

BlazeVOX 12

an online Journal of Voice

Fall 2012



BlazeVOX 12

Fall 2012
an online Journal of Voice

BlazeVOX [books]
Buffalo, NY

BlazeVOX12 Fall 2012
Copyright © 2012

Published by BlazeVOX [books]

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced without
the publisher's written permission, except for brief quotations in reviews.

Printed in the United States of America

Book design by Geoffrey Gatza

First Edition

BlazeVOX [books]
76 Inwood Place
Buffalo, NY 14209

Editor@blazevox.org



publisher of weird little books

BlazeVOX [books]

blazevox.org

2 4 6 8 0 9 7 5 3 1

BlazeVOX12 an online Journal of Voice

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the fall issue of BlazeVOX 12. Presented here is a world-class issue featuring poetry, art, fiction, and an arresting work of creative non-fiction, written by authors from around globe.

We are continuing our new section in the journal, Book Previews, which as the name describes it is a brief look at some of our new book titles. You will find work from Aaron Apps, Paul T. Hogan, Kristina Marie Darling, Ken Warren, Ben Bedard, Jared Schickling and many others. This is truly a special issue of BlazeVOX. And if you are so moved, please take a tour of our online bookshop. We have 300 titles of weird little books available for sale. So hurray, now get reading!



To highlight our vast catalog of great books, we are now going to offer a special each week on two selected great titles and we will be offering them for half off the cover price. Will be selecting new authors and titles each week, so stop on by and add one to your shopping cart before you check out. You'll be sure to enjoy each of these books! Hurray!

Hurray again, and thank you all for your kind support! I am so very happy to be working at BlazeVOX [books] and I am looking forward to a whole new year cooking for Big Night. Cheers to you, and wishing us all a very quiet fall semester :-)

If you should wish to sign up for our newsletter, you can do so here:
<http://www.blazevox.org/index.php/author-resources/sign-up-for-our-newsletter/>

Rockets, Geoffrey

Geoffrey Gatz
Editor & Publisher
BlazeVOX [books]

Table of Contents

Poetry

Alex Schmidt

Mary Alyssa Rancier

Andrew K. Peterson

Ather Zia

Changming Yuan

Doug Rice

Eleanor Levine

Gianina Opris

Jorge Lucio de Campos

Keith Moul

Kendall McKenzie

Marcia Arrieta

Mark Young

Oliver Rice

Robert Whiteside

Ross Robbins

Simon Perchik

Wayne Mason

Anne Thrope

A.J. Huffman

Andrew West

Geoffrey Gatza

Dan J. Johnson

Elaina Perpelitt

Genevieve Pfeiffer

Lee Guyette

José Hernández Díaz

Kay Porter

Liz Mariani

Mariah Hamang

Mark DeCarteret

Rachel Custer

Rowland Anthony Corr

Scott Keeney

SJ Fowler & RDG Thomas

Zachary Scott Hamilton

Fiction

Amy Savage

Rive Gauche

Alyssa A. Peck

Candid

Brent Lucia — Two stories

Through Cobblestone Streets

Finding Zion

James Ballard

Los Angeles 1993

Joe Labriola

Golden Delicious

Mariah Krochmal

Harvest

Nick Kozma

According to Luke

Sarah Sorensen

Snow Blind

Uriel E. Gribetz

In The Life

Mark Higham

Killing Caiaphas

Jeffrey R. Schrecongost

The Uphill Climb

BlazeVOX 12

Book Preview Fall 2012

Selections from our new and forthcoming BlazeVOX [books]

- The Moon and Other Inventions by Kristina Marie Darling
- The Epic of Hell Freeze (What Stays the News) by Richard K. Ostrander
- The Pink by Jared Schickling
- Slinger: The Equilibrium of Stars by Ben Bedard
- COMPOS(T) MENTIS by Aaron Apps
- Cheltenham by Adam Fieled
- Inventories by Paul T Hogan
- Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch A Guide to the Homeric Punkhole, 1980–2012 by Kenneth Warren
- a dictionary in the subjunctive by Damian Weber
- Preview of Forthcoming new book: a poem from Dear Darwish by Morani Kornberg-Weiss

BlazeVOX 12

Zachary Scott Hamilton

Tonalli's Donut Shop

(Ne 28th and Alberta)

The streets wander in, laughing. Through a window you can watch passengers from a reflection in the sun, cotton candy movements. Small scale laundry-mat tubes drop from the ceiling eroding into halves three times above me. One segment of the room lets down a corner before straightening and collapsing out. The Asians smoke in one corner of time, girls from Europe eat silent food tucked in stripes and books. The workers move with all of their body parts at once, describing areas of the room with bleached rags in segments of muscle memory. My head is a shaft of electricity, blubber fat and nervous cellular, abrupt in the fourth center, one node that should start our four corners we use to create the snail shell.

A metronome of fact burns underneath the soda machine, menacing buzz truths at us with a verve in its song noise. The people leak the sun into each other out there, wired telephone conversations crossing through every one of them. Birds before the clouds, trees before the birds, telephone wires before the trees, phone poles before the telephone wires, newspaper boxes before the phone poles, yellow awning before the newspaper box, posters on the windows before the yellow awning and then Europeans and then there is me, an amoeba shelled in a donut shop.

Cur.tain

i.

We've seen armchairs yarned in factories
as they take away great grandmother
with cancer of the lungs, a string of long
fluid woven into her assembly

apt for a tapestry, a long room
that is woven of her memorized thread of choice.

A Volta television swamp floats until breath emerges
gentleman like, heated from its length of rope nerve.
Six looping pythons in one belt

4:44, a tilted mirror and
a bookshelf.

iii. Theat.rics doub.led (/when spoken to/) four.teen mirr.ors

The radio has got to quit following people
into my secrets – I have seen the evidence of other shadows doubling
with these voices on the radio.

A four head of micron,
swallowing outer arm crazy springs.
Our life hair challenges them,

Marquis Sylvania, an albatross equilibrium. Harsh bone
puzzle hands twinkle down, to plant
a Hammond organ growing from the soil

(hours) plastic touching our childhood.

He can play very well,
his fingers ripe, his hands
potatoes,
a harm of fire towers
giving birth.
The year is reconsidered
from a palace in the rosemary

our mice neighbors twinkle fingers up
proposed leaf (/) long shapes in hand-assembly.

The shouting, undressing old pin point swing sets singing a shallow end of the swamp

our pearl necklace –
ink warped leaf fabric

somehow
diamond's
connected
rude shelters, but argyle (deceased) +program.

Four headed television rug
arcs to the necklace pillow butter, luminous
hallows inside letters chiseled of ice weave,

foam reflection –
lamp shade on lamp shade,
tan pillow case, mirror maze.

ii.

A fragile, breakable exhale comes in
through a python repetition of half eyes.

The silk in my feeling
is spinning anchors –
one way spatial relations,

a low cloud stripes up sticks,
a life can be a lovely beginning.

A lewd, distracted light emerges,
I am resting the speaker to your velvet thigh
all rosemary arranged in radio, red language.

Sand Library

Saturday night sky was a bloom with rose kites of place. Walking into a green book cover stitched together out of soft thread, a micro-tape silhouette beneath the moment, sound pours within, a little river carved from the roof top into a silver horse shoe pond running through the attic (Molecule)

A series of hands run along the tapestries beneath the mountain, a capturing of sleep from under the rust oxide fabrics of time. The loosening purpose, [eyes,] ripe with reflection and studying instructor lines of Delta patterns; only so much picture can be made of, since a room is golden marble, stacked in geometry. Five little rooms (inside each other) for lives to grow source, flat in moss, grown in mushrooms. A weaving world of challenges and insects. Windows form in windows again, once the walls disrobe those deep wood lines –

They've got to have membranes in walls or stuff gets broken, they've got to move, bend and be broken over and then grow again just like before – otherwise the house dries up and crumbles. The house (five times) crumbles and falls through mountain, and through tapestries. Alone. One clock swinging open.

Wayne Mason

Swallow The Dead

I sent a number statistics masked names. The “I” was not in place and started working dimwitted and obsolete. We at one point pierced the cold and worked our asses in the minds of prison and the commitment of the world (which is all time). Kneel down, close the eyes, charge back to the stars – swallow the number of dead, grinning, ugly, evil enemies. I'm going down continuously to cleanse the conscience of all expression. It is not piety or debt, not human experience, not in relation to safety or the formulas. By the final touch the image of man is a monopoly.

Hermetic Magnetic Theory And Tape Practice

Audio montage divination borrowed aesthetics from broken records where cutting up horoscope looping bits, manipulating a substantial and intentional amount of cutting up work and sounds that a solid recorded geomancy transformation into musical compositions. This use of transformation was achieved by many astrological cutting up, elements for speeding up, its own reversing purposes, and looping. Recorded sounds have been more commonly possible in divination to record practice and and store in the sound of symbolic discourse. Aural black mass achieved through rhythmic looping of subconsciousness and the machinery of hermetic noise.

Anonymous Windows

The mornings eyes nonchalantly fill the deep void squeezing out the gray silence of time here like long downtrodden depression. Purgatories hands drop sharply splitting darknesses excessive splintered nothing. Conditioned memories mirror ancient suburban graveyards.

The creeping death and slow eternity rang comfortably through quiet anonymous windows. I was simply talking shit sarcastically still after the elusive zero. Cradling floating deafening to cut us down apprehensively slinging blood and affliction, cryptic viruses back lit through the electric theater. Realization to speak slowly, hears breath, stammers redemption. Uninhibited sky cursing you. Of course. The finger there, articulated alone? Nothing but solitude. Hesitant fingers grasp upwards through claustrophobic horizons looking for God, or at least transcendence of birth and time.

I Spoke Terrible Of All Of The Free

Though in action, the "I author" of thought turned to me. I have bread, that of engineering. See the occasion. Believe the I of standing failure, of danger. To here separating the are from writer. Yes, dream and experience the spoken. Photo engineering its true vision insistent on revelation.

Silent symphonies immediately function with the possibility of dreams. Prayer enters measured exceptional perhaps of the non-sense mind. Licensed strangers close in on the hands of timid artists. Play the inexplicable danger. Writing is bread and prayer. Creativity the engine driving through the suburbs of mediocrity.

Uriel E. Gribetz

In The Life

“Hector is on his way up here. He wants to speak to you.”

“Now?” Gold asked. To hear above the din of traffic, he pressed the cell against his ear.

“Yes! Fucking Now!”

“I’m on my way to work,” Gold told Byron. He waited with the other suits for the light on the corner of Madison and 73rd Street. It was a perfect spring morning.

“Dave do not make this guy look for you.” Byron hung up.

Gold was sure that Byron was overreacting and that he, Gold, would be able to straighten this situation out with Hector. It was not going to be a problem going into work late. Gold had no cases to cover. He was working night court. They would not even notice that he was not there. Things were going to be worked out, as they always were, Gold reassured himself.

At Eighty Sixth Street Gold caught the uptown number Four Express. The car was crowded with high school girls in tight jeans who brushed against him with their knapsacks and screamed at each other above the train’s noise. One heavy set teenager used the belt loops of her jeans to pull them up over her substantial hips.

Down the stairs at 149th Street and Grand Concourse, Gold caught the uptown number two through the South Bronx and out to the daylight of the EL and the Pelham Parkway stop.

Gold took the steps to the street. Above, the sun filtered through the tracks and cast shadows onto the black top below. It triggered within Gold images of his childhood as he walked down this block.

The Cuchifrito took the place of Sid’s Kosher deli. Empanadas instead of knishes and franks were on the grill in the front window. A Dominican Hair Stylist specialized in fades, braids, cornrows and hair extensions. A Pakistani in the newsstand replaced the blind guy with the scary eyes and the Yamulkah that Gold remembered. Tony’s Pizzeria

and his parents' butcher shop, were up ahead on the corner of Lydig. The sign says 'Gold's Kosher Butcher'. Pork chops and pigs feet filled the display.

"Esther, look who came to visit." Nathan, his father told her.

She did not hear above the meat grinder that dripped chop meat onto red paper.

Nathan reached over the counter to grab his son's hand. He led Gold gently around the edge of the counter and hugged him awkwardly.

Nathan was thin and strong. Like a rock. It was from all those years of carrying, cutting, chopping and sawing slabs of beef. From a lifetime of busting his ass and working like a dog, Gold thought to himself.

"I don't want to stain your suit," Nathan pulled away and gestured to the bloodstains on his apron.

Esther cleaned her hands on her apron as she approached. Her glasses were perched on the edge of her nose with a string that held them around her neck. Her features were flushed from bending over the meat grinder. She grabbed his face, and brought it down toward her lips and planted a kiss on his forehead.

"How is Penny?"

"Good." Gold answered. Good question Gold thought to himself. Gold did not know how his wife was doing because although they did live in the same apartment, they rarely talked or had much to do with one another. Lately, Penny had been coming home late from work or not coming home at all and instead stayed with her parents in Forest Hills. His marriage was not looking good.

"Come, I'll make you a hamburger. We have fresh rolls from the Puerto Rican bakery." There was a stove in the back room of the store.

"I can't Ma. I need to borrow the car. I have a meeting in City Island."

Nathan fished in his pocket for the keys.

His parents spoke with thick German accents. Nathan and Esther were from the Black Forest. They never spoke German. They were survivors of the Nazi death camps. They mumbled to each other in Yiddish, just as they were doing now, especially when they did not want Gold to understand them.

It was only when others mentioned their accent that he was aware of it.

Nathan handed the keys to his son, and a beefy man entered and looked at the London broil. Nathan waited on him and with a long shiny knife trimmed the fat off it for him.

"Are you sure you don't want something to eat?" Esther asked her son.

“Nothing Ma,” Gold was impatient. “I have to get going.”

“Bye Dad,” he called to Nathan, who was chit chatting with the customer. “Bring Penny next time,” His mother told him as she walked him to the door.

“I will,” Gold lied to her. “I’ll talk to her tonight. If it’s nice this weekend, maybe we’ll go the zoo and then stop by for a visit.” Gold did not know why he said this to Esther. None of it was true.

As Gold left the store, he heard the man who was buying the London broil ask his father: “Is that your son?”

It was parked on the far corner, where Lydig intersected with Barnes Avenue, a baby blue ’78 Pontiac Bonneville with the front end that was shaped like a nose. The broken rear brake light was repaired with red masking tape, and the bumper was reattached with wire. ‘It only has 65,000 miles on it’ was what Nathan told him when Gold bothered him to buy a new car. His parents used the car to drive the two blocks from the apartment on Pelham Parkway to the store and back. In high school Gold took the car on dates. It had a huge back seat. With its muffler rotted through, the V8 roared and the radio’s volume was turned high and tuned to 1010 ‘all news all the time’. Gold shut it off.

Gold followed Pelham Parkway East. It was a flat two lane expanse bordered by benches and paths. At the light Gold watched an eastern European lady in a long skirt and a polka dot kerchief wrapped around her head as she picked dandelions on the grass island. Nearby, a man in a black suit lounged in the sun on the rock outcroppings.

Gold crossed the bridge onto City Island Avenue. It was weekday dead. The seafood joints waited for the weekend and the crowds that inched along in traffic on the two-lane road. Gold parked the car in front of Z’s bar at the end of the island. Sea gulls hovered over the parking lot and the empty tables of the outdoor fried fish place next door.

Byron was behind the bar washing glasses. With his head, he gestured to the tables. Hector sat with his back to the window. Gold approached. The ceiling was covered with fishing nets. Gold could see that Hector was fidgeting with something in his right hand. Stuffed fish decorate the walls.

“Sit,” Hector told him.

Now Gold could see that Hector has a box cutter in his right hand and with his thumb Hector is playing peek-a-boo with the triangle shaped razor. Gold thought of what he would do if Hector swung the box cutter at him. Would he be able to protect himself and block it, or would he have one of those phone scars across his cheek that fellows in prison get for taking too long on the phone? He pushed the seat back to give himself as much room as possible just in case Hector lunged.

“Byron thinks I’m in the banking business. He is wrong. I am into making money, not lending it. Besides, the banks are a bunch of pussies who when they run out of money go crying to the government for a handout. Not me. I don’t need no fucking bailout, and I don’t believe in credit.” Hector wore rubber bands around his grey scraggly beard. A ponytail hung from the back of his baldhead. With his bulging blue eyes, Hector looked like Captain Lou Albano. He had a tear drop under the corner of his left eye. “Let me put it to you this way, if you go to the store to buy a loaf of bread, do you need money?”

Gold was not sure if the question is rhetorical or if Hector wanted him to answer. Gold decided the wise thing to do was to not say anything. Hector paused, and he continued to play with the box cutter. Through the window behind where Hector sat, naked sailboats floated on moorings. The pylon remains of a dock looked like missing limbs exposed in the low tide of the Sound. Gold thought about the video that Lou Albano did with Cyndi Lauper back in the 1980s. Why is he thinking about that now? He asked himself and then he remembered the song was ‘Girls Just Wanna Have Fun’.

“I can see that you’re not a bad guy, but you’ve got yourself into heap of shit son. You owe me some serious cabbage. I mean I could cut your face or you could do me a solid. Correct me if I’m wrong, but I think you like the way your face looks and you would rather do me a favor and work this off.” Hector slid a thick white envelope filled with cash across the table. “Fourth floor DA’s office, two o’clock. He is a young cop named Tom Donolly. You will see him in the waiting area wearing a Florida Marlins cap. Follow him to the bathroom. Put this by the toilet and take the envelope he leaves and bring it back to me.”

Hector stood. He put the box cutter in his pocket, grabbed Gold’s hand, and shook it and then he patted him on the shoulder. “You have nothing to worry about as long as you do what I want and then we’ll square this shit up. When you come back with the envelope Donolly gives you, I also want you to bring me five hundred beans for good measure. You know what I’m saying, as part of the reimbursement.”

Hector walked Gold through the bar. Byron did not look up at them.

Gold stepped out of Z’s and rushed to his car. In the car, he passed a boat yard with yachts on cradles and dinghies on top of each other pressed against the fence. There were yellow rusted hoists alongside the empty dock.

Coop City loomed over the marsh. Out of a science fiction movie, it was an alien city from another galaxy lowered from a passing space ship onto the swamp that overlooked the Long Island Sound. Gold pulled the envelope

Hector gave him out of his pocket. It was thick with hundreds. “What the fuck have I gotten myself into?” He asked himself.

Each time that Gold rode the elevator in the Courthouse he was sure that he was going to get stuck. Today was no different. The doors slammed violently behind him. Between floors, the car inched so slowly that Gold was not sure if it had moved. Finally, when they had reached the floor for the District Attorney’s Office it stalled, and the doors remained closed for a minute or so until they opened slowly.

In the large waiting area, cops and complainants waited for ADAs.

Gold spotted Donolly in the Marlins’ cap. “How are you doing?”

“Are you from City Island?” Donolly asked Gold.

“Yeah, I am Hector’s friend. Don’t tell me you’re a Marlins fan?”

”Are you kidding me? Go Yankees. I just dig the lid.”

Gold followed him to the men’s room.

“Do you believe that New Yankee Stadium?”

“What the fuck?”

At the sink, someone washed their hands.

“\$2500 box seats.”

“For what? Who’s going to be able to afford that?”

“Other than the corporate assholes.”

Finally, the guy at the sink left.

Gold used the urinal and left the envelope filled with cash by the flusher. Donolly took Gold’s spot. Instead of unzipping his pants, Donolly reached into his waistband and took out a manila envelope and placed it on top of the urinal. He took the envelope Gold had left.

Gold stuffed Donolly’s manila envelope into the breast pocket of his suit jacket.

When he came out of the rest room, Donolly was gone. Gold caught the elevator to the second floor where the courtrooms were located. The hallway was packed. In front of the huge courtroom used for arraignments, Simpstein, a rabbi/lawyer from Monsey, argued with a bunch of Dominicans in Spanish.

Zupone, an old timer, sat in the front row. He had a nervous twitch: it was as if Zupone's shirt collar was too tight so that he twisted his head to the left, again and again, as if to loosen it.

The cops must have raided the hooker spots on Hunts Point. The pimps used Zupone to get their girls out. Zupone waited for the girls to get processed through Central Booking, and then they pled guilty to loitering for the purpose of prostitution and received a sentence of time served.

Night court started at four. Gold was early. There was a lull in the courtroom. It was that time of day when day court was winding down and night court had not started.

The desk for Legal Aid was empty. In the bin, one folder remained from day court.

Tonight it was Gold working with Tofer and Bolinsky. Tofer was a fresh faced kid just hired out of Boston University Law School. Tofer, like all new Legal Aid lawyers, thought he was going to change the world, but because he was new, he was only allowed to handle misdemeanors. Bolinsky, on the other hand, had been with Legal Aid for thirty years. He was an expert on keeping his case load low. From the bin, Bolinsky had a reputation of cherry picking the paper felonies. Those were the cases that were going to be reduced to misdemeanors and pled out. All the Legal Aid lawyers knew about Bolinsky's reputation and no one wanted to work arraignments with him. Gold did not care. Any case that Bolinsky had where a client wanted to go to trial, Bolinsky would pick a fight with the client so that the client asked the judge to assign another lawyer and Bolinsky got off the case. Bolinsky had not done a trial in at least ten years.

Gold unhooked the clip on the chain separating the well from the audience section.

"Hey Gold. You working today?" Bobby the Bridgeman asked him. The Bridge was the part of the well-the front of the courtroom between where the attorneys stood and the judge sat. That was Bobby's territory. He ran the show. "Do me a favor there is a kid in the back charged with jumping a turnstile-a fare beat. He's Zooey, but Corrections doesn't want to have to take him back to Riker's Psych ward. Go in the back and talk to him. Explain to him that if he just pleads guilty, the Judge is going to release him; and if he starts acting bat shit, the Judge is going to order a 730 psych exam and remand him for 30 days. He has been here all day." Bobby placed his arm around Gold's shoulder. "They want this guy out of here. He's stinking the place to shit and the C.O.s can't take it"

"Sure Bobby," Gold told him, and he took the folder from the bin and rang the bell before the large steel door to the pens. He could hear the keys, and the correction officer opened the door from the inside.

The pens always smelled like wet rags. "He's in the 'why me cell'," The correction officer told Gold.

Gold followed him to a smaller cell around the corner from the regular pen. It was for the inmates that had problems. Gold smelled the stench above the incense lit by the C.O.s.

Gold stood by the bars. "I'm the Legal Aid assigned to represent you. My name is Gold."

He was a short stocky white kid, and he wore woolen hats over dread locks that were matted like beaver tails.

"Don't trick me," the kid eyed Gold suspiciously.

"I'm not going to trick you. I just want to help you get out of jail."

"You're with the others. You're sending brain waves to control me." He pulled the woolen hat over his ears.

Gold felt sorry for him. Gold's eyes were nearly tearing from the smell. Maybe they should send him to the psych ward at Rikers? Maybe that's what he needs? Gold thought to himself and looked at the folder in his hand.

"My dreadlocks are a source of strength, like Samson's hair was to him." He wore layers of clothing. A jacket pulled over another jacket, Sweaters over sweatshirts. Two pairs of pants. The padding gave him the appearance of even more bulk.

"If you don't listen to me Terrance and do what I tell you to do, the Judge is going to send you to the psych ward at Rikers for a 730 evaluation and they're going to cut off your dreads."

That got his attention.

"Oh my god," His eyes welled up with tears. He was like a little kid that was about to be sent for a timeout.

"Don't get upset. I am going to help you get out of this. When we get out there the Judge is going to ask you if you plead guilty to jumping a turnstile and you say 'yes'. That is all you have to do. Got it?"

In the courtroom the judge was tired. He was doing a double. He had worked day court and now he would be working night. He looked at Gold and his client. The stench from the client reached the bench, and the judge reared back. "Does your client plead guilty to the charge of theft of services?"

"Yes Judge," Gold told him.

"Mr. Terrence Mallon, do you plead guilty to the crime of jumping a turnstile?"

"Yes. Yes. Yes."

"Shhh!" Gold told him. "One yes is enough."

"Time served," The Judge was hunched over his papers at the bench.

The cuffs were taken off, and Terrance skipped down the aisle of the courtroom, all the while he was whispering ‘yes, yes, yes.’”

The arraignment part was a constant stream of bodies through the system. Drug addicts were pinched for selling so they could get high. One junkie claimed it was soap, fake crack, he was selling. Another perp swore that he was taking a piss in the park and that was where he’d found the loaded gun. He said he was on his way to the precinct to turn the gun in when the police arrested him.

A woman in sunglasses beckoned Gold from the audience.

“Do you have my husband Louis Petralia?”

“Yes.”

“I am his wife. I don’t want to press charges.”

Behind the glasses, Gold could see her eyes were black and blue. They brought him out. “The complaining witness is here, and she doesn’t want to go forward.” Gold told the Judge and the ADA.

The woman in the sunglasses stood for the Judge to see her.

“What is she, a glutton for punishment? \$2500 bail. Officers take charge” The Judge said.

“I love you,” The man shouted as they took him back to the pens.

“But why?” The woman in the sunglasses wanted to know.

“For your own good.” The Judge told her. “He beats her up and now she wants to take him with her. Maybe next time he’ll kill her. Not on my watch.”

Then Gold had a case with neighbors fighting that led to each of them being charged with assault charge, and the next case was an arrest for a robbery that ended with a shooting. Some stayed in jail on bail and others were released on their own recognizance.

Gold knew that the harder he worked the faster the night went.

It was two o’clock in the morning, and Gold entered the pens to interview the last case of the night. It was the one remaining file in the Legal Aid bin. Tofer and Bolinsky had left.

A teenager waited for Gold at the interview table. “Are you the Legal Aid?”

“That’s me,” Gold told him.

“I didn’t do anything. I just caught a lift from my friend and the cops came up on us. I swear I didn’t know the car was stolen.” He sniffled.

Gold glanced at the file. His name was Edwin Garcia. He was in the eleventh grade in Evander Childs High School.

“Don’t worry Edwin. The Judge is most probably going to release you.”

“My parents are supposed to be here. Can you check for me?”

In the courtroom, Gold asked: “Is anyone here for Edwin Garcia?”

A couple in the back of the courtroom approached. They talked into the hallway.

“Is the Judge going to release him?” Edwin Sr. asked. “He’s not a bad kid and we are nice hardworking people. I work for the MTA and my wife works at Jacobi.

“We don’t want them sending him to Rikers,” The wife added. Edwin Jr. looked like his mother.

“I’m not the Judge and I can’t guarantee anything but...”

“How much would the bail be?” Edwin Sr. interrupted him.

“What if we paid you? Could you make sure that he would get out tonight?”

Gold had been offered money many times before, but this time it was different because there was Hector with his tear drop and his box cutter who waited and expected Gold to bring five hundred beans tomorrow.

The hall was empty. Gold tried to be as inconspicuous as possible when he stuffed the money into his jacket pocket. “I’ll get him out.”

The court officer brought the kid out into the courtroom.

“Defendant was a passenger in a stolen car.” The young ADA told the Judge.

“Judge I’m asking that he be released in his own recognizance. He has no record, and his parents are here.” Gold said to the Judge.

“He is released to the custody of his parents,” The Judge agreed.

The parents hugged him. Edwin Sr. looked back at Gold with a strange look. Gold did not like it. He should not have taken that money, he thought to himself.

“The court stands in recess.”

After six o'clock in the evening, there were no restrictions about parking next to the courthouse. Everybody who worked night court parked as close as they could to the courthouse. Nobody wanted to walk too far to their car in that late hour for fear of getting robbed or assaulted or worse. Gold rushed to the Bonneville parked right in front of the Courthouse.

To keep awake, he opened the window on the Major Deegan South, and exited at the Willis Avenue Bridge and then drove downtown on Second Avenue.

"Fuck, fuck," Gold muttered to himself as he looked for a parking spot and took the side streets west across Lexington and Madison and then north again and east back across to Third, Second and York. Finally, he found one on East End by the river.

The apartment was empty. Penny was probably at her parents' house again. Gold was too tired to hang up his suit. He left it in a pile by the bed.

SJ Fowler & RDG Thomas

Fighting Cocks: a didactic dialogue poem



: - ...they are trying to break you

: - until I get caught on you, you big barbed wire fence. Together we are urban pollution

: - you pollute me

: - I am a gigantic dark vessel, those who embark will not regret

: - I heed your warning. I take note of both size and colour. There are Jurassic park-
esque tremors in my gallery. Is that you, travelling?

: - I travel through concrete like a worm, like the popular film tremors. I'm never far from the action.

:- All teenage French girls have good quality cameras.

:- It is not I who will work the foliage. Worm devourer, I hold them as
sacrifice

:- my barbed warrior has broken many a French defence and is crowned King supreme!

:- my fighting cock champion is called Poppies Martinez. His nickname is “hot sauce”.
my other fighting cock is called Pipino “huevo assassin” Cuevas and if I had my way
I’d have him kill

:- my fighting cock is still called ‘feathers’. I trained him in retirement homes where the skin is like paper & the smell
is of oaked mattresses

:- my fighting cock has razor blades sewn into his feathers to slice unnecessary small
talk and a general air of pompousity. Whocka! he cries slicing

:- my cock is a Siamese twin with ADHD and narcolepsy, his medication I hold back

:- my fighting cock is a blur of golden feathers and ferocious focus when slicing the
achilles of my enemies, those hiding in galleries and those spreading their alopecia

:- my cock protects me from the Moorish people who visit from the east, their dark magic cannot penetrate the
cock’s tough carapace

:- my fighting cock has developed beak calluses from pecking justice tattoos into the
flesh of the middle-aged. He is enraged by the faint toilet smell in all our canteens
and eating areas

:- the faint toilet smell is piped in to mask the odour of sin.
feathers needs a bag to cleanse his guilt

:- I have told Pipino, the proud feathered, that the blood of the other smells
. Thus he is compelled to spill it

:- I introduced your war bird to sickness whilst it was developing in its egg; it is now weak and useless. Feathers will
be cloned

:- the alliance has dissipated and it is now clear in its terms. Pipino
will receive the finest medical care and manage his affliction with a daily regimen of

pills. He will offer tactical advice to Poppies Martinez, who begins to train.
Meanwhile that shitbag feathers swans about the Kings rd, buying lady ponchos
and salad

:- french cupcakes around again

:- my fighting cock launches only dawn attacks, known as the 'whisper' or the
'rorke's drift special'

:- my fighting cock has developed swollen glands so falling back is not an option, he stands rigid and prepares for
the days skirmish

:- my fighting cock humbles man & beast alike, like a sea he rolls
weakness away from the cave or light. He doesn't underestimate you but he
doesn't like you

:- my fighting cock is a spy in a hot country.

:- my fighting cock has been in the employ of the Rothschilds since 1796. He is a party
to the welcome afforded thieves & slanderers by this noble family

:- feathers drinks primordial soup from the mountain nipple before his journey

:- my fighting cock is rewarded with dried bananas lathered in chocolate. The bananas
are dehydrated, not fried!

:- feathers just activated that alarm to lure you into the toilet, he's hiding in the roof, waiting

:- my fighting cock has been invited to the royal wedding. He is to turn pink paper
into confetti

:- feathers is writing speeches for the royal wedding

:- my fighting cock is friends with a man named Tonie Bruton & thus has political
sway when it comes to laminates & DISABLED PARKING

:- my fighting cock traces the route of the number 69 back to an easter egg palava &
sneers at any Friday being 'good'

:- feathers whips himself today, showing no emotion, focusing on the fact that his time will surely come

- : - my fighting cocks is a form of belief! Don't execute the retarded
- : - your cock has fear in its walk
- : - my fighting cocks thinks you smell what you are & he knows you are smelling
rancid pig evacuation
- : - my fighting cock translates Fernando Pessoa, beginning with the verse that reads 'I
like little girls, they make me feel so good'
- : - my cocks gods anoint him with cream egg & batter to slick his feathers pre-battle
- : - his battle will be brief, like his mating intercourse, & just like his bouts of sexing, it
will also only be with himself
- : - my fighting cock wants the alarms off gallery 20a. He also wants a forest full of
gentle bears & the moon on a stick
- : - feathers the dead
- : - my fighting cock cried at the deathbed of Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks
- : - My fighting cock is Susan Sontag waxwork, during her time in Sarajevo, making a
funny face
- : - my cock has no power to fight today
- : - my fighting cock celebrates this day as your day that is the day of days that is a
closing of the magic eyelid
- : - my cock, in all its splendour, stands tall in gallery 18 and starts to execute all these children and their parents
- : - my fighting cock signs the treaty of Brest-Livotsk with your fighting cock knowing
full well the consequences of such a peace
- : - my fighting cock refuses to honour the bargain, he wants foam
- : - the human resource chocolate gorilla hides the egg your cock desires beneath her
fleshy womb. take care as it is surrounded by a lightning storm
- : - my fighting cock has lungs full of sarin gas and a will to breathe, his beak in your peoples pipe

:- my cock has visited the land of Croatia

:- my cock is cleansed beneath his wacka wacka prepuce. he wins the world cup without good strikers!

