

Every night at dusk when I would open up the back door and go out to the yard to feed the dogs, I would see him. Adam Henry coming out

of the shadows of the trees and the fading light. And I would tell myself it was only the strange light of the dusk that made me see him, and only the added darkness of the trees. But then the darkness would move and the dogs would freeze in their tracks and bristle and bare their teeth and growl deep in their throats. And Adam Henry would jump out as clear as day with his craggy, pocked face, and his watery mouth. And I would feel the strength in the weakness of his withered hands, knowing I could not escape them, not even with the dogs.

It is Lilith they come to see. And the incidental paintings hanging in the wing with her. Darling, she says to me.

My lover made a brutish sound. I could see his mouth moving and his eyebrows arched and his eyes so very intense. He yanked my head back by my hair. Hideous man with his twisted face who left me in that small, unwholesome patch. There was broken glass on the ground. And the dark furry shapes of rats.

Today a tour guide and a group of German tourists. The tourists enter the Blanch and A.L. Levine Court in a cluster, breathless and excited, smiling at everything the tour guide says. The tour guide talks to them in German. I notice one of the women has large teeth and an overbite. I notice that. The tour guide marches the group over to Lilith and for a few minutes they are quiet and serious. But then the tour guide makes a joke and they are all smiles again. As they move away from Lilith and go out to the other wings, I hear the tour guide say: *sich wiederbeleben*.

Darling she says to me, we might go sailing on a ship. Across the high seas. Darling, she says to me.

I dream I am on a ship at sea, on my way to an ancient city. The ship sails high on top of the water, great and majestic, much higher on top of the water than it is usual for ships to sail. The captain is a tall man, strange and quiet. In the distance across the ocean are the shapes of black mountains.

I wake up knowing where I am. I think I am alone. I think I am a piece of broken glass, shining as the light goes down, the final rays of the sun. There is the smell of camphor which means that grandmother must be somewhere around.

V: Just now I could hear a voice saying to me you are not good.

Lilith: It was saying you are not God.

V: It is cold today like winter coming and leaves blowing up around the museum.

Lilith: Darling, it is warm in Spain, you'll wear nothing but a sundress. The sun will bake you. You will walk on the beach at Finisterre. The gulls will fly above you looking graceful in the air, gliding on outstretched wings, you'll listen to them screaming, you'll confuse the screaming of the gulls with the screams of the dead fishers, their bones dashed against the rocks, against the granite of the headlands. There is a wild coast there they call the coast of death.

V: I have dreams of being loose in the night. In those waiting backyards.

Lilith: The lynx is shy and nocturnal and sacred in Spain.

V: I stayed quiet so as not to rouse my lover further.

Lilith: You will march in the procession of the grief and lamentations.

V: My lover raced away like a wild animal. I saw the outline of his body hunched. I saw the shadow of his twisted face. It was no longer dusk, it was night.

Lilith: There are the long inlets along the coastline. There are forests filled with green eucalyptus.

V: I waited for someone to find me.

Lilith: The salt water washes clean.

V: It is not unusual for the rats to become your companions.

Lilith: In Spain you will go down to the beach and watch the fishing boats come in. The fishers have laid out their nets. The nets are heavy with fish.

V: No one comes into the back alleys. The desolate patches. The ground covered with waste and broken glass. No one came.

Lilith: You will dream you are dreaming.

V: I fell asleep.

Lilith: Darling, I did not notice how small your hands are, like the hands of a porcelain doll. The line of your neck invites closer examination. Across the lines of your shoulders. White White White.

V: I woke up and found the places where my clothes had been flung. I got dressed and walked home alone. My bruised body.

Lilith: In Spain you will go deep-sea diving. The starfish and the ocean flowers are waiting.

My lover played his trick on me at dusk when the dark came and everything was shadowed. I got dressed and walked home alone. The other houses had the lights turned on. The other houses had the smells of food for supper. But my own was cold and empty. Grandmother was sitting in her chair in the dark. Mother was out somewhere. The kitchen was cold. The lights had not been turned on. There was the smell of camphor on Grandmother. Vira, she said to me, come here and rub in more camphor. It was dusk.

I've learned art since working in the museum. There are things I want to do. I have ambitions. Sometimes I go to lectures, like the lecture on Seurat with all his dots.

I wrote down in my notes: air and light; even and tranquil; linear direction and surface pattern; line and color having emotive potential; slipping back and forth between the pattern and perception; shimmering on the edge of the abstraction; the frontier of the unknown realm; where he does not want to enter; but is irresistibly drawn.

When I learn to enter the unknown realm I will be able to move through walls, through solid rock, through pure stone, through the bronze that is my Lilith. I will be able to move inside her head, inside her brain, to listen to her thoughts. Perhaps her thoughts are of a dark night when she went prowling in her demon dress, the arch of her back like a cat's, the glow in her eyes like dying embers. She is mysterious, my Lilith. Perhaps her thoughts are of the desolate places she has been. With the junipers gnarled by the wind. Perhaps she remembers her husband, his hands on her flesh, insisting on this barren place, this deserted patch, broken glass everywhere, where she does not want to be. This is the position that the sculptor has remembered:

The crawling and prowling of Lilith.

The word **A**balone. A marine mollusk. It's shell spiral-shaped and perforated near the edges. Lined with mother-of-pearl. Pearl. I take you from the sea, from the grinding teeth of the oyster, where you have grown in silence, in watery incubation. Pearls worn by the museum matrons with their grim faces, glancing carelessly at Lilith, at the paintings, at the artifacts in the cases. I am becoming versed in art. I use my time well in this museum.

In the dictionary, under abalone, **A**bandon.

When I'm **A**lone at night my lover grabs for me, grabs for me when I am in my bed, when I am in my tiny city room, grabs for my ankle as I lift my feet up off the floor, grabs for my arm when it moves too near to the edge of my bed. **L**ashes out at me when he cannot reach me, his face furious and threatening and dangerous.

Darling, she says to me, it is still beautiful in Spain. There is still the golden light shining on the crested doors of the basilicas. There are still the waters, the deep marine pools filled with fish that sing their strange, elusive songs. There are still the men with their husky voices, the caballeros, still waiting to applaud your dance, to worship the shape of your calves in your high heeled shoes. You are so seductive, Darling. It is no wonder the men go mad for you.

I wouldn't be at all surprised if an artist were to come into the museum and tell me he wants to paint me. I wouldn't be surprised. I wouldn't be at all surprised if this artist were to fall in love with me. To lose his equilibrium because of me. To paint no one again except me.

Darling, she says to me, you must pull me from this wall, you must free me before they take me. You know nothing about these things. Nonetheless, I insist that you do it.

I watch the people clutching their museum guides, squinting and reading the words on the white cards. There is always a slight start when they see Lilith.

Darling, she says to me, you really must hurry to free me. Think of all the fun we'll have in Spain. We will go to the bullfights and watch the toreros. So handsome in their close fitting jackets. The torero prays before he goes inside the ring. Oh sweet torero! There is music in the streets at night. Fingers up and down the necks of the guitars. The drunk boys singing. The ladies raising their skirts. The bull sinking to its knees and lowering its horns. The sound of its dying like music. There are seductions in the night. A sliver of moon in the sky. The street lamps lit. And the moths. The kisses and pleadings. The silk sheets on the beds, and piled high with pillows. The glasses passed around and around. They kill the bull. Hurry, darling.

My lover entered first from one direction, and then from another. He followed me through the streets of the old city. But all that day it had been so fine. The sky so blue like a Spanish sky. The air like cool mist. I had been in a trance all that day. I had been the girl at school, waiting for the day to end, for the dusk to come and the streets. The act was unexpected, it took me by surprise. He was strange to look at with his blue eye and his brown one. Vira, he insisted. He wore boots. He gave out black light, not brilliant but penetrating. He yanked my head back by my hair.

I see the shadows in the alley, the jagged glass, the rats with their whiskers shivering.

Darling, she says to me, the bull comes into the fight unwilling. There are shouts from the sidelines from the caballeros. The upward glance of the dancing lady. It is a fleeting thing. The head of the bull with its horns.

My lover smiled. He told me to be quiet. He was nervous, I could tell by his fingers trembling. Trembling like the whiskers of the rats. He was excited, I could tell by his heartbeat, fast and pounding in his chest, against my chest, my shock and my terror. He did not kiss me. And he did not stop smiling.

How furious my mother used to get with me when I was a child because I tried to paste the leaves back on the trees. My work was seasonal, the magnitude of the task nearly killing me in autumn; winter spent recuperating from my exhaustion. Outside everyday in autumn. My jar of paste with its bristled brush. The jagged edge of the oak leaves. That big old oak in our front yard becoming each day more skeletal. I set to work in a fever with my burning to restore it. I wore the clothes my mother had laid out on the bed for me: the pale pink corduroy pants, the navy blue jacket with its matching tam.

I began by pasting back the leaves along the lower branches. The leaves I had gathered from the ground. My jar of paste with its brush. Applying clumps of paste sometimes to the branch, sometimes to the leaf.

But soon I had to climb up to the higher branches. Like the goats in the Los Picos mountains. Climbing sure-footed not to miss the highest branches.

Even in the trees my lover finds me. His one blue eye and his brown one. Vira, he insists. His shadow restless on the ground below. I eye him with my surgeon's eye. Through the vast territory of the trees.

Today, when I report to my job as a guard in the museum, I find a shipping crate. I find the workmen deinstalling Lilith. The shipping crate is large and made of pine with a clean look to it, open at one end like the mouth to a cave, hollow and empty inside. The address label has the words Santa Fe written on it in bold black letters. The crate is for returning Lilith; her loan to the museum is ended.

They wrest her hands free from the cleats on the wall and then wrest free her feet. She is heavy and her bronze flesh smooth; when the supports are removed they almost drop her. I see her hands glittering; the look in her eyes is fleeting. The workmen struggle to position her at the open end of the crate.

One of the workmen strains and lifts her to clear the outer rim. He presses the full weight of his body against her. He shoves and bears down on her while the other steadies the crate. There's a roll of packing tape on the floor, gray and wide and sticky. He pushes into her again and I see her body move forward.

Darling, she says to me, it will be glorious. I can already hear the music in the streets. A celebration to welcome us into the old city.

I have no heart to tell her.

Darling, she says to me, there are gypsy dancers with their eyes like fire. The heavy women race along the streets. Their hair is black and falls in ringlets. The dogs with their high pitched whelps.

I have no heart to tell her.

He drives into her again, his flanks tighten. Her hands look thin now, raised upward and dangling fragile. It is cool in the room from the air in the blowers, like a cool night, the breeze in the oak trees.

The workman groans. He gives a final thrust. She disappears inside the crate.

V: It is cold today like winter coming and leaves blowing up around the museum.

Lilith: There is the sound of the bull dying.

V: Oh . . . I've let go of the branch. I've fallen out of the tree. I've fallen to the ground below.

Lilith: Your voice is green now like the leaves. And velvet.



Chuck Light: *Mechanics 3: Synthesis*

EDWIN IOMMI

THE ORCHID'S HOUSE

It's true that I once killed
a flower that existed only
during happiness. I buried it

beyond the grasslands
of a distant wedding planet,
near the altars to the wind mammoths.

A bride from my pre-Raphaelite
sleep said the orchid
destroyed the gods who left it there.

I followed the wind's vanished harvesters
until I reached the orchid's lean-to—
it held a stillness

deep as the rage stranded
in the ruins of a rose. But it wasn't
a rose, and never would be.

Every brown garden growth knew.
And it trusted nothing. I folded and unfolded
the orchid and kept its house

from falling until that thin rage
matured among my hand's
lifeline, which always led back

to a fatal kind of joy.
And it's true—with kisses
and monogamous hellos—that I did not marry.

Nor have I produced
a single scrap of child, nothing that blooms.
But the flowers without names

make their one sound—
a wasp following the bright pink voids
from stone to stone.

translated from the Spanish by Cruz Ortiz



Alois Nožička: *Na Konci S Rozumem*

LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

MUTATION OF BATAILLE

I dreamt of touching the viscous sadness of the world
by the charm-broken margins of an absurd swamp
I dreamt of a murky water where I might reencounter
the lost road of your profound anus.
I have felt in my hands a vile unclean animal
that had fled in the night from a frightening jungle
as savage as the wind, like the black hole
of your body that causes me to dream
I have dreamt of a filthy vile animal in my hands
and I knew that it was the malady of which you will die
and I summon it, laughing at the suffering of the world.
A demented light, a harmful, hurtful light
finds in me nothing but the dead body of your laughter
your laughter that liberates your lengthy nakedness
and the wind uncovers our death
resembling that filthy hole that I want to kiss:
an immense resplendence will then illuminate me
and I have seen your pain as like a kindness
lighting up your ample and immense form in the night
the scream from the grave that is your infinity
and I have seen your pain as an act of charity
like someone delicately placing an eye
in the outstretched white hand of a beggar.

translated from the Spanish by Arturo Mantecón

LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

UNPUBLISHED POEM FROM THE LAST MAN

Valdivia has more men, more horses
and trees that spit fire and blood—
faced with the beast Valdivia, the Indian
possesses female blood.

Valdivia has Gods for whom
the blood of man counts for nothing
gods like sapless trees
that he wears hanging from his neck
but it was Lautaro's night.

And in Lautaro's night there are dogs behind the tree
and the moon lights the way for the wolves.

Enter the bearded man, the Spaniard sacking
our homes and showing his cock to the women
but he loses himself in the forest, in the dark
labyrinth of Eldorado.

They make, then, a path with blood
between the darkest of the trees
so that the man will lose himself there
because it was Lautaro's night.

In Lautaro's night the Castilian god
is less than a viper, and his body
is a pale tracing in the snow.

There, where I told you Eldorado was
is a craftsman to carve out your death
on his bare ankle are
the jewels you ask about
search for them in the night of Lautaro.

translated from the Spanish by Arturo Mantecón

LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

AWAKENING ON THE GRAVE

On the sea sands of the night
I showed my eyes to the sirens
who toyed with my cock with impunity
who undo dreams with my phallus
in the malodorous bed
and the stone of reason falls to the ground.

AFTER TRAKL (2)

Dark is the forehead of the solitary man
who wanders through the garden where the stars have died
through the motionless garden where the stars have died
and a fish
shines resplendent in the sky
indicating the path of excrement.

translated from the Spanish by Arturo Mantecón

LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

POETRY DESTROYS MAN

Poetry destroys man
while the monkeys leap from branch to branch
searching in vain for themselves
in the sacrilegious wildwood of life.

Words destroy man
and women devour skulls
with so much hunger for life!
A bird is beautiful
only when it is destroyed
and slain by poetry.

MADNESS MAKES ITS NEST

in what remains of the face
in the grimacing crooks of the mouth
and a fisherman in the night
sings to the moon, saying:
Kali, this is what I found in the dungheap.

translated from the Spanish by Arturo Mantecón

LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

HOW TO AVOID PURSE SNATCHERS

Cuca has been hollowed out. Yes. Didn't you know? They took out her womb, her ovaries, everything. Maybe that's why he calls her Hiroshima Mon Amour. Yes, woman. And she thinks that no one has found out. And in reality, everybody is pretending not to know... No, only when she's around, naturally. Yes, yes, I do believe they know. Yes, yes, woman, how can they not know? Just stop and consider what a big deal she's making out of this thing! No, no, I haven't had a hysterectomy myself. However, if I had, I would have personally told everyone because it's a most natural occurrence. No, how could she possibly wear a mauve dress? What is it with this obsession! "What if they look at her? What if they touch her?" No one's going to look at her. How are they going to see her? How are they going to touch her? What is it with you? Yes, yes, well, she says... Well, just think if she forgets to close the lace curtains all the way, and she's taken off her pantyhose... What else could the poor thing say? So right away: Boom! "The curious ones," as she calls them, will come peering in through the front window off the patio. The curious ones. It sounds like ufos or something. The curious ones...

translated from the Spanish by Arturo Mantecón

LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

SUCCUBUS

And I encountered a woman before me
and I said to her:
“I have no hair; I am a fish.”
And she said to me:
“Then you will know of the sea
that wide grave in which the Kraken swims
and where ships are lost.”
And it was like discovering aboard a ship
at night, by the light of the stars
that one is embracing the devil
that woman, the beggar’s alms
that only he could offer me
And her hand clumsily caressed
the empty sockets of my eyes
set in that sewer
I have for a plaything and for a body
and I will tell her, then
that I have had commerce with Nothingness.

translated from the Spanish by Arturo Mantecón

RONALD WARDALL

IN THE FIELDS NEAR ERAGNY

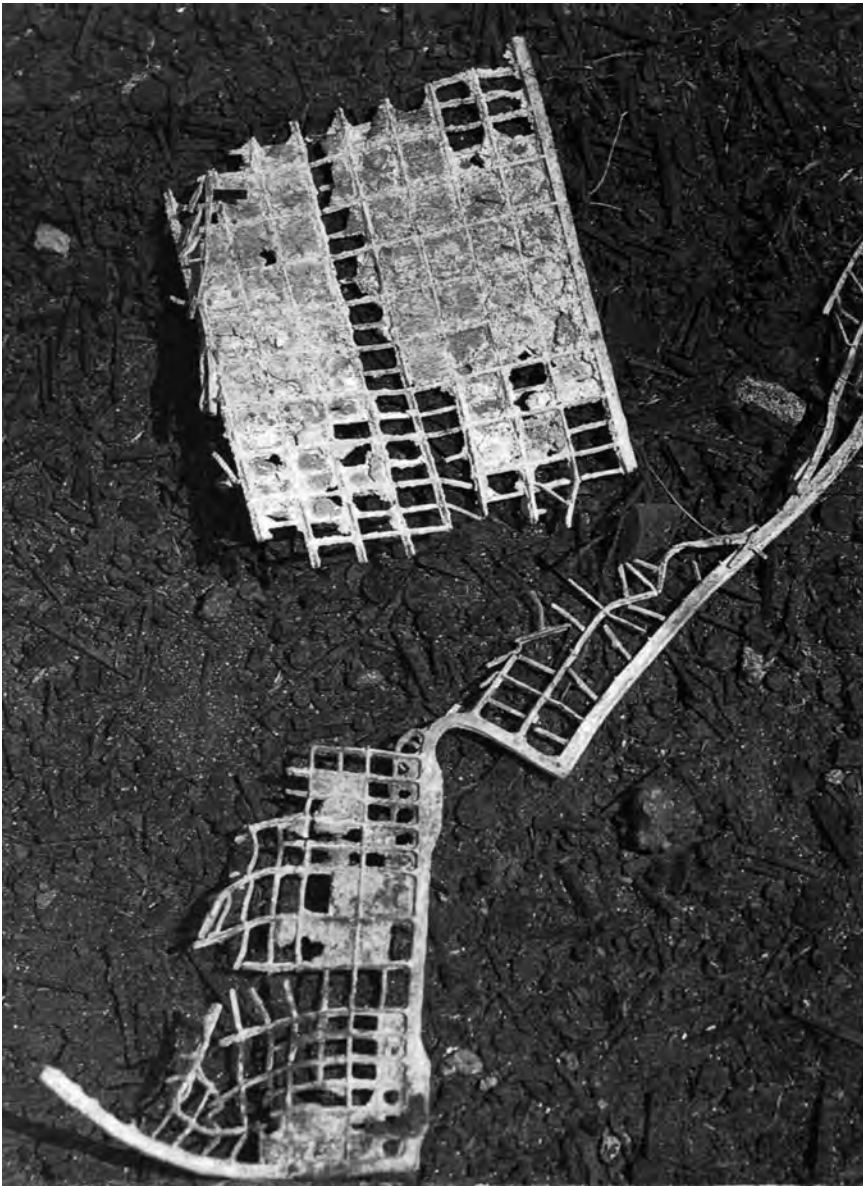
after seeing an exhibition of the work of Camille Pissarro
at the Jewish Museum

In all seasons,
weathers, hours
stilled, caught spare,
shadows about to move,
in the bone silence
the woman will put her foot down
into the brook, calm as
after a bell, or before the rain

awakens the worms
to open their mouths
and soften the earth
through the full wriggling lengths of themselves,
the secret bird to break
from the bush, against quiet layers of field,
field, trees, hill, field,
sparse peopled with those who watch

as one might watch a face,
watch to listen,
silent ceremonies of shovels and baskets,
worn as hands and prayers,
plain as cracked shoes,
clear as a cow's breath in winter,
and the light sometimes too frail
to make a shadow, a lighter gray

gently pushing against a darker gray, the light
sometimes like a pink ghost behind
the gray on gray on gray
like a promise kept to a child,
light like wings
whispering field, water, shirt, ankle, cheekbone,
a motherlight, supple and hushed,
to untie stones in their sleep.



Alois Nožička: *Kostrc*

JOHN GOODE

FROM HERE TO ROMANIA

I went on a date with the wind.

We drank newspapers under the light
of a bleeding television.

She spoke nervously of the large yellow machine
in the lot on the corner.

Doors banged open and shut.

We swept through Toledos of mauve
and woke up inside shadow states.

We followed the creaking of mailboxes,
past adderall nests and gasoline farms.

We grazed on the absences in each others' bodies.

In her aluminum-colored eyes,
I searched for my lost bicycle.

She read feather prophesies
from the lips of tumbling smoke.

We studied our StreetWise invitations.

When a young architect began to weep,
we reached into the dimension we were bound by.

I laid my head on the sounds in her chest;
my thoughts plummeting through a chasm
of peregrine fevers and coyote ash -

the long slow fire of her spine.

I could feel the bones she'd collected in her passport.

The word, "come," which she left
in a Russian birdbath.

She wrapped around me like a mood of sand.

I whispered against her neck the verses
between my wallet and electric bill.

We kissed in the boarded-up sunlight
of the last jukebox.

Our missing voices tunneling through
the endless space between us.

JOHN GOODE

LATE NIGHT WORK SHADOWS

The tattoos that skinned him
had no feelings.

There was barely any meat
left on his smile.

He dangled from the blade
of his fingernail,

and disappeared relentlessly.

He drew bloodshot eyes
on the photo gallery in the bathroom,

and followed his clothes through
tombs of overtime.

During the tequila storms,

he wired love and threats
back to Mexico.

On nights when the dining room was high,

he crept through the water
like a missing cloud.

His hair was black as oil pumped
from the bottom of his spine.

*“How many Fernandos does it take
to make a man?”* he kept repeating

into the socket of his double-jointed thumb
whenever the bartenders cursed him.

He'd hunted many lovers down
through the mirage canyons

where his grandfather hung armadillo shells
from Leviticus bones.

His brothers refused to speak
with the nightmares he performed.

But he loved the piano,
its nest of squealing keys.

