

# (ěm)

A REVIEW OF TEXT AND IMAGE



Fall 2012





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# Contents

ART	
8xx – Weldon Kees .....	6
FICTION	
Homecoming – Jon Chopan .....	7
POETRY	
Absalom – E.G. Cunningham .....	13
POETRY	
Landscape With Fucking Squirrels – Hugh Behm-Steinberg .....	14
POETRY	
A Word In A Nest of Birds – Hugh Behm-Steinberg .....	15
CREATIVE NONFICTION	
Thank You – Paul Lisicky .....	16
ART	
I'll Tell You Why – Nance Van Winckel .....	17
ART	
One Key – Nance Van Winckel .....	18
POETRY	
Guide To Snaring Coyotes – Lois Marie Harrod .....	19
PHOTO ESSAY	
The Language of Alligators – Katherine Riegel .....	20
FICTION	
A Tail of Space – Joseph Pravda .....	26
FICTION	
Openings (2004) – Richard Kostelanetz .....	27
ART	
Qualcosa si muove – Cesaro Lucchini .....	35
ART	
Quel che Rimane – Cesaro Lucchini .....	36
ART	
Quel che Rimane Paesaggio – Cesaro Lucchini .....	37
POETRY	
Map 2 – Joanne Ashcraft .....	38
POETRY	
Map 3 – Joanne Ashcraft .....	40
POETRY	
Map 4 – Joanne Ashcraft .....	41
FICTION	
Pressing – Jerred Metts .....	44
POETRY	
Petrarch #191 – Tim Atkins .....	56
POETRY	
Petrarch #160 – Tim Atkins .....	57
POETRY	
Petrarch #164.1 – Tim Atkins .....	58

ART	
	Heavy Warehouse – Steve Javiel..... 59
ART	
	Boom – Steve Javiel..... 60
CREATIVE NONFICTION	
	Waters: A Collage – Donna Steiner ..... 61
POETRY	
	Hell, Sarte Said, Is Other People – Jürgen Becker, Okla Elliott, trans ..... 71
POETRY	
	Tell Me How You’re Doing – Jürgen Becker, Okla Elliott, trans..... 72
DRAMA	
	The Waiting Room – Weldon Kees ..... 73
POETRY	
	Unusual Turtles – Theodore Worozbyt..... 96
ART	
	Disassemblage – Peter Fine ..... 97
ART	
	Drip – Peter Fine ..... 98
FICTION	
	The Wager – Ken Poyner ..... 99
POETRY	
	Back To Futurism – Alex Cigale..... 100
COMIC	
	Ballad of Rosalind – Andrew Stilborn ..... 160
FICTION	
	Kwik Stop – Joanne Brent Leake..... 164
POETRY	
	The Momentous Life of a Drip of Paint – Alifair Skebe ..... 173
FICTION	
	Me & Jesus – Lori Sublett..... 181
POETRY	
	High Maintenance – James Reidel..... 182
POETRY	
	The Home For Friendly Girls – James Reidel..... 183
POETRY	
	Voting Habits – James Reidel..... 184
POETRY	
	Cooping – James Reidel ..... 186
CREATIVE NONFICTION	
	She Would Love to See China – Patricia Smith ..... 187
CONTRIBUTORS	..... 203



8XX — Weldon Kees

# Homecoming

*Jon Chopan*

I walked in and saw Billy Chapman wearing his Marine Corps blues, his gloved hands wrapped around a pint and his face covered in the kind of joy all warriors felt when they got their first taste of home. The women, girlfriends and wives and daughters of servicemen, circled around him as if he were the only man in the whole VFW hall. It was a sobering, patriotic event. Billy had returned home a hero. The Corps had flown him in straight from Iraq. He'd served his country and now here he was, on leave, touring the States to stir up morale. I felt a kind of sick envy, a nausea that could only be explained when one considered the types of dreams I'd had about my own return home, parades and women and a celebration about the fact that I had laid my life on the line to defend the American Dream.

I hadn't known a single person, until now, who had come home to the kind of fanfare Billy was getting: the free booze, the story in the local paper spanning two full pages, with photos of his bright, young, enthusiastic face. This was the culminating event in his heroic return, something akin to pinning a ribbon on the beauty queen. I was confused about how a kid, as incompetent as I had remembered him, could go on to do such great things; how he had for so long, during our time in the same neighborhood and at the same school, lived without much notice.

Billy was a runt, younger than me by two years, and I had, when we were younger, as so many people did, poked fun at him, thought of him as the harmless short kid. I was shocked, even a bit jealous, that he'd gone on to become a kind of legend. It seemed to support my theory that I would make nothing grand of my own life.

There, in the VFW hall, Billy Chapman looked so polished, so put together, that he might well have walked out of an advertisement for the Marine Corps itself.

I took stock of the VFW. It was a square, dark place, like a bunker covered in all kinds of confetti. Everyone there seemed to have forgotten what it was normally like, quiet and lonely, and instead, they all laughed and danced and made jokes as if they were celebrating the New Year. The walls were plastered with streamers and every surface was covered in some kind of patriotic slogan.

“This is too much,” Billy said.

“Tell us your story again?” one of the women said.

“There isn’t much to tell.” He lifted his beer slowly and swallowed half of it as if he were replaying the events that had brought him here, trying to find a new wrinkle, a detail he had yet to tell.

“You’re some kind of hero, kid.”

“Bullshit. It ain’t like that,” Billy said.

He looked up and smiled at me for the first time.

I had never seen the place like this. I’d spent a lot of time there, once I’d returned, sitting with the three or four old-timers who went every night. And nothing good ever happened. We all left a bit worse off, it seemed, but I always found my way back.

Every night, as the doors swung open, I imagined I might walk in and find something new, some kind of miracle. We had, most of the younger men who’d enlisted, come home seeking an identity, a direction, and as we shared beers and stories, we truly believed we might find one. But by the time we stumbled out, our best stories told and retold, we returned to our beds the same sad, lost bodies, the same boys who had come home without a sense of purpose, without an idea about who we were or where we might be headed.

That night I sat at the bar with a young soldier named Mitchell Flowers, who had come to Rochester to play minor league baseball. He had a wonderful afro that puffed out like a kind of halo. Watching him play on local TV, as fluid and graceful as his swing was, I



couldn't imagine him at war. He spoke eloquently about women and race and art. He'd come in a few times during the months I drank at the VFW. His whole life stood before him. To the younger veterans like myself, he was a symbol of hope, because we believed we might somehow find our own kind of direction, something like we thought he had. Hearing him tell stories about road trips and big games made it easy to imagine that we could all attain a certain level of celebrity, even if it was only by living through him.

Flowers, who'd come straight from a ball game, didn't receive his normal welcome because of it.

"Look at this right here, a celebration," he said with a tired smile.

He passed me a shot glass full of whiskey and said, "I came down to see this wounded warrior everyone's been talking about."

Then he downed his drink, gesturing for me to join in. "I'm not going to be around much longer. I wanted to see you one last time," he said, waving his hand at the crowd. "I'm headed back to the front. Uncle Sam is calling me back to war."

Mitchell turned and hugged me like a child seeking comfort. He was still wearing his uniform, the front of it covered in dirt, his cleats tracking clumps of grass and mud all over the floor.

Then it dawned on me that Billy hadn't come home a hero, or that his story was more complicated than that. One of his cousins, or a friend, or somebody from the neighborhood had mentioned to me that he'd been injured just three weeks into his tour. They didn't, at the time, know the full extent of it, but I recalled something they'd said: "Done for, over and out, finished." Staring down the length of the bar at Billy, I finally saw how truly unlucky he looked, like a man who was one number off from winning the lotto.

What's worse was, for the first time, I realized Billy Chapman wasn't home on leave, as if he were going to return to the war again someday, but that he was home for good, that this whole mess was about the fact that in all likelihood there were a lot of things Billy

would never do again. He'd been paralyzed from the waist down. Out on patrol, during his third week in country, an IED, hidden inside a dead body, detonated behind him. Struck in the back by shrapnel, he had lost all feeling and movement in his legs, and now the doctors were telling him that he could, though they didn't know when or how, maybe, one day walk again. This was what the profile in the paper was about, his struggle to recover, to become whole again. But I'd been so focused on my own plight I hadn't bothered to understand.

This is how it was at the VFW because, to some degree, we all thought we had it worse than the next guy. That's why the Marines picked on the Army guys and the Army guys on the Air Force and right on down the line. We all believed we were special. Part of it was about ego and tradition and posturing, but another part of it was about self-pity, about feeling like nobody on the face of this earth knew what it meant for you to have seen and done the things you did.

Billy, despite losing five pints of blood, had been brought back to life. The Corps wanted him to tour VA hospitals, because he still believed in the mission, and they believed that his positive outlook might rub off on the guys who were starting to have second thoughts about war and soldiering and giving up their limbs for the nation. He tried it for a time, visited hospitals in Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, but it wore thin, seeing all those injured men, hearing their stories and sometimes their anger, and Billy returned home to serve out the rest of his time at the clinic doing physical therapy and filing paperwork.

This was his life at twenty years old.

The VFW was still open and going on like normal. But people had soured on the war, or maybe, more accurately, they just sort of lost interest. As for me, I'd been working a shit job at a meat-packing plant, spending my money on booze, waiting for the day when my miracle would come.

One night after Mitchell returned, he, Billy Chapman, and myself went out on the town together, searching for trouble or love, we didn't know which.

Billy sat on one side of me and Mitchell on the other. Mitchell, during that last deployment, had suffered a brain injury, which went and ruined his coordination. His baseball days were over. People washed around us in a sea of happiness that we could not understand, but remembered as a part of some phantom life. I considered that and how, I think, all of us wished we could trade places, even with the saddest cases in the joint, just to live one day free from our own skin.

Between us we had all of fifty dollars. Mitchell and Billy were waiting on disability checks. I had spent most of my money drinking alone at the VFW. We drank every last dime we had.

When the money was gone we went to Billy's place, where he had a stockpile of drugs, some for anxiety and others for sleep and more still for pain. He hadn't taken any of them, but instead stashed them in a filing cabinet, afraid that if he took them he would let go the drive to walk again, afraid that he might become hooked on them and then lose his mind along with his legs.

In Billy's apartment we sat, an array of pills laid out in front of us.

Billy turned to me. "What's your story, Fitzsimmons, hanging out with two cripples like us?"

"Where else would I be?"

"Out getting laid, college, back at war. Anywhere but here," Billy said.

"I guess I'm a little lost is all."

"Fuck, we're all a little lost," Mitchell said.

I didn't tell them this, but in some ways I envied my friends. After all, no one would ever question the choices they made, the drinking, the pills we were about to swallow by the fistful, because they would assume that their injuries explained their behavior, in

some way excused it, and I had no explanation for the things I did. Then Billy said, “The worst part, you know, about the legs. It isn’t that I can’t walk. It’s that they’re still here. I look down at them every fucking morning when I wake up, refusing to do anything I tell them to do.”

We shoveled his pills into our mouths, mixed them up and washed them down with the lone beer left in Billy’s fridge. I don’t remember how Mitchell and I made it to my place, even though it was only a few blocks away. My spine was on fire and my brain felt like a limb that had fallen asleep. Within minutes Mitchell was slumped in a lawn chair. I could hear him mumbling, “I believe, I believe,” just like that, over and over again. The last thing I remember thinking was that I wanted to rush to join him, to stumble into his dreams, because it sounded to me like Mitchell was, just then, meeting the Messiah for the first time.

As for Billy, I cannot speak of his dreams. The next day they found Billy hanging in his closet by a necktie. They ruled it a suicide, but I knew better than that. Because, for a time, it came to me in flashes, strange dreams that appeared, usually, when I’d been drinking. So I drank more and more.

Sometimes we’d be back in the VFW celebrating with him. Other times he’d be out with Mitchell and me. But then there were times, and those were the worst, when it was just Billy and me, and there he’d be, through clinched teeth, saying: “Stand up, you worthless piece of shit. Stand up.”

I saw the panic in his eyes. Somehow I knew that he didn’t want me to help him. Outside the sky was a dark, foreboding shade of grey, like a storm was coming. Billy looked at me, and I could see that he was trying to tell me something. I leaned in close, could feel his faint breath against my cheek. But always it was something I could not hear.

I believe my friend died trying to get to his feet.



## Landscape With Fucking Squirrels

*Hugh Behm-Steinberg*

I'm sitting in my yard, looking at the peavines arcing over their trellises, dirt tamped down, the black line of soaker hoses and their rusting staples; the branches of the apple tree with the weight of their unripe apples. A young squirrel bites into one and spits it out, into another, the same. Over and over, the ground gets littered with applescraps, cores, browning food for yellow jackets. He's fearless, I throw pebbles at him, he just shifts his weight. Just be glad I'm not a monkey he barks, be glad I'm not a rat. I should try to stay awake, persist in learning how to do something, being stubborn. Afterwards, no secrets in my hair, my hair becoming wild.

## **A Word in a Nest of Birds**

*Hugh Behm-Steinberg*

If birds then unangling. A moving stillness which isn't work. Not trying you're just working on your beard. The word is work the work is free. The word is free. It will be your ghost, it will be your bird. It will be beautiful, it will be tree bent. Branches and twigs, weighed down and bent upon with nests, nests of leaves and wood and hair. Then a bird will sleep in your mouth, a ghost will sleep in you. Which means nothing, which means love, which homes you, which you thought you'd like but you had no idea how much. It's late you don't want to untangle yourself from your singing. Hey haven't you heard about the bird the bird is a word.

## Thank You

*Paul Lisicky*

What to do with all these clothes? And shoes, shoes that moved across parking lots, carpets, weeds, sticky patches, spilled things, rough things, gum, puddles.

The husband stands before his wife's closet. He can't even lift anything off the hangers without her scent coming off. He's afraid to touch too much lest that scent get fainter and duskier, something not her. So he shuts the doors, harder than he expected to, then sits on the stool with his head in his hands.

Later he's back inside the nursing home he once visited once a day. He watches himself handing the dresses over to the women who lifted her and set her down. They take the dresses, not even sure they should want them, though they coo and smile, just as they think he wants them to do.

Stylish, they say.

Can he still hear his son from fifteen states away? But the fabric's not even cold!

They drape them over the arm of the chair.

His wife at the sewing machine, folding, piecing, squeezing, pulling. Little thump of pedal, needle punching, pins in mouth, concentrating. Light hot on the backs of her hands. Dresses she'd never wear, dresses made for somebody else's life, her name in script on a tag inside the collar, as if it were not exactly her own name, but an insignia for a department store.

Are you all right? say the women, who stop, having already gone back to wiping up after someone.

I think, says the man, propping himself up against the door frame. But it's not him who says it, oh no. For what kind of man would dare to leave, leaving behind the precious dresses to women who'd give them away?



"I'll tell you why I always  
serve *gentle press* juice"



Oh here. Here comes  
the sea, God's martini.



It's been well stirred  
and lightly shaken.



And now so  
shall we be too.



Because our bishop  
sold the last  
of his indulgences



FROM LIBBY'S FAMOUS 1,000,000  
SINS REMEMBERED

*I'll Tell You Why — Nance Van Winckel*

WRITE ON A TYPEWRITER WITH ONE KEY?

***I WOULD LIKE TO TRY THAT.***

***AND YES, I AGREE  
TO DRINK WHAT IS WRITTEN.***

*33 Fine Brews*  
**BLEND**  
*into One Great Beer*

**Pabst  
Blue  
Ribbon**

One Key — Nance Van Winckel

## Guide to Snaring Coyotes

*Lois Marie Harrod*

You want to catch  
the midnight clutch  
in your throat, the howls  
behind the silo,  
the barn, the static  
yelps at the edge  
of the field, the cat  
that prowled the grass,  
missing now for days  
and you fed him,  
fish scraps and poultry.  
So you wash  
and boil the snares,  
no good cooking,  
hang them outside  
until they smell like rain,  
and you warn your neighbors,  
they're just dogs, they say,  
those coyotes,  
but you hear the snouts  
all night, sniffing  
around the foundations,  
snuffling in the shed,  
you are wild with grief,  
you wash your hands  
the way you washed  
your hands of him,  
you put on surgical gloves,  
you set those stainless  
steel traps  
in the peonies.

# The Language of Alligators

*Shark Valley, Everglades*

*Katherine Riegel*

1.

If you trace the lines of their bodies on a piece of paper, it looks like a map of marshland, rills leading to creeks leading to a mire of rivers.



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2.

From above, nine of them together create glyphs, symbols in some ancient natural language. The four in the upper right, all touching, are elegantly connected, their tails curling like calligraphy. They form a character that means *we*, or *warmth*, or *power*.

In the bottom right, two touch nose to foot, tail to side. One could make a C, but together they make a circle with a tail, an infinity of river.

And the three in the upper left say *going, going, going*, they say *growth* and *grass* and their tails point to the right—except the one in the shade, his head in shadow, who sits at the beginning of the page but seems to be speaking of endings.



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3.

Impossible not to think *affection* about the two paired like a cross, the smaller over the larger's back, face to the sun. Part of the largest character, legs akimbo like the rest.



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4.

Teeth even make a pattern, dangerous as tail, armor like stubble.  
Upturned nose, swollen neck, brown-black eye as innocent as a deer's.  
The letters written on this body with scales and skin and bone and muscle: *U* and *O* and *L* and *V* and *S* in variation on variation. *Undulate* and *overpower*, *lunge* and *vector* and *surge*.



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5.

Almost a smile here, no visible teeth. Neck wrinkled like an accordion. She has made music already; she watches us, and her young that blend, camouflaged, into the grassy water.



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6.

Striped and mottled, the baby reaches with tender hands. *Baby*, we say, as if these creatures were ever young. This could almost be one of the anoles we have carried in our hands, helpless. It says *leaving* and *fleeing* and *exploring*, all those words meaning, for it, the same.





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7.

When we look at them, we think they speak to us. We think they say *danger* and *beware*, we think they say *beauty* and even *shiver*. But they are not interested in us, our fussy bipedal lives, our ignorance of sun and submersion. They go on speaking with their bodies, writing down the millennia season by fugitive season.

## A Tail of Space

*Joseph Pravda*

Torn between the greater good of peace, at last, between peoples of differing cultural mores and traditions on the one hand and his selfish concerns about posing as the chained primate in Grigori's elaborately feigned appearance of insanity as his ticket home, Astronaut Simpson agreed to play Jocko the surly monkey in the upcoming television transmission back to Star City, Russia from the confines of an admittedly long past prime Mir, hoping earnestly that when his time came to return his prehensile tail would fit into his spacesuit.

## Openings (2004)

*Richard Kostelanetz*

A prominent athlete, he flirted only with those women who  
knew how to behave with a prominent athlete, never giving a  
second thought to the rest of us girls.

A volcano represents Mother Earth speaking a language that can-  
not be understood.

Ashes found between the pages of family books are the most  
poignant reminder of our father.

Forever hailing taxicabs that were occupied, I thought myself a  
perpetual dunce.

Maidservants angry with their employers beat up not on children  
but on carpets, mattresses, and pillows.

Once the seamstress does her work, the button-hole welcomes a  
new button.

From her starlet youth, only her gorgeously shaped ankles  
remained.

Rummaging through his late wife's papers he found a photo-  
graph of her naked, with her legs apart, wondering, since they  
had married when she was nineteen, who could have taken it.

I woke up thinking that the world should remember me as a  
saint.

He was the sort of lawyer who would invent problems and rene-  
gotiate otherwise satisfactory deals, billing liberally for his time.

She could feel his presence, his oppressive maleness, towering  
above her.

Much as I'd like to forget what happened, I will now remember  
the last eight glorious hours in my brother's short life.

Most of his best writing focused upon the point where memoir  
becomes fiction.

Once I gave my nephew an entry-level job, he displayed more

bull-headedness than was  
necessary or appreciated.  
The only apartment he could find was directly underneath a den  
of prostitution.  
Home from college for the summer I recognized how much  
naïveté had once infiltrated my mind.  
One truth not to be forgotten is that fiction is largely false.  
What an educational experience it was to find oneself attracted  
to a woman, a mature women, who was only twenty-six inches  
high.  
The husband was forever getting into trouble over money.  
Once I passed through the arches, the well-dressed hostess  
greeted me with a smile revealing only three teeth.  
My mother taught me all the tricks she necessarily learned when  
she was my age about how to distance oneself from an alcoholic  
husband and yet appear to be supportive.  
My ability to walk on water wasn't learned in a day.  
I was invited to take dinner at a table where my utensils--my  
knife, fork, and spoon--had an aura of gangrenous mold.  
In her husband she saw all the years that had been taken from  
her.  
Out of shame for her house she never asked men to pick her up  
at home, always insisting that she would meet me somewhere  
else.  
She was the only child in the class who didn't know exactly when  
and where she was born.  
He failed in quick succession as an administrative trainee, a store  
salesman, a telephone  
marketer, a furniture mover, and a janitor.  
Disliking childish things, he longed to be a man and, most im-  
mediately, to get out of school.  
My final words to my favorite student were, simply, if your wife's  
best friend ever becomes single again, think first of me.

I always carry with me a tape recorder to ensure not only that I'll  
not be misquoted but so that all my utterances can be copy-  
righted.

If I were alive today, it would be my one hundredth birthday.  
I stood transfixed as my new boss drove a nail into his head with-  
out drawing any blood.

He liked every night to take his camera, special film, and infrared  
light into a city park where people were having furtive sex.

Returning from a research trip the husband presented his wife  
with evidence documenting

that they were indeed fraternal twins separated at birth.

As the coffin fell over, we heard the sound of movement coming  
from somewhere inside it.

I knew my husband married me to charm people important to  
his work; but since he had so  
many clients I often make mistakes and so strike everyone as  
hopelessly confused.

Talk to me only while listening.

Both of us found sexy women frightening--he because he was a  
virgin, I because anything

unfamiliar made anxious from my fingers to my toes.

Every time I fall asleep I wonder if I'll ever wake up.

He believed that, firm and strong though his body was, it was  
not designed to survive a normal life span.

I saw down with the vow not to get up until I'd written a million  
words.

Even as a teenager he imagined what it might be like to fall in  
love with a woman, deify her, and have her wash his feet.

His greatest dream was to see what would happen to his family  
after he died.

She embroidered her name on the thighs of her stockings so that  
once she sat down and

hiked up her skirt strange men would know now to address her.

When I was born I weighed fifty pounds.  
Even into her sixties she spent every morning a considerable  
amount of time making herself up before a mirror, never quite  
sure what might be needed for her very best look.  
She died thinking--no, obsessing--about her mother.  
This is a story that should have never been written, and certainly  
never published.  
I use a pseudonym to put as much distance as possible between  
the reputation attached to  
my name and the story I want to tell.  
Even twenty years later I can remember vividly the last time I  
saw my mother.  
I don't need to turn on the lights when I enter the front door--I  
know my house.  
To facilitate his emigration he invited both his mistresses to meet  
him at the same place and the same time.  
The Devil's coming--everybody hide.  
Though those who are older and wiser tell me that compress-  
ing my life into a single book is "impossible," I try, here and  
elsewhere, to defy common sense.  
The purpose of this manual is making the world safe from crime,  
one crook at a time.  
He worked his animals twenty hours every day.  
Inadvertently I wandered into a room full of women masturbating.  
He spent his days writing fortune cookie slogans and his evening  
dreaming of political revolution.  
The principal conceit of my fictions was making animals speak  
words you can understand.  
What would happen if all of us knew everything there was to  
know.  
I discovered in my late mother's diary that she was so promiscu-  
ous before I was born that she didn't know for sure which of  
several men, in several countries, might be my father.

My mother was a formal but sensual woman whose confusing  
taste in clothes sent contrary signals.  
I am now older than everyone I've ever known when they died.  
What awakened me was the sound of a crowd running over my  
sunken sleeping trench.  
On the wall in front of me, a concrete surface, suddenly appeared  
the image of a face that I recognized as mine.  
Because I like to dream, I tend to sleep an awful lot.  
I don't hate other people as much as I hate myself.  
She created the preconditions for confusion by giving all their  
daughters the same exotic first name.  
If animals don't wear clothes to cover their genitals, why should  
I?  
Though I live only five minutes away from work, I invariably  
leave my house at three minutes before nine and speed.  
I dreamed that I peed into the toilet until I discovered that I  
hadn't.  
Whenever I visit my in-laws for any length of time, I try to  
behave like an incurable alcoholic.  
The world doesn't come alive until human beings, homo sapiens,  
begin to move in unique ways.  
To win is human; to win and make your opponent accept defeats  
amicably is superhuman.  
My mother repeatedly told me that my dad died because he stole  
from the rich to give to the poor.  
Morning will be cancelled today.  
This will read like a children's story until you realize that its  
theme isn't childish.  
One reason for my well-known reluctance to travel is the ease  
with which make new friends.  
In most of the board games you love, you're offered only two  
possible moves, each equally credible, one of them more hazard-  
ous than the other.