:- my fighting cock is heading to Denmark to force marmite into the food chain

:- my fighting cock takes a flying leap onto a pile of poppies trying to escape some boring old clothbag

:- my fighting cock will introduce woodworm and moths to the African continent

:- my fighting cock builds a new city. it is an exact replica of London aside from one minor detail, it has no museums. they have all been fucked to death.

:- my fighting cock lives out his days on the precipice of the Spaniards leap

:- my fighting cock pisses on the floor of the room named 18

:- my fighting cock climbs mountains

:- your cock flies so high. he believes he can fly, he believes he can touch the sky. he is wrong. he is a fantasist and a sex offender

:- my cock wants to use the museum gym and punish your medicine ball slowly and deeply

:- my fight glistens with medicine while my cock beats a yuppie at squash

:- my fighting cock treks deep into the jungle. He then returns to the nest to make it airborne.

:- my fighting cock wants to know how training is going for your fighting cock?

:- my cock has a gym where he turns up the gravity

Simon Perchik

*

It's not easy for charcoal
--you wait for your birthday
where speed is always painful

let the grill lay low
till the air fits --this day
must have been much wider

separate from wood, left over
when some axe blew apart
and branches headlong, torn out

burning to the ground
--they don't see in the dark anymore
can remember only its color

though the flames will never again
come back, just the smoldering
to torment your eyes and morning

--you slow this wreckage the way all lids
are dropped face down, change direction
covered with smoke, with days and holding on.

*

Lifted too close this leaf
fastens on your sleeve and dries
--it must know why one ear
hears sooner than the other
forces you to turn and climb
till there's nothing left
to lose, the sun
worthless, the air
limping, poisonous

--you hold in your arm
what every tree finds too heavy
throws out and even in winter
you pick up from there
crumple your fingers till their bones
want to live at the bottom
but only one recognizes oak
from when the moon fills up the sea
drop by drop and your knuckles
pounding against each other.

*

Her ankle needs adjustments, puddles
for runoff :tectonic coasts
and one shove more

--she hasn't time to explain
though the splash is almost invisible
already summer the way each wave

migrates mile after mile and back
--with just a leg she detonates the place
for membranes and her reflection

till it erupts again, tilts the sun
sideways and around her glistening heel
just below the surface where the sky

somersaults from joy and expectation
as if every rock that never made shore
could be lifted in her arms

already singing again and her stride
touching down on mountain streams
--only water can understand this

broken in pieces :the path
for continents, for step by step
falling through the Earth.

*

You lean against the way each evening
fills this sink waist-deep
though the dirt smells from seaweed

and graveyard marble --the splash
worn down, one faucet abandoned
the other gathers branches

from just stone and rainfall
--by morning these leaves
will lift a hand to your face

--you drain the weatherbeaten
the mouthfuls and slowly the mud
caresses your throat --you go

shaved and the gravel path
sticks to your skin, flowing
half shovel, half trembling.

*

Its root right from the start
unsure, poking side to side
the way a calf will nudge
and the thick milk underneath
half summer sky
half a little at a time
though it's not raining

--you build the swing
float an old clothesline
knotted as if this branch
would forget leaf after leaf
its first Spring then another
scattered in all directions

--you bunch from in back
push so the flow when it comes
is still warm, already breathing
--your knuckles ache
--it's been a long time.

This rope depends on straw
and drying, holding on tight
to the dark breasts
hidden in the light between
your fingers wobbling across
the dead grass and continent

--it happens! your hands slow
stumble to a stop
and under the leaves
falling painlessly, waiting for snow.

Scott Keeney

On Meeting Ted Berrigan

The way every day is holy sneakers, a shower
of sunlight, insistent hum of cars around corners
and contagious amazement, Ted, swallowing a little
Pepsi with his pills, gulped and said, “Only you
can write your poems, but who hasn’t felt the sun
shining on his face through the bedroom window,
waking up with cotton love like a structured form
of remembrance, taken like a cheeseburger
in thoughtless contemplation of the moment?”

I nodded. “Now, that little something on the side
of your mouth, that bit of hamburger juice, that’s
your poem. Go get it, genius.” And we laughed.

“What else can we do?” he continued, “The sun
has been shining us for a long, Whitmanic time!”

With that and a “Terrific!” he stood up and I felt
like a child in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty.
A Buick Century with Paul McCartney and Wings
drove by singing “My heart is like a wheel, let me
roll it to you.” Ted lifted an eyebrow and curled
his lips. “It’s fun to imagine the sun is mooning us,
that intention exists without us.” A breeze shuttled
a pair of ragged leaves across the sidewalk as we
moseyed away from St. Mark’s Place. “Be a full-time
hero. A full-time thief of fireworks. Don’t put things
off for five years.” I put a ten in his hand and we both
said “Thanks, man” at the same time— “Jinx, you owe me
a beer.” At the corner where he went left and I went
right, he tilted his head back, face to the sky—
“It’s friendlier,” he said, “than originally designed.”

Meditative Chatter

Ah, the weather with its recurrent themes,
charming us one minute with clarion sunlight
and luminous birdcall, turning violent the next
as if Old Thunderclaps could burst our eardrums
if she wanted to. When nature speaks we hear
the words we want to hear, all inconspicuous love
and forgiveness, or passionate judgment, or
hazardous indifference. We write the script
and cast the parts and say the movie was already
in production. Look at the rain with its measurable
patter: it's too many pills. How it knows what it is
alone in the crowd, lost and found in the mist
of meditative chatter. “. . . always been miserable
and I don't know why. I never did harm to no one,”
he said. “I know, I know,” she replied, patting him
on the knee as he looked out the train window
at the sunlight smirking among the evergreens far
across the pincushion field the way one story ends
another begins. An earthquake is a dreamy seething

zombie army guttering in and out of existence as
they approach consummation—will they seize
our bumpy skulls or blink away in search of other inter-
galactic brains? So it goes. Or else a rust-colored cloud
crawls through town, painting the housing complexes
and single-family homes, the corporate parks and
shopping malls, the banks and places of worship
brown and red, harbinger of the melancholy whirlwind,
the hospital, too. With all due respect to greater minds,
dismissing irony and distance from spiritual revelation
suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature
of things. As our world always was and will be lost,
so poetry is always a ghost of itself, better known
by not being known, that which returns and that which
does not, and so forth. “I think I will go for a swim,”
he said, having not gone for a swim in seventeen years
but having owned a pool for three. A dragonfly
floating on the surface, an iridescent black screw
with wings the shape of blue, prominent identity
opening into an expanded view of infallible process,
the feeling that our time is spent pushing fragments

in and out of place, hoping to get it right or hoping
to free ourselves from the hope of getting it right
with every keystroke the urge to fudge, to skew,
to intervene, to announce This is who we are, when
it's readily apparent the sounds form the meaning—
as the weather's mystery remains intact, prescribe
the urge to know to something like the sequential
numbering of rice grains or blades of summer grass
or how the Kalash, Dardic-Vedic descendants of
the fire lances of the Hyperzephyrians, understand
the horned wolves of want, the black water of need,
and the snowcapped peaks of what used to be,
rosy-fingered spawn of Alexander the Great till
the blood-soaked dawn of the Iron Amir, an outpost
of light, the blue centuries of light, bringers of the light
to mountain temples, sun-worshipping winemakers
almost a footnote, surviving in threes. "If it's good
enough for God, it's good enough for me," he said,
walking three job folders to the incoming shelf
in administration, not keeping to himself the secret
he found, though no one wanted to hear it anyway.

To continue walking, right out the front door, into
the yellow wall of the sun, to take that road and stand
among the trees and hear them hashing it out
with the wind, to understand, when it starts to rain,
where the weather report falls short is art's domain.

small town siberia

after Tristan Tzara

i.

the tin roofs glimmer like crates of herring

drink to a gallop

a blue light and the heavy dance begins

you call it bread crumbs

ii.

as always my comrade

i rest on the bench

between black windows

hearts and eyes rolling in my mouth

iii.

the quiet house of my trembling mouth

a blue drink

stuck on the ceiling

cold oh yeah if only we could

iv.

the newspaper on the bench

like a label on a pill bottle

for hell's gates in my locomotive heart

i sleep against you bread crumb eyes

v.

the tin roofs like crates of herring

sometimes the light settles in a necklace around us

i rub my hand against the hard table

are you the angel? i ask anyone who approaches

Good Luck with Your Chaos

There I am: the crony
with the coffee cup
reading Extremities
on the elevated train
into work through the rain.

*

A larger vision,
a cozy warm cancer.

*

The multi-tasking self-starter
and standout team player
suddenly unable to withstand
the faces relentless as flies,
the voices' violent buzz.

*

The self as monument

to what cannot be—

a lick of sand

in the cold sunlight.

*

What am I a popular song

returning to my spot

at the edge of the night,

a clean swath across the glass?

*

What appears in
the space between
the *it* and the *is*

in *it is raining*,
in *it is night*,
in *it is* anything—

the “What is
it anyway?”
that follows.

*

As a Vietnamese monk
in a saffron robe
plucking the dandelions
from an empty parking lot
I feel more like myself
and less like the window
through which I thought
I might escape.

*

I am you and you
have recovered it—

the sunset we watch
through a blender.

Three Suburban Shaman Songs

I laugh on my way
to the source of thunder

a family of otters
pulls me downriver

• • •

The stag beetle stares
from the fallen branch

the branch that kills me
many years ago

• • •

The door to my home
swings open in the wind

the crows caw and caw
and I caw some more

Sarah Sorensen

Snow Blind

I remember the bruises on Sheila's thigh as being kind of pretty. They looked like violet clouds with little red points. I felt guilty for staring, for liking them a bit. I knew how she got them, and it should have made me sad. But, when I looked at her all I felt was gratitude. Back then, I couldn't really see her as miserable or violated. To me, she was everything. A perfect blond with perfect pointed teeth that could sink into my shoulder and make me feel a little pain. Perfect teeth that could make me feel. I thought maybe she liked pain a little too, so maybe she let Mitchell leave a few marks. I didn't want to know that the real reason that she didn't leave him was she because she was just a sad fuck. It is impossible to see that when you idolize someone.

I would come over late at night when Mitchell was out boning some other girl and I'd creep in through Sheila's kitchen door and sit at the table, listening to her take a long shower. The first few times that I came over, I took it upon myself to look through the drawers and cabinets. I saw that all of her dishes and cups were plastic. One drawer was just miscellaneous junk: rubber bands, expired hamburger joint coupons, an old nail file, and a Texas postcard from the only out of state vacation she'd ever been on. I'd sat looking at the armadillo on the card, wondering why she'd driven to Texas with that asshole instead of me. Sometimes she'd take so long that I'd even do her dishes. They were always caked with shit and smelled like eight days of trash.

The time that I remember best was that March when the big snow storms came and shut us in for a whole day. Mitch called from the Super 8, telling Sheila that he was staying there for the night because his buddies had “felt like it.” Sheila told me that I could stay over. The next day, the snow had sealed us in so tight that Mitch couldn’t get in and I couldn’t get out. I stayed from 2am Wednesday until 7:30 that night. It was the most time that we’d ever spent together. And it was the last time that I’d see her.

It had started out like any other night. She came lazing into the kitchen after her shower, and we just sat at the table for awhile, drinking her old coffee. It tasted terrible and I could tell that she wasn’t paying much attention to me when I talked. I tried to tell her things about my job, about my family, and the stuff that I was dreaming about for the future. I don’t think she really wanted to know me, least that was the impression that I got watching her fiddle with her mug, dance her fingers around on the table, and all of the rest of the things she did to fill her mind while I tried to say something about what it was like to be me. After a few tries, I gave up and just listened.

“He knows about you, you know, but he don’t leave me. It hurts him so bad; he’s just gotta let it out somehow. And really, he never does it where people can tell. He doesn’t want to shame me that way. Some men like to let you go around looking all jacked up and kept, but he don’t never touch my face. It’s his way of being considerate.”

Sheila looked so sincere when she was talking. I wondered if she ever thought anything really bad about Mitch. I wondered if she ever thought that she could do better.

“So are you saying he loves you so much that he’s the victim?” I asked.

“Sure. Men like Mitchell can’t look weak. They can’t cry about their shitty girlfriend who fucks her girlfriend. If I wasn’t shit, I’d probably never get knocked around. I don’t know. I’m just not very monogamous, I guess. Like, I think to myself: ‘this is the day. I will stop effing around on him, bake a cake or some shit like that,

and be all dressed up when he comes home.’ Then, I get to feeling so lonely. He don’t get here ‘til whenever. I get more lonely. I start thinking about getting off. I start thinking about you.”

I could feel my face going red. I could feel my palms and armpits sweat. I looked down at her mug that said “Don’t Stress Me Out!!!” and featured a frazzled looking cartoon cat. The copyright date was 1989.

“So what do you think,” she asked. “Ready to fuck?”

I grabbed her long blond hair and pulled, tilting her head back. I kissed her neck.

“Let’s go to bed,” I whispered.

She got up and dropped her rat-eaten bathrobe, leading me into the bedroom. I watched the dry tips of her wet hair curling across her lower back. I liked the four dimples on her right ass cheek, and the tattooed on garter on her left thigh. She glanced back at me over her shoulder and smiled, eyes a little dead.

The bedroom was always a big mess. Her clothes were everywhere and there were cheap fashion magazines spread open all over the bed. She’d circled posh looking necklaces and blazers, things I could never picture her wearing. Sheila pushed them to one side, laid down and spread for me. Then she shut her eyes and scratched her right breast.

“Go on, honey. I’m ready.”

I tried to kiss her, but she just smiled that same smile.

“C’mon. Don’t make me beg for it,” she sighed.

I stopped trying to kiss her, to touch her breasts or brush my fingers along all of her peach perfect skin. I just fucked her, like she wanted. When she came, she bit my shoulder until I bled. Then she collapsed and turned away from me. She turned on the TV to *The Golden Girls*, set the timer, and pulled up the covers. I could barely get out of her way fast enough.

“My favorite is Blanche,” Sheila said. “She’s a lot like me.”

“Maybe,” I said.

“Since Mitchy’s not coming home tonight and you’re staying just make sure you don’t move much. I sleep light and I can’t get lines under my eyes or I won’t never get a job.”

“What kind of job do you want?”

Sheila had been working a single night a week at the pizza place downtown while her friend was on maternity leave. Other than that, she did nothing all day.

“I want something of my own that I know how to do. I hear the titty bar is looking for girls. I like to dance. It’d be money. Mitch’d get off my back about what I spend. Things would start to be real ok for us.”

“You have beautiful tits,” I said. But when I reached around her from the other side of the bed, she just slapped my hand away.

“It’s still a new piercing,” she said. “And I’m too tired for more tonight anyway. Now shush because I can’t hear my show.”

I laid in silence, trying not to touch myself until she was asleep. Then, I tried to touch myself without moving much or making any noise. The result was pretty lackluster. So I just laid there, in the Mitch scented side of the bed. I ran my hand over my short pixie hair and then traced over my bicep the tattoo that I’d promised myself next paycheck. It was going to be a mermaid girl with wild swirls of red hair, strategically twisting over her breasts. The guy at the shop said he could do it in about an hour and a half, one hundred and eighty-five bucks. Probably give him an even two hundred. Good to tip those guys well. They are serious business and you can’t look cheap to them or they’ll fuck you up on the next tat.

Sheila was so deeply asleep that I could see the drool glistening at the corner of her mouth when I leaned over her. I wished that I could run my finger over those dagger teeth. I wished that I could tell her to leave Mitchell, to wash out these sheets and ditch him so that I never had to smell his cigarette and stale cologne stink again. Eventually, I fell asleep.

When I woke up, Sheila was standing over me asking for pancakes. I got up and made them. I piled them on a plate and we took turns peeling them off the top, eating them with our hands and no syrup. We looked out the window above the sink and ate in silence.

Later, when we sat half-heartedly playing a hand of Old Maid with half the deck missing, she surprised me.

“You should fuck Morgan,” she said.

Morgan was her cousin. We had gone to school together. She was the reason that I had met Sheila in the first place.

“I don’t really like Morgan like that. And besides, Morgan *has* a girlfriend already. Take your turn and stop saying things like that,” I said.

“Honey, you got to know this won’t ever be much.”

She dropped her eyes down to her cards, and frowned. I could see the tiny specks of not quite washed-off mascara still clinging to the corner of her left eye. Her thigh bounced impatiently under the table.

“Yeah.”

“Well, can’t say I never warned you,” she said.

Then she won the game.

When Mitch called to say that he was coming home soon, I picked up my wallet and my tube of Pink Crush Valentine lipstick and got ready to go. Sheila stood out in the snow with me, pants-less. She was buried up to her thighs and wearing nothing but a nightshirt.

“You’ll fuckin’ freeze,” I said. “Why don’t you just go in?”

Her legs were a sort of periwinkle just above the snow crust, the same color as the sky.

“I just wanna say goodbye,” she said.

“There’ll be other times, Sheila. Go in before you get frostbite.”

“No,” she said. “There won’t.”

As I tried to protest, she turned and left. The snow and ice caked to her thighs dropped off in clumps and drips as she stood inside the screen door shivering. Sheila glanced over her shoulder for a second, then closed the door. My fingers instinctively touched the tender spot where her teeth had been, a new scar already forming there.

It made the cover of the paper the next morning, a huge article about her bereaved family and the grieving boyfriend. Mitch talked his talk to the reporters, using phrases like, “what a waste” and “too young.” Sheila was gone long before he’d ever gotten home that night. She must have done it pretty much the minute I got half way down the road. Funny how people always say that if only they had known, maybe they could have saved the person. If I had stayed behind, she probably would have just shot me too. She never did like to do anything alone. And I was never more to her than a useful thing.

Rowland Anthony Corr

He Remembers Past Love

'Was here' you'd written, and in front; your name,
On unspoilt sand; unspoiled, that is, before,
Now arm in arm, now hand in hand, we came
With languid step along a languorous shore,
Till of a sudden, there, you broke away
And with slender fingertips began to scrape
The letters, smiling as the words took shape.
Then, satisfied, still smiling, said 'Some day
I might come back and find it here again.'
Though if in earnest, -strange, I couldn't say.
And all the while you wrote I watched in pain,
Yet not because I saw some insult lay
Behind it all, for surely there was none,
But that you wrote a name, and only one.

Great Passion

Great passion never yet was known to yield
To reason nor to reason yet were moved;
Were never tempered but that it was steeled,
Nor yet been stilled but still resurgent proved.
But when to hold does not suffice possession
Desire must surely mock satiety;
Though solemn, even saint-like in devotion,
Yet lacking the accompanying piety;
Whose plea, devoid of reverence, or despite it,
Would else comprise a very prayer recited;
Both bound to hope yet hopelessly confined
By doubt, and, doubtless, passion is requited
Without settlement, there being none to find,
But that it's settled, being sued in kind.

The First Among Sins.

Without exception, nobody exceeds
Their baser instincts forgoing food or rest
For their young. It's a function manifest
In lesser creatures else. But selfless deeds
For strangers to the heart and blood attest
A grace that is the fruit of virtue's seeds.
Yet, whether any hateful act succeeds
A like intent, where we have most transgressed
Weren't action but where action were eschewed,
Nor thought, but that from which the thought ensued;
A sentiment, though scarce if sensed within,
The name of which, at last, is ingratitude;
For prevalence alone, man's greatest sin,
And that from which all others first begin.

Ross Robbins

Bird, Violence, Bird

Drugged and dragging limbs:
a broken-winged swallow
pecking a malt liquor puddle.

There are worse things than flapping
to reach no sky. To shiver,
sunk gutterward, rain-thrust stream

pushes your limpness towards a culvert.
Weakly flail against this force,
so, so fucked: Dolly Parton v. Tyson.

(Imagine the way her tits would ripple
in the sheer bomb-blast of his uppercut.
Her lipstick stains his knuckle.)

The icy-twatted feminist bares a canine:
“This so-called humor can only result
in a multitude of black-eyed wives.”

Shaking off this vision I crash
from the bus to the boil
of the sidewalk where

dirty syringes and candy bar wrappers
are shuffled by sneakers...
A gasping pigeon scrabbles from concrete

To die in the dirt for want of a drink.

Diagnosis

As a cathartic strikes the bowel
the word “reactive” whacked my tear ducts.

Renamed myself “Catastro”
when my t-cell count read “AIDS.”

Retroviral murk. A black balloon.
Lymphocytes pule and shudder.

I am Christ in the cenacle,
Judas smirks behind my back.

Amphigory? More like a hymn:
“We shall now sing the song of my undoing...”

Crouched down naked at the end of the world
shavin’ my face with a sharpened old chicken bone.

This is not the end of man.
This is just a Tuesday.

Phlebotomist: my Pontius.
HIV: my Judas.

Tercio de Muerte

Torero enters the ring.
Bull snorts,
Sun shrieks.
Attendees shift on their wooden seats,
bleachers worn smooth
from the shuffling of buttocks—
feet crackle in sticky cola.

Cries of the revelers,
bellows of the bull.
Bitter, blinded, bastard thing—
the matador reigns triumphant.

Having worn down this beast
he hoists his muleta.
Toro, enraged, ignores the bait.
He plants his horn
like a tulip bulb
in the fertile loam
of the young man's guts.

Petals blossom red on cotton
He sinks: a coin tossed into a lake.
Soils his knees on the arena's floor,
Bull staggers off to bleed.

Crowd falls silent.
This is more blood than sport.
The young man flops from his knees to his face.
White-clad screamers rush the arena.
Camera pulls back
The death scene fades
into legos and tinkertoys and ants.

False Starts, Bits and Bits

May the hand of the most holy
Caress and bless this book I hold
And endow upon its wood pulp pages
Inspiration, inspiration.
May I find within its wealth of blank lines
not the toiling of a poetic Sisyphus
but a workshop where my stone crests every hill.

May it free me from the prison of iambs,
the rise and fall of stress and flat no longer
so so-so.

May the days and weeks to come bring a torrent
of verse and rhymes not blunt as spoons
Nor crumpled like the classifieds,
every word suspended in amber,
May I bless my hours with beauty and sight.

AMEN.

*

And a time came when we all decided to be childlike, but then we couldn't stop getting hit by cars.
I guess we did it too well.

*

My t-cells slain and laid out in a fleshy sepulcher
funereal lymphocyte, sarcophagus wherein lies my past,
my present, and what future might once have been.

*

Preternatural ease with which time lubricatedly slides
through fingers like marbles dipped in motor oil

*

The green of the tree is contained
in the spiral of my iris,
the way you fall into the sight of me,
and Hell, I couldn't resist, either.
The birds' exertions swirl a tornado,

the *whoosh* of a golf club powers a cyclone,
tumble dry the ebb tide, better pray for rain.

*

I have claimed a vaster realm of experience than I am privy to—forgive me, I have longed to make an ocean of my voice.

*

Even the rain seemed set on avoiding me, steam curling up from my skin
as a bubble of waterless space seemed to grow around my blazing form.

*

Daylight now, the warmth of summer growing in magnitude
like the rising Richter of the Earth shaken to its bones.

*

Yesterday's ebbing tide leaves in its wake
a holocaust of desiccated skeletons
the frameworks of what should have been
tomorrow. What promise once held, washed out
to sea. With what time is left to reach
skyward (so dramatic) and wail,
"Oh where has my tomorrow gone?"
Well, sweetheart, today was and is
always here, eternally reemerging from the grey
haze you draw down over the unfolding
events becoming: the future: only real
once it becomes present: and at once:
the history of who we: became—
 Becoming: Becomes: Became.

*

This urge to flock together
birds of an abscessed feather
Informing a future that never was
of our presence, the light on our hair.
Enduring moment: glint of a candle
 on the white of bicuspid
and gleam of an eye. You and I
we are the present and the becoming.

*

Silver stop sign backsides. Razor wire. Minivans and yarmulkes. Riding the #4 down outer Division, an unleashed Rottweiler picks his way through the tall grasses of an empty lot. Sober. Pure of blood. The joy to be found in days not mashed like an abandoned cassette, tape unwinding and casing crushed by a Camry: “Use Your Illusion”—biting into a bouncy ball, give of the rubber, grit on incisors. “Specificity is the enemy of the poem. Trim that adjectival fat.” The snake persists in the meal of its own tail. This page persists in its pursuit of meaning, continues to come up –lessness. You know the talking to yourself is a problem when you blurt, “I want to suck your cock”—and there you are on the bus, a little old Asian gasps her disgust. “I mean it. I do.” She moves away.

*

I feel my way through the darkened halls of unknowing by pawing at the rough walls. Vertigo, north becomes east, having come this far on (mostly) sight—there may come a time when feeling trumps my eyes. As such, I tape my eyelids and I spread forth my palms for a clue.

*

I used to have a wooden bottle that held my great grandmother’s perfume. Her memory faded, the perfume faded, the bottle stolen, and now even that as if it never was.

*

“Stygian” – the kind of word a sad sack wants to force into a poem, as if to say

“I may be depressed, but I’m smart enough
to justify behaving like a teenage goth girl’s
diary, vomiting gloom & black eyeshadow
all over your welcome mat.”

*

Keening wail from the mouth of God
paresis down the right side of this hirsute young man’s pectoral,
Quivering of his bearded neckflesh as my tongue runs up his thigh.

Tell me, my delectation, eructing and smacking your bacon-slick lips,
fingering a lock of shorn beard—what Atlas will shoulder your world
when the usual suspects flake? Pell-mell accusations, not enough fingers
for all this pointing. Scapegoat or Billy Goat, “Baa Baa!” says Black Sheep.

*

The dead reach up hooked claws
to grope for the pennies in their eyes
and open those sunken vestiges of sight

having blindly stumbled this far.
But the ferryman is only accepting bills,
points to a sign that says as much.
“No paper, no ride; you should have learned by now.”

These unlucky masses, the cashstrapped decedents,
re queuing up en masse along the banks of River Styx—
 “This stygian customer service
 is simply shameful, mark my words:
 a day will come when everyone
 will go elsewhere for their afterlife needs.”

*

Left reaching for you like a kid holding up a Roman candle
uncertain whether the last shot has discharged.
Just waiting for the next fizzle...Pop! Bang!

Instead there is only me, alone,
as the smoke of you falters and fades...

*

The pain of losing you was an ill-fitting shoe,
so that with every hobble I felt your absence
 in that presence.

*

There I am in that same old dream city, it is part Portland, part Missoula, part Helena, and a dash of Paris. Heroin dealers lurk in abandoned train tunnels, balloons swell their cheeks like chipmunks. I keep coming back here where the river splits the city. It is the Willamette rushing with the speed of the Clark Fork, but its arched bridges span the Seine. A street urchin à la Dickens rushes at me clutching a tarnished silver teapot. “Your cup is emptied of blood.” Tilting the decanter, a fine black mist envelops my mouth and nose. The smell of a spoiled steak rotting in the sun, the taste of metal and saffron. In that jump-cut logic of dreams I am next standing before the throne and see a petulant child wearing a crown with jewels on her fingers the size of marbles. “You are not who you think you are.” I wake to the wrath of sweat and scattered thoughts.

*

Belly all sunk like a vengeful God’s opening salvos of famine...

*

BlazeVOX 12

Fall 2012

Robert Whiteside

Vague applause

Vague applause from an
Uncertain banister
A calling of aesthetic
Requirements
Made real by crowds of raven
Skies till I am pinched by stars
And have forgotten the names
Of all things
But not their syllables

Beauty is jest

Beauty is jest
Is simply gross
The long legs of evening
But for an overcoat of dreams
Joy begins to fill in
Where there are no lines
We are left naked
Except for the sea
I carry the clouds and sky
In my beard beneath my
Fingernails

If I have bothered to note a bird

If I have bothered to note a bird
Or two on a power line, some flowers
In a vacant lot for flowering, I have
Done so heedlessly and without regard
For the safety of those around me

Solitude is what I want

Solitude is what I want
On a bus headed to some
Shitty city just as long as I'm stoned
And it's raining and I'm hungry
And I've no money and have to borrow for a grilled cheese
At the next stop only then will
The droplets on the pane
Uneven birds
In the passing trees resound with any
Magnificence any solution of emotion

Rachel Custer

Convergence

After Jackson Pollack

Something moves in the sliding way of yolk

(that necklace is stunning)
wrap pause unwrap of frayed rope

convergence is
a turning of the eyes

you are not that woman

dreaming
of barn swallows, the banality
of clouds

the sound of the pier rusting beneath your feet

you are not that woman

lean fingers clicking
rosary beads

you know because
you cannot make that sound

The Gospel of Potholes

This is something new -

flocking sirens, the gathering myth
of morning

the way wheat breaks before the wind

can a woman think fast enough
to subvert herself?

Can a woman (the street preacher
is praising a tin can)

can a woman, can
a woman
learn to bow?

Always, there is the pressing weight
(the preacher is praising)

God
like a cold hand
in yours.

Who dreams of growing
to speak
to God in an alley - the dust motes,

a child smaller than you.

Softly Spoken

saw a little girl lying in sunlight

saw good farmland
yawning before you like a parable

This is how I knew he was lying

compare a dumpster
filled with sewer grease

a billboard on a dead end street

the indignity!

I keep trying to bury melodrama
in your chest

saw a cornfield

saw water disappearing

saw a girl curl herself into a dust mote

dinner will require
a good deal more killing

Testimonial

This, the day after

tornadoes dreaming the land into new instincts

you saw that buzzard pick gristle from its hair

tidbits of empire

make of this Chevy an altar

little plasticated

miracles we quicken for

the trouble is, it's unproved rock

your mother says

why don't you stop while you're ahead

as if anybody plays the vertebrae

anymore

Oliver Rice

A PRIVACY

The sun gleaming on your umbrella,

forty million species, they say,
existing on Earth at this hour,
slithering, burrowing, infecting,
taking shorthand, upstream rapids, the bait,

the surf, the breezes soothing your spirit,

extant organisms being one percent of the billions
having once drawn oxygen from air or water,
passed from egg to mammal,
turned to marble at the bottom of the sea,

the gulls exhibiting their arts and crafts,

one tenth of one percent of the living tonight
destined for extinction by bedtime a year hence
from alighting on telephone wires, migrating,
stinging, nesting, severe existentiality.

CHEROKEE NATION

In the mountains, at their summer village,
before the Spaniards came,
the braves out patrolling their hunting grounds,
the maternal aunts arranging the courtships,
the sun and the rains blessing the gardens,
beans, squash, corn, sunflowers,

*their word for life
is said to have been
ga-no-du.*

The talk in the councils of their elders,
around the cooking fires and storage sheds,
more and more about the conflicts arising
with English settlers invading their lands
along the Georgia and Carolina frontiers
bearing ill will and strange diseases,
more and more about families migrating
fearfully into Tennessee and Arkansas,
about their leaders manipulated into ceding
more and more of their sacred territory
to ruthless state and federal authorities,

*their word for liberty
is said to have been
a-du-da-le-s-di.*

The dreaded edict received from Washington,
rounded up from scattered villages
by soldiers demanding their instant departure,
abandoning even absent family members,
crops, animals, furniture, clothing,
all possessions except what they could carry,
forbidden to sell anything to anyone,
assembled and detained at collection points
until the authorities had devised their controls,
herded westward on the Trail of Tears,

*their word for happiness
is said to have been
a-li-be-li-tsi-da-s-di.*

Nick Kozma

According to Luke

“You want it from the beginning? The very beginning? I don’t know if there was ever a single beginning but I know where I start.”

There I was, walking down the grey, cracked sidewalk, made with crumbled conglomerated stone instead of the typical concrete. It was a calm summer day on Carmen Avenue in Westbury, NY. The teal painted mini-mall was before me; its red lettering sporting names such as Carvel, John’s Laundromat, Deli, Dairy Barn, and Ristorante Venere on the corner. Two gas stations, a Mobil and Shell were up on the corner. Today, my destination was the Dairy Barn to grab some milk.

A man’s face separates itself from the crowd. He was a tall beastly man, with wild hair and a square herculean jaw. One look at the man, and I knew he was no son of Zeus. His eyes were black irises. Our eyes met. His mouth broke into the smile of a jackal that sees his next kill.

I duck into the Dairy Barn. My eyes search for any safe haven. Bingo. Swiftly I hide inside one of the walk-in coolers. I close the steel door behind me. The latch clacking shut.

I do not know how much time passed. It could have been 5 minutes. It could have been an hour. Throughout my time amongst the 2% milk, eggs, and cheese I heard grinding steel, explosions, and shrieks of terror. My body’s temperature dropped to dangerous levels. Silence. My teeth began to clack together like a snakes rattle. I unlatched the door.

The freezer was all that remained of the Dairy Barn. Carmen Ave looked as though it had been struck across the face with a sledgehammer by a strongman with a running start. The Mobil was absconded from its corner. The

Shell was, well, just a shell of its former self. Standing in the middle of this ground zero, was him. His back faced me, his body shaking. He was laughing.

Suddenly, I felt something rise inside me. I was angry. I was angry at him for doing this, angry at myself for doing nothing to stop him. I started to yell at this, this thing, this monster standing before me. “Who do you think you are?” I bellowed. The man turned, slowly, like the hour hand on a clock, “Why,” He said “I am Demos.” I ran.