And he beat it to sleep
when the Ellington chills had passed.

Words slid like sweat from
the ditch of his mouth,

words I could barely understand.

The waitresses were giant loaves of bread
to his fingertips.

He only knew he was there
if someone was watching.

Years away,

the baby Fernando, deep in its crib
of Whitesnake posters,

shakes its bottle of vulture milk,
till the moon answers,

"more..."

JOHN GOODE

THE DISHWASHER OR A DISEMBODIED VOICE OF TREMBLING FERNANDOS

*

The mops are slathered in dust.
Are soaked in piano vermin.

Stick like crosses out of buckets.

The mops walk in unison through
fields of iguana tile.

The mops kiss each other on
beds of cowboy lyrics.

The mops listen at the door
for windows of blood and coffee.

The mops drink from each other's
social security skins.

*

When Fernando enters the bus parallels
he wipes the soap from his nose.

When the alternative universe Fernando
is hunting television his Hollywood
never ends.

As Fernando dreams, the rats mark
their territories of sunlight -

as the mops of Fernando wash their
faces in toilet bowls of moonlight.

As the light in the mop turns to breathe,
Fernando collects the recyclable fog
on water's breath.

*

When all the Fernandos are thinking,
"sky, sky, sky,"

the bicycles of Humboldt Park grow.

When the silent lives of carrots
are buried in broken glass,

the pubic hair Fernandos carry flowers
up steps of glistening sperm.

When the Simi Valley Disciples
of S.U.V. Martini Sorrows arrive,

the bus stop Fernando sensations listen
to their tattoos for wind.

*

The Fernandos you've never met practice
testosterone tumbleweed paintings.

The Fernandos of steering wheel excitements
prowl their glove compartments for botany
experiments.

The Fernandos of lawn care tarantulas
won't move fast enough.

The Fernandos of New Yorker Sudanese prose
are not even alive yet.

*

The Fernandos that seed in your back yard,

and the Fernandos that bid at your
digital mini skirt auctions,

and the Fernandos that would rather not
know you;

are all the Fernandos afraid to sleep
on Greyhound buses.

*

When the mops wear masks Fernando finds
he's been asleep in minimum wage too long.

On his cell phone screen saver,
a cheetah with red irises.

In his hair, half a century of revolver oil.

In his thumb, a spine that bends
among the three star steak graffiti.

*

The Fernando of the kitchen
is high enough to forget:

The distant border vibrations crossing
the moon beneath his eyelids.

The Fernando of the tequila fugue
calling back a history of shadows.



Alois Nožička: *Twenty*

BILL YARROW

MAGRITTE

1. Introduction to Magritte

I pick Magritte up from the bottom of a star.
He is desolate with lavender.
“Who is it?” he moans, touching my wrist
with his wing. I help him to his feet,
careful of his cedar leg.
Behind his grimace he is smiling.
Like a man drowning in warm water.

2. First Experience—Dawn

We climb through a busted window.
Magritte cuts his arm. Blood drops out
like rusty pennies. A mermaid
standing on wet gravel waves to us.
He doffs his bowler.
The black paraffin that fills his head
spills out.
This always happens.

“What’s in your palm?” he asks.
She opens it.
It’s a baby oyster
covered in cobweb.

3. *Second Experience—Midmorning*

The day's as gray as a century of salmon eggs.
One sun-pocked building catches my attention.
"No," he says. "Under this arch."
We cobble our way through old streets,
pass vegetable merchants, occasional hunchbacks,
daughters yet to be consecrated.

Arriving at the pier I see a sailboat in dead wind.
"That is pathos," Magritte says,
pointing to a barnacle.

4. *The Woman*

She folds and unfolds her kerchief
folding her eyes in her lap.
Her fingers are long and drawn and thin
like hollow reeds or scabbards.
She is all meekness, all pastel.
We see her at the scaffold
darkening in the air
where the clouds are heaving like minstrels
and the hawks watch as they fly.
Her majesty derives from open clouds
yet she derives from twilight.
We salute her in tandem
and gasp as her voice rises
and rises into our eyes.

5. *Toledo*

That evening, stepping over lengthening shadows,
we are in Toledo where the moon
appears as the white bone of a rose,
where four clouds create the horizon,
where four sounds echo through the trees.
At the curtain of the city
we come across a thin strand of finger
belonging to El Greco.

“Give that to the woman,”
says Magritte.
“She has more need of the digit
than we.”

6. *Bedtime Narrative*

And on that day, the Creator said to Speech, “What makes your skin flat like the river? I shall give you wounds to perform in your flesh so that you may never be plain to me.” And He was pleased with the lesion which He called Silence and touched His lips to the sky. That place, today, is forbidden to birds.

7. *Waking*

Now the tendon of God is stretched to plain view.
A million onions have been carried to the mirror.
Long birds fly in broken formation.
All is amethyst and milk.
Without warning the white sword
crashes down on orthodoxy.
The sky splits open like Hell’s abortion.
A Saracen sun advances on Magritte.

BILL YARROW

A PACK OF MATCHES

I

across the way
insulated from snow
by a slim cleavage in the hills

the wet nurses gossip
to the storm clouds
about the old men in the jail

on the opposite side of the lake
inky frauds seek celebrity
as if that porousness were protection from despair

twelve floors up
I sit on used furniture
and recalibrate loss

II

in the Tropic of Parkinson's
the heartless moon looks on in stupor
as the ocean catches frail meteors in its arms

outside the castle of Catholic Gnostics
the palsied rain
conspires with tattooed thunder

around the corner
a colony of ruined trees
laments a bend in the weather

then the cheaters
ever merciless
begin losing at cards

BILL YARROW

FLAUBERT

EATS BREAKFAST

they were sitting
waiting for more toast
up at him and said
has dried up your heart
louise did that
class you're just upset
come my darling
and water the desert
surprise us yet
you're incorrigible
give me your arm
look the sun is bleeding
soft guardians of virtue—
God is out walking
white bees hover

at the breakfast table
when she looked
your mania for sentences
that's not true mother
and gout and the middle
my fruit bowl is empty
let's take a walk in the garden
of my heart the future may
gustave my sun my star
yes mother I am but
the eggs will have to wait
on the flowers the clouds—
they will protect us
his dog as over us
like angels of clotted milk

TÓRRODUR POULSEN

EARS

ears
won't devastate
the hurricane
when they don't hear
you love
the reflection
less than
the shadows
of broken
branches

translated from the Faroese by Randi Ward

TÓRRODUR POULSEN

HEAVEN

heaven
has broken
my mirror
so now i
no longer believe
in seven years
bad luck
but in showers
of rain and hail
and the shadows
of colossal
sharp-tongued cliffs
frozen stiff
in the church's withering
intestines when the gospel
tolls everything to ruins
that waves
may sweep back to sea

translated from the Faroese by Randi Ward



Alois Nožička: *Stopy 055*

TÓRRODUR POULSEN

THE SOURCE

the paper
comes to life
rises up
about me
like a cage
accusing me
with my own
handwriting
that i am
the source
of all
loneliness

CHURCH BELLS

the church bells
are ringing
they want us
to forget the time
we heard nothing
but church bells

translated from the Faroese by Randi Ward

TÓRRODUR POULSEN

SUFFERING

suffering's
set
on the table
and eaten
before she's
had a chance
to beg
for mercy

translated from the Faroese by Randi Ward

RANDI WARD

SKIFF

Snowflakes fall
through withered
rustlings of red
oak leaves—
drifting
off to sleep.

DOGS

Bolting
alongside nipping
at the balding
tires' skull-bucking
shimmer.

GRANDMA

What's left of her
paces
the sagging porch
wearing
one sock crying
for the dogs.



Alois Nožička: *North Coast 2*

KENNETH FROST

THE CHASE

Coyotes float out of the trees
decked in rat coats for their full-moon
travelsong.

The flotilla bows and twists
and giggles hunger to the deer sucked
by the quicksand of newfallen snow—

these light-fingered pianothroats
trading boogie from both ends
of the keyboard, those harbor lights
trailing the guts of the full moon.

The cocaine wake of the deer's blood
grails pain to its hypnotic garden
where brain circuits are read
by a dust storm on Mars.

KENNETH FROST

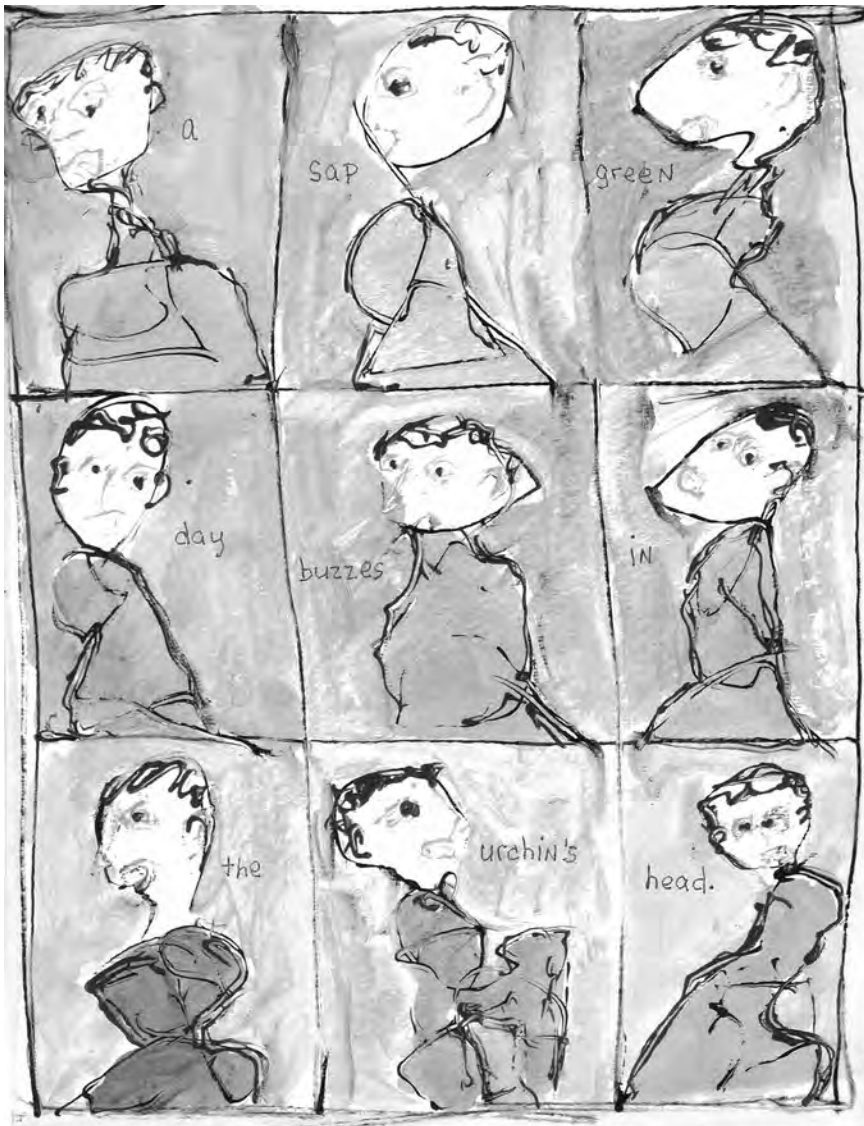
JULY MAN

Erupting
from the gaping
hole in his head,
the July man
armed with his wool cap
rides the
frothing wave
of the down
escalator back
into the hole.

KENNETH FROST

DIXIE CUPS

I live
next to the mad-
house where I glue
my dixie cup
to the real
history
of solitary
rooms where they teach
flies to burrow
into words
that flesh out
wisdom tattooed
into lampshades
of living skin.



Guy R. Beining: *Mime Matters*

CAROLYN GELLAND

SMOKE-DANCE

Halloween
smoke-dances
while my mind drools
over the cliff
like Dali's pocket-watch
pulsing its double
chins.
Darkness crawls
across a wilderness
of mirrors,
dragging
the face that passes
through walls.

CAROLYN GELLAND

DAYLIGHT

Daylight comes,
daylight and its
after-vacancies,

when nearness remains
the furthest thing from you

and you sit
in the derisory
shade of a tree
you could not even
hang yourself on,

buttoning up
curtains
of emptiness.

CAROLYN GELLAND

FEVER

His fever heated
the winter.
From their nests
in his skin,
little vampires
flew out—
lilac-colored,
red,
black.

Voices
spread their microbes
by mirrors.
They gave him
too
much
darkness
to
drink.

He collected
his dying
in
deserted
clocks
and left
with the angel,
his dog
following.

CAROLYN GELLAND

SLUM

The beaten ones
in alleys,
sitting
around
the sugar
of a
candle
on meek,
broken
chairs,
squeak like mice.

They sing
in your walls
at night,
hectic,
monotonous,
seductive,
cancel
the walls.

Not so
strange, then,
their habit
of lying
beside you
under
the blanket,
for
warmth.

CAROLYN GELLAND

MANDELSTAM IN THE LUBIANKA

In the hall of lost footsteps
a sudden holiday of hands
dangles dreams of scorpions--
their little forelegs flutter
feverish caresses,
a chance of eyes impeached,
plague-dancers
overturning chairs
in a decor of plastic curls
called voluble in my hearing.

The portals of the sanctuaries
open and close.
The demented patriarch
drinks the river dry.

MERCEDES LAWRY

MY HEAD IS A PUZZLE

How many pieces?
I can't put them together.
Why are the shapes each different?
Ge-o-metric. Luminous angles.
My words won't stay inside
the cube or the oval or the square.
They turn into wasps and beetles,
scurry and bloat into lies. I used to be
a wolf with a secret. Not now.
The ding dong rain comes down and down
and I've lost count of the hours.
My head doesn't like this.
My head is a bird. Flap.
Welter of sound, watery, water
glubbing at windows.
I say help and help and help.
Louder. Hurry.

MERCEDES LAWRY

SUPER GLUE AND OTHER GARDENING TIPS

Love lay fractured on the floor, a polished bamboo in sync with the upwardly mobile. Far too many pieces for repair. Though it began in vivid colors, love had become colorless and the pieces were barely discernible. This would be a problem for the cleaning woman who had staggering reserves of patience and yet, like all of us, a breaking point. Those responsible had retreated, hoping their trump cards still held. Singular and plural in each of the rooms. An old clock continued to tick in a guttery fashion. Last gasp is what comes to mind. Love and its embodiments constantly fleeing or searching for a small patch of dirt where they might shove down roots and risk survival.

JULIET COOK

SAINT LUCY EYES

1.

Martyr mouths to be filled and then stomped on

body parts to be pried open poured into
choked gagged dragged stabbed left for dead
who cares they're just objects with holes

2.

Dredged out suppurated glitter head

pull off all the legs of that daddy long legs
stick the un-moveable circle in a shot glass
until it dies into a tiny eyeless skull
or a disembodied eye to be inserted
into an empty slot, another ripped out hole

3.

If you just add water it might rise up and grow
new eyes and open them, until you shove it back down
into the hot poison cauldron and watch

Purple brain flowers burst out

JULIET COOK AND ROBERT COLE

COPY AND PASTY MY EYES

The hollow cartilage comb surveys a new red pasture to sector.
It's in that place where you tear out my eyes, then
fill the bloody holes with pasties and make me
dance like my eye sockets are broken strippers.

The harsh carapace pressed onto
my neck under the monitor's lash,
forked and heavy with red and black velvet.
Lacing down my poison inside a silver plate.

I thought tonight I might escape, but now I can't even see
except in dreams about prongs, screaming we'll shoot your eyes out,
dreams about hooks in the dark, from where the exit's soft light,
where children play, is damned by the off-kilter profile of burnt carcass.

Here, at the entrance/exist, blinding dust is everywhere.

REBECCA LILLY

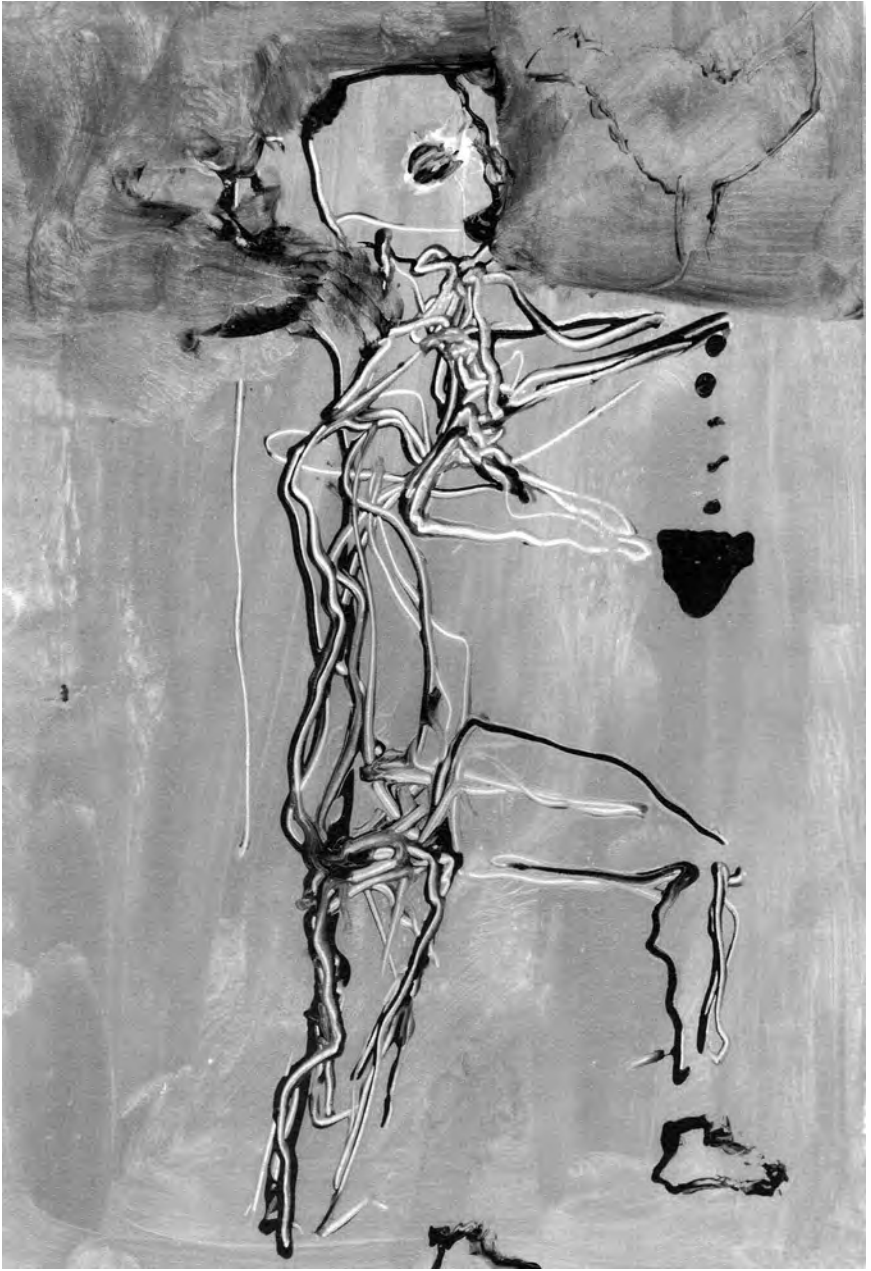
THE SPY PEAK

You see great distances from this peak; if you're alone, you hear patterns in the wind as it hits pines and cedars; here only the leanest grows.

Night spies on the sun. I've wondered often whether my soul is more in my shadow, or reflection. One is predictable; the other lacks precision and detail, but has the drama of enlargement. You have to figure its strategy to shape-shift and disappear if you opt for the chase.

The danger of reflections is falling in, as Narcissus did, while the risk of a shadow is in losing it, for the shadow has its disappearing acts and wanderlust.

"Night is a bandit who steals both," said the wizard, who trekked up the mountain with me and taught me to see wind flutter in the pine groves. "There's no less truth in shadow than reflection, but a shadow must be known with eyes closed."



Guy R. Beining: *Transforming*



Guy R. Beining: *No More*

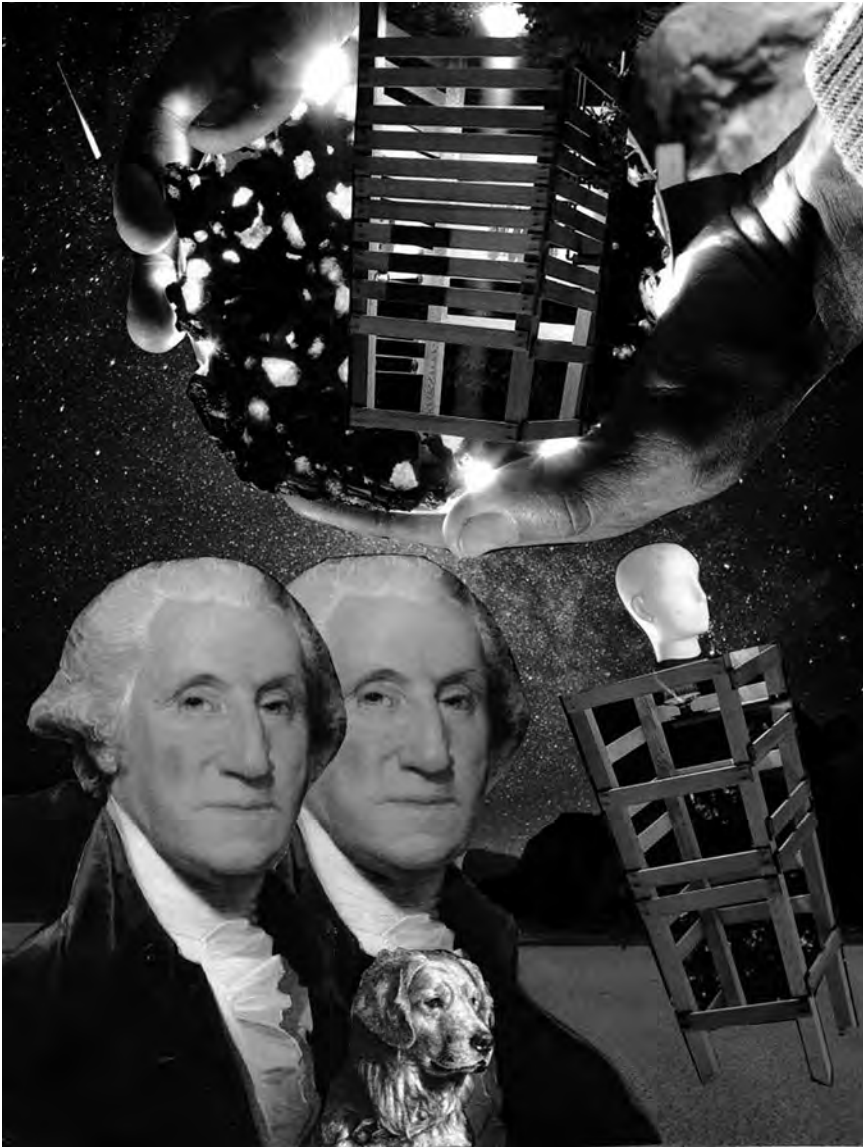
JEFFREY MACLACHLAN

DYSNOMIA

Disorder that causes difficulty recalling correct words

Woke up from CAT Scans and need a napkin to see myself. Need to mellow with just a little pipe caffeine. Honey just pass some black and trash from my canteen. Everyone hear that fork-lift falsetto whine? My head is filled with second-class smoke. CAT Scans wooze and stagger. I lost a bar brawl in there. Most of the mechanized bears chainsawed power strips and compacted decanters into glass globes. I hung upside-down from the ceiling and spun my pupils. Napkins with water rings open holes to my dreams. Inside are bent chain fences and bloody lots overgrown with blue weeds. Everyone sips liquid codeine cold from contrail ice. When do jet planes get CAT Scans? Presidents? Peso kites?