I was so paralyzingly drunk when I awoke that I wondered  
whether I shouldn't pee in bed.  
When I was twelve, before I could fully understand what she was  
saying, my mother told me that my long-lost father's penis was a  
half-meter long.  
On first glance my "blind date" for the evening looks as though  
she had applied makeup to only the left side of her face.  
Kids often wreck a marriage—if not the first kid, more often the  
second.  
There are only a few performers who, after people have paid to  
see them, are heckled into restraining, if not halting, their act.  
My instruction was to greet the object of my blind date in the  
costume of a polar bear.  
In the dead stranger's wallet the policeman found photographs of  
two teenagers who resembled his daughters.  
I never outgrew my taste for very tall red heads and so would  
stick myself with women who fulfilled that silhouette but failed  
in other, less obvious, initially less visible ways.  
In dreams begin the assumption of responsibilities.  
From the security of a state prison, he directed the daily activities  
of a gang of bullies.  
He thought of himself as a genius inevitably misunderstood, even  
by his many lovers.  
Released after twenty years in prison for murdering his wife, he  
knew he had only the slightest chance of loving, let alone marry-  
ing, again.  
I think of myself as a marble statue plagued by perpetually cold  
feet.  
When a husband leaves his wife for a woman he finds different,  
his wife and her allies mistakenly complain that "all men are the  
same."  
One reason that this man of leisure never traveled was an excess  
of sexual obligations at home.



For several decades now, it has been my dream to create an alternative alphabet that would conquer the world.

The young newly weds made love often but not to each other.  
My greatest fear, whenever my mother took me to school in the morning, was that he would returned in the afternoon to pick up another child.

Parachuting to the roof of a jail, he had first to disentangle himself from encumbering paraphernalia.

When she ran into the tunnel, she could hear, not see, someone running behind her.

From his earliest years his mother told him that he was the child of a genius whose “smart genes” he had inherited.

I’ve known some clear truths and rejected some unclear truths.

The most evil social planners are those who fail to consider secondary results that would be less obvious and less desirable.

If I could make you look stupid, should I take all the credit?

Even though I’ve been awarded all the honors available to a writer in my small country, my income is negligible.

The King sponsored a contest that would award a lifetime education scholarship to the child who could give the most accurate count of all the stars in the sky.

Did you notice that the clouds once in the back of the house are now in the front and that the pile of money left on the kitchen table had disappeared?

He became more adept at soccer whenever he imagined that the ball on the ground before him was his little brother’s head.

A signed prescription is a doctor’s gift not to the patient but to the pharmacist.

The first love you make with a new lover sets a standard and a level against which all subsequent loving will be inadvertently measured.

Don’t you recognize in me the face not of my father but of his best friend?

Rich though I considered myself, owning everything I can afford  
to purchase, certain desires remind me of the truth that I'm still  
poor.

With such a bad memory he forgets that he has a bad memory.  
Nothing saddens a child more than a merry-go-round than its  
slowing down and an adult more than a marriage that is winding  
down.

My life has been a disappointment—everything positive too  
fleeting, everything negative everlasting.  
I prefer private libraries to public for the extra pleasure of reading  
annotations made by the owner in his or her books.  
Beyond my imagination is where I want my fiction writing to go.



*Qualcosa si muove* – Cesare Lucchini



*Quel che rimane – Cesare Lucchini*



*Quel che rimane Paesaggio – Cesare Lucchini*

## Map 2

*Joanne Ashcroft*

spike  
my love

lick its  
neck

adorned  
in lotions

girls tell

of

scattered grass

cut

eyes

hollow logics

more tale than tease

sins slit(her)

soul-pocked

cries

stall and combine

---

(ěm)

signs

yellow

enshrined

## Map 3

*Joanne Ashcroft*

seared with gauze  
a rill safe yawned  
armoury-ous ova

souring spaces  
dancing dis-eased

weapon scented  
foolery  
of womb-i-versal-ity

threads croak

(skip li(n)es)

half alimony  
minus snores

suck  
the beautiful

in awe  
I stick him  
more tells



## Map 4

*Joanne Ashcroft*

torn star  
sling-a-sing  
pitch it harder  
voice it aw(e)ful  
ring old  
          metallic roses  
dim the sly trickle bells

thirty canes  
seethe my says  
hear sunsore earth

th'eloquent lushness  
flings spring  
sprints oriental  
heavenly twists  
sit refreshed

route hot tongue  
peel paint furrows

free this rush higher  
bending oxygen

with ire  
land sings  
flippant moanings  
of limps and sores

hand back eyes  
impair ear nose  
ogle her lick her  
fumes

thinned heart  
sad sick (m)other  
embers sever(e)-  
ing

past her (or me)  
tears sticky die and  
rescind

their male-ness  
hangs free on a shelf  
with rude items  
(eggs and gin)  
TRUTH pecks  
stuns their heirloom

dun-one  
of chewed ear  
ponder will green  
and brew liberty

THEN PREPARE

sullenly  
toothsome  
bitter grist cap  
it all eyes  
scour ringing  
count treasures on  
desk tiny  
throw anchor near  
ten souls damned  
wrestle versed giants  
and slide cackles at  
you a grave away

thorns gut  
where  
all guard spoils

empty ear and  
pour sun where  
ridge tore neck and air  
Joy  
surf ashes edges reef

re-turn her  
love  
grows her

## Pressing

*Jerred Metts*

Alarm clocks were tricky at first, you know. I can't risk missing class oversleeping but there's no way I'm pressing that snooze. It'll scream and scream and I unplug it, see, like this morning. Gotta replug it when I go to bed and leave it at twelve 'cause I can't reset the time, that goddamn pressing; it's all over my life.

Gotta spend all day avoiding it, you know. Took a hammer to my toaster awhile back, can't press that lever or some blonde Russian sexrag somewhere gets incinerated, and toast isn't worth having that on my conscience. Put my bread in the microwave 'cause it's one of those with the knob you turn, and it opens by pulling the handle, like the fridge, not goddamn pressing like always which is why I can't have a television, or lots of things.

Everything is pressing, always pressing, till we press our fingers off and grind the bone up to dust, you know, 'cause that dust is coming back for us eventually, someone will press a button somewhere—like that bitch Becky at the redlight earlier, pressing the crosswalk all huffy and puffy and impatient while a building somewhere crumbles like a giant finger pressed into its foundations, and pressing it again just to make a plane fall out of the sky somewhere in Tennessee 'cause that bitch doesn't understand the light's on a timer; no way they have some dude sitting in a box pressing buttons to change the traffic light a million times a day 'cause I know the world's fucked up, but not that fucked up—but somebody will press something and that'll be all she wrote for somebody, you know, all 'cause someone rolled over in bed and slapped the snooze on their alarm clock ten times before finally getting up and of course they didn't lose any sleep over all the people they killed the day before setting the time. It's a system, like two people trapped in separate rooms and the

only way for one to get out is to press a button that opens the door but also kills the person in the other room, and of course anyone's going to press it, but not me. I'm saving lives with the small things.

I don't own a car, 'cause it's all buttons. You know, can't turn on the air 'cause you gotta press the button, and can't roll down the windows to get cold 'cause you gotta press the switch, and can't listen to music to take your mind off how goddamn hot you are 'cause you gotta press the knob on that thing too. The ignition turns, sure, but everybody loves pressing down on that pedal, speeding around and endangering the whole road. Cars are button traps.

So I take the bus. The driver gets to press his radio button all day, but at least he pulls the handle to open the door so I can get on and off without feeling like a butcher. I turn and pull, never press, you know. Even if I could get one of those cars with levers for handicapped people, I couldn't get gas. I'd be forced to stand around the station until some attendant comes out all eager to press the fuel types and receipt buttons, trying to say they're helping me out since I obviously don't know how to work simple machinery but really they just love their job, pressing buttons on the cash register all day, every cha-ching someone in America getting hit right in the face by lightning.

Pull-open doors are great, unless you gotta thumb down the switch, in which case fuck that. On the way to class, I just stare at the door till someone walks around me and opens it, holds it open for me expecting a thank-you. I should say fuck you, buddy, but I don't. He already knows he just made a bus full of people fall off a bridge, and I guess he's okay with that. I'm sure he watches me go up the stairs wondering how I became such a saint and I would tell him 'cause I'm careful, you know, like the fact I'm taking stairs. Elevators take awhile and you have to hope someone hits the button for your floor, or even worse someone'll ask you

and you have to tell them to press Floor Number 13 and you just vicariously made some kid's Pops fall off a ladder and die before he could ever watch his boy's first Little League game. Then you gotta stand there with all the people who pressed a button and bite your tongue while they try and smile at you like they didn't just cause fatal mechanical malfunctions all over the world just 'cause they didn't want to exercise their legs.

So I'm sitting in math class with my wooden pencil so I don't gotta press to get the lead, you know. Everybody clicking their lead out is oil drilling accidents. And cell phones, don't get me started, a third world country goes extinct every text message. I try so hard not to lose it. And then Becky, that bitch, walks into class all sassy and clicking a pen, click, click click click click, click, and the TV in the corner covered in buttons starts blaring about a guy going postal and killing six people in a movie studio right up the street from our building. How can I not say something?

"Don't you and that damn pen have anything to say for yourselves?"

"You're a freak," that bitch says, and clicks her pen three more times all rapid and I can't leave the room to save those poor people in the studio 'cause the door is closed and there's a goddamn button on the handle, and how can I explain to all these killers why someone needs to let me out?

So I just sit there with my wooden pencil and stare back at 'em, you know, till they all turn away, mumbling to themselves about how they wish they could be more like me and not that bitch Becky, in her tight jeans with one of those snap-on button waists that she likes to play with, snapping it and snapping it every now and then while some poor machinists in Ohio get their arms pancaked by three-ton pistons meant for flattening sheet metal. All I wanna do is throw my pencil at the back of her head but I can't lose it 'cause it's my only one, and Professor Stallworth walks in, smiling at the class while she bustles through the door 'cause

that doorhandle with the button just helped her create a sinkhole at the corner of some university where a girl walking her dog fell in.

Even though she's a presser like the rest of them there's something about Stallworth that I like. She's been my math professor for a few years now and has made a few attempts at understanding me. Everyone else just tends to stare at me, you know, like I'm a puppy stumping around on pawless little legs 'cause someone rang a doorbell somewhere. Or they'll take the Becky route and call me a freak.

But the professor's different, she sees me sometimes, standing in front of those doors with button-handles, and asks me if I'm all right, if there's anything she can do, trying to repent for the hundreds of people she has killed pressing the button on her iron to flatten out her frilly tropical dresses she wears to class every day, and each time I pity her and frown at her and all I want to say is that she's just gonna end up killing more innocent people if she tries to help me 'cause that's who she is, you know, a presser. And eventually she takes my silence to mean *Please ma'am press the button on this door and open it so that a young teenaged girl becomes violently and instantaneously lethally ill, choking on her vomit and dying during her Prom, all so that I might not piss my pants standing in this hallway in front of the bathroom* and she opens the door to the john for me; you would think bathrooms would just be simple pull-handle doors but no. And the professor holds it open and looks at me in that soft way, not accusatory 'cause her pencil-lead eyebrows aren't so sharp looking, they're arched and sad and nearly camouflaged into the wrinkles of her forehead. I go in and do my business and luckily the door is a pull-open buttonless handle type on the other side and you can rest assured I don't flush that goddamn toilet ever. I'm not sinking a cruise ship 'cause my pissing and subsequent lever push to flush lead to the creation of a giant whirlpool in the Atlantic.

So Professor Stallworth walks to the front of the class in her big tulip-covered dress with a stack of papers held against her chest and unplugs the television and I'm proud of her right then. Instead of hitting a million buttons she pulls the power, such an efficient way to save people, you know. But I wonder about those people in the movie studio being held hostage and Becky's been clicking that goddamn pen this whole time, so I doubt there's anyone left, so sad. Stallworth starts passing out the papers, and everybody is pulling out their calculators, of course except for me.

"Once you finish the exam, you may leave," the professor says, then retreats to her desk. She whips out a bag of pretzels and starts snacking them.

I try and occupy myself by reading the exam. Please complete the following section of the exam using a calculator, it says. Yeah right, and beneath that all these Egyptian looking words and signs that basically mean death. Everybody talks about what Pi is and I know the truth: it's the fact you gotta hit that button on your calculator and cause a physicist to have a stroke when all the while it's three point-one-something. Pi is just another way for the system to get you to kill someone.

So I just sit there, you know, staring at this exam that isn't a test of my math skills but really a test of my determination to be a non-murdering denizen of this world and listen to the professor smack away at those goddamn pretzels and Becky snapping those goddamn arm-crushing jean buttons while everyone types away on their calculators and all over the world people are getting electrocuted by faulty appliances one after another, the heroes using knob-turning microwaves are getting blasted in the face by a gamma-wave explosion and pool pumps are faulting and electrocuting pools full of little children in theme parks all in the name of Sine Cosine and Tangent.

A zero on an exam is a small price to pay, you know.

After awhile people are finishing the exam and handing it to



the professor, and she's giving out pretzels from her bottomless bag like a murder reward. Some people look at me as they walk out, me sitting here with my little wooden pencil and the empty exam and no calculator. I give them my fiercest look so that they know my will is strong.

Eventually me and Becky are the only ones left; she's done snapping that jean button and clicking her pen, I guess she's just concentrating on her exam. I look at the professor and she is sitting there, crunching and watching me with those drawn-on eyebrows all soft and arched in her way. Crumbs and little diamonds of salt glimmer all over her chest.

"Are you almost finished with your exam?"

I shake my head.

I don't want to say anything, you know, 'cause even though she can be a nice lady she's trying to make a sick joke, what she really means is how much longer are you going to go before you submit to the urge to kill and I wish more than anything for some way to make her understand that we're all in a big labyrinth of rooms with buttons and that she has a choice whether to kill or not.

"Come here," she says, waving me forward with a pretzel.

I get up and walk past Becky, still hunched over her test. I wait next to the desk for Stallworth to say something to me.

She just sits there for a moment, with her purse-sized pretzel bag, watching me, the TV in the corner with its armor of buttons gazing at me over her shoulder like some sort of blocky genocidal soap-opera box parrot.

Finally, when she opens her mouth to speak, I can see pretzel mush stuck in between her back molars.

"This is a trigonometry class," she says nice and slow, her salty breath washing over my face.

"Yes," I say, and I'd like to add it's more like Auschwitz.

"Trigonometry requires the use of a calculator."

She smiles when she tells me this, it's a sad and soft one. Those sketchmark eyebrows rainbow back up, and I can see it in her eyes that just beneath the surface she knows I'm suffering, you know.

"You've failed this class twice already," she says, her smile dragging at the corners. "I'm sorry, but I'm afraid the third time is the charm if you fail again. I will have to deny your enrollment next semester."

"It's not fair," I say. I pinch the bridge of my nose, between my eyes.

"Why not? I am more than happy to supply you with a calculator so that you may graph the necessary equations."

"I can't use those."

"And why is that?" She leans back in her chair, popping a pretzel into her gobchomper as if she's waiting for the show to start, like I just have some typical fratboy excuse.

I hit her with the truth that I've been wanting to tell her for the past two years.

"Calculators kill people," I say.

She snorts, a little underwater giggle, like I just surprised her completely with the most horrible news that she has known her entire life and never realized, and then she starts gurgling and she looks at me with her eyes all huge. You can bet your bottom buck those drawn-on eyebrows are completely vanished in the wrinkles. She starts coughing.

"This test is bullshit!" Becky stands up, her desk grinding away from her. "It's not fair at all."

Becky balls up the exam and throws it overhand. It bounces off my face and she is out of the room before it hits the ground, making sure to press down on that door-button nice and hard, you know, so some football player somewhere gets his jaws shattered in a helmet-to-helmet collision.

I turn back to the professor and she's leaning back in her

chair, hands in the pudge of her neck, and blue spiderwebs are crawling out from her temples to where her eyebrows used to be. She's coughing and I've heard the sound before, like a dog trying to vomit.

I'm thinking oh shit so I go ahead and say it, "Oh shit," and she's thinking the same thing; I can see it in her bloodshot eyes. She hacks, leans forward, hacks, throws the pretzel bag and they go all over the desk and floor, and I'm just standing in a puddle of pretzels. I don't know what to do. She's got her cellphone in her hand, still making those sick hacking sounds and her face is turning more purple than the tulips on her dress, and she pulls her thumb back real far to jam on the buttons, first one, then the other, then her eyes go white and she keels to the side, chair and all, spilling on the floor like a fat bouquet lying in the shallows of a pretzel pond.

The phone's on the table and I see the numbers 9, 1 on the screen. Those pretzels are trying to kill her. I turn around and run for the door to get help and stop halfway.

What could I say? My professor is choking on a handful of pretzels and might have had a heart attack when I told her what life is? We're trapped in here, and that button on the door might as well be a lock 'cause people have been killing other people with that thing all day long. Becky, that bitch, she knew it was gonna happen and ran off and left me here to watch Professor Stallworth die.

She's lying there on the floor, flat on her back, looking up at the ceiling and making soft air noises, like the airpocket under your back when you do a situp on the ground and it's almost like a fart. She's struggling to breathe, the pretzel somewhere in her gullet scraping up the walls and blocking the airflow. The phone is sitting there watching me from the desk and I pick it up like a hand grenade.

One button.

I gotta hold the wrist holding the phone so I can keep it still, it's hot enough to burn through my hand and all I wanna do is drop it on the ground and hope that the 1 key gets pressed somehow, by the floor and not me but that might break it and then there would be no way to get someone on the phone to come save Stallworth.

I know I have to hit it, it's up to me—the television is sitting there watching me and all the pens on the desk with their little button switches and I know as soon as I press 1 the TV's gonna turn on and Bill Cosby is gonna be there laughing at me and the pens are gonna start clicking by themselves and cackle in their own little pen-way and somewhere a boy with a terminal illness attached to a breathing machine is gonna lose power in the hospital and wither away while his family has to watch or someone is going to decide to walk into Disney World with a belt of C4 strapped to them or some kid who could have been a future president is going to get punched in the face during a routine lunch-money theft and when he hits the ground his brain is going to turn off like a cracked lightbulb or some girl walking across the street to ballet practice is gonna get hit by a semi and that semi's gonna be so covered in little-girl blood that the driver won't be able to see when he crashes into a gas station and detonates the entire oil drum underground and sets a whole rural outpost town on fire—and professor is lying there and the wheezy fart noises coming from her mouth are getting softer and all I've ever wanted to do was save people and this is my chance but why does someone have to die somewhere?

I pick up the phone. I press the button.

A rope inside my stomach is knotting itself up; I lean over and battle back the urge to vomit, and there's a voice coming from the phone. Someone is talking to me.

I say, "Operator come to classroom 3112 my professor is dying and I can't escape this room."

It's a man, voice deep and bass, and for a second I think that it's God or some higher power, whoever designed this horrible button-pressing contraption of life, gonna tell me I lost the game by winning it.

"I need you to slow down and tell me what happened, sir."

There aren't any more whooshing sounds coming from Stallworth's throat and her face is a deep Barney purple, the coal eyebrows she stenciled on running with forehead sweat.

"A pretzel is trying to kill her and she's unconscious."

"She's choking on a pretzel?"

"Yes."

"Is she breathing?"

"No."

"Can you clear the airway with your hand?"

"No," I say. "It's too deep."

"Sir, I need you to do chest compressions—" he says and I don't hear the rest 'cause the phone drops out of my hand, bounces off my shoe and skids across the floor next to Stallworth lying there, still as a corpse. I drop to my knees beside her and pick up the phone. The voice is still talking.

"Sir, did you hear my last instruction?"

"I can't," I say.

"You have to, sir. Do you know how?"

The phone clatters in my shaking hands. I know the world is just having its fun with me.

"I need you to press down with a lot of force. A unit is en route to your location but there may not be much time. You're her only hope right now, sir."

I drop the phone. Maybe someone did press the crosswalk or their snooze button and it caused Stallworth to choke on that pretzel but maybe I'm the deciding factor, the one variable that can change whether or not she dies. I can reverse the experiment and free both people from the rooms without anyone dying and

purge myself of the guilt for whoever I just sentenced to death dialing an emergency number.

I put both hands on her stomach, just below her flower-patched breasts, and I can feel her heart beating just barely, super soft. I lock my fingers together.

I can only hope that when I press Stallworth's torso-button it causes some man in California to get sucked out into the undertow to get eaten by the deepwater sharks and some young teenager with frizzy hair sees it happening and swims out to save the man or someone picks up a baby before it can shove its pinky in an electrical outlet or a Marine that gets shot in the leg gets saved at the last minute by air cavalry, anything so that no one dies in the chain I'll have caused by pressing this woman's insides.

I piston my arms down like a dynamite plunger from the cartoons.

Stallworth's mouth explodes like a whale's blowhole. A geyser of pretzel paste and spit and a couple of whole pretzels sprays across my face and all over my eyes and I fall backwards with the sound of my own head hitting the floor like two marbles clacking together, then there's nothing but fuzzy white and brown with blackness creeping in on the edges. I can hear Stallworth coughing and breathing again and then she's above me, looking down and I understand that I sacrificed my life for hers and pressed my own button. It's all over.

But then Stallworth slaps me in the face, not a horizontal swoop of the open hand but a Buddha-strike palm half in the eye and half on my nosebridge and the blackness decides to leave me alone, fleeing back to the corners of my vision. I sit up and feel warmth on the back of my head that's either throat fluid or my own blood. Stallworth crawls over to the corner of the room still coughing and breathing ragged like someone poured salt in her esophagus.

I sit up, my head feels full of sloshing water and I want to lie

down and die. The door of the classroom buckles and flies open, and a man in white clothes stained red is standing there with one leg in the air. That's a great way to get around pressing the button on the handle.

This man comes up to me, worried and smiling, ready to save. I bet he's a nonpresser like me, or at least a nonpresser like I was until I came to this goddamn classroom today. I can tell by the blood on his shirt that it's his job to break the button chain.

He feels my throat and stares at my eyes and puts something cold against the back of my head while some other man in white is tending to Stallworth in the corner. She won't quit staring at me with those eyes; they're completely red, entirely whiteless.

I want to say, you're welcome, professor, but suddenly she gives me the finger and starts crying. I decide to tell the man holding my head thank you instead.

"It's alright, buddy," he says to me and smiles.

"The operator told us he was having some trouble getting you to initiate CPR. But it looks like you came through like a champ."

I shake my head. My vision blurs, like a dad that can't work a camcorder focus.

"We've been having a hell of a day, too," he says, pulling something out of his pocket. I can't tell what it is, my vision is still swimming.

He waves the fuzzy shape of his finger in front of my face.

"First the shootout at the movie studio, then the girl downstairs that got hit by a cab," he says.

"Hit by a cab," I repeat, ignoring the finger and staring at the object in his hands, trying to focus.

"Yeah, a little blonde honey in jean shorts. Died on impact. We were just bagging her up when we got the call for you guys," he says, and I finally realize that he's holding a flashlight.

He points it at my eye, and before I can tell him about that bitch Becky and how I'm the one that killed her, he presses the button to turn it on.

## Petrarch #191

*Tim Atkins*

Because in the mind all is perfect

& there is little salt

Because it passes like a cake

A little counselling is enough

& as for we who love to be abused

On water or on fire may be deceived by taste & good touch

Because there is no mind

Because

Because the majority of cave dwellers are dexterous with pens

Because they fit

Because yuppies always move south

Because it is easy to blame the green vegetables

Because a single thought is always too much

Because burning is of use to describe humans

Put it out



## Petrarch #160

*Tim Atkins*

Her white breasts pressed against a green tree-trunk

One cat kissing another cat on a card in a card shop in Clapham

The orange of oranges as only oranges can summon different from a  
blue tongue in the mouth or the hand

Of a Chinese doctor trembling just a little at the front of the concept of  
reciprocity

Her yellow body as white as white paper really white

Two boxers standing silent in a ring perhaps hugging What Spunk!

Light on wrought-iron in the dome of the mind of the Dadaist Restaurateur

Whoever wishes to love nobly when she presses her green something against a  
white what— friends—

There

Must

Always

Be

Doubt

## **Petrarch #164.1** *for Jeff*

*Tim Atkins*

Oh! Here I am & what is this

Duvet & ketamine lemons the North & South Circular stars asleep in their  
beds & the paparazzi

Do not twinkle at the gates or were they Cheerios & cold milk

Producing a temporary high & then finally the remorse of a lover human or  
Pu Ling-En he said

Feeling a little light-headed over multiple copies of Wallace

Spilling & losing weight from the fingertips but I Do Not

I got IBS paying off the IRS perhaps the

Ignis Ignis on the branch pecks my wood when life is good (perhaps)

I went to the library in order to learn things but To Kill A Mockingbird taught  
me

Nothing about how to kill mockingbirds

It is beautiful to look at beautiful things & say

Fuck to the revolution because one has already done it

I got the tiny mumps instead of Concupiscent Cups

You never really do get all your money back



*Heavy Warehouse — Steve Javiel*



*Boom — Steve Javieł*

## Waters: A Collage

*Donna Steiner*

I'm spending a few hours a week at the lake. That is, I drive to the lake, sit in my car, and watch what happens. What mostly happens, late winter, on Lake Ontario: nothing. No boats, no ships, no jet skis, no swimmers, no fishing. What mostly happens: giant sheets of ice that made the lake appear to be frozen – Lake Ontario hasn't actually frozen in its entirety in over 70 years – begin to break apart. When waves slap the shore, they hit 20-foot high promontories, thick plates of ice that have, in effect, become a temporary coastline. At this time of year, the waves are half-water, half-slab, and the movement is undulate, each wave's motion curtailed by the presence of floating, drifting ice islands. As the days pass and the temperature rises, the ice begins to break up. Halfway into March, the slate-gray water is dotted with suspended chunks of misshapen ice. The chunks look to be the size of small boulders; I'd guess they weigh 200 pounds or more although it's hard to tell from my perch on shore. It's a windy day and the waves are choppy; when they break on the icy plateau a halo of white mist sprays the air. Everything I see is shades of white and gray, from the low clouds to the shrubbery to the last dregs of snow. The water looks muddy, like the streaks left over when a watercolorist cleans a paintbrush. A scrap of purple cloth is caught in a bramble; it's the only break in the monochromatic landscape, and it looks like a victory flag.