I shot up in my bed. Heart pounding through my undershirt like the bass at a dance club. Sweat soaked my skin as if I had run ten miles. The blonde girl with emerald green eyes from the night before lay still next to me, sound asleep. *Mother had those green eyes.* I slowly got out of bed and walked to the bathroom for a glass of water. The florescent light made the white tile yellow; the porcelain sink was streaked with stains. Someone got sick tonight. I checked the toilet, no damage, and picked up my blue cup with my toothbrush in it. Removing the brush, careful to put it somewhere puke free, I fill my glass from the tap and take a sip. Looking in the mirror, my brown hair looks like an unkempt hedge. My hazel eyes are bloodshot. Scratches and stretch marks alternate on my shoulders like tiger stripes. I look like shit.

I think back upon the dream, about Demos. One thing sticks in my mind. His eyes were filled with a vulgar desire. He hated me. For what, I do not know. *Demos*, I repeat to myself. What a terrifying name.

“John” said Green Eyes, “Come back to bed.” I forgot I was “John” tonight. I finished my glass of water, and walked back into the bedroom of my studio apartment. Well, more like bedroom, kitchen, and living room; the joys of living on a budget. I climbed back into bed and cuddle up next to her. She leaned in for a kiss, but remembering the sink, I rolled the other way pretending not to notice. I drifted to sleep. I forgot Demos.

I woke up the next morning and she was already gone. She even cleaned the sink, what a dear. I am not worried about where she is. Women are like stories. Some are novels, others are novellas, and some are short stories. She was more of a haiku.

Months passed. The typical New York bullshit happened around me. The Yankees won the pennant, murders happened, women went missing, and gang shootings; the typical timeline of the Empire State. Demos? I did not think about Demos anymore. It was just a dream- just more vivid, more terrifying, and worst of all, more real.

I started taking bouncing jobs at random bars and clubs. Just taking ID’s and making sure no undesirables got in. I hated undesirables, especially to many a John’s dismay, hookers. I was working at this one place, Lee

Outlaw's, a biker bar the new owner wanted to reform into a classy joint. It was located out on Hempstead Turnpike, near the Coliseum. Before I got there the place was known as a rowdy haven for drugs, prostitutes, and violence. The kind of place I usually avoided unless I was looking for a fight. You never saw any college kids in there; it was all 30 year old bikers and their girlfriends. Leather vests and denim was the dress code, until Vincent bought the place out.

Vincent was my boss, this 30 year old promoter. He always wore a gray or black Armani Suit, with manicured nails. He got his black hair cut every Friday. He was an alright guy, for someone who thought he was the next Frank Sinatra. He was a consummate ladies' man. Always found chatting up some dame by the bar. Never saw him leave with one though. The Chairman of the Board knew how to run a bar, I'll give him that. I was bouncing in one of his other places, Larry's, out in Westbury and he offered me the gig at Outlaw's. It paid more and was closer to my apartment. I took it immediately.

Vincent mandated a collared shirt and a blacklist for anyone who fights or is caught doing drugs. He never said anything about the hookers though. I took care of that myself. It was my job to keep up these standards.

My first day was a cruel joke. Even with a two week grace period, every Tom, Dick and Vincenzo that came in was not wearing a collared shirt. Every asshole had on his denim vest with patches and black t-shirts. I easily turned away 50 people. I got my fair share of "Fuck you's" and people telling me where to stick the collared shirts. Then this one guy comes up to me. He's wearing a black, well fitted collared shirt, but I still needed to see his ID.

"Hey man, I need to see some ID.

"Naw man, c'mon now you know me."

"Come on guy, no ID, no Entry."

"Buddy, you know who I am."

"Yeah guy? Who the fuck are you?"

Black irises met my hazel eyes. I saw something so familiar. "I'm Demos."

I started out of my chair in the corner of my apartment; heart pounding again like so long ago. I checked the clock. 2 am. I was starting my first day at Lee Outlaw's in approximate 12 hours. The TV was blaring the National Anthem, then the snowstorm of static that signaled the end of the programming day. I vacated the rickety wooden chair with its orange cushions. I saunter into the bathroom, looking at the man in the mirror. I saw those eyes again, the dark pure black hatred of his irises. Demos. He came back for me. I thought it was just one nightmare, this was

something more. I pondered my options; it disturbed me that this happened again, and so specific to what was happening in my life. I looked into my own eyes. My whole life I have not really been a religious individual, but my mother had went to church 6 days a week. I wondered what it was she would do in a situation like this. Of course. it's that simple. I would just quit.

I went in early. Vincent was there getting ready for the night. A brunette was interviewing to be a waitress the low-cut blouse showing her excellent resume. "Hey Vincent" I began "I can't work for you anymore, I quit." He was pissed. "Are you fucking kidding me buddy?" Everyone was Vincent's buddy. "You know the position you put me in? Now, I gotta find another bouncer in four hours, do you know how hard it is to find a good bouncer? Nearly fucking impossible." He looked up at Angelo and Demitri. "Get this cocksucker out of here." The other two bouncers picked me up and toss me to the pavement outside. "Yeah, nice knowing you too Vincent." I yelled back as the door slammed shut behind me. I got in my T-bird and drove back home.

I woke up the next morning, head pounding, and walked out to get the Daily News. I turned immediately to the back page; Knicks lost again. I flip to the front and see Lee Outlaw's with police tape out front in the lower left corner "Biker Bar Massacre". The story was almost as succinct.

That night someone pulled a gun, killing three people, Vincent, some girl, and the bouncer who took my place. Good thing I quit.

Sometimes you just know.

"Don't lie to me, Luke. I know what happened. I am here to help you."

I open my eyes. The blinding light of the solitary lamp overhead gives way to cold grey concrete above. I sit up. The green striped mattress below me is stripped of sheets. Suicide watch, I almost forgot. You fall off a roof one time and they think you're suicidal. My nails are worn down to stubs so I start chewing on some of my skin. Oral fixations are hard to break. The bastards won't give me toothpicks.

"Luke, are you listening to me?"

I look up at the mirror in front of me. My head is bare like a cancer patient's. The orange jumpsuit only amplifies my pallid skin. The bright light doesn't help either.

"Luke?"

"I hear you, goddamnit."

"Tell me what happened at the bar."

“I already did. Vincenzo, some girl he was hitting on, and a bouncer got shot.”

“Who shot them?”

“Demos, I assume.”

“You have said this before.” I could picture the Good Doctor laying back into his chair. “but you but still have not told me the truth.”

“What truth is there to tell? I was not at the bar that night.”

I was. I pulled the gun. I shot that punk Vincenzo through the eyes. I shot his girlfriend too. I took the bouncer just for fun. It was all good fun. Fun. Fun. Fun.

Blink.

“What was that you said?” The Good Doctor sounded scared.

“What are you talking about? I didn’t say anything. Maybe you’re the one losing your mind. Perhaps we are just three...”

“Three?”

“...two lost souls. I believe you said I was a lost soul.”

Lost? I am not lost. I have never been more alive. I have been having lots of fun. That first girl was easy. She laying right next me sound asleep. I strangled her supple little neck. I thought it was going to snap. I wanted it to snap. Her emerald green eyes rolled back into her skull. Oh, so much fun. I wonder if this Doctor would be up for fun?

“You’re in here for more than 10 murders, you know that.”

“It wasn’t me.”

“Listen here.” The Good Doctor paused for a moment. I heard a release of breath.

Just like the first. You never forget your first time.

“We found the body behind your apartment. We found two fingers from two different bodies in the glove compartment and trunk of your car. We dragged two bodies from the stream near your apartment and one more body hidden in various engine parts in that broken down blue Impala you dropped off at the junkyard. All hookers. All but one of the bodies had been decomposed no more than a month.”

“It wasn’t me.”

“We have you on film breaking down the door. Literally kicking it off the hinges, then pulling your .22 and shooting all three victims. You emptied the clip.”

“It wasn’t me. Demos did it.” *You’re damn right I did.*

“4 eyewitnesses identified that it was you and you alone.”

“It wasn’t me.”

“Listen, Luke, you’re facing life on either death row or an asylum.” The Good Doctor reminded me for the millionth time. “You deserve the chair sane or not. But, clearly you have some problems. I am here to help you.”

Captain fucking obvious

“I am done talking to you.”

“What happened to your parent’s Luke?”

“I only knew my mom, my father was never around.”

“No Luke, your real parents.”

I dip my head. How does he know? How? How? Nobody but me knows about that. Sure I was adopted. But no one knows why I was orphaned. No one I never told anyone that secret. No. No. Nobody knows. The secret is safe.

“They passed away.”

“You were there when they died weren’t you.”

He knows. This motherfucker knows. Fuck him. Fuck him. I tell him nothing.

“What did you do when you opened the door to their room?”

“Fuck you.”

“Be easy son, I am only trying to help. Just talk to me. Tell me how your father had killed your mother.”

“Fuck you”

The Good Doctor released his breath. “What did you do when you saw your mother tied to the bed? The knife in her heart. The two knives through her hands. The blood gushing from her side. Your father, hanging from the bedpost by his tie; unable to live knowing his wife was a prostitute.”

“I stared.”

“That’s all?”

“There was nothing I could do.” *It was beautiful.*

“Tell me...”

I stared. It could have been 5 minutes. It could have been hours. Hours of staring into my mothers green eyes staring lifeless back at me. I heard nothing. I saw nothing but her green eyes. The next thing I remember is the tall, muscular, and dark eyed man grabbing me in his arms. He carried me away. He freed me. I asked him his name.

“Demos” he said.

Mary Alyssa Rancier

Stolen Accessories

Just a step behind, you can feel the eyes burning
Into the back of your neck.
Hollers into your back
“You fine girl, you fine” ever they taunt.
“Look at dat body! Mmm, I could eat you up!”
As if we’re an accessory hiding behind glass.
As if we’re waiting to be sold,
Waiting to be stolen.

Each word is a cut
And ever are we bleeding
For reasons we are not to blame,
But for a fool
That took what was not his.
Something meant to be precious.

Now drops of poison leaks into our brains
Knowledge that it was satisfactory.
You may taunt us,
You may degrade us,
You may even touch us,
But you will never have us.

Respect

Dear my sisters
I can hear your cries
And I can see the pain in your eyes.

Another girl starting shit at the club
For her body isn't worn by a man.
She saw that you were the lucky one tonight
So she flung magnetic curses
Such as, "skank", "slut", "whore!"

If she weren't so busy observing the scenery
Perhaps she can see the pain in her eyes
Which is this,

She hasn't had sex in over 3 years
Saving herself despite what was already taken
Because man, oh man
Can a man lie with such pure eyes.

I know my fellow sisters have seen this
Going on for way too long
So we begin to accept it.
Ignoring our frontal lobe
We think that we don't need or deserve respect
As long as there is good sex.

This is why we are "crazy"
Because we've been told for way too long
That pure emotions are bad
So what do we do with that?
We try pleasing ourselves while pleasing you
Living not for our own sake
But for yours
And this is what we get in return.

It shouldn't be rare
To simply be respected.

Mark Young

A line from Herman Melville

An atelier will al-
ways have its
ragged edges. A
reaction to. Angles

& planes. Abraded
by. Pressures
from above. No
comfort zone. Life

at the top of a
house is not like
life at the top—
the sky intrudes.

you have been banned from facebook

Let your Girl Scouts
lip-synch freedom
songs & use their cookies
for pleasure not for
pain. Now that the
mouth of the wild beast
is ranked #315 with a
bullet on TripAdvisor's
top 788 attractions in
Paris, we can move
on to the next important
project—does *jelqing*
lengthen, & lengthen the
shelf-life of, one's penis?

A line from Coco Chanel

Is the washed-up
rodeo queen who
still dreams of
clowns & cow-

boys a signifier,
as Baudrillard
put it, of lost
contact with the

"real", or rather
evidence of an
instinctive desire
for authenticity?

Polka dots & mung beans

More & more the backyard is coming to look like a Vegas strip with its new casinos, hotels & restaurants. The hustle-bustle factor drives us all. Our pedigree Samoyeds—*tutti i nostri cani discendono da linee di sangue prestigiose*—determine the rotation speed of a merry-go-round in the one corner that still has green in it. In another corner, a small band of sushi sous-chefs watch a rerun of the Giants-Redskins game. I settle down in a temporary comfort zone set up somewhere amongst the slot machines. The waitress brings a tray of truffle oil. I drizzle it over the spandex that surrounds me. Torquemada arrives, channeling the music of Marvin Gaye, wondering what's going on. Neighborhood kids with cellphones capture it all. Commentary may be added later.

A line from Hank Williams

The culture of Kyoto,
with its line-segment-
ation, sliding windows
& continuous dynamic

programming, has long
been regarded as
a literary genre. Two
key concerns: space

surrounded by a
suspended stainless-
steel grille, & light
in the form of lavish

ornaments worn by
a dizzying troupe of
ancient & modern hip-
hop stars. Curiosity

is the spirit of the
geek so stare at
the footwear, a true
hybrid of pollution

& other problems
put together by an
architect. Then dress
in style, go hog wild.

After Aristotle

The food & drink
provided is com-
posed chiefly of
silicates of somewhat
complex constitution,
but the increased flow
of gastric juices is a
viable vehicle for the
new generation of
young Athenian theater
students who delight
in performances
of sensation & absurdity.

A line from Franz Beckenbauer

The entire Eastern
Seaboard, an area of
wet fields growing
dinner greens, just

got picked up for
syndication. It's the
first-best solution to
the collusion problem

of compulsory micro-
chipping. A highly
capable economic
location. Is manna in

the wilderness. More
information about
formatting options
will be provided later.

holla at me lata

Fifty is the new
forty. In the
legendary tradition
of the game show,
calorie & heart rate
monitors are the
only vocabulary
you need. That
& the fact that the
only real mistake
you can make
is wear a strapless
Jason Wu dress in
a creamy chiffon
with a pair of
off-white shoes.

A line from Dalton Trumbo

Had the wagyu beef
burger for lunch today.
It's the culinary equi-
valent of a Porsche—at

least that's what the
surfeit of visual & aural
stimuli surrounding it
has to say. Sure have

to go through a bunch
of shit to get it—appear
on talkshows spruiking
the product, do tricks on

a skateboard. Have be-
come captive to unneeded
needs. They exist. They
happen. Ah, technology.

My dog sings along
with the music. It's the
melodic equivalent of
a street fair in Iceland.

Mark Higham

Killing Caiaphas

He ran with his hands over his eyes. He just kept running, not knowing where his feet were taking him, wondering what would happen when his strength finally failed him and his hands moved away from his face and he would be exposed to the Great Ruin. He had just been deglassed a short while ago, and now an outcast, a heretic, he could only leave his family, his town, his people, and run headlong into some impossible void that held such a terrifying mystery that no one still living even knew what lay in store for one such as him. The last deglassing was more that two hundred years ago, and there were only rumors about what the experience must have been like for the person so disabled. Forebearer just ran, hoping that something, anything would happen to him that would prove a moment of salvation and he would be hidden from the horror of the Great Ruin. Without his reality machine, the nonbeing that surely would fill his senses would be a living hell. And then something unexpected happened. He fell into water. As he began to sink, the memory of the events leading up to the deglassing seemed more present in his mind as the cold of the water penetrated him with a chilly grasp. The water was his reality now, and he realized that he would have to try and swim or else die, and so he thrashed his arms around until he surfaced, so preoccupied with his motions that he didn't even notice that his hands were now no longer covering his eyes and he was just being blinded by the sun above him as his eyes could not adjust to light very well, and he

wondered if this was the Great Ruin, but somehow he didn't think so. He just kept thrashing at the water, propelling himself forward, now blinded by light, and fearful of ever finding land before his feeble attempt at swimming ended with the sinking into the murky depths of the water below. But he felt emboldened by the idea that perhaps the water meant escape, from what he wasn't sure but it was comforting to keep fleeing and realize that his eyes were seeing *naked* reality for the first time in his life. The yellow skinsuit that he wore made coursing through the water easier and he began to think of redemption, and death, and whether he should just give up and let the water take him, or continue prompting his survival instinct toward greater levels of intensity. He chose the latter since the feel of the water, being both new and revivifying compel courage to continue on. As he swam, he kept replaying the deglassing ceremony in his mind.

The village elder, Inclose, kept prying and prying at the glasses that had covered Forebearer's real eyes for the whole of his life, and even in the midst of this horror, the thought of how his heresy was discovered played in his mind like a troupe of tumblers deftly dancing around in his consciousness. It all started with his poem.

The Raphaelites were known for being artists, but they usually preferred visual media. When Forebearer began writing poetry, his fate as an iconoclast in the clan, no, the whole world began to seem more assured. But he couldn't help himself. The compulsion to write had hold of him like a fist. The fact that the two clans of his civilization, the Raphaelites and the Vacuumists were the only peoples who would arbitrate the arts was a true problem of adjudicating quality. Even though his poem, when it was published, was reviewed positively, his peers immediately feared that it could be misconstrued. The poem itself was so simple on the face of it, but it broke a cardinal rule and that was the doubt it placed in the mind of the citizenry as to the reality of their already adjusted lives. It read:

Dust falls on the glass
Now a mirror

Dripping a two faced time
Leaving the clansman to realize
The dust was absent
The mirror did not exist
So there was nothing to fall on the
Mirror; not even a mirror to be fallen upon
And not even a world to support the profusions
Of dust and mirrors, for there was only the profound
Thought itself, the dissolution of time and being; there was
Nothing.

The Vacuumists, who held the reality machines covering their eyes as a scientific verification of reality, started the bickering between the two clans, and there didn't seem anything else to do but hold a conference on the merits of Forebearer's poem.

Inclose spoke first at the "conference," his glassed eyes whirring in their constant simulations.

"This poem that Forebearer has written could poison the minds of the citizenry in unimaginable ways," he said. "It is a form of seeing, for everyone knows that art alters perception. He seems to be talking about the Great Ruin, and we cannot have talk like this."

"But it is just a poem," Forebearer said in his own defense. "It is only natural that something of our collective unconscious should sneak into it. We are not machines just because we have the prismatics to keep us from the terrifying Sight."

"I agree with Inclose," Distant said. "The poem is heretical. It deserves to be burned in every publication it appears in. The only thing we have to do is decide what Forebearer's punishment should be."

"But this is absurd," Forebearer said. "Art should be immune from censure for it is only the representation of reality, not reality itself."

“Enough,” Inclose said. “You have broken the covenant of Myriad. Distant is right. All we have business for now is to decide your punishment.”

“Then this is truly a false proceeding,” Forebearer said. “You do not want dialogue since it is obvious you have already made up your minds. You are all narrow-minded imbeciles who can’t appreciate the subtleties of life. It is no wonder that the council is made up of Vacuumists. You do not tolerate anything beyond your narrow views.”

Forebearer realized he had made a deadly mistake, and he could tell by the look in Inclose’s face that he had just made his punishment more severe.

“I have decided his fate already in my mind,” Inclose said. “You are going to be deglassed.”

There was a general sigh of horror in the audience, and the panic in Forebearer was absolute. Someone in the audience stood up.

“But this practice has not been done for centuries. Surely you should soften your heart. No one deserves that punishment. The Great Ruin would possess his mind forever and Forebearer might not even survive.”

“Ever since the Great Ruin, the pushing of a false reality into our own, we have had to be on guard for every kind of potential incursion of this false world,” Distant said. “I concur with Inclose. The punishment might be severe, but given that the future of Forebearer’s writing career, we cannot take the chance of further heresies. The Myriad covenant is absolutely clear on this point. In several days, the deglassing will commence.”

“I would take great pleasure if the deglassing were to fall upon me,” Inclose said, and Forebearer shuddered at the frightening display of viciousness that was surrounding this sham of a court proceeding.

“Then I will just say,” Forebearer began, “that you all are too obtuse to realize the merits of art as the Raphaelites contend, and that in your desire to punish me, you are really punishing the Raphaelites. Your disgust of art has always been apparent and now your aversion is insane.”

“Take him away!” Inclose shouted.

“Yes, I will go now,” Forebearer said. “But yours is the greater crime and I will find someway, any way to keep writing, even in the limbo of the Great Ruin, and I will torment you with the written word for the rest of my life.”

“Folly!” Inclose shouted again. “Be quiet and be gone.”

Two guards came and led Forebearer away.

Now as Forebearer struggled with his arms and legs he found that he was tiring too quickly; the water was winning. But, even with his diminished sight, he thought he could see land just a little farther away. He resolved to reach it, and when he finally found the beach, he collapsed on the sand and became insensible.

Peter and Judas were reconnoitering the beach area when they found Forebearer in a heap on the sand. They looked at each other and just shrugged. They were intrigued by the yellow skinsuit that the strange human wore. It was not a garb they were used to, so they stared down at the stranger wondering where such a being could come from.

“What do you think?” Peter asked.

“The only thing I can think of is that he came from the leper colony on Coney Island.”

“Yeah, we really don’t know much about it given the stigma.”

“Perhaps we should get him to the car before the bloody Romans come across him,” Peter said. “There’s no telling what they would do to him.”

“I agree.”

Peter and Judas grabbed the body and dragged it to the road above the beach. They piled him into the Mercedes and Judas got behind the wheel.

“Do we dare take him to the safe house?” Peter asked.

“Based on the way he’s dressed, I don’t think he’s from one of the other rival groups. He’s certainly not an Essene.”

“Then let’s take the chance until we can figure out what this person is all about.”

They pulled onto Cerberus Avenue and headed for Claudius Street, where they would take the Augustus tunnel back into the city. As they drove on, Judas turned to Peter and said, “You know Jesus won’t let us question him in the usual way. Sometimes his compassion is confounding.”

“That’s his function as the Seventh Incarnation,” Peter said. “When we finally found out that his true destiny was to overthrow Rome, it was too late. Convincing Jesus himself that he wasn’t supposed to be so gentle has been nothing but an exercise in frustration.”

“Yes, in his First Incarnation he was so convinced that he should win the hearts and minds of the people in the sheer act of preaching as if that ever convinced anybody.”

“Well, Judas. He is the Godman, so we have to assume that the divine side of his personality is going to contain quirks. What do Gods know of humans?”

“Once we convinced him by his Fourth Incarnation that miracles only attract too much attention, he seemed to settle into his role as the messiah, but it has always been hard to get him to realize that he doesn’t have to suffer to accomplish his goal.”

“The irony is, he always does suffer because the Romans keep discovering his destiny. I wasn’t sure how until I found the manuscripts when we broke into the palace. Some ridiculous prophets have been predicting his Lordship and it always scared the Romans enough to seek him out every time he was reborn.”

“Well, the labyrinth will protect him, at least for now.”

Peter and Judas paid attention to the road now as they entered the tunnel until they heard a groan from the back seat where their hapless companion began to stir.

“He’s coming to,” Peter said.

“Say something to him to keep him calm,” Judas said.

Peter turned around in his seat and saw the man trying to lift his head. That’s when Peter saw the metal rings around his eyes. Peter stared at the stranger and wondered what the rings were for. But first he just wanted to know his name.

“You’re all right,” Peter said. “Do you know where you came from; do you know your name?”

“Where am I?” Forebearer said.

“You’re in the back seat of a car for one thing. You’re in New Rome for another thing.”

“You speak strangely,” Forebearer said. “I know nothing of this place you call New Rome. What is this vehicle we are in?”

“First answer my questions,” Peter said. “Tell me where you come from and tell me your name.”

“I come from Discourse,” Forebearer said, realizing with a start that he rarely spoke the name of his own city. It just seemed unnecessary since the borders of their world were limited to what the prismatic would allow them to see. “And my name is Forebearer.”

“Strange names indeed,” Peter said. “Has this been some kind of place that the Romans have allowed as a kind of haven or something?”

“Romans?” Forebearer said. “I know nothing of Romans.”

Forebearer began to wonder if this was what the Great Ruin was; a hallucination of an alternate world from his own, but where from his unconscious these strange people emanated he was helpless to explain.

“Do you come from the leper colony?” Peter probed further.

“I do not know of a leper colony or even what a leper colony might be. I can’t even tell if I am experiencing reality at all or whether the Great Ruin has taken possession of my senses.”

“The Great Ruin?” Peter said.

“You don’t know?” Forebearer said with real consternation.

Peter shook his head no.

“The Great Ruin is the imploding of reality into a formlessness that normal brain processing cannot accommodate. We need these prismatic to adjust our perceptions to keep from going mad.” His hands had gone reflexively to his eyes and then he realized that they were gone, the prismatic and the protection they had generated for the whole of his life, at least until now that he had to live without them and face this strange situation that he could no more verify as real as he could tell whether a human and a projection of one were now the same thing to his disabled condition.

Peter turned to Judas. “He’s full of stories that can hardly be believed. It’s like an alternate civilization has been on the borders of New Rome this whole time and nobody has even heard about it. He has these strange metal rings around his eyes that he says keep them from going mad from a thing called the Great Ruin. It all sounds so improbable, I don’t know what to make of it.”

Judas spoke then. “Do you wish to go back to where you came from?” he asked Forebearer.

“I cannot,” he said. “I have been ostracized. Maybe they think that I could live among them as a victim of the Great Ruin but I don’t want that. I want to be as far away from them as I can. But I have also become an insurgent. I want to keep publishing my writing until it finds their hands, and torment them with the truth about our situation for as long as I hold breath.”

“Sounds like a real vendetta,” Judas said. “We can always use insurgents in our cause. Would you like to join the Company of the Seven Saints?”

“I don’t know what you mean,” Forebearer said.

“If you want to be an insurgent, you can help us with our world, dominated as it is by the evil Romans. You see, there were four of us that Jesus recruited, not twelve like the good book says. And he didn’t choose us because we were fisherman but because we were immortals. We have been planning the overthrow of Rome for two thousand years. But they just kept getting stronger, and when God decided to send Jesus, he kept failing time and again, until now we have him in his Seventh Incarnation and have finally persuaded him of his military role. It took that long to convince a God that he really needs to fight, not love people into being good. The human nature is so blackened by evil...”

“Please, Judas,” Peter said, “no more philosophizing. I think our companion here has had enough shocks for today. We’ll take him to the safe house and let Jesus do his thing.”

They had exited the tunnel and now they drove on Xllth Avenue, which would take them directly to their destination. Then they heard a car coming up very fast behind them. As the car neared them, machine gun fire began to pelt the back of the Mercedes. The back windshield broke.

“Down, everyone!” Judas shouted. He gunned the engine and they began driving very fast as the car behind them closed in. Peter picked up a handgun and started firing out the window. Forebearer just clung to the backseat of the car wondering what he had gotten himself into.

“I think it’s the Essenes,” Peter said as he kept discharging rounds from his gun.

“I’ll turn up a side street and try to lose them,” Judas said.

They barreled forward until Judas swerved onto a narrow street that barely had room for one car to maneuver in. But it proved to be a deadly mistake. At the other end of the street, a car waited for them, and it was too late for Judas to react. The Mercedes collided with the SUV blocking the road, and two men, who hung out the windows, spit machine gun fire that hit Judas full in the chest. He had taken four rounds. Peter sprung into action and hopped out of the car, opening the back door, and pulling Forebearer out. “Follow me,” he shouted as the men shot at them and pieces of brick rained down around them. Peter pushed open a door and they ran into the building, where they searched for escape routes until they emerged onto a small street. “This way,” Peter called to Forebearer. They ran along an alleyway until they reached a building. “This is it,” Peter said. They entered the building by Peter putting his palm on a pad next to a door and it slid open, giving them passage. They were immediately confronted with a maze of stairs. Peter ran down them with Forebearer growing ever more confused about where they were. The experience of negotiating the stairs produced a vertigo that Forebearer couldn’t adjust to. They turned into other hallways with still more stairs until they finally reached what appeared to be a bottom. “In here,” Peter called. Jesus was awaiting them.

“We lost Judas,” Peter said. “The Essenes shot him.”

“He’ll be all right,” Jesus said. “All the commotion will bring the centurions and the Romans will get Judas. We’ll just have to get him out of the prison somehow.”

“It’s a good thing the other insurrectionists don’t know we’re immortal. They might change their tactics and then we’d have to change ours, and it would be a circle of destruction that would involve too many people and risk your exposure.”

“I still don’t know why you protect me like a butterfly in a chrysalis,” Jesus said. “But here. We have a visitor.”

Forebearer was looking at the machines in the room, things he would later learn were called computers, and that he was in a kind of command center where the Company of the Seven Saints plotted their various schemes.

“Please,” Jesus said. “Sit with me and let’s have a talk. I can tell by your dress and the metal rings around your eyes that you are from Discourse.”

“You know of this?” Peter asked, incredulous.

“We have information about them, yes. But there is much about them we don’t understand. They seem to labor under a belief that the world suffers from a flaw in its ability to produce stable realities. It was started in the twelfth century when the scientists of that time discovered a wormhole that would take them into a different dimension. They founded Discourse there, but the wormhole was actually a loop and they never knew they had never left our reality but were entrapped in an alternate state that was unstable. Ignorant of science, they mistakenly took the instability of the wormhole which they never really left as a diminution of reality when it was just the wormhole weakening. They could have come back any time, but they chose to stay and their culture became what our friend here now knows.”

Forebearer regarded Jesus. Jesus' carefully coifed hair and the suit that he wore produced a strange mixture of business-like acumen and sangfroid that seemed to make Jesus a living contradiction. But Forebearer didn't know whether to believe this strangely calm man or not. He didn't know of wormholes or twelfth century scientists. He was always told that Discourse had existed for thousands of years and the makers of the prismatics were wise men that had studied the technology of reality making just in case such a thing as the Great Ruin became a possibility. It never occurred to him that the wise men knew more than the stories' parabolic words.

"It may be hard for you to hear this, uh...?"

"Forebearer."

"Yes, Forebearer. But all the leaders have been keeping your society secret from the Romans by starting the leper colony myth. We thought that letting your civilization continue on its own course would be better than trying to integrate you into this world, which is a ruin of its own. It would probably be best if you stayed with us now since it will be safer for you with me.

"I'm sorry, sir," Forebearer said. "But I am consumed with vengeance for my people doing this to me. I can torment them with words as I am a poet and I want some way for my communications to reach them and disrupt their smug sense of themselves."

"There is no room for vitriol in our emotions," Jesus said. "You see, I am the one who was foretold would come, and I have come to deliver people from their sins, all of their negativity and clinging to falsehood. You see, I, like your people, believe that false realities should be obstructed and then eradicated. I intend this to be my last incarnation, and I intend to succeed. Here, put your hands in mine."

Jesus stretched out his hands and took Forebearer's hands in his. Immediately, a sense of calm descended on Forebearer and the sword of vengeance he felt in his heart instantly evaporated. A feeling of absolute joy possessed him.

Peter, who had been watching, instantly fell to his knees and bowed his head to the floor.

"They know I'm capable of this kind of healing," Jesus said to Forebearer, "but they are surprised every time I do it. In fact, given modern medicine, I usually heal people of their mental maladies more than physical ones anymore. Plus, they are so fearful for my safety that it's the rare occasion I get to heal anyone. Thank you, Forebearer, you have allowed me to exercise my spirituality and it is very fulfilling for me."

Forebearer just stared at his hands and felt the peace that had suddenly come into his heart. But just then, a sentry appeared in the room.

"Sorry to interrupt," he said, "but Judas has just come back. He's in bad shape."

Judas, who was being kept in a standing position by leaning on two sentries, walked in the room.

"They never saw it coming," Judas breathed out. "When they came into the car to make sure I was dead, I blew them all away. I think there were four of them."

"At least you weren't captured by the Romans," Peter said. "We were afraid we would have to plot a way to get you out of prison."

"Well, the bad news is that the Romans did follow me, and they're in the labyrinth now. Shall we go rescue them?"

"Of course," Jesus said. "Bring them here. I will spoil their allegiance to evil."

"Forget it," Peter said from where he knelt. "We can't take the chance of them becoming double agents. Let them wander until they die."

“Why do you have such a cold heart, Peter?” Jesus said.

“Modernism demands we think this way,” Peter said. “You have to understand the cruelty we have to be capable of to survive in this era.”

“You are my master in these affairs,” Jesus said, “being an immortal, and having seen many things I have not. But I insist you bring the Romans to me.”

“Jesus!” Peter cried.

“Let it be done,” Jesus said.

The sentries left the room. Judas weakly sat in a chair. He began to recover, as his wounds seemed to close together, punctuated by a slivered scar gradually fading.

“I do not understand this fighting,” Forebearer said.

“The evil empire of the Romans needs to be overthrown,” Peter said. “You will understand in time.”

The sentries entered the room holding two Roman centurions at gunpoint. Jesus looked at the Romans with a chilling gaze.

“You must give up your allegiance to evil,” Jesus said to them.

“Please don’t kill us,” one of them said. “We have information that could help you.”

Peter shot Jesus a look, and Jesus nodded his head. Peter arose from his kneeling position and walked over to the two Romans.

“Out with it,” he said.

“It’s Caiaphas,” the Roman said.

“That collaborator,” Peter spit out.