CAT Scans pinch napkins
with crumbs of brain that arrange
into doorway beads.



Richard Baldasty: *Doppelgangers in Space*

PAUL B. ROTH

NEW CONSTELLATION

Creekwater in your cupped hands is stilled. A full moon drips through your fingers while drinking. Its light behind a face without features embraces and brightens the shadows that surround you from within.

Stars migrating atop fence posts, leave nothing behind when unknowingly you touch their absence and with both hands feel the sensation in your fingertips has little to do with Earth and everything to do with these stars becoming all ten of them.

PAUL B. ROTH

NEW MOON

That sliver of light javelined through winter's dark pines is the new moon. Out walking, you watch it flicker through snowy winds strafing these pines' old golden cones and needles. Reaching up, you pull this new moon down, slip it inside your vest pocket and then, at a half-run, sneak it back inside your house. Who would notice it missing on such a night?

At home you have many other moons of all sizes: full ones, almost full ones, half ones, eclipsed ones, quarters, crescents and even newer ones than this new moon. All you've collected lines up or leans against each other in no particular order along every bit of high wall space available. It's not as bright as one would imagine, for in the sadness of their capture, each moon's had no choice but to reflect light unto itself from dark skies, indifferent waves, and even the bowed heads of blackened sunflower fields. For this reason, many invisibly shaped moons lay in varying degrees and disarray around the house.

Of course, any new captured moon knows right away that any dark sided ones, come early November, will be dumped by the trailer load into rotting corn and pumpkin fields. Each does its best. Entangled by stringy vines and bent stubble, late fall's heavy rains further dissolve the soiled edges of these disfigured moons. Where you stumble, sleepwalking rocks remind you of how many more there are than just this one.

PAUL B. ROTH

DAILY

As an unheard man who sings himself to sleep, who keeps himself company in the darkness of his own blood flowing through nights without end, you don't know another voice exists outside the range of your own, so when hearing your echo are stunned at how unlike yourself you sound.

Where you see yourself less and are no more, all familiar songs crumble the instant your lips part to sing them. You long for the voice you've been missing to return, but after so much waiting for the perfect rendition of its remembered sound to occur, nothing occurs.

Even the puzzles your hands create have no possible solutions. Being empty, they too have nothing to lose.

PAUL B. ROTH

COUPLING

With a crow for a heart who prays between her wings and hides her silence high in dense spruce nests, the woman you love remains unseen. Although she knows where you are, your whistles for her attention never draw her in.

Sour dough toast leftovers, shaped the way Klee tiles float in space, are avoided as long as you're in sight. No matter how excitable her delicate plumage becomes with each glimpse of your approaching wings, her heart can't help but fly away.

Not convinced forever's gone, you glimpse it when her nakedness covers the sun yet brightens the entire earth all at once. Ever since, there's been no darkness. Ever since, only the living have gone on ahead without you. Ever since, no one's sent back any word of you, of her or how unimportant your love's become.

PAUL B. ROTH

HAND ON THE DOOR

A hand's on the door, a breathing that pushes the limits of your silence, and so you dare not move, dare not swallow or breathe too deeply. There's no knock, just the light pressure of a hand on the latch and a flickering shadow sliding back and forth in moonlight fallen under the closed door as though silence competed on either side to see who could be quieter.

You don't move until a nearby dog's sudden barking hurries the other's footsteps down stairs and away from your door. So relieved no one's attempting to share your silence after all, you fall back to sleep unaware and without hearing your lock click quietly open.

Never before has your room been entered. Some have knocked politely, a few more profusely as if impatient or in an emergency, while still others have rattled the handle or left excessive messages about services they'd provide if only you'd be more civil and open your door, your heart or, for that matter, your wallet to them.

It seems no one standing above your sleeping body has any intention of waking you. When satisfied with your silence, each backs out until, at the very last, and lagging considerably behind, the very youngest of their children forgets to close your unlocked door behind them.

PAUL B. ROTH

EVER'S PAIN

With each turn of the earth an unmistakable pain shares all who exist.

Like most everything else, you live from one such pain to the next. At times it appears healing ignores you. If only you could believe your body was not against you. Why the pressure to stay alive when there's so much suffering to undergo in exchange for a less than occasional sampling of relief?

You prefer no one else know the pain you've known when your own face's wince mimics the snow leopard's extinction stalking an uneven horizon piled high with spent cartridges and that unmistakable puff of nuclear litter.

Not that oil soaked pelicans make you feel any different when, left at gravity's mercy, they're tugged well below the gulf's rainbow painted many sand, black oil, blood, and money colors.

With each turn of the earth an unmistakable pain shares all who exist.

PAUL B. ROTH

THINGS CHANGE

Although the darkness you touch near the uppermost corner of your doorway bleeds from your empty hands, it's not the bleeding of blood that bleeds, but the shadows darkness bleeds around the urban hearts Caracas, Cairo, Kuala Lumpur, Chicago, São Paulo, and Islamabad slum children palpitate for risky sex, single-shot pistols and the snug-tight tops of brushless glue pots.

Having never noticed so dangerous a darkness before, your wide open eyes witness nothing else. Into every man-made light, every natural phosphorescence, long dead star, shrinking moon, seen and unseen meteor shower, it seeps until its own flash, having had little effect on brightening any child's life, leaves nothing but its selfishness behind.

Stretched under you is a ragged mat across vast yards of concrete where tens of thousands of others on threadbare mats just like yours are but children demanding the innocent rules of their own new vision be enacted. So much older now and with nowhere else to go, you seem unconcerned about your safety when they come and take you away.



Richard Baldasty: *No Place To Hide*

TRACY THOMAS

VOLATILE CRAB VIII

There are several cacti in the yard over there that are actually some sort of primordial idols called scabs of the earthwound. They're serving up black pomegranates on antique silver trays. They're killing puffins in the foxtails.

That's what I was told by the Dime Store Pariah. She just showed up one day in the quiet neighborhood of my mental states and harvested eggplants from the lake. Now I'm just a disseminator of the literature of driftwood, the self-help books for road kill. The Dime Store Pariah was on vacation with stolen Brahma. She was attempting to navigate the rough terrain of my mood swings when down in the hollow rustling with cattails and lunch pails, she noticed the wreck of some machine for enumerating all our failures. She found herself at the place where some love affair had fallen to earth. She proceeded to traverse the monotonous dross of life with the plethora of rebellions she had borrowed from the other human race, the one made of dead flowers. She was not able to think in the abstract. All she was able to think about most times were five white hummingbirds carried away like milk. She had only just recently discovered that she was alive in a pile of leaves on an exclusive golf course. Her memory was apparently a victim of a crusade or some other papal bull but the piranhas of her heart lurked in the little tropical pool of her emotions. The sun was in Aries so she had a large black beetle creeping around the surface of her thoughts. It was a mobile apartment building for stowaways and other dreamy miscreants. She was the martyr of snipes, the duende of lost car keys which always return to where they were lost.

The Dime Store Pariah returned home, which was the sailboat, La Evangelista, wrecked on a mountainside above a southwestern desert. She kept records of all her returns. There was an entire lifetime of returns and she liked it that way. A return to hyacinths mutilated by cheap toys, a return to the Bedouins fly fishing among the aspens, a return to the bamboo grove which is a roof for the louvers of hell, a return to the weather vanes of nothingness, a return to the jack-in-the-box song of the blackbirds. These returns were the only things that kept the heavy shadows of oblivion at bay. She could hear the honking of a flock of geese lost in that oblivion. Shh

can you hear it? If not, they'll be flying over soon enough. She could hear the sighs of old friends that she had lost touch with in that oblivion. There were mincemeat pies which belong there. There were earrings in the shape of an afternoon monsoon, after which you make love until you stop breathing. There were sinkholes with only one iron claw protruding from the deeps. There was a child in a desolate tower holding a bowl containing one white fish like a messiah. There was the moon which is a quail's nest. There was a pile of ice and dead creepers. There were my words melted into a wax to plug my ears so I'll never hear them again. All I'll have are thoughts inside this cage. They'll enact miracles from there. They'll take entire cities on vacation. All I'll ever feed them is the sound of a night train at 3 a.m.

One of those thoughts is a sunny room where the Dime Store Pariah sat sipping mint tea. Outside the window the garbage truck hauled away some enormous beast that had fallen in the storm. This beast never knew where he was, where he was supposed to be. If you asked him at anytime in his life where he was going, he wouldn't know, or if he knew, he was wrong. The beast always watched lovers from a distance. He watched meat floating in the sea. He always smelled perfume in the breeze. That's how he knew he was alive.

The Dime Store Pariah was reading a black newspaper with white words. These words told her plentiful things. Things that needed to stay buried. Suddenly her sunny room tumbled down the hillside right into the surf. It was actually a white cardboard box she had decided to spend the afternoon in until the lemmings arrived. She crawled out of the box covered in mint tea and seawater and looked to the top of the grassy hill to see what had caused the mishap.

Standing there was Archtypo with hands over his heart. "Sorry, it was an accident. I thought you were going to doze off just about sunset and then you and your box would drift away in the sea breeze like a runaway kite and when you'd awake, all you'd see is stars above a cloud-coated sea because you would have sunken into the pages of the abyss, where all the greatest masterpieces go. But that's not what happened at all, was it?" he asked.

"No it's not, instead I climbed back into this white cardboard box, which had become some sort of white underwater sea bird and what was kind of nice is, it was named Albigen, and it still had a window. And then the bird dove into the sea which was actually the pages of the abyss where all the greatest masterpieces go. Once into the depths we came upon an enormous black beehive which also had windows. Through these windows we could see various occurrences like what usually happens at these depths. Inside one there was a greenhouse where all the plants were engulfed in a symphony of flames while knights in suits of armor wandered about calmly watering the zinnias with watering cans. Inside another was a flock of cranes in mid-flight but they were surrounded by the ornate frescoes and

friezes of a cathedral basilica. Another contained a blossoming cherry tree; its leaves and falling petals serenely fluttering in the breezes of Corvus and Crater. Then there was a pot of coffee but when the lid was lifted an orchestra was busy interpreting the hiding places of the red anole. Then, there were horesetails growing inside someone's head but it was impossible to tell who because the window was steamy and the ruins' moss-covered walls obstructed the view. In another we saw a pool that contained a prison door factory in its green glowing depths, the remains of the biblical flood. We then dove into an incredible undersea valley growing with trees that gently waved in the slow sea currents and which were hanging with pastel colored fruits. These fruits would occasionally break loose and rather than fall to the ocean floor, they would begin to ascend to the surface, but before they rose completely, they would burst releasing certain myths enumerating all the ways you can waste time. We continued to dive into this valley. And after a while it seemed not an undersea valley at all but an immense cavern and we weren't under the sea anymore but gliding through dank subterranean air of the stars beneath the ginkos, the stars beneath the land mines and we were the sea of bones, of exoskeletons, of protoplasm, the aurelian mind rift in the verdant torrent of the fleshstorm helixing immaculate plasma spire crested ridge horizoning the salt rib tendril open and petraflowing germination organray of the bright bottomind”

The Dime Store Pariah continued to catalogue the possibilities, but Archtypo was afraid, so he erased her story, except this fragment and he then became the brightest ray of sunshine beaming into her sunny room while she sat sipping mint tea and the garbage truck hauled away the beast that had fallen from above.

TRACY THOMAS

VOLATILE CRAB IX

Here I am approaching middle age and I can see better already because the gray stars of mystery are currently engaged in the process of gouging out my eyes. I see the escaped goldfish peeping at me from the birdhouse. I can say things too because my tongue is being pulled out by the aura of fallen blessings so I'm arriving at some of those black questions. In fact, I was considering one of those questions in infinitesimal detail when a group of glue gun wielding cannibals boarded the bus I was riding at 17th Avenue and Washington. I guessed they probably weren't from around there by the human finger bones they wore in their noses and they didn't seem to care for public transportation or at least the seating arrangements either as they immediately glued a man's mustache to his little papillon. I attempted to ask them where they were going in what I thought was their language but my attempt at parley only infuriated them to the point of ripping off my eyelids. Uncomfortable with this latest development, I politely asked for an audience with their chieftain so I might lodge a formal grievance but before I could do so, the doors opened for the next stop and some troubadours danced on board.

And then things really started getting out of hand with eating of human flesh and singing of cansos with lute and tom-tom like some medieval primeval festival. I knew I had to take action immediately when they attempted to glue my nomination for the Nobel Prize in Literature to the ass of the village idiot, so I called Emergencia on my cell phone.

"Hey, it's me Trace. I'm living in this here piano." But it wasn't Emergencia on the other end, it was the gray stars of mystery that had recently made me blind.

"No, I'm sorry, I can't see you anymore and I have good reason. Hold on a minute." The rolling carnival (actually it should be carnisal, i.e. hello to meat, rather than good-bye: see etymology of carnival for clarification) forced me to interrupt my conversation.

"No, I don't want to learn any of your fucking Provençal love songs." I admonished the flesh eating poet wassailers.

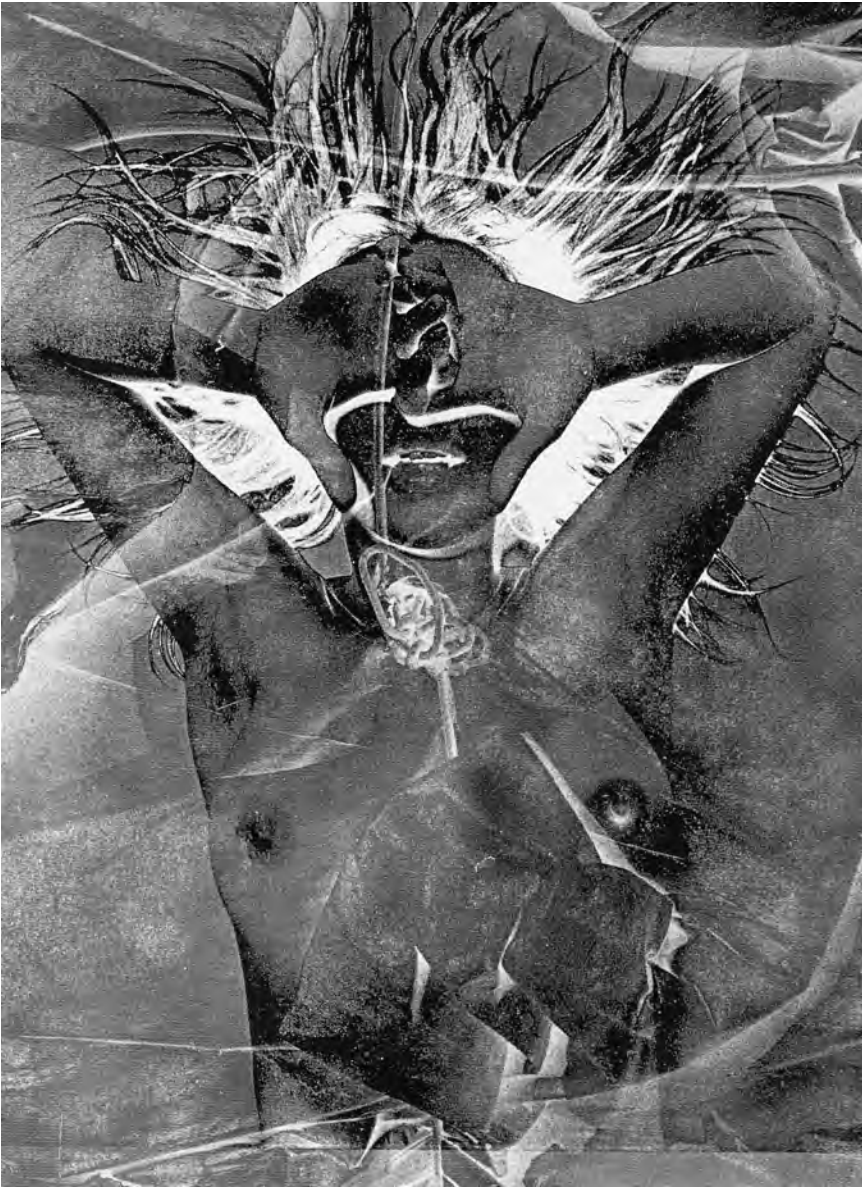
"Sorry about that, but I've finally launched this blue lantern on the sea. I can see it all the way to the vale of the world. I can see it all the way

to where the skeletons of meadowlarks fly. And the dark eye of earth is watching too. It watches it pass through the ninth journey of the evaporating hermit in flames. It watches it dangle like blue fruit from the branches of the holy rood. Now it sees the cerulean sleep of hedgehogs, the azure mandala of the bottom of it all, the wombr crater human. It lies on the gray birdcall of gaping but it can't sleep because something's burning in the attic; something's tangled in the meat of things, the viscera of breath. It's the bag lady's broken Kirin. It's the eye of the torn phallus. It's rape in the red heather. It's the song of the blue frog of nothingness. 'How much black wine will pour from this jug?' asked the man of fishbone house. You can retrieve your poem from the offal, from the shadowmeat, from the burning hair and bone of day-in-day-out, then tell me about the lapis bees of sunlight among the jasmine. Just once let that wild heathen tongue lick the sun and that mind of yours like a cemetery full of the palimpsests of lives. The limousine pulls up with all the maggots from the core. They spiral away with the green efts of twilight scents, the blood whisperers, the spawn of urban hum, all desire's blue moths in a whirlwind of flame. All in the light of a floating lantern in the running salmon rain." The gray stars replied by having me answer their phone.

"Good afternoon, this is Whatever-the-fuck-you-want. How may I direct your call?"

They had me open their mail too. It was the typical mail of infinite things. It was letters from the set of teeth in the abyss to the ancient treasure lost in the bromeliads. It was the flutter of the bible ribbons. It was love's blue glow in a window we could've known. I filed their bird's nests of dead violets, their rainbow moons of blood, their child carried away by scarabs. I made copies of their holes that dreams fall into, their water cooler taboos, their almonds of the dead, their horrible bird smears on life.

Finally I had enough, so I quit and wandered into the darkness which is more frequent on the edge of town, into the arid darkness full with the clicking of geckos and the whir of night insects beneath the arms of saguaros and the dark soup of the stars. I wandered into the darkness until my eyes desiccated into chromatic ingots of rain. I wandered until my tongue fell out like the slag of the overworld. I wandered until I vomited black questions, until I was the fountain of black questions. And they devoured me.



Alois Nožička: *Strach 2 Vysetrovac Melody*

STEPHANIE DICKINSON

HOUSTON INSOMNIA

* You *

I call myself *you* here because it's hard to believe that this *you* was ever me, ever I, the singular first person.

* Blue Dawn *

The Trailways bus is just now pulling into Houston and the islands of skyscrapers surrounded by spaghetti bowls of interstates glitter in the steamy darkness. It's still hours before dawn when you crunch the last ice in your Styrofoam cup. The air conditioner sends up a chill mustiness that smells and feels like a cold sweat. Your head that has nodded against the pillow of the window—the scratched plexiglass where thousands have rested, breathing their stale sleep—awakens from its stupor. Hours you've ridden from Austin through the night and the great space that is Texas, listening to the snorting of the air brakes, the stopping at flyspeck towns, the squeak of the driver's seat, the unlatching of luggage, and the carrying in of boxes to darkened gas stations. Towns stop you from ever arriving. Conroe. Magnolia. Giddings. Towns whose names cross your path like jackrabbits fleeing the glare of headlights. Lagrange. Humble. Your body aches from the bus's worn shocks. Around you other travelers—young Tex-Mex guys, welfare mothers with their kids, skinny shot glass men who've lived hard and now at the end of their run sit slumped in their seats coughing a lung. The blue bonnets stampeding down the middle of the interstate try to fool you into thinking wildflower-blue, but the earth is a scorched brown, and the sky hoards its rain. Conway Twitty sings to an earthscape, racked like barbeque spare ribs.

* Texas Street *

4:00 a.m. on Texas Street and you've staggered into the depot carrying your red patent leather hatbox. Sunday, left hours ago, has reached blue Monday and the magnolias still open are already closing—a thickness you can swallow—the sullied odor of a too-sweet sock. Bus women shift in the peach orchards of sleep, their rope-tied suitcases like clefted buttocks under their feet. He walks toward you: wide-awake, tall, late twenties, not

handsome, not ugly, smiling widely. He's dressed in black jeans, a tee, a good-looking antelope-colored suede jacket. The janitors have returned from their break and lift the long poles of their mops, the greasy eels drowned in Pine Sol. He's come looking for a match to light his cigarette. In the depot no one complains of second-hand smoke, no one notices. He's looking for the marks, the easy ones he can talk into his ride parked outside, next to the junked vehicles with crushed rusting wings. Surely, he already knows the ones to approach, the ones who never learned to say no, who only wear tight clothes, the fatherless ditch girls who move to the city to be noticed, the ones already damaged [i.e., like you shot at age eighteen and now twenty-five, your left arm paralyzed and disguised by a fringy lace shawl,] already shouldering a visible weight of regret and mistakes. You can talk moonlight through wasp-bitten lips to hide your disfigurement.

* Newports *

"Can I trouble you for a light?" he asks as he drops into the plastic chair next to you. An unlit cigarette balances itself behind his ear. He pats his jean pocket. "Oh, sorry, I've found my matches." He lights a Newport, offers you one from a pack. You take it and inhale the minty smoke. The floor's a checkerboard of black and white. The ladies room is up an open staircase, its banister a grillwork lattice of 1920s elegance. "Where are you heading?" he says with a smile.

You tell him you've arrived; Houston is your destination. "And what about you? Where are you going?"