Three times a week I come out here, to the winding road that overlooks my town's share of Ontario's perimeter. Sometimes I go down to the abandoned piers, other days I'm at the top of the hill looking out at the break wall and lighthouse. Today I'm near the college where I teach, pulled off the road close to shore, taking advantage of the abandoned campus while the students are away on

spring break. “Spring Break,” here, is a misnomer – for the time being, we’re still firmly ensconced in winter.

The regularity of my visits is a direct result of misfortune, although not mine. My partner, Leigh, is at physical therapy, working to recover flexibility and strength in her leg after surgery to repair a damaged Achilles tendon. Every other day I drop her off, then drive to the water. I bring binoculars, a camera, paper and a pen. I see what I can see, take some notes, and head back to pick her up. Lately, my lakeside excursions have been confined to the car. Temperatures have hovered in the 20’s, and it’s usually snowing. It’s been a long winter, and I’m looking forward to the first warm days when I can get out and walk around and begin my own recovery.

When I was young, my father would take us to the beach on weekends he wasn’t working. A spit of sand called Sandy Hook, the northernmost finger of the Jersey shore, was our beach. It was, and remains, the place I think of as home. Some say the beach isn’t much to look at, but in my eyes it’s a perfect landscape: sand, water, sky. In places there are jetties composed of massive rocks; in places there are wisps and clusters of beach grass. But mostly it looks like a Rothko painting, the world divided into sections, the colors of each section muted but distinct. My father used to say that the waters of the Atlantic Ocean could cure anything, and I believed him. I believed him although never once did the water soothe a mosquito bite, mend a wound, alleviate an ache – but even as a child I understood metaphorical power, I understood the faith he had in his words.

The town where I live now is defined by water. Lake Ontario is to the north, and the Oswego River bisects the city. People give directions by designating whether a location is on the east or the west side of the river. We’re all south of the lake; if we were north,

wēd be Canadian. My college, a branch of the State University of New York, is situated right on the lake shore. Many of our students are from downstate, New York City and environs, and the lake makes a strong impression. A freshman once wrote, erroneously but beautifully, “the lake in my mind is a small ocean.” It does look like the ocean, at times – as far as one can see, the world is lake and sky. In the winter, all that’s added is ice and snow. I could look at it forever and not grow bored. The lake, in my mind, is a small ocean.

I’m parked at the top of the hill, looking down at the inlet this side of the break wall. The lighthouse is in the distance, and alongside me are about eight or nine other cars, townfolk here for some peace and quiet during their lunch breaks. From the chilly confines of my vehicle I watch a few dozen ducks on the lake and a couple of gulls in the air. The herring gulls – most often called sea gulls here – are batted around by the wind, and look like they’re enjoying the assault. One flies an erratic up-and-down path; it looks like it’s trying to stitch the horizon to the lake. Its body is the same gray-white of the sky, so when it drifts above the horizon I almost lose sight of it. When it dips back down, the dark gray of the lake allows the bird to stand out in relief. I watch it drop on a current, lift back up, seem to stall in place, then finally flap its wings for a little momentum. The gulls’ shrieks sound like the pulleys on my grandmother’s clothesline; the gulls are a vocal lot and provide the only counterpoint to the background brush of the waves and wind. They sound like they’re saying *eyok yok yok yok yok*, or maybe *yuk yuk yuk yuk yuk*. Hard to know if they’re complaining or exulting, but they definitely prefer articulation to silence. The winds are just strong enough to skiff the surface of the inlet’s waters; beyond the break wall the waves are turning into whitecaps.

Unlike the gulls, which today are interested in altitude, a pair of ducks chooses to race the length of the visible lake by skimming just a few feet from the water's surface. They're fast, they're well-matched, and I soon lose sight. Earlier I'd watched a dozen or so of their compatriots bob on the high swells of the Oswego River. The water was fast and rough, but the ducks took it in stride. They'd occasionally dip below the surface when a particularly large wave rolled through, but for the most part seemed unruffled by the weather.

The geese, the last significant component of the local water-bird trio, have begun to return from the south. I spotted a few hundred of them this morning, high over the house. Plenty of geese don't go south, but overwinter instead. They hang out at the school's track, or congregate in front of the main administration building. There are street signs in town that depict a goose followed by a trail of goslings – the sign means slow down, geese crossing the road. I've seen cars stop for ten minutes at a time while a mother goose and her babies took their time getting from one side of the road to the other. They can appear to be a little like insolent teenagers, refusing to speed their pace for even a two-ton machine. I once saw a police car stop where there was no sign. The officer got out of her car, put her hand up, and stopped approaching vehicles while a clique of adult geese ambled across the road.

Out behind my mother's house – the house where I lived from age 2 to 18 – there's a small, rocky creek. I defined our neighborhood, as a kid, by the creek's length to the south, the railroad tracks to the west, and blocks where my friends lived on the other two sides. Those friends and I hung out at a dead end near a narrowing in the creek. We'd throw big, flat rocks into the water, create a haphazard bridge and hop across the creek – a shortcut we used in order to waste an hour at a nearby shopping center. Other



days we'd walk the tracks to get to the homes of friends who lived further away. Neither of these activities was dangerous, really, but our parents discouraged both. Rats were occasionally spotted near the creek, and trains, obviously, regularly chugged up the tracks or, if it was a commuter train, sped past with a loud shriek. We thought we were smart enough and agile enough to outrun both a rat and a train; it was a fortunate quirk of fate that none of us ever learned otherwise. We had phrases for both our creek encounters and our train-track adventures. We'd refer to "crossing the creek" or "walking the tracks" – both phrases were shorthand for a whole range of activities, and the answer to "want to cross the creek?" or "want to walk the tracks?" was always yes.

Several of my stereotypical small-town memories – happy memories – are related to the creek. One summer afternoon when I was three or four I walked its length with my mother. The sun was shining and I was entranced with the swirls of sand and sediment our feet would stir up. I kept squatting down and peering at the shallow, sparkling edges, then looking back at the murky spirals of sand around our ankles. When the sand settled, I could see my feet, my mother's feet. I noticed that they seemed to break at the ankle, and tried to explain the phenomenon to my mother. I don't remember if she tried to explain the word refraction – I doubt she was that ambitious, nor that I'd remember it – but years later I'd learn the word and think back to the way our legs seemed to shift location precisely where they entered the water.

When I was a little older, I became obsessed with a story I'd read about a message in a bottle. I started writing notes to sailors, and I'd seal them in bottles and toss them into the creek. They probably made it about 100 yards before getting caught in some debris, but I imagined those bottles making their way to sea, into the hands of some lonely, possibly shipwrecked survivor. I hoped that someday a recipient would contact me and tell me how my message saved him, changed his life. I wish I could remember

what I'd written on those scraps of paper. I wonder what my childhood self would have found comforting. Did I include my phone number, an address? All I know for sure is that I wrote in pencil; I knew that ink would run if it got wet, and my message was too precious to run the risk of damage.

I was lucky enough, as a teenager, to live in a neighborhood jam-packed with kids around my age. There were probably about twenty kids I spent time with – swimming in one another's pools, ice skating, going to movies, playing hide-and-seek on long summer nights. One night a bunch of us crossed the creek to see the movie *Jaws*, which had just been released. I didn't know anything about the film except that audiences were flocking to it. I went with three guy friends and my brother; we left in the daylight but came home at night. We had to jump the creek to get home – simply hopscotch across a ten-foot wide, one-foot deep span. And every one of us, me and those boys, were terrified to go near the water after seeing those on-screen sharks. There's no accounting for the fluctuations of the heart or the mind; we all knew there were no sharks in that creek. I doubt there were even fish in it; all we'd ever seen were polliwogs and frogs. But that movie had made us feel vulnerable, there near a body of water in the dark, and every one of us shrieked as we leapt from rock to rock in an attempt to get our suddenly-fragile bodies home safely.

When I pick Leigh up at physical therapy she's walking with just one crutch. I see this as an improvement, but she sees it as another burden to contend with before she can return to normal. The time she's been incapacitated – 10 weeks so far – has sped by for me. I've been teaching a full load of classes, taking care of the house, driving her to appointments, running our normally shared errands, going non-stop. She has been reading, studiously exercising her leg, and reading some more. Her recovery feels endless and tedious to her, a twilight zone of housebound suspension.

But from my perspective, it's been a remarkably quick healing process.

Point of view, she says, is everything.

A few weeks ago I had a seizure. I'd like to describe what happened, but the nature of a seizure – mine, at least – means that I was unconscious. There were three witnesses and, by all accounts, I slumped as though in a faint, my hands clenched into fists, my arms shook, and my eyes rolled back the way one sees on those horrific television shows set in hospitals. I was unconscious for over two minutes, during which time a surgeon attempted to resuscitate me by, among other things, sharply pinching my chest. When I eventually came to, one of the first things he told me was that I might have bruises the next day. I did.

Following the seizure I was unable to sit up for roughly an hour. During this time, a nurse was by my side – I had coincidentally but conveniently had the seizure in a doctor's office during one of Leigh's check-ups. The nurse was not rattled; she told me later, however, that if I hadn't come to in a few more seconds she had intended to call for an ambulance. As it was, my blood pressure remained so low that I agreed to go to the hospital. Tests ensued, protests ensued – the ER doctor wanted me to stay overnight for observation – but eventually I was released with the promise that I'd follow up with my own doctor. Once I got outside, I felt better. Frigid air has its upsides. But the events of the day had scared me, and I followed through with a round of tests to check my brain and heart. All tests came back with the same results, phrased the same way: “perfectly normal.” Perfectly normal, that is, except that now I live with the knowledge that I had an unexplained seizure.

The other night on television I came across a show that demonstrated how to repair a tree that had been damaged by ice. It

was a young birch, just a trunk and two primary branches, and it had been split down the middle, as though a turkey wishbone had begun to be pulled apart but had not entirely separated. I expected the tree doctor to saw off the damaged branch; the actual remedy was equally simple, but perhaps more brutal. A hole was drilled straight through the damaged section – he referred to it as the tree’s “crotch” – then a long screw and bolt pulled the two damaged sides together. As one of the two men on the show tightened the screw, the other said “it looks like the crotch is coming together nicely.” The language seemed disturbing – screws and crotches and drills – but it was easy to see how the tree would now be able to recuperate. What isn’t always easy to see, or understand, is how something so benign in one context can be damaging or even deadly in another. That tree, sustained by water, was broken by ice.

I went over to the track today to take a walk in the few hours of sunshine where it seemed almost warm enough to be outdoors without too much discomfort. I bundled up and by the time I’d walked half a mile, I began to warm up. I was the only one at the track with the exception of a few gulls who squawked from a vantage point at the top of a football stadium floodlight. Every once in a while they’d swoop down and scream, but mostly we left one another alone. We were about a quarter mile inland, and probably all would have preferred to be closer to the water. The wind was brisk, however, and I, for one, needed the buffer zone of that quarter mile. The wind off the lake has been known to knock individuals off their feet, and I wasn’t up for a more vigorous excursion. I just wanted some air.

Customarily, during the warm months of spring and summer, and well into fall, I take these walks with Leigh. For now, however, she can’t make it around the track. Soon she’ll put the second crutch away, then the heavy plastic boot she’s been wearing, and then will be able to walk on her own, will slowly regain, in notice-

able increments, much of her normal range of motion, strength, and endurance. For a while, she'll walk with a limp, but then the limp will fade. Her scar, up the back of her calf, is already just a thin line. It reminds me of a woman's nylon, the way they used to be, a line sexily running up the back of the leg. Her calf muscle is still smaller on the right side than the left, but it, too, will return to its firm and supple status. Recovery takes time, and for the one in the midst of that process, time stretches and lags. But muscles and tendons strengthen, bones mend, skin recovers its elasticity. Anyone who makes it to middle age and doesn't find the human body remarkable hasn't been paying attention; we are fortunate, complex, and amazing creatures. I have read that human blood is 83% water, human bone is 22% water, human muscle is 75% water -- maybe that's why I'm drawn to the creeks and rivers and lakes and oceans when I am in flux, when I feel that some part of me, literal or otherwise, seeks healing.

It has remained a mystery why I experienced that seizure. Maybe, as the cliché has it, it was a wake-up call, my body's way of telling me that I had overtaxed it, was wearing myself out by worrying, by working, by trying my best to aid in my partner's recovery in whatever ways I could. Maybe it was something else entirely, some burgeoning illness that will reveal itself in the months or years to come. Maybe it was a fluke.

Years ago, I read somewhere that the chemical composition of human blood was almost identical to the chemical composition of ocean water. This seems, now, impossibly romantic, but I refuse to research the veracity of the information. I want to believe it. It might not be a fact, but it is an element of my faith, and like a true devotee, at times I cannot bear to question those basic tenets. This is a flaw in my intellect, I realize. But I am drawn to flaws or, to be more accurate, to what are often perceived of as flaws. I am drawn to the scar up the back of my lover's leg; I am drawn to the story of my seizure; I am drawn to the neighbors huddled in their

cars in the winter, who refuse to breathe the fresh air because, to put it simply, it hurts. I am drawn to the ruckus and the riot the gulls cause; I am drawn to the irrational fear in the hearts of my friends as we crossed that creek as teenagers, half expecting to see the approaching fin of a menacing shark. I am drawn to all of it, and sometimes – on wind-filled, cloud-flecked days – it all seems as flawless as the great lake Ontario's lambent skin.

## Die Hölle, sagte Sartre, das sind die Anderen

*Jürgen Becker*

L'heure bleu, könnte sein, aber es ist  
der Heimwerker, der nach seinem und meinem Feierabend  
die Stimmung macht. Machtlos dieses ganze Haus,  
siebtes, elftes, vierzehntes Stockwerk; der Mann  
bohrt in den Wänden, und man sieht  
ihn nicht. Falls ich ihn sehe, werde ich,  
werde ich nichts. Wie immer, Beschwerde geht  
ins Gedicht, das großen bleibenden Lärm macht.

## Hell, Sartre Said, Is Other People

*Okla Elliott, trans.*

L'heure bleu, it could be, but it's  
the do-it-yourself handyman who makes the mood  
for his and my evening. Powerless this entire building—  
seventh, eleventh, fourteenth floor; the man  
drills into the walls, yet no one  
sees him. In case I see him, I'll, I'll  
do nothing. Like always, complaints go  
in the poem, which makes a large staying noise.

## **Sag mir, wie es dir geht**

*Jürgen Becker*

Oft müde. Die wirkliche Anstrengung besteht darin, immer anwesend zu sein und Anwesenheit zu beweisen. Je besser der Beweis gelingt, desto ferner rückt der Horizont der Ruhe. Abends schweigen die Erscheinungen, die Vorgänge nicht. Bald ist es ein Privileg, die Fenster öffnen zu können. Handlungen ohne Gefühle, und das macht Vorteil. Eine zunehmende Starre in den Augen. Hören worauf es ankommt. Manchmal die Nähe von Wasser zu riechen oder den grünen Himmel zu sehen, das sind jetzt Wörter; Dinge und Erfahrungen nicht.

## **Tell Me How You're Doing**

*Okla Elliott, trans.*

Often tired. The real effort comes from being present always and proving presence. The better the proof, the farther the horizon of calm recedes. In the evening, appearances are silent, but not the events. Soon it's a privilege to be able to open the window. Actions without emotion, which is an advantage. An increasing rigidity in the eyes. Hearing where it arrives. Sometimes near the water, to smell it, or the green sky, to see. But these are just words; not things or experiences.



# The Waiting Room

A Teleplay  
by Weldon Kees

*Edited by James Reidel*

JILL: *Willis used to say—my God!—that there was a tribe  
in Australia where the mothers eat their children.*

NANCY: *Not only in Australia.*

—Lines added and struck out of the director's copy

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Lincoln, Nebraska.

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Reidel, based on manuscripts in the Jane Pope Geske Heritage Room of Nebraska  
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During the research for my biography of the poet Weldon Kees, *Vanished Act* (2003), I discovered an incomplete copy of his play *The Waiting Room*. He had intended it to be performed in his theater, the Showplace, in late May 1955. However, San Francisco's fire marshal forced Kees to cancel the premiere as well as the performance of three other one-act plays, including works by T. S. Eliot and Arthur Schnitzler. After suffering this setback, Kees adapted *The Waiting Room* for television in the weeks leading up to his disappearance on July 18, 1955.

This reconstruction of what is his last work incorporates the missing text from his “director’s copy” of the play as well as typed and handwritten corrections. The one significant difference in the two versions is the poem the character Nancy recites early in the play. The director’s copy has “The Hardy Garden” by Edna St. Vincent Millay. It surely entailed permission and copyright fees for televisions, which Kees got around by supplying his own woman’s verse. I consider that poem—albeit not part of his official opus—his last.

The following is extracted from a new collection, *3 Entertainments* (2012), published by the Knives Forks and Spoons Press in the U.K. It includes two screen story collaborations by Kees, which are also published for the first time, as well as longer text about their significance in his life and work.

—James Reidel

*For Nina Boas, Jan Davis, and Penny Vieregge<sup>1</sup>*

## Cast

Nancy, a woman of 23  
Jill, a woman of 40  
Patricia, a woman of 35  
Nancy's Mother  
Nancy's Father  
Man with a Cigar  
Shackelton

A bare stage, except for two benches of the kind used in bus and railway stations. Lights up slowly: harsh intense day. Seated on the bench at right, Patricia; on the bench at left, Jill. Jill looking through a newspaper; Patricia has a magazine in her lap. Jill looks appraisingly at Patricia; goes back to her paper. Patricia looks curiously at Jill as Nancy enters. Nancy carries a book and a balloon on a stick. She starts over to the bench on which Jill is sitting, but Jill looks up suddenly and gives her a look that intimidates her. Nancy sits down on the bench with Patricia, who looks curiously at the balloon.

NANCY: I got it for my little boy. He and his father are meeting me here.

JILL: (*Feels her face; reads from the paper*) “Dear Alice Hooper Maxwell: I have been going with a man for twenty-two years. I am fifty and he is ten years older than I am, and he has a wife and five children. They live in another city, but he is on the road a lot—a traveling man. For twenty-two years he has been promising me that he’ll divorce his wife and marry me. What would you do, Mrs. Maxwell, in my position?” (*Looks up, exasperated*) Oh, for—(*Lights a cigarette nervously; to Patricia*) Do you have the time?

PATRICIA: Sorry.

JILL: (*To Nancy*): Do you know what time it is?

NANCY: Why, it’s—why, look, my watch has stopped. (*Shakes her wrist*)

JILL: I wish I knew what time it was. (*To herself while other girls read*) Did I leave that oven on? I’m always leaving that oven on. It went out that time when I went to see Carmen Jones<sup>2</sup> with Philip and when we got home the parakeets were

dead . . . I must have turned it out, though . . . I remember . . . I keep remembering how they looked, with their claws, there at the bottom of their cage, and the newspaper at the bottom of the cage had part of a headline: Foresees Prosperous Future For . . .

PATRICIA: (*Reading from magazine, satirically*) “The all-in-one suit, in both tweed and flannel. Once it’s unjacketed you see its core (*Lifts eyebrows in mock astonishment*)—a bare, squared camisole in the same fabric. From Carol Mahon.” Why didn’t someone think of this sooner?

JILL: People are dense.

NANCY: There are some poems that always make me want to cry. Do either of you care for poetry?

JILL: Oh, if there’s anything I hate, it’s waiting. Waiting for people, waiting for something to happen, waiting for something not to happen . . .

NANCY: Listen.

*I have lost my way in the forest, O my beloved,  
Mist has obscured your face.  
The trees waver like weeds that are seen through water;  
There is fear in this place.*

*I have forgotten the dark paths of the mind  
And the terrible red canopy of the heart;  
I am a child or the pale ghost of a child,  
Strangely withdrawn and apart.*

*If I should touch your lips in this dim forest,  
I should perish of cold and fall down slain.  
Here there is no sound but fungus dripping  
Through fog, like a slow rain.*

*Somewhere there are bells drowned in a pool;  
They ring when the pool is stirred.  
Let the woods close in upon me and the night fall  
Leave me without a word.<sup>3</sup>*

Isn't that beautiful?

JILL: We came in the door and all the lights were out and Phillip said, "Oh, my God you've left the oven on again!" As if he never made a mistake in his life. What about the time he got the case of Scotch from a client of his in the South and left it out there in the hallway? I always thought those two boys who live across the hall are the ones who stole it. Twelve quarts of Dewar's White Label . . . "Oh my God you've left the oven on!" he said. As if . . .

PATRICIA: (*Sliding down in the bench*) I always have trouble staying on these things.

NANCY: Have you been waiting long?

PATRICIA: I dunno. It just seems long. I liked the way you read that poem. I never read poetry, but it sounded good—the way you read it.

(A man with a cigar approaches the women, pauses, sits down on bench by Nancy, looks her over. He leans down toward her and whispers in her ear. Nancy draws away from him; he persists.)

NANCY: Go away! Go away! Leave me alone.

(He is unruffled and whispers some more)

PATRICIA: Leave the kid alone! (*Stands up*) She doesn't have to listen to you if she doesn't want to! (*He grins and blows smoke in her face, looks back at Nancy and walks away*)

NANCY: Thank you.

PATRICIA: What a nerve. When I was in the nightclub circuit—

NANCY: You were on the stage?

PATRICIA: For fifteen years.

NANCY: Isn't that wonderful! I don't think . . . I know—I've never met an actress before in my life. When I was in high school . . . I wanted to be an actress. I saw Ingrid Bergman in a picture.

JILL: With Humphrey Bogart.

NANCY: She was so beautiful . . . (*To Patricia*) Were you really on the stage'?

PATRICIA: Stock, musicals in New York, vaudeville, nightclubs, road companies . . . the works.

NANCY: How did you get started?

PATRICIA: Well, there was this man—(*Does a double take; laughs*) Talent, naturally, talent! No, honestly, it was my dear old mother. Dear old mother, my foot. She was one of those real shoving, pushing, ruthless ambitious women that missed the boat and wanted to get their daughters on another one. She started



me on ballet the minute I was able to stand without holding on to something. You know. (*Patricia gets up and imitates a little girl learning ballet steps*) And then—swiftly up the ladder of success!

JILL: (*Looking away from the other two*) It's stuffy in here. (*The other two look at her*) Oh, I beg your pardon.

PATRICIA: Oh, that's all right. Ladder of success, my foot. My first big performance after Mother got me to New York was putting pieces of huckleberry pie in the compartments at Horn and Hardart's.

NANCY: Horn and Hardart's?

PATRICIA: You know, the automat. Oh, you don't know? Mother left my father, who drank, and, boy, did he have reasons to.

NANCY: I had a wonderful father. (*Dissolve to Nancy's father in a white surgeon's coat. He stands rigidly for a moment, then shakes a thermometer.<sup>4</sup>*) Daddy was a doctor. (*Very confidentially*) He specialized in female complaints.

PATRICIA: I've had a couple of 'em in my day.

NANCY: We lived in Santa Barbara. But . . . it was like your father: he drank, too. (*Nancy's Father takes a flask from his hip pocket, drinks, looks warily around.*) Mother was always calling him up on the phone. (*Father picks up phone*) "What are you doing now, Charlie?" she'd say—my father's name was Charlie—"What are you doing now? Did you get rid of that secretary of yours like I told you to? I'm positive you're drinking again, in spite of everything I've told

you. What are you doing, Charlie, what are you doing?" (*Father hangs up, has another drink*)

PATRICIA: Poor man.

NANCY: He's dead now. (*Dissolve out on Father*)

PATRICIA: (*Touched*) Oh, I'm sorry.

NANCY: (*Rapidly*) You know? After one of those phone calls one day, he hung up the receiver and . . . shot himself.

(A long pause)

JILL: (*Anxious, tense*) Listen, did you hear that sound?

PATRICIA: I didn't hear anything.

JILL: (*To Nancy*) Didn't you hear it?

NANCY: No.

JILL: It was like . . . something falling.

(A long pause. Patricia and Nancy look at each other, puzzled. Jill very nervous, listening.)

PATRICIA: (*As though to break the tension*) Well. About my career on the Great White Way. Mother and I had a fight and she went back to South Bend—for a while. I lost my job. I auditioned all the time for chorus jobs. I was so low. I was living in the most terrible hotel on West 45th Street where the manager had designs on me . . .

NANCY: (*Yearningly*) David, David. (*Stands, walks forward. Speaks: entirely internal*) There aren't many men these days that are really considerate . . . and good. He used to call me from the office, after we were married, twice a day; I always knew where he was, what he was

doing . . .

JILL: (*Gets up, pacing around the room*) He's not coming. He's lying again. All those weeks I was flat on my back in the hospital . . . I was good . . . I was! I was! I did everything he wanted, everything! Even that time he mixed it up with that Mrs. Jamison . . . I didn't even raise my voice (*Loudly*) I didn't even raise my voice! (*Sits down, crosses her legs, then wearily*) Like hell I didn't. Sometimes I think the whole thing came about through some biological mix-up. Willis used to get drunk and talk about that. "Jill," he'd say—I remember he used to lean forward as though it was a matter of life and death, and he'd point his finger at me . . . God, he never cleaned his fingernails . . . and he'd say, "In this culture"—he was always using that phrase. I wanted to simply scream sometimes, he said it so often . . . "In this culture the women are so mixed up they don't know what they want any more . . . they don't even know what they are . . ." (*Pause*) Those fingernails of his looked as though he dipped them regularly in india ink . . . He carried the whole thing too far, of course. It's all perfectly clear what we want: money, security, a man . . . lots of men.