“He has devised a perfect assassination plot of Jesus.”

“What is it?”

“He has turned your sentries against you.”

“Impossible,” Peter said.

Just then the sentry who had been holding the gun on the Roman pointed it at Jesus and opened fire as the Roman grinned. Judas had been moving all the time they were talking, though and had been standing next to Jesus when the gun went off. In one motion he had pushed Jesus out of the way and then rolled over the table picking up a machine gun and fired, cutting down the two sentries, but the Romans had dived on the floor and fired at Judas, since their guns were never removed. But Peter picked up a fork that Jesus had been using to eat with and flung it at one of the Romans, burying it into his eye. Judas took care of the other Roman.

Peter kicked the bodies one by one to make sure they were dead. Judas looked relieved until they realized that Jesus had taken a hit. The wound in his chest was bleeding out very fast.

“It’s mortal,” Judas said. “Looks like we’ve lost the Seventh Incarnation.”

“Damn that Caiaphas,” Peter said rushing to the aid of his dying master.

“Do not worry,” Jesus said, coughing up blood. “I will see you in my next incarnation. The Romans will not win.”

“You say that every time you come back,” Peter said, tears filling his eyes. “Go well into the afterlife,” he said. And then Jesus died.

Forebearer spent the next several weeks in the Company of the Seven Saints, making forays into the outside world of the labyrinth and noticing the huge buildings and strange vehicles called “cars.” Eventually, Peter, John, and Paul decided that they must destroy the labyrinth since their hiding place would certainly be discovered. It was at this

time too that Peter had a complete mental breakdown. Judas even had him on suicide watch in their new apartment. Peter was in such anguish that it made Forebearer very anxious.

“Don’t worry about Peter,” Judas said to him once. “He’ll be all right. It was just that we had such high hopes for this incarnation, and believe me, we are all a little anxious about what will happen next. The Essenes aren’t as active against either us or the Romans, and now with Jesus out of the picture, the world seems to have undergone a second fall.”

“A second fall?”

“Yes, that’s right. The first fall happened after Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden and we are taking that imagery to describe what’s going on now. Seven is a holy number. Part of Peter’s distress can be chalked up to doubt creeping in; like maybe it was never Jesus’ task but ours to change the world.”

“Let me see him,” Forebearer said.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea right now.”

“Please.”

“All right,” Judas said. He led Forebearer into the room where Peter lay writhing on a bed.

“Come to me,” Peter rasped at Forebearer.

Forebearer went to Peter’s side and took his hand.

“It’s been said that Jesus didn’t die on the Roman cross,” Peter said, “but died of a broken heart. My heart is broken now.”

“What will you do now that Jesus is gone?”

“The Romans have made us terrorists. We will have to bring about the fall of Rome on our own. We can no longer wait for the Incarnation to do it for us.”

“So you will live and not take your own life?” Forebearer asked.

“Yes, my heart is broken and there is a real risk that I might expire. Judas has a defibulator on hand just in case my heart fails me. I don’t know if it’s such a good idea for you to stay with us now. Things will be getting very unsafe.”

“I have a plan to kill Caiaphas,” Forebearer said.

“Vengeance is never good,” Peter whispered, his body weakening.

“I no longer feel vengeance for my people, but I wish to revenge Jesus. He is the one who took the sword out of my hand and somehow I feel clear about this assassination I propose as a rational act, not one of vengeance. Jesus made me believe in the possibility of a good life and I wish that for your people now.”

“Don’t be a fool,” Peter said. “It would be a suicide mission.”

“Now that I don’t have the prismatic, I feel like I see reality in the way it was meant to be viewed. I have no wish to take my own life either, but I feel a sense of duty and purpose about this. You must understand that I must do this.”

“Perhaps that is the meaning of your being here. Perhaps God brought you to us for some reason even though I don’t think that this plan to kill Caiaphas would be it.”

“Just hear me out.”

Forebearer left Peter’s room with his convictions intact, and with Peter’s assent in his mind. He told Judas, Paul, and John about his plan. They were taken aback that their new found friend could possibly have thought of this, but they, like Peter, felt that they couldn’t miss the chance to really get Caiaphas, something that would make their new found predicament easier, certainly. So they complied with Forebearer’s instructions as he laid them out. Forebearer took the parchment they supplied him and used an ancient concoction of ink that had been taught him

by his grandfather, something that was used to destroy missives that could fall into the wrong hands. Forebearer finished his preparations and rolled the parchment, which he finished with a wax seal. Meanwhile, Peter was strengthening, and Judas and he spent many hours in conversation about what their plans should be. Sometimes the discussions got very heated as they disagreed on some of the methods they should employ, but they both agreed to wait until Forebearer had completed his mission, something he seemed so intent on doing. Sometimes Judas just shook his head at the improbable plan that Forebearer had fashioned, but then Forebearer seemed so confident of success, that they just looked for ways to get him out of Caiaphas' room without any solutions presenting themselves. When the time came to let Forebearer go, Judas kissed Forebearer on the cheek and whispered into his ear, "the Judas kiss. It will be for good luck, not for ill as the good book has portrayed it." Forebearer didn't know what he meant but just walked out the apartment door and walked in the direction of Vth Street, the place where Caiaphas' offices were, straightening his new clothes.

As Forebearer walked, he suddenly found himself confronted by two men wearing robes, hoods hiding their faces. One of them took his arm to Forebearer's alarm.

"It is I, Inclose," the hooded man said.

"And I, Distant," the other man said.

"How did you find me?" Forebearer asked.

"Something that we don't talk about very often," Distant said. "The prismatics, since they are attached to a chip in the perceptual areas of the brain, give us a kind of paranormal sense; an ability to read minds. I can tell from yours right now that you are on your way to do something particularly awful. I suggest that it is not worth your life as you seem to be ruminating on."

"What do you know of it? Besides, how do you know about New Rome?"

“We have always known of it. But we thought it best to hide our knowledge from the people. You see, you were only the first cog in a machine that has been building in the people’s mind for a long time and that is the thought that our existence in Discourse is running its course that bad things are in store for us. We had to make such an example of you for social control. We always intended to reglass you but you just ran off and we feared you had drowned.”

“You must not stay me from my task,” Forebearer said. “I am resolved.”

“I can see that,” Inclose said. “I appeal to your better nature not to proceed.”

“It may change this world.”

“But it is not our world,” Inclose said. “Come back with us, let us reglass you, and we can let you write your poetry. We won’t stand in the way of that anymore. I must confess that we probably made a horrible mistake by making your punishment so severe.”

“Let me go,” Forebearer said. “Surely you must see in my mind that I will not be deterred.”

“Yes,” Distant said. “But let us help you.”

“I don’t see how you can.”

“You will see,” Inclose said. And he turned from facing Forebearer and the two men moved passed him.

Forebearer thought about the conversation with Inclose and Distant as he walked quickly in the direction of Caiaphas’ offices, clutching the document in his hand. So they felt remorse. All the better. But his thoughts needed to be focused on his task, so he walked and when he arrived at his destination, he walked in the building and confronted the doorman.

“Do you have business here?” The doorman asked him.

“Tell Caiaphas that I have something he would very much like to take a look at, something about the eighth incarnation,” Forebearer said.

The man picked up a phone, and after a short conversation, put the receiver down and told Forebearer to go to the fourteenth floor. After Forebearer exited the elevator he checked to make sure his sunglasses were in place and then knocked on the suite door. A big man, obviously a bodyguard, opened it and motioned for Forebearer to come in. The big man escorted Forebearer passed another guard into the office and pointed to the door. “He is expecting you,” the man said, and as Forebearer walked into the office, he was careful to push in the lock as the door closed behind him.

“The doorman said you have a document about the Eighth Incarnation,” Caiaphas said, his back to Forebearer.

“Yes,” Forebearer said. “Your prophets have been successful at finding every one of his previous incarnations but this eighth one will be beyond their abilities and it may finally prove your undoing.”

“A man who peddles information,” Caiaphas said, “always wants something in return. I doubt you are doing this out of some kind of altruism for the empire.”

“Just let us drink together, and I will show you what I have for you.”

Caiaphas laughed. “Judas sold out Jesus for a couple of pieces of silver and you would sell him out for a drink.”

“It is my honor to be in your presence, sir,” Forebearer said beginning to grow bolder by the minute.

“Vodka?” Caiaphas asked. Forebearer nodded.

Caiaphas reached into his liquor cabinet and produced the alcohol, which he placed on his desk and then fished for a couple of glasses.

“Please fill it full,” Forebearer said. Caiaphas complied and filled the glass generously.

“Look around you and you can see the strength of the Roman Empire embodied here,” Caiaphas said.

“You see this sword?” He said. Forebearer nodded. “Its superior technology at the time allowed the Romans to conquer the known world. Who would have guessed the shape of a piece of steel could have such consequences.”

“Is that why you collaborate?” Forebearer asked. “Because you admire them?”

“I admire power, young man,” he said. “Now, to our business. Let me see this document.”

Forebearer handed Caiaphas the document and took a long draught from his glass. Forebearer watched as Caiaphas broke the seal and began to unravel the parchment, which then instantly burst into flames. Forebearer sprayed the alcohol in his mouth onto Caiaphas and he screamed as his body suddenly became engulfed in flames. Forebearer calmly walked over to the desk and poured the bottle of vodka on Caiaphas making the flames even deadlier. There was pounding at the door and Forebearer waited for the bodyguards to break through, thus sealing his fate. Caiaphas died quickly from the immolation and as the guards broke through the door, they, for some reason, slumped to the floor. Two hooded men stood in the room then, and secreted their daggers back into their robes. It was Inclose and Distant.

“Hurry,” Inclose said. “Like I said we would find a way to help you. Now we must leave quickly.”

Forebearer looked behind him at the burning remains of Caiaphas and felt satisfaction that his assassination attempt had succeeded. The ink had been specially treated so that anyone who unraveled the scroll would find himself holding fire, just as Forebearer’s grandfather had showed him. With a little alcohol and the assassination was complete. Now he followed Inclose and Distant out of the building, where they got to the sidewalk and ran together. When they had sufficiently distanced themselves from the building, Inclose turned to Forebearer and said, “Now will you agree to come back to Discourse with us?”

Forebearer nodded.

Now Forebearer was an old man, volumes of his poetry books sitting in rows on the bookshelves. He had decided to write Peter a letter, and his prismatics clicked and whirred as he put pen to paper.

You are still young and now I am old, waiting for death, now assured of immortality as the survival of death has been beautifully portrayed for me through the presence of the Incarnations. I hope that as this letter has found you that you have ceased being so militant as the true way is peace, something you somewhat reviled in the Incarnations, but this is the real salvation, the beauty of truth lying in its gentle persuasion of the soul's innermost goodness. The way of the Incarnation is the way of the simple realization that hatred is often reversed like a river running a double course, populating the water with lilies the reverence of touch can only dream of accomplishing. For all of life is a dream, Peter. The prismatics that cover my eyes are only simulations of that which you have without thought for their reality and wholeness. I adjure you to dispel the myth of indignation before a false reality invades you with its awful pretension to power, but the truth of life is that we make reality in the form of our innermost desires which we cannot stop from surfacing except some overmastering principle imprisons us with its fanciful dream...

Just then, Forebearer's eight-year-old grandson, Ingold, walked into his study.

"Grandfather," he said. "I've been having this terrible time lately."

"What is it?" Forebearer asked.

"I had a thought that gave birth to another thought and then I saw a dazzling array of other lives. Have you ever heard of New Rome?"

Forebearer dropped his pen in something like horror or pleasure he wasn't sure. Who would have guessed that the Eighth Incarnation would be born in Discourse and within his family lineage?

"I will take you there," Forebearer said. "There is someone you need to meet."

Mark DeCarteret

Page Play

Return to the spot you put your double to sleep,
then try to draw them with their hyphenated eyes, pouts.
But do not read into their spasms. Or any area radiant, rose-lit.
And please don't peel off their most unfashionable
wardrobe and make them feel silly, worse, lifelike,
follow some urge to tug phantoms from out
where their fingers have stiffened past fists,
their toes, tired of tallying your ever-lateness.
It's all well beyond righting. This moment is not a gift.
In fact. you're figuring in it less with each selling point.
Yes, you may listen to their grunts, hard-won stillness.
And rouse them enough so they say something funny.
Though not enough where they stop, their mouths
summing up the soured prayer of their breath.
Just be sure to try topping their output. Not boring any of us.
There's no need to see if they remember the song
you sang seeing to everything in their sunless nursery.
It might only rub them more deadpan, indifferent.
Best you bury the remote, seal them off behind memory.
More new leases not to burn but to sign on more fire.

My Medium and I

One rap on the coffee table
and I'm sparring with the earth again,

what had started with ape-swings
now overpowered by the ablest of bleats,

two, and there are more details of the lake
we had come to call "Side Note" or "On Said Desire"

depending on the slant of the editor's pen
or the part in the cameraman's hair.

I've never seen myself as Russian.
Or even myself with any surety.

But, the "X"s on this bottle have been scored so deep
not even the ascetic next door is safe from its posturing.

My interior's off-limits, still in its flinty, uninterpretable stage.
Here, my late translator has it as "The Din in the Mind

as Unintended for Others." There, "The Gate."
(Note to reader: You've been duped by one's far more reputable.)

I'm not so much haunted by the golden calf's
stare as its unfounded criticism of us, tics.

And I'm still sick from reading its epic.
The clips of our love-making. The kissing alone.

Was it just another lifetime of nothing to be footnoted?
Thousands more like it to be opted by execs, texted endlessly?

But O how the sparrow arranging a nest on my new brain
luckily bears a striking resemblance to my old skull.

Up above it a cluster of stars reputed to be dead.
And a space station plundered of all of its log-keeping.

From now until the bottom of the page--SAVE ON MANDELSTAM!
This tomb-silence as seen on TV. By all but the damned.

In Defense of Thomas Bernhard's Soul

1453 could've been the day before yesterday
and let's say oblivion the day before that.
With that in mind, the wind sure feels pleasant.

I hold off swallowing the olive because
it strikes me as the right thing to do,
almost Christ-like in the right light.

What risk is there filing one's life under sleep?
Or to sleep like the pulse-less, kissed-off?
The sleeper is at home in heaven and hell.

Lead me to those most pliable of memories
or if you wish just the moon—the shined-up
side one can only see when standing here.

The best of lines come like a door-stopper.
When lashed to no one god's mast the seas
are not so much open as unfazed, bluest-blue.

I was lent ten times this in your happiness.
I fattened-up, grew ever-mightier, on happiness.
Nothing looks dafter on the page than happiness.

Ever since I put out the new mat I've been
kept up all night by its ceaseless pleading.
May it be washed of my sins and the sins of my friends.

Please, tell me I haven't lost you. Are we not
so much made, wrestling free from damnation,
as forever dreamt-up, taking one for the team?

A creak in the board swears if I tripped it would not let me fall.
All well and good but will I have the words for it?
No, the best of lines come like the prettiest of swords.

Hide Out

Remodeled even more (it only lacked
for a collar or cufflinks) and now edit-mad--
not an ode (see: sun killed-off, what hasn't once
been like that damn ocean) never mind sonnet—

what was merely trying to remind me (o rolodexed
whim!) some love I'd volunteered lab samples, ballistic info,
(and at least tide me over till the fall and its half-ton of leaf)
but ended in a kind of war, our shadows cringing

from our bodies, these frail figures marked down
by the grocer's gun, his exceptionally fixed prices
(our lips raw from the lies and slipped *others*)--
little of our past not strapped in for this air-ride,

left undocumented or decoded by those plastic rings
we won tossing (or shooting up) hot diamonds
into that marriage of darkness to light (nope, it's a type
of smudged mishap ever-at-odds with this white).

What to Take from Founders Cottage

There is the light in which the gull looks less
the white of Beckett's book about being at best,
than the black of the turned cabbage, potato
in which I'm killing time like this mightiest of lakes,
calling out to the cat's toys, the talc-colored sky—
"This cast on my leg can't come off quick enough!"
and looks less the tub-caulking white of the showroom
then the black of the undermined tooth of my childhood,
(so while sleeping tonight I won't age, let my lungs pal with language)
and much less the white of some cooled star still looking ticked off
or the tag I've torn out of my lab coat because it itched
than the black that butts up against where all space is stubbed out—
a hue that the locals dubbed "Our Lord God's Guile" or "Butcher Shop"
and less the white of both the fun-rationed, underfed
than the black of the bomb-deafened mob or the bargain store strobe
(so while sleeping tonight I'll age double but sing in the bloodiest of notes)
because the voice of the gull is both the voice of the cove
and the voice of the tales it's slugged down across centuries—
one's face given to fits, another stiffening to the wind, a catastrophe,
and much less the white of the spittle sprayed during one's dawning
than the black of the air raid, the tipped car, or train wreck
(for what lasts of the portrait on the wall is the wall
when all it stands for has been shoved through as law)
and less the white of my six year old scalp the comb tells on
than the black of the grab bag, its long-ago swallowing up
(and why I'm given to fits, stiffening into the wind, a catastrophe
I haven't a clue, as if it's like luck, a dead uncle I've summoned by knuckle
from that world we'll row out to in mist or be led to by hand,
the one we've known only at-wonder, when rocked or held close
or when ad-libbing in front of a class or stiff-arming a wand
though the bubble's still clung on, rainbowed and a-wobble,
or when knelt at a drawer faring worse than its ghost-written will
and we gleaned the gull's laughter, lugged it up like a salty skinned angel
to the shore, its song Theremin-stretched to sci-fi-ish affect--
a letting-go, less arguably gray, than a graying, more telling than light).

Mariah Krochmal

Harvest

Autumn is standing at the sink looking out the kitchen window. There's a mountain of dirty dishes but no dish soap. Autumn doesn't have a face; Autumn doesn't know how to talk.

Margaret gets off the bus at 2:45 each afternoon. It's a Tuesday but Margaret doesn't like Tuesdays, or to say the word Tuesday, because Tuesday was her stillborn baby sister's name. Tuesday is lying down in the rose garden. There's an abundance of new rose buds but not enough sun to make them blossom. January comes over to Margaret's house on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to do homework and tend to the garden. January always has cold hands, January can't sit still. It's about 3 o'clock now, and January wasn't on the bus. Margaret questions this but doesn't have time to think much of it. She calls Matthew. Matthew is her next-door neighbor. Matthew doesn't answer the phone. Discouraged and confused by this Margaret goes down into her basement and cries. Upstairs she hears pacing back and forth, nervous pacing. She hears a man talking loudly in a language that she doesn't understand. She wonders if maybe it's Matthew speaking Biblical verses again, but quickly realizes that the voice is too deep, and no one can get in through the front door. Margaret doesn't have a front door. Margaret hears footsteps coming down the stairs. It's about quarter of four now so it's getting darker outside and there are no lights in Margaret's basement. It's Summer, Margaret's friend from school. "Hi Margaret" she says in a soft tone of voice. "Did you miss me? Sorry I haven't come around much, I've been much too busy. What are you doing down here all alone? Where's Jan?" "January wasn't on the bus today" Margaret replies. "I don't know what happened to her. Maybe she's sick. I tried calling Matthew but he didn't answer. Who is upstairs? I heard a man's voice but I didn't

recognize the tone.” “I didn’t see anyone when I came in, sorry.” Margaret is royally confused, but not concerned. People come in and out all the time, no one ever gets hurt. Summer sits down on Margaret’s floor. “Got anything to eat? I’m starved, I haven’t eaten all day.” “We can check the garden if it’s not too dark out yet.” Margaret and Summer climb out through the small basement window. It’s fairly dark outside, but not too dark. Margaret and Summer pick tomatoes and Carrots. Summer steps on a broken mason jar, “OUCH, goddamn it!” she says. “Don’t talk like that, Summer.” Matthew says. “Margaret, why haven’t you called? I’ve been at home all day, we haven’t hung out in a while.” “I called you at around 2:45 Matthew, you didn’t answer.” “Where’s January?” he asks, completely disregarding Margaret’s last statement. “She’s with Tuesday.” The man from upstairs says. “She’s in the rose garden, we got her back.” He says, Autumn is standing beside him. She has four dirty dinner plates in her hands, both in which are cracked like old mistreated leather and starting to bleed. “Margaret we’re all hungry. Why haven’t you called any of us? We haven’t hung out in a while.” He says. Everyone sits down, except for Margaret. She is crying. “What do you mean got her back? She asks. What did January ever do to you? I don’t know who you are, or who she is, or why you’re here.” “Sure you do, dear.” The man says. His voice is soft and harmless. “We got her back.” He repeats again. “WHAT do you mean got her back? Why won’t you answer any of my questions, who are you, and why are you here?” “January was taking too much of you.” He says. “You don’t call anymore. And you know who I am Margaret.” “Who is she then? What’s wrong with her, I can’t see her face, she doesn’t speak” “Margaret” everyone says, weirdly synchronized. “You know who she is, you know who we all are. Jan got what she deserved.” “Matthew? Summer? Since when are you on their side? What did you do to January, tell me now” Margaret is crying even more. Autumn accidentally breaks a plate and it cuts her. She’s bleeding even more now. She signs with her hands and tells Margaret to join them. “Margaret sit down, spend time with us. We’re all starving, we rarely hangout anymore.”

Mariah Hamang

nonfiction

The crosswalk is blocks away, I could dash through the void before the halt of the blinking, but this is the city—the citizen. I am not a living spirit in a body of carnal pulp, this is no playground of vegetation and energy coursing within us, leaves, you, feet, seeds of all kinds. Here there are jaundiced splotches of skin-tinting lotions, ambulances, old men with back braces, I cannot just let the humming mumble of your melody diffuse throughout my body precipitating fingertips and eye muscles and all other fleshy edges, the husk, the husky invisible organs pulsing as one pulse, as many pulses. This is quantum theory, this is inside you, scraping against all the right and left buttons, performing knowledge, transformation inside you, pearls, you are filling each other up with pearls. Does shoveling destroy or create? Where was your orgasm? Two or more spaces hurled at you, landing more or less underneath the wheezy television, rather unsettled. Your suggestion is to turn around and bewilder the mosquitoes and now we are running, your laugh is that deep, smirking satisfaction from your throat or your nose or your sternum as I hurdle horizontal tree trunks and you, the Adam to my mitochondrial Eve, primal substance despite the disillusioned nature trail before the distinctions between fen and bog. Something is to be said about pedestrian crossings.

Simple

I am the schoolteacher who seduced her thirteen-year-old student. He pursued me like a man, and our marriage is happy.

I put roofies in the cornbread, and steroids
in the meth, for good measure, we tied double knots
around our fates (rent) and sprinkled balloons all over this town.

I am that man on a prayer mat, bowing toward Mecca between classes,
savoring the indications of habits
that haunt these hallways, a junkie's a junkie.

I am the daughter of an impulse in my father to concede
to an impulse in my mother, a renewal
of the bittersweet aching of the generations
to breed more mouths and hands and eyes
to stand in more assembly lines that package our snow globes.

I will die kneeling in a nursery home, praying to some promised utopia,
puttering down to a payoff that was always this escape.

I think if more pilgrims had smoked peace pipes
and found their spirit animals, I would feel more american.

I will tell you you can't talk to me like that
as I avert your eyes and steal the zip-loc bags, telling you
you should see what middle school is all about.

I pick up the bread crumbs scattered in a straight path,
cup them in my hands, and feed them
to the birds, to the resemblance.

preserve

your fingers were steady,
you skin tone gave nothing away
as you said “by then I will be almost 40”
 knowing it would be past forty.
through the windows of the breakfast dive
we started counting the compromises
in somersaults, in unlikely quarters
 of these counties.
the confines of a territory.
did you feel you lost the chance
 when you said no?
even the sugar substitutes
have substitutes, the bended gaze.
mimicry, tokens of insecurities.
dismayed that all the revelations were laid before you
in a Blimpie at 3 AM, in a gas station
conversation, in your seventh cup
of coffee, or vodka, depending on the age.
and now it makes no sense
to say you want mothers, to be with a person
 who has designed a life
 groping for impossibility.
we have to get out of here,
we have to climb these mountains of neuroses,
 afraid to sleep because
we might miss an opportunity,
we might really have to slacken the defenses,
tighten the hemispheres. they are always
 so discontent, so unbelievably noisy.

timeline

together, our bookshelves could bristle.
I have imagined it like i imagine
myself as someone else like myself,
but older. Someone done
with the things I am doing.
It is probably a woman because
I am a woman and I think
womanly things. Someone has to.
I am not sure what this plastic wrap is doing
around here. These borderlines are becoming
more fun to poke at, more difficult
to see. I am confused. you laugh
when I use words like “obfuscating.” I swear
this feels like a phase of life.

I recall something once said
about a duck quacking and looking oddly
like a duck. ah, well. discouragement.
Not in your eyes, but rather in the corners
of this room—
not in its conversations,
in its red veil,
but out there. All that stuff
out there. And for now,
it is right here. But I am telling you,
getting sleep will be delightful.

flame

You can shave off the scenery. You find which luck you want to press, and you don't press it. Not yet. There are too many outlets. We must speak more kindly to the machines. We question the resistance of scar tissue to skin cancer, how the winter will affect our sun worship. Devouring your surroundings, you conclude they are stale, like any hometown. The meandering desire to leave did not account for the disappearance of unscaled mountaintops; it stopped or started at the palm trees, depending on your direction. straps and pigeonholes. indeterminable altitudes. relentless riverbeds. And all the while, the hazard areas were charted neatly in the pamphlets you never use, the mileage made indefatigable assumptions we didn't bother to disprove, just disregard.

tuft

We crowd around the infrastructure.

Our wrists break as we wait

for something to do with our palms.

There are clouds between us now, and water towers,
and their shadows.

snap, fizz, snap, fizz.

We have no neighbors, nor roads that lead to Rome.

Here my dreams are louder—

they wake me up at 3 am,

picking out the Proto-Indo-European as if

I were to get anything more vibrant out of it.

Our discourse is far more beautiful in Sanskrit,
although we understand next to nothing.

Still. We do not define work with physics.

We leave scraps of it on tables, trading utensils.

Are we to take restlessness seriously?

Have we nothing else to do but wither

and wring out the frustration?

It is quiet when it hits the others.

Even though we can't bear the impatience,

time will pass. with or without dignity.

In airports, in forgeries,

in passive aggression,

I cannot wait around anywhere forever.

grown up

oh, it is the hallway.
the tunnel of potential
in little capsules,
flesh and steel spirits,
 floating in what is not said
 under
currants are delicious.

 the eye lock,
or not. there is always
 diversion. talk about the weather.
 fine print. this floor
is difficult.

 a song says “what
will you give,” and i think.
it is better not to answer
when it was not a question.

you send your isolation
like a vibe. the airs between
our words reach at each other

invisibly. this chair is broken.
these are details. new ones,
more familiar every weekend.
almost nothing, then nothing.
we had almost progressed
to miscommunication.

heads heavy and lines
sufficiently blurred,
we remain artificial.

BlazeVOX 12

Fall 2012

Marcia Arrieta

to find

wise birds often caught in intricate lines

fire dragon rain intrepid light details introspection warrior identity
broken mosaic time theory coherent intangible relativity: dandelions
stones trees parallel worlds postcards analyze — // indiscriminate
velocity the past present

if you tell me your story

writing/leucadia beach house

*

“Like poetry, mathematical & formulaic equations modify
the meaning of sensory elements by utilizing systems of subtext”

The Boundary of Blur
--Nick Piombino

*

memory—10:15-11:15

morning light in the classroom
the compass is in the desk

*

at the beach

a feather is found in a book
next to the poem “Man Carrying Thing” by Wallace Stevens

*

at home in the laundry room

a blue painting collage
with the word *RESISTANCE* awaits completion

*

the clouds assume the forms of birds & ships

the travelers

we erase the memories or the memories erase us. we become the hamster, the turtle,
the goldfish, the magician's assistant, or the blue heron. we assume the lives of others—
doctors, teachers, lawyers, poets, musicians. we invent characters or become characters.
characters with light sabers, dragons, or trees. we are all enigmas. seldom we speak.

fiction the life between oaks—clear spaces of sky.

I wander in a theory of the inanimate pertinent to aspiration.

amongst things—I collect leaves. I collect sand. I contribute to the path. any path really—street mountain forest. I consider destiny. paradoxically I choose not to remember the date or the time. there is darkness. there is light. on a wood wall I encounter lines of poetry by shelley. there is always the sound of the river in the distance. I sweep. I dream. I collect old clocks & compasses. I address envelopes. the stamp is a polar bear. I invent the world of rearrange. it is not numbered.

yawn

I slept in a field of cars

the wind battered my head

I opened my eyes

& waited

for a subtle message from the sun

as I listened to leaves

drift across sky

wire & string

the mind as memory
corridor
thoughts
undertaken
as they are
in dreams
or the abstract
footnotes
of the avant-garde
fragments
in chance
vertical/horizontal
outlined, numbered
recalling circumstances
topography
peripheral vision
echo memory echo time

intuitive

statistics &
language

breadcrumbs
in
the
continuum

simplify the complex

between worlds

acknowledge
tangible

Liz Mariani

Tailed Calibration

In a virtual graveyard
en route through
recollection.
attempted abductions of self.
removing. returning. renaming.
stomping a larger Google footprint
edging the elephant cage.

Decomposing grays.
whole wholesome. more evermore.
Give way to each verbless process.
all abscesses will call.
all canvases will leech for sound.

Game River

Satisfied with the landscape. The vista.
The punting panorama.
Glancing downwardly.
The ground mocks.
Surprising canyons.
Rivers of fecal matter flowing where milk could run.
I lift my mind when memories pour over.
I lift my mind to scoop singing carousels.
I lift my mind to fill, once more,
with a child's radioactive, unsaid, uninsured pain.

Isolated, I lift my mind.
I dig for the golden hypothalamus.
Dig with a sterling mellon spoon. I give it CPR.
Playfully, exhausted by repetition.
I give it a drop kick feasted by thousands.
The crowd roars.
Extras are called in to fill the gaps.
Lush with support, it becomes food. Food for holidays.
Food for tradition. Food for hospital. Food for death.
When it is no longer edible,
nearly never digestible, it is recovered
by a voyeur's archeologist who declares it,
all of it, untouchable.

Standard Kitchen Heat

Amniotic sacs convince hard coils to wake at dawn.
Lemons drip. dot.

We make it through layers of
skintight girlhood washed from
sweetened voices.

The lemon dripper
rains upon stippling portraits
retorting.

All clockwise time lapses into a sorted spinning
running tandem turning night terrors like dough.

Eventually, sharing impersonal exhaustion,
white noise, heat lights diminish.

Absent. Lifted from skin.
The current begins.

Orange Season

What about your fantastical cemeteries perched upon a weaning genmaicha
where dogsleds slice pulp?
Tell me. Will you know you are in the right place?

To check, scour each threaded contralto. Listen for mammal cries.
Stake for other creatures, other movements. Notice those able to walk.

Please remember to amputate extracts of static.
Charter the pigeon-toed.
Census the indexed, the eager, those muted into bedded mustard.
Challenge this jargon-thick bibliography.
It has, after all, been said.

Whereas plastics calm phosphates, arched shape-magnets fall weak.
Machines call, crawl. Crazed.
Ring. Ring. Ring.

Desperate, we fall for refrigeration.
White bleeds a still, fermented exotic.
Brief theists fail to show.

Citrus groves fail to deliver palettes of absolutism, festering a problem.
A problem. A candied purse.
Dollar coins harm pious anklets. Clanking.
A daughter claims weight. Leans.
She reaches gingerly for the possibility of an urban farming orb.

We walk, walk, walk.
Take Nothing You Do Not Find stands neon. Stands slogan.

You continue to ask if age can swell a fervent sucrose for benefactors,
the benefactors of hip injuries in tune.

Documents arrive. They ask.
Who exits nude, ceaseless, forgetting cause or hunger?
Who buries for the roots?
Who gives to the citrus what acid will not kill?

Jeweled geckos arrive entranced, entrenched, intricately in tow.

This time, we answer with story in order to enthusiastically put you down.

Lee Guyette

Anomie

Stretch

Like mascara

On a spider's legs

Length, volume

Like a coal eyed Italian

Crouch

On the balls of your feet

And spring

Across the court

Human tennis ball

Human karaoke meter

Human

Are you sure

That's what you are

Not a mass of tendons and nerves

Straining

To beat a time

First to live

Last to die

Rockabilly

I like the anchor tattoo
Beneath your ear
Tell me
Would you anchor me
Or let me float
Over the both of us
Like a helium balloon
Set free
To strangle a sea turtle
And grant children's wishes
Simultaneously killing one life
And giving wind to another
Every movement
Pushes another
Just a little bit closer
To what could be the end
So every motion
Must justify its worth
What justified your anchor
Was it a boy
In your life
Who walked out to smoke
Right as you reached for him
Anchor me
And I won't float away

Cotton Ears

You are

Like a bullet in my teeth

Chipping off enamel

Sanding down my little ridges

You are

A queen sized sheet

On my double bed

Strangling my late night dreams

You are

Everything they warned me

You would be

But listening to the facts

Cold, merciless

Is like listening to the scratching of your hangars

In my closet where they live

But do not cohabit

With the starched lines of my bow ties

Listening to sounds that mean nothing

When filtered through my ears

Is time I have wasted

Not drowning in you

Kendall McKenzie

We Didn't Play House

A swallowed hook wound
round the rib bones of a bass from my childhood
creek. The fish, us children, all
came for dinner.