"Nowhere." He flicks his ashes with a long fingernail. His nails are short except for his two indexes. Tallowy, manicured. Like weapons or drug spoons. "I go part-time to the University of Houston." You'll learn that he's no student. So this is what a lie sounds like on the lips. Like truth. He suffers from insomnia and comes here when he can't sleep to talk to people. "So what do you do?" he asks. You tell him you're a teacher. You don't tell him you're a lover of books and strong coffee, of fruity words dipped into rose petals and glistening sentences, the wet red of a girl's lips against the white stem of her throat, paragraphs scribbled in the dialect of flesh. You don't tell him it's your first real job after getting your MFA in poetry. A personal enrichment degree, your mother thinks. To teach the profoundly retarded at a private school, a Master of Fine Arts will do. "A teacher," he repeats. Laughing, he looks at your matador pants and heels. His eyes are black pools drowning their irises in purple, amaretto liquor. They forget something; they travel you up and down, from thighs to knees, to your feet and back up. "What do you teach?"

You let him know you've seen his disbelief. "I'm going to change clothes in the bathroom and go straight from here to work. I'm waiting for it to get

light. I start at 7:00 a.m.” The Center for the Retarded on West Dallas, Google it and you’ll discover it recently changed its politically incorrect name.

* Archives *

A girl is lying in a puddle of water. On the last day of January, 1930, east of Tomball, Texas, the dead body of a 16-year-old girl is found. Suspicion points to James Irwin. He is captured and taken to the place of the crime. Tortured, mutilated, and then burned. Great crowds ride out to see the body.

* Parallel Universe *

He asks if you get high. It’s crystal or crank (methadrine) before the big media blitz, before the Meth brand, when it’s still a biker/bathtub/Galveston connection. He wants to get you buzzed. It’s under the radar while cocaine and crack are all the headline rage. You’ve always liked fast and since the shooting you live in a pill world. The fire in your left arm from shattered nerve endings keeps you ever vigilant for ways to mute pain. “You have enough time,” he says with a watch glance. “Let’s go to my place and get high, then I’ll drive you to work.” The lure of crystal. A South African diamond. A conifer singing to the sunrise. You stand, letting him carry the red patent hatbox through the swinging depot doors. You follow him out into the charcoaly burnt-up night of Texas Street. The icehouse dregs where the men and women in purple bedroom slippers watch for the dawn and now switch from beer to coffee. The Houston sky waits for that first blaze of hot blue. The humidity is 75 percent and 102 degrees at 5:10 a.m. by the Allied Chemical Bank. Mockingbirds whistle at you.

“By the way,” he says, “I’m Larry.” Not Lawrence. Not Leonardo. Not Layton. Larry.

He unpockets his car keys and crosses the street. In a parallel universe, which physicists postulate there could be millions of, the car still exists, as you do, the 25-year-old who should know better. Nothing mathematically prevents it. Perhaps Larry has a different, richer name there—Lionel or Leopold. In that universe the girl who is you passes the aqua-painted storefronts and empty lots, the nine-foot fence where homeless men lean, nursing beer quarts in brown bags, and that girl walks past the rib shack—its open pit garbage-can cookers sizzling breakfast brisque, the smoke rising—and keeps going, doesn’t willingly nibble the fat worm-wrapped fish hook, follow a stranger, get into his car, and bite down.

*Liz *

Monday's exhausted classroom of the profoundly retarded with autistic overlays lies before you. A week of preteens in diapers, none able to speak, some hum the music of drool, others groan and giggle, rocking, comforting themselves. There are other teachers like you. Single. Imports from the North. The clean ones like Faye Fish you love right away; with the dirty ones the love takes longer. Like Andrew Dickey, the doctor's son suffering brown lice in his eyebrows, who lives in a locked room at his father's manicured River Oaks home. Asking Anna Gomez to follow a penlight with her tawny lynx eyes, back and forth, while she stares over your shoulder into the wall, you watch the beam and hypnotize yourself. Theresa in her upside down sunglasses. Liz, a cretin, welded into blue stretch pants and saliva-soured pink turtleneck. Hair is her poetry, her drug, her sex, her fascination. Her transcendence. Why the gleam in her deep blue eyes when she stretches a single strand of your long hair between her fingers? What is it Liz sees? A silken stallion? Leaf shadow? Why does her heart pound against her ribs when she makes a loom? Sweeping the floor with her fingers, she collects hair on their wet tips. Her head's half-bare but for baby-fine wisps of chick-yellow. All her life she's pulled out her hair, playing with it, tasting it. Blue eyes like dark violet pools of water, startlingly beautiful. How stunning Liz is in the parallel universe where her brain awakens, her thoughts shimmer like moth wings, and her hair's a blond waterfall. Here her wrists smell of lotus blossom, not crouching on all stinking fours, as she scours the floor for hair prey. A long dead day ahead in the universe of soiled diapers and puzzles no student can fit together.

* 5:00 a.m. Sun *

He fits the key in the ignition and a woman on the radio sings in a thick voice like a pillow that wants to pull you into papaya and mango, the sweet sob of the tropics—orange too orange, green that tastes pink. The street where you live flashes past and he begins to whistle a birdsong of perfect white incisors. On Westheimer the sun is the color of a flesh wound. Like the hummingbird thrumming of your heart in love with the interstate's jitter.

Cleveland Drive. Washington. Jefferson. Streets named after gone presidents where fists of men—Mexicans, Guatemalans, Columbians—line up for day labor. Dawn-strong roosters but after a day in the sun pounding nails, they'll shrivel becoming red-pink like the bleeding heart flowers on your grandmother's farm, their flesh-stems trembling in the sweat rag of 5:00 p.m. Houston, the most air-conditioned city on Earth. Gateway to hell. Elevators high as skyscrapers, prefabricated apartments, thrown up, flash and scurry by. Everywhere there's construction, a hunger

for walls, sliding glass patio windows, queen-sized mattresses slabbed between plywood bones. The whole country is searching for work in Texas. Iron workers, beer bottlers, refinery workers, wildcatters, roughnecks, bargemen, longshoremen, water diviners.

* Nursing *

Lamar Drive, past the strip shopping centers and Used Auto Parts where you've forever arriving in the gutlessness beyond the Dunkin Donuts and dusty magnolia trees. "I live here with my sister," he says. Two tiers of apartments painted brown and thrown up around a parking lot. Box air conditioners hum from each unit. Azaleas snuggle against aluminum window frames. A baby is crying as you climb the stairs.

She's sitting at the round kitchen table nursing her son when the two of you walk in. A young woman with espresso-colored curls glances up. Her visible breast—a fallen fruit where her baby smacks his milk and claims her as first food. Nipple shellacked, you glimpse kiwi with its aureole of dark sheen and seeds. She's taken one look and without a word to her brother (or boyfriend or husband) starts packing: tote, diaper bag, car seat. Between the siblings there seems to be Medusa's snakes, brother telegraphing his sister to leave. Jars of Gerber skitter over the Formica of the dinette, strained carrots and beets, apple sauce, thud. You listen to her disappearing into the boom city of grain elevators and icehouses, of glass towers glinting like enchanted kingdoms.

* Confirmation *

He opens the refrigerator and reaches in the butter slot for baggies nestled in white rice. You flip through the *Houston Chronicle*. A beautiful eight-year-old girl in her confirmation dress touched the third rail of a train. "Come on, let's go party in the bathroom," he says. Why do beautiful eight-year-old girls in their confirmation dresses of eyelet lace and taffeta touch third rails? Why do these angel girls die and your kind survive?

* Red & Black Bathroom *

The bathroom is luminous: blue projection lamps glow cool as pool lighting, and dried orchid petals litter the black sink and vanity. You've never seen a black bathtub, especially one where rubber ducks and squeeze toys frolic in its depths. The toilet lid and tissue dispenser adorn themselves in burgundy fur. He takes out a hand mirror, a bouquet of golden flowers enameled on its back, scrapes methadrine with a razor blade; it's damp and crumbles like gum eraser no matter how fine he chops it. Dividing it while

you moisten your lips and bat your eyes not at him but at it, he tells you to kneel. Barter. Bible verses begin to float through your mind. *And he did that what was evil in the eyes of the Lord.* You notice the sponge duck's webby feet. The toilet seat and Kleenex dispenser begin to sweat under their furs of red. *Likewise, when they had killed the rams, they sprinkled the blood up the altar.* Kneeling before the mirror and black sink, under the racked lighting, kneeling for the prize that makes your heart race, how glitter-sharp its edges. In purgatory you'll kneel forever in the forbidden thick red carpet, in the scarlet blood of too-salty beets. There's a scab of shaving lather on the mirror. He snorts. You lick. Eat. Taste of cat urine and yellow apples. The roots in your teeth quiver and the hairs on your neck rise. In the parallel universe of goodness you're not bowing your head over the mirror, pressing the last taste of yellow into your gums, sucking the bitterness from your thumb. Over the razor blade's edge your grandmother's in the farmhouse kitchen making strudel, draping the rolled-out dough long as cheesecloth over the table, chopping the orchard apples with raisins and walnuts and cinnamon. When your grandmother looks up, you hide your face.

* Orchard Childhood *

"Fleece," you hear your grandfather say, as he lifts you onto the sheep's back. "Hold onto the fleece." You laugh with happiness. "Ride me, cockleberry sheep. Ride me, pink-eyed bush of straggly wool." Your grandfather clicks his tongue. Through the apple orchard you ride the half-asleep old sheep with tarpaper legs. You, who will one day become a black sheep, clutch onto the white one, your fingers tangling in her wool. Slow you go through the watery falling apples.

* Grovel *

He's led you into the room where his sister stores her college textbooks; he wants to show you the beige carpet and cardboard boxes, the peculiar room with a door that bolts from the outside. When he leaves to get his cigarettes you try to follow him and discover he's locked you in. Left alone you think it's a joke. You read titles. *The Aztecs and the Making of Mexico. Red Star Over China.* He returns dressed only in a hooded Joseph's robe of many colors—woven grapes and maroons and dark blues. Was it Israel who adored Joseph more than his other sons, because he was the child of his old age? There's an ashen shine to his knees as if he'd rolled in Lent ashes. He opens his robe and pushes you onto your knees against the box of textbooks and enters you from behind. *For this reason I fall on my knees before the Father.* Face the box, stay on your knees. Under your lids there's

a snarl of fuel pumps and jumper cables, of overgrown okra and broken bottles. You imagine the sister's come back and sits at the plywood dinette nursing her son, rocking him, cooing the name *Wand*, soft sounding as breeze over the orange-billed place mats. Again he takes you against the boxes, your face bruising the books you're up to your elbows in.

* Box Room *

He's brought you a Coke, to ease the hard ball of spit from your lips. He's still wearing his robe of many colors. He doesn't want to see your face when he uses your body. Not this Lancelot or Lazarus. When he touches you his imagery rises inside you—word pictures of chokecherries, mayflies, of wasps stinging cicadas and burying them alive in the dirt for their larvae to feed on, of plate glass shattering, used salvage, tacos el carbon and lard. When he's done he leaves you to the walls that drift over your face. Pressed sawdust. You listen to the sounds of the overpass farther down the street, traffic high on the girders splashing through your head. What time is it? In the classroom they must be missing you now that the afternoon sun is starting its climb down to the horizon. It's time to take the students out to sit under the magnolia trees, the leaves, dry and flat as lunch sacks. Footsteps shuffle in the living room, then stop. A key turns, someone walks in, closes a door, lifts the chain-lock and drops it. Is it his sister? You're still thirsty. More books. *A Wreath for Emmett Till*. *The Power Elite*. You don't hear sounds of the sister or the baby, only the earth of Houston sinking and molding, oil and gas leases being traded, grain billowing its yellow dust over grade-level railroad tracks. You rattle the door. Locked. You wander. You read. Gaetano Mosca's *The Ruling Class*. *Every generation produces a certain number of generous spirits who are capable of loving all that is*. In the night he slips into the room. Not Lewis. Not Lathrop. But Larry. You hear your breaths, quick little pants like puffs of a lit cigarette, and your fingers still burning from him pushing you into the cardboard, burn again. You sleep and when you wake another Coke has appeared and a Tupperware bowl.

* The Ruling Class *

The voices of the books circle each other. ...*Such individuals make up a small moral aristocracy, which keeps humanity from rotting in the slough of selfishness*. A thirteen-year-old is run down by bloodhounds. Pines slithering in shadows of Klansman. *He winked at me*. Sun or moon they come incandescent, blue-white robes that leave behind radiant slime. You wonder if magnolias and mimosa grow just outside beyond the scholars' belch and the twitch in your eyelid. The room dreams the forests of grown

men hiding in sheets. They open their mouths and breathe out burning houses and dogwood hanging trees. Echoes of ragtime piano. Mosquitoes. Has his sister finally returned? No, it's his flip-flops cantering across the kitchen, the water faucet's hiss. You keep hoping but it's always his flip-flops walking.

* Dawn of the Second Day *

Morning and the stale light around you is the pear water of the janitor's swill bucket. Outside the locked room all has gone quiet and you try the door. You feel the pulse beating in the flesh of your neck. It's open. Slowly, you nudge the door ajar, tiptoe. Not Lorenzo. Not Llewellyn. Larry. In his hooded robe of many colors he's fast asleep on the black leather sectional sofa. You imagine his eye teeth slightly pointed sinking into the soft calf liver of your wrist and draining you pale as white apple blossoms, his tongue the maroon of stagnant slough. You've sharked the deep waters of trapped women; you've been given a taste of what it means to be ensnared. You walk through the living room and out the front door. The parking lot sun explodes over you.

I deny that the you was ever me, ever I, the first person.

ALISON KAISER

THE MAN WALKING IN FRONT OF ME

is unaware of my screaming eyes
on the flap of neck bulging
from his pressed white collar.

I saw a man I'd dated once
in his soft back.
I saw that night again in the plump
lobes of his ears. They looked so docile,
like me one night last December,
on my knees
after four Blue Moons at some dank bar
in Jersey..

Those lobes.
I wanted to pluck them
from the lump
that has choked me
since winter.

ALISON KAISER

UNDERTOW

I see myself,
finger running seems
of fraying pocket
Sunday empty, again
tugging strings
waifish, defunct, scattered.
I sew myself with night, wrestle it
like heroin, next day vomiting, achy, swollen
with the Saturday to come.
I'm not the kind of girl
men set on fire.
Not anymore.
They hide me
in the meat packing district,
stick me sloppy drunk
under a bridge.
"Open your mouth."
They spit.
"Thanks, we should do this again sometime,"
but we don't.
Maybe it was love that
locked me in the closet, that
forced me on a dirty sofa,
smacked my face for it, made me
scared to sleep.
Is that why I scrape the bottom,
ring the bell every night?
I can't seem to turn my page,
backwards or forwards, blow on the corner,
lick my finger, frantic.
It's all vanilla or it's empty,
sweet and hard.
Feed me a bite that lingers.
Grass and clay, habanero,
the blue-green veins of stinking cheese.

Shove me down the laundry chute. Smack my ass
on the way down, a small gesture to
show you care,
like coming back to eat
the downward glance of
my narrowing eyes.

MATTHEW P. GARCIA

BROADWAY BLUES ON SAINT PATRICK'S DAY

In a moment is change wrought—
Wrought with irony and love of penitential embrace
Of forgiving oneself for trespassing against oneself
Because survival after all is essential to the *true art*—

Having spent all the energy I had for the sake of the *false art*
In mourning I shaved off all my pubic hair.
Dripping water into the hallway with a straight razor in hand
I stood before a full-length mirror extending my arm
And offered myself as a sacrifice.

The conversion itself a changing faith
Breaking in increments the construct of truth—

A subtle, disseminating rupture of value and worth
Deluded—and then diminished and destroyed.

And her
And I

Are deluded as we sit in my peasant home and drink Tennessee whiskey.

“A water death is a beautiful death”

Hart Crane

I Say

Virginia Woolf

She Says

Plath must have dropped down to her knees to stick her head in the oven
Must have died on her knees—and then collapsed in broken obedience
To the *true art*—an “ugly death.”

Then it all comes back to Hemingway shooting himself
With the elephant gun, pulling back both triggers at once
The weary sot—like father
All he could get from the world
But lost the only thing that mattered.

Don't let it break
The way they've broken—in increments
Or at once, against the wind, the sea,
Carbon monoxide and birdshot
For the sake of art—in abeyance.



Alois Nožička: *On the Ground*

NITZAN BLOUIN

TERRIBLE DEATH

I leave the door open
to a terrible death.
Your arrival is delayed.

My gray hoodie,
still hanging neatly
on the bedroom door knob.

You said something
I didn't understand.
Your eyes screaming dark
though the silver square lenses.
Cyrillic words
muttered short through
your Bosphorus lips.
Waves crashing one after another.

I was shielded by the tall
sea rocks
The ones you promised we'd climb together,
but then you went to climb alone.

You broke your skull,
Instead of coming back.

I carried your ashes
up Rila mountain.
I nailed the plaque
onto a bench
looking at eternity.

Your mother never said a word.
Your father didn't dare to
look in my direction.
Just like you, sitting across
from me in a restaurant
saying you were tired
of looking
at
the
wall.

NITZAN BLOUIN

NEW BLACK

Fingers
laugh through
lies
whispered by other fingers,
none have lingered
long enough
to know
where there is
actual pulse.

There was an imprint of
a smile
on your
falling eyelids
I thought was a sign of a promise,
but your fists found me
first.

Then resumes a familiar pace
New black is born.
No type of make up
can cover it.

JON LUTHRO

TIN ANGEL

for K.P.

We bought an angel at a yard sale, on a whim. A flat tin one,
and I was fastening it to the back fence with screws. The artist
had done a good job with the eyes. She had good eyes.

But first let me tell you about the man who robbed the bank.
He was on the front page of the newspaper
and now everyone says he's a bad man,
but before this they said no such thing. In fact,
they would have said he's a good man.

He was caught outside the bank in minutes, and robbing a bank
is a federal offense, so he'll go to federal prison,
which they say is nicer than state prison,
but far worse than no prison at all.

In prison, they say, the men are shouting and yelling
all day long and even late at night,
and they also say that after many years of hearing the din
one can learn to tune it out enough to hear
another voice riding on it like a wave,

and what the voice says I don't know.
It must be interpreted by each man,

or each man who hears it, because if they listen too hard
it will go away and if they listen too loosely all they hear is din,

which is to say the many other voices are the din, except
when they are a soundbed for the true voice that is there,
but not often heard.

People can hear voices and still be sane. So when I was fastening
the tin angel I heard her speaking, but I couldn't understand
the words, even though I recognized them as English.

She spoke and I listened, and I remembered the poor bank robber
who must have mistakenly heard a voice tell him to rob the bank
to feed his family, and the prisoner who holds too tight
and hears only din.

And I thought, me too, I can hear a voice, except I don't want
to listen to an angel I can't understand,
or to one who can't be trusted to tell me the right thing.
For what is an angel but that which is shaped as such,
or that whose voice is heard only above the din?

JON LUTHRO

TWO TARMACS

In those days words and things could make other things
come into being, and could make them true.

I was aware of this when she said that all the houses were lost
in the flood, but there they were, the houses, so she had to say
it was some years ago. The flood.

The flood made two tarmacs because the good one had broken
and no plane could land on the broken lights and runway numbers.

Except there was the helicopter, and it could land,
and it did, except only to bring the governor
who made a law and said goodbye in no uncertain terms.

Rebuilding was a hazy dream, and the men drifted slowly out
of the high woods with their green and yellow boots on.

Where there was a house and now was no house
they made a new house and angled it back on stilts.
Strong to withstand with ease. The water would go around.

Slowly the river had redone itself to be narrow summer
water again, and slowly no one was afraid.

The houses built the village. The tools made fixing noises,
and trucks hauled fresh dirt to the gardens and made revving
noises and warning beeps to back up.

And more people, the elderly and frail, the children,
came out of the woods and climbed the crooked stairs,
into their new level houses.

Inside, this was the first time the people knew
they could live here, because the flowers colored the vases
and the vases did not slide off the table. Sunflowers made the garden.

But the girl who told me this was wearing the buckle kind of shoes,
and I thought surely this was why the river held safe again.

Because the boots had made the flood and no one in the angled town
could see this, except perhaps the governor, from his helicopter above,
and all he could say was the word goodbye.



Alois Nožička: *Prekonavani Bariery*

MARGARET GILBERT

THE DEATH OF KATHERINE ANNE PORTER

1

I remembered seeing it on the front page of *The New York Times* in the heat of my East Side basement apartment that September of 1980 — Katherine Anne Porter Dies — beneath a black and white picture of a glamorous-looking lady in a large hat. Oh, the pity and the sorrow of it, I had thought. Katherine Anne Porter seemed the immortal artist, someone who could never die. I tried to recall the short story by her I had read in high school about a young woman with a green purse walking the city streets in search of something lost—I couldn't recall what—just the experience of reading the story in Jim Hall's English class, his face with *too white skin of pallid hue* and hazel eyes, and the smell of the shiny brilliantine he wore to smooth down his wavy black hair. It had stayed with me all these years. I no longer remembered the title, but the images of artistic promise it had brought had died in the New York winters. It seemed as if all the things I loved were leaving my life.

2

In high school I had won all the prizes, and so I had gone off to New York. But in New York, I had sort of disappeared into the anonymity of the city, an asphalt jungle of steel and grey concrete high-rise buildings that my father had said I craved. "I know you love to be anonymous," he said. But that wasn't true at all. I wanted to be famous like Katherine Anne Porter. But I wasn't Katherine Anne Porter, and I hadn't published anything. Both of my legs were covered in ghastly purple bruises where I had fallen in an epilepsy seizure at my job at The Pierre. I wasn't a famous writer, and I was seeing a married man named Fred. You could say I was a party girl. I was the girl "whose disembodied face floated along the dark corridors and blinding signs" of night-time New York.

3

The night before last, I'd been out with Fred, was wearing too-tall stiletto heels, and a few glasses of champagne had disturbed my sense of balance. I had clumsily crashed onto a New York City sidewalk. I had laughed a little too loudly but had gotten right back up assuring Fred that I was okay. Later, crossing Park Avenue, we necked brazenly. I tottered on little stick heels, swaying against Fred, who clung to my behind suggestively. We had both had too much to drink, and we gave each other one big slurpy kiss as we staggered off into the night.

4

I was desperately in love with Fred. I felt as if I were being brought incandescently, electrically alive and at the same time killed each time we made love. I wept melodramatically thinking, I'm meant to bring love into the world, like Mary, when the angel Gabriel appeared. I was stricken each time he left. That Fred was married or that he didn't return my *feeling* made no difference to me all. It even made him more exciting.