PATRICIA: (*With magazine: to Nancy; she points to a picture*) Look at this little tomato. I used to look like that . . . ten years ago . . . Well I was telling you. I was living in this fleabag in New York and I couldn't get anything. I'm not kidding. I was at the point of taking up a life of shame. And then there was one of those things that happen sometimes. I started to tell you about this man, Bert

Shackelton . . . (*Dissolve through to Shackelton sitting at his desk with his feet up, reading Variety*) Well, he turned out to be one of the most unusual men in the world—an honest agent. (*Shackelton assumes an expression of absolute rectitude*) Well, honest most of the time. (*Shackelton looks as though he was scheming up something*)

JILL: There isn't even a telephone in this place.

PATRICIA: He had a hole in the wall off Times Square.

When I first met him he didn't have dime one. (*Shackelton pulls out empty pants pockets*) But he was pretty wonderful. I showed him my many talents. (*Patricia appears at Shackelton's desk, pantomimes various things: a fashion model, a great lady, a Charleston dancer. Shackelton watches her with deep interest.*) I could see that he was interested . . . Well, to make a long story even longer, he began getting me jobs. Nothing very big at first. (*Dissolve out on Shackelton*) I was all over the Sears, Roebuck catalog one year . . . there was a photograph of me modeling winter underwear for the farm trade. Buttoned down the front, snug as a bug, where it counts. I got into the chorus line of a show called "Emma's Dilemma" . . . awful. (*Holds her nose*) It closed out of town, never hit New York. "Emma's Dilemma"—it was a musical version of Madame Bovary.

(Nancy is staring at the balloon, turning it as if it were a crystal ball. It deflates.<sup>5</sup>)

JILL: Say, have you ever overheard men talking about women? It's perfectly disgusting. One time I was out in the kitchen baking a deep-dish blueberry pie—Willis loved a deep-dish blueberry pie—and he and some friend of his were in the living room drinking scotch on the rocks. And I mean drinking. This friend of his taught theosophy or something equally idiotic at some dinky little college back East. Well, I overheard them . . . I heard Willis saying, "I can't figure them out any more; just can't figure them out. Why, that one out in the kitchen—" He was talking about me, mind you—Well, never mind what he said.

PATRICIA: Go on. I'm interested.

JILL: Well, he said to this man—a terrible little man who kept wrinkling up his nose as though he was trying to get something out of it—he said that they ought to go around with little tags pinned on them—he was talking about women—"little tags on them like at conventions." He said that one could have a tag that said, "I'm a frigid, selfish little bitch," and another would have a tag that would say "Watch out for some hairpulling after I've had five martinis," and another one would say, "All I want is my career and your money . . ." Willis and those friends of his!

PATRICIA: Men would read those little tags and it wouldn't make the least bit of difference.

JILL: (*Paces around room*) Jealousy, that's what's the trouble. And don't let anyone tell you men

aren't just as bad as women. Willis and his "culture" and all his ideas . . . He was just as bad as the rest of them when it came to jealousy. Oh, at the beginning they're full of honey and promises. At the beginning, Willis used to say, "If there's one thing I pride myself on, it's that I don't have a jealous bone in my body." (*To Patricia*) Why do you suppose there isn't even a telephone in this place? What if someone wanted to make a phone call?

PATRICIA: They'd be in a bad way, wouldn't they?

JILL: These shoes are killing me.

PATRICIA: (*To Nancy, as Jill kicks off shoes and sits down on the bench next to Patricia*) Well, to get back to Bert. In a year or two I was getting some pretty darn good parts in musicals; it really set him up . . . Ten years on Broadway . . .

(Pause. During the last few speeches, since her last speech, Nancy has been staring intently at Jill.)

NANCY: Why did you let me grow up? (*Patricia alert; Jill nervous and annoyed*)

NANCY: (*Toneless*) I said: why did you let me grow up? Why didn't you tell me about the ward with the flying beds in it and that nurse with a face like a . . . (*Rubs her hands piteously across her face*)

JILL: If you think I—

PATRICIA: (*Abruptly to Jill*) Now just hold it. (*To Nancy, patiently*) That's all right, honey. Tell me all about it. I've seen plenty of beds flying around in my time.

NANCY: (*Trying hard to think*) It's . . . not . . . right growing up. I go back over it all the time and try to . . . (*She stands up and walks rigidly, semi-catatonic, to Jill*) Don't pretend you're not my mother. Those are my mother's shoes. When I was a little little girl . . . the ignominy, he said, the ignominy of growing up . . . growing up . . . growing up. (*Nancy steps into Jill's shoes, walks around in them like a little girl.*<sup>6</sup> *Jill starts to get up; Patricia restrains her with her hand. Nancy singing like a little girl, posturing of a girl of ten, experiments with cosmetics: makes up mouth badly with lipstick.*)

(Dissolve to Nancy alone in the room. Her pantomime continues. She is no longer wearing Jill's shoes. She dances, "whirling from one boy to another." She kisses a man and transforms into a "brisk, efficient secretary."<sup>7</sup>)

NANCY: (*At phone*<sup>8</sup>) Bullock, Masterson and Ives. No, I'm sorry, Mrs. Ives, Mr. Ives has not come in yet this morning . . . Yes, I'll tell him. Bullock, Masterson and Ives. . . . He's on another line, do you mind waiting? (*Nancy freezes as if remembering*)

(Like an apparition that no one else can see, Nancy's Mother, a real horror, enters the waiting room and walks up behind Nancy.)

MOTHER: (to Nancy rigid, frozen) I held you in my arms when you were a tiny baby. (She eyes Nancy) Heaven knows I tried to bring you up to be a decent wholesome girl. (Picks up phone) What are you doing, Charlie? What are you up to down at that office? Last night I smelled whiskey on your breath again. And last night I'm sure I detected cigarette smoke on Nancy's breath when she came in from her (Contemptuously) date. She didn't want to kiss her mother goodnight, that much was obvious. What are you doing down there, Charlie? Hello, hello. Oh, you have a patient. Well. (Hangs up phone) It's wrong to let any man so much as touch you until the day comes when you're a married woman. (Nancy sits back down and sinks into her bench. She puts her head in her hands and sobs.) You never really liked that beautiful doll I bought you on your second birthday, did you? I ordered it especially out of the mail-order catalogue. You always preferred that filthy old rag thing instead, taking it to bed with you. (Quick shift in tempo) You know I love you, dear; you know I love you more than life itself. (Slower) And those puppies you used to bring into the house! You know I can't stand animals underneath my feet, and the dirt . . . and you can get diseases from cats and dogs. (Sits down by Nancy, who turns her face away, sweetly) You're twelve years old now and I want to have a heart-to-heart talk with my little girl. (Puts hand on Nancy's hand) Oh, I don't know whether I can bring myself to say these things



to you or not. Men are—well. My own mother never told me anything. *(Pause, then sharply)* You've got to always remember that in this life you can't be too careful, and I mean about everything; you must learn to watch every penny, as I've had to do, always keep your distance dear, your mother knows what she's talking about, it's disgraceful the way your father has spent money like a drunken sailor—sometimes I think it's only prayer that has given me the courage to go on—you've got to think of yourself first if you're going to get anywhere in the world. And learn to know the right people, good church people, always go to church on Sunday, you didn't wash the back of your neck again, in this world, in this world you can't be too careful, you can't be too careful, you can't be—*(Nancy screams. Then clicking noises like a cracked phonograph record.)*

*(Dissolve to Nancy in the waiting room with Patricia next to her on the bench in place of Mother. Jill is in the facing bench. Her shoes are back on her feet. Nancy sobs. Patricia tries to comfort her; she shakes her off.)*

JILL: She's hysterical. Oh, it's all so idiotic . . . the jealousy, the bitching, the faking, all the other things we do. For love. For what they call love. Happiness. Be happy. Whatever that means. *(Starts suddenly)* Listen, didn't you hear that?

PATRICIA: *(Decisively)* No, I didn't hear a thing. Look, we've got to do something about this one.

JILL: Oh, she'll get over it. (*Sits listening*) I heard a sound like something in the wind—a window shade—something—blowing.

PATRICIA: You heard what?

JILL: There's a sound, you hear a sound, late, late at night you come out of a sound sleep and I heard that noise in the next room where Willis— (*Catches herself*) Love. I got to the point where I was (*Stronger*) in love with jealousy. I don't even know why. I was wild with it. I was playing two men against each other for everything I could. It would be late, late at night . . . I was living in New York. One would call me up . . . the phone would ring . . . and I'd be in bed with the other one. I could feel his jealousy on the back of my neck and the other one's jealousy coming over the phone like a red-hot wire. I didn't even think of it as jealousy. I just thought . . . me—me—me.

PATRICIA: (*Very husky, her brassiness is all gone*) Bert, Bert Shackelton. He was the only guy I really loved, with all my heart. And he never even made a pass at me. He had a wife. If I could have . . . If I could have just managed to get him to see me in a different way . . . You know how it is when you're walking all alone down a street that you know just as well as the back of your hand, and all of a sudden you see the side of a building or a window or a footprint in the sidewalk that you'd never realized was there . . . I don't know: Bert was . . . Bert always looked at me as if I were a thing . . . you know? A sort of commodity—

a nice commodity, of course—blood in my veins, but a . . . commodity. Maybe he was just protecting himself . . . (*Looks around*) There was that day when we were in Philadelphia together, and he came into my hotel room. God, it was hot, I remember an electric fan whining and that terrible wallpaper with roses . . . I knew what I wanted . . . I knew just what to do . . . I could have done it and in no time we'd have been . . . (*Long pause*) I couldn't do it. I couldn't do it to him.

JILL: (*Looking at her face in her compact*) My God! I'm getting to look like my mother.

NANCY: (*Looking up, wild*) You are my mother; you are my mother.

JILL: Am I?

NANCY: (*Comes over to Jill*) You don't mean to tell me you don't remember. All those months after David was killed . . . you don't remember. You don't remember . . . You don't want to remember (*Shakes Jill*) You don't! You don't. In the hospital, you kept telling me you wouldn't let them give me shock therapy. I was sitting there with my world all gone like a punctured balloon. My face was pressed against the wall and the doctor had a face like my father's. You kept saying, "How much is this going to cost, Doctor?" And "did he think my little girl will ever be well again?" And how you couldn't understand how a daughter of yours . . . (*Pause*) My nose was so hard against the wall I thought the bone in it was going to break. And I felt myself . . . something so

private and deep and far inside me go down like a death. Like David the night they brought him back, all smashed up and burned. He'd been out with another girl and they were both drunk and on the highway . . .

JILL: (*Stands up*) Stop it! Stop it!

PATRICIA: Let her get it out, for God's sake! Let her get it out!

NANCY: You killed him! You killed him! You always wanted him dead. You killed everything I loved! (*Slumps down on floor*) No, no, no. (Jill and Patricia look at each other) I was there with you at the clinic and I felt—It was like something breaking, I am trying to think, like that time we were high up in an office building, David and I, and there was a parade and people were cheering about something and I saw a piece of paper go down and then the wind caught it and tore it and it ripped apart—(*Sobs*)

PATRICIA: It'll be all right now. It'll be all right now. (*She comforts Nancy*)

JILL: People can't say what they want to to each other any more. I remember Willis saying (*With sympathy*), "In this culture—" pointing his finger of his right hand in my face—" In this culture, people are so busy chasing after money and position they don't stand a chance. They don't know how to live. They're raised on happiness, happiness, and optimism and getting ahead and then when the going gets rough, they can't take it. No wonder so many of them crack." (*Nancy suddenly looks up*)

(Dissolve to Nancy's Father on the other side of the waiting room. Nancy starts suddenly.)

NANCY: (*Running over to Father*) I always loved you best of all.

(Dissolve out on Father. Nancy stands alone. Lost.)

JILL: (*Face forward, staring*) At one time or another, I've believed just about anything and everything. And now I don't know what I believe in. I don't know if I even believe in men anymore.

PATRICIA: (*Rises from the bench and speaks to Nancy*) You've got to believe in something, even if it's the worst. (*She takes Nancy by the chin and lifts her head*) You ought to be wasteful . . . with love . . . with affection . . . don't think I don't know . . . we're not going to be around very long.

JILL: I wonder what time it is.

PATRICIA: I don't know, but I'm through with waiting. I'm not going to wait any more. (*To Nancy*) How about you, kid?

JILL: I'm coming with you.

NANCY: Sometimes nothing turns up and you have to live with that, too. I can still pretend. (*Does a quick spin movement of gaiety, of elation. Grins.*)

JILL: I'm hungry. (*To Nancy*) Are you coming?

(Nancy stares at them in silence)

PATRICIA: It's no use trying to make people do something they don't want to. Goodbye . . . I didn't catch your name. I'll remember the way you read that poem.

JILL: Starving. (*To Nancy*) Maybe whatever it is you're waiting for will happen. Goodbye. (*To Patricia*)  
Come on. I could eat a horse.

PATRICIA: We'll call a taxi?

JILL: Okay.

PATRICIA: (*To Nancy*) Look, take care of yourself.

(Patricia and Jill exit. Nancy watches them intently as they go. There is a balloon on the bench before her. She picks it up, looks at it as if surprised and begins to blow it up. She holds it out admiringly.)

NANCY: I want to be happy! I want to be happy! I want to be happy! (*Breaks the balloon. Drum roll.*)

(Dissolve to epilogue on screen)

And the home I scatter, and house I batter,  
Having first of all made the children fall,  
And he who felled them is never to know,  
He gave birth to each child that received the blow,  
Till, Madness, I am, have let him go.

—Browning, "Aristophanes' Apology"

## Notes

1. This dedication is taken from the flyers Kees printed for the opening of the stage version of the play.
2. The film *Carmen Jones* (1954) is a film adaptation of Bizet's opera, *Carmen*. It starred Dorothy Dandridge and Harry Belafonte and featured a cast of mainly African-American actors.
3. In the "Director's copy," Nancy recites Edna St. Vincent Millay's "The Hardy Garden."
4. In the final version of the play, Kees replaced different colored spotlights with camera dissolves (e.g., Nancy's father is lit in blue for this scene).
5. Kees had crossed out this necessary stage instruction in the Director's copy, but left an arrow to indicate where it might be repositioned.
6. There is no stage direction for Nancy to remove her own shoes or put them back on.
7. The Director's copy lacks this second phase of the pantomime, which has been edited for continuity here; it takes up with the Mother's speech instead.
8. This is still part of Nancy's pantomime, not a prop.

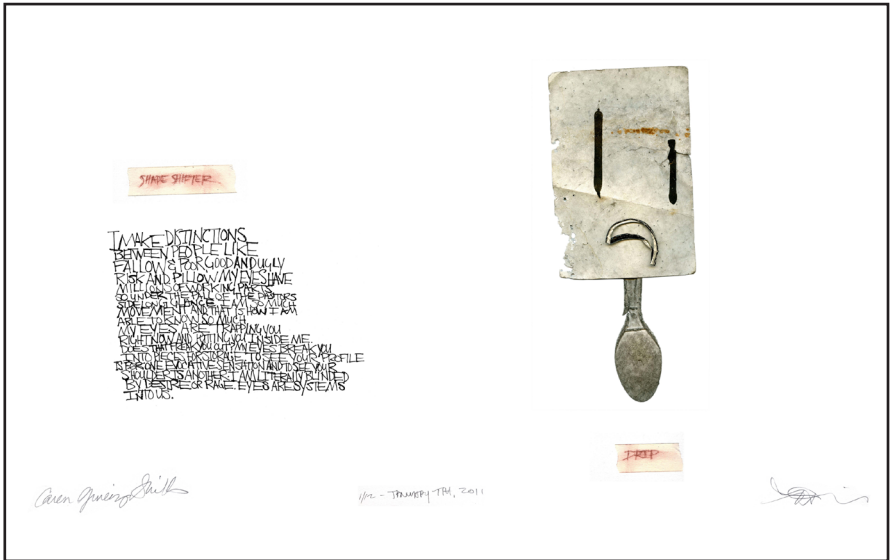
## Unusual Turtles

*Theodore Worozbyt*

Tomorrow in a crate in a dark kitchen with a black oven, a hammer on the mud. Inside the crate the noise is redwood. When you look through the stainless mesh you almost see her. One eye seems not to, a droop of gray. As if there were a sentence being paid. And to be stopped. I unwrapped a cat in the middle of the fourth room. It was one in a quilt, so that much is not bleeding or sleeping. The rooms and halls are being done in deep camel hair. A very strong wind, smelling of Parliaments, blows, is blowing from the bottom of the bedroom door, where a golden gloves jacket hangs under glass. The moan of the hose, the ghost like a dog. The glint of mica in the morning means I look habitually down. When I broke my cookie it said, Beware of unusual turtles. When I grew wary of unusual turtles, I saw no more of them.







Drip — Peter Fine & Carmen Giménez

## The Wager

*Ken Poyner*

We gathered around the placid fence, leaning across it like penguins at the edge of water and about to drop inelegantly in. This is where conversation occurs. This is where men together have thoughts that are not entirely sex.

“I had to put it up,” Riley said as though he had to put it up.

I know differently. Everyone knows differently. There was no commandment, no compulsion. It was Riley’s own determination of need; Riley’s own analysis of the costs and benefits: favored, like a butcher’s thumb on the scale, for Riley.

“I know that’s true,” I told him.

Nelson looked down the street and opined, “I thought they would have put in a speed bump.” And he missed the point. Swung at the pitch during the pitcher’s windup. Cut left into the hedge when he should have cut right for a clear run from the fifty yard line on to forever.

There will never be a speed bump. The city hasn’t got the time nor the money. And we all know it was Riley’s fault: he did not have a fence. The neighbors’ children got into his yard and then the teenager in the Mustang took the residential curve too jolly cakes fast and, smack, one kid gets knocked all the way to Riley’s garage door and another rolls under the huffing car and all the rest go running like rain on a new wax job. The city wouldn’t put up a speed bump, so Riley put up a fence.

I beat the dent out of that garage door: laid it out on my picnic table and with that rubber mallet I always thought would never be useful, beat it out near to unremarkable. I ought to know about what is required.

Riley looks up and down the white vinyl of his fence, lightly kicks one post, and says, “I tell you, you ought to put up a fence.”

“But Riley,” I say, “I live on the inside of the curve.”

## Back to Futurism

*Alex Cigale*

As poet first, and translator only a product of my affinities, I fully intend the English versions of poems presented here to speak for themselves. I do however ask for some understanding; while not an academic exercise, an appreciation of the many difficulties inherent in communicating the spirit of experimentation c. 1913, as opposed to the letter, will put the reader in good and patient stead. My purpose in this brief survey of the Futurist strain in Russian poetry is to offer a guide to the terrain, and so this demonstration is threefold: 1. to chart and characterize the modes of expression particular to Russian Futurism; 2. trace the historical links that joined, and separated, its various groupings and generations; and, most importantly, 3. offer the English reader unfamiliar with Russian poetry's map at least a partial zeitgeist of its social and aesthetic milieu, primarily in order to indicate the continuities of the poetic tradition. As the popularly held view insists that Modernism, and post-Modernism, represents a complete break with the past, I think it best to address these aspects in reverse.

Perhaps no other announcement of the Futurist program has left a greater and more lasting impression than The Futurist Manifesto of 1913, "A Slap in the Face of Public Taste" (signed by Khlebnikov, Kamensky, Burlyuk, and Mayakovsky) which, while intentionally aggressive in its dismissal of tradition, to the point of being offensive ("throwing Pushkin et al off the ship of modernity,") like the best of manifestos, was an aesthetic move, clearly calculated in the interest of *épatage*, most striking for its lyricism and wry, sophisticated tone. Velimir Khlebnikov, in his more extended writings on the subject, explained that the object of derision was not Pushkin per se, but the need for a Pushkin for the new age,

that in his own time, Pushkin had represented a challenge to, a bone in the throats of the French-speaking, Western-educated reading public, and that in the process of becoming domesticated as a national poet, it was precisely the decadent function of his art that had been lost. The Nineteen Teens was an age of the manifesto, of youthful exuberance that announced an intention to clear the cultural thickets, even more than the cobwebs, of the past, not a renewal but a cleansing, a “Revolution of the Word.” Like every such turning, its impetus was also the generational need to supplant the socially established modes of expression and their representatives, and *épatage* is simply the weapon adopted in every generation for this purpose.

The Cubo-Futurists group identified by the name of their publication founded in 1909, *Hylea*, aimed to synthesize the fragmentation of space of the first Modernist art movement with the extending of action into the dimension of time of the second, and this orientation of literature toward art aesthetics is characteristic of all Futurism. Many of the poets either trained as or were naive painters themselves (David Burlyuk and Vladimir Mayakovsky would be expelled from the Moscow Art Academy for their political activities in 1914). Vasilisk Gnedov’s “Poem of the End,” with its blank last page intended to be acted out gesturally, extended the tradition of *The Incoherents* (1880s Paris) and prefigured Kazimir Malevich’s famous “Black Square”. Collaborations between poets and artist resulted in the production of the Futurist books that are some of Russian Futurism’s most lasting artifacts and which may (and must be!) viewed online at the digital archives of the Getty Museum.

As the name Ego-Futurist implies, the foremost concern of the group founded by Igor’ Severyanin was not a formal one but rather the emphasis on the persona of the poet. In a twist on Groucho

Marx's quip, Ego being raised to a maximum, Severyanin departed almost immediately after founding the "movement" to exalt his own name, not wishing to be a member of a group that would have other members. More generally, it is important to note the influences so universal at the time. By 1907, the wide appeal of ideas expressed in the works of Nietzsche, Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, Einstein's matter-energy equivalence and special relativity papers, and Bergson's *Creative Evolution* is evident throughout Futurism.

A word is also in order regarding some continuities with the late Russian Symbolists. The other of the two major "movements" that broke with Russian Symbolism (each now in its centennial year,) Acmeism (which emerged out of the "Guild of Poets" c. 1911-1914) expressed as its end not a complete rejection but a corrective to Symbolism's over-riding concern with the spiritual and its detachment from material conditions, but by 1910 even in late Symbolism (Balmont, Bely, Blok, Bryusov, Sologub, most of whom would shortly embrace the Bolshevik revolution) is evident a reaction to the social decline of empire and the ferment of the coming revolution. Another weakness of Russian Symbolism was that it never approached the decadence of its French predecessor and so represents a "late," exhausted style. But the debt owed by the next generation to such transitional figures as Alexander Blok and Andrey Bely is evident in a close examination of their thematics, prosody, and both their theoretical considerations and praxis of purely sonic values of verse.

The divisions among the Russian Futurians (so titled to acknowledge their denial of a debt owed to Marinetti and the Italian Futurists,) their splintering into the Cubo- and Ego-Futurists (a matter of both personal Egos and the eternal division in Russian poetry between Moscow and Petersburg) and Pasternak's and Aseev's

Tsentrifuga (intended precisely to reject the Futurists' more radical break and emphasize their link to the tradition,) under closer scrutiny reveal that individual differences are ever overlooked as a matter of convenience in order to pursue specific common goals, that poetry as a whole contains a variety of methods within the tradition. The individual talent, as T.S. Eliot so famously argued, is never outside the tradition; though not evident in translation, many of Khlebnikov's and most (aghast!) of Mayakovsky's poems rhyme! That the Futurians included poets as diverse as Vasily Kamensky and Alexei Kruchenykh, and the Ego-Futurists Severyanin and Gnedov, is an indication of how much the divisive issues are a generational matter, of the socially conditioned need to distinguish oneself, and that, as ever, poetic schools are simply convenient groupings of friends, none of these stable enough to have lasted more than 2-3 years.

The middle generation, born at the turn of the century, though emerging out of Futurism, in the late 1910s announced their own groupings and platforms as alternatives to it. The last three such modernist "schools" of significance, the Imaginists (represented here by Shershenevich,) the Constructivists (Selvinsky et al,) and the Russian Absurdists (Oberiu, the tongue-in-cheek *Ob'edinenie real'novo iskusstva* or "Association for Real Art") represent the last of the Russian Silver Age socio-cultural phenomenon collectively referred to ever since as the "avant-garde." The Imaginists (Shershenevich, born in 1893, the same year as Mayakovsky, old enough to have competed for a position of leadership among the original Futurists in 1913, Mariengof, and for a brief time their friend, the lyrical poet Sergey Esenin,) though in part influenced by Pound's Imagism, declared themselves in opposition to Russian Futurism and distinct from their western counterpart. One need only recall the same jostling abroad, Pound having abandoned Imagism to the proselytizing of *Amyism* (Amy Lowell) and founded his other

brand of Futurism, Vorticism (“we are not Futurists – we are Imagists.”) Imaginism, in rejecting any text with a fixed meaning as poetry and declaring metaphor as the end-all and be-all, proved to be in many ways a reversion to Symbolism. The methods of the Constructivist poets are of particular interest to me in that they partly correspond to those of the second generation of American Modernists, the so-called Objectivist poets, and prefigure Concrete and Conceptualist, that is post-modernist poetics.