I apologized. I offered my hand,
pushed it in and risked a puncture.
I let the fish eat my arm, not stopping

at the wrist. The fat white underbelly
filled with my child-bones. Dilated and stretched
along the grain of the scales and then I
dug my feet into the mud bank while
the fish gave oral birth to me.
I held up the red-soaked hook,
thrashing with evidence of new life.

Thunder Hole, a Photo Op

"We were hungry before we were born."—Fever Ray

We are more primordial than sea lettuce and drag
rubber soles across the cracked shore side. Hurry,
the next wave should be good!

The tour guide warned us to stay
back from the cliff. A rogue wave
claims from the viewing platform a child and mother.
I see them cresting a few miles away.
They must be mermaids, unafraid of snagging
on the current's many teeth.
Any sort of soft cloth
or human contact must raw their skin.

If I hold the camera this way,
at arm's length, I'm a self-portrait
framed up with the crash, the waves that growl
and hiss like a cloud's starved belly.

The kidnapped two roll under the world while we
stand and shake into coats and hats
on top of Earth's organs.
This rock is a kidney. This rock, a nerve.
Thunder Hole is a throat that clears
and we edge closer for the next wave.
Wool to flesh. Skin to skin.

Wax Magnetism

A baby bee girl writhed, belly upright
on my palm. She swam out of the glass hive
as if through slush.
She stilled in the wind.
Wide-nostriled state fair
children refused to hold her.
“She won’t hurt you,” I explained. “She can’t yet.”
I tweezed my fingers around a few more sisters, rolling them
together for comfort. Covered in field soot,
yesterday’s amber, they scoured
the cracks of my hand like tapping the veins of a bloom.

Another bundle of children toed, almost sneaking
up to the booth. I offered them
two handfuls of worker bees, girls
who split wax
sacs open and pried themselves
from the tacky brood. Four little girls placed
grubby hands on the glass and warmed against the soft
beat beat beat beat of microwire wings.
Their eyes were diamond pinpoints, black and focused.
They were still young.
Guard, mortician, nurse, forager.
A hum shivered through the group,
a vibration in each body.

For the Love of Taxidermy

I'm trusting the raccoon in your yard to keep
you safe. She's fond of you
and your walks together. Let her be
your neighbor and don't damage her face.

Keep her real parts trophied in ethanol.
She is the shape of an apple, top heavy
and built to carry. Let her hind legs harden
with muscles from surveying the border
around your house. Call her only sweet names, then fill her

with affectionate white noise and ether
to weigh her down. Use the correct strength
of jawset. If you find the raccoon tongue
to be too clunky, use a sharp coyote tongue.
They're practically cousins.
Use the albino red lenses. They see better
in the dark. Install in her

your rage, your prosthetic lion heart, your vacuum. Take comfort
in her woody musk, of wool blankets, rain, rust.
She won't need a leash. To her
your voice sounds like bite marks,
the kind of chewing used to groom fur.

When the border alarm string of jars
clangs with invasion, she'll serve
as a distraction and lead the intruders off with
the view from behind
of her ringed tail, the burning
dance of a bull's-eye, away
and away from you.

Keith Moul

ALTERED TOUCH ANIMATES LOVE

Sunlight screwballs into the bedroom
adding riotous heat to already passion.
But the intended act, thus exposed,
turns comic. My final caress
of real flesh by thumb
and three fingers (no pinkie)
makes me a Saturday cartoon,
rather than your lover, animated.

You are my daylight embrace on which
three fingers may work volcanic magic
on the marriage bed. Three may raise
my red banner to full staff. Three
may be calloused by the keenest love work—
but insidiously in the Disneyland of life
the symbol of three fingers

alters my well-aimed touch
to Mickey Mouse.

FURTHER READINGS IN HISTORY

Over time, many will master events;
many will leverage a moment for effect;
most, like deer at a salt lick
will risk their ends to unreckoned threat.

Of these few will wrangle footnotes
in the unabridged revised—for most
accounts are hogged by the truly great.

Yet, Man's failed opportunities;
Man's untold, thereby unknown events;
Man's days wrongly spent, or days wasted
in unchronicled pursuits without consequence;
while reading history, *these*
lives are counted worthless.

Yet, the agonies of fruitless hours
through which I squirm shake me
to explore more closely any gap
in history's final print:
to dive into another's empty time
as though it were the bottom
of an unplumbed lake;
the abandoned reaches of a still ore-rich,
but left to superstition, mine;
or sing proof for sine
of the arc To Be.

No doubt there is a trick to saving time,
creating history, in fact, that
once learned can lure
the elemental mind to face off
with another mind, or thing,
or mountainous thought; no doubt
some men's hours are filled
with magic acts in which the mouse
chases the cat, eyes out-quick the hands,
or sands are catalogued—two by two by two by two.

I delude myself.

Reading history, I take
its abridgement in stride; I worry
its false mathematics into consequence; I swim
so I will not sink too pedantically
in ink and time.

If not inspiration, diligence
may raise the rabbit from the hat.

LINES

Now and as I foresee,
I revere fine, straight lines—
such as those too uncanny
for a map, mind-lines
taking me from here to there,
now to then—
until this instant that I breathe,
this cadence that I walk to,
that is,
because *there* and *then*,
if birds,
would be birds of prey
and ravenous.

What should be simple routes
returning to here and now
are marred by wingbeats,
scarred by talons
clicking across them awkwardly.

Sometimes I know
that birds of prey,
hungry for flesh,
will even eat a line
conceived utterly as meat of the mind.

Kay Porter

Memory of Ryu Hayabusa

Soaked by rain he stared out over the edge
of the roof. Below he saw some of his
enemies and he knew where first his sword
would strike. Vengeance had been silenced for too
long, but now they would all learn by his hand:
debt to vengeance paid. He made his way down

to the ground below, he brought the first down
silently as he landed. His sword edge
gleamed like a facet in a ruby. Hand
swift, he threw stars and the three men on his
left fell. An alarm sounded. Men began to
emerge from the building. Work for his sword

started. Whistling through the air his sword
found purchase. The rain continued on down
and found steel on its way. They fall, some two
at once, and he made his way past the edge
of the battlefield. Routinely, his sword
cleared his path. Vibration numbed his hands.

Wave after wave were brought down by his hand.
Red mixed with clear and ran from his sword.
Lightning flashed. Rumbles of thunder reach his
ears over the clamor of the men. Down
they crumble to his vengeance and he edged
closer toward his purpose. He knew all too

well that victory and defeat were close. Two
men, the last left standing, rushed him. His hands
deliver fate. They fall beneath the edge
and victory is quiet. He looked down
to survey the damage. Few got past his
guard and found flesh. Blood pulsed and stained his

left thigh and he felt the burn, felt good to
be alive. He must bring their Master down!
Entering the building he found him, hands
together on steel. Their dance began, swords
flashing quick as lightning as edge met edge.

Swiftly, his victory was brought to hand.
Returning to its leather sheath, the sword
brought down, gave peace to owner and edge.

Ōkami Amaterasu

The white wolf walks along the narrow dirt road,
the yellow of the dirt that lies ahead reflects
the sun's harsh rays but what follows behind
is the miracle. Green grass and pink flowers
sprout from the dirt her feet touch. Withering
trees come to life as the air that surrounds
her blows through the brown leaves.
Crops, dead where they were sown,
begin to reach towards the sun and ripen.

The people she passes shrink
back in fear from the effects
the wolf has on her surroundings.
They whisper to each other
and avert their eyes as she passes.
She mourns the crops that will be left
to die once again, the trees that will be cut
down, and the grass and flowers trampled.
No one trusts what they don't understand,

but she gives the people this gift anyways.
She hears the cries and prayers
of those who are starving and knows
it is the role of a god to provide.
One day, a man will brave
his fears of the unexplained
and bite into the shiny, red apple
from the tree beside that very same road.

It will be the best fruit he has ever tasted.

Aboard the Normandy

The hot, glowing stars and planets
on the Galaxy Map
are cold to the touch.
Shepard picks where to defend.
So many must be lost,
to save so few.
Does every commander feel this guilt?

Earth is where the war began,
the purple hull of the Reaper ships
gleamed in the midday sun
as the red eyes of their cannons
focused on city after city.
The smell of burning,
concrete and flesh and wood,
signaled to those that still lived
that the Reapers had won control.

Earth is where the war will end,
Shepard promises the fleet
of a hundred different races,
all fighting to defend against this enemy.
This enemy who will do the same
to other homes if they are not stopped.
They prepare for travel
through the mass relay,
but will it be enough?

Aboard the *Normandy*,
James and Kaiden talk shit as they go
all in on a last hand of poker,
Garrus hums a tune his youngest son sang in the fourth grade play
as he cleans his “Black Widow,”
Liara lies in wait for Shepard under the soft, white sheets.
Everyone is preparing for a last stand
against the enemy who had shown them to fear
what lived in the blackness behind the stars.

José Hernández Díaz

re(volver)

I.

The noise of what was once a sky {at dawn}
There is no seed or flaw
Or falling
Rain

From what
Was winter
Once The rhyme and reason of the blue-
Black space

;le désert.

The coffee
Stains the
Mirror ^ Mind:

Purple orchid,
Night.

II.

Black and blue
And grey-
Brown suits
March downtown
Market Street
Shiny brief-

Cases/ fade
On the skyscraper
Wall /puddle
Acid rain and
←Unoriginal thought

The cigarette
Smoke-stained
Hotel-hallway
Mass-produced
Artwork from the
1970's - let the
Beat come back
To provide structure for the
Poem as it is
In defiance of
What is good
And true.

III.

A woman's
Tears will
Send you
Off to
War
Without
A gun
In hand

VI.

And it was
Autumn once
Before
The falling rain

{at dawn}.

the flocks cloud the roadway

IT'S A BUSINESS SELLING WORDS

-Michael McClure.

I.

I smoke a cigarette
outside my apartment
window; 1:46 AM.

Tomorrow is trash day
in my barrio. The dogs
are barking AT the man or

woman (it is rude to stare)
who sifts T h r o u g h the trash
cans for recyclables:

5 cents for each beverage container
Less than 24 ounces and
10 cents for each container
24 ounces or greater.

The dogs are barking.
But at the snow. And it
is may - WIND OF RAIN—

5 cents for each
Beverage container less
Than 24 ounces
And 10 cents for each
Container 24 ounces or
Greater—

And it is May.

II.

“You have to make it
new,” said my Creative
Writing Professor.

“And you have to write
about what you know,
but for god sake don’t

be sentimental it is
considered a weakness -
A lack of refinement -

If you will - because
when it comes down
to it you have to sound

very detached and non-
chalant, and maybe every
now and then hint at your

post-modern humanity
with an easily
accessible/ yet definitively com-

plex metaphor about the
wind of rain."

III.

and it is MAY:

For each 5 cents container

Beve era age and10

For ounces greater or

Than:

It'

S

A b u s i n e s s

selling cans.

Of all things

I am drunk typing
On this laptop
Who knows what time
The next bus will arrive
Yesterday seems serene
The light
Reflects monotone
The insides of medieval
Churches
Along the river
Spots of sunshine
Sufficient to say
Of all things
The frankness of form
Somewhere
Pierre Reverdy
Is laughing
Two to one ratio
And you are
Prettier than
The stars

The Persistence of Reverie

*Entropy,
blue
rose—*

*When I picture all the fractures in the non-essential street; when I see how it is hollow
in the corners of defeat; it is always always autumn for the poet in the night—*

*And we
almost
grazed the
moonlight
with our
footsteps
on the
fountain;*

*And we
never
saw the
rainfall
with our
eyelids
on the
flame—*

*It is
calming
with the
music of
the
tossing
of the
wind—*

*It is always always autumn for the poet in the night;
Entropy, blue
rose.*

autumn window

The café
is spinning
jazz—

smoke rises
to the ceiling
and crashes

with the
abstract pattern
in my mind:

quiet wind,
autumn moon.

There is a
window in the
non-existent
room

and
you walk
through it—

the blue rain
softly falls
in the
dark street/

and
you walk
through it.

Jorge Lucio de Campos

THE OLD MAN'S BOAT AND THE OLD MAN'S DOG
for Eric Fischl

All I think
feel
breat

he a lonely
orgasm at sea

O BARCO E O CÃO DO VELHO HOMEM
a Eric Fischl

Tudo o que penso
sinto
resp

iro un solitário
orgasmo no mar

THE MAP

for Richard Bosman

A whole plain
setting stars

without even
looking at them

O MAPA

a Richard Bosman

*Planície inteira
a fixar estrelas*

*sem ao menos
contemplá-las*

THE END OF THE JOURNEY

for Joan Brown

Your Janus head
appears in my torso

not how I lean
to the left

our melancholy
became a half

and I'm around –
time to time

little dreams
prick

O FIM DA JORNADA

a Joan Brown

*Teu rosto bifronte
irrompe em meu torso*

*não como me
inclino pra esquerda*

*nossa melancolia
tornou-se um meio —*

*e eu, ao redor, de
tempo em tempo*

*pequenos sonhos
espetam*

Joe Labriola

Golden Delicious

There were no jobs.

None for me, at least.

I had held out with the hope, like many, that I would eventually find something. But after nearly thirteen months of collecting unemployment benefits, this overqualified former northeast regional assistant quality-assurance manager at Hostess Snack Cakes was as close to working now as when my search began the day after learning that I would no longer be doing what I had been doing for the past twenty years.

It wasn't anything personal.

It was just business.

Smart business.

Good business.

Streamlining, outsourcing, globalized markets – it all had something to do with my layoff, although I was unsure if my boss, and longtime friend who had broken the news to me that fateful fall afternoon lunch, had fully understood what he himself was really talking about.

“I’m sorry, Joe,” Bill had told me. “I really tried everything I could. I even spoke with Sean, but he said his hands were tied.” Sean was the northeast regional vice-president of operations. Well, the former northeast regional vice-president of operations, as I learned when Bill called me three months later. His shaking voice explained how Sean had shot himself after finding out that he had been laid off. He had gone to bed the night before and waited until the next morning for his wife to drop off the kids at school. “But you’ll be getting full severance,” Bill assured me. “Still working out the length, but you know I’ll do everything I can... You alright Joe?”

“Huh?” I had grunted.

“You alright?”

“Yeah,” I had answered. “I’m alright. I mean, I’ll be fine. I’m just thinking about Shelly.”

Bill sighed into his chair.

I didn’t vote in the previous presidential election. In fact, I couldn’t remember the last election that I did vote in. Was it 2000? Or 1996? I couldn’t remember, but I was happy with our current commander-in-chief. I had slept through most of my Intro to Political-Science course back in college, passing with a C+ grade, but the hour or so of CNN that I watched every night had recently explained to me via shouting commentators how the “opposition’s” regime would have cut my unemployment benefits months ago. This president had extended them. I was glad for that.

But politics didn’t really interest me. Jobs did. And there were none left. None that I could find, at least. And I had looked. Craigslist, search engines, newspapers, job fairs, friends, family connections, old acquaintances, new acquaintances, strangers at bars. I had exhausted every network to try to find some work. Any work.

But there just wasn’t anything available right now for a former northeast regional associate quality-assurance manager.

I had even applied for menial management positions at several supermarkets and restaurants, but no applicants could compete with my credentials – which was just the problem. Some of those jobs would pay me almost as little as I was receiving on unemployment right now – others offered even less, but I honestly would have rather been working than sitting at home dawdling the days away. I hated wasting around; interviewing and waiting, interviewing and waiting, interviewing and waiting. And searching all in-between.

Despite exploring everywhere I knew to look, I hadn’t found anything, yet.

But still, I kept looking.

“Low-lying areas are under mandatory evacuation as of noon tomorrow,” the newscaster announced into his field mic from the sun-bathed parking lot. “The first rains are expected to begin late tomorrow afternoon and strengthen as we head on into the night. Wind gusts are expected to exceed sixty miles per hour by six p.m.”

I hit the power button off and tossed the remote on the couch cushion next to me. The storm was coming. I knew that. I had known for almost a week since the cute, blonde-haired Channel 12 newswoman had frantically explained how half of Puerto Rico was being swept away. The hurricane had been classified as a category four storm then. It was a lesser terror now – category two, and although weakening with every mile blown farther up the milder northeast coastline, the experts still warned that the damage here could be as devastating as everywhere else so far along its fateful trek.

I was born and raised in my little coastal town and remembered past storms bluster up from the south. Hurricane Gloria, and later, Bob, had both wreaked destruction that took emergency crews weeks of scrambling to cleanup. We rarely lost power, but I recalled those long, wasting days of 19th century living. This cataclysm was foretold to bust the damage records set by both storms. So the experts warned us.

We might return to the 19th century for a while, several fine-suited weather forecasters had prophesied.

Just what we needed in these strained economic times.

But all we could do now was wait for what we all knew was coming.

I lived only a few hundred yards from the local harbor. Fortunately, my house stood on a wooded hill above the coastal roads and homes that would surely be steeped in surge waters. Flooding or not though, I was confident that some despair would blow my way. Maybe falling debris would total my car? Or a whole tree would crush my house? The fifty-foot evergreen rising from the brush along the driveway might not survive the hundred-plus mile per hour gusts. Maybe I wouldn't either if Mary's old Christmas tree came crashing down through my bedroom ceiling at three a.m.

My wife had always loved that tree. How cynically ironic would that be?

But it might be better this way. My sarcastic sense honestly wondered that at the time. Not me dying, but the house being smashed. I imagined that I could use the insurance money to pay off the month's mortgage. I almost chuckled at the idea that either Mother Nature or Salle Mae would likely take my home of nearly fifteen years.

I thought about it for another moment. It seemed logical that I *should* hope for the falling tree. Only time would tell what havoc struck where though. But maybe I would be one of the lucky ones for a change.

I was never religious. Instead, I poured another coffee cup full of Disaronno liqueur. My now nearly iceless drink was the only task left on my Friday night agenda. I had bought all of the standard emergency survival supplies:

bottled water, non-perishables, a few bundles of wood from 711, batteries, first aid kit, fire extinguisher, flashlights, etc. The cache of preparations stacked in the corner of my den looked like I was readying to weather World War III.

It could last for a week, they were predicting – the 19th century, that is. At least until the power came back and the roads were cleared of fallen hazards.

The blurry clock hands above the T.V. in front of me had slowly swept their way over to eleven-thirty p.m.

I should probably call Shelly, I thought as I took another swig of almond-flavored ease. My daughter lived in Connecticut and was unlikely to get much more than a long day and night of windy rain. But she still worried. Just like her mother had. She was always worried.

I finished my drink just as I realized that I had been sitting there, staring into the deep dimness for several minutes. I was tired. It had been another mundane afternoon of awkward phone calls to prospective employers and online job browsing. And zero progress made. People seemed paranoid beneath the impending storm's black-clouded prelude. The tropical breeze was still swirling in the south, but we all knew what was coming. It had been predicted with precise accuracy. I had tuned into over a dozen news, radio and internet forecasts today, and almost all of them lectured that landfall would be within a sixty mile span of my home. For once, I might finally be seen by the eye of something divine, only this time, this look was that of nature's ire.

At least I had prepared though. All that was left now was to wait for the inevitable event.

I leaned over to the wooden nightstand, grabbed the cordless landline phone and dialed Shelly.

"Hello?"

"Hi Shelly, it's dad."

"Oh hey dad. How is everything?"

"It's going fine," I said, tilting the Disaronno bottle to add a splash to my empty glass. "Just finished getting ready."

"You have all the supplies you need then?"

"Everything on the list."

"You have enough water, right?"

"Oh yeah, of course. I got two cases – and the old well out back," I added with a half-chuckle. "I'll be fine."

"Good. And you have flashlights and candles too, right? And batteries?"

"Yup," I chuckled. "Geez, you sound just like your mother."

Shelly paused.

“I know,” she finally spoke. “I’m just worried... You know they say this is going to be bigger than Gloria *or* Bob.”

“Yeah, I’ve heard. But don’t worry. I’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure you don’t wanna just come stay with me? If you drive up now you’ll still beat the traffic. You’ll be here before one, probably.”

“Nah, I’ll be fine. Someone needs to watch the house anyways.”

I took another swig.

“Okay,” she conceded. “Well, Andy’s still coming over, right?”

“Yup,” I said. “Andy’s gonna come by tomorrow during the day and stay the night.”

“Good,” she sounded relieved. “Is he bringing his survival gear?”

“I certainly hope so.” We always got a kick out of Andy’s backpack that appeared with him whenever summer storms and February blizzards spread across our area or through neighboring states. We had never needed to use his flint tools, camping gear, or bow and arrows, but some of these rudimentary items were probably good to have around just in case.

“Well, that’ll be good then. It’s better to have a friend with you just in case something happens.”

“In case what happens?” my alcohol soaked skull asked.

“Well, you just never know.”

“Yeah, well, we’ll see if Mom’s old Christmas tree finally snaps. That could split the whole damn house right in two.”

“Dad, don’t say that.”

“Hey, you never know. I’m sure at least a few of the older trees will be down in the backyard.”

“Well, at least Andy will be there. It’ll be good. You two can spend the weekend chopping firewood then.”

I managed to burp a laugh. Everyday was the weekend for me.

“Are you gonna be okay up there?” I shifted the subject.

“Oh, we’ll be fine,” she said, referring to herself and her kitten, Saucy. “We’re just expecting a lot of rain, but that should be about it.”

“Eh, I really wouldn’t worry about it. There’s been worst storms to hit before.”

“Yeah, that’s true, but I heard on the news how the last one this strong was in like 1820 or something. It did a lot of damage then, there just weren’t that many people around for it to hurt.”

“Yeah, I read about that online somewhere too,” I corroborated. “But we have a lot more infrastructure now too. A lot more people and resources if things get bad.”

“You’re right. I’m sure you’ll be fine – just promise me that you’ll be careful.”

I chuckled again as I swallowed my splash. “Okay Shelly. I promise I’ll be careful.”

“Well, just remember to call if you have power. Is the cell service still lousy there?”

“Yeah, but I should be able to send out texts. Don’t worry though, I’ll call you tomorrow during work before the winds start up.”

“You promise?”

“Of course, pumpkin. I’ll call you at noon. You have lunch then, right?”

“Yup, same time as always.”

“Okay, good. Well, I don’t wanna keep you up. I’m gonna get some rest. I’ll talk to you then, alright?”

“Okay, get a good night’s sleep, alright?”

“Promise.”

“Okay. Oh, before you go, any luck?”

“Negative,” I said, somehow without sighing. “The search continues.”

“Oh...alright. Well, don’t even think about it for this weekend. You’ll just start fresh again on Monday.”

“I always do...” Now I really struggled to hold back my sigh.

“Alright, I’ll talk to you tomorrow. Love you, dad.”

“Love you too, Shelly.”

“Night.”

“Night night, pumpkin.”

I clicked the fluorescent blue “talk” button off and sat there for a few more absent moments before rising. There was nothing left to do tonight. No need to worry now. I had done everything I needed to prepare.

All I could do now was to sleep, wait, and dream.

I would bank my hopes for Monday’s job search.

The morning was gloomier than the overcast evening. A slight wind swayed the tall pines and oaks, but the real threatening gusts remained far from our bay, for now. I spent most the day watching T.V., switching between stormcasts and sitcoms. I called Shelly back to reassure her that myself, and everything else, would be fine. Nothing bad would happen. Andy was on his way over, I had told her. I loved her and would call her back as soon as the storm ended.

Andy wasn't really coming over though.

My old high-school buddy was actually out east for the weekend with his self-proclaimed "storm training squad" that he regularly camped with. His group had access to a real shelter but their mission was to prevail beneath the deadly torrent. It seemed insane.

But I had always seen Andy as a bit of an unusual character.

Shelly had no idea he wasn't coming, of course. If she had known, she certainly wouldn't have left me here by myself. The issue wasn't that I couldn't handle myself, but as nearly every broadcaster had picked up the cliché, this was supposed to be, "the storm of the century."

But I would be fine. I think my only child was more worried about me being alone regardless of any hurricane. Again, just like her mother had, Shelly possessed the incredible ability to sniff out my depression whenever it seized me, and I had been gripped by a feeling of hopeless futility for a while now – a long while. It was nice that she cared – especially with her mother gone.

Shelly gave even a cynic like myself a small glint of hope to stare at.

That seemed to be all that was left now.

At least I held some light, as the skies grew darker around me.

Andy actually called me around three p.m. when the drizzle began. He invited me out one last time, and I politely declined, one last time.

"You sure?" he had given his final pitch. "This is a great opportunity, man. Once in a lifetime."

"An opportunity?"

"Yeah, man. A-class survival training."

"I think I'll survive just fine with my Netflix, but thanks anyways."

"Heh, not without power you won't."

Andy had previously listed about a dozen reasons why his psychotic camping adventure was actually, “the responsible thing to do,” but the time was too late to argue anymore. Through the window I watched the creeping beast’s heavier breaths scare the weaker leaves from their quivering branches. We both knew that it was too late to join him. Too late for me, at least.

“Just promise me that you’ll be careful, alright?” Andy said.

I laughed. “You want *me* to be careful? You just watch out for them falling trees, alright? I won’t be there to help you hobble around like the Catskills weekend.”

Andy chuckled, remembering our college summer camping expedition in which the young adventurer had fallen ten feet from an evergreen in an attempt to hide our food from skulking bears hungry for dinner. But Andy always survived. “You know I will,” he reassured me.

It wasn’t until three a.m. that the power finally flickered out. But I had known this would happen. All of the forecasts had told us. The wooden electric poles were already tilted from years of bending gusts. How many decades had passed since they were reinforced? Maybe not since the last major hurricane? I remember waking up from what had sounded like a giant, zip-lock bag “POP!” The now faceless digital clock on the dresser next to my bed might as well not have existed in this total blackness.

We were back to the 19th century.

I figured I should just try to get some more sleep despite the world’s moaning. The wind gusted with an airy howl.

I wrapped a pillow around my head. Maybe I would be lucky and awake back in the 21st century.

That was my hope as I drifted off back into dreamless rest.

I woke around seven a.m., according to one of the only functioning electronic devices that separated me from my great grandparents’ generation: my cell phone. Solid sleep had been difficult to maintain with the swirling winds trying to penetrate my half-century old sanctuary. The nonstop rain had hammered on the shaking shingles. It might have even hailed at some point over the long night. But by nine a.m., the lashing winds had slackened and the deluge dissolved back into carefree drizzle. As noon arrived, so did the inevitable end of the much-hyped inevitable end.

The all-consuming darkness had yielded to typical late summer overcast. It seemed safe to step out into the shaken world.

The damage was clear, but I was more focused on the fact that Mary's fifty-foot evergreen right outside of my window stood as sturdy as it had yesterday. My gaze shifted down onto my 1999 Nissan Altima, which had also survived almost unscathed. The silver vehicle was coated in a collage of green leaves and brown twigs, but no big branches had crushed the roof – no windows were smashed, crushed or even scratched.

I shrugged and smirked at my luck for once.

Everyone got lucky sometime.

I made my way through the limb-littered muck, weeds, and grass onto the pebbled street. My property had begun tangling into a knee-high mess of wavy blades shortly after I stopped paying the landscapers. I hadn't used my old mower in weeks and had no real intention of cleaning out the bag and greasing the engine anytime soon. It was menial work that took too long to complete. Why bother if I might be evicted before the month was over anyways? Why bother if the fallow winter could do the same work without complaint?

Several electric lines across the road, in front of my neighbor's house, had been ripped from their plastic casings by an uprooted tree. That explained last evening's booming pop and power-outage.

"What a nightmare," I mumbled. It would definitely take days before the power company got here to clean this mess up. The main roads were always cleared first. I lived on the shore though. The back streets were last on their list. The highways and two-laners were what kept things moving.

We weren't the priority.

I sighed as I continued examining the scattered scene. A few of my neighbors were visible as well; at first peeking from their windows, then creeping out from their doors, and finally braving the first soggy steps to assess the damages and begin rebuilding what had been broken. It wasn't too bad though. There were some busted fences, fallen trees, and one crushed car down the block that I later heard about, but nothing irreparable had happened. Our puzzled worlds could be pieced back together with care and time. There were no tragic deaths here. No gruesome injuries nearby. It would just be a while before everything was back to normal again.

I could wait.

I returned inside for a few minutes to follow my Sunday routine before realizing that there was little to do with my now obsolete appliances. Without Internet access, my Dell laptop was nothing more than a glorified DVD and CD player. It hardly seemed worth wasting the battery, so I didn't.

It wouldn't last long anyway.

I had spent most of the morning reading magazines, and occasionally checking the basement, which had taken on about an inch of water since the pair of garden hose-connected pumps had sputtered silent in the middle of the trembling night. My concern was more out of boredom than worry though, now that the rain had stopped. It would be dry by dawn.

But what to do now?

I thought about reading some more, but figured that I might as well go exploring farther than my own lawn. Initially, I was too timid to venture out past my property line, but I could see others down the street from out of my elevated window. A few brave adventurers were drifting toward the harbor. I wondered if the local landing were flooded. That might be some sight to see.

And I had all the time in the world to read, after all. At least until the power came back.

I laced up my winter boots and entered the outside world again. The landing was about half a mile down the road from my house. I began the post-apocalypse journey alone, at first, still uneasy about the few power lines lying so deathly silent across the roadsides. I made sure to avoid these, even though the electrical supply had probably been shut off, lest some fools wander the wet pavement too close to the high-voltage wires. My safe stepping took me past the first few houses from mine before I joined the trickle of others headed the same way. I knew some of the neighbors, but didn't recognize more of them. Even the sunniest summer afternoons normally lacked as many out running, bicycling, and walking with dancing dog leashes in one hand and directing baby strollers with the other. This sight seemed unusual even though such an outdoors renaissance made so much sense right now. What else was there to do on a Sunday afternoon in the 19th century?

We soon reached the flooded landing. Most of the pier was still soaking beneath the uneasy tidal surge, but the benches and recently mowed grass were drying.

"Guess we got lucky," my neighbor, Kendra said as her children splashed on the water's gradually retreating edge.

"Yeah," I agreed. "I'm sure they got it much worse to the south."

“Yeah, they always do with these kind of storms.”

Just then, I heard a gentle strumming that made me turn. The acoustic guitar chords floated from the fingers of a pale-faced teenage boy sitting on a heavy branch across the soft pavement.

“Looks like we have ourselves a little music festival,” I joked.

“Yeah, it looks like it,” Kendra said. “Sammy!” she suddenly scolded her eldest daughter who was splashing her younger brother. “Sorry,” she lowered her voice for me before rushing away. “Sammy, stop!”

I took a moment to take in the choppy harbor waves below the lazy overcast above.

“Should be out by nightfall.”

I turned, startled by the speaker who had crept over behind me.

“Huh?” I gargled my confusion.

“The water,” clarified the middle-aged man with a yamaka sized bald spot marking his otherwise buzzed head.

“The tide should be out by six or seven, I’d say.”

“Oh, yeah, it’s not that bad now though. We definitely got spared, that’s for sure.”

“Heh, not so much with the power though.”

“Hah, yeah, that’s true. No power for you either, huh?”

“Nope, it went out at three in the morning. I knew it was coming though.”

“Mine too. Hm. Must’ve been the same wires.”

“Yeah, probably. Where do you live?”

“Oh, right up the block like half a mile.”

“Really? I haven’t seen you around here before.”

“Oh,” I began. “Well, I don’t get down here much nowadays. Just so much always going on, you know?”

“Ah, yeah, I hear you. Name’s Dave by the way.”

“Joe,” I reciprocated. We shook.

“There’s gonna be hell to pay if I can’t get to the office tomorrow,” Dave continued. “I’m hoping the roads will be clear by then, but you never know.”

“Yeah, I guess it depends on where you’re headed though.”

“Well, it’s only about a fifteen minute drive, but who knows what the main roads look like. I just rather not have to take a personal day, you know?”

“Oof, yeah. I guess that’s why we really have them though, right?”

“Yeah. True. You work nearby?”

“Oh, well, I’m, uh, in between work right now actually…”

“Oh yeah? What’d you do before?”

“I was the northeast regional assistant quality-assurance manager at Hostess Snack Cakes,” I answered as prideful as possible. I was sick of that once-title. It meant nothing now, here in this half-flooded park.

“Really? Wow, that sounds like the real deal.”

“Hah, yeah, well, it was for twenty years.”

“What happened? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“Oh, no,” I sighed. “Not at all. Just cuts. You know, the economy and everything. Company restructuring. They merged my position with some other managers in the area. It’s a long story, but it happened how it happened. I’m just ready to move on now, honestly.”

“Well, that’s definitely the right attitude.”

“Yeah,” I chuckled, less enthusiastically than I wished I could. “I mean, that’s all you can do, right?”