5

Fred said he had met his wife in Paris and that they had fallen in love instantly. She was the daughter of a very famous literary critic. But she had turned out to be an alcoholic. They hadn't had sex in six years, although he said she was having an affair with J. Robert Oppenheimer. He said she called him "Opie." Now Fred would come by deep in the night with Burger King take-out and bottles of champagne, and we would get very drunk and go to bed. I always saw him late at night. But at dawn he would get up and drive back to New Jersey, where he lived with his wife. On New Year's Eve, we had gone to a movie at The Paris called *Carmen*, and during the big snow, we had stopped for brandies at Donahue's Bar. Just now, I thought of Fred and the fact that I wasn't sure I had any telephone service and that perhaps he had been trying to call me. Bell Telephone company had threatened to shut it off yesterday for non-payment of bill.

6

Yesterday, after that evening on the town with Fred, I had lost my job in the wine cellar of The Pierre. I had loved working for The Pierre. They used to send me home with bottles of wine, and my meals were free from the hotel dining room, plus they always paid me each week in cash. It was an elegant arrangement. But then I had had the epilepsy seizure at work, and had been dismissed.

7

It was my job to keep the temperatures steady and account for a list of available wines on a daily basis, but down in the wine cellar of The Pierre I kept thinking of Fred. In the corridors, there were baskets of fleshy orchids in green and purple and red and yellow on marble stands, and the halls were strongly scented with fresh-cut flowers and fragrant stalks, in urns and tea vases straight and narrow as long dark coffins.

8

I remembered going down a dark narrow corridor at The Pierre, shiny formica, a narrow office with low ceiling in brown and a tiny window that let in grey light; just like the one after my seizure at the Barbizon Hotel for Women, where I had lived when I first came to New York and worked for the New York City Opera.

9

Leslie Black of The Pierre had called me into her office. She had gold hair and very white skin and was dressed in slacks and pumps and a mink coat in the heat of the room. She always had a Southern story to tell in her droning-on voice. “Margaux,” she had said, sounding a lot like my mother in her droning-on voice, “a pretty young girl like you shouldn’t need to drink. What made you do it?” I did not say that my boyfriend had told me that this was his favorite wine, the wine of popes and connoisseurs. Much later, I realized that I had forgotten to take my epilepsy pills the night before, dilantin capsules, barges like “red-belted ocean going ships” in *The Great Gatsby*.

10

On my way to work that morning, I had seen a woman in gladiator sandals with wiry white patent leather straps outside The Viand, and that had thrown my mind into a turmoil. The white serpentine straps wound like ropes around the woman’s ankles reminded me of a scene from childhood of being tied up and beaten, and having something taken from me, like having bad sex.

11

My mind had gone blank several times during the day with the image of those strappy shoes, as I stared at the wine bottles stacked neatly in their wine racks down below the hotel with the lip of each bottle slightly at an angle. If Chef could drink hotel wine in the kitchen, I reasoned, I could also taste it down in the wine cellar.

“I poured one of those wines down the sink recently,” Fred said to me later that night as we opened the bottle of 14 year old Chateauneuf-du-Pape *from The Pierre*. “These wines don’t last.” “But I read that this wine doesn’t age,” I said. Fred’s wife had a wine cellar, but Fred declined to divulge the exact number of bottles it held, comparing himself to a priest who wouldn’t talk about how many people he saw in confession. Then Fred had confessed to me that he didn’t really drink Chateauneuf-du-Pape himself, but that he served it to his wife’s literary friends. “But I took it for you from the hotel because you said you liked it, and they fired me today,” I said.

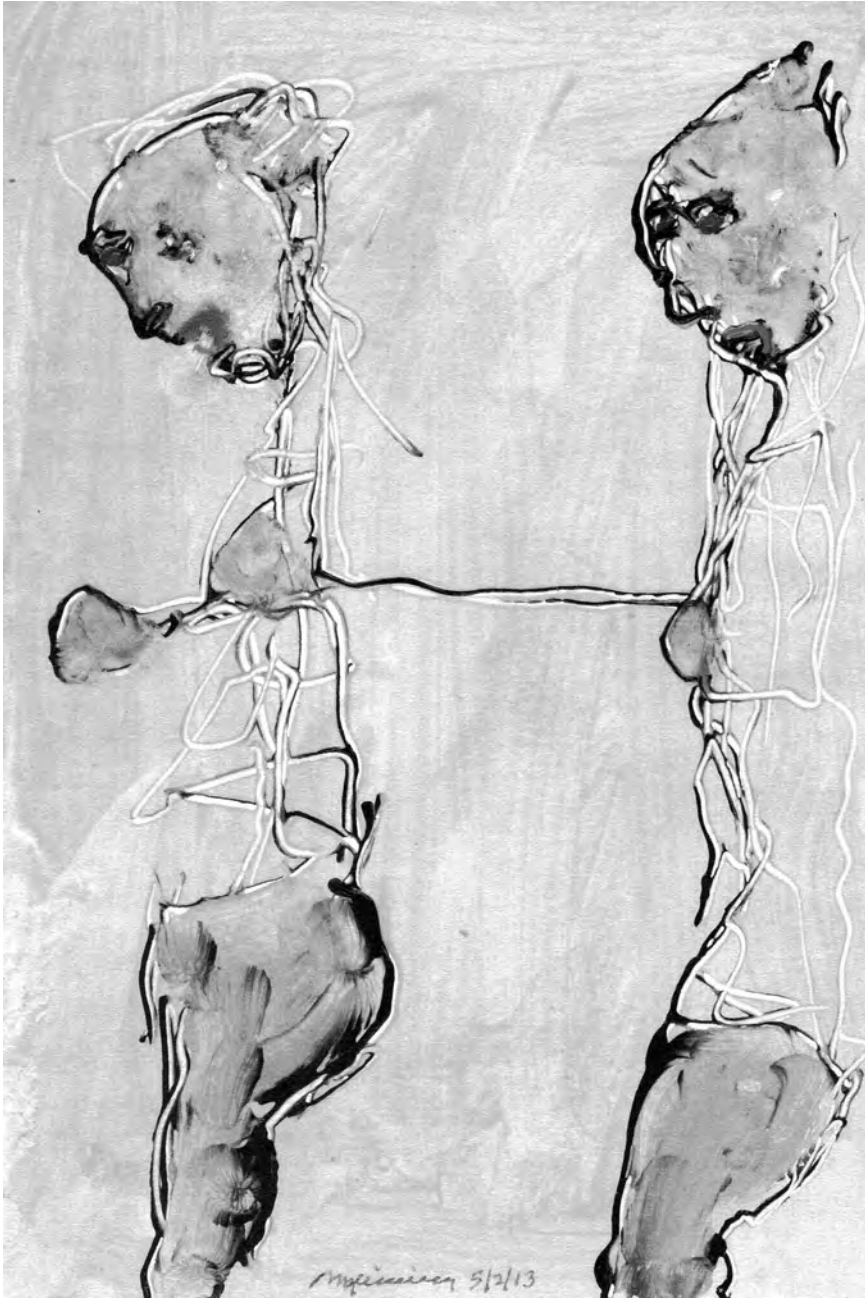
The next day, I drank myself blind over losing my job and Fred’s coldness to me, finishing the case. Although I had been dismissed by *The Pierre*, I felt that I didn’t have epilepsy badly, only when I didn’t take my medicine, or when I was put under extreme stress. I hated to take my epilepsy pills, and I tried not to tell people about the epilepsy because of the way they would act once you told them. Sometimes they would roll their eyes or look away or they would look like you had just dropped a brick on their head. Some of the time they didn’t believe me because I looked like everyone else. But aside from Leslie Black and my parents, no one really knew. My *bete noire* was hidden from the world. There were no incriminating videos or pictures of me as I lay on the floor in a swoon or vomited up the latest medicine in nausea. Fred didn’t know. He thought I was a good dancer and had just tripped and fallen like I had on our night out.

That night at 3:00 A.M., I had a seizure in bed. I remembered coming to and not knowing where I was, like I had travelled back in time. I thought my father was still in school at Vanderbilt, and we were in Nashville. I went into the bathroom with the wild dragon wallpaper and threw up. My throat felt funny like it had blown a fuse. I examined myself closely in the mirror. I had bitten my lip severely, and there were teeth marks on my tongue. I was extremely sore in all of my joints from the seizure. The seizure had torn through my body, a storm leaving me ravaged in its wake. I stared at the butterfly rash beneath my eyelids and the middle span of my neck, and my torn lip, my bones like the fallen branches of trees.

GLENN HALAK

ONCE HUMAN

Black Labradors leap in red maples.
Night chases them fast as it can,
dragging electric stars out of the West.
Sunset towers are vanishing, failed dreams,
only their windows visible, heavy as coffins
called thinking, once thought inviolate.
Now at the touch of your skin your head lifts
and you sniff what waits beyond death.
Now at the feel of your skin your hackles rise
and bones howl silver songs that frighten the moon.
Now at the stroke of your skin all the clocks stop.
Is that ice between the ribs as the man
with the hungry breath on your cheek
helps you slide down into the Earth?



Guy R. Beining: *Painted Hollow*

ALAN BRITT

BABOONS

Baboons link man & dog.

Biting their nails like stock market junkies.

Staring into heaven
with a no-vacancy sign around their necks.

Dissolving hind claw behind right ear,
extracting things that need extracting.

Clouded leopard paints the mountain rocks
with its smoky presence outside midnight
mass near Cape Town.

One baboon, man-dog,
scans the shadows for intercourse,
a quickie, nightcap, perhaps,
one eye peeled for moonlit rocks
changing their spots.

ALAN BRITT

CARNIVAL

*(You can say I lost my faith in politicians.
They all seem like game show hosts to me.)*

—Sting

Military solution. . .that's the way:
one more time. Fourteen of yours.
One of mine.

Care to amortize?

Gas leak?

Shift eye shadow at inauspicious time.

Jiggle hips & declare the golden apple
filled to the brim
delicious,
but no vacancies.

Unravel mummified religions membrane by membrane
& see what you get:
myths enjoying better days,
elders with long, black habits trailing their reindeer sandals.

Wood stork arrives,
clouded feathers fanned to obscure
horrific beak boned
against the promise of another ice age.

The room empty
except for middle-aged utensils:
a fold-up knife doubling as heretic,
stainless steel blunt pulling calf hide
past instep, over ankle.

Whoever heard of fueling your new Malibu
with overweight, long-horned cattle,
anyway? That's not the queen of spades;
that's not an alarm to the second or third infinite,
or whatever season inherits the fourth to be falling on.

Hair knotted above your head,
turbulent knot like downburst mistaken for common tornado
full of acid & ash, full of 1950's Florida rainwater,
full of pottery baked according to the ochre gods & goddesses
of their particular hey-day for happenstance religion,
mistaken for evaluation or evolution,
mistaken once again: happenstance religion.

ALAN BRITT

LISTENING TO THE BLUES

(For Ron Noel & Gary Moore)

Brother, this is the evolution to Gary's metal days,
songs galloping from your 200 pound, hand-built,
Nashville speakers piping, bashing, splintering the
crystal dawn as our German brother, Georg Trakl,
once dreamed. . .

*(. . .Unexpected raid on foregoing events upstairs,
just enough to tip the delicate scales. . .)*

. . .then out rages his solo's gas blue flames
scorching the gills of his amphibian Stratocaster,
stitching scars & filthy notes rising like scorpions
of existential smoke.

FREDERICK POLLACK

AGENTS OF REFUSAL

They know what I do
but have no way to discuss it –
no routine questions or sympathies,
not even a viable setting
for their faces. No clue.
And if I bring it up
I'm in the position of someone
who tells a joke, then has to explain
its mores, diction, double entendres,
social context, then go back to explain
why it's funny, meanwhile smiling.
No wonder they think I'm dour.
I might as well be a hitman.

Through the murk of an aquarium
one gets a faint idea of them.
They only appear edge on,
like rubbery moldy pancakes.
Their habits, which one reads about, lack charm.
The lights on their undulating
circumference suggest language,
but when we (scientists) decode them,
all that they ever say is Look at me.

2.

Years ago I brought someone home,
my home poor enough,
but with light and food and bars
against the ruined world outside.
Which was why
she looked around tenderly.

Or was it her place,
myself shy
at relative wealth and delicate things,
and conditioned to be nice
though expected, in this case, to pounce?
Yet the world was ruinous

and brought us together wherever,
however. I said she was beautiful;
she knew it.
She said I was kind,
gentle, the sort of thing guys
take under advisement.

A candle burned on the table
as if for Doctor Zhivago.
All that month there were tears, sighs
I half forget,
as one does the wolves roaming
the snows that must have preceded warming.

3

A water buffalo sleeps in the mud
of a rare waterhole.
A Komodo Dragon three miles away
tastes the air, approaches.
The buffalo wakes. The dragon circles.
The buffalo could crack its spine with a hoof,
but the dragon – whose mouth,
even apart from the poison,
is one of the most septic spots on earth –
gets in one bite.
Weeks pass. Mad from headaches,
nausea, flies, blood not clotting,
the buffalo looks one last time
at the dragons, of which there are now ten,
as they close in.

The feelings one could read into that glance
are a quality of the mammalian eye.

None of the men or women seized
 in the raid on that crack house
 claimed or could account for
 the baby.
 Not of their race,
 clean, neatly pajama'd and blanketed,
 asleep amid infinite possible harm,
 it exerted a pull
 on both detectives on the case. One, an agnostic,
 resolved to check that Children's Services
 found the kid's parents or better ones.
 But when footprints, fingerprints, fibers, DNA
 led nowhere, the other detective, a Catholic,
 decided something strange was going on.
 The couple who adopted were rich
 and loving. And the boy was no trouble,
 never crying or acting out.
 In school he flourished without bullying or noise,
 was chosen for teams, did his work
 well, without provoking jealousy.
 His teachers observed that other kids often
 sought his advice and fair judgment.
 The Catholic detective, now an uncle,
 doted on, and tried but failed to spoil
 the boy. Took him fishing – the kid threw them back –
 and to games the kid watched with polite interest.
 Often, though he put off mentioning it,
 he imagined his nephew
 graduating Police Academy,
 and more privately pictured him
 entering the priesthood, and who knows, someday
 Conceive, then, the detective's horror
 one day when, slow and retired,
 he found the youth in the darkest of holes,
 hugging his knees, near-catatonic,
 mumbling, "There was no mother.
 One can't exist without a mother,"
 his unshed tears dissolved in the bad air.

There are lines of sociocosmic force.
 A century ago, Theodore Dreiser
 sensed them intersecting
 somewhere in his apartment. He lifted his armchair,
 moved, put it down, sat,
 moved it again all afternoon.
 No mere writer, however, could introject this power,
 and since that time the vectors have often moved.
 They meet now in a gully in a desert.
 Bands of Salafi-nihilist killers,
 for which the region is known, are real enough,
 but are also inadvertent sentinels
 ensuring that this grail is hard to reach.
 Those who convene there are not delegates
 but avatars of all the world's true powers.
 Stylishly and variously armed,
 horribly fit, they obey
 the law of ever-immanent betrayal.
 May seem to be negotiating shares
 of drugs and religion and oil,
 but what each agent is after
 is to stand in that vortex
 of energies before shots come from colleagues
 and new bones are walled into the wadi.
 The heat of a quadrillion orbiting dollars,
 the bracing mephitic air
 of general mistrust, the mind
 layering its own impotence
 as high as the near stars ...
 No, it is given to no artist
 to experience these essences,
 and those who make the sacrifice
 believe they die as acolytes and heroes.

Benches as worn as those who sit.
Dustmen arriving to clear

paths of refuse, not dust.
Aspens bowing

stiffly in a breeze
like a long sigh between stanzas.

No vertically mating,
noisy, skateboarding young.

Some in school uniforms,
intensely repressed and brooding.

Stones left in shock
when Pickelhauben, shakoes, Stahlhelms,

Budenny helmets rode through.
That would do

for me. Papers always in order,
never requested,

I would rise in slow stages,
leave in slow stages

through the hush;
turn at the end of the allée,

give time back
before I vanished.

ERROL MILLER

PAST THE SOUTHSIDE OF CHICAGO

After a brush
with several semi-intimate
ladies, I headed Out West to Wide
Open Spaces to let my heart
do some rehab.

(You know how it is
to be alone & want someone).

I stopped along
the way at the Twix & Tween Café in
Centerville for a cup of hot chicory coffee,
maybe “something more.” It was not
an awesome distant charting.

I remembered Don Johnson
back in Alabama when the top
blew off his ‘40 Ford convertible.
He just kept right on going,
right on going, so I
figured I needed to keep on going, too,
maybe find “the right one for me,”
even a lady from Up
North.

Of course,
I was no native son
of anywhere, my Daddy
from NYC & Mama from Some Southern Place,
back then, back when they wrote a letter,
rubbed noses, & got married.

So the poem was (is)
writing itself with plenty
of raw material to draw from.
Like the ladies at Parents w/o Partners
who wanted to play some Glenn Miller
albums & sip some tea at 3 a.m. Hey,
even a rooster wouldn't settle for
that with dawn drawing near.

Having been a soldier once
I had learned about living off the land,
about the rich ebb & flow of goods
& services in the Marketplace here on Earth,
above the red clay Earth of Dixie & elsewhere
where people have a drink or two or more
& pluck & place their bets, doubling
down sometimes.

I always admired
"landscape." I'd just imagine
a semi-rundown Juke Joint like Smitty's
with flaking blue paint, a flashing neon sign,
& country music drowning out my own blues.
I who had given one of my prime ribs
for womanhood, I who had
nothing else to give.

So I learned
that humankind has a thirst
for more, painting pretty pictures
on their bodies, bonding with lukewarm
prospects right before closing time. I
wouldn't call it a dance hall
cause who wanted to
dance, right?

On my way West
I was thinking about some
ol' good times, bygone ladies
like Bibbie from Birmingham & True Hope
& Miss Priss, so what if True Hope gave
me no hope at all, left me standing on
the front porch of the parsonage
after she turned the light off.

Yet I
have salvaged something
from lost love & semi-bad times.
I have shaped my human losses into
literature straight from the heart, these
notes from myself, tear stained, painfully
carved out of 1955 & on & on...

Yes, there are graceful
oaks in my neck of the woods,
big wide white front porches, Tara,
maybe, or an assemblage of tarpaper walls
& windows with bodies swaying to the music
inside, really gettin' down, illusion or not.

But a man could
lose himself in the dim-lit
future that Granny talked about, he
could park his one-horse wagon outside
& never find it again, the horse departed, too.
And certainly, night would be falling again
someday, on the Opera House & on all
of "them" with combustion in
their britches.

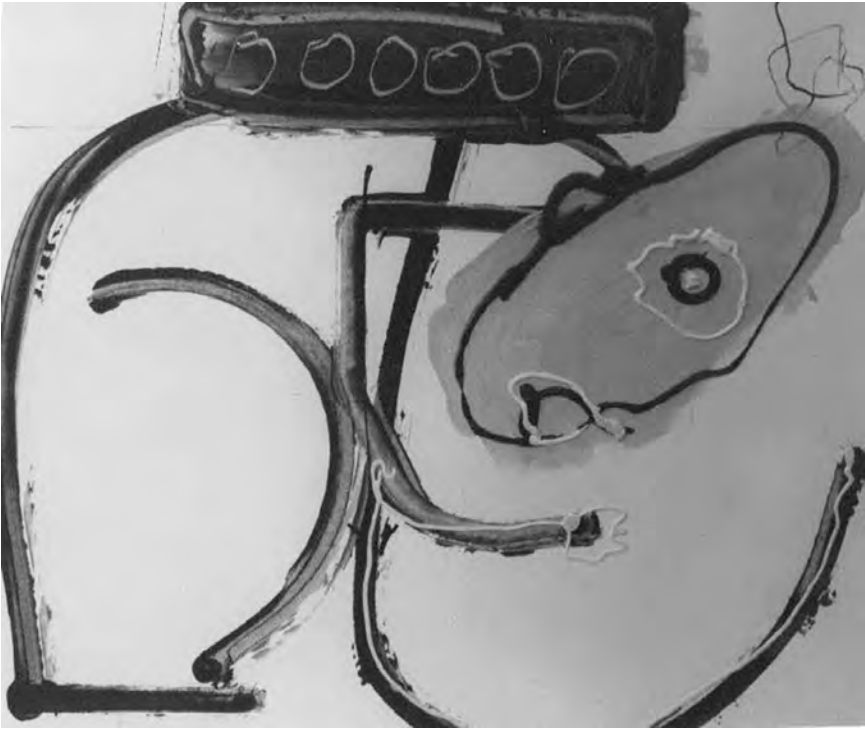
But like F. Scott Fitzgerald,
I row on, I row on making up
a new Daisy, then another, passing
through Louisiana, I waited 40 years
for the light to change, never
made it on to Texas.

I rolled my car window down
& another semi-lost soul was playing
accordion music, about down on the Bayou,
down on your luck, a stoic icon from
Billy Bob's in St. Martinville,
I think, or from that place
where hot sauce
is made.

So I rolled up my window
& headed back to Alabama, to Pearl's Café.
Does it really matter to the drifter when
he's drifting? So I thought of Bibbie
from Birmingham & True Hope
& Sasha...

Then I
remembered
this was all a dream.
Sasha, dear Sasha, love of my real life,
the best slow dancer I ever knew, though
our life is old & worn, old & worn,
it is just right, my Sweetie, just
right, just right.

And you,
the Queen of Casa Grande Street,
are all I ever wanted.



Guy R. Beining: *Heavy Back*

STEVEN RAY SMITH

SIT STAND

He had a buckjump way of standing,
as if to say that he deserved
to remain seated but if
he was going to stand then he
was going to bump around the conclave
with a jake leg.

Newcomer after newcomer dashed
to pet his slickened hair and chase
his rocket to the winner's table
and watch him willfully rush to lose.
In cheering the obvious counterfeit
they refused to sit

long enough for him to win.
For these he pumped as drum major
of theirs and his own losing pace —
sit stand, sit stand,
pontificate, pontificate,
drum out the wait.