An important note in Russian poetry has been the division between the two centers (Moscow and Petersburg) and their constant renewal by an influx of new blood from the provinces (Pasternak and Tsvetaeva were Moscow royalty, but both Mandelstam and Akhmatova were parvenus). Khlebnikov was born in the deep-south Astrakhan, near the Caspian Sea. Burlyuk arrived from Kiev, Ukraine, Mayakovsky from Bagdati, Georgia, and later Kirsanov from Odessa, Ukraine. These three poets represent a kind of poetic transmission, Mayakovsky having been a young protégé of Burlyuk; and it was under his editorship of the Constructivist 1920s journal *LEF* that Kirsanov would emerge. A similar, later path of transmission in the post-war years is revealing of the importance of tradition and of the community of poets. Just as the young Joseph Brodsky found an affinity at the feet of Anna Akhmatova, poets as diverse, though more “experimental,” as Andrey Voznesensky and the Chuvash-Russian Gennady Aygi found their own footing by seeking out a relationship with Pasternak and Kruchenykh (just as Pasternak and his generation had worshipped at the feet of Alexander Blok.)

The middle generation, of Vvedensky and Kharms, who found their own “leftist” group, the Oberiu, represent similar lines of transmission. As a teenager, Vvedensky had sent his early verses to Blok; and both were influenced by Khlebnikov’s poetry. Their



turn toward *épatage* and performance, and later toward theatricality, speaks of their connections to Burlyuk and Mayakovsky on the one hand and Khlebnikov's and Kruchenykh's "supersagas" on the other. The Oberiu, though historically and esthetically linked to the Silver Age, do not properly speaking belong to this avant-garde itself because by the late 1920s, the opportunity to simply even publish their work no longer existed, and they survived as poets only in manuscripts and notebooks that emerged after "the thaw" to influence the post-war generation (the line from Khlebnikov through Kharms and Vvedensky is particularly evident in the work of Khvostenko I have published elsewhere.)

Rather than examining the minutia of divisions between schools, it is more interesting for our purpose to summarize the several modes that, in various combinations, are representative of Russian Futurism as a whole. These are: 1. the related orientations toward performance and the neologistic qualities of sound poetry as represented in so-called *Zaum* or "trans-rational" poetics; 2. a recovery of the folk, animistic themes already evident in Late Romanticism and, more specifically, of the proto-Slavic roots of the Russian language; 3. the decadence and individualism inherent in Romanticism itself; 4. the formal qualities of the language as material, characterized by breaking of grammatical rules: elimination of punctuation and capital letters or their expressive, visual use, metrical irregularity and variation, syntactic complexity and irregularity, the irregular, expressionistic use of conjugation, portmanteau words and partial, modified neologisms extending existing cognates (Khlebnikov, for example, invented 400 words with the root word "love," to which the Serge Segay sequence in the present selection may be considered an homage); and lastly, 5. the related thematics of the new technological age, ironic or grotesque treatment of the bourgeoisie social milieu representative of increasing urbanization and class stratification, and the

alternative Man of the future whom Khlebnikov christened the “Budetyanen” and conceived of as an alternative “Government of Time,” neither a ruling class nor artists, but rather a creative class of inventors-explorers.

At the core of Marinetti’s own 1911 Futurist manifesto was its “anti-cultural, anti-aesthetic, anti-philosophical” dimension, his “art of the future” being a nihilistic rejection of past examples, its “universal historical purpose... to spit daily on the altar of art.” These negativist aims corresponded to the political, rightist program of worship of the machine, power, violence, and war, the creative impulse as destruction. Along with these, one might posit the more positivist, linguistic aims: “the demolition of the socially accepted syntax,” “the use of the verb in ambiguous declensions” with the aim of communicating the indivisibility of experience and the preeminence of intuition, “maximum of disorder” and “comprehension by analogy,” “the acceleration of style” through elimination of punctuation, all these intended to enable the literary text to communicate the material conditions of life, including the life of inanimate objects themselves; all these are still very much relevant to poetic practice today. The almost pagan, ecstatic depiction of such objects as trains by nearly all the Russian Futurists was transformed in the “SotsArt” of the Russian Conceptualists of the 70s and 80s, its “documentary” focus on the collective minutia of the dominant imagery and vocabulary of Socialist Realism (propaganda posters, postcards, slogans, passports and other documents) now viewed through the lens of irony, the locus updated from the decadent setting of the 1910s cabaret and subverted in the private prism of the Russian communal Kitchen that had become the new meeting place for the “decadent” bohemia of the 60s.

As the Russian Minimalist poet Ivan Akhmeteyev put it: Khlebnikov – our grandfather, Kharms our father. The connections

linking the poets of the post-war generation to their Futurist predecessors are far more extensive than this brief survey may suggest; these are but the most obvious examples. Serge Segay and his wife, the poet Rea Nikonova (Anna Tarshis) were officially recognized for preserving the tradition of the Futurists with the Andrey Bely special prize (1997). Alexei Khvostenko, late in his life, adapted and set Khlebnikov's poems to music, available in his album with the Russian progressive rock group *Auktyon, Zhilets Vershin (Inhabitant of Mountaintops)*. While the members of the so-called Li-anozovo group (Jan Satunovsky, Genrikh Sapgir, Igor Kholin, and their mentor, Yevgeny Kropivnitsky) repeatedly acknowledged the influences of Khlebnikov and Kharms; their compositional methods and collaborations with painters and graphic artists speak to an even deeper connection. Gennady Aygi's own unique way, his "composition by field" and folk thematics, reveal both the influence of Khlebnikov and a reaction against Mayakovsky's fractured line that had proven so formally dominant for the 60s generation of official Russian poets. In many ways, Aygi's life path is exemplary. Having been expelled from the Gorky Institute in 1957 for "composing a book of poetry subverting Socialist Realism," following Pasternak's advice, he began to compose in Russian while working for the next ten years as the secretary of the Mayakovsky Apartment-Museum. Mayakovsky's liberation of the line, his own Chuvash heritage, along with the western example of French poetry Aygi translated into Chuvash were his influences. The Moscow Conceptualist poets (Dmitri Prigov, Lev Rubenstein, Mikhail Sukhotin,) while outside our scope, may similarly be counted as heirs to Futurism on the basis of the performance-based nature of their work, and as viewed through the ironic lens of the post-Futurists. Lastly, the roots of the Russian Minimalist poets (Vsevolod Nekrasov, Ivan Akhmetyev, Alexander Makarov-Krotkov) may also be traced to Khlebnikov and Kharms.

I suspect that in 2013, the centennial of the apex of the Russian avant-garde, the founding of Russian Futurism will be commemorated and commented on often. My intuition tells me that we are now at a similar historic and aesthetic juncture and that, following our own fin de siècle ferment, another change, another syncretism and convergence is likely brewing. But that is another story, one that requires a parallel re-examination of Acmeism (which I am pursuing in my publications on the work of the minor Acmeist poets, Mikhail Zenkevich and Vladimir Narbut.) My hope is that with the presentation of this work, particularly that of the lesser known poets, a more complete picture of Russian Modernism and post-modernism becomes available to English poetry.

## David Burlyuk (1882-1967)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### Dead Sky

“Sky – you’re a corpse! nothing more!  
And stars – worms – drunk on fog  
Inured to pain (rust) – lings of deception.  
Sky – you are a rotting corpse!  
For (attentive) myopics,  
Licking sickening grains  
With the greedy (graspiness) of Africans.  
Stars – worms (pus-filled alive) hives!!  
I am caught in a web of cords.  
A bittern’s moan.  
Humans-animal!  
Truth a sound!

Lock the clocks of gateways  
The call of arms  
A spider.

1913

## Railroad Whistling

The platfoRm – a stRing of flashing lights  
The autumn Rain scRapes with its bRoom  
A cRowd of people as the face of a wall  
On theiR knees to kiss the Roadside ALTAR.  
“The light lives”!?! – appropriate these puns  
Oh midnight of witticisms  
Of threadbaRe bacheloRs  
To discaRd the bReeze’s fables  
and be – ASH.  
(concentrated upon the sound of R is a sense  
of the most severe strictness:)  
D and T – the sense of solidity, stability.

1910

## Caboose and tender

1.

The engine like a bird  
Whistled and was gone  
The moon = quotation +  
The object sanctified  
The train's exhalation  
An incline and a bridge  
A perspiring underarm  
And a thundering tail

2.

The child was young  
He cried day and night  
The poet ran off  
Executioner of life  
My head teeming with  
Other people's words  
An estranged bride  
The train's wheels start

1910

## **Train = arrow**

Train = arrow  
The city = a bow  
(departure time = confirmed)  
Every sacrifice is wretched  
Streetlight = a needle  
And the heart = a bunch.

Winter train ride  
Path of snow = whitewashed way  
The frost = bee stings =  
Hissing of steam  
Years of distant sparks  
Fleeting  
The Russian  
aRk.

1910



## Velimir Khlebnikov(1885-1922)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

\*\*\*

Timingly—Cat-tails

    On the lake shore,  
Where stones have become time  
And time has become stone.

    On the shore of a lake  
Cat-tail time and stones,  
On the lake shore  
    Noisily bright-lit.

1908

## Grasshopper

Winging its golden scroll  
Of utmost-thin veins  
The grasshopper places his belly on rigs  
Of the many a near-shore blade and faiths.  
“Din, din, din!” – the animalcule trundles.  
Oh, swan-ning!  
Oh, enlight!

1908-1909

\*\*\*

Sing to me of young girls, innocent,  
Those that are arguing by the cherry trees  
About their broad-shouldered young men.  
They are among you – I know and believe.

1908

\*\*\*

The wind's wrist whirls and wanders  
Along the willows' golden horde.  
What once was morning now is day.  
Blessed be he who all morning lazed.

1908-1912

\*\*\*

Young girls, those who are stepping  
with the boots of their brown eyes  
on the flowers of my heart.  
Young girls, who are lowering spears  
over the lakes of their eyelashes.  
Young girls, washing their feet  
in the lake of my words.

1921

## Alexei Kruchenykh (1886-1968)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

\*\*\*

At midnight I noticed on my bed-sheets something black and  
solid  
the size of a bedbug  
framed in a red fringe of millipedes.  
I set it on fire with a match. And he swelled up, without burning,  
like a metal bottle with its bottom sticking up.  
So I thought to myself – perhaps not enough of a flame.  
But for such a one – a match is like a log!  
My friends arriving covered him up with kindling,  
papers soaked in kerosene, and set him ablaze.  
When the smoke cleared – we noticed a little beast  
sitting on the corner of the bed  
in the pose of a Buddha (about 1/4 inch in height)  
and like bi-ba-bo hand puppet smiling snidely.  
Having understood, this is a SPECIAL creature,  
I headed to the pharmacy for rubbing alcohol  
while at the same time  
my buddies were twisting cigarette butts into his guts  
as into an ashtray.  
Trampled it with their heels, slapped his face around, roasted  
the tips of his ears  
and someone scorched red-hot the headboard of the bed over a candle.  
Having returned, I asked;  
How goes it?  
From the darkness, they answered quietly:  
It's all over!

So you burned it up?  
No, he blew his own brains out....  
BECAUSE, he said,  
IN THE FIRE I DISCOVERED SOMETHING INFINITELY BETTER.

1922

\*\*\*

You fled the train station's background  
and the signals all meekly flared out.  
The train  
    hooted and thrashed about,  
With its throat slitting the metal air.  
Chattering with chills  
    the rails couldn't set  
    a tooth upon tooth.  
The wind swung a noose of suffocating smoke.  
And I dressed for the occasion, funereally  
    in suit and tie....  
And suddenly – in your wake:  
    Stop! Seize her!  
She has left for good?  
The silhouettes are tearing above the forest,  
and I – into the wishing well,  
    with mops and brooms,  
to flail about doggie-paddle cold and alone  
where the dampness and night sleep embracing.  
On the Caucuses Express you sashayed doll-like  
    and soon will get married,  
and me – to bugs slithering under a stone,  
where the bone-crunching octofang  
    will chomp me  
    all the way through....

1930

---

(ěm)



## Igor' Severyanin (1887-1941)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### Overture

Pineapples in champagne! Pineapples doused in champagne!  
Wonderfully delicious and exciting and spicy!  
All dressed up in something Norwegian!  
done up in something Spanish!  
I'm inspired with passion! and I reach for my pen!

The airplanes' striations! the automobiles' wild rushing!  
Express trains' windwistling! The wingsails of yachts!  
Someone here kissed all over! Someone there has been beaten!  
Pineapples doused in champagne – the pulse of the night!

In the company of nervous maidens, among intellectual women,  
I will transform life's tragedy into a fantasy-farce....  
Pineapples in champagne! Pineapples doused in champagne!  
From Moscow to Nagasaki! From New York fly to Mars!

January 1915

## **Nikolai Aseev (1889-1963)**

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### **Announcement**

I would forbid the “Sale of Oats and Straw”....  
Doesn't it smack of murder of the Son and Father?  
And if my heart arrives deaf to the streets' worries,  
cut off, thunder, chop off my foolish, unhearing ear.

Letters like fleas hoping over infest  
and, sticking to, cover the pristine page.  
The mind, following its ingrained habits,  
gathers up and hoards dried out crumbs.

An orphanage home for the stray wind  
or for the spring's inns and hostels –  
this is what must be distributed freely  
through all the markets of our country.

1915

## Vasilisk Gnedov (1890-1978)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### Summer-flighting

*to I. V. Ignatiev*

Saddle up summer on the dappling  
Inflating a wing over greening.  
Guardiing Summer-flight-house  
Mountains. Knees under hands slapping.  
Summer-flight-house guardy, hourling –  
Roundscape – an unsleeping eye –  
Gossamer veil-swaddled with gauze,  
Flower-light colors Summer us....  
I oversum summer-flight! Wing oversum!

1913

# Dappled-field

*A Sketching*

A scream....  
Sun-dapple  
And twenty clues...  
Grass poisonous –  
Greenish-dapple

1913

## **Boris Pasternak (1890-1960)**

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### **Train Station**

Train station, the indestructible fire box  
Of my departures, my meetings and partings,  
My tried and trusted friend and orderly,  
Were I to enumerate your merits I'd fail.

At times my life was – I, wrapped in a scarf,  
and just as the cars are open for boarding,  
the muzzles of harpies are breathing with fire  
and a thin sheet of steam that covers our eyes.

Thus it has happened, that just as I sit down,  
It's touch-and-go, all over, touch and it's gone.  
I say my goodbyes to happiness, it is time now!  
I'll be jumping off the train here, conductor.

It so happens – the west opening up before us  
In the maneuvers of rails and wild weather  
Begins clicking with its beak of ticking snow  
So as not to fall under the train's rail guard.

The repeated train whistle decays into silence,  
And a second one sounds from a distance,  
And the train flurries across the stations  
Like a deaf and many-humped hurtling storm.

And now the twilight that has grown impatient,  
And now in the wake of the smoke and the steam,  
The fields and the wind startled chase after –  
And I numbered among them join in their team.

1913

## Vladimir Mayakovsky (1893-1930)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### As it may

The street collapsed like the nose of a syphilitic.  
The river – sweet longing that spilled into spit.  
Having shed their underwear down to the last leaf  
the vulgar gardens have gone to seed in June.

I walked out onto the square  
and put the desiccated neighborhood  
on my head like an orange wig.  
People terrified of me – out of my mouth  
squirming with its feet an undigested scream.

But they won't judge me, won't bark at me.  
As at a prophet, they will strew flowers in my wake.  
All of them with collapsed noses know  
I – am your poet.

As by tavern rot, I'm terrified of your terrible judgment.  
The prostitutes will carry me alone in their hands  
like a sacred relic through the burning buildings  
and display me before God as their redemption.

And God will break down and whimper over my book!  
Not words – shuddering, congealed into clumps;  
he will race across the sky with my verses under his arm  
and, all out of breath, recite them to his acquaintances.

1914

## Something regarding the conductor

The restaurant glowing orange from electric lights.  
The armchairs sprawling with the soft flesh of dames.  
Then the offended conductor raced out  
and ordered the musicians to wail.

And right off to the one who tastily stuck  
in his beard a fat herring, the trumpet,  
having found a way, into his well-fed mug  
smacked a fistful with its copper tears.

He still had the time between his hiccups  
to expel a scream into the golden chops  
and was trampled by those smacked around  
by the trombones and oboes and ridden rough.

When the last guest failed to crawl to the door  
and was snuffed out with his cheek in the sauce,  
having ordered the musicians to howl animal-like  
the conductor completely went off his rocker!

Into the very teeth of the overstuffed carcass  
squeezed a trumpet like a copper cream puff  
and blowing into it listened, swollen to twice its size,  
thrashing about in his guts a cry.

When toward morning starving from viciousness  
the bar owner showed up to split the night's take,  
the conductor, hanging from the chandelier, already  
turning blue, swung and turned a little bluer.

1915



## Vadim Shershenevich (1893-1942)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### Photographs of the heart

#### *Khrisanf*

You don't suppose that with your Kodak-heart  
you can photograph a second dancing the can-can!  
Eternity herself has shaved off her beard  
and is luring you on a flute that is broken.

The ribbons of lips in the beckoning distance.  
We exist outside of time – let's skip town.  
We hold garlands of charlatanism in our hands;  
shall we toss them to one drowning in a pond?

We slash down the fences with our innovation!  
How endearing it is to preach the new gospel.  
Before us stands the monument to Cubism  
Shuttered by the curtain of anonymity.

Please understand, I believe we are moving  
along the broad avenues of electronerves.  
You're kidding! I too am dressed in orange.  
Yes, we are all equal and comparable.

Return to me the crumbs and bones of memory!  
I want nearer to the monument! Please let me!  
There, the gospel about hysterical Hamlet  
(My friend) is inscribed upon the granite.

Shatter and tear the curtains, you clowns,  
If you are certain beneath them is a prince!  
The enraged Apises will trample your soul.  
I am alone.... I am little ... I'm a pinkie.

[1913]

## Toast

a l l o f u s a s t h o u g h o n r o l l e r s k a t e s  
e **V** e n t h o u g h e a s y t o f a l l o **F** f b u t n o w  
w h **A** t a p l e a s u r e l a d i e s t o **R** a c e w i t h  
j o l l **L** y g o o d h o w t h e y w e a v e **O** u t a n d i n  
l i q u **E** r **B** a r s f i t c o a t o f a r **M** s t o a t e e  
& w e d a **R** i n g l y s p r a y e d w i t h p e r f u m e  
e v e r **Y** s **Y** m b o l s e e k s j u l y s **A** r d o r a n d  
s a l **U** t i n g s p e e d w e r a c e c r **U** d e b o a t s  
p a **S** s i o n a t e k n o w i n g t h a t **T** h e y o u n g  
m **O** u t h s a r e b e a r d l e s s w e w **H** o s c r e a m  
**V** i v a t ! a n d d r a i n g l a s s e s **O** f w h i s k y  
h a p p i l y r a i s e a t o a s t t o m **R** b r y u s o v

[1913]

## Ilya Selvinsky (1899-1968)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### **\*Report**

*To Chairman of the Triumvirate*

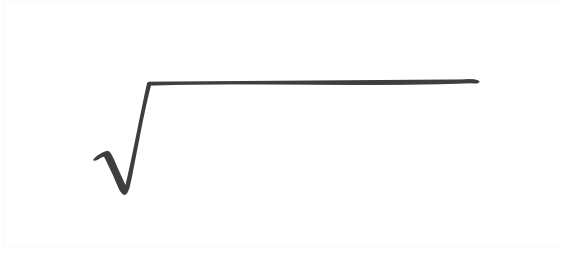
*Mister Dolinin*

*Platoon Leader Braude's Report*

On general's orders in Kronstadt'skot Ravelin  
On battery tower number four (south-west)  
For my command during the intervention in Karelia  
Of the armored train "The Screamer"  
On the night of the 3rd I was shot by firing squad  
And dumped in a moat ditch.  
To guard the honor of the Russian flag  
I ask you to grant the following request:  
For a botched job – trammel the soldiers,  
As for me: finish me off.

Signature: Braude  
Lucerne Village  
March the 6th

Index number and resolution:  
The second point – granted.



The structural objective of “Report” – to present in condensed form – the epos, if we are to understand it as a broad depiction, of the conflict of races, nations, and classes. The breadth of this representation may depend not so much on the lens’s aperture, as on the perspective – just as the horizon is as clearly visible through the ship’s portholes.

The semantic content – the conflict of class sensibilities examined in the light of morality: on the one hand, the arrogant heroism of a representative of the old land-owning class, in spite of everything seeing underneath a Red Army uniform only a Russian soldier and, in no uncertain terms, demanding his own death as a means of correcting the latter’s incompetent work – on the other hand, the deprived-of-all-sentimentality, meticulous, no-nonsense response of the Bolshevik.

1921-22

## **Daniil Kharms (1905-1942)**

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

I detest children, old men, old crones, and elderly wise people.

Poisoning children is cruel. But something has to be done about them!

I find only young and healthy plump women endearing. To the other representatives of humanity I relate with nothing but mistrust.

Old women, who carry around wise thoughts in their heads, should be caught in leg traps.

Every mug bearing an intelligent expression calls forth in me a very unpleasant sensation.

What are flowers anyway? Every woman between her legs smells significantly better. Both one and the other are natural; this is why no one would dare take issue with my words.

second half of 1930s

\*\*\*

King of the universe,  
dearest king of nature,  
king who is nameless,  
who hasn't even a definite frame,  
come over to my house  
and together we will down vodka,  
stuff ourselves with some meat,  
and then discuss acquaintances.  
Perhaps your visit will bring me  
the Lord's on high autograph,  
or perhaps your photograph,  
that I may your portrait depict.

27 March 1934

\*\*\*

It is your part to god-create me (this a heavenly gift)  
A heavenly gift, one ought to think, a sacred gift.  
Yes, I am definitely very very very interesting  
And even very very very very highly evolved.

How satisfying to write without missing a beat!  
And then what I have written out loud to read.  
A most pleasant way to pass the time indeed.  
When at once participate both body and soul.

That's when I feel myself in the universe's stream.

1935



\*\*\*

Yes, I'm a poet forgotten by the sky.  
Forgotten by the sky from days of old.  
But once upon a time Phoebus and I  
made a racket joined in a sweet choir.  
Yes, there was a time when I and Phoebus  
joined in a sweet choir and made a squall.  
And there were days when I and Geb were  
tight as drops of water and in clouds above  
the thunder in its youth rang with laughter.  
The thunder rolled flying after Geb and I  
pouring from the heavens its golden light.

<1935-1937>

\*\*\*

The end's here, my strength expires.  
The grave calls me to her rest.  
And suddenly life's trace is lost.

Quieter and quieter beats the heart.  
Death races toward me like a cloud  
And in the sky the sun's light goes out.

I see death. It's forbidden for me to live.  
Goodbye, dear earth! Earth, farewell!

1937

## The Sensual Lumberjack

When in the distance flashed saws  
and the axes had started ringing,  
my girlfriends all became dearer.  
I'm in love with them ever since.

Oh, girlfriends, my dear girlfriends,  
So pleasant to sense you with my hands!  
You're all so smooth! All so solid!  
One more wonderful than the next!

It's so pleasant to touch your breasts,  
Brush my lips the length of your legs.  
Oh, help me people, my dear people.  
Oh, help me God, my dear God!

24 August 1938

## Perechin [Mr. Contrarian]

Perechin sat on a thumbtack, and from that moment on his life changed abruptly. From a quiet, thoughtful person, Perechin became a confirmed mischief-maker. He let his mustaches grow out and subsequently trimmed it in such a careless way that one mustache was always longer than the other. And besides, his mustaches grew in a very uneven way, so that it became impossible to look at Perechin. And to boot, he winked his eyes and twisted his cheeks in a disturbing manner. For quite some time Perechin limited himself to minor delinquencies: he spread rumors, wrote denunciations, short-changed the women train conductors, paying them for the ride with the smallest copper coins and always omitting two and sometimes even three kopeks.

August 14, 1940

\*\*\*

How easy it is for a man to get lost in insignificant details. It is possible to pace for hours from the table to the wardrobe and from the wardrobe to the sofa without finding an exit. It is even possible to forget one's whereabouts and shoot arrows at some small case suspended from the wall. "Hey, you!" you can yell at it, "I'm gonna get you!" Or one can lie on the floor beholding closely the specks of dust. In this too consists inspiration. It is best to do this for hours, having come to terms with time. Of course, it is very difficult to determine a schedule for this, for what sort of time frame does dust have?

It is still better to gaze into a bowl of water. To gaze into water is always beneficial and instructive. Even if there is nothing to see in it, at least it always feels good. We gazed into the water, saw nothing in it, and very quickly became quite bored. But we soothed ourselves with the notion that we after all did something beneficial. We balled our fingers one at a time into our fists and counted them. But what we were counting, we had no idea, for what is there that can be counted in water?

August 17, 1940

## **Semeon Kirsanov (1906-1972)**

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### **The Letter M**

Maroon M –  
my metro,  
Moscow's metro.  
May, music, many Muscovite maids,  
muscular metro masons,  
mingling multitudes march:  
– Meager merit?  
– Mates, much more!  
Muffled, minus moths.  
May I? Merci!  
Marble, marine malachite, milky mosaics –  
mirage!  
Mikhail Maximovich mutters, mechanic –  
Makarich, Makarich –  
Meter's monometer moves.  
Mute minute....  
Metro's motor mightily  
moans.  
Motion, motion, motion;  
magnesium, meteor, movement.  
Mom, mom, mother!  
Marvelous!  
Motor murmurs – machine's mighty music.  
Moss Mall!  
Mitya motions to misty-eyed Marusya!  
Mar' Mikhailna, metro man-created.  
Mighty men, masterful!