“I hear you. I’ve been accounting at the same firm for almost twenty-five years and they’re chopping guys who’ve been around longer than I have!” It was Dave’s turn to sigh. “It’s just so tough in this economy. Things are still all screwed up.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Hey, if it’s any help, um…I have a buddy in construction, and they’re looking for someone in middle management at their corporate headquarters. I don’t know how similar it is to what you did, but I’d be happy to introduce you to him. Maybe have him talk to you about the work over some drinks or something. I mean, you never know, right?”

“Oh…” I tried to seem interested. By this point I was taking any leads no matter how dim the path seemed. “I mean, yeah, that’d be great. I’d really appreciate it.”

“Here,” Dave said, reaching into his black leather wallet to retrieve a business card. “Give me a ring or text when we get back to civilization and I’ll see what I can do.”

“Yeah, definitely. I really do appreciate it.”

“Nah, don’t mention it. It’s nothing, really. I should be headed back though. I told my wife I was just going out to see if the neighbors have power. They’ll be thinking I was electrocuted or something if I don’t get back soon.”

“Oh, hah, well definitely don’t keep them worrying then.”

“Nope, definitely not a good idea. Nice to meet you though. I’ll see you later.”

“Same here,” I said as Dave started away. “See you around.”

The landing was a beautiful spot with the green coastal hills and beige cliffs framed by the blue bay and gray sky. It was a composed scene even only an hour or so after the hurricane’s final flusters had sauntered off north. That storm had moved on – a category one now according to the radio before I had left the house, and was weakening further as it continued across the eastern seaboard. But areas farther north were said to be even less prepared for such a cataclysm than we were. The damage was sure to be comparable, if not worse, in some places where naysayers hadn’t been willing to admit and accept their unalterable doom.

But we were here. We were safe now.

I hadn’t been down to the landing in months, and now that I was, I couldn’t answer the question that bloomed in the forefront of my thoughts: *Why haven’t I been here in so long?* It was late August and I had spent most of the summer either indoors or in my car to reach elsewhere to be indoors. I wasn’t an athletic type unless my activity involved a knife and fork, or chopsticks. I had run track in grade school, but those seeming-marathons were about as relevant as the world that had been before the now vanished storm. My present workout routine involved a rarely used exercise bike from the 1980s that I had bought at a garage sale years ago, and some dusty dumbbells. It seemed vain to try too hard. Who the hell was I trying to impress anyways?

But this spot was beautiful. Despite the deep overcast blanketing the azure heavens high above, there was a calming peace about this wedge of grass, bushes, pines, pebbles, and pavement. The harbor beach ranged off somewhere over the tide-swelled marshes waving on the breezy horizon. Even the bobbing sails that had braved the long storm looked right at home.

It was a beautiful home.

It was my home.

The boy playing his guitar had attracted a small crowd of children and their parents, who moseyed nearby and clapped whenever he finished fingering a tune. A father and son played catch on the grass. An elderly couple held hands as they stepped slowly up to the waning water to view the surreal serenity of the healing harbor. I had never seen *this* landing before.

I didn't know the time, but after a few more reflective moments, it seemed time to return home. I could always come back later, after all. Maybe I would bring some magazines and read under one of the coastal spruces when the ground dried some more. That seemed like a good way to spend the afternoon.

But I needed to call Shelly too.

Normally I would use the landline, but without power, my cell was my only outbound connection to society. Unfortunately, there was little service within these shoreline hills. Sometimes I got lucky, and by freezing in the right position, at the right angle, and at the right moment, I could capture enough black bars on my fluorescent screen to squeeze out texts. I should be able to at least send out a text. This wasn't *really* the 19th century, after all.

I walked back onto the road leading away from the landing. The usually car-traveled lanes were scattered with pedestrians; some wandering to the waterfront park, others leaving, and even more floating in other directions to other places of other interests. I was about halfway home when I came to the fork in the road. I paused in the small depression where the paths met. The one way bent left, taking me farther up the winding incline and around the bend to my silver-shaded mailbox and long gravel driveway; the other choice bore right, rising steeply, but leveling out soon after that first difficult heap of paved Earth. I hadn't been that way in a while. It wasn't in the direction of work or worry, but I remembered the journey from some time past. Today seemed like the perfect day to enjoy such a scenic route.

The hill tested my resolve, but I had conquered such a mount before, and I knew that I could again. After about a minute of wearisome huffing, I straightened and stretched my back at the summit before continuing along the oak-lined curb. There were houses on this way as well; all of them old, snuck in on small cleared patches among the acres of woods encroaching them. I saw an old man lugging a cracked branch around a tall, planked fence from out of his backyard.

"Hey there," I called as I jogged over. "You need a hand?"

“Nah, I got this one...thanks,” the elderly man answered through heavy breaths as he dropped his haul on the edge of the leaf-littered road. “Wish you’d been by about an hour ago – I got most of the debris cleared now though.”

“I’ll say.” I noticed the pile of snapped tree limbs by the old man’s wooden trashcans. “Wooden trashcans?” I asked, hardly realizing the thought had snuck out through my lips.

“Oh, those, yeah. Biodegradable.”

“Biodegradable?”

“Yeah, they break down when you throw them out.”

“Throw them out?” I asked. “Who throws out garbage pails?”

The old man snickered an honest chuckle. “You still got the same pails you did from the 80s?”

“No...”

“Well they didn’t just up and disappear, that’s for sure.”

“Hah, yeah, I guess so.”

“Heh, the name’s Chris, by the way.”

“Joe.” I reciprocated.

We shook.

“You live nearby?”

“Yeah, right down the road, actually. I haven’t seen you around.”

“Hm,” Chris thought aloud as he scratched his white scruff beneath his faded green fisherman’s cap. “Well I’ve been here for...oh...thirty-three years this winter.”

“Wow. That’s a long time.”

“Hah, yeah, I guess you could say so. It’s been home for a while now. Might as well have always been home. Sure as heck’s gonna be.”

I noticed the rows of stringy green bushes through the open gate in the lacquered fence. “Are those plants?” I asked with casually curtailed interest.

“Well they sure ain’t lawn fixtures,” Chris answered with a smile. “Care to take a gander?”

“Yeah,” I said. Normally, I would have politely declined such an invitation into a stranger’s yard, but Chris *was* my neighbor, and I did have all the time in the world today, and perhaps for days ahead. “Sure. I’ll take a look.”

“It’s right on through here,” he said, trudging up the grassy rise and on through the fence.

I followed, stepping into a yard that might have once been a short-trimmed field for kids to play summer games and dogs to frolic on. Chris’s house was across the acre-sized plot, lined with what appeared to be chest-high beans stalks, reinforced on thick poles.

“What are they?” I asked as we stepped among the plentiful plants.

“Sugar peas. Or at least they will be in another few weeks or so.”

“They seem to have weathered the storm just fine.”

“Heh, yeah, lucky, I guess.”

I was no horticulturalist but I noted the barely sprouted pods.

“Jesus,” I murmured. There must have been a hundred of these stalks. “What the heck are you gonna do with all of them?”

“Eat some of them. And sell the rest at local markets.”

“Do you make any money off of them?”

“Enough to feed me. The house is paid off and I have quite the pension plan from the state for the time being. What money do I really need?”

“I guess so.”

“There’s more too. We still got some tomatoes, basil, oregano, garlic, thyme, mint, cucumber, further back by the house. Got plenty more to plant and harvest before the year’s over. Squash and pumpkin season’s right around the corner.”

“Geez, this must take all day to manage.”

“Not really,” he assured me. “I have my routine. I’m a retired high school biology teacher, so it’s pretty much my thing now. It’s good training anyways.”

“Training?”

“Yeah for when we all start farming again.”

My lips made to move but fell fallow. “What?” was all I could think to finally mumble.

“Hah,” Chris chuckled. “Not now. Not yet, but some day.”

“Some day?”

“Yeah, I suppose in another twenty, maybe thirty years. Probably after I’m long gone. Back into the soil myself. One can only hope though, right?”

“But why would people start farming again in another twenty or thirty years?” That seemed backwards. If grade school history had taught me anything, it was that fewer and fewer families were farming every year. It was just the way and trend of things.

“Nothing lasts forever.” Chris smiled. “Here, I wanna show you something.” The old man waved me over as he continued past the hedges closer to his house. “You ever done any gardening?”

“Not really…” I frowned, following behind. “Never really had the time.”

“Hm,” he sniffed. “Have you?”

Chris pulled ahead until I caught up with him near the peeling white steps of his small, perhaps two bedroom, one story home. We stopped at what I presumed was his herb garden out front. The budding leaves peeked out above the dark, tilled soil; perfuming the air with a scent reminiscent of my Italian grandmother’s kitchen on Sunday afternoons.

“It smells amazing,” I commented, drawing thicker than normal breaths.

“It is,” Chris said, his satisfied hands placed on his leather belt above his baggy blue jeans. “Enough herbs here to last you through the winter if you store them right.”

“Really?”

“Oh yeah. Hold on a sec, I got something else for you…”

Chris hobbled up the creaking wooden steps and disappeared into his house for a moment, and for that moment I pondered about stealthily departing. Normally I would have snuck off to get back in time to catch the beginning of the game (football, baseball or whatever exciting event the current season sported), but what else was there to do? Might as well indulge in 19th century living for just a little longer.

It wouldn’t be like this forever after all.

“Here you go,” Chris said, halfway back out through porch-ceilinged door. He came over and raised forth his age-shriveled palm.

“What’s this?” I asked, taking the brown crumple of lunch-bag paper. I unfolded the small wrapping to find myself holding over a dozen spouting beads.

“Seeds,” the old man answered. “Apple seeds.”

“Apple seeds?”

“Yup. Golden Delicious. One of the tastiest breeds in my opinion.”

“Oh...those are nice,” I said, assuming that he meant the yellow apples from the supermarket as per the name, Golden Delicious.

“Yup. Well, those are yours to keep.”

“Mine?”

“Yup. Yours to plant and grow as you wish. As you see fit.”

I paused. *Me* growing apple trees? The notion was a seemingly ridiculous one at the time.

“Thanks...” was all I could think to say right then.

“No problem. You can plant them right now as long as you keep them inside for the winter. Wait till the spring to move them to your yard.”

“Won’t an apple tree take years to grow though?”

“It’ll take some time, some work, but definitely not twenty or thirty years at least.” Chris grinned. “What do you do by the way?”

“Oh, well, I mean I used to...” I paused, “...um...well, nothing really right now.”

“Heh, well I guess you got all the time in the world then, don’t you?”

“Hm,” I smiled. “Yeah, I guess you could say that I do.”

“Well then I’d say you should get right to it then. The sooner you start the sooner you can start enjoying.”

“Damn... I don’t think that I have any plant pots though...” A long-dormant piece of my spirit was enthused by this idea, but I hated the thought of spending any amount of money that I literally didn’t have. In such situations I had always half-jokingly assured myself that was why God invented credit cards, but such an option was long-since maxed out. “Well, I mean I guess I could hit up the dollar store and find some soil at the landscaping place up in town.”

“You got an old bowl?” Chris asked.

“Um, yeah, probably.”

“Got dirt in your backyard?”

“Well yeah...”

“Water from your faucet?”

“Yeah, well, there’s actually an old well up by the woods on my property from whoever built the house.”

“Well it sounds to me like you’re ready to go.”

“Heh, yeah, I guess so...”

“Try it out,” Chris said, patting my shoulder. “It’ll take some time, but I think you’ll get the hang of it over the next few decades.”

“Well, thanks, I’m definitely gonna try.”

“That’s the only way to *do* – gotta try first. Care for some cider? I just finished a batch last week.”

“Oh, thanks, but I think I’m gonna try and get these seeds going. What, do I just put them in dirt and watch them grow?”

“Yeah, you can plant them right now. Just make sure to water, but don’t flood, and leave them somewhere with plenty of sunlight – the more the better. Might have to upgrade to some larger pots over the winter but as soon as spring roles around you can move them outside.”

“Huh...alright. Well I’m sure I’ll be back with more questions.”

“And I’ll be sure to be right here.”

“Yeah, really, thanks a lot.”

“Don’t mentioned it,” Chris said with another smile. He extended his hand to shake. “Neighbor to neighbor.”

I remembered the last time that I had rushed home with such excitement pulsing through my legs. Of course these legs were much stiffer now. I was much slower, but my rushing anticipation mirrored my past passions. I had gotten an A on my forth-grade science invention project that me and my dad had created together (the Spongeulator 9000). I couldn’t wait to let him know what a hit our genius had been with my teacher, my class – the whole world, at the time. I remember that run home from school – my desperation to share my adrenaline fed adulation. Life had possessed a bright meaning back then. Back when the world was golden. Back when the world was right.

My childhood was far behind, but I now felt that enlightenment once more.

It took some time searching in the already dry basement before I found an old ceramic bowl. I hurried outside to scoop up some dirt from the muddy border between the uncut lawn and gravel driveway. The gray sky was growing brighter. The clouds were whitening. Back inside, I kneaded the seeds into the cool muck. The pebbly mixture didn't seem like it needed water, but I figured I would wet it just a little. I was sure that the thirsty seeds would quickly soak up what moisture the dark dirt held.

The windowsill in the kitchen facing the backyard seemed like the best home for my future tree. The sun now peaked over the dissipating clouds, spreading late summer warmth and light down onto the damp Earth.

As I stood in the glaring afternoon brightness, I realized that I forgot that I had originally left the landing for home to try to text Shelly.

She would be happy to hear about this new project.

But I was hard at work now, tilting the pregnant clump's bowl with paper towels stuffed beneath so that the angle would yield the most plentiful life.

I nearly forgot that I was still in the 21st century.

Jeffrey R. Schrecongost

The Uphill Climb

“Yo-yo-ing is a sport of kings.
Frisbee is for fruitcakes.”
-- Buddy “Big Blue” Tremont, 1974

February, 1982

“You spent five hundred dollars on a yo-yo?” Linda said.

“Screw Sinatra,” Norman said, sniffing. “Bobby Darin was better. Sinatra couldn’t play guitar. Sinatra couldn’t dance.”

The Stolichnaya vodka went to work on Norman. He had placed the bottle in an ice/snow drift in the backyard the night before and was enjoying the spirit neat in a monogrammed rocks glass. The song was “Dream Lover.” He turned up the volume. Darin’s voice leapt about the Moss household. He sniffed again.

“You spent five hundred dollars on a yo-yo?” Linda repeated. “I can’t believe this shit.”

“Bobby Darin evolved. Of course, Frank had his moments, let’s be fair, but --”

“-- Would you please shut up about Bobby Darin and talk to me?”

Linda turned off the stereo.

“About what? About what? Okay, so I bought a new yo-yo. It’s what I *do*. Remember? It’s what brings money into this house. So how about being nice and climbing off my back for five minutes? Can you do that? Is that possible?”

Linda stared at Norman for a moment, shook her head, and walked down the narrow hallway to the bedroom. She slammed the door, disjuncting a photograph of her mother and father and catapulting a picture of she and Norman on their honeymoon in Hawaii. Six years ago. He was a brain surgeon then. Thirty-two years old.

The framed glass shattered on the hardwood floor.

Norman stood, sniffed, walked to the end of the hallway, and shouted at the bedroom door. “I’m a winner, Linda. I’m a hero. People depend on me. They win money betting on me. You depend on me.”

Norman waited for a response. When it came, seconds later and barely audible, Linda’s words cut him open, but cut him free.

“You’re a child,” she said. “And a fool. And you’ve gone insane. And I don’t love you anymore.”

Norman looked at the skewed picture of Linda’s parents on the wall. They smirked. He grabbed the picture, ripping its tiny nail away from the wall, and threw it at the bedroom door.

“Guess what, baby,” he said. “I’ll do it alone. I’m the best yo-yo-ist in Clarkton. You’re all jelly and no toast. You’re nothing without me.”

Then the power went out again.

Clarkton’s yo-yo tournament mania began in Buddy “Big Blue” Tremont’s garage in February, 1974. On a frigid, ugly night in Dickey’s Anchor Tavern, Tremont suggested to patrons that they join him at his place after the bar

closed to determine “who the real men” were. Clarkton was a matriarchal town, and Tremont was its only open masculinist.

Soon scores of Clarkton men began to pile into Tremont’s garage for the sort of bonding only yo-yo-ing could provide. The men had a voice now. They had a shared interest. They felt whole. Every month Tremont would hold boxer short burnings in his backyard. His wife, Phyllis, never understood him. She wondered why men couldn’t be happy just spit-roasting the wild pigs. A man’s place, she felt, should be next to the fire pit.

These clandestine yo-yo-ing nights became big business in Clarkton. Sheriff Bibesco decriminalized gambling on yo-yo matches, and the tournaments were moved to the basement of the Clarkton Moose Lodge on Melcher Road. Organizers, in a still controversial move, later borrowed money from the local Teamsters pension fund to construct a swanky, Las Vegas-style yo-yo-ing tournament hotel and casino next to K-Mart on McWaverly Avenue. They called it The Palace Club. By 1980, even some of the old-timers were proud of the yo-yo craze and the attention it had brought to Clarkton.

February, 1983

Norman Moss sat alone in the living room of his Deercreek Estates colonial-style home. He didn’t mind the silence. With Linda gone -- she’d moved back to Los Angeles -- he could better prepare for the evening’s yo-yo match. Tonight he would face Albert Cordilla, one of Clarkton’s best yo-yo-ists and Norman’s most formidable challenger, in a title match. The purse was \$25,000.

Al’s tour de force was “The Angry Mongoose” -- a bizarre move that required flicking his yo-yo from a resting position on the ground up and out some twenty feet and back again in circles from the center of the ring. He would at times even crawl his yo-yo along the faces of spectators, leaving most uninjured.

Anticipation was high for the match because of the animosity between Norman and Al -- three years ago, when Norman was still a practicing brain surgeon, he had inadvertently left a pair of tweezers at the base of Dolly Cordilla's skull after a tumor-removal. This flagrant error caused Dolly to suffer from hours-long, nocturnal hiccup attacks. She also forgot how to cook. And have sex. Norman settled with the Cordillas out of court, but Al still held a grudge.

Norman closed his eyes and envisioned his strategy for the match. He would start off modestly with "The Menacing Moss" -- a trick that required getting on his hands and knees, bouncing the yo-yo up and down his back, over his head and under his body, then standing up and finishing the routine with the yo-yo spinning on its own, hands free, at his feet and coming to rest upright.

He'd follow up with "The Mao Moss." In this unique mini-drama, Norman would place duct tape over his mouth, cotton balls in his ears, look nervously from right to left, and cautiously yo-yo in a pedestrian fashion. It was not terribly exciting, but its cerebral, sociopolitical nature would be appreciated by the crowd.

Finally, Norman's coup de grace would be "The Missing-Link Moss." He'd slip out during Al's last routine, grab his portable stereo and an audiotope of Miles Davis's *Kind of Blue*, and slide into an Abominable Snowman costume. When Al finished, Norman would leap into the ring, growl, play the tape, and dance a cancan while working the yo-yo back and forth from right hand to left in a convoluted blur of fingers, yo-yo, and string.

Norman leaned forward, picked up his five hundred dollar, gold yo-yo from the chrome and glass coffee table, held it out at arm's length, grinned, and sniffed.

That ought to do it.

Norman Moss had largely ignored the initial yo-yo hysteria. He'd worked hard and long to become a brain surgeon, and he was satisfied. The job paid well, gave him suburban clout. His life was an elegant gallop.

But on a cool, spring evening in 1981, a Lear jet made an emergency landing at the Clarkton airport, and its passenger would change Norman's life.

As Norman completed the last leg of his nightly neighborhood jog, a lengthy, maroon limousine pulled up next to him. The driver, a toffee-complexioned brunette in her late-twenties, rolled down the tinted passenger side window and stopped the cruise-ship-on-wheels.

"Hey," she said.

"Hi," Norman said, wiping the sweat from his forehead while jogging in place.

"Champagne?" the woman asked in a smoky voice.

"Champagne?" Norman said. "No thanks."

The woman popped the cork off a bottle of Dom Perignon she'd pulled from a silver ice bucket in the passenger seat and poured herself a glass of the shimmering, gold liquid. She brought the glass to her lips and sipped deliberately, never pulling her eyes off Norman. He stopped jogging in place.

"That's a shame," she said. "If you say no to champagne, you say no to life."

"Isn't that a line from *The Deer Hunter*?" Norman said. He looked back and forth. "Just one glass, I guess."

Why am I doing this?

"Hop in," she said, placing the ice bucket on the passenger side floor.

The back passenger side door opened, and a silver-haired man in a gray turtleneck sweater, shiny, black pants, and black, leather shoes leaned forward and grinned.

"Hey, kid," he said, lighting a cigarette. "Have a seat."

It can't be him.

Norman eased into the limousine and stared at the man.

“Where can a guy get some action in this town? We’re on our way to fuckin’ Chicago for a show tomorrow night -- big show, Liza, Dean -- and that big silver bird starts to pull up lame. Guy says we gotta land here. So, where’s the action?”

“There’s a nice, quiet restaurant, a steak and seafood place, just up the road,” Norman said.

“Nah, kid. I said *action*. Don’t you know who you’re talkin’ to?”

“Yes. Absolutely, Mr. Sinatra. I --”

“-- Call me Frank, jogger-boy.”

“What kind of place do you mean, exactly? There’s not much action in Clarkton, Frank.”

“I’m talkin’ about the kind of place where men like us can be men we like. Games of chance. Beautiful broads. Swingin’ jazz. Get the picture?”

“Well, there’s The Palace Club, but I don’t think they play jazz there.”

“Yes! The Palace Club. Sounds like my kind of joint.”

“It’s not what you think, Frank. It’s a yo-yo-ing club with a small casino. Mostly yo-yo-ing, though.”

“Yo-yo-ing, huh? People bet on the matches?”

“Yeah, but --”

“—Monique. Baby. To The Palace Club. Floor it.”

The limousine picked up speed, and Monique turned up the stereo volume. Bobby Darin’s “Mack the Knife.” Frank closed his eyes for a moment, then looked at Norman.

“You think Bobby Darin’s better than me, kid? Don’t bullshit me.”

“Hadn’t really thought about it, Frank. I -- ”

“-- That’s okay. Don’t be nervous. He could dance better. And I can’t play guitar. But I fuckin’ won an Oscar.

From Here to Eternity. Mother of nine bastards. That role turned my life around.”

Frank looked at Norman and grinned.

“Drink up, kid. Relax.”

Monique took the back roads at ninety-miles-an-hour and arrived at The Palace in fifteen minutes flat. She turned off the stereo.

“I’ve heard about this place, but I’ve never been inside,” Norman said. “I’m not into yo-yo-ing. I’m a brain surgeon.”

“That’s a shame, kid,” Frank said. “You been operating on other people’s brains, but you’re not using your own. You’ll be okay. I envy you in a way. It’s like having sex for the first time. You’ll wonder what the hell just happened, but you’ll wanna do it again. Then you’ll get better. Then you won’t be able to live without it. Trust me. What’s your name again, kid?”

“Norman. Norman Moss.”

“Let’s enjoy life, Norman Moss,” Frank said, opening the limousine door.

He walked up to the driver’s side window and tapped it three times with his diamond pinky ring.

Monique rolled down the window and touched her lips to Frank’s, then pulled back, making a tiny popping sound. Frank whispered something to her. Norman got out, stepped toward the club entrance, and turned around.

“Wait. I’m underdressed.”

“Don’t worry about it, Norman,” Frank said, shoulder-slapping him. “There’ll be plenty of time later to get you into some sharp duds.”

Monique sped off, waving to the two men as Norman stood with his arms outstretched. He turned, walked to the entrance with Frank, and opened the doors to his destiny.

Norman, donning his tan, suede, fringed cowboy jacket, a white, silk shirt, Levi's, and black, leather, ankle-high Beatle boots, strode into The Palace Club's main yo-yo pit.

The place was a maelstrom of psychedelic color, light, and sound. Lynyrd Skynyrd's "I Know a Little" blasted from the club's \$200,000 audio system. Hundreds of rapid-blinking, multi-colored light bulbs dangled from silver wires below the gold-domed ceiling. The match was a sellout. Eight hundred suspense junkies, degenerate gamblers, pimps, prostitutes, dope pushers, and hippies crowded the seats and aisles surrounding the pit.

Norman nodded and waved as his fans cheered him on. Al stood still in his corner, eyeing Norman as a big cat eyes its prey. The stocky, bald referee shuffled into the ring, grabbed the microphone, and introduced the two competitors.

"For the Clarkton Yo-Yo title! Three rounds!" he said in a high-pitched voice.

He called the men together in the center of the pit.

"Okay, gentlemen. Regulation yo-yos only. No grease. No repairs. If your yo-yo breaks, you forfeit the match. Keep 'em in the pit. No lewd tricks. Good luck."

Al leaned in close to Norman, his lips an inch from Norman's left ear.

"This one's for Dolly," he said.

Norman smiled, and the two men went to their respective corners. The ring announcer introduced the three judges, and the match began.

Al opened up with his signature routine, “The Angry Mongoose.” If Al jumped ahead quickly on points, Norman would be forced to complete his first routine error-free. Al’s dedication and training paid off, and when he finished, the judges awarded him thirty points -- a perfect score. Al pointed at Norman and nodded his head.

The crowd bellowed.

Norman stepped into the pit, got on his hands and knees, and executed “The Menacing Moss” flawlessly. His gold yo-yo bounced and rolled like a creature with the ability to reason. Norman finished the routine, grinning at the crowd as he dropped the yo-yo string and allowed the thing to spin and come to rest upright an inch from the tips of his boots. He bowed and picked up the yo-yo, working the crowd into an awe-lather. The judges held up their scorecards: thirty points.

Al licked sweat-drops from his upper lip. He stepped into the center of the ring and began his “Demon Drop” routine. All seemed to be going as planned -- no mistakes, high marks for creativity -- when he got tripped up by his string in the middle of the Highland Swing section. His right leg flailed in ugly desperation, further complicating matters. Al, ankles captive in a nightmare of tangled yo-yo string, fell to the floor.

The crowd moaned.

Al freed his feet, rose, and retreated to his corner. The judges were rattled. Still, points had to be deducted. Al’s score: fifteen points.

All Norman had to do now was not make a mistake.

Norman scanned the crowd, then the rubbery faces of the judges. He looked back out into the crowd and there she was. Third row on the aisle. Linda.

Can’t be. Can’t be her. Shit. It is her.

The referee motioned for Norman to step into the pit. He couldn’t hear the crowd. Just the voices in his head.

“This one’s for Dolly.”

“You’re a child. And a fool. And you’ve gone insane. And I don’t love you anymore.”

“Guess what, baby. I’ll do it alone.”

“That’s a shame. If you say no to champagne, you say no to life.”

“Just one glass, I guess.”

“...where men like us can be men we like.”

“This one’s for Dolly.”

Norman prepared for “The Mao Moss.” He pulled the duct tape out of the right pocket of his jacket, tore off a strip, and placed it over his mouth. He reached for two cotton balls from his left pocket and stuffed them in his ears. He looked nervously to his left and right. He put the loop on the end of the yo-yo string around his index finger and began his routine. He glanced at Linda. She shook her head, and the yo-yo slipped from Norman’s fingers.

He tried to grab it, but just missed, and the golden yo-yo bounced on the glossy, parquet floor, then broke into three pieces. The center section rolled away from its string, across the ring, and came to rest at Al’s feet.

The crowd gasped. Then silence.

Norman walked toward Al, pulling the duct tape off his mouth and the cotton balls from his ears. He sniffed.

“You win,” Norman said.

The referee bear-hugged Norman and walked him to his corner. Then he returned to center-ring and grasped the descending microphone.

“We have a forfeit! Broken yo-yo. Our new champion is Albert Cordiiiiiiiiiaaaa.”

The crowd rushed the pit and picked up Al, holding him on their shoulders in celebration. No one noticed Norman as he snuck out of the pit and out of The Palace Club. When he stepped into the freezing, pitiless Clarkton night, Linda was waiting for him. She was tan and trim and pretty.

“What’s your story?” Norman said. “Here to wish me luck?”

“Nope. Here to place a bet.”

“I choked. It happens to the best of them. At least your instincts were sound.”

“My God, you’re an idiot. I didn’t bet on *you*. I bet on Al.”

“Jesus! He was seventy-five to one! Are you stupid?”

“Obviously not.”

“Why did you come back here? Why?”

“Because Bobby Darin never won an Oscar. Frank Sinatra did.”

Norman sniffed and lit a cigarette.

“What the hell are you talking about?” he said. “Gibberish, that’s what. Nothing but gibberish.”

“Is it?”

“Let’s go get a drink.”

“Goodbye, Norman,” Linda said as a valet pulled up in a glossy, white Jaguar.

“Gibberish.”

Linda handed the kid a twenty, got in, and pushed the accelerator down to the floor. The Jag’s rear tires screeched. As she drove away, she turned up the stereo volume. Echoes of Bobby Darin’s “Dream Lover” rose then reposed in the frozen air outside The Palace Club long after Linda had driven out of sight.

James Ballard

Los Angeles 1993

Bobby was the one who told me he was dead. John said he died at sunrise. Paul was holding his hand when he let go. Sam said he never regained consciousness. Bill left the room when his breathing became irregular.

Mark was angry he skipped all the clinical trials. Dave didn't think it mattered. Phil was sure the new meds would have saved him. Chris said he had lost his will to fight. Frank said it was Kaposi that brought him down. Taylor said it was pneumocystis.

Hal kept his leftover AZT. Tim recalled the day he named his anal warts. Ron remembered when he stopped taking calls.

Will divided up his address book. Grant called his family.

Gianina Opris

the only thing here is me and my art

I'm the girl with the purple shirt
I'm running
The leaves move me
I pass a tunnel
I'm a cow moving
By the pansies
I find my head
I'm in a small room
I see words
They are leaves
I'm in a beautiful fall
With bare branches
And black water
I see children full of injuries
I write songs about long kisses the next morning
With my skinny pen
I don't need a tissue
Just a chair, paper at once
My toes are freezing
I know why

One by One

words get muddy
she carelessly writes things
as if she is light
she is warm wind
she sees next door
I carelessly write things
As if I'm 8
One by one
Shapes
Rounds
lime slices
whispers: the world is ugly
they all want her hand
her heart
blue shoes
heavy head
when she paints she doesn't eat
she rides her bike instead
I swallow what I teach
And still have hair
Legs
Hands
Teeth
Eyes

I was the poet for this lullaby

From the limbs
That locked me in
This says:
Write this on
Put this on
I don't want to study
Dragonflies
Female changes
Or
You are just at that age!