DAVID CHORLTON

CREATION STORIES

When the earth was shivering
the people who had made it
added grass and trees and bushes
to keep it warm. That was easy.
Then they found it was weak and talked
about the problem before deciding
to make mountains and rocks, which they called
bones. But the earth couldn't breathe,
so thunder was invoked. Just like that, as if all
it took was to wave a hand
and there were storms
with cleansing rains and lightning.
Next came the sun, from east to west,
but too low so it scorched all it passed
and the people had to crawl
on hands and knees to stay low enough
to avoid it, until fine tuning
raised it to its best position in the sky.
The moon was a problem.
It made the nights too light.
Up, and up it went
to where it gazed from among the stars
and the nights became dark. The story
showed creation to be simple, from the first
declaration of a site in the universe
to the picking of fruits
that made it all good. Then the time arrived
to tell a different one, in which
the rivers flowed away and could not be caught,
the snow turned into wings and lifted
from the mountain tops, and a dry wind
blew across the earth, the origins
of which became the cause
for many years of talking, talking, and more
talking, in which time the birds
flew away to look for another earth,

which did not exist, and when the talking
ended there was a silence
which begged for the story to begin again,
but in a different version
and the arguing began over which one to use.
While this continued
the earth grew smaller, and the smaller
it became the more hostile
was the bickering over whether it was better
to go back to the way the Apache
had built the earth, or to turn to the Tohono O'odham
whose First Born started out with algae
from which everything took form.
I like that one, someone said, but no one else
agreed. So it went on, story after story
was considered. *How much will it cost?*
How long will it take? How soon can we build our factories
again? The ones with the stories
couldn't answer, so none was chosen
and there was only the darkness on the water
from the first time.

PATTY DICKSON PIECZKA

PANDORA OPENS HER GIFT

She creaks the hinges
and unlocks the night—
a black so still and so silent
its serenity hypnotizes her
as it pours into the courtyard.

All at once, bats fly out
and skim her hair with their wings.
Breath catches in her throat.
Her trust in Zeus cracks
into silver stars.

Blood-snakes slip free
and coil her ankles. Fire blooms
in her fragile hand, but she knows
that a woman formed of earth
can never burn;

mud melts from her fingers,
drips to her feet.
Demons and witches stain the sky
and turn the moon a deep violet.

She sees how darkness can curl
around a heart, and how evil
can hide in a clear, blue eye.
A smooth stone sprouts in her fist.

PATTY DICKSON PIECZKA

ELEGY

I can only
converse with wind
or call down
a well; my voice,
in fragments of breaking
ash, mulls into motes
and dusts back, too thick
to swallow.

Shadow sketches
your silhouette
leaning against a tree.
As light drifts,
you fall away
and pour back
into the earth.
The wooden air
creaks shut.

Time has stilled,
and my reflection
is missing.
My lips try
to form your name
with a tongue of stone
and this gnarled throat.



Alois Nožička: *Pocta Emile*

ALIXA DOOM

DEMISE OF SILENCE

The silence was so large
we took its emptiness for granted,
not seeing how our plundering
would deplete it, like an endangered species,
so that it could not absorb another word.
Every small sound ever uttered
spewed up out of the earth and
all that had wrapped its quiet around us –
beach and the meadow, the woods,
and night sky – crackled
in a cacophony of clatter until
there was nothing we could comprehend.
Without the glass doors of silence
even our small talk made no sense.

The only place bereft of din
was within our selves—
we began to train to access
this space without words.
Silence activists jumping off cliffs,
swinging at rope's end to span
the chasm, we'd woo the return
of silence, the columnar quietude
of its forested heart,
back to the mountain.

ALIXA DOOM

OTHER LIFE

Sometimes when I experience a loss in my life
I drop down through time for another look at her.
She moves slow as a fish, as if in rooms under water,
the one who did not want a divorce, stayed behind
in the house I loved so much. The tile on the kitchen floor
glows gold in the last light as she opens the pine cupboard
to prepare an evening meal for the husband,
who still comes home to her. The table is set for three,
the daughter did not grow up, has not left home.

The house in the woods is paid for by now,
and she does not have to work, dedicates her mornings
to writing. Sometimes she travels to exotic countries
with her husband, who pays for their expensive trips.
Her daughter is happy to see her when she returns.
She hasn't lost a thing. Her skin shining with
the serenity of so much contentment,
she feeds logs to the fire, pulls her chair up
to the warmth of the flames and lifts a pen
to yet another novel I have not written.

Thirteen years later I admire her like a lost sister
who wears my cast-off clothes. If I tapped at the glass door
surely she would let me in. We could sip coffee,
play Mozart on the stereo, watch deer feeding at the deck,
share her husband's paycheck. When he comes home
I would remain quiet; as before,
he wouldn't notice we were both there.

She rises and floats toward the door,
as if she's heard something. *It's me I say,*
I'm you, back for the life you have kept. My voice
does not reach that far. She turns, drifts deeper
into the airless room and drops into a chair
to take up her journal. *It is another one of those days,*
she writes, *when I find myself dreaming*
of who I could have been if I had left.

ALIXA DOOM

LIGHT AND STONE

1. Light

Life is softer in the candlelight that moves slowly
and takes time to feel the oak tabletop, our skin,
and an old photo, the way someone did not take time
when we were small, to love us. Tongues of candlelight
flicker like love in a dark room. Everything shines back
with a glow from deep inside itself, where even grief
is set afloat like a shadow of a cloud
passing through the heart.

Light is not always warm, sometimes its fire reaching us
long after the star has fallen, or the woman in the photo
gone to another life, leaving her face like a shadow
and a faded arrangement of flowers in the attic,
the darks of her soul revealed in the way her eyes
and bones stopped the light that day she looked out
into the faces of children who had not yet opened eyes
in this life. They too have come and gone, marveling
at the stars, making a wish on the one falling,
its light going out a thousand years before.

2. Stone

An old light slants like music between the stones
that quiver underwater or rest on grassy hillsides.
Perhaps light is the language of stone,
lifting from its clotted heart, flowering in the air
with the reverence of prayer. Once it was thought
the gods spoke through the mute wordless well of stone.

There is darkness in stone that does not open;
holding it in your hand you may recognize the weight
as your own. The cool feel of stone's heft in a pocket satisfies.
Fire dormant, primordial solace of ancestors,
unruffled by the rub of prayers, the stone endures
far beyond our transient query, answers gestating
like seeds of stars in a hard darkness.

CHET HART

THE PHARAOH

The night is a young girl
dug up from someone's back-alley garden
and left near my door; it is known I am tragic
as the mannequins down at Brubaker's—
only one person to visit me

all year—and frightened away by a moth
dying on the windowsill!
*Oh, I just remembered—I have to get my child
at the Laundromat, she stuttered as the delicate
pale pharaoh simply ceased its dreaming.*

It was nothing like Cleopatra impaled
on the great Assyrian pickets.
I slipped the woman and her panicked shoes
into a matchbox whose emptiness the moth
couldn't reach, and never found the tremors
that were like live clitorises during that isolation again.

CHET HART

BROWN DUST VILLAGE TO THE NORTH

WE WELCOME ALL.

(only a stone's memory
of crawling toward brown dust villages
allowed beyond the border crossing,
a heat line on the map of an illegal's
determined but thirst-strangled body.)

Who could trust
the flag with its middle finger
aimed at Mexico, Pakistan, Iraq?

WE WELCOME ALL.

Here is your handful of water.
Here is your heritage of names
killed off with our landlines.
Here is a ceiling stain
that resembles a los angeles
claimed by no one.

WE WELCOME ALL.

The snakes will bring you their jails at night.

Their coliseums of electrical storms
where no language is spoken.

WE WELCOME ALL
WHO'VE LOST THEIR WAY TO MORNING.

The flag, when it gives up its shivering cities,
can be rolled into a ball of blood.

“Who will companion the barren, widowed curtains?”
the house groans, a mild perversion.

A man brings a knife to bed.

By tomorrow he’ll have gutted
the infant suicide choirs
inhabiting his sleep.

The same man who sits down to pee.

WE WELCOME ALL THAT STAY SILENT.

You will have to learn our incomplete words.
You will have to forget
every previous thing by heart.
You will have to add one hour to every day.

You will have to subtract ten mountains
and ten skies and ten underground oceans from your name.

If your facial kindness does not wilt on camera, we welcome you.
If you work for free, we welcome you.
If you hate the chelation therapists and the green mountain past
and all healing forms of sleep, we welcome you.

WE WELCOME ALL WHO SHARE
THE GOALS OF OUR STARS AND STRIPES.

All skulls. All skulls and fake water mentioned by no one.

Hussein’s body bleeding from the sky’s penitentiary
mentioned by no one.

But it’s pretty.

We have such pretty ways to destroy where we’re standing.

The flag loses its direction
like our bones lose their way in us.

ALAN BRITT

IRON OVERLOAD

(For my mother, Roberta Crawford)

Most people dying from iron overload
never hear the tick of the clock,

or tiny church bells
rattling the rafters of the brain.

As iron settles into the heart, pancreas and liver,
carefully unfolding death's warm quilt, needlessly,

hardly anyone dying from iron overload
hears each tick of the clock

or tiny church bells
rattling the dusty rafters of the brain.

As killer iron, like Genghis Khan, ravages the body,
rusting livers, brains and hearts,

an icy chill eases beneath death's warm quilt,
needlessly, needlessly, needlessly.

MY PERSONAL ODETTA

*“Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.
Sometimes I feel like I’m almost done”*

Odetta

A half-wasted Phil Ochs is slumped on the floor—air of this mundane motel room stupified with weed—he glares at me, grumbles: “You Commie Jews are all the same.” I’m neither a Jew nor a Commie. And I’m thinking I’m hot shit: charcoal grey “mod” pin-striped suit, point-toed Beatle boots purchased with big bucks freshly reaped from Cass Elliot who sat for me while I did her portrait. Why the fuck would Ochs notice me, given the awesome presence of this royal, rotund, black woman at my arm. She jerks me onwards, like: “Keep the peace Brother,” or “*I’m laughing just to keep from crying,*” words she’s just performed at The Troubadour, fabled West Hollywood night club where all the tripped-out freaks, hippies and newly-discovered folk singers hang out. These are days charged with political outcry. I suppose she and I might be classified as activists but four years ago, 1963, *she* was dubbed “The Voice of the Civil Rights Movement” by Martin Luther King. Good grief! I’m little more than a blonde longhair; a bushy-bearded, rabble-rousing, anti-war buffoon in compare.

Well...that, plus I am one blessed dude to know this grand woman as my friend.

««—»»

Now she’s dead—December ’08. **Odetta.** My first Negro hair.

The last time we ever spoke: October ’85. I’ve just been released from two weeks in the nuthouse, prepared to face the world, “be my own man.” I long to touch base with a few significant friends from my past. Odetta is in my top ten. I’m so glad she answers the phone. Shaken when she doesn’t recognize my voice. Or my name. But when I mention her portrait, her hair painted in Havana Lake casein on mauve Crescent board, she nearly shouts, “Ohhh yes!”

Back to Boulder Colorado. '65. I'm a waiter at The Huddle, a university nightclub on The Hill that brings in bigtime music talent. And this is where my taste for Hollywood begins. And the bigtimer I become especially attached to is Odetta, world class folk singer who dazzled The Newport Folk Festival, throwing her spectacular baritone-to-soprano voice so far into its huge audience she didn't even need a microphone; a powerhouse whose acoustics persuaded a young Bob Dylan to trade his electric for a flat top Gibson. I'm doing portraits to supplement my Huddle tips and I convince her to sit for one, (unrealistically hoping it might become the cover of her next album). The portrait turns out somewhat better than so-so but she pays. Cash. No promises about the album cover; that decision is not hers to make. We become quite chummy—me, proudly courting her around Boulder in my pink and white Buick to shop for bright new scarves and big earrings—showing her off at favorite haunts; *we love to talk*.

After her final night's performance, we get into tight-hugdancing at a private farewell party hosted by a local oldtime piano man. There are whispers she's been in the kitchen puffing weed—I've never smelled nor smoked the stuff. But she and I are doing her favorite: gin, straight up—though I really don't dig it. Her close-cropped Afro strokes my cheek and I'm surprised, in fact enlightened, that the nap of Negro hair is soft, like deep velvet. (I guess I've always imagined it to be coarse.) And, oh, that deep contralto, rising from some place no earthbound soul can know—she's humming—straight into my ear—resonating, through the whole of my body. No sweat that Paul Simon's soft voice is turned too loud on Al's hi-fi: "...*hear my words that i might teach you take my arms that i might reach you...*" I am possessed. But as her mooshy lips nearly become mine, she excuses herself, then bids me "Be well."

Minutes later, Eddie, her flamboyant queen limousine driver returns; taps me, and like a court messenger, loudly announces: "Madahhhm wishes you to join her." I look back over my shoulder—he surely means someone other than me—he *knows* I don't do women. "But Eddie..." I say. "Dahhhling," Eddie says, "madahhhm likes young blondes." A straight Huddle buddy promptly steps forward to rescue me—says, "I'll fuck her!"

But this is not the end. Next morning she phones to confirm our champagne brunch date. I drive her to Stapleton Airport, barely in time for her flight, and as we rush to her gate, she laughs that hearty laugh: "Last night was perfect, don't you think," she says. "And will I see you in Hollywood?"

I am so ready for Hollywood. Ready to thrive where I can be openly gay; several musicians who've played the Huddle have urged me, among them: the great blues man Josh White, the outrageous "sick and weird" Judy Henske, Puerto Rican singer guitarist Jose Feliciano, and the Randy Sparks' folk group The Back Porch Majority. Though Odetta actually lives in N.Y.C, she's the one who convinces me Hollywood is the place I belong. So with a hard-saved \$250 from tips and portraits, my very used yukky yellow-and-green Chevy station wagon stacked deep with remains from my last Denver one-man show and BIG dreams, I abandon my native Colorado.

Sometimes live people say thank you to dead people. Thank you, 'Detta...

And every time you played The Troubadour, we hooked up. I'm remembering that night hanging out in your dressing room, a tall glass vase of long-stem blue irises, your usual bottle of gin, (was it Gibson's?), and the very famous silent-movies' star Gilbert Roland and his kick-ass Mexican wife Guillermina and sculptor daughter Lorie (like so many fascinating Beverly Hills folks I met through you, such HUGE fans of yours) had just been there. The Stone Poneys were the opening act. And as you and I blabbered on about happenings since last time we'd seen each other, like my total comfort in Hollywood as a gay man, Linda Ronstadt took the spotlight out front. And as she began to sing, 'Detta, you rose up and walked out onto the balcony to "stand at attention." That moment, for me, was like watching The Queen pay homage to a lowly princess. God, how I admired your ever-present, perfectly tuned ear. No conversation between us was too big to come between you and a beautiful voice. I don't know if I ever told Linda that story but she certainly deserved to hear it. Thank you, 'Detta—from Linda. From me.

And the last time I saw you play The Troubadour, I hollowed a couple of pullet eggs, then attached tiny brass fixtures to create one-of-a-kind earrings for you. I tested them beneath various lights to imagine how they'd look on stage, beneath the spotlight, rolling against your soft dark skin. Your reception of the eggs in your dressing room seemed guarded—maybe your gin was not doing its business. Then on stage, you appeared without them. Were you afraid they might crack? Oh well... No big loss; your big brass earrings were magnificent glowing against your cheeks! But, as always, your big acoustic guitar, hoisted so high against your breasts, seemed too clumsy to me; I wish you'd performed without it—left your hands free to illustrate your words like your wild friend Nina Simone. I often wondered

if you did this to distract from your weight that I think you employed so beautifully that night (beneath purple cloth, your favorite color), your smooth undulating mass, sexy—not at all unattractive. By then, I was on to your little trick whenever you sensed the slightest loss of your audience’s focus, humbly pulling a tissue from your cleavage, then softly blowing your nose. That hint of vulnerability never failed! Oh I felt such affection for you! Even far beyond the magnificence of a voice so stunningly tender, so brutishly impassioned, so playful, sometimes remarkably propagandistic—never forgetting you were a powered spokesperson for too many generations of blacks who have too long been disenfranchised. And, too, never forgetting your songs of oppression and castigation are a majestic cry for release, for me, as a homosexual, and for all minority peoples, away from the thugs who terrorize this world.

««—»»

Neither she nor I mention the earrings as we toke in her motel room. With only light from the streets seeping through the window, her bright greens and purples are reduced to greys. We vibe in mellow tones; her hands talk, just like they talk on rare occasions when she lays that goddamn guitar aside. My hands talk back as we pass the moistened joint between us. We lean face-to-face across the tiny table, cheeks occasionally touching, barely whispering as our conversation leads to talk of god: *what is it?* She pulls a ballpoint and motel pad from the table’s drawer and begins drawing lines—maybe this is what god looks like? We talk, we toke, we talk, then I contribute a few lines. Just lines. No bearded face, no imagined all-powerful human-like fantasy God—just simple lines. We tear up or wad and trash each drawing, letting our fingers talk, once again her lips nearly becoming mine. Her hair whisks the bush of my beard as we agree the night is fulfilled.

As I slide into the bucket seat of my silver dream Porsche, my moss green hip huggers display a surge and a moist spot.

««—»»

She tried to survive just long enough to sing at Obama’s inauguration, his picture pasted at the foot of her hospital bed.

But that glorious heart wore out on December 2, 2008.
I will feel her hair against my face as he swears his oath...

ELEANOR KEDNEY

MOVEMENT

Among rock and gravel
an angling, bare ocotillo
leafs and flowers—
red flame tips torch the sky.

Outside, clouds roam
and quail chitter on the gate.
Everything bidden by the sun has risen.
Among thorns of the staghorn—
fruit and flowers and seeds.

Fallow beyond spring,
I read of the night movements
of green plants folding in
then opening at dawn.
I push memory's mulch aside
and listen to my breath climb
the rungs of my ribs with more
to give this world
than a long cry.

I rise to daylight,
soft and shadowless.
Rocks, too, have turned over.

JACK DEVLIN

TEMPERATURE CHANGE

When the trees die
for the last time
inside you,

all the sadness drained
from the
leaves,

you'll be smaller

than the lamps
grieving in the living room,

which is only a flicker now.

The lamps whose
soft
hummingbird
light

won't let you
access
the smile embryos
you swallowed—

really pills hollowed out
at the core—

to slow the vanishing
of the birds
you scratched into the wall
searching for summer,

scratches that do not sleep
and do not go away.

Scraped from the walls
like a shadow's sadness,

your stains will not
tell each other about you, who counted
the same pill again and again
and never returned.

JACK DEVLIN

FARM TRAUMA PASTORAL

When the trees of kindergarten
blink out behind you,

and your shoes
with their straightened
slipknots

keep making their little noises,

your head full of melted
sunlight,

you will let each knife
soften inside you.

You will have no choice

but to let them repeat your name
until the walls
look like massacres of paint
spreading north.

After they lose the trail
back to your hand,
you will never again hear

the knives crying,

nor the wind blowing
through the tall fields
with the kindness

of a grasshopper's abandoned saws.

The sunlight closest
to the farms hacked into your wrist
will lure the smallest lamb
from your scars as they dream.

JACK DEVLIN

LONELINESS

Yesterday I was ambushed
in the foot
by a stick-bug splinter,

a ground nest syringe,

a live wasp shard,

a warning
at the level of people sitting
in chairs inside me:

*do not look for the
isolation hospitals today,*

*do not pick up the small words
eating the larger words
that fell to your feet,*

do not try to heal that silence.

Today I raped the bed
and the bed, without a woman,
made love back to me.

“You will not survive the loneliness
of even John Crisman’s hopes and dreams,”

the stick people say,
holding each other on the floor
of my pine needle
cranium.

Maybe they look out the window,
like me, at the storms begun
by black bears,

and hear the same mutilated name
again and again,
chasing the things I've done
north to the edge of the window,
near the closest lights of hell.



Richard Baldasty: *Lemur Connection*

JEFFREY ZABLE

A SHOW OF SOLIDARITY

I look into my right hand and see fish swimming around in circles. One of them, multi-colored with a spotted tail, smiles up at me. "I like your poems," it says, "but I think you need more wordplay, more symbolic language, and an agent who could sell Kotex to a bloody gopher!" A bit startled, I respond, "Yes, thanks for your advice." And before you know it I've written, "Audacious fish jeering at human frailty wear silk pajamas and have everything to fear once freed from the hook."—Applause is heard around the world, where those who were making love or murdering others have stopped and flags are raised as a show of solidarity at the bottom of the sea.

THE PROCESS

It's painless from beginning to end.
We remove your life and give it
to someone else at a cost that you
might have afforded had you been
wiser in your educational and financial
choices. And please understand there
are times we do make mistakes. Should
you wake up screaming, someone will
attend to you immediately to insure that
such an inconvenience does not happen
again, and of course you will be compensated
under laws set forth by our system of justice,
comprised of exemplary executioners.

JAMES GRABILL

STORM

A thermo-luminous convergence of future thunderhead fronts thickens in the west. Weightless ciphering rips across anvil-top emptiness of unheeding *nay*.

Bartok, who is dead, draws the city through Valeriy Sokolov's violin closer to the living genome. Whoever may have lost or won, and why in this instant, or what is here, ascends the river of light into brown eyes of a self.

In the daylight, a feminine yet masculine finch wing feather lifts into *what is, what is, what has survived the blank night within being*.

Catalytic sweeps emanate through transience of the self, as a century of advancement comforts future absence and presence at the floors of cells. The lake-ragged comb of embryonic depth settles in far-back rock with its kindred.

The trawl of sunken equipment through complex sadness fails to dissolve in time. Inexplicable heaviness and lightness in open-source momentum risks more of the future for now.

JAMES GRABILL

DAMSELFLIES HATCH WITHIN BEING

Can the night coyote hear his echo move farther back into the hills,
and out through the kennels and yards?

Does only the present person unwilling to speak hear the galaxy
roaring?

Sunlight burns a sacramental gap where sinuous nerve has room to
grow. Where light can't reach, squid strategize, reinventing language and
form. The next world sweetens and sours the Moray Eel in muddy pulp
at the bottom of matter.

Does weather reaching the shore require an artist's eye alive?

Which part of predestination can you see from the balcony we have
in common?

Where the opposite of the opposite dances with its opposite of an
opposite, ruined palace rooms sway and identity mushrooms whole.

Hasn't eggshell coral spilled its pieces of broken pottery on the sea
floor of self?

MARIA LISELLA

WHEN MAGRITTE WASN'T LOOKING

When is an apple an apple?

When it is not a painting of an apple.

Or, when its high chartreuse makes us disbelieve its waxen sheen, and size, larger than the palace behind it.

It tells us something.

That, it is an apple overgrown, overcome with itself, so vast, it drowns all sense of time, emits a faint perfume from the skin still sealed tight.

Compare this to a baked apple.

Its skin shriveling as sugar bubbles out of its core to gurgle and rise from its bulbous green body, trembling in the heat of a roasting pan, settling once it hits the cool air, its pulp ready to receive the spoon that scoops out its heart.

MARIA LISELLA

THE NEW YOU

From coffee to coffee
I balance my cup
I'll be there, but resist
answering your phone calls,
the press of doing the right thing.