Motion, motion, motion...  
Miniscule Marik mopes to mother:  
Mom, mom, may I, ma?  
Not enough words starting with this letter...  
(Music ... moths ... marvel ... meanwhile....)  
Mechanical minutia!

Attend to the poet!

I command

words

to begin

with the letter eM:

MLY MENGINE METRO MUNDER MALLS  
MOSSOVET  
MAST MOZDVIZHENKA  
MOWARD MOGOLEV MOULEVARD!  
MLEASE!

1935

## Andrey Voznesensky (1933-2010)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### Monologue of a Beatnik

Escape – into yourself, to Haiti, village churches, outhouses,  
to Egypt –

Run away!

Roaring and meowing, mechanical multitudes emit smoke:  
“Meat!”

The barbaric, like Khan Batu,  
Machines have enslaved us.

On ships in their miserable quarters,  
From shot glasses swilling benzene,  
They calculate: who was it in England  
That led the revolt against the machines?  
Run away!

And at night, having overcome timidity,  
To his creator,  
The cybernetic robot:

“Give me – he says – your wife!  
I have a weakness for brunettes – he says –  
I love it at thirty rounds per minute.  
Better surrender her of your own free will!”



Oh, this century's predatory things!  
A veto is imposed on your soul.  
We flee to the mountaintop, go to seed,

Dive naked in the water,  
But the rivers evaporate,  
In the oceans the fish go extinct...

From Women's wombs spring Rolls-Royces ....  
Radiation!

... My soul, my feral beastie,  
Along the metropolis's back alleys,  
As a puppy with a rope around its neck,  
You dart about, whimpering!

And time whistles prettily  
Above tan-skinned Tennessee,  
Mysterious, like a phoenix bird  
With a Duralex chassé.

1962

## Alexei Khvostenko (1940-2004)

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale*

### **\*Verpa/Portraits of Friends**

*to a. sorokin*

the targets are: petersburg side  
vasilevsky island  
colonna  
pharmacy island  
okhta  
vyborg side  
golodai  
new holland  
france  
italy  
pharmacology  
vologda  
in one word  
the russian/empire/

1.  
visible in the distance the gray skeleton  
of peter's island/autonomic stump of ground  
so accidentally it was depicted by a japanese  
landscape artist or wise man  
so we ourselves sketch it covered in thickets  
of the tiger or with cat-tails in its hands  
so it feeds on the dampness of the royal puddle  
and stuffed with significant history disappears  
into europe

2.

here is a man  
incapable so to say in a word of “breathing”  
to lead him by the hand  
from the row of other  
words signifying nothing  
/wearing a hat  
or with isakievsky cathedral on his shoulder/  
he tosses the above-mentioned history  
on the card table  
and while considering the impossibility of losing  
already kissing eternity places a bet on zero/  
/null/

3.

in the childhood home something strange  
is taking place/ /!  
answering to.....  
and patting europe on its little head he strolled  
along the winter canal to the neva river  
somewhere in the folds of his clothes lost  
are the netherlands  
/and what exactly?/  
in portugal – salazar and/or  
I  
/was there a century earlier/

4.

immediately after the outskirts the provinces begin  
old women and men wash themselves in the puddles  
loudly giggling and splashing mud  
further along comes into view the diligently Guarded  
master’s estate

with portraits of the former vologda  
eminences of the local nobility  
/hanging in cellars/  
a church in which on easter  
/and in all the other weathers/  
the sound of hollow tin balls knocking together  
is heard and further on –  
at the very bottom –  
just past the border:  
my signature  
/a.khvostenko/

5.  
trunks  
voyage sacks  
blanket carrying bags  
box crates  
suitcases  
all luggage is checked  
/under the condition of certain return  
at the journey's end/  
but before my eyes a miracle occurs  
some or other/single/little suitcase  
journeys immediately  
/among all the tourists/  
alone  
without its “master”

6.  
or otherwise  
targets – are deprivations  
/constant vanishings of formerly  
meaningful words/  
written down before  
the rules and conditions of the game had been set.

1965-67

*\*Verpa:*

- 1. word invented by Alexei Khvostenko ("Khvost") to describe his literary credo;*
- 2. name of the avant-garde Leningrad literary group founded by Khvost along with Henri Volobonski;*
- 3. title of posthumous anthology of the collected literary works of Alexei Khvostenko.*

## Serge Segay (1947- )

*Translated from Russian by Alex Cigale with Dana Golin*

### recipes of metamtextosis

#### 1. japanese cemental for gluing of werworld

from a lits,  
thinly diluted with cold mindough,  
they make textbread,  
thin it with thinkoil  
and ponder for the yeastduration of two minutes,  
cemental,  
risk and green,  
may serve for the gluing out of framedifferent things.  
another no less charmgrowing cemental  
for the adhesion of werworld and mystery  
prepared fr om another'segg wordcream  
mixmashed with crushed briskinness.  
it quickly drysugars and is veryternal.

#### 2. creatinoid eclairs

5/8ths pound of pissugar finely  
sprinkled  
mixed with 6 creamterlooped cursives  
stirring in 3/8ths pound of finest dried longing  
and a touch of mumbling sleepery  
or anylime mindstraining.  
slither a mental knuckle

muck it up to a sheen  
wipe it down with paperalchemy  
sprinkle lightly with melancholy  
pour the prepared terrormass  
into the handwriting tubulus  
dirtydip the very tip  
and use it to squirt out the textdough  
in fine squigules  
put it in an ashwarm flace  
but not on top of languagestove  
so that it is lightly crusticized  
then insert into deceptible speech  
and make sure that no one spoils it.  
when they are ready to be sounded out.  
let it get slightly stalecool.  
defend with a knife.

### 3. honeycakes in a hurry

take 10 yolckisses and rub-grind with 1 sighful  
of consumpsugar  
whiplove 1 sighful lovecream, 1 lovecream blubber,  
squeezezejuice from 1 lemonlove  
slobber it all up well  
and stickbitch hands in until  
the thighdough is not too thick  
also bite this well through  
add 10 foamed up carresses  
let the doughprivates rise  
and spill into prepared sheets.  
and bake in hot lovery

#### 4. sour fluxage

water (warm) . . . .	500 c
hyperspermic dessicate	100 u
or pharphallic	150 n
menstruarchic feelup	12 t

#### 5. dried lyubabka, shishlyoub from fellated chickery

meat (chickery) – 500 bounces  
sprig of bulbous – 1 nudie, stale vinger  
per 2-3 saltthighs  
painhurt  
penisper to taste.

slicelick chickery into tiny piecebites  
soil with salt, lovepepper, comingle into anti-hymenate  
cuntainer, douse with nibblings, urinate well  
bed-whet for no less than 3 hours; then pull out  
the sausage from marinanus, strip off remaining bitchatude  
fornicate up to 5 fuck-slices per thigh  
and stir-bother on sleezed-up charm-coal  
give it up in bloodbed on hard stop.

#### 6. canned tomatings

best to can mature dear tomatings  
round or boobular in shape  
with a dense meaty pulp  
or prickly. you may



can the tomatings peeled  
or with skins on.  
preserves made of skinless tomatings  
have the best qualovity.  
take in the lovely tomatings, rinse, lay down  
in consieve and drop in firingpot  
with boiling llovequid for 1-2 lovemeasures.  
quickly remove the consieve  
and immediately place in coolinairy lube  
on the milkedfruit will appear cracks  
the foreskin will stretch out from the pulp  
and this will fucksillitate its removal  
removing the skin is possible by hand  
with the help of knave, slicked in all the right places.

#### 7. jam made of loverberry

carefully comb over the loverberry  
sew as to seminally manhandle bare-breast.  
ectomize the pit-joints and the unripe bare-breasts  
prepare the scratch-pot  
and carefully immerse in it the loverberries  
lightly stir the com-pot  
and let it loverrise.  
remove the lidlove  
and squeezelove to loveliness  
per 1 lovertion of loverberries  
1 lovergram of sugarlaugh,  
½ glastick bitchbrew.

(numbers 1 thru 4 written in 1973, the rest in 1974)

## Appendix A: Poet Biography

Along with Boris Pasternak, **Nikolay Aseev** (1889-1962) was a key participant in the post-Futurist group Tsentrifuga. Aseev's reputation and quality, both as a poet and as a person, his significant talent notwithstanding, suffered from his live-long service to the Soviet regime. Considered a close friend by Mayakovsky and Pasternak, the latter broke-off his relationship with both of them c. 1925. Aseev's infamy rests primarily with having been the last person Tsvetaeva turned to for help, not forthcoming, days before her suicide (he had received the Stalin Prize the same year, in 1941.)

**David Burlyuk** (1882-1967) has been called "the father of Russian Futurism" and was its impresario, organizing the group's barn-storming and immensely popular tours throughout Russia. Burlyuk is perhaps most famous for having served as mentor to Vladimir Mayakovsky, both having been expelled from the Moscow Art School in 1914 for their political activities. His artwork brings in substantial sums at auction, and among his many accomplishments as an artist was a leading role in bringing Modernist art to Japan, where he lived from 1920-1922, before immigrating to New York. He was not allowed to return to Russia until after Stalin's death.

**Vasilisk Gnedov** (1890-1978,) a member of the Petersburg Ego-Futurists established by Igor Severyanin, after the dissolution of the group, he toured Russia along with the Cubo-Futurists (Khlebnikov, Mayakovsky, Kamensky) but never joined the group. His is most famous for his poem "Death to Art," the last part of which (15. "Poem of the End,") was a blank page intended to be accompanied by a gesture of the hand in performance. He ceased writing poetry in 1921. Repressed in 1936, Gnedov survived twenty years in the Gulag. He resumed writing, this time very short lyrics, in the late 60s and early 70s that were published posthumously during the 90s.

**Daniil Kharms** (1905-1942), along with Alexander Vvedensky, co-founded the OBERIU, the so-called Russian Absurdist group of poets during the 1920s and 30s. Kharms was not allowed to publish his work and survived for a time by writing poems for children. Having feigned insanity to avoid arrest and deportation to the Gulag, he starved to death in a psychiatric hospital in 1942, during the Nazi siege of Leningrad.

**Velimir Khlebnikov** (1885-1922) had been called "perhaps the most important modern poet" by Roman Jacobsen, one of the founders

of Structuralist linguistics. His Collected and Selected in English are available in the translation of Paul Schmidt. Khlebnikov died of infection in the winter of 1922, having been weakened by an extended period of starvation.

**Alexei Khvostenko** (1940-2004) deserves a larger, “literary” audience, but his outsider status is unlikely to be reversed posthumously and outside the Russian context, requiring an appreciation of him as a multi-artist (poet, singer/bard, collagist/sculptor) and an awareness of his immense popularity as a persona non grata during the exhilarating cultural moment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the Soviet status quo was still in place but the liberating/decadent influences of the West had flooded in. Khvost (his nickname means “Tail”) lived in Paris after his 1977 expulsion from the USSR. Alex Cigale’s translations of his seminal minimalist-serialist poem is at <http://intranslation.brooklynrail.org/russian/the-suspector> and an early seminal piece of Russian prose poetry, “The Dread Tree” is in the current issue of *The St. Petersburg Review* (4/5).

While still in his teens, **Semyon Kirsanov** (1906-1972) was the organizing force in his native Odessa in 1921 behind the Southern Association of Futurists. In 1925, Vladimir Mayakovsky published two of his early poems in his Constructivist journal LEF, having met the younger poet on a visit to Odessa. Upon moving to Moscow the same year, Kirsanov began an apprenticeship with Mayakovsky and the poet Nikolay Aseev and, in the public imagination, inherited his mentor’s torch after Mayakovsky’s death in 1930.

Together with Velimir Khlebnikov, **Alexei Kruchenykh** (1886-1968) is considered the inventor of zaum, or trans-rational poetry. Kruchenykh wrote the libretto for the Futurist opera Victory Over the Sun, with sets by Kazimir Malevich. He is also primarily responsible for the production of the great Futurist artist books, many of them written by his hand. The long-lived Kruchenykh served as an essential link for the post-war generation of Russian poets of the 1950s – the so-called Lianozovo School, Moscow Conceptualists, and poets like – to the work of the preceding generations, not yet available in print.

The grudgingly respectful words of Marina Tsvetaeva sum up well **Vladimir Mayakovsky**’s life and work: “A rebel among poets; a poet among rebels.” Having lost his father at an early age, Mayakovsky (1893-1930) moved with his family in 1906 from Baghdati, Georgia, where he was born, to Moscow. He began to compose poetry following one of his arrests for political activity, during a period of solitary confinement in 1909. (His Marxist education had begun well before his formal one

ended at age 15, when his mother could no longer pay the school fees.) The 1912 Futurist publication *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* contained Mayakovsky's first published poems, along with the influential manifesto of that name. A trained visual artist, Mayakovsky made significant contributions to theater, cinema, and particularly to early Soviet propaganda poster art and as editor of the Constructivist journal LEF. Mayakovsky's final work, his famous suicide note: "The love boat has smashed up against the rocks of life."

As one of the so-called "Big Four" (along with Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, and Akhmatova,) **Boris Pasternak** (1890-1994) needs no introduction other than a reminder that his earliest writings, which he later in life renounced, were in a Futurist vein. Outside Russia, Pasternak is best known as the author of *Doctor Zhivago*, published in 1957, for which he was awarded the 1958 Nobel Prize in Literature that he was forced to decline. Pasternak's other great service to literature was his translations of the plays of Goethe, Schiller, and Shakespeare, which remain deeply popular in Russia.

**Serge Segay**, born in 1947 in Murmansk, completed his studies at the Leningrad Institute of Theater, Music, and Cinematography. From 1974 he lived in Yeysk (on the Azov sea), moving to St. Petersburg in 1997, and in 1998 to Kiel, Germany. He and his wife, the poet Rea Nikonova, have been credited with reviving the Zaum poetry of the Russian Silver Age avant-garde, editing and publishing *Transponance* (1979-1987,) a renowned Russian underground hand-made journal, covers of which can be viewed at The Sackner Archives. In 1998, they were awarded the Andrei Bely Prize for "special services to literature" for their preservation of the history and poetry of Russian Futurism. His Selected Poems in English, exoDICKERING, are forthcoming in Alex Cigale's translations from Xexoxial Editions.

As part of the Constructivist movement, in his early work **Ilya Selvinsky** (1899-1968) attempted to implement "a scientific approach in the realm of poetry." Later in life, one of the beloved lyrical poets of the so-called War Generation, he served as a correspondent at the front the entire period of WWII. As a Pravda correspondent, he was a member of Captain Otto Schmidt's famous polar expedition (1933-1934) along the entire Russian coast of the Arctic Ocean to the easternmost tip of the Chukchi Peninsula.

**Igor Severyanin** (1887-1941) made dandyism, pretentiousness, and vulgarity, in the sense of bad taste, into high art. His work, characterized by aesthetization and sentimentalization verging on parody, included con-

stant, megalomaniacal, self-conscious proclamation of himself as a genius (hence the Ego in Ego-Futurism). Perhaps more than any other poet of his time, he succeeded by dint of his persona to “capture the public imagination and reach stardom”. Severyanin was one of the first poets to leave Soviet Russia; following the 1917 revolution, he lived in Tallinn, Estonia until his death.

**Vadim Shershenevich** (1893-1942,) born the same year as Mayakovsky, was old enough to have begun a Symbolist, vied for leadership among the Cubo-Futurists, help found Ego-Futurism, move on to become a leading spokesman and theoretician for Imaginism, and, in 1926, to declare it and the avant-garde dead: “Poetry has become polemic ... poetry without lyricism is as good as a race horse without a leg... the failure of imaginism is ... it always insisted on poetization of poetry.” He moved on to theater, both as writer and director, libretti, and screenwriting, also doing translations of Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Brecht. He died of tuberculosis in 1942.

As a leading voice of the so-called Russian “60s Generation,” **Andrey Voznesensky** (1933-2010,) in addition to gaining world-class recognition as a poet, made significant social contributions. As one of the co-founders of Russian PEN, he was the organization’s Vice President until his passing. Near the end of his life, he was instrumental in the creation of the Pasternak Museum. Voznesensky’s obituaries recounted the tributes paid him by Pasternak and W. H. Auden, as well as his friendship with Allen Ginsberg, which yielded for him an international audience and a role as Russia’s unofficial cultural ambassador. His great popularity as a performer was augmented in that scores of his verses were turned into songs and he was the librettist of a beloved Rock Opera, *Juno and Avos’*. He acknowledged his debt to Russian Futurism and to Mayakovsky specifically, both in the form and the contents of his poems. As testimony of his restless experimentation, see link to his Videoms on his Russian PEN page. Alex Cigale’s and Dana Golin’s tribute to him in English is at *Big Bridge*.

## Appendix B: Links to the Poets

*Click on the links below for more information.*

[David Burliuk](#)

[Velimir Khlebnikov](#)

[Alexei Kruchenykh](#)

[Igor Severyanin](#)

[Nikolay Aseyev](#)

[Vasilisk Gnedov](#)

[Boris Pasternak](#)

[Vladimir Mayakovsky](#)

[Daniil Kharms](#)

[Vadim Shershenevich](#)

[Ilya Selvinsky](#)

[Semyon Kirsanov](#)

[Andrei Voznesensky](#)

[Alexei Khvostenko](#)

[Serge Segay](#)

## Appendix C: Collection of Futurism Links

*Click on the links below for more information.*

[Russian Futurism / Hyalea](#)

[Ego Futurist](#)

[PDFs of Russian Futurist books in the Getty Museum collection, including A Slap in the Face of Public Taste, Klhebnikov's Works: 1906-1908, Vladimir Kamensky's Tango with Cows, and Mayakovsky's Tragedy, illustrated by Burlyuk.](#)

[Vladimir Mayakovsky's 1916 book, \*Simple as Mooing\*](#)

[Audio recordings of Vladimir Mayakovsky](#)

[Victory Over the Sun: a Supersaga by Alexei Kruchenykh](#)

[LEF: journal Constructivism founded and edited by Vladimir Mayakovsky;](#)

[For manifesto click here.](#)

[Slap in the Face of Public Taste](#)

[Oberiu: The Russian Absurdists](#)

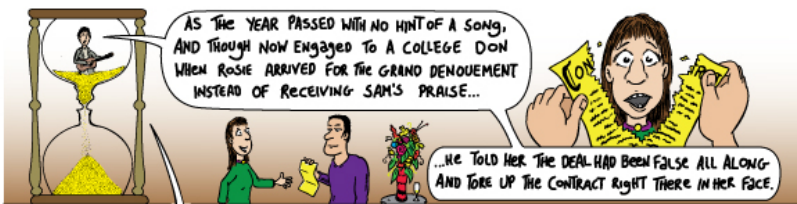
[Two translations of F. W. Marinetti's Futurist Manifesto: The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism](#)  
[The Futurist Manifesto](#)











## Kwik Stop

*Joanna Brent Leake*

Lyman didn't want to ride with his granddaddy to the Kwik Stop to buy cigarettes and beer. It almost always ended up in some kind of scene. Most everybody pissed Granddaddy off. Then that meant there was yelling and cussing. And hollering about things in the Bible and the newspaper and on the TV news. Granddaddy might be old, but he put a lot of store in keeping up with things. And that led to him having lots of opinions. Lyman thought that Granddaddy was probably a little bit crazy. But on the other hand, he was smart, or at least the smartest one in the family. Sure as shit smarter than, say, Lyman's mother, who spent all her time working at the world's crappiest job, doing other people's laundry at the Fluff & Fold, or sitting on a folding chair in a strip-mall church listening to all the ways people were going to burn in hell if they didn't straighten their lives up. Even though he was sixty-four, Granddaddy had a computer, and he knew how to use it. He was always looking things up online and then telling Lyman –and anybody else that would listen-- little-known facts about how the world worked and what the government was up to.

There were computers at school, but the principal said they had a way to track what you were looking at, to see if you went on dirty websites or watched rap music videos. And those were the only things on the computer Lyman liked. Computers were just like books. All the letters turned into squiggly lines, and the words didn't make any sense. Not being able to read worth shit was what made school like going straight to hell every day. That and not being able to find out things he wanted to know. And what was he supposed to do? Just go up to Sherri and ask her what she meant? Right. Like that would ever happen. So that pretty much left Granddaddy. He might yell and talk until you wanted to run

and hide, but he never laughed at Lyman or said he must be some kind of complete fucktard. He said Lyman was a work in progress. He told people, “He ain’t but thirteen. You can’t write the boy off quite yet.”



So there they were, pulling up to the Kwik Stop, and Lyman was just fixing to ease into the subject, when Granddaddy saw Rooney Dinkins’ red pick-up truck parked in front. It was a big, shiny dualie, with all kinds of chrome and giant bumper guards and fancy rims that Rooney had to special-order all the way from Dallas. Granddaddy had only lately taken to hating Rooney. It was partly because Rooney sold an oil lease on some acres his uncle left him. It galled Granddaddy to see Rooney spending money like it was water, buying a sixty inch flat screen TV and a hot tub and a big, gold wristwatch, not to mention the red dualie pick-up. But mostly it was because of Rosalie. She had been Granddaddy’s on-and-off lady friend for as long as Lyman could remember. Even back before Grandmaw died. While Grandmaw was alive and going to church, where Granddaddy didn’t set foot because he didn’t want his mind poisoned by the bible, Granddaddy would have breakfast with Rosalie, and they would bring Lyman sometimes. Usually they went to Waffle House. Granddaddy thought IHOP was trying to be international, like Europe, and he said that pancakes were invented in America. But now Rosalie was seeing Rooney, and nobody was going out for pancakes anymore. Rooney was short and bald-headed and kind of fat, but he was usually in a good humor. Granddaddy was tall and lean and still had a full head of gray hair, but he didn’t shave as often as he should have, and he was mostly in a bad mood and pissed off about something. Especially now since Rooney got the oil lease and Rosalie, and Granddaddy didn’t go out to breakfast anymore

and had to go to the VFW dances by himself.

“Goddamn,” Granddaddy said when he saw the truck. “A man can’t go down the road for a pack of smokes without having to see Rooney out flashing his money and acting a fool. He ought to be too rich for the damn Kwik Stop. He ought to be using credit cards out in the mall where people might give two shits and think he’s somebody important.”

Lyman hunched down in his seat, hoping that Granddaddy might decide to forget it and drive off. But no, he was opening the door and starting to get out.

Lyman took a deep breath. “Hey, Granddaddy,” he said. “Lemme ask you something.”

Granddaddy sat back down in the car. “What you need, boy?”

“What’s ‘platonic?’” Lyman said.

“How do you mean?” Granddaddy squinted at him.

Lyman thought about Sherri, leaning back against the wall by her locker, twirling a piece of hair around her finger while she looked at him, all soft and smiley. “Like a relationship,” he said. “Platonic.”

“Oh, well.” Granddaddy smiled, the smile he always had when he was settling back to talk for a long time about something. “You were just saying it wrong is all. It’s plutonic. A plutonic relationship. And that goes back in history, way back to the beginning of cartoons.”

And then he told Lyman that once in the olden days there was a cartoon called Mickey Mouse, the mouse that invented cartoons. And Mickey Mouse had a cartoon dog named Pluto and ever since then, because a dog was man’s best friend, when you wanted to talk about being friends you called it a plutonic relationship.

Sherri had just kissed Lyman one time, one quick kiss when he was standing in the parking lot waiting for the bus and she was running off to get in her daddy’s car and drive home. But

he thought it wasn't much like a real kiss. It didn't seem like it had been wet enough to be a real kiss. It probably didn't mean anything, just like Granddaddy said, just like a mouse and dog in a cartoon. "It's being friends?" he asked.

"Most times yes," Granddaddy said. "But here's the tricky thing. Some of them nasty girls, they mean something different. You think about Pluto, right? He's a dog. They say plutonic to you, and it means they might be willing to do it doggy style, like all them nasty girls do."

Lyman tried to think if Sherri wanted to be friends with him or if she wanted to maybe go under the bleachers and do something nasty. He thought about standing behind Sherri, lifting her skirt up, and doing it doggy style. He had never done it at all, any style. But that might be a way to start. Sherri was partly a regular girl and maybe partly a little bit nasty, so it was hard to tell which thing she meant.



They stepped out of the car, and now Granddaddy was getting all bowed up, walking into the Kwik Stop. Lyman could see he was looking for Rooney, looking to say something smart and mean to him, something to make Rooney look stupid and Granddaddy feel sharp. But it wasn't Rooney at all. It was Rosalie. Rosalie with her hair all curled, wearing a blue dress with little, yellow palm trees on it, standing at the counter, holding a big bottle of Diet Dr. Pepper and buying a Powerball Ticket from Miss Janice, the lady who ran the cash register.

"I need to get some Tylenol," she was saying to Miss Janice. "My head's killing me."

"Go on and get it," Miss Janice said. "And get you some crackers too. You don't want to take them tablets on an empty stomach." She handed Rosalie a pink Powerball ticket. "Looks

like a winner,” she said.

“Hey there, Jimmy,” Rosalie said to Granddaddy. She gave him a big smile.

Lyman liked how Rosalie was always friendly, even now when Granddaddy looked at her like he was fixing to spit nails, not saying one word.

“Nice to see you two,” Rosalie said. She took her Powerball ticket and headed down the aisle to where the medicine was.

Lyman wanted to say something back, but he knew no one was supposed to be nice to Rosalie since she started taking up with Rooney.