Peeling an orange I hear
"The master criminal
is murdered"
"The tornado
takes the lady's porch"
"They no longer sit in church"
This happened in the year of the Rabbit
The rest
You know

Dear Wind
Dear rising rage
Why don't I call this
by its name?
Turn this tune
into leaves

Geoffrey Gatz

There is a Monster at the End of this Poem

I am not human
I am not German
I am not coffee
I am not artwork
I am not poetry
I am not writing this
I am not human
I am not in my sunset years
I am not watching TV
I am not listening
I am not breathing
I am not breathing
I am not watching you
I am not writing
I am not eating
I am not what you think I am
I am not open to that at all
I am not into that either
I am not human
I am not a vegetarian
I am not vegan either
I am not a non-smoker
I am not a poem
I am not a cigarette
I am not a Buddha
I am not a TV
I am not a good writer
I am not a poem

I am not a bowlful of marijuana
I am not happy
I am not happy with you either
I am not sad
I am not dead yet
I am not at a funeral
I am not at a poetry reading
I am not a fascist
I am not a marxist
I am not a lion
I am not sitting
I am not human
I am not inhuman either
I am not a poem
I am not like that anymore
I am not music
I am not a song
I am not a film
I am not a video either
I am not a car
I am not a car radio either
I am not at my desk
I am not on the phone
I am not a computer
I am not email
I am not a tweet
I am not in charge
I am not out of debt
I am not money
I am not credit
I am not a bank
I am not an accountant
I am not an ant either
I am not a toy
I am not human
I am not asleep
I am not a cat
I am not a pot of tea
I am not a book
I am not a poem
I am not speech
I am not the president

I am not congress
I am not progress
I am not open
I am not closed
I am not occupy
I am not political
I am not what you think I am
I am not that either
I am not about drugs
I am not a pillow
I am not about to run anywhere
I am not for war
I am not against war
I am not what you would call a true-believer
I am not a superhero
I am not a hero
I am not a jelly donut
I am not here
I am not there
I am not measured
I am not able to be measured
I am not human
I am not your family
I am not at your dinner table
I am not in your home
I am not at my home
I am not on the streets
I am not in a fish tank
I am not a truck
I am not John Ashbery
I am not a good poet
I am not a good person
I am not worthy of emotion
I am not able to rid myself of emotion
I am not a machine
I am not human
I am not a poem
I am not an airplane
I am not a yawning gap
I am not subsidized
I am not politics
I am not in the commons

I am not affordable
I am not a house
I am not demanding
I am not conservative
I am not talking
I am not downsized
I am not an owner
I am not labor
I am not a psychoanalyst
I am not practical
I am not a house
I am not a gingerbread house
I am not forgetting
I am not a memory
I am not a time
I am not late
I am not early either
I am not human
I am not ethical
I am not a volunteer
I am not a metaphor
I am not able to explain
I am not a dealer
I am not on ebay
I am not sentimental
I am not without sentiment
I am not valuable
I am not vital
I am not we the people
I am not the universe
I am not an urban fox
I am not a city rabbit
I am not a dog
I am not cultured
I am not a vocal determined minority
I am not a nation
I am not making it worse
I am not ninety years old
I am not piss and vinegar
I am not a windmill
I am not the crown
I am not empty

I am not doing what you tell me to do
I am not aristocratic
I am not healthy
I am not in bed
I am not stupid
I am not human
I am not with the Internet
I am not animated
I am not part of the staff
I am not realistic
I am not in danger
I am not dangerous
I am not embracing anger
I am not Elvis shooting the TV
I am not unfair
I am not unsound
I am not sure
I am not in protest
I am not outside
I am not a real treat
I am not best pleased
I am not reacting
I am not mocking you
I am not ridiculing
I am not old
I am not sorry
I am not anywhere near the end of this
I am not disappointed
I am not bored yet
I am not thinking of something else
I am not looking at my watch
I am not fidgety
I am not in protest
I am not voting for you
I am not worried
I am not smiling
I am not laughing
I am not honest
I am not flicking you in the head
I am not pleased
I am not part of the one percent
I am not hungry

I am not human
I am not a quote
I am not a child
I am not educated
I am not me
I am not you
I am not the news
I am not a guide
I am not a philosopher
I am not shaking
I am not impressed
I am not dreaming
I am not in New York
I am not in a trance
I am not wondering
I am not a worm
I am not employed
I am not in the past
I am not in the future
I am not alive
I am not dead
I am not solid
I am not monied
I am not concerned
I am not an appendix
I am not on the lam
I am not free
I am not alone
I am not with friends
I am not very far away
I am not near you at all
I am not able to tell you that
I am not remembering well
I am not misremembering
I am not a train
I am not alighting
I am not vocabulary
I am not a single word
I am not a rifle
I am not a killer
I am not a poet
I am not human

I am not watching CNN anymore
I am not a drone
I am not military
I am not a warship
I am not unaccountable
I am not able to make peace
I am not able to make water
I am not able to eat without killing
I am not a killer
I am not eating
I am not killing myself with tobacco
I am not high right now
I am not human
I am not a poem
I am not clean
I am not shaved
I am not an animal
I am not what you think
I am not alright
I am not a machine
I am not human
I am not a poem
I am not cancer
I am not a Virgo
I am not a twin
I am not born
I am not reborn
I am not getting younger
I am not old
I am not what I thought I would be
I am not cool anymore
I am not a bully
I am not in school
I am not in my locker
I am not a victim
I am not a butterfly
I am not a flower
I am not a scent
I am not a cup of tea
I am not coffee
I am not sugar
I am not open-minded

I am not a tablecloth
I am not a table
I am not a foundation
I am not cracked from water damage
I am not plaster
I am not a statue
I am not human
I am not a poem
I am not sluggardly
I am not a spy
I am not a communist
I am not with them
I am not with you either
I am not for my own interests
I am not for your well-being
I am not fond of the post office
I am not afraid
I am not in the dark
I am not naive
I am not a bottle of water
I am not an ocean
I am not a droplet of rain
I am not cloud
I am not seeing a silver lining
I am not going to stop
I am not releasing energy
I am not a green house emission
I am not mission based
I am not on the moon
I am not going to ever set foot on mars
I am not in the mood
I am not ready for Christmas
I am not ready for the New Year
I am not winter
I am not snowfall
I am not an icicle
I am not a frozen circle
I am not green leaves
I am not an autumn sunset
I am not giving thanks
I am not thankful
I am not ungrateful

I am not shaking your hand
I am not welcome
I am not hearing you
I am not kissing you either
I am not inside of you
I am not in love
I am not loving
I am not unloved
I am not a cat
I am not a doctor
I am not voice
I am not sound
I am not unsound
I am not level
I am not a mantel
I am not reading
I am not awake
I am not flowing
I am not on top
I am not thinking
I am not thoughtless
I am not obscure
I am not clear
I am not championing
I am not worn out
I am not a heathen at the gate
I am not a gate
I am not a door
I am not fixed
I am not in the highlands
I am not enjoying myself
I am not longing
I am not a thing
I am not brilliant
I am not trivial
I am not supercilious
I am not extreme
I am not a fact
I am not fact based
I am not talking
I am not swelling
I am not lying

I am not a liar
I am not telling the truth
I am not on opposing sides
I am not a reflection of myself
I am not bristling
I am not shocked
I am not explaining
I am not in a crux
I am not a crucible
I am not adherent
I am not conveying this well
I am not going to stop for a long while
I am not against you getting up and moving around
I am not a poem
I am not going to get upset
I am not rude
I am not Hamlet
I am not a ghost father
I am not expounding
I am not in a cloud of doubt
I am not reassessing
I am not rummy
I am not failing
I am not ham-fisted
I am not riding high
I am not a front runner
I am not an 'also ran'
I am not in your head
I am not out of my head
I am not careless
I am not reckless
I am not skillful
I am not anything
I am not a thing
I am not endangered
I am not small
I am not composed
I am not on my game
I am not footloose
I am not free
I am not Lazarus
I am not reborn

I am not tired
I am not going to play with the cat
I am not contradictory
I am not going away
I am not a machine
I am not human
I am not a poem
I am not a concerto
I am not a parallelogram
I am not rhombic
I am not feigning
I am not baited
I am not a heartbeat
I am not tortured
I am not repressed
I am not boarded
I am not water
I am not brave like you
I am not going to run towards fire
I am not running into gunfire
I am not exploding
I am not dying for you
I am not going to save you
I am not able to fly
I am not a bursting alarm
I am not able to reach your outstretched hand
I am not watching you fall to your death
I am not on a mountain
I am not an avalanche
I am not on my way to the dentist
I am not remembering Paul Harvey
I am not recalling those days
I am not going to remember anything I do not want to remember
I am not your son
I am not angry
I am not going to ask why you asked me that
I am not questioning your authority
I am not overruled
I am not ruled
I am not a ruler
I am not measured
I am not tomato soup

I am not in a can
I am not a pipe
I am not real
I am not surreal, either
I am not confused
I am not on a voyage
I am not bound for glory
I am not hopeful
I am not for technology
I am not a futurist
I am not a rocket ship
I am not seven
I am not striped
I am not five
I am not any year
I am not a plate
I am not a mouthful
I am not childlike
I am not a gallerina
I am not a shopper
I am not citizen
I am not incorporated
I am not around the corner
I am not a mural
I am not a memorial
I am not never-ending
I am not powerful
I am not up to date
I am not watching
I am not hiding
I am not exporting democracy
I am not on Facebook
I am not social
I am not anti-social
I am not on policy
I am not a hatchet
I am not a tree limb
I am not playing nice
I am not an invention
I am not a status
I am not getting my thoughts across
I am not staying in touch

I am not a tutor
I am not a lifetime of stories
I am not a blogger
I am not a wonderful gift
I am not a great-great-great-grandfather
I am not there yet
I am not dead enough
I am not on the page
I am not with me
I am not exhilarating
I am not a giver
I am not going to chill
I am not as fast
I am not as loud
I am not paying retail
I am not jumping in
I am not an estate
I am not dusty
I am not for sale
I am not a squirrel
I am not a cheetah
I am not cheater
I am not victorious
I am not choosing
I am not going home
I am not ok
I am not
I am
I am not at bay
I am not bath water
I am not dry
I am not a warthog
I am not warmth
I am not a candelabra
I am not snorting
I am not therapeutic
I am not making strides
I am not searching the web
I am not amazing
I am not the queen
I am not in search of my next meal
I am not foraging

I am not hoarding
I am not suckling
I am not wild
I am not comfortable
I am not switching mothers
I am not a monopoly
I am not a machine
I am not human
I am not a poem
I am not what you say I am
I am not a phenomenon
I am not a magic bullet
I am not white hole
I am not a public library
I am not getting it
I am not subscribing
I am not part of the public
I am not on the surface
I am not producing paradoxes
I am not knocking on your door
I am not enormous
I am not being viewed
I am not in focus
I am not a galaxy
I am not backwards
I am not changing history
I am not a Luddite
I am not a rate of flow
I am not a mouth
I am not a moth
I am not the same
I am not in a rocket above the earth
I am not on the ground
I am not fast
I am not in the center
I am not moving towards the past
I am not taking you into account
I am not correct
I am not wrong
I am not in Massachusetts
I am not in a gravitational field
I am not on GPS

I am not revealed
I am not possible
I am not in the universe
I am not traveling at the speed of light
I am not far fetched
I am not a worm hole
I am not time
I am not in time
I am not a time machine
I am not in the book
I am not a camera
I am not the universe
I am not messing with Texas
I am not an alien
I am not an illegal alien
I am not around
I am not a competitor
I am not Afghanistan
I am not a brand new computer
I am not compelling
I am not human
I am not a poem
I am not approved
I am not easy on the budget
I am not my own boss
I am not unleashed
I am not ultimate
I am not licensed
I am not a gun owner
I am not installed properly
I am not engineered
I am not unbeatable
I am not cooking
I am not getting eaten
I am not answering you
I am not all the rage
I am not suffering
I am not a parody
I am not based on a novel
I am not a blank slate
I am not a Ouija board
I am not infallible

I am not a bow and arrow
I am not a tango
I am not tangling
I am not done with that story
I am not a man
I am not a dirty old man
I am not looking at your chest
I am not hitting on you
I am not in two parts
I am not hurt
I am not an escalator
I am not elderly
I am not entertaining
I am not finished
I am not an idiot
I am not noble
I am not a hoodie
I am not a reader
I am not into books
I am not a hub
I am not scary
I am not aligned
I am not a servant
I am not no one
I am not one
I am not granted wisdom
I am not wise enough to see
I am not mistaken
I am not understanding
I am not wounded
I am not resilient
I am not in motion
I am not intelligence
I am not a trinket
I am not worshiped
I am not a traitor
I am not convinced
I am not back-sliding
I am not in Rome
I am not a tractor pull
I am not into Rod Stewart
I am not into football, either

I am not slanted
I am not horizontal
I am not lengthwise
I am not lost in a maze
I am not hoisted
I am not a horse
I am not blind
I am not disappointed
I am not a witch
I am not desperate
I am not seeking redemption
I am not people
I am not crap
I am not lettuce
I am not sucking
I am not a product
I am not chrome plated
I am not a stimulant
I am not lemon
I am not facing north
I am not nude
I am not a malady
I am not a colored light
I am not buying shoes
I am not a customer
I am not shielded
I am not in my own shoes
I am not Milwaukee
I am not an x-ray
I am not lethal
I am not made up of atoms
I am not radioactive
I am not going to tell you anything anymore
I am not the monster you were looking for at the end of the poem
I am not
No really
I am not a monster

This poem was written for the Starlight Gallery and their Open House event Friday, August 3rd 2012. The theme "Monsters for Peace on Earth." When I began thinking of peace seeking monsters I immediately went into my memories of childhood and Sesame Street's peaceful, well-educated, educating monsters. Specifically, my favorite, the forthrightly open, lovably blue Grover seems the perfect method to plot out this poem. So I called upon one of my first-love books, "There is a Monster at the End of this Book, for inspiration. So here is my poem for Starlight, There is a Monster at the End of this poem. It's a bit long, a bit tedious, a tad bit repetitious but all in all – it's a perfect for an infringement festival :-)

Genevieve Pfeiffer

A Disturbance In The Surface

We are either strong willed and close minded,
or malleable fools whose hearts are all too yearning.
But no, we must be more than that.
We are admirals dashing
into a tryst with pearled tears,
dancers of war,
hunters of truth and winds.
Far more than grains of sand trying our magnetism.
Hoping to be more than darts flung,
twisting our own hearts to miss the bulls eye
if we think our will has been bent back
by another hand.
Knifing our shards just to see how much we can take,
we are survivors of our own identity.
The stagnated sweetness of the maple tree
pushing out it's life,
amber time chrysalis with
a morbid, selfish, indemnified
genuine mind
worming for a way back inside.

Socrates' Phoenix; An Allegory

If
I
could
be your
fire I would
burn you, just so
you could feel. Jump
out your shell, a lightning
shock straight between your
eyes. Down your spine. Grip your
insides. I could never be your campfire.
Do not toast marshmallows in my name &
suck melted sugar. The roasting stick will only
warn you I'd be a forest fire; scorch your throat
with the heated orange zest of burning bushes you
forgot/to listen to, I'd be like a thousand paper cuts on
fingertips, reminding you every time you picked up a
pencilpencrayonbrush, keyboard or touchscreen, to spread
fire to the cobwebs between your fingers. I'd be a brushfire
racing along spider/web/lines woven into your skin, the visceral
palpitation of lust for each particle of life smoldering, I'll leave my
charred handprints on everything you touch. Don't touch me If you
can't handle me. I'm red and black, leave embers and charcoal in my
wake. You can see waves of heat rippling behind me, I'll be your lake
and I want you to drown. The last thing you hear, the sound of your
own breath and find peace in it. Then I would lap the words from
your mouth in heat, you'd speak nothing but your soul's language
back to me & we'd commune as a sacred candle's Morse code,
the flickerings of Wholy worship, flames licking shots off
tongues at screens (I bear the message that shadows
are not as far away as they seem) and I want you
to see what Gods see, before I roll the skies
on their backs and douse you
in your own skin.

Clothes

strung out in the hot summer air
hanging on a line
ready to be wrung out and take their shape.
Ready to wear.
To wrestle with little brothers, sit at the dinner table,
or be worm into town.
Hung with anticipation
of slow-dance nights
hushed with sweat.
Or taking-on-the world
Business-Wear.
Some toughed out
with a raised fist and squinting eyes
ready to stand tall
in the face of bright colored collages pieced into law
with speakerphones
and judicial enforcement.
The just-let-me-live cut.
Forged mail and armor over skin.
An orange jumpsuit,
hand-written mail,
to an amour
who is also the sun
drying and shaping words
sitting on shoulders
breaking backs.

Earthworms ⇒

The Earth has no straight spine
but worms the winds to her will.
It is the nature of the straight things,
the backboned trees and towers,
skeletons of bumblebees and eight-tracks,
to snap.

Like blades, pushing
apart outdated flesh of blacktop
bending back considering the winter
making room for rain to freeze
and bust open cracks,
we are guided.

Shaped and molded
by the uncontained
yielding to propensity.

Butterscotch Fingerprints

I can still hear you.
The last eye lock
Still burns
Smoldering in the synapse
Between my tongue I taste you
Sweet like butterscotch
Sticking to me
Droplets collecting
Still smudged across dresses
And books
Scenting my memories

On your Birthday
I sat in the kitchen
Dinner and the taste of us,
Burned.

Eleanor Levine

Thysanura

Gray nymphs
crawl on the ceiling
Mother says it is dust,
my dust, that makes
the silverfish
dance rapidly
propeller toes
in corners
where you can't
quell them unless
they pose naked under
a light and
we squash
the insides
with a grin

Minnie

moist as baked salmon
a verse from
William Carlos Williams' last meal
my Mother knew Minnie
and her husband Moe
with ruby whiskers
who lived in a brick building
near Red Moon Pizzeria
and Lane Drugs
"Minnie Mouse has rubber lips,"
I said when Mom made me visit
we brought diabetic chocolates
& a quart of milk
to her apartment, which smelled
like grey hairs in the medicine cabinet
we sat in the dark
Minnie didn't use a lamp
she and Mom spoke
about matzo
eggs and
the items on sale
at Shop Rite
that week
when Minnie died
we no longer
went to her place
near Jamesway
where Welfare recipients
made glamorous purchases.

The Follower

He was her Jesus Christ
and she was his apostle

Together they sang about
fecal matters and other elements

In the backyard that she
ate or killed, such as squirrels

or rabbits who trampled on
the wrong side of the tree

whenever Jesus left for work,
the disciple would whine for

hours at the window in the living
room and await the cream cheese

and bagel that Hilda (his mother)
offered as communal fodder for

her poor digestive system, which
had pancreatic difficulties that even

Jesus couldn't cure, although they
tried numerous remedies that cost

about \$12,000, where Eastern met
Western medicine in the vet's office

Finally, she stopped breathing and
biting as well as she had and he

could no longer find the teeth marks
she always left on his hands.

The Eighth Commandment

A born-again Christian
who shared Mom's hospital room
stole her underpants.

Between oxygen inhalations and
her daughter's visit, the woman said,
"Jesus will look after you—
needn't worry about the
future or your heart."

Reading *Matthen*, *Mark* and *Luke*
the elderly lady, who had dialysis,
reached into Mother's cupboard

*

"Can you forgive her? I'll buy panties
at Walgreens."

"That's not the point," Mom proclaimed,
"it's *what* she's done that so disturbs me."