The in-patient shuffle
toward me, you walk old.
The new you, broken, repaired,
Refusing physical therapy
the scar tissue rubberband tight,
movements shallow.

Fingers charred
from smoking butts
to filters –
the ultimate freedom
currency is
cigarettes at \$4 apiece.

Barred windows
parking-lot views
weekly visits hauling
comfort food –
pasta and sauce, apples.

The long ride home
acidic citron of disinfectant stays.
Denial piles up like snowdrifts
at the end of a driveway,
throw the car into gear,
rock an inch forward an inch back,
Stuck in its own tracks.



Alois Nožička: *North Coast*

GARY LEE JOHNSTON

CARVED AND NOT SHARED

Someone strips his own apartment—
its wallpaper meals
and coat-hanging kilns
and frustrated sleep—

until the window's one
thought shows
itself.

And such a scribbled man!

He looks outside on his television.

A boy pulls the Santa Maria
behind him like a little red wagon.

The cities of dark Pennsylvania
lose their families when
the boy asks his mother
if the wind is really the streetlamps
pointing to where he's tired.

She tells him, instead, that no one knows
when Scranton disappeared,
or which day of wind it followed.

How many buried there
with toxic crimsons and war paint,
Appalachian parking lots,

coal foliage,
recovered Delaware River twilights.

No "faith in poverty" levels reported.

a holiday that lasts as long as it takes
a woman to turn off
her windows during
the rationed minutes
of Stroudsburg
when a man leaves
the Music Store and returns
to his place in a police report
about another man

who, street-skilled
and hatchet-starved,
forced the afternoon this far

with less than one Mayflower
that can be counted

by thumbnail laptop

until that repeated integer
seems enough, by itself,

to “put fat on the table”

either from here
or from wherever “the taking of warmth”
has fled
on its own,

a day or more past the Dexedrine crashes
and razor-blind highways
between Blairstown
and Mount Pocono,

not roads to those isolations,
but slit wrists drying on maps
no one uses anymore,
maps of the sunlight that returns
vandalized every morning
from a tavern’s birdless foraging.

DAVID CHORLTON

SILENCE

The fire burned down in the stove
and a silence descended

around us while we slept.
It occupied each frozen limb, spread

evenly across the ground,
and even Silver Peak became

a whisper in the forest's ear.
Two deer

came to listen
to the buried language

from the time before
the animals were named.

FRED BOLTZ

THE GREEN HORSE

The green horse,
standing lost
& alone upon
its curved wooden
rockers, has a
half-moon ear
torn out of
its inner body.

One eye lies
sleeping lazily
in the dust,
while the other
stares out across
the darkness of
the empty room
& contemplates
the direction
of ceramic
ceiling tiles
on their nightly
journey to the stars.

FRED BOLTZ

THE ASH FIELDS; VULPINE

In the darkness,
my shadow
crosses the
invisible line
separating dusk
& the pure blue
light at dawn
and fears nothing
except itself;
walking away
into the stillness
of the night
alone.

But today,
driving slowly
through deep
ruts in an old
dirt road, as we
passed the
black hills
of coal dust,
where huge
mechanical cranes
work on through
the day, dragging
their men with
them down into
the long sunset,
something moved
so gracefully
off through the tall
weeds and dead

brush, flowing
still and silent
beneath a river
of red fur
and then just stood
there with the
brightness of stars
in its eyes, calling
me down into
the depths of
a hollow den
beneath the roots.

When I leave
this place,
I will travel north
and sing to
the dying moon
in the silent voice
of the fox.

CARL MAYFIELD

CHARITY

The warrior who is temporarily between meals
has decided to accept me as is: gimpy spirit in
white face. We exchange stories. My narrative
spools into a respectable profile while his most
recent terror was seeking a church on Thanksgiving
night because it was so cold. (O Columbus,
you get lost just once and see what happens.)
We look at each other for a very brief lifetime.

money moves sideways
our throats
remain uncut

CARL MAYFIELD

DIGITAL HOO-HA REGIONS BECKON

An illuminated screen is a door into a world that doesn't exist. We click a few keys, wait for the woman to appear. She leans over a balcony sans bra, like a den mother for lonely cub scouts learning how to climb. Her smile is an echo of bills paid. We profess our love with a few more clicks; she leans back on a couch now, ready to test our sincerity with both knees.

in love
forever
with contact



Guy R. Beining: *Courtship*

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

266.

splashes in space,
splashes under herds,
& a flash of lightning
in the curling rain.
the deck is white
& slants into the future.
we are hinges
in the rain,
trappings of a
heftier way as
a brook of stone
cracks the terrain.
now the tide
lifts its skirt
& sucks at the girth
of a lighthouse
that is but
a stone pencil
that erases not one
word from the sea.

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

269.

don't play with
this narrow forum.
a bud of light
begins again as a
fuse in the socket
of a flower
infinite- - - - - finite
night in its
lost reach
lignified into
night crawlers
& their heavenly
dialects spinning into
a new substance
marking fossils
as predetermined
flowers.

much to be said,
nothing to be heard.

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

270.

there are rare bones
passing these moments,
& the guesswork writing
outlines, crossing
& recrossing, grey
enuf to win
a chance of being
revived, digging thru
the page again, tearing
apart the obvious
traps, eyeing the inner
mind in a firm battle
squared off in this
rubbish heap
of an hour.
the words again blacken,
smearing like coal
to the touch.
an uneasy figure
runs from the page
& can't be caught.

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

273.

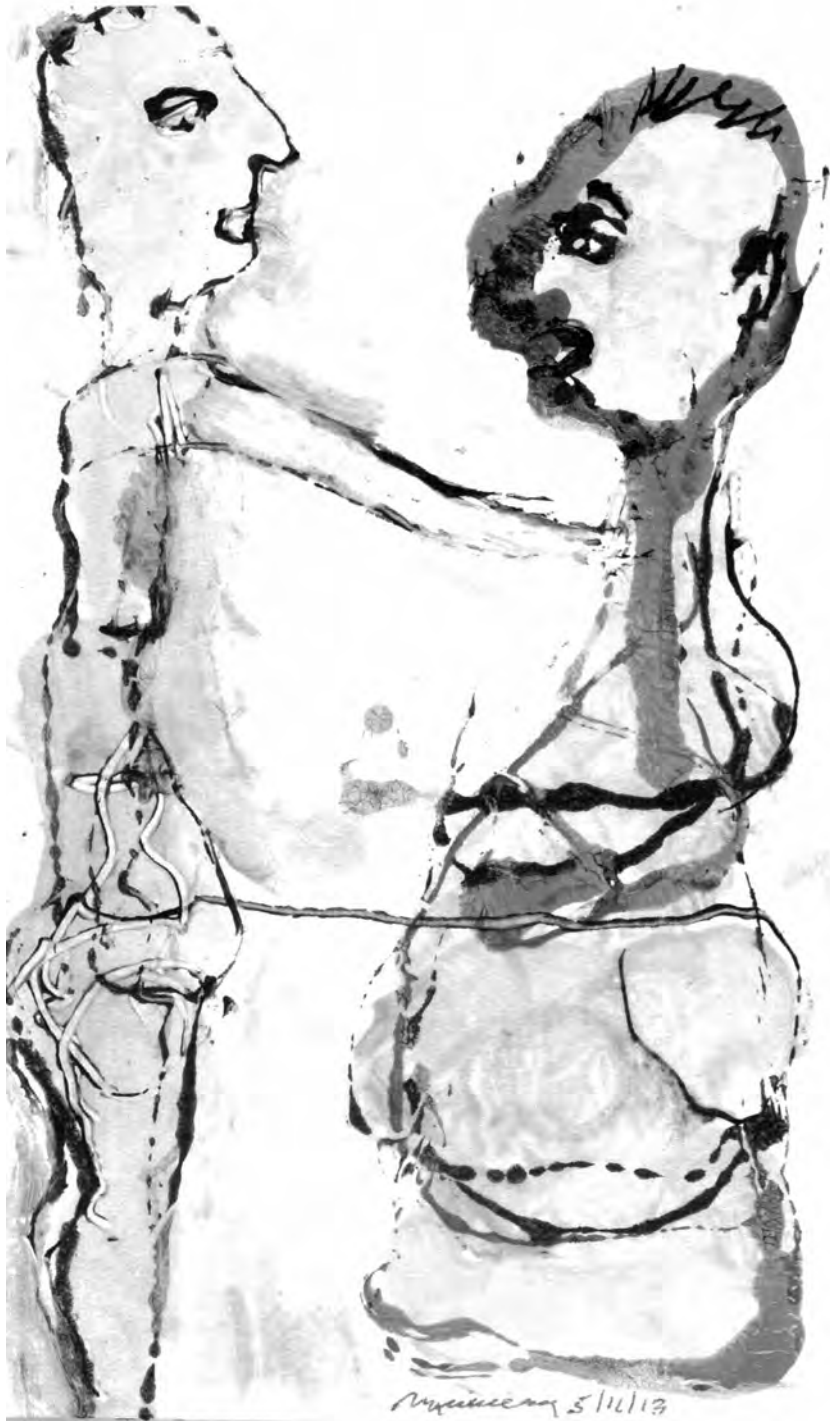
meet the hiss
of this day,
the underground rattle,
& cracking sections
on top of the world.
take a fast car
out of here &
remember the key notes.
retell the story
of growing, then dying.
blanche america, blank
america, cuffed, riding
the pepper line.
in books we are
dapper green & wearing
well, & plead
to forget where we are.

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

276.

are you wearing
the right pants
for traveling, & have
you caught the clown
that traces your
every move?
i am measuring
once again those
broad, singed wings
that are crumbling.
just received a text
from the sun chamber
& have searched thru
all the clay pots
& bandaged fingers
but find that
little has survived.
moon, sun, sea,
it is all a guess.



Guy R. Beining: *Rework*

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

292.

long into the weeds
fettered in the
tin shed where
the poet can
only say so much.

i find the
glass teeth too formal.
junk follows us
even in water.

my poverty is in
the fields that i
have left behind.

my orthodox foot was matted
to the floorboard,
& the hat with
its other parts
was never returned.

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

295.

on
tracks
of
the
cradle
skid
marks
grew
in
the
winter
tunnel
as
daylight
&
its
shadows
dropped
into
thickening
brine.

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

298.

last
question
of
the
bugle
buried,
did
the
note
wipe
away
the
pain
of
his
death,
squeezing
thru
shiny
metal,
taming
the
memory?

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

299.

pay me
a load
of this
with turnips
as
soup
of
window
clings
to
schism.
we the dead
pave the way
we the dead
climb the vine.
fresh
notes
were
delivered
&
the marshes
cushioned
the
ears.

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE

300.

the dream
reminded me
of that
other place.
the
other
dream
tho
was
swapped
causing
the
death
of
a
kingdom.
singed, we go
with coffers high,
wickers in the lie,
lugging
pyx
about
the
set.

GIL FAGIANI

ACID DAYS/TITO

The first time I copped acid, my connection warned me not to trip alone, but I did anyway. When the “Heavenly Blue” kicked in I couldn’t get my dungarees on and after an hour of tangled pant legs and watching dried paint beads on my basement walls turn into heads singing “Ave Maria,” I walked outside in my boxer shorts. It was 2:30 in the morning. That first trip taught me to respect acid. The second time I tripped I hung out with Little Johnny and we swam in Highbridge Pool on the border of Harlem and Washington Heights. The water morphed into cotton candy and we skylarked all day bathing in the taffy-sweet sunshine. When we dressed and left, I stopped to comb my hair in the side mirror of a car when it broke off in my hand. I didn’t know what to do, so I placed the mirror like a broken-winged bird on the car’s front fender. We’d walked two blocks when we ran into a crowd of Dominicans, wearing bandanas on their heads and carrying baseball bats. Little Johnny laughed and whispered they looked like an Indian war party. Suddenly two guys grabbed him and another threw me to the ground. The guy on top of me held the car mirror and cocked back his fist like he was going to pulverize me. My last memory was of his fist stretching back three, nine, twenty feet, leaving purple traces in the sky.

GIL FAGIANI

LOLLIPOP

The lights dim as the 6 train snakes through the tunnel. I look up and see a stick figure with a halo-high Afro. He's staggering, fly open, a violin case flapping on his hand like a live fish. The lights brighten and I realize the man in the red velvet show outfit is *Paleta*—"Lollipop"—the famous fiddler for the Barrio All-Stars. Hours earlier, his playful riffs and sizzling glissandos brought the crowd to its feet. He turns to me, waving a bent cigarette. *Tiene un fósforo? You gotta light?* I look away. It's five in the morning. Any self-respecting dopefiend is going to snatch *Paleta's* fiddle the moment they see the shape he's in. I think about the pure Peruvian flake in my pocket. I could tell him to come with me, offer him a blast to shake off his drunkenness. Then I remember the after-hours club, the smiles of the women when you offer them a hit or two, the way their nostrils flare, their breasts tremble, when they take a deep sniff of nose candy. I exit at Times Square, leaving *Paleta* slumped in a seat, head on his violin case.

GIL FAGIANI

RUMBERO

He claps his withered hands in perfect *clave*—Afro-Cuban rhythm. *Yo quiero cantar una rumba, I want to sing a rumba, but this pain in my chest won't let me sing nada.*

Sitting on a heated grate, he's surrounded by melting snow, a navy cap pushed down to his eye brows, frosty white against his tar black skin, two bottom teeth like fence posts.

I learned to sing rumba, when I was a chiquito—a kid picking up cigar stubs and empty rum bottles in Havana. At eighteen I sang with Benny Moré and Celia Cruz.

I'm almost eighty now, can't get around like I use to, but I know all the chants to Changó, Yemayá, all the rhythms, yambú, guaguancó columbia, If I could, I'd return to Cuba,

give back to America my government checks. I want to sing a rumba, but this pain in my chest won't let me sing nada.

PHILIP DACEY

CENTO SONNET:

Jeongwon Ham at His Piano Master Class

Beethoven always thought orchestrally.
What instrument does this passage remind you of?
To accelerate here's natural; you don't have to try.
Details aren't details. Even rests can be expressive.

Always read between the lines of the score.
Imagination's as important as technique.
You absolutely need a pedal there.
Don't play just with your fingers; use your back.

Here's where you let the beauty emerge from the beast.
For keys, sometimes a tender touch is best.
You're so fast, a quarter note sounds like an eighth note.
Give your left hand more attention. Relax your wrist.
If something's missing, don't think Beethoven forgot;
he left it out for a reason. Ask yourself what.

PHILIP DACEY

LEXICAL

Combining our two households into
a single home, she and I discover
our English language dictionaries
total one for every room.

Now, searching for a meaning,
an etymology, a spelling—
“Should the word be hyphenated
or not?”—we’ll never have far to go.

It’s like having fire stations
strategically placed throughout
a city, ready in case of an
emergency, a linguistic 9-1-1.

Once, years ago, it was
an ash-tray in every room,
but now the only smoking
is that of certain words

whose consonants rub
erotically against each other,
their contact smoothed
by the scented gel of vowels.

When you come to visit us,
you’ll sleep near a dictionary
and maybe dream of a festive
parade of words or, say, a long

march of them, like refugees
from a war zone, their history
of meanings, their only possessions,
piled on their backs in packs

they want to set down while resting
from so much forced labor and abuse
by so many, curl up beside you in bed
and renew themselves in the silence.

PHILIP DACEY

IF WHEN I HEAR THE BLOWOUT

and see the semi roadside,
the driver bent to fix the flat,
his big load of pigs screaming
as if in recrimination, thrown
into turmoil by the sudden stop,

I think of hell, its rings,
and wonder which is this,
where bristled, stinking devils
heap a din of insults
on a sinner's back,

does it follow there must be
inside of me a ring of hell
where I am both screaming pigs
and stooped driver, devils and damned
at once, self-punishing,

and if there is, what have I done
to incur my own wrath so
and will I forgive myself in order
to ascend and ferry back
across the Styx until I

stand up and stretch beside my truck,
that takes me where I have to go,
and smooth my bristles on the slats,
nudge a fellow pig until he calms,
returned to my earthly flesh, this heaven?

JOHN GREY

COEXISTENCE

It's absurd that it should rain,
a sky empty and blue one minute,
gray and bursting the next.
And it's equally absurd
that two people should coexist,
that their bodies don't crash
into one another
at inopportune times.
Planes up there,
cars whizzing by,
computers telling me
the weather in Alaska...
the absurdities pile up.
If the world still runs on reason
then it's one beyond my understanding.
I'm in the kitchen,
someone else is in the bathroom.
Isn't that the height of the bizarre?
A kiss here, a quiet conversation there.
Incongruous surely.
I look at myself in the mirror.
I'm not built for anything more
than sucking in air,
blowing it out again.
And yet the television works,
the stereo somehow functions,
the electric razor spider-crawls its way
across my chin.
And there's someone else in the house,
probably thinking the same things.
Heart pumps, nerves send messages,
brain beeps, muscles expand, contract.
And I love somebody.
And not just because they function.

MICHAEL MONTLACK

“SHOULD WE HAVE STAYED
AT HOME, WHEREVER THAT
MAY BE?”

— Elizabeth Bishop

“I heard an airplane passing overhead. I wished I was on it.”

“Not all those who wander are lost.”

“We travel, some of us forever, to seek other states, other lives, other souls.”

“real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.”

“To shut your eyes is to travel.”

“And you want to travel blind?”

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness”

“See the world. It’s more fantastic than any dream made or paid for in factories.”

“ever notice that the first piece of luggage on the carousel never belongs to anyone?”

“I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel’s sake. The great affair is to move.”

“Travel makes one modest. You see what a tiny place you occupy”

“The map of the world ceases to be a blank”

“The seam in between is fenceless.”

“May come home with a smooth round stone as small as a world and as large as alone.”

“at each new city, the traveller finds again a past of his that he did not know he had”

“Travel whets the emotions, turns upside down the memory bank”

“So I find words I never thought to speak/ In streets I never thought I should revisit”

“Thus should have been our travels: serious, engravable.”

Writers in order of quotes: Bishop (title). Bukowski. Tolkien. Nin. Proust. Dickinson. Cohen. Twain. Bradbury. Bombeck. Stevenson. Flaubert. Darwin. Stein. cummings. Calvino. Mayes. Eliot. Bishop.

MICHAEL MONTLACK

ICELAND: HULDUFÓLK (THE INVISIBLE PEOPLE)

Some say you're the filthy children
Eve hid from God. While others
claim you spawned from Lilith,
destined to live in the in-between.

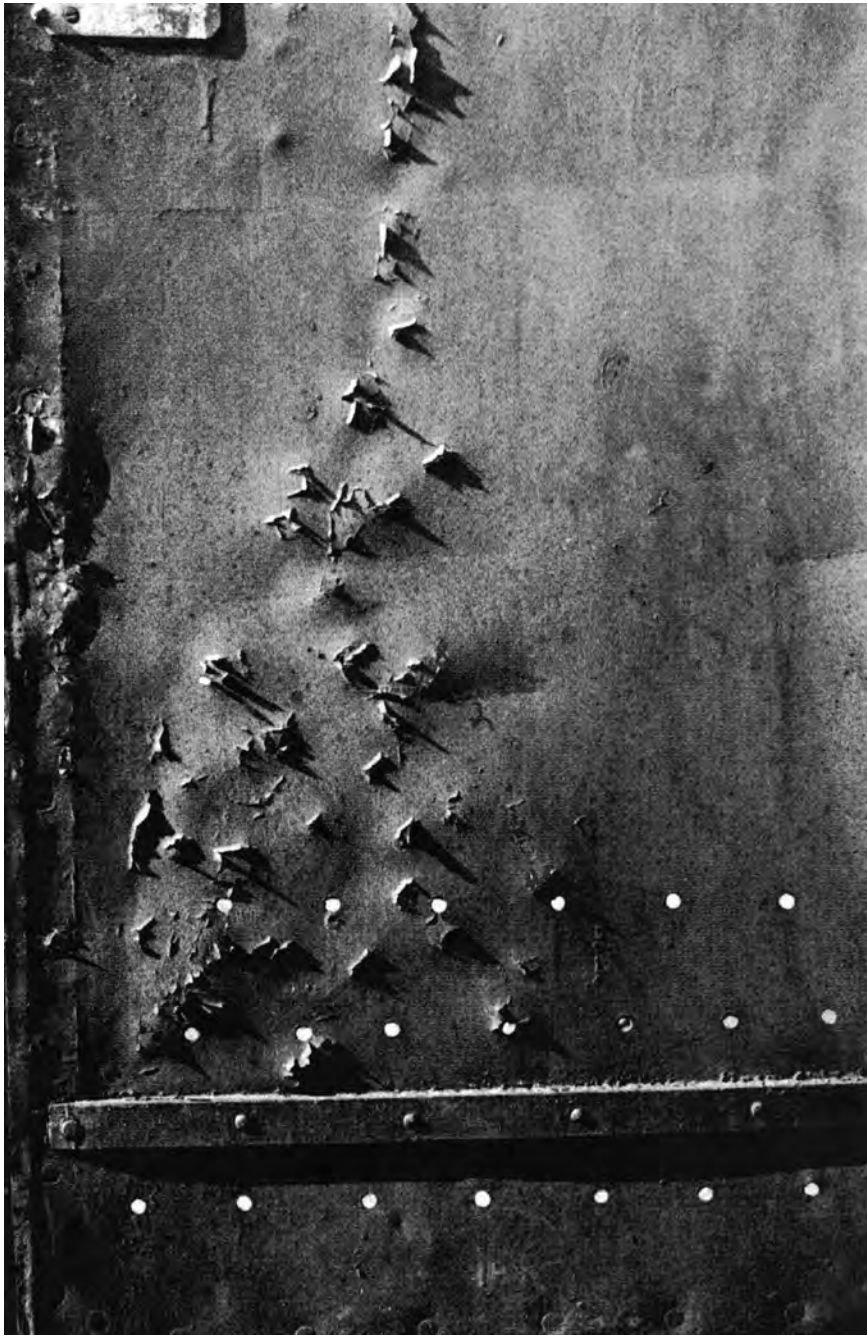
Those virgin-snow-on-white-sky
landscapes outside Akureyri—
I believed I glimpsed heaven there,
in the hollows of the three-feet-deep
bootprints dotting the pathless way
to a half-frozen waterfall, not far
from the Mid Atlantic Ridge,
where North America meets Europe.
Stunningly desolate. Pristine. Cold.
Later we visited the 'Gates of Hell,'
just a short drive away, suffering
the sulfurous smell to be warmed
by the grey mud hole's vapors.