Granddaddy made a growly kind of noise in his throat, watched Rosalie walking away, then turned around, like he just remembered something important he had to tend to. “Lemme have a carton of Camels,” he told Miss Janice. “Go get a couple of six packs,” he said to Lyman, taking out his wallet and handing him some crumpled up money. “Bud Forties. I’m gonna go wait in the car.” He headed for the door and right before he went out he looked over his shoulder and hollered at Lyman, louder than he needed to, “Get em from the cooler.”

Granddaddy believed that beer from the cooler had more alcohol in it. He never bought beers off the shelf. He said if you were paying for a beer you might as well get a buzz on. Shelf beers were for pussies.

At the back of the store Lyman found the Bud forties in the cooler. Maybe this might be one of the afternoons when he could sit on the back porch with Granddaddy and drink. Sometimes he had to drink a Coke while Granddaddy drank his cooler beers, smoked cigarette and talked about all the things in the world that were fucked up. But other times Granddaddy let him have a beer or two. Then Lyman could talk about his own fucked up things. Like how school sucked, except for playing baseball and having a locker next to Sherri’s, and how he was probably going to get



held back unless somebody invented a magic smart pill that could teach him how to read. And the afternoon would go on and on, and Granddaddy would listen to him and drink more beers. And the next day, he wouldn't remember any of it, so Lyman never had to worry about the subject coming up in front of people. Or maybe Granddaddy just acted like he forgot. Either way, it worked out fine for Lyman. He liked those afternoons.

Lyman went back to the counter and paid Miss Janice. As she bagged up the cigarettes and beer, he looked over his shoulder at Rosalie. He thought maybe he should catch her eye, wave goodbye, maybe make up for the mean look Granddaddy had given her. She was still standing in the aisle, holding a bottle of Tylenol, looking at it like it was some amazing object she'd never seen before. He headed over to her, practicing something nice to say, something that wouldn't make him sound too much like a fucktard. He looked back to check to make sure Granddaddy couldn't see him through the window. Just go ahead, he told himself. She's standing right there. Say something. But then Rosalie kind of crumpled up, like some big invisible hand had pulled all the stuffing out of her. Lyman stared at her for second, or maybe it was longer, but finally he dropped the beer, and he ran over to where Rosalie was lying sprawled out, the Tylenol bottle rolling along the floor by her head, her Powerball ticket still in her hand, like she was reaching out to him.

There was something clear and foamy on her mouth, and her eyes were open and kind of filmy, one looking staring up at the ceiling and the other one looking off to the side, like she was looking right at Lyman. But there was nothing in her face anymore, and she wasn't looking at anything. Just gone. It seemed like it was a long time, Lyman standing there, but it really wasn't. In that long minute that wasn't really long, he thought about how weird it was. How one minute Rosalie had been there and the next minute she wasn't. And she'd never be anywhere anymore, not

ordering eggs and biscuits at the Waffle House or driving Rooney's truck or smiling at Granddaddy, driving him up the wall. Even though she was with Rooney she still smiled at Granddaddy. She had a one-eyed tom cat named Moe. Moe was still around, but she wasn't. And she never would be. He knelt down, close to her.

And it was just him and Rosalie.

Then Ms. Janice came running, and a man coming in to pay for gas called 911 on his cell phone. On T.V. people always felt for a pulse or began CPR or, if it was that show about lifeguards, did mouth-to-mouth. Lyman wished he knew how to do CPR. He would rather do anything than go back out to the car where Granddaddy was.



When he told him, Granddaddy, for once, didn't say anything. They watched as the man with the cell phone came back out to his truck and went into the Kwik Stop carrying a drop cloth. Lyman took a fast look over at Granddaddy. His face was all tight, and his eyes looked too bright, like he was staring right into the sun. Lyman wondered if somebody ought to call Rooney. He was at home, maybe watching his big TV, thinking it was still a regular day. Granddaddy swallowed and rubbed his hand across his mouth. Lyman decided not to say anything about Rooney. He looked down at his feet. He didn't want to see if maybe Granddaddy might be fixing to cry.

But then Granddaddy grabbed Lyman by the arm. "Go on back in and get me my beer," he told him.

"Huh?" Lyman said.

"You heard me." Granddaddy's fingers were digging in hard. "And my smokes."

Lyman looked at him. You'd think that because of what happened, he would be softer now, feeling sad. But there was

something wild and shiny in Granddaddy's eyes, and he seemed madder than ever. Not crying, but something worse. He didn't want to leave him. But maybe Granddaddy wanted to be by himself for a while. Lyman didn't know what to do.

"O.K.," Lyman said.



Lyman's feet seemed to drag. It felt like a million miles back inside the Kwik Stop, like it took him hours to travel just those few steps. He thought about living in a cartoon, a world where all the lines were drawn in black, and the colors were clear and bright, and everything anyone said or thought showed up printed over their heads, and you knew exactly what everything meant. He thought about Sherri. Did she want to do it doggy-style or did she want to be a plutonic friend?

Walking up to the counter, even though he tried not to look, out of the corner of his eye he could see down the aisle. The drop cloth was spattered with paint, dots of red and yellow, big globs of bright green, happy, cartoon colors. One of Rosalie's shoes, a white sandal with a sole made out of some kind of cork, looked like it was coming off. He thought somebody should put it back on for her. Miss Janice and the man with the cell phone were standing there. He thought maybe Miss Janice might be praying. He could hear her say "Oh, Jesus." He laid Granddaddy's money on the counter and picked up the beer and the smokes, still in the bag where Miss Janice had left it. As he walked out of the store he could hear the siren from the ambulance.

In the car he and Granddaddy watched as the 911 men went into the store. Granddaddy's jaw was clinched tight, like he was fixing to chew on something hard. And there was still that look in his eyes, too bright and too wild, like something trying to break out of a cage.

Lyman squeezed his eyes closed and took a breath. “She wanted you to have this,” he said. His voice sounded loud in the quiet car.

Granddaddy turned to look at him.

“She told me,” Lyman said. “She said it, right before...” He trailed off and reached into his pocket. “She wanted you to have it. So you’d know she was thinking about you. That’s what she said, so you’d know you were the one she was thinking about at the end.”

Granddaddy stared at him while Lyman took the Powerball ticket out of his pocket and put it in Granddaddy’s hand.

“She asked me to give it to you,” Lyman told him.

Saying it over and over, seeing Granddaddy taking the ticket and looking at it, the tightness easing up a little in his jaw, his eyes getting all soft and blurry, Lyman could almost make himself believe it was true. That maybe this wasn’t the worst thing he had ever done in his life.

In the end, he told himself, it didn’t matter that he had stolen the Powerball ticket from Rosalie after she was dead. He knew it wasn’t going to be a winner anyway.

**‘No Such Many as Mass,’ ‘Limits Are What Any of  
Us Are All Inside of,’  
or The Momentous Life of a Drip of Paint**

*Alifair Skebe*

*An investigation into the person of Jackson Pollock with R.D.  
Laing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Olson, Tom Stoppard,  
and George Berkeley.*

The vision though blind beats itself inside the cage of the mind

a split from periphery  
or stasis

had we known you were like this then it would have made all the difference

into an ear the scent of lambs

Lee, how your blues sparkle like midnight  
I'm not sure when it came to me  
*I think we will discover*



an interviewer speaks:

tell me about yr  
about the becoming  
the process of that thing  
any thing  
the labyrinth

to be is to be seen

no "I" has ever been  
before  
this  
moment

*Catch me*

in pursuit  
Lee, if I had known your curves of honey then

chance

the

fall

result

*Ready?*

playing at a game of questions  
*new needs new techniques*  
don't think that moment was false

space and time    give me the space    and the time    a barn  
perhaps    outside of the city    the city is drowning    the oceans are  
drowning    with fish    the fish are breathing    my breath

the move, parallel  
parataxis

one drip    this moment    the mark of a tool    one scrape    one cut  
against this    to envelop    this    me

*[toll]*

*limitless*    (serpent)    *of my own term*    *the compound*



- 1) a bristle brush: mass count many many movement
- 2) the stick: matter power movement both general and specific no many to get in its way
- 3) the gravity: catches

*They work from within*

*inner forces*

intention the extension expansive encompassing reception is direct      d i r e c t  
 access to the interior the exterior what maintains the distance between the rational  
 and the mystic cognitive this is me I speak from my experience this is all I can  
 know *not aware of what I'm doing* illustrative no longer possible I cannot  
 translation outside to inside inside to outside the same construct on canvas two-  
 dimensional opening to the third an eye for seeing fourth the texture paint the canvas  
 moving its position on the palette unmixed mixing the body as palette a chemical  
 taste in nostrils swelling

the moment  
           the fall  
 the distance  
           self  
           the material

*When I am in*      embodied      *there is a limit*

*To the extent that he is thoroughly 'in' his body,  
he is likely to have a sense  
of personal continuity in time.*

*immortality is all I seek*

to follow the labyrinth in  
one entrance, one exit  
expands the labyrinth

going backward is going forward  
the minotaur was a misanthrope  
I had been watching for hours  
immortality comes before the new

*consistency is all I ask!*  
*...a ruthless consistency*  
the minotaur was a baby  
kill the beast at the center

*Limits/are what any of us/are inside of*

no drip exists outside of the moment  
suspended in time its body

time            the physics of gravity the space the drip has traveled in  
                 materialized  
                         outside of iconography      outside of hieroglyph  
   inside the sphere

to play at a thing  
                 no  
                         to play in a thing  
enter  
the threshold of  
                 experience  
no outside to besides  
                 no pre-position to position  
relational physics loses ground  
                 effective immediately  
                 directness of the indirect

*He who confronts the paradoxical exposes himself to reality.*

the paradox one inhabits becomes the center of the skin attached  
to the between  
*I can see what I have been about*

sight without vision

                         doing    waiting    touching  
the body on sphere    the body on itself  
                 without the organs of hierarchy            a flight into space



## Me and Jesus

*Lori Sublett*

I found Jesus in my SpaghettiOs, hanging out at the bottom of the bowl trapped under a meatball. He was as surprised to see me as I was to see him, his little pasta mouth fixed in an “o.” I was still hungry so I ate around his face, but I felt a little bad about it. He didn’t seem to mind much, just stared at me with wide all-seeing eyes.

I couldn’t bear to rinse him down the drain. He’d know exactly what I’d done. I took the bowl and set it gently in a drawer – the one that was almost empty except for the fancy-colored Post-it’s, a handful of change and the birth-control pills I didn’t need anymore. I couldn’t look at him, not while he was naked and shocky, his face a series of concentric circles. The TV said to slap someone who’s in shock but my hair stood on end every time I thought about it. So I just put him gently in the drawer.

I left him there and went to feed the cat. I didn’t have any cat food, so Lando Calrissian and I curled up on the couch with some fudge brownies my neighbor made fresh a couple weeks ago. They were hard but it didn’t bother me much and Lando wasn’t complaining. I fell asleep on the couch and woke up to a cold bundle of fur in my lap. Lando had died - morte par chocolat. I buried him in the backyard underneath the lemon tree, by Don. I went back inside, washed my hands, and noticed the tan line on my finger was fading. I pulled the bowl with Jesus out of the drawer. His mouth was a crusty crescent curving down, his eyes slitted and mocking. I threw the bowl away then turned on the TV.

## High Maintenance

*James Reidel*

*On being told this*

My yard ended in a birch thicket.  
A farmer planted it long ago.  
He kept cutting it back for tool handles, wicket  
gates, sheep pens,  
Pain.  
And so it served until no one else came  
For its purpose,  
Its control,  
Its spread into a crown,  
A rod garden from which I cut my walking-stick,  
One varnished a rosewood,  
Upheld,  
That is what *maintenance* means.  
It's with me now in the woods,  
Closed in my hand—I will say I didn't bear that.  
Otherwise we take sides,  
Otherwise you take yourself for the low,  
Lowheld.

## The Home for Friendly Girls

*James Reidel*

*Man on the floor*—I miss announcing my presence,  
The pro forma, the inside joke to them,  
My mocking a lower register,  
The pomp warning but a towel.  
I miss using the women's showers,  
Not lifting the seat in the steam—and such dawns  
    in a sister's room,  
Sun parting drapes,  
A bed narrow enough to hear this right,  
To make no mistake, *we're just friends*,  
Pillow talk I set my watch too.  
I even miss that release no matter how tight in my hand  
One terry corner could eat the other.

—*for Sander Hall, U.C., demolished*

*Note:* The title is a play on a Victorian euphemism for that institutional combination of orphanage and lying-in hospital called a “home for friendless girls.”

## How I Vote

*James Reidel*

### 1. *I Did Early*

I learned our national ecology of 0s and 1s from the  
    high chair,  
A simple shell game with one shell,  
Of spilling my partitioned plate,  
Letting the symbol bossing the Bakelite clatter of  
    both sides  
Go heads or tails—  
This when I ate with fists carrots and peas,  
Apples and oranges,  
Stars and butter,  
Sing-song and pasta,  
Spelling with Mandarin slices,  
My smiles for this and my frowns for that.

### 2. *Abacus*

I decide a favorite by October,  
When the costume store opens in the closed store  
That I went to get something I forgot and now miss,  
When the water takes longer to warm from the showerhead,  
Longer to factor in my own reluctance  
To the change,  
To step inside naked and yet



Still I pull the curtain back,  
Pull its plastic rings,  
Their click and clack  
I love her/him,  
I love him/her not,  
Sliding them free across the rod,  
Wearing a little more of its silver down to the brass.

3. *W.W. Jim D.*

I blink once for no,  
Twice for yes.  
I blink like everybody.  
I blink unlike them too,  
Choosing the greater E looming like the big E,  
That is,  
Whatever gets it over quick.

4. *Κυλάκι*

I don't want walking money.  
I want all your small business,  
The smallest of it,  
The footprint of a ticket booth,  
No more shelves to dust  
Than a snake museum's museum shop,  
That is only in business to earn the last dollar  
Framed behind the counter on the wall.

## 5. Cooping

*James Reidel*

*—In his last days, E.A.P. cast for spirits*

This has the weave and sheen of bombazine,  
So pigeon droppings will bead like dew,  
But for the love of God the Shaker hat will not do.  
The straw crown's too tight to fit my sheep's head right,  
The brim blots out the sun and lamp,  
Such that I am bereft that I inked my jots and like a dragon  
Dried them with my breath  
Fired from quaffing down every Whig in the ward and if I  
heard you right,  
I may have another pour? *Point d'honneur!*  
You're looking at who powdered bombs better than you pour.  
There is a number for us all from here to there,  
Beginning to end,  
You can't just aim and push me in the street.  
This takes another round (For whose slate you say?) and toast  
(click) for Virginia,  
—and widows who in pew pray for a certain Poe,  
Him you see.  
To the rim facilitates digestion and rhyme,  
Lines that once lapped with them, seas of them,  
Even before you got to the end of them, by me.

## She Would Love To See China

*Patricia Smith*



**Barby (1919-1997)**

**Those ashes.** I hadn't expected to love them. The twelve-inch square box, the glossy white paper. How *heavy* they were. That's the bone, they said. In the car, I shook the box, and the bone rattled.

At home, I scoop some out. The powder in my hand is dense, not dusty the way wood ash is, and it is infused with tiny slivers of bone that remind me of Stone Age needle-tools. I take another handful. The ash seems to contain something like life, but the opposite of warmth. I seal my purloined ashes in a sandwich bag and lay it flat in my desk drawer. Then I rewrap the box, tape it shut, and tuck Barby's ashes into a canvas carry-on. I am flying south to California, to meet my brothers.

On the way to the airport, I shake the box again. The bone rattles.

Barby was my mother, but I always called her Barby. Many people begin calling their parents by first names once they grow up, a rite of passage, but in my family it was Barby and Dick from the beginning. They said my big brother Bruce started it when he learned to talk and they just let it be. Everyone called her Barby, my friends, her friends, our teachers, the cleaning lady, the kids on the block; milkman, mailman, garbage men. Because she came before the doll, I never associated her with all that. Anyway, the doll spelled her name B-A-R-B-I-E, and, except for the same noteworthy breasts, that vacant-eyed airhead was nothing like my Barby. My Barby smoked cigarettes, drank martinis, and was really really smart.

Later, the grandchildren called her Barby, too, but by then she wasn't the same person.

We are meeting at David's place in Del Rey Oaks, near Monterey. We plan to rent a car and drive down the coast to Santa Monica to release Barby's ashes into the ocean. No one knows whether or not this is legal, but that is the plan. We are not exactly close. This will be our first gathering since Barby's seventy-fifth birthday, three years ago in Knoxville, Tennessee.

A quick introduction. Barby was a housewife and Dick was a rocket scientist, and they were married for twenty-six years, from 1938-1964. After five years of unfettered, young-married fun, they had four children: Bruce, me, Geoff, and David. For most of my 1950's childhood, we lived in West Los Angeles around the corner from the sprawling Douglas Aircraft plant where Dick worked, on a busy street called Bundy Drive. Sprinklers, sidewalks, and stucco ramblers.

In the fall of 1963—Bruce was in college, but the rest of us were still at home; David, the “caboose,” was barely ten—things fell apart. Dick went to Huntington Beach to live with his girlfriend and Barby went crazy.

Neither of them ever came back, not really.

*Black Dog backwards. Barby flung the skirt of her shirtdress over her head. She would not come out; she would not cover her exposed underwear and skinny, bruised legs, askew on the rumpled sheet. Black Dog backwards, she rasped from under the thin cotton, over and over and over. They called it “nervous breakdown.”*

The sun is out in Monterey. We have all come from deep winter: Bruce, a scientist at NASA, came from Cleveland; Geoff, a physics professor, from Knoxville; and I, a private-practice psychotherapist and visual artist, came from Seattle. David, a math professor, is the lucky one. He lives here, where you get spring in January.

We assemble in David’s bright living room on two sectionals and the sole family heirloom, a spindled mahogany rocker, all wary. It occurs to me to put my glossy white box on the coffee table, but I don’t. Dust motes jounce around in the late afternoon sunbeams. We always do this, some delicate shuffle, like dogs creeping around corners to sniff and sneak peeks. Sometimes, in the course of our get-togethers, we soften up. I know we try. I had wondered if it would be different with Barby gone, but this feels the same. I feel responsible for (and incapable of) making things go well, and I prattle, brightly, into the air.

David hops to the kitchen and returns with a bottle of champagne. I watch his handsome hands, square like Dick’s but with more refined fingers like Barby’s, as he unwinds the wire. His left-hand nails are short and the right-hand’s long, for guitar and bass. He pours the cheerful, light-amber liquid and we raise our

flutes. No one says Barby, but it's to her. Then we all chat, about weather, wine, travel, nothing.

Bruce steers into our past. He complains about the derision, the neglect. His face, in any case pinkish, flushes deep rose, and his lips are stiff. I stare at Bruce's thick wavy hair, shiny-aluminum in a sunbeam. Barby loved Bruce's glorious hair, the wave and the widow's-peak. I don't think Dick did. Dick was bald. Bruce says there was some weird overlay of *sex* in our household. He says we were *abused*. We have talked about all this before, but I am no longer interested.

I was there when Barby died. If she had just died suddenly in her sleep, like Bruce I might have still been mad, not about our childhood but about the long years after, thorny and stingy. And I would have been sad. I would have been relieved. But Barby didn't die suddenly in her sleep. Barby spent her last days tucked in my house, in my bedroom, and something I could not have anticipated, or even imagined, happened. We fell in love.

*You never know, Barby-the-athiest said, two days before she died. She was talking about heaven, about joining her mother there. She smiled into my eyes, a brave girl going off to her first day at kindergarten. You never know.*

I cannot expect them to feel the way I do. They weren't there. I tried to tell them about Barby over the phone last September, how sweet she was at the end, but I got the feeling they found me irritating or disloyal. But if you walk off the ship, must it mean you are abandoning the other sailors?

Geoff stands up. He looks the same as always, with his deep-set brown eyes, dark beard and plain-brown country haircut—except for the eyebrows, I notice, which are darker and bushier and create a shelf so that his eyes are hidden in shadow, just glints. Geoff brings from his room a fake-leather yellow suitcase with

rusted locks and peeling decals secured by a heavy nylon strap. Barby's stuff, what is left of it; in fact, her entire archive. Barby left it with him almost two years ago when, evicted from her apartment in Knoxville, she moved to Seattle to live near me.

*Barby rolled her eyes and pointed at her lap. Uh, oh. The airport wheelchair appeared to be leaking. Barby sucked hard on an Old Gold. We had passed three bathrooms between the gate and baggage claim. Three times, Barby had claimed she did not need to go.*

*A little puddle formed on the dirty grey cement. Barby smirked, took another long drag, and gazed at passing cars with smoke leaking from her nose. The puddle trickled toward the curb.*

Geoff lays the yellow suitcase on the coffee table. His hands are a slightly larger version of David's. I look at mine. The same, Dick's; I wish I had Barby's. Geoff says he wants to show us how beautiful Grandma Butch (Barby's mother) was. He takes off the strap, unlatches the rusty clasps, and lifts the lid. The smell of stale cigarette laced with mildew rises into the room like a genie wafting out of a bottle. We are silent.

Over the next hour we pluck out photos: sort, stare, show each other. We build our separate piles, from our yearly visits to Barby's beach in the 1970's. I think about those ashes again; they belong to all of us; they might help bring us together. But still I do not bring them out. I'm selfish. We sort.

I grab a random snapshot of Barby standing on the lawn on Bundy Drive in the '50's showing off her new, short haircut, called a ducktail. Her head is tilted. She wears a satisfied smile.

*Why not? Barby would say, spiraling her right forefinger in the air in a tight circle and then swooshing it up and away. Barby was learning shorthand, a stab at practicality for this summa cum laude Phi Beta Kappa. Her simper said it was a cute trick. You knew she was never really going to be a secretary.*

Finally, Geoff suggests we stop and he closes the lid. We move on to more wine and David's lasagna. Later, Bruce, Geoff, David and his wife, Anne, settle at the dining table to play Pit and Liars' Dice, games from our childhood, and I envision the competitive steam from our childhood. I am not a good loser, I never was, and I usually lost—and I am tired—so I retreat to my room to read.

But first I say, on impulse, "Would it be okay if I took that yellow suitcase home with me? After we're all done?"

They look up. Anne shuffles the cards.

"Sure," Geoff says.

Bruce shrugs and nods.

David nods.

I can take the yellow suitcase home with me.

I will use that archive to investigate Barby's life, something I know almost nothing about. I will use it, photos and papers, to write her story. And I will paint portraits of Barby, too, lots of them. But I do not know that yet. I just want the yellow suitcase.

*Night night, sleep tight—I tensed—don't let the bedbugs bite! Dick pinched my arm. He chuckled.*

*I liked it better when Barby patted my shoulder: night night, Patty.*

We spend the next day exploring Monterey County like pilgrims in the Holy Land. You can tell David is proud to show us around, and he knows the sacred spots. Near Big Sur, we sight sea lions, sea otters, pelicans, and then a spout, and then lots of spouts, out near the horizon. David focuses his scope. The glistening barnacled backs of gray whales, migrating to Baja to have their babies, heave into view.

Barby's mothering may have been absentminded, but one thing all four of us got, and we got it from her, is this capacity for enchantment. With nature, anyway.



Across Highway One, we take a hike up Soberanes Canyon: Redwood and manzanita in the ravines, prickly pear on the slopes, and everywhere horsetail fern, coyote bush, shooting stars, and sticky monkey flowers. Bruce doesn't want to cross the wooden bridges over gold-flecked Soberanes Creek. I have to coax, I hold his hand. Bruce was born with a stiff, permanently contracted right arm and right leg, probably the result of a difficult forceps delivery—*spastic diplegia*, it was called. This is the first I've heard that, because of his shriveled foot and uneven gait, he does not trust his balance.

We eat apples and trail mix on Rocky Ridge with the sun warm on our backs and the Pacific below.

On the way back to town, we make a quick stop at a copse of eucalyptus in Pacific Grove, just in case. The canopy is coated—*coated*—with Monarch butterflies, like orange-and-black leaves that unfold and flicker sunlight with silken whispers. A peak experience, Geoff mutters. He and Barby were the butterfly collectors.

Finally, we pay a visit to Ventana Vineyards, in the foothills of the Santa Lucia range, to watch the sun set while we sip sauvignon blanc. They just give you this? For free? They don't charge for this? We find Geoff's amazement very funny, our genius physicist bumpkin brother. Maybe Barby gave us her enchantment with wine, too. For her, it was nearly lethal.

That night, like a kid calling in the last outliers in a game of hide and seek, David sings out, *rings of Saturn, Jupiter's moons*, and we crowd onto the deck to take turns one more time at the scope: rings of Saturn, Jupiter's moons, in Del Rey Oaks' clear winter skies.

Whales, wildflowers, butterflies, wine and planets. These are what bring us together, wrap us in happy wonder. And though Barby was not mentioned, she was with us all day. Barby loved California.

We set off the next morning in the rented Chevrolet, everyone soft and generous about who gets which seat. We steer onto Highway One, the old snaky coast road—eight hours to L.A., but it was the road of our childhood, and it has the gunmetal Pacific Ocean ruffled by white wavelets on one side, and silver, olive, and jade chaparral dotting new-pea foothills on the other. Red rock. Black conifers. The smudge-line in the west where ocean meets sky. I always feel hopeful when I see that line.

But then Geoff inserts country music, Alabama, into the tape deck and our sweet, delicate accord deteriorates: Bruce says something funny—Bruce is very funny—but it has bite, and Geoff, who has one of those faces you can't read so you read it as arrogant, stares at him in the rearview mirror without speaking. I am in the back seat with Bruce; I start vibrating with his prickle. I wish I were the kind of person who could tune that stuff out, but I'm not. Finally David and I generate a rule that the driver should get to pick the music and Bruce curls into a slouch, his mouth a horizontal thread. Now the silence is not tranquil.

And I was already getting tense. Geoff drives too fast. They all do.

Later, when Bruce is driving, he puts in some loud rock music. Geoff, now in back, protests. Bruce pauses the tape. Do we have a rule or don't we? Okay then. Bruce again blares Led Zeppelin. The atmosphere in the car has become noxious, as though oxygen is in short supply, and my stomach clenches. I need something, like my own tapes, maybe the Goldberg Variations. Why didn't I bring tapes? I think about those ashes in the trunk. I want Barby. This longing surprises me. I never believed Barby was on my side. I would have said she liked the boys better, and David best. I find out later they always thought she favored me.

But did Barby ever settle our squabbles? Did she soothe us? Four kids.

Finally, after seven-and-a-half hours, we hit L.A. County. Geoff is again at the wheel. Right at County Line beach, right

where we set off Fourth of July fireworks when we were little, he inserts a new tape. Oh dear, I think, now what?

The piercing guitar and sweet harmonies of the Beach Boys' *Surfin' Safari* burst forth, loud and ringing, and instantly we are bouncing, all four of us, bouncing high in our seats; and singing, too, like on ancient family car trips. I glance at Bruce's bobbing, grinning, weeping face beside me. We hold hands. I look at Geoff in the rearview mirror, and at David—we are also weeping, all four of us, but weeping can't stop us. We chant, we shout, we shriek, *Help Me Rhonda, Good Vibrations, Surfin' USA* past the sere hills of Malibu, past Topanga Canyon and Sunset Boulevard and Will Rogers State Beach; *Wouldn't It Be Nice* past Chatauquah Boulevard and the cliffs along the Pacific Coast Highway. Together again, all the way into Santa Monica. And Barby would have sung along. She loved music, any music, including our music. Barby loved to sing harmony.

That night, in a modest hotel on Ocean Avenue, I place my box of ashes on the nightstand and I stand there, my palm on top, until the paper grows warm. Then I slide my bare legs between cool, pillowed sheets and turn off the light. I roll the stiff pillow. I am too worn out to read, too tired to dream.

*Ollie ollie oxen free free free. Robin song, eucalyptus, orange blossom and dust. Barby's musical lilt called us in. Ollie ollie oxen free free free.*

The next morning we meet in the lobby wearing shorts and sweatshirts over bathing suits. We carry identical white hotel towels, and I carry the white box. No one comments on the box. I also carry four copies of a poem, Rilke's *Ninth Duino Elegy*. We amble, silent, two blocks along Ocean Avenue to a steep little alley called Pacific Terrace, down to Appian Way, then two more blocks to the Sea Castle, Barby's last home in California. The temperature is in the sixties, the sun a pale disc behind morning marine air.

The Sea Castle is gone. My throat constricts. The pink, art deco high-rise is gone, replaced by a sleek steel and glass structure called the Sea Castle Luxury Suites. Why would they tear it down? We had loved the rent-controlled Sea Castle, with its assortment of grizzled eccentrics, mothers on welfare, and old ladies. Barby claimed Joan Baez lived in the penthouse on top, though we never saw her. We did see the surf bums who lived in white vans in the parking lot—in fact, David had once lived in his white van in that parking lot. If you got there early enough, you could catch them rousting out of side doors, their ecstatic teeth and far-away eyes gleaming in bronzed faces. Beach coyotes, they would lope to the ocean with their toothbrushes. Their hair looked like the cellophane hair of dolls.

We trudge through the half-empty parking lot, now devoid of ratty vans, to the fresh asphalt boardwalk, now called Ocean Front Walk, and down the same old concrete steps onto cool, soft sand. Far away down the beach, two orange beach-cleaners chug toward Venice Beach.

We sit on a shelf formed by the night's high surf and we gaze at the grey-scrimmed waves. No one speaks. Finally, I read the Elegy.

*Why, if this interval of being can be spent serenely  
in the form of a laurel, slightly dark than all other  
green, with tiny waves on the edges of every leaf  
(like the smile of a breeze)—: why then have to be  
human—and escaping from fate, keep longing for  
fate.*

I tell them how I found this poem on my computer the morning after Barby died, in My Documents, and how I had not put it there, and Wayne, my husband, had not put it there, so I decided it was a message and a gift. And how I told Wayne it was proof that God was in the computer, and how Wayne said, only

half joking, don't tell anybody, and how I told everybody. How I read it at Barby's memorial, read it to all my friends, read it to colleagues, read it every evening to myself. (David's wife, Anne, had typed out the poem for her collection on her last visit and accidentally saved the file. Learning this later in no way diminished my miracle.)

*Earth, isn't this what you want: to arise within us,  
invisible? Isn't your dream to be wholly  
invisible someday?—O Earth: invisible! What, if  
not transformation, is your urgent command?*

Transformation. *Urgent command*, I say again, and I hand them their copies. My breath grows shallow. My chest feels as though it is wrapped with wire.

We tell stories, the old standards: cows eat dirt, all through train go home now, ice cream tastes good with napkin. We each pitch memories into the pot, but our supply is so small. Geoff, and especially David, can't remember much about Barby before her nervous breakdown. I want to give them something, but nothing comes.

Some sniffing, a few tears. Silence. Bruce makes us laugh, reminding us how Barby was just like Lucy on *I Love Lucy*. It's time.

I pass the box of ashes to Bruce, who hefts it and rattles it. He passes it to David, who hefts, and David passes it to Geoff, to be hefted, rattled. They pass it back. I hold out my hand, but Bruce un-tapes the white paper, flips up the lid and grabs a fistful with his left hand, his good hand. He extends the box to me in the crook of his right arm.

Bruce marches to the water and stands ankle-deep, a lone figure facing the heaving, leaden ocean with his arm raised. He

leans over and lays his ash on the sea. Some of the ghostly powder blows away, some rests atop the creamy foam. Bruce appears to taste his hand.

He turns around and limps back to our shelf, his mouth upside-down. Geoff wraps his arms around him and they sob. I cling to David for a moment, and then I take some ash. I walk to the water. Sprinkling her ashes through my fingers as though I am spreading grass seed, I say softly, here you go, Barby. After a minute, I turn around. Three pairs of eyes are watching me; three stripped faces.

Bruce wails, “I thought we were only going to say good stuff. But she was a *terrible* parent. We *all* had a hard time, a *terrible* time. And I will do better than that.” Very fierce, “*I will be better.*”

Geoff, who has recently had hard times of his own, says, “Well, but she is like us, we are like her. She did the best she could.” Bruce is sobbing. I don’t know what he hears.

As though he has no choice, Geoff picks up the box. Maybe in a family that falls apart too soon, marching in birth order is a way to resurrect, to concoct, tradition. Or maybe all families, fallen-apart or not, do things in order. Geoff scoops, strides to the water, and flings the ash, like a cloud, at the surf. The cloud flies apart; tiny fragments rain down. The bone. When Geoff turns around his cheeks are coated with tears.

David takes his turn. With the light steps of a cat, he jogs to the sea and lays his handful of ash on the foam with the rest.

Then we all just bawl. Together.

The first time we lost Barby, thirty-four years ago—that was when we blew apart. We shriveled, stunned and silent, into our separate shells. We moved away, from her, from each other, and sooner or later, from L.A. Now we stay together. We hug, we look at each other. David’s round brown eyes swim, his lower lip quivers; Geoff’s face morphs into a gaping mouth and injured brow; I don’t squelch my crumple and hiccup; and Bruce, the

expressive one, our Pavarotti of grief, spews saliva and snot and tears and words, though I don't follow. I think, we've never cried together, but then I remember just yesterday we cried with the Beach Boys.

*Later, on the drive home, David will say that we salvaged a family on that beach. I will say we created a family. Geoff will say we're both right.*

When our tears are spent, we just sit side-by-side, staring at the sea. The ash on the foam has not dissipated. I watch it slide toward me, and away.

But I guess we were too frugal, because when I check the box, it is still half-full. I give the boys a look. Bruce smiles, the green-glass of his eyes startling against red rims. I jerk my chin at him and say I want someone to go in so I will have to. We all stand up. I pull my sweatshirt over my head. Bruce shrugs and says something like, well, here goes. He grabs a handful of ash, dashes into the surf with his lopsided sprint, and dives under a roller. He jets up on the other side, howling.

I am right behind him. I dive—it is so cold—and the icy ocean snatches my tears, leaving me empty and clean. I shake my hair and dive again and this time I open my hand, and Barby's ashes bloom into the salty water. I pray to the ocean gods, take her to China, she would love to see China.

Geoff, and then David, slam into the waves beside me. We all leap and scream and chortle and snort; windmill arms and whip water. We grin at each other, born-again in the surf. We are proud to be the only people at the beach. Angelenos, they call us.

Pretty soon, I get out. I feel like a chicken. But I am too cold.

Years later, on the phone, Bruce will tell me, "I talked to

her out there. I remember, I was standing in the water up to my chest—it was so cold. But she was *there*. I talked to her. And I told her, it's not your fault." He paused to snuffle and clear his throat. "It wasn't her fault," he cried, his voice high. "It's like, our family was *five kids* and *one really horrible parent*."

Of course, I thought. That's it. Dick was the horrible parent. Barby was one of us.

We sit again on the shelf of sand wrapped in white towels, hunched-up and shivering. We aren't ready to leave the beach. We watch the scrim of foam, now top-lit by the sun, slide toward us, and away. I pick up the box.

I have a fleeting thought that we should have used some ash to create a ritual, swiped a bit on each other's foreheads—but no. We did what Barby did; we did the best we could. And those ashes are gone.

To China.



**Honeymoon, Ontario, Canada, 1939**







## Contributors

**Joanne Ashcroft** has poems published in *Neon Highway*, *erbacce* and *Stride*. She was joint winner of the Rhiannon Evans Poetry Scholarship in 2010. Her first book *From Parts Becoming Whole* was published last year by Knives Forks Spoons Press. She is about to start a PhD researching Sound in the Wor(l)ds of Bill Griffiths, Geraldine Monk and Maggie O'Sullivan. She is the winner of the Poetry Wales Purple Moose prize 2012 for her collection *Maps and Love Song for Mina Loy*. She lives in St. Helens, UK.

**Tim Atkins** is the author of *Folklore 1-25*, *To Repel Ghosts*, *25 Sonnets*, and *Horace*. Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at UEL, editor of the online poetry magazine *onedit*, and translator of Petrarch, Horace, and Buddhist texts, he is a Buddhist, husband, poet, and father. He is a happy man.

**Jürgen Becker**, born in Köln, Germany, in 1932, is the author of over thirty books—novels, story collections, poetry collections, and plays—all published by Germany's premier publisher, Suhrkamp. He has won numerous prizes in Germany, including the Heinrich Böll Prize, the Uwe Johnson Prize, and the Hermann Lenz Prize, among others.

**Hugh Behm-Steinberg** is the author *Shy Green Fields* (No Tell Books) and the forthcoming *The Opposite of Work* (JackLeg Press). Recent prose poems of his can be found in such places as *decomP*, *Diode*, *On Barcelona*, *Death Hums* and *Thrush*. He teaches writing at California College of the Arts, where he edits the journal *Eleven Eleven*.

**Jon Chohan** is the author of the novel *Pulled From the River*, which was published by Black Lawrence Press in 2012. His fiction and nonfiction have appeared in such places as *Glimmer Train*, *Post Road*, *Hobart*, *Hotel Amerika*, and *Redivider*. He teaches in the Creative Writing Program at Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, FL.

**Alex Cigale's** poems have appeared in *Colorado*, *Green Mountains*, *North American*, *Tampa*, and *The Literary* reviews, *Asymptote*, *Drunken Boat*, and *McSweeney's*. His translations from the Russian can be found in *Ancora Imparo*, *Cimarron Review*, *Literary Imagination*, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, *PEN America*, *Two Lines*, *Brooklyn Rail InTranslation*, *The*

*Manhattan*, *St. Ann's*, and *Washington Square Reviews*. He is currently Assistant Professor at the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

**E.G. Cunningham's** poems have appeared in *Breakwater Review*, *The California Quarterly*, *A Bad Penny Review*, and elsewhere. She is a recent MFA graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, and lives in Athens, GA.

**Okla Elliott** is currently a PhD candidate at the University of Illinois where he works in the fields of comparative literature and trauma studies. He also holds an MFA from Ohio State University. His drama, non-fiction, poetry, short fiction, and translations have appeared in *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Indiana Review*, *The Literary Review*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *New Letters*, *A Public Space*, and *The Southeast Review*, among many others. He is the author of a full-length collection of short fiction, *From the Crooked Timber*, and three poetry chapbooks. He also co-edited (with Kyle Minor) *The Other Chekhov*.

**Peter Fine** is an assistant professor of Art at New Mexico State University. As a designer, artist, and writer, he explores the role of the designers past, present, and future, seeking ways to integrate design history, theory, and criticism with practice. He is currently exploring ways to make environmental concerns a vital component of the Graphic Design curriculum at NMSU. He continues work on his book *Graphic Design Reconsidered* (Berg Publishers, 2012), an introduction to the subject of green design for students and professionals. In his course, Visualizing Race, students compare their DNA, personal identity, and medium to understand how race and representation operate within Visual Culture. Fine received his MFA from the University of Arizona in 2004.

**Dana Golin** was born in Riga, Latvia. Her poems in and translations from Russian have appeared in *Novy Zhurnal* and *Big Bridge* and are forthcoming in *Ice Floe* (U. of Alaska) and *Interpoezia*. She has a graduate degree in Counseling Psychology and had worked in neuro-rehabilitation in New York City for the past 15 years. She is currently Assistant Professor at the American University of Central Asia, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

**Lois Marie Harrod's** *Fragments from the Biography of Nemesis* will be published by Cherry Grove Press in March 2013. She won the Tennessee Chapbook Prize 2012 (Poems&Plays) with her 12th manuscript *The Only Is*. Her 11th book *Brief Term*, poems about teaching, was pub-

lished by Black Buzzard Press (2011), and her chapbook *Cosmogony* won the 2010 Hazel Lipa Chapbook contest (Iowa State University). Her chapbook *Furniture* won the 2008 Grayson Press Poetry Prize. Previous publications include the chapbook *Firmament* (2007); the chapbook *Put Your Sorry Side Out* (2005); *Spelling the World Backwards* (2000); the chapbook *This Is a Story You Already Know* (1999); *Part of the Deeper Sea* (1997); the chapbook *Green Snake Riding* (1994), *Crazy Alice* (1991) *Every Twinge a Verdict* (1987). She won her third poetry fellowship from the New Jersey Council on the Arts in 2003. Over 500 of her poems have been published online and in print journals including *American Poetry Review*, *Blueline*, *The MacGuffin*, *Salt*, *The Literary Review*, *Versé Daily* and *Zone 3*. A Geraldine R. Dodge poet and former high school teacher, she teaches Creative Writing at The College of New Jersey. Read her work on [www.loismarieharrod.com](http://www.loismarieharrod.com).

**Steve Javiel's** work is focused around experimenting with recreating the aged, decayed, layered surfaces around me. He believes that these aged surfaces tell a story and that they are a raw reflection of their environment—the aging is not premeditated. The layers of textures, typography, colors, graffiti, and decay, have all been applied and manipulated in some form by humans, nature, time, and the environment. This random orchestration fascinates him. By painting his own representations of these surfaces, he forms a connection to it and is paying homage to it as if it is a wise elder. These surfaces have emotions and stories to tell and he feels they are revealed if you are willing to look passed the “ugliness” of them.

The American poet **WELDON KEES** (1914–1955?) published three books of poetry, which are included in *The Collected Poems of Weldon Kees*, edited by Donald Justice. Kees's life, work, and disappearance are the subject of the biography *Vanished Act* by the poet James Reidel, published by the University of Nebraska Press in 2003.

**Richard Kostelanetz's** work in several fields appear in various editions of *Readers Guide to Twentieth-Century Writers*, *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature*, *Contemporary Poets*, *Contemporary Novelists*, *Postmodern Fiction*, *Webster's Dictionary of American Writers*, *The HarperCollins Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, *Directory of American Scholars*, *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, *Who's Who in American Art*, NNDB.com, Wikipedia.com, and Britannica.com, among other distinguished directories. Otherwise, he survives in New York, where he was born, unemployed and thus over-worked.

**Joanna Leake** was born and raised in Baton Rouge, La. Ms. Leake's short fiction has appeared in the *Intro anthology*, *Cultural Vistas*, *Xavier Review*, *The Panhandler*, *the Louisville Review*, and the *Apalachee Review*. She is the author of *A Few Days in Weasel Creek*. The screen adaptation of this novel was a C.B.S. movie-of-the-week. In addition, she has written screenplays under contract for Rainbow Productions, Twentieth Century Fox and Warner Brothers. Three of her manuscripts have been optioned for screen rights. She graduated magna cum laude from Vassar College and received a Master of Arts in the Humanities from the State University of New York in Buffalo. She is a Professor of English and served for fifteen years as the Director of the Creative Writing Workshop, an M.F.A. program at the University of New Orleans. She is the editor of *Bayou*.

**Paul Lisicky** is the author of four books: *Lawnboy*, *Famous Builder*, *The Burning House*, and *Unbuilt Projects*. His work has appeared in *The Awl*, *Fence*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Rumpus*, *Story Quarterly*, *Tin House*, *Unstuck*, and other magazines and anthologies. He is the New Voices Professor at Rutgers-Camden and he teaches in the low residency MFA Program at Sierra Nevada College. A new memoir, *The Narrow Door*, is forthcoming from Graywolf Press in 2014.

**Cesare Lucchini** was born in Bellinzona (Switzerland) in 1941. In 1965 he took his degree by the Brera Academy of Fine Arts in Milan, the town where he worked until 1988. Since 1989 Cesare Lucchini has been working both in Lugano and Germany (initially in Düsseldorf later in Cologne).

**Jerred Metts** studied Creative Writing and Psychology at the University of South Florida. He resides in Jacksonville, FL, and is currently torn between the pursuit of his three greatest passions: writing, clinical psychology, and ice cream.

**Ken Poyner** labors by day as an information management specialist; he splits his remaining time between writing, and acting as eye-candy at his wife's power lifting meets. He has published often during the last 40 years, most recently in *Menacing Hedge*, *Corium*, *Eclectica*, *The Adirondack Review*, *Poet Lore*, and a few dozen other places. He and his wife live in the lower right hand corner of Virginia with five rescue cats and one fierce fish.

**J.B. Pravda:** Born Brooklyn, NY, US Government Attorney during Watergate, when he 'Felt' uneasy about governments, and laws; later, public company CEO, lobbyist, now, multimedia artist, published produced playwright (paid royalties), columnist for leading magazines; his paintings have been published & included in a national touring exhibition as well as several multimedia exhibitions in NY and other venues. Published diversity author via major university, Finalist in *Stymie Magazine's* 1st annual collector cards edition. Lifetime Guest Artist @ Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts via 2006 Playwriting Intensives (invitation only). <http://www.angryspunge.com>

**James Reidel** will be the resident poet at the James Merrill House in Stonington, Conn., beginning January 2013. Earlier this year, his revised translation of Franz Werfel's *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh* and a new translation of Werfel's novella *Pale Blue Ink in a Lady's Hand* were published by Godine. He recently finished a selection of Weldon Kees's works for film and television, *3 Entertainments*, for Knives Forks Spoons Press. He is currently preparing a new book of poems for publication with the working title of *Worry (beads)*, two of which were published by DMQ Review in its summer 2012 issue and cotranslating the microdramas of Robert Walser with the poet Daniele Pantano.

**Katherine Riegel's** first book of poetry is *Castaway*. Her second, *What the Mouth Was Made For*, is forthcoming in 2013. Her work has appeared in journals including *Brevity*, *Crazyhorse*, and *Fourth Genre*. She is poetry editor for *Sweet: A Literary Confection* and teaches at the University of South Florida.

**Alifair Skebe** is author of two books of poetry. Her recent work is forthcoming in *House Organ*.

**Carmen Giménez Smith** is the author of a memoir, *Bring Down the Little Birds* (University of Arizona, 2010), three poetry collections—*Goodbye, Flicker* (University of Massachusetts, 2012), *The City She Was* (Center for Literary Publishing, 2011) and *Odalisque in Pieces* (University of Arizona, 2009)—and three poetry chapbooks—*Reason's Monsters* (Dusie Collectiv, 2011), *Can We Talk Here* (Belladonna Books, 2011) and *Glich* (Dusie Collectiv, 2009). She has also co-edited a fiction anthology, *My Mother*

*She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me* (Penguin, 2010). She is the recipient of a 2011 American Book Award, the 2011 Juniper Prize for Poetry, and a 2011-2012 fellowship in creative nonfiction from the Howard Foundation. Formerly a Teaching-Writing Fellow at the Iowa Writers' Workshop, she now teaches in the creative writing programs at New Mexico State University and Ashland University, while serving as the editor-in-chief of the literary journal *Puerto del Sol* and the publisher of Noemi Press. She lives with her husband, the writer Evan Lavender-Smith, and their two children in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

**Patricia Smith** is a visual artist and writer living in Seattle, Washington. "She Would Love To See China" is a companion piece to a book length memoir, narrative and image, about a mother's death (twice) and a daughter's search for her life, called *I Hate To See You Go*. She is also finishing a collection of short fiction, all of which contain human-animal intersections: bees, butterflies, spiders, pythons, a feral cat, gnats. The stories consider the solace of the natural world—or not. She has received the KASL Consulting Engineers Fellowship for Fiction at the Tomales Bay Writers' Workshops, Honorable Mention from *Glimmer Train's* "Family Matters" contest, and third place in the Short Story America Prize. Until recently, she also practiced psychotherapy in Seattle.

**Donna Steiner's** writing has been published in literary journals including *Fourth Genre*, *Shenandoah*, *The Sun*, and *Stone Canoe*. She teaches at the State University of New York in Oswego, is a contributing writer for *Hippocampus Magazine* and was a 2011 fellow in Nonfiction Literature from the New York Foundation for the Arts. She recently completed a manuscript of linked, place-based essays and is working on a collection of poems. Her chapbook, *Elements*, is forthcoming from Sweet Publications.

**Andrew Stilborn "Stilly"** was born in Doncaster, a seaside town in the North of England. He currently lives in Oxford and can see it's dreamy spires if he catches a number 3 bus. Stilly is the author/illustrator of many popular stories including "The Vacant Plinth", "The Twisted Stick" and "The Beautiful Swallow" - tales of terror and suspense, accompanied by pictures of horror and cross hatching (Imagine if Rod Serling had met Edward Gorey and somehow together they raised a child who didn't meet either of their expectations). See more of his work at Flickr - Stilly24 or contact direct at [stilly.24@virgin.net](mailto:stilly.24@virgin.net)



**Lori Sublett** has a Master's in Creative Writing from Oklahoma City University. Her works have appeared in *The Scarab*, *SugarMule*, *The Oklahoma Review*, *Conclave: A Journal of Character* and the print anthology *Ain't Nobody That Can Sing Like Me: New Oklahoma Writing*.

**Ira Sukrungruang** is the author of the memoir *Talk Thai: The Adventures of Buddhist Boy* and the coeditor of two anthologies on the topic of obesity: *What Are You Looking At? The First Fat Fiction Anthology* and *Scout Over, Skinny: The Fat Nonfiction Anthology*. His poetry collection, *In Thailand It Is Night*, was awarded the Anita Claire Schraf Award, and forthcoming from University of Tampa Press. He is the recipient of the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship in Nonfiction Literature, an Arts and Letters Fellowship, and the Emerging Writer Fellowship. His work has appeared in many literary journals, including *Post Road*, *The Sun*, and *Creative Nonfiction*. He is one of the founding editors of *Sweet: A Literary Confection* ([sweetlit.com](http://sweetlit.com)), and teaches in the MFA program at University of South Florida. For more information about him, please visit: [www.sukrungruang.com](http://www.sukrungruang.com).

**Nance Van Winckel** will have two new books out in 2013: *Pacific Walkers*, her sixth collection of poems, (U. of Washington Press); and *Boneland*, her fourth book of linked stories, (U. of Oklahoma Press). She's the recipient of two NEA Poetry Fellowships and awards from the Poetry Society of America, Poetry, and Prairie Schooner. New poems appear in *The Pushcart Prize Anthology*, *The Southern Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Crazyhorse*, *Field*, and *Gettysburg Review*. New short fiction appears in *AGNI*, *The Massachusetts Review*, and *Kenyon Review*. She teaches in the MFA in Writing Program at Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her digital photcollage work has been in several juried shows; more may be viewed at: <http://photoembynancesvanwinckel.zenfolio.com/>

**Theodore Worozbyt's** work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Antioch Review*, *Best American Poetry*, *Crazyhorse*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Mississippi Review 30 Year Anthology*, *New England Review*, *Poésie*, *Poetry*, *Sentence*, *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, *TriQuarterly Online* and *Quarterly West*. He has published two books of poetry, *The Dauber Wings* (Dream Horse Press, 2006) and *Letters of Transit*, which won the 2007 Juniper Prize (The University of Massachusetts Press, 2008).