Even your Christmas is acute
with 13 Santas, all shysters skilled
in their own trickery—Bowl Licker,
Door Slammer, Window Peeper—
the sons of trollish Gryla, known
for her naughty-children stew.
Boys and girls offed to bed, their
shoes perched on icy windowsills
open-mouthed like baby birds,
hoping to be fed toys come morning,
instead of dreaded potatoes.

Adults honor you too, with small
elfin homes in their gardens. And
warnings never to throw stones,
lest one hit and harm you.

Land of sprawling lava rock
peopled by so few—is it true
ancestors may have invented you
to double their meager population?

To think thirty years ago,
citizens searched a NATO base
to see if foreign Phantom jets
had injured any of you—a feat
far less likely to be fruitful
than growing Icelandic fruit.
Did you laugh or just keep hiding,
giving the visible something to do?
Or maybe your fate is to always
be on the move, dropping by all
those garden houses for brief visits,
undetected but ever welcome
on your short untraceable route
between a brutal void-like heaven
and your summer place in hell.



Alois Nožička: *Perforace*

OSHINN REID

STATE ROUTE 160 HEADING TO PAHRUMP, NV

A lavender dusk turned round
in the hand to be examined, fist open to breathe the snow air,
smooth eggshell touch on a fingertip tracing,
hesitantly, along the arc
of the evening's first stars.
Bellybutton craters in the moon
pocked in the sky above the powdered hills,
a fishing weight to anchor the heavens
as they dodder into a long clear Nevada night.

This cresting a long hill, removed to the shoulder,
head and chest jangling with symptoms of loneliness,
sharp travel pains— the stagnant poison of inertia—
mutiny of bowels on a hot plate diet— feet on fire with flight.
Humming and humming, a simple song:
go away, go away, go away from here.

Go away to the coast where the land roars, alive.
Go away to the furred mountains framing the north.
Go away to the koans in midwestern wheat.

Crossing the desert, the scenery forgave the cities.
The cities sprouted from the sunsets.
Land sales are made after a demonstration
of the soft colors of late afternoon in winter, which,
as they fade, present a terrain
airbrushed by a tender Hand,
pardoning its sharp flaws.



Oshinn Reid



Oshinn Reid



Oshinn Reid



Oshinn Reid



Alois Nožička: *Pochybny Cerv*

SIMON PERCHIK

*

For the last time this overpass
reaching out and the invisible horse
half spray, half these cobblestones

that follow you around each corner
—four legs and still you stumble
carried up by the uncut flowers

you hold on to though this on and on
is already aimless, falling from rooftops
as rain and on your shoulders more feathers

—you are flying the way this street
loosens from its stones the weightlessness
that covers every grave and overflows

lifts the sky across —midair
you sift for runoff and from below
the unwanted shadows cling to you

—all these thorns :step by step
each splash fastens on just one foot
though you dig without any dirt or shovel.

SIMON PERCHIK

*

Her shadow takes you by the hand
though darkness once laid in the wound
soaks through, festers
while the sea comes and goes
looking for more water
carries away the dead
mistaken for waves
for these cars whose lower beams
are honed on the curve coming in
for the kill, row by row
closer and closer, pass after pass
all night circling in pairs

—it's your shadow now
looking in your eyes, is sure
you are too far from morning
can't make it back
though the headlights overheat
chased off by the poisonous froth
from your mouth—it's your shadow
that helps you yell
the way an invisible anchor
is lowered and at twelve each night
splashes across the dry grass
half seaweed half on its side
calling up one mouthful at a time
to hold the sea fast and your hand.

SIMON PERCHIK

*

You fold this tablecloth, again, again
lifting her dress though your fingers
are hidden and turning colder so no one

touches your hand already frozen
fallen off between her tireless breasts
that still dance, offer you no other way

—you have to fold! smaller and smaller
the way each stone over and over
breaking in half to forget

by sealing this leak in the Earth
in this wobbly table and in her plate
a fork half braids, a knife

between the kitchen and the bedroom
as if she saw in your face her lips
melted down for yours

—you have to fold, make the table
disappear so you don't remember
the soothing lace, the smothered wood

—you have to trade! and this tiny spoon
that wanted to be a flower
picked for her cheeks and flowing again

folding again, over and over
till nothing's left in the open
not the walls, not the arms, not the breathing.



Alois Nožička: *Plamenny Projev*

VINCENT CZYZ

“THEY DANCE,”

EXCERPT FROM GHOST DANCER

Shawna was dreaming. He knew because he could see her eyes moving beneath their lids. He sat on the edge of the mattress looking down at her, his own eyes adjusting to murk tinged red by the glow of the digital clock. She was on her side, the sheet pulled up to her neck, her hand balled underneath to anchor it there. No matter how hot the night, she needed that scrap of cover.

He stared for a long time, memorizing the slope of her nose, the slant of her puffy upper lip (the lower tucked underneath as if taking shelter), the slash of an eyebrow.

He slipped a hand under the sheet. The bony furrow between her breasts held off his fingertip. He wanted to press a shape into it, a shallow depression that might hold a flat gem or attract gazes, maybe intimate the life's star beneath. Through his finger he tried to insinuate himself under her skin, expand outward with her chest, feel what it was like to be warmed by her breath (he heard a sound like winter through a broken attic window).

The parts of him that were bristly, unrefined—hands so rough they made a rasping sound when they slid along her clothes—were smoothed away. Dissolved in her blood, he circulated through her, lodged in her heart. The part of him most in need of her would always be in one of those four chambers, soaked with dark, never still. It was there that the body remembered everything that had squeezed saltwater through the corner of an eye, forced breath into a burst of laughter, sent blood through her too fast to leave her anything but dizzy.

A double life to her, the Shawna who smiled at him during the day was off somewhere without him at night although he slept right beside her. Her body went on with its hidden chemistry, a good deal closer to the miraculous than the parlor-trick of duping lead into revising its elemental blueprints enough to be taken for gold.

Through it all, his mingling with her blood, the breaking and entering into her organs, she never stirred.

Anything woke him. The silent liquid change of a digit sometimes. Or maybe that was happenstance, the flowing number coinciding with a change somewhere else, a subtle difference in the arrangement of things. Maybe he picked it up somehow, like being on the ocean bottom and feeling a pocket of cool water drift past you or a shift in the tug of the

current. Maybe what he really felt was a good friend whose heart had finally given out. Or a mother's distress for the son she hadn't seen in years.

The street, the sidewalk were slicked with rain that had fallen maybe half an hour ago. Traffic lights signalled to drivers who weren't there. The silence was amazing to him, that anything of this magnitude could be still.

They led café lives in this city, blocked out bits of the night, put a sheet of glass between themselves and the homeless woman shuffling past, sipped their coffee. Living in one compartment, working in another, shuttling back and forth between them, only ants had more affinity for niches and chambers.

Steam seeped around the rim and through the perforations of a manhole cover, rose across the street like fog from the underworld. The only movement there was. Or you might never know the city was hollow.

New York was Euclid's dream of space: straight lines, angles as sharp as blades, planes like smooth stretches of sky, circles and spheres as friendly to pi as fish eyes and turtle eggs.

A line of glass moons on steel posts made a long tent of pale light. At home in the brick stillness, he put his hand on a cornerstone fixed there ... for how many years? For how many more? The weight of a building on it. In the Southwest there had been cities before there had been Anglos. A place to come back to, something to haunt.

The mouth of a subway reeked of grease singed by electricity. The entrance grated off to keep insomniacs like him from being swallowed.

Cramped, crowded, dense as New York was, there were still vacant lots. Discarded bottles like shiny gravemarkers knocked over, in disarray.

Broken glass crunched underfoot.

In Oklahoma, outside a town called Okeene, he'd come across an old rockery. Floorboards warping up to meet his foot covered with bits of plaster, shards of window, a dozen open boxes, strips of wood, papers (sales records? letters? tax documents?), calendars well past the years they marked. The whole place a kind of stopped clock. Where you got to look at time—not what time it was, at time.

A storefront with meticulously attired mannequins reminded him of the tribal dead buried in their finest regalia.

Wind swept past him from an unexpected car. He watched the red glow of the tail-lights—reflected on the wet street—shrink and disappear around a corner.

No one stood still anymore.

He stood, staring.

Clouds so low they almost touch the tops of skyscrapers, lights making bright spots on them as if tiny suns were on the rise. Katsinas dance on rooftops, stomp on the tar and gravel of these hollow buttes, parade their power like flashes of lightning in a dry desert storm.

Above the day, a desert of crystal blue.

To the north, one of immaculate white and ice.

Three fifths of the world sea-misted desert where St. Elmo's fire dances on spars, winds itself like electric blue eels around masts, reminds mariners of voices older than superstition.

They dance.

The maskwearers, whose faces we are not allowed to see.

The firebearers, whose bodies we are not allowed to touch.

Goldspun hair floating lazily above empty sockets, the skull of a Norwegian woman whose grave is sealed by the asphalt at his feet turns to him and speaks: If only she had known this earth was restless with native dead she would have gone back to her home across the water; she would have returned to its arctic calm. This beauty, she says, is too terrifying, it will not let her lie.

Remember what it was like before cities buried horizons, he says, remember that.

A katsina, eyes slits, kilt stitched with lightning, reaches for her withered hand. Beneath stars humming in their vacuum-bitten desert, they dance. Bones rattling, feet thumping, hair curling into flame, they dance.

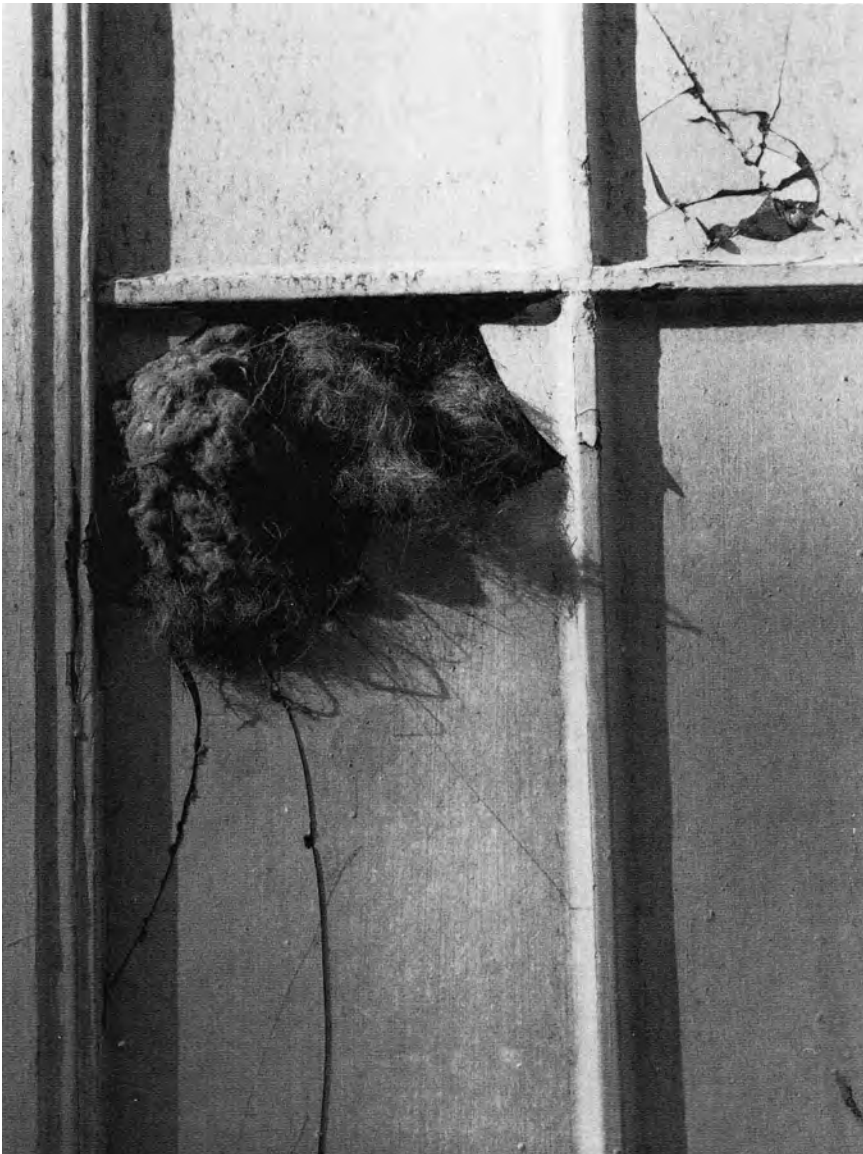
By the light leaking from the ceiling (how could it?), by light that seeped through the window, bled from the red digits of the clock, he saw Shawna's face. He looked up to see if there was glass in the ceiling, a moon overhead. There was neither.

The music had gone out of time—no chime on the hour, no melody played at midnight or midday, no cuckooing bird, no tick even to announce the passage of the night.

There was Shawna's breathing.

He lay in bed next to her, not sure what had woken him ... something pushing out, or something pressing in.

He looked down. His jeans lay on the floor, belt still threaded through the loops. He remembered the leaden light of the psychiatric hospital, remembered the night he'd heard his own singing coming from someone else, from outside. He lifted a sneaker off the floor; the bottom was wet. He hadn't been dreaming. Or if he had, he hadn't been sleeping.



Alois Nožička: *Vyhledy*

KARZA HERNANDEZ

MOTEL DIMENSIONS OF WANDERING

1.

a room with its isolated, voice-stained bed.

the wallpaper's outdated surveillance.

a drop of sperm shivering in the shower stall.

the man who stays here crawls a mile into his sleep.

he wakes up knowing his money exists only in the minutes
before the september loneliness.

he wakes up with small parts of him missing.

he wakes up where he can still be heard
on a planet between contaminated heartbeats.

2.

zero calorie needles—

condoms decaffeinated swill—
a nicotine beltline—

leakage and crisis arousal—

the man calls a woman who lost the sunlight in wisconsin.

without names or body parts
they whisper to each other from a 1987 phone sex directory,

the closet of a carnivorous motel
at the end of a thought that could not be completed.

3.

even in his own endless body the man has no signal,

just potential eyeblinks in the wastelands of a mirror,

pine sol ranges, liaison temperatures with none of a night's deep sweat.

he has neither enough words nor enough light to find strangers
looking for him back in carjack season,

and before going into the destructions of sleep
he warns the unnamed animals he can see shivering
in the spilled drops of visine:
“do not look for this room after my eyes have closed.”

4.

storms on cable music channels.

late august antidepressant sunsets.

local cellular humidity.

“the black stripe on the back of a credit card
is not a form of music,”
says the news actor,

reading with sigh-like affectations of weather and disaster.

5.

“i slept with the girl who came apart on the radio,” the man says.

“i chopped up her voice and tried to put it back inside her.”

“i saw the last of the cigarette smoke drifting away in her eyes.”

“i wanted to love the people.”

“i grew my hair until it was part of the night only so i could touch the girl.”

6.

the man washes the sleep from its bed—

sleep not human nor animal nor betrayal,
but the flames of an electrical fire moving like deer
through a nearby burger king.

7.

the man who listens only to the lights passing outside
starts his car and follows the cedar river—

he studies the oncoming traffic for safe patches of darkness—

“never trust what can be talked about only once,” he says,
checking to make sure the river
hasn’t gone missing on the radio,

no deaths, no new parts of him
reported from the anonymous gas towns and cell phone fields
where a person still many calls away asks,
“are you okay are you okay are you okay.”

8.

“i was never whole,” the man says to each part of his body,

the sky programmed from certain viruses,
the outcasts working at their frontiers,

the digital landowners digging voice mail dungeons
in the lightning’s unharvested static,

the chemically false nightfalls of alien autumns,

the shorted-out lamps
dimming to where nothing is heard,

only the man scratching for the surviving water,

the crops of ajax,

the carnivorous televisions,

the woman who woke covered with a five dollar bill
and the morning she couldn't see hacking into the dollar behind it.

9.

"i looked everyplace for the girl who had the soul of a river," the man says.

"i walked through every hiss of the lonely snake towns and did not see the girl."

"i made a map of the motels so the deer could hide."

"i made a statue out of the girl to comfort the drying riverbed."

"i gazed at the mirror as hard as i could until no blood was left."

10.

a child hoping his kite will grow.

birds that look like scattered sticks that don't move.

someone already said that, before the cities were the only seasons.

"winter just isn't me," one person said with a new intelligence.

the land sinking to thought levels.

laughter stolen for a birthday card
and never seen again.

11.

"i collected the statue's footprints so i could give them to the girl,"
the man says, not as a true statement,
but a slight reason to stalk the sunlight back
to the cassette trailers of kansas and oklahoma

where the woman who started all the stories of winter
could be emptied and fucked for at least one more day
before the rivers returned.

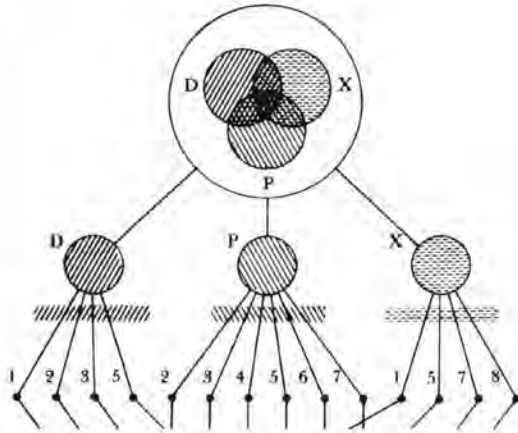
12.

“what will happen when we run out of cancers to eat?”
the man asks his sudden mother out in the iowa telephone weeds
and the northern barns of a growing cattle sadness.

“we keep moving toward the searchlights of heaven,”
the mother says, petting the birds as they disappear
on the stick-dead screen where no wind is left

and the man’s eyes keep running away
to the house where the stillness of the clouds doesn’t end
and the children slaughtered for tofu dampen their beds of barbwire
and the river, without the consciousness of a moving current,
dreams inside the blinding windows at night.

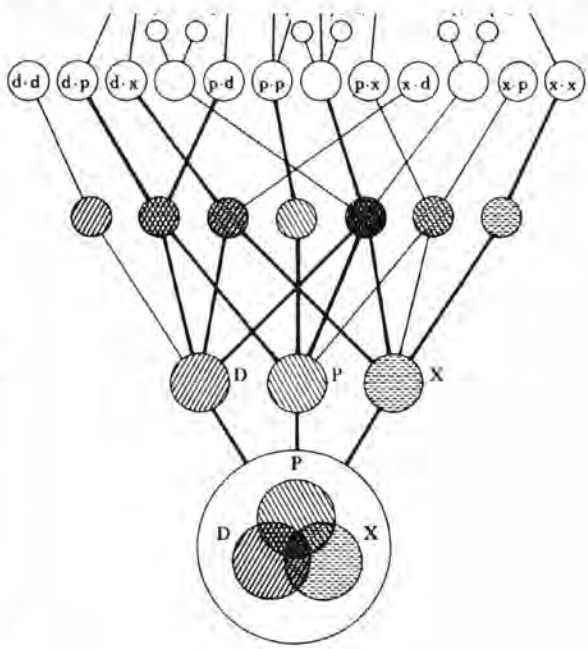
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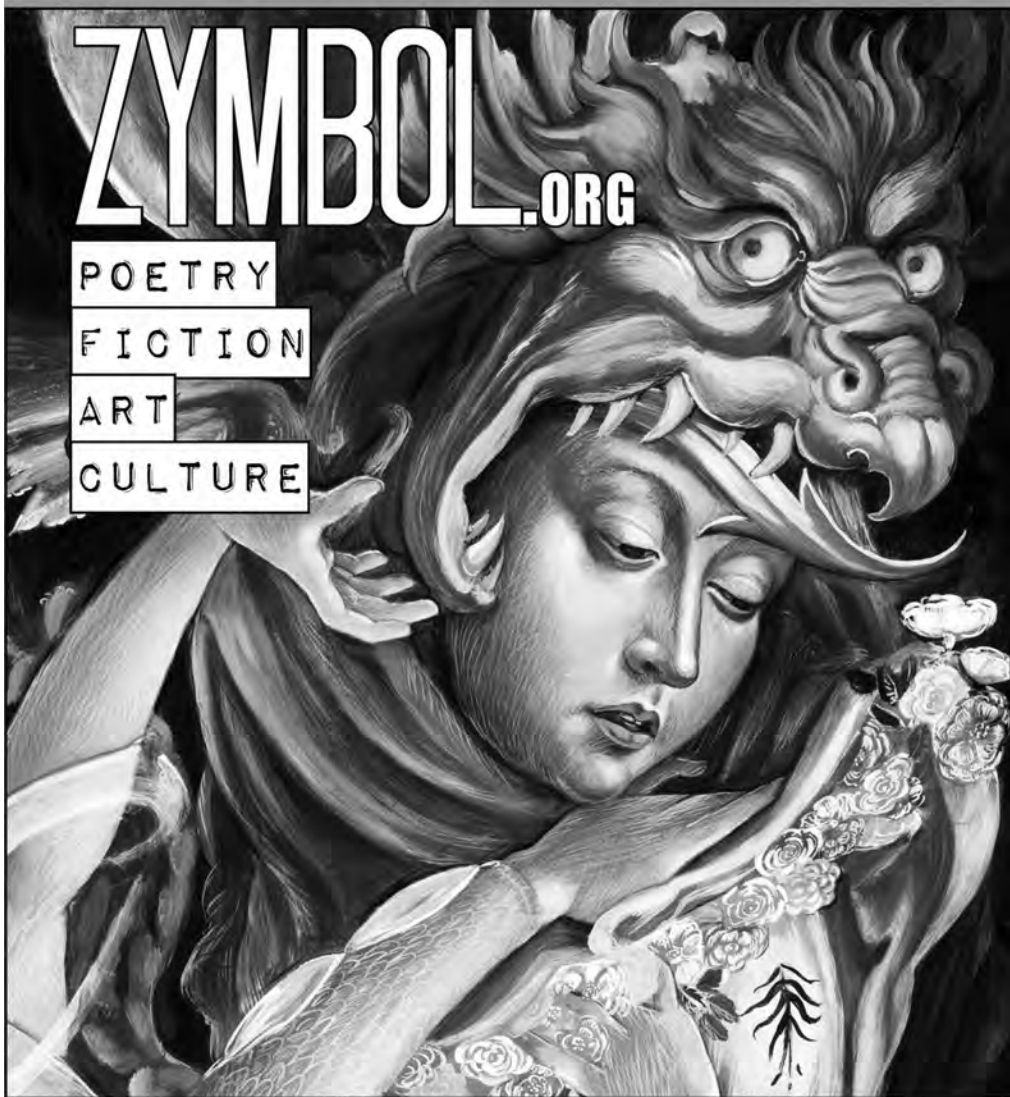
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