At Delicious Orchards¹

humming since the Pharaoh
first stored colonies
in a desert apiary
black-eyed peas dancing
on hexagonal wax vestiges
hung from bellybuttons
off their momma
~~~~~  
spinning headlong  
into each other and their  
vast nest of Christ-like  
followers who merged  
year round  
even when snow  
covered our feet  
we knew  
it'd mean ripples  
of flesh  
bitten by  
brown and yellow tenants  
if you threw  
a rock into their  
condominium

---

<sup>1</sup> At Delicious Orchards in Colts Neck, New Jersey, in the 1970s, they displayed a glass beehive case with hundreds of honey bees.

Elaina Perpelitt

### The Beast

loss is not a subtle beast, but it lives in the shadows in the creases of your face, and in the back of your throat when it's rainy and ripe with nostalgia,  
and it lives also in the frames of your eyeglasses when the blue glare reflects just so  
or when a gift smells of better days, sweet pine and cold snow, darling,  
you remember... it sleeps sometimes in hibernation, like when you smile and it is curled in your rosy cheeks and within the wavy circles of your oceanic irises, until the spring comes and it awakens,  
tired and ravenous,  
eating away at the peace you've formed—  
loss is not a subtle beast, it roars, roars, roars  
with the alacrity of a youthful sore, reborn in your wrinkles  
when it rains.

## Evolution of Lies

I am the evolution of lies  
from little white  
to puerile to insidious to  
unforgivable;  
the last mentioned being  
what I am right now  
existing merely to exist but drowning in  
self-reverential existential narcissistic  
whatever  
vomit,  
trails  
of  
last night's  
discoveries  
hidden in anthologies of the 20's  
blacklisted  
just like my frozen veins  
figuratively  
not literally  
you idiot—  
I care not for indulgence in prolixity nightmares  
politically incorrect  
screaming from the backseat of wet taxis  
or—Dear God—  
grammatically incorrect  
the worst crime  
you could commit  
being with  
the shallow “miss me”  
meaning  
that I am once again  
morphing into an amalgam  
of kitchen sinks and  
artificial sore throats raw  
from kicking in Cliché's favorite hideout:  
your heart,  
spewing grayish puss and bile  
into horoscopes nightly

echoes  
in the stars  
formulated into freckles  
which occur only in  
moments of orgasm  
not the sex kind  
but the kind you get  
reading a particularly good Poe poem  
because you know he's manipulating you  
because he tells you so  
but it still sends  
melancholy  
crawling icy up your back and into your neck  
and out of those eyes—  
and I read Him there  
laughing sadistically.  
Inspired  
I stretch my  
vocal chords as wide as a python devouring prey  
saying things  
that twist senses and sensitivities and sense itself,  
common and otherwise  
(including but not limited to: of direction).  
Love partially,  
please  
love wholly only self and love holes in self and the Holy self which is  
of course  
in itself selfishly oxymoronic  
which is to say,  
You  
are the aforementioned partial  
to me,  
and only partial  
in the margins  
at the  
edge  
of reasons dried and crumbling  
like old birthday cake  
delicious in its time  
now stale  
and let's be honest;  
there is nothing worse than

stale birthday cake  
forced down  
at midnight  
in a rush of denial—  
“I’m not that old!”  
If all of this  
is not enough to  
drive you away,  
I’ll relieve you of  
puddle candles (they burned  
all night; you know what you did)  
and  
filthy showers and filthier diaries  
and  
pantries of  
romance food  
mostly poems and inside jokes  
occasionally something clever like  
a play  
on the words “miss” and “me”  
so that whenever  
anyone  
whispers  
these  
things, you will feel sick  
and vomit whatever vomit  
all over the back seats  
of taxis  
and you will see the candle wax harden and want to  
shove  
all those memories  
back up into the vortex of infinity  
or maybe just  
back up into me,  
but I must warn you,  
I will have evolved  
into the next  
lie  
and this one will be  
beyond unforgivable,  
it will be  
summital



paramount  
annihilation  
and it will lead to  
revolution  
within the psyche of modern *homo sapiens*  
and it will not be made of words  
the way I am right now;  
it will be made of  
Raw Seduction  
licking lips  
into oblivion, the friend  
I've yet to make—  
for now  
I'll continue these exercises  
of exacerbation,  
you fucking  
fucking  
fucking  
idiot.

## Starving

bulimic control freaks enjoy post-purge highs in bathroom stalls smelling like yesterday  
masturbating boys next door screech quietly at the idea of perfection planted in Playboy

girls drinking down carbonated caffeinated aspartame to keep the poetry at bay  
and loners drowning in the aspirin induced lull of internet television where commercials precede commercials that  
precede ads that explain with condescending authority how to fix yourself.

Don't you realize they are not the enemy? They are us.

One girl's thirsty starvation monster claws at the lining stretched far beyond capacity  
Fix? I need a fix, she thinks, swallowing whatever is stale in the cabinet of claustrophobic friends,  
little does she know she's not as alone as mental health professionals would have us believe in starch thousand page  
textbooks analyzing twitches and the freckle constellations on her face and legs  
which of course mean much more than the Gemini astrology section she reads daily, beware the love that will steal  
your heart, beware the dinner that will fatten you into your mother or worse, your teacher.

One boy's angry hormones hurl his morals into battlefields where creeps are the definition of peers and life comes  
in one orgasmic yell encompassing the devil's red hot passion  
dreams of the girl whose mouth will turn him into an upright citizen of pleasure  
we all starve for something  
we all starve for something,  
and sometimes the lost are the most grounded for at least they are within a moment of need  
not dreading past nor future clocks the way wrinkles count years in slow rocket lift-offs.

OK

I am Oh Kay. O. K. Okay.

OK?

This time two letters define soft grass  
growing in  
my brain, the underbelly of heartbreak  
where the damage  
is really done—  
from scar tissue there planted  
the most beautiful garden  
of acidic resentment, yellows, oranges, reds and greens  
splattered  
like freckled temperatures punctuated with  
Hell  
circle after circle after circle  
where I wrote myself into  
pillowed pity  
sobbing corridors of isolation  
greasy with self-loathing  
until I realized  
oh, oh, oh  
so arresting, this I created, this my world  
and I am King  
because in this world women can be Kings  
and I rule with silver-fisted tyranny,  
slapping regret into dungeons of dusty books  
and tying optimism to my eyes—  
that's what that sparkle is,  
that glimpse of the sun,  
I bet you didn't realize I was holding it captive,  
how brilliant my deception  
as I  
cough up bloody bipolar reality  
subtly into a napkin  
folded perfectly to match  
my smile  
white, pearly, always—  
always meaning now, hiding all evers  
especially for's ever—

winning over  
angels of anorexia who cling  
for dear life  
to always, my lying always, of course,  
and me  
and my kingdom of pariahs  
outcast outlaws outed by  
ones who loved then stopped loving—  
the cruelest of cruel  
almost unbelievably impossibly cruel  
yet to remain fixated is  
as petty as  
a thirty year grudge over five dollars  
borrowed for a stale beer  
once. Oh, once, how you separate  
me from  
my lover (once)  
who loved me (once)  
who told me I'd be his (once)  
and who now  
whispers sour nothings in the ears of another,  
a girl who may  
or may not wonder if she will be his  
or his once  
as I am, that which  
my brain garden can attest to  
overgrown flowering lethargy,  
how I adore this garden now  
how I water it  
how I feed it  
how I smother it with kissing poems  
of nonsensical metaphors  
hate poems hating love  
love poems loving hate  
poems hating love and hate poems  
because it all seems so pointless  
in strawberry sheets  
and it all seems so meaningful  
in the rush of verbs,  
verbs do so love to rush, don't they,  
screaming, punching, kicking—  
breathing feverishly, they live to breath feverishly

as do I  
as do I  
as I realize my own mortality daily,  
morningly  
perpetually  
especially on rainy mornings  
when ambiguous Gods vaguely sneeze  
and us agnostics  
huddle together with atheists  
to keep warm (on particularly bad storms, of course  
we allow the anarchists shelter  
as well.) And  
well...  
this concludes  
yet another  
empty pondering preponderance  
of the forgivers over the forgiven  
of the religious over the materialists  
of the liars over the honest  
because in the end  
our gardens are our gardens  
they may flourish  
they may wither  
they may look however we build them to look  
and really be just... Oh Kay,  
and O.K. always,  
a brilliant summary  
of my current existence  
of which I am immensely proud  
because of the connotations  
that Tomorrow brings:  
OK (once.)

Doug Rice

### Rainskin

“All through the foothills of Vietnam,” she tells Doug, “there are people whose skin is made of rain.” Mai’s body waits for the sun to vanish behind the clouds. Her fingers childish and curious pulling blackberries from a bush. “Some say such people are only the people of myth, of old stories dropped along the way, the wet underside of river rocks.” Her eyes witness the appearance of these words, her words, her breath, her dreaming. “These people say this as if myths are not true, as if the people of myths are not real. But I have met these people. I have touched the water of their skin. I have listened to their damp voices, their whispers, their murmuring sentences.”

## **A Moment Beneath**

Mai's tongue, her throat, her bones, her muscles, her feet, her skin shaped her words, rooted in water, into a tiny desire for raw beginnings. She pulled word after word from beneath her silent and still tongue. A few of these words occasionally burned her lips before she could say them. The earthly branches of her roughened syllables moistened by careful morning rain. To write, Mai only needed to feel the breath of her body—the language and longing of her lungs, of her womb and of her ribs. Where her body was most tender, Mai wrote one single word in pencil. She translated all of her memories from the refugee camps onto the seams of her clothes. Her silent prayer to history. With each step, these memories rubbed against her flesh, awakened her tender muscles. While I slept, Mai hid other words carrying her memories of the time before the bombs fell on her village beneath my fingernails so that I would always remember her remembering.

## **Breath Before Birth**

The subtle curve of Mai's words made from dirt, made from stone. From the bark of lonely pomegranate trees, she carved ancient, muddied words. She cut fairytales from the fruit of these trees, their innocent seeds. Red, wet letters scrawled across her dark skin dreaming of weeping rivers. Mai refused to form the breath of her sentences merely from words. She mixed the pulp of pomegranates with the insides of lotus flowers. She learned secret ways for writing on the surfaces of water. Onto the whitewater of the American River, Mai scribbled these lost words. A diary of her innocent travels up and down green mountain trails. Familial stories of water written directly from her tongue, her parched lips. She carried each of these stories beneath her skin, near her womb. And she listened while she wrote sentence after sentence onto the rivers.



Dan J. Johnson

Ombrosa

divided  
stockfish  
sausages  
and cheeses,  
and sorrow over the loss of  
mania  
the beehives  
turned  
to the peasants  
gave orders for watercourses to be dug,  
fright began to wave  
overturned a beehive and  
a cloud of bees ran blindly  
a fever from stings  
another from wetting  
the will to live would stay in bed all day  
trees  
had been murdered; his daughter married  
herself;

hallucinations that Jesuits had taken  
his house  
from one tree to another,  
the branches of cypresses  
watched the burial from beyond the cemetery wall  
we flung a handful of earth  
down a small branch of leaves  
bailiffs and tenants  
would be on a branch.  
perched on the big nut tree in the square  
people treated him  
telling stories to groups of Ombrosians,  
the foot of the tree  
would describe our uncle's end,

Changming Yuan

### Cityscape: A Parallel Poem

Rusty teeth in the mouth of the city  
Morning glows in the tongue of the day  
*Bite off all the darkness, they whispered;*  
*And chew the season well.*

## Strawberry: Another Parallel Poem

Bolder than blood  
Fleshier than a whole collection  
Of summer spots

You wear your heart inside out  
With sun-stained seeds

We wrap your body greedily  
With our tongues and minds

## Natural Confrontations

### *1/ Orchid*

Deep in the valley  
Alone on a shady spot  
You bloom aloud, though  
There are neither eyes  
Nor ears open nearby  
Paying the slightest attention  
To your shape or melody  
Be it ever so fragrant  
So fulfilling

### *2/ Ant*

Stretching its hair-like limbs  
As far as it can  
The ant embracing  
The tallest Douglas tree  
In the forest  
Attempts to shake off  
All its leaves  
Branches, and even  
To uproot it

### *3/ Feather*

A white fluffy plume  
From an unknown bird  
Happening to fly by  
Drifts around, falling down  
Slowly as if to wipe out  
All the dust at dusk  
With its invisible fingers

## Seasonal Stanzas

### *October*

Burning, blooming  
Like spring flowers  
All tree leaves  
Giggle, guffawing  
With the west wind  
In their fierce defiance  
Against the elegy of the land  
Recited aloud  
In blood-throated voices

### *November*

Most monotonous month:  
Each passing day is depressed  
Into a crow, its wings  
Its body and tails  
Newly glazed in the mists  
Of thick dusk  
Though its heart still  
Lingers in the memory of  
Summer's orange morning glows

### *December*

As the sun sinks deeper every day  
Into the other side of the world  
The shadow is getting longer, darker  
Making our lives slant more and more  
Towards night, when nature  
Tries to balance yin and yang  
By covering each dark corner  
With white snowflakes  
Ever so softly, quietly

As each twig frowns hard at twilight  
Why not give it smile and book a space in heaven?

## Egg\* Poems: An English Languacultural History of China

### 1/ *Ancient China*

They used to drink *tea*  
Wear *silk*  
Eat from *china*  
Think in terms of *zen*  
And practice *Confucianism*

Only - is it true?

### 2/ *Semi-Colonial China*

Wearing *cheongsam*  
These poor *coolies* arrived here  
On *sampans*  
Always ready to *kowtow*  
To a *tycoon*  
Who lived in *Shangri-La*  
Eating *dim sum*  
Drinking *oolong*  
Playing *mahjong*  
Gambling in a *casino* every day  
Though reluctant to give *cumshaw*

3/ Mandarin China

Led by *dao*  
A *yin*  
Running *dog*  
Wearing *qipao*  
Is fighting against a *yang*  
*Paper tiger*  
With *nushu*  
After getting *brainwashed*  
Through *maotai*  
Like a *taikongnaut*  
At a *fengshui* spot  
Dominated by *qi*

\*A word (or person) with a Chinese origin living in the West is often called an ‘egg,’ which is white-skinned, but yellow-hearted.



Brent Lucia

### Through Cobblestone Streets

Even if it was a dream at least I was part of something. I couldn't remember the last time I felt included; I've been avoiding people ever since my last moment of contact with my x-girlfriend. Once the relationship reached its deathbed, we didn't pull the cord. We brought in the medical ventilators and hoped for the best. After a few months on life support, I began sending her haikus via text-morsels of love in Japanese poetic form:

*My Love in your Water*

*I hide it from my failed soul*

*Buried in Heart Waves*

She never responded. Or at least I don't think she did. After a day of silence I made a sad face out of a colon and half a parenthesis and was about to send it to her but changed my mind. Instead I spiked my Iphone into the concrete and bought a pack of camel lights. I hadn't smoked in over three years. The first drag was a breath of fresh air, strangely enough, and I hoped to God it got me closer to the end of this tragedy. That day was three weeks ago; I haven't gotten a new phone since.

Now I have this dream. It's my signal. A lighthouse on destinies forgotten shores. I won't battle with my destiny or look to ignore it; she's a real tuff mutt. All I can do is wait and observe; a complete surrendering to fate.

So it came to no surprise that I approached a strange man on the F train who resembled a character in this dream. He was Puerto Rican, wearing dark Ray-Bans and a white tank top that simply stated “Shake Your Culo.” The man was older, straight faced, bobbing his head to the music in his brain which seemed to go on endlessly. I couldn’t escape the structure of his eye sockets that dug deep into his skull like construction sites. His thin red lips pulling his cheeks together; the same lips that talked to me late last night.

“Remember me?” I asked, taping the man on the shoulder.

“Huh.” He said.

The train took a sharp corner; I dipped under the overhead bar. The man looked away; he wanted no part of this. In another world we were brothers, riding together like we were today-only down sharp alley ways on cobble stone streets. Me as the driver and him in the back wearing a tailored made suit and a top hat.

I tapped his shoulder again, this time with authority. “You don’t remember me I take it, I was...”

The man looked up with pure hatred in his eyes. “Stop touching me pal, wus wrong wich you! I dunno what it is you talking about.” So I stopped. I couldn’t press him. Our midnight rides were long gone, just fragments from my broken brain. Without him knowing I dropped one of my business cards into the side of his book bag. When he’s ready to talk, he’d call.

On that train I wondered if at this time tomorrow there would be a similar moment like this one, as if all moments were tied together like pearls on a string, falling in a pattern that we could sometimes stop and understand. I wondered if my x-girlfriend could see the same patterns. There was a picture of us smiling in front of the Williamsburg Bridge taken by her sister, both our eyes burning in a desire for love. I wondered if that was ever a true fire, or just some tired heat.

I walked down Broadway, towards 34<sup>th</sup> street, catching an eye of random strangers here and there. Some of them looked familiar, like B-actors in recurring movies, but none existed in my dream. In the exhausting air of midtown, I couldn't escape my own thoughts; I thought back to the worlds' drawn in my brain. The dream was resurfacing, attempting to show its unfamiliar face. There was a long car ride, my eyes glaring down an old road. My Puerto Rican passenger, distinguished gentlemen in the backseat, talking to me like an old friend.

Yes!

We were in deep conversation, listening to each other's wisdom on life. I turned from the road to face him, to catch his final words of advice. Such words were muttered once in a lifetime....

But there was nothing. A deep, blank space. I should have gotten the Puerto Rican guys number. He was my only chance.

Suddenly, like cattle I was filtered onto 34<sup>th</sup> and eighth, dead center into Herald Square. The crowd swelled like an unwelcomed bruise; my pupils dilated. I wanted to dissolve into the masses like salt running through water. These were the dying dreams of men and women, moving past each other like blades of light. They took me in like I was one of their own and soon you couldn't see me. I surrendered under each angry, metal cloud that decorated the Manhattan skyline.

## Finding Zion

Tucker walked out towards his car twisted in knots, tighter than his bulging waistline. There was no room for the beers he was about to have at Rumsfield's Pub, his weight now reaching new levels of obesity. He reached for a packet of M&M's in his glove compartment. The chocolate calmed him down. His wife couldn't seem to get off the edge of the world, screaming her fucking head off like someone was about to push her over the side. But there was nothing really to yell about, her roast beef dinner was cooked to perfection and her daughter just brought home an A in honors history. But when it came time to washing the dishes, she couldn't help but start a fight about the mortgage, digging into Tucker's beaten confidence with her pitch fork-flames dancing off in the background. Tonight wasn't the first time she got angry; she performed her she-devil act on a daily basis, burning any life that grew inside their home. Tonight Tucker just left without saying goodbye; he went to get drunk with his phone off.

Each street Tucker turned on was empty. He kept checking the rear view mirror to see if anyone was following him but he was all alone. Outside the horizon ran on endlessly, separating the place that Tucker knew from the world of the unknown. Tucker focused on the stars above the trees and wished he were out there even though he didn't know what "there" was. He was lonely, and this world he built for himself had shaken him loose at the moment. He was a fallen fruit in the wind. He wiped the side of his beard to feel the skin that kept him close to Earth-something human and familiar. And just as fast as it had struck him, this feeling of divine fellowship had left, and the spirit world breathed a sigh of relief. His eyes went back on the road. He could never focus long enough on the horizon to speak to the unknown; he could reach out only briefly but never gain a response. Was anyone's willingness to surrender ever heard? He thought back to a life as a child, his mother always dragging him to church,

demanding he repent his sins. The weekly confessions were followed by locked doors when he got home. Nothing was ever talked about. The cold dinners by himself at the dinner table were endless. His mother was a saint, said the priest, a true daughter of the lord. And she would smile under the chapel, under the fresh white boards of the wooden church. But home was dark-blacker then the bruises on his neck from his father when he failed to follow the house rules. His mom, the saint, could only watch and pray. He gripped the steering wheel harder now, the past covering him like a blanket on fire. But Tucker was older and capable of living with the burns.

The popcorn at the bar was stale and the bar top stuck to Tucker's forearms when he sat down. The stools were ripped, the glasses stained with old lipstick and the bartender had a look of carelessness and the personality of dried toast. Tucker kept his phone off, listening to the juke box move between songs. The record was slowly being picked and placed in its playing position. Elvis was chosen; the song was "In The Ghetto." Tucker ordered a pint of Guinness and let the song drown out the voice of his wife in his head. Once the first sip ran down his throat into his belly his large body relaxed; the knots took a break on their death grip around his heart. No one was talking in the bar except for Elvis. The bartender didn't even look anyone in the face; he kept to himself, and nothing was said.

A man in a white collared shirt watched Tucker drink his beer. His hair was trimmed down to a crew cut and his skin seemed soft-almost golden. He was clean shaven, and his blue eyes bounced off the pure whiteness of his freshly pressed shirt, accompanied with a straight black tie. His black pants were creased, falling to a perfect length right above his black dress shoes. On his chest was a small black name plate that read "Elder Gunther." To the right of his plate of chicken salad and mixed fruit was the book of Mormon, and Gunther had his hand gently rested on top of the small black book. Gunther had just finished his second meeting with an AA clinic down the street. He scratched his fork at his chicken salad, playing with the pieces of celery that clung tightly to the chicken

while thinking back to his speech-particularly his choice of Brigham Young quotes: *“We aren’t going to wait around for the angles anymore, we are going to build Zion right here in America.”* The sentence gave him goose bumps; an electric energy ran through his spine. He loved those words and he thought back to all the young men in the audience that night, smiling as he said them. Prosperity was ours; he knew that to be true. Why couldn’t everyone see this truth, he thought to himself. If I could share the word of our Lord with everyone I meet, then there is a chance that all could share in this truth. We could all learn what it means to be human. A smile grabbed his face instinctively, a habit Gunther could never shake. He was always smiling for no reason, just laughing in the image of his wonderful God.

Tucker turned on his phone; he had twelve missed calls and one voice message. He put the phone to ear and listened to the first few words of the message:

*“You are half the man my ex-husband was, Tucker, you limp-dick, fucking...”*

That was enough. He shut his phone back off and concentrated on the lines inside his Guinness. He had been with his wife for four years now, his second go at marriage. A decision he made at the age of forty-five, living in a one bedroom apartment, scared of growing old alone. But suddenly death wasn’t as scary as it used to be, there was something to be said for the one option out of his living hell. There was divorce, yes, but then he had to start all over again, the long nights alone and the free time with his thoughts. No voices in the house; he couldn’t bare the silence and yet he couldn’t stand the constant arguing. These feelings were not new, but Tucker ran from them like an escaped prisoner, afraid of what he might be capable of if he came to terms with his thoughts. Something was slowly boiling inside of him, the bar was as quiet as a graveyard and Tucker could hear a sound of liquid steaming from an open surface. It came without warning, without any sense of the unknown, the horizon or a God. It showed its teeth to Tucker as he kept his eyes closed-he knew what it was. Rage.

Suddenly a hand touched the back of Tucker's shoulder. His eyes opened. "Hello sir, I'm Elder Gunther. If you have a moment I'd like to talk to you about the church of Ladder Day Saints. Do you believe in God?"

Tucker turned around; his eyebrows were drawn down in confusion. He looked at Gunther, his flawless white teeth shining across his pale, young face. His ears were perked up, his hair freshly cut in a perfect rectangular shape. Even Gunther's buttons on his shirt were perfectly aligned with the button on his pants. He looked at the name plate and immediately knew what this was about, but Tucker didn't turn away. There was a long silence as Tucker stared into the man's eyes. There was opportunity here, he thought to himself. Something was burning from inside those bright blue eyes.

"Yes," said Tucker. The boiling hadn't stopped, it simply was containable now. Tucker could live along side it. He listened to Gunther as the man dove into a storyline regarding salvation and Jesus Christ. The Guinness touched his lips, flowed down to his pit and stretched out his gut. Gunther explained the glory of God, the great teachings of Jesus Christ that were spoken to the early American settlers. Tucker listened intently, responded with questions and gave signs of agreement. With each description, Gunther became more enthusiastic, falling into a trance of pure joy and excitement. He refused to sit, and when Tucker offered him a beer, he thanked him but said he did not drink. As Gunther continued to talk Tucker thought he saw the horizon in his third glass of Guinness- the straight line separating the stout from its white foam. There were two contrasting worlds, never to be joined. How fucking awful, Tucker thought to himself. And this man thinks he can bring them together. Tucker heard the boiling sound again; his left eye began to twitch- nothing but a nervous tick.

"Where's your closest church, maybe I'll come in and pay you fellas a visit sometime." The words were not Tucker's, yet they escaped from his mouth. Gunther stopped his preaching and looked in amazement at his new friend. Never would he have thought that a conversion could come so quickly, in a bar none the less. His eyes were

beaming threads of pure blue light, staring down at his possible new brother. What spectacular news. Gunther couldn't help but flash a smile.

“Right there on Fredrick Street we got a church, Tucker. I'll write down the address.” Gunther pulled out a pad and a pen. “Here ya go. We would love to have you come in. I'm there Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays all day. Otherwise, I'm doing mission trips around the neighborhood.” He handed Tucker the paper. “There ya go, buddy.”

“Thanks.” Tucker pushed the paper down into his pants pocket. Rubbing his beard, he looked up and saw Gunther staring, showing off his glistening white teeth. His face brewed perfection, a pure happiness. Gunther looked like he never even felt pain, it simply didn't exist. Tucker tried to smile back, forcing his lips to move out towards his ears briefly, failing to show his teeth. Smiling wasn't something you did in Tucker's family, it came only when asked during professional photos. His mother never smiled at him; her teeth could have been rotted from her mouth and Tucker would have never known.

The night grew late and both men lost track of time. Tucker, now holding two Mormon Pamphlets against his half empty pint, put down his drink and looked at his watch. It was twelve thirty, the last bus for Gunther to get to his church left an hour ago. Gunther ached with disappointment, taking off his glasses to rub his forehead. How did he forget his bus? It wasn't the first time Gunther lost track of time while preaching about the lord; he was comfortable with that excuse.

A voice suddenly cut the silence. “I'll drive you home.”

Gunther stopped rubbing his face. “Thanks Tucker, I appreciate it. That ok? I only live a few blocks away.”

The barman was wiping the bar down; the lights were turned off in the back dining room. Tucker was confused; did he just offer this man a ride? The line on his half drunken Guinness was blurry now, staring at it made



Tucker dizzy. He was done trying to find the horizon-this was no business for a drunken man. Gunther continued to talk on their way out, preaching about Joseph Smith and the Angel Moroni, but all Tucker could hear was the boiling sound, making its way to his surface.

Suddenly, a few words escaped from Gunther's muted speech and reached Tucker's ears. "...and so Brigham Young says that we aren't going to wait for angels anymore, we are going to build Zion ourselves..." Tucker looked over at Gunther and new his game; another one of those religious robots, sputtering off one dogmatic phrase after the next. The angles were gone, Tucker thought to himself, leaving us to drown in the failures of life. Yet this man talks to the horizon, and he says someone talks back. Then where was the voice for Tucker? Where was his Zion? The screams came crawling up Tucker's spine like an old friend, circling his ears. He knew the voices all too well. Once at the car, he watched as Gunther got into the passengers seat, buckling up like a good boy. Like his mother would want him too. "I have a mother," Tucker said to himself out loud, as he got in the car and reached underneath the driver's seat; his cold hand finding the handle to his .45 caliber pistol.

Ather Zia

### Poems for Kashmir

#### Poem 1: Prima Facie nothing has happened

circa 1989  
doors, once kept the homes warm  
now lie open, flapping like  
wounded jungle birds, the  
Himalayan winter  
enters unasked, the  
river is frozen, there is no water  
blood crusts their lips  
daughter, mother,  
sister and niece,  
the 10 year old whose legs are bare -  
grandmother, great-grandmother  
grandaunt, great-niece  
petrified,  
dark weaves into  
their hearts, now just a mound of broken,  
palpating flesh in the ash-filled courtyard  
where tunics, and veils  
have become rags  
shameful flags of hubris  
that bled across barriers  
age, kinship, young, old nothing mattered  
the terror filled night  
still hangs onto the doors,  
refusing sleep -

a probe,  
swift to begin,  
as justice has never been,  
inside the armored jeeps shiny insignia's, flags,  
guns and painted roses,  
stiff men in muftis hunch over papers  
some turn the earth, filling little envelopes marked evidence' with dust,  
their glasses reflect the darkness of the blinding light,  
their gloved hands, hold newly issued note-pads, shining pens, ready -  
their words are hard, and easy to follow,  
(depending on you knowing what they mean and don't),  
scratches,  
no forced entry, no witnesses,  
compensation,  
not so innocent 10 year old  
tea stains, safari suits, bonus,  
boot marks,  
urine, rape-kit, set-up  
daughters (not their own), swabs  
military, sputum, semen,  
militants, dissidents and traitors,  
pleasure, rolex, airfare,  
framed, nation,  
glance, youth,  
virgin, hand-me-downs  
newborn born with a broken arm,  
(a womb can only offer so much protection),  
skiing, royal springs, golf  
overtime, vacation  
there is much, much to endure  
what, where, tampering, nothing  
medical eyes, surgical hands, find smudges, marks, scratches  
that tell no tale -  
clinical ears, hear sobs that must be quieted  
pens through a maze of words, find those that must fit -  
prima facie nothing has happened

circa 2011

the women lurk inside,  
rags hung on ancient nails,  
eyes turned inwards,  
lips are a thin line of horror and fatigue,  
voices that entered into their bodies  
are like metal probes with endless thorns,  
still echoing  
over and over  
that night sticks to their doors, hunted  
watching over the unseen dead bodies of their husbands,  
the ghosts of the disappeared sons haunting only them  
the women mourn in an unknown language  
by the cracked river-bed dotted  
with bleached bones, and melting plastic shoes,  
mother's must watch over  
the children, who are growing up  
and resemble no one  
the officials come to measure the territory  
and to keep the barbed wires in place -  
a cog in a square wheel of the sovereign  
count the number of souls' in the bodies,  
the alleged rapists' again deny all charges,  
and yes - prima facie nothing has happened

## POEM 2: Homecoming

His lunch is getting cold, she whispers, to herself  
The nickel-plated, copper edged bowl,  
placed just right on the thread-bare mat  
white, glob of pudgy rice  
wet with glistening collards,  
a twisted wreath of peace

the slogans rise  
Khoon ka badla khoon se lenge  
(blood for blood) -  
Lal \* chowk is lal today  
(red square is red today)  
She closes the window,  
Shivering; shuts the sunshine out,  
The noise dims - only for a moment

She waits, like everyday  
For him to come  
grease, gas, and sorrow marking his face  
he remembers to forget the  
phantom coolness of the trigger  
warmth of a mission, which he thought was bigger than his heart,  
now he tries to coax unwilling vehicles to life  
touching the worn map behind his grandfather's framed picture,  
for the last time, every time  
in the garage where everything creaks with age and poverty

She puts her ear to the closed window  
Khoon ka badla khoon se lenge  
(blood for blood) -  
Lal chowk is lal today  
(red square is red today)  
The shouts fill the  
Emptiness everywhere  
Seething a little,  
she wrings the dripping rag,  
cleans the already-clean kerosene stove,  
whispering, his lunch is getting cold

She watches the weathered door open a flood of eyes,  
Cramming the small dark room,  
The aroma of cooling lunch  
drowns in short gasps of fiery breaths  
He is cradled in a sea of frightened arms,  
Sleeping like he never could -  
The yelps of kicked-about dogs in the night,  
the moans from his father's room, and mother's prayers,  
never let him  
She laments his cold lunch  
He does not hear,  
like always  
He has arrived, he has arrived  
but he is not here  
his lunch is getting cold

\*Meaning : Lal means the color red and chowk means square. Named after Red Square, Moscow.

### Poem 3: Journey across the concertina-wire

the road stops everywhere  
stops being a road  
and just be that  
a check point  
a staccato journey,  
barricaded, potholed, of the ridiculed sort  
that will not lead me to my grandfather's anymore -  
useless borders,  
simply waylay me,  
reminders of my inclusion in the exclusion  
contained within the fancily named  
concertina' wire,  
toothy, metallic,  
shiny, gloating  
wantonly lying on the roadside,  
one with dust, spit, dried blood, ash,  
in that intimate display with AK-47's  
looking over the heaps of abandoned shoes,  
and puddles of endless dog-mess,

there at the check points  
my chest is riddled with labels,  
and yours  
together we ride the limp wind,  
heads drooping, eyes down  
headed for the same place  
though we hardly seem to know where we are going -

watching across the toothy wires,  
you seem to stop everywhere  
stop being you  
and just be that  
a point, of endless burden and blame  
receptacle for the metal of certain order  
(not gold, not silver)  
same as me  
still  
we must keep walking.

#### Poem 4: The Shoemaker: In the killing fields

They seldom wore shoes  
they said they had nowhere to go

then one fine day they wore them out,  
kept wearing them out,  
kept coming for all the mending I could do,  
they held candles in their bloody hands,  
urging me to hurry  
then they came no more

I heard their toes were gone,  
their feet, crumbled  
Frost bitten, hard as icicles  
buried in the snow too long,  
summer heat seared away  
what winter left of the rebel flesh  
In the unforgiving Himalayas

Sour, green Adams or in other words soldiers'  
came for me!  
Sewing, needle, thread and candle light  
Became aiding and abetting,  
Mending shoes became a mark of a traitor,  
Metal butts made bloody dents in my flesh  
they kicked me, and kept on kicking  
their boots stuck like unwanted destiny on my chest  
and then I saw,  
the boots were torn like the shoes of the dead ones  
shadows of winter were creeping on their exposed toes  
latent icicles waiting to fall off

I lay back assuaged, the burden gone  
The resistance ebbing -  
My hands lay quietly by my side  
My lips closed,  
Blood rushed into my ears,  
they kicked and kept on kicking,  
I saw nature taking its course



### Poem 5: A Fake Encounter with the Real

Yesterday's sunset  
is quite on your face,  
still, cold -  
your body is accounted for (just this once)  
your life never was  
Probe the matter, they say!

You could be posing  
for a gallant photo  
without that victory smile,  
black dust, grey ash, dead blue  
on your stiff, awkward  
fingers  
a galaxy exists  
between them and the gun,  
sticking to your sooty palm  
your eyes - dark, open graves, silent, untiring  
your shirt - torn  
the hole on the back of your neck is neat, lethal  
dead on  
Zuliekha tongues lick fire over and over  
Probe the matter, they say!

You are a rigid, stubborn, cold question  
I have no answers,  
At least not yet  
Your question mark of a wife,  
swears, you made winter coals for living,  
in the jungle of oozing stumps and deadwood,  
above their village,  
leaving each morning pre-dawn  
chewing stale bread  
with dark tea (milk if any was for the kids)  
she still smells the turmeric on your hands,  
from the lunch of collards and rice she had packed  
in the old copper tin box  
passed down from your mother's brother,  
you lived on hand-me-downs,  
she wipes her tears and children's noses

in one expert swipe  
you never lifted a knife, she wails (not difficult to believe),  
never even sliced a fish (not that they could afford it)  
or pared an apple ever, for the  
litter of kids, who cling  
to her bony body, like wet, living rags  
Yesterday's gunshots  
echo, ring, scream, echo  
temple bells before deities made of soft stone,  
dead notes cowering in the eternal autumnal  
cold earth, closing for a long winter  
barren fruits and sterile lands,  
a tiny, clean entry wound,  
a halo, residue of close-range shot  
as if someone had lent to give you a kiss (of death)  
Speaks, clear and loud,  
a nightmare takes the witness stand,  
claws my eyes  
inscribes on my flesh, etches itself on my heart,  
the pen continues to write the account  
of the real encounter of the fake kind  
Thus the matter stands probed!

Anne Thrope

### Sound, Unsound

You are walking towards shadows  
You open up the door and dream  
You are not really there, but here.

Look upon whole worlds and measure.  
Give to fire the presentation of a star.

Nova, supernova  
Sound, unsound  
Coffee or trauma?

The band is playing  
The taste of shame  
A slippery character

Dance in the knowledge of divine retribution.  
The duke is the happiest man on the planet.  
Only the sick respect the concept of health.

## Elastic Waistbands

The agony child is hushed, against  
The war news is on the TV, right now

Shut up and let the adults listen, fatten  
Fire trucks run at Wednesday dinner.

My heart, my heart says I see you.  
Restraint love happens, pepper-spray

Architects sweep up broken glasses.  
The president is in Australia, true love of mine

An open umbrella indoors is bad luck for the rest of your life.  
Don't make connections readily, apple

High alert  
Weather patterns

Temperature  
Data streams

Computers generate  
Astro physics

Measure the, the visual field *[sic]*  
Environments in which you can step away from

Ecology, sound

The power of one idea  
Distilled in one essence of what to say.

## Having a Man in the House

Gut decor  
hugeness  
scots pine

hut gurus  
cut cedar  
life is brutal

Hob more branch, a tree  
Article artificial official  
Foam snow never melts

My guns sit me down in the root cellar near the show business  
A bright blue beams forth a fond blue light not found in nature  
Gels drip veto embarrass twine butter

A free bonus is a dog standing in Christmas garland  
Breathe our branches intertwine goats and oat pine  
Right here is where I want to be warm

Kit guy hatred hope loiter  
Trees love each other

# BlazeVOX 12

Fall 2012

Andrew West

*IMG\_0001.JPG*

venice  
suns

do not  
set in

kansas,  
that may

rise  
for fields,

we shall  
falls

for this  
not there

*IMG\_0057.JPG*

gold.  
zounds!

wound  
rivers.

ah, fell  
night,

why do?  
you.

ewes  
drown.

trees,  
and, trees

*IMG\_0107.JPG*

red,  
of some

fire.  
rings of:

there  
will that

may be  
cash,

there  
will be

johns:  
of does.



Andrew K. Peterson

### MAYFLOWER SUTRA

“A historical truth may be revealed as a riddle – as a form of intuitive and anti-authoritarian pedagogy – in contrast to the dogmatism of institutionalized religion.” – Dan Adler, on Hanne Darboven’s *Cultural History 1880 – 1983*

While driving I see a young man wearing a black sweatshirt, the hood pulled up. He moves his arms around in a somewhat rhythmic manner, like he could be rapping along to the music in his head, as he walks through the gas station pumps. He crosses into traffic, as if oblivious to the auto landscape. Tracking my thoughts, sequentially: I worry something is wrong; I worry for myself; I worry for him, then I worry for others. I wish my thoughts were ordered differently, but there is no fighting the order of appearance. Sequentially, later, is how this man’s mental and emotional well-being, is it ‘ordered’ behind my own ‘safety’. And why his unusual behavior instill fear in me? I’m the one in the car turning left across his path as we weaves through traffic stopped around him at the intersection. Trash bits slip loose from a dump truck, I drive over them. What’s it all for, if I’m ‘making it’?

The Mayflower is a ship that brought some ‘here’, then what happened. As human mass, a space filling is another story for the museum of history, no more special, social, indicative of a staid approach to repression, bridges, family, meetings, friendships, misunderstanding, cultural exchange & difference, economy in deference to ritual, falling through water ledges, sickness & death, thievery, land appropriation, misfit belief in ownership, tribalism, suspicions, egotism, war, the color of the sky during wartime, color of grass into war, animal sounds in retreat during war, gradations of saturation, starvation & intricate wells, air blowing through during wartime, no more or less the word, in captivity in human & animal losses, the sound of a hut being taken, taking, the sound of what the sound in middle verse, counter melody in the dissolve, survival, it being forgotten.

My sister with her bedside updates setting daily frustration, guilt, anxiety, anger, caustic hope & dark humor for the chance of her sick daughter, taken in by the receptionists, imagining all the emails of the world pushed forth in a digital wave, flung invisibly at the shore as it dissolves. The Mayflower, missing for weeks responds safely, hauled over the mountain to its plantation. Ghost pumas, stripped bare, grieve for the weakened white cells...

*Curse*

the mayflower bursts  
from the confined bubble  
a wave in silent empire's  
shadow sea  
carried from its parachute liquid ritual  
a mercury slum  
unraked disintegrating coals  
pale humidity in stylo-foam  
rots a bloodlike siphon  
soaks as it slowly seeps  
tuning bone to the tears of its track

\*

*"I saw fire blaze up for the wealthy man,  
And he was dead outside his door"*

The sun as we know it  
A silhouette  
for a solar implosion  
A sense of a smoke sunk reef  
Quiet naysayers engulf the inference & spray  
A jade reliquary to the silent ensemble, hustles  
along to its research, scenes from the jumbled steps  
A souvenir from rarest talon, vines  
outer memory, and out of memory  
Code reflecting  
Code deflecting  
Coming to a counter-justice  
Into the exit aisle a collapse persistent  
Fuselage & fossil  
An applied bluff  
Mismatched proportions to affront the fire  
Deference to the leaden quake  
A cancelled song cavity rest  
in staccato clefs  
The shape of incense, its spray  
cake of joy resting on the could of day

History's serial cries,  
Lemon cream coronas  
signal amiable pivots  
The angelicized purge in the capital,  
two ton maggot, Aged troop prisms  
aim, charm & tangents  
Reconfigure proofs of an imitation  
Less quarrelsome for a future  
storm burnt into the bay's filling rim

\*

*To Parse*

to parse a blueness from its abstract truth  
you are on one side of yourself , then the other  
a jacked up easter thicket of night's oyster fissures

to deny you, a pale seizure's informal eclipse  
on a piquant sternum

a goldenrod golem  
a breath hatches its inner shell  
from a pull & wobble orbit

loss changes circumambulating scatter  
larval strain in Coptic scabs  
under a boiling ozone band aid  
deep in the viral bath spread's  
scamper to bloom

\*

*Ragnarok*

Subtle dirigibles  
Move on like an ant through ink  
Toward a deafening nirvana

\*

Forget to acknowledge but remember to thank  
Forget to thank but remember to apologize  
Forget to apologize but remember to ask  
Forget to ask but remember to release via kisses  
Forget to release via kisses but remember to engage through laughter  
Forget to engage through laughter but remember to smile  
Forget to smile but remember to disengage through repetitive menial tasking  
Forget to disengage through repetitive menial tasking  
But remember to compliment  
Forget to compliment but remember to acknowledge

\*

*Sabina*

Sweating crystals  
Tears whisper down lightning bolts  
Down the mushrooms tell  
Behind the table  
Closer in a sunlit hammock  
Inexorable open shapes  
The mouth's closed interior  
Forms the secret of a word  
Its letters form a gladed brass pinion

\*

The rock breaks in half  
In its small repositioning  
For if any didn't need  
This breaking  
Up with the laughter it exudes  
To disown the account  
Continent by continent  
(conscience, conscience)  
Welcomed by coercion  
Loath course of contention & terror  
Be the wilderness  
Around the premises  
Was a destiny too cunning to diminish

With historic participation in retaliation  
Pre-incinerated from its past  
“ghosts from its past intrude”  
Throughout the reassuring familiar  
images of surprise & imagination  
exhumed from captivity  
“the society determined to  
enshrine this boulder portion  
in inappropriate edifice”  
Obscures prefigured reassessment  
seamless versions of its fracture  
front past & struck  
harassed & assumed lost  
causal & abetting

\*

*[Not to conquer a continent]*

not to conquer a continent  
remains of evitable moments  
unfettered to wants of responsible  
buffers balanced between  
and a coerced intention  
fractions of many by the very beginning  
recreations uninhabit  
ghost-wolf coats’  
shed inviolate light

\*

Sparks of the person crushed by alternatives  
A strand of your hair brushes against  
During this time of swaying objects in  
Veiled ventriloquill gusts  
Rushed wind and voice  
Voice from the dead  
Voice of the spirits  
Flayed by an afterthought  
Without being human  
The universe turns inside out to devour  
& sleep, my darling, sleep, sleep

Today I shall play the flute  
I am the foreigner, the passing stranger  
Youthful stranger  
I am a spirit of love  
Take me, and do not tell of them  
Whom bomb    Starless  
'the uncreated conscience' of  
Who it would do the most good  
\*

*Circling a settling dog*

Invent an identity and  
Illusive  
Create deafness, come  
Anti-echo to call

\*

solids the hemorrhage  
with a butterfly sutra

Mayflow      butterfly

X

Waymower    griefstring

dog re-pisses its ground  
reprisals  
tensile crush of unseen weight

\*

You are the possibilities of grief,  
The plea of debt & the course it kindles  
You are intention's glazed edge  
You are possessed by white flags  
sewn by birds & hunted animals  
You are standing at either end  
of the unreachable  
disputable measures,  
inches from means

You are the court's exception to  
blood company  
You are return to an assumption  
dared by darkness  
branched by descent & mis-protection  
You are the cheerful madness  
lodged between the tasks  
the lit dusks & ritual, as yet  
unsummoned power

\*

Hands a frame the window splattering stars  
Holding two sounds  
Into a relay  
Alien operations of mechanic code  
Constructing a superhuman stutter  
It will be seized and plunged into the tumble  
Turpentine watercolors  
A carnivorous fissure  
To say that, after all. But fun is fun, I've had my share, and reality's  
Beloved poise  
Will blank out  
Is a mystery to most, naked quivering  
Let's leave it at that  
I don't know, what, forgot what I might want  
Hands a frame the window splattering stars

\*

*Erratum(unknown)*

“Preface, p.xiii, line 16: instead of ‘(an estimated 90,000 downtown and 236,000 in the County),’ please read: ‘an estimated 90,000 homeless in the County).’”

90,000 downtown and 236,000 in the county  
I wanted to see the main character's face get bitten off

It feels like a massage  
In your house in florida

\*

*Annanwon*

“a continuum of loss where knowledge is gained every second” – Pete Winslow

A glittering seizure struck the black creatures burnt by night  
Preparing a séance en face opposing  
across the threshold she resembles a snow stagger  
Where a list of apparitions  
Drops the concordance of a gift  
A gift of stillness  
A wo-hsiang  
Voiding seed's busk

\*

“I am the pressure of water on New Mars” – Will Alexander

“while we dream of an age that is equal to our passions” – The Invisible Committee

Illusory quake  
alarm strengthens sounds against  
“when they play the rats play under them”

& brings strength to suffering  
Unusual mild and ramshackle moods  
That leads steady towards turbulence  
At the end of the sea

The mystery bang in nature  
I heard the smell with touch and mind combine  
A possible refrain from the attack & decay  
Tempting a fuse between  
Temperate claps  
Beyond new disgorged horizons

\*

“I am of no nationality or object ever contemplated”

An atonic hand appears to busk a figure across the brook  
Right into the illusion affected



By a loneliness enhanced by focus pull

On to the rendezvous

I hear you sing “dint of cobalt ether”  
Out of this deceived perception of attachment

\*

*Naglfar*

A fist under any fur coat  
is a corpse-eating eagle  
Poised at the edge of the sea –

A wolf hung above a western hour

What happened to my affirmation  
Of freedom, of love for  
Of love. O goddess of spring, forgive

This displacement of romance behind the fall

Let is swarm up in the harm of branches

Silent as a wise guest  
Careful & silent

\*

*What the Goddess Knows*

“It’s Hi Ho Hey  
I am a bald marauder  
& Hi Ho Hey  
I am the white destroyer  
I will bring you to & show you:

A stretching wolf:  
A gaping bow:  
A grunting flame:  
A rising tree:

A boiling dart:  
A boiling wave:  
Ice of a serpent:  
A coiling weight:  
A bear's bed talk:  
A mended child:  
A slack seer:  
A ragged dragon:  
A one-eyed god

& fear will bring our night a name  
That you, goddess, cannot know

\*

The vegetable kingdom is missing.  
The world serpent follows so close behind

In your night spine  
By brief candle power  
A ton of daisies  
Into the emptied canal

Under human-kindness's root –  
Where pinions gift the keys  
To passing secret lovers:

C for flesh's earth  
D for blood's sea  
E for bone's mountain  
F for hair's tree  
G for skull's sky  
A for brain's cloud  
B for eyelash wind

Fold the ship into your pocket  
The hawk, a bridge above

for poets & dogs  
“by one name I am never known”

A dream carries you far from me  
forgetting whose it's supposed to be

An intent refusal of forward motion

\*

Lacking crystal , divvy  
Up the inheritance of ice

\*

SORRY PETE I'M A SAINT WITHOUT MOTET  
SELF-SUMMONED THROUGH CLANGS  
OF A DRINK FROM THE HAMMER  
METAL HEART STRINGS IN A DREAM  
MADE TO ORDER  
IN A SUMMONS IN MOTIONS UNSPOKEN  
TO PUMMEL  
AN INCOMPLETE PART OF THE ORIGINAL COUPLE  
PRETRANSLATED SECRETS  
FROM BOOKS OF PRIMAL STRESSES  
LIKE WHAT CAME INTO BEING  
TRANSCRIBED BY THAT POWER  
THE FUNCTION OF BEARS TO DISARM  
ON THE MOUNTAIN  
UNBRANDING HERETICS  
A SOURCE-CODE DYADIC

\*

*Leaf & Leaf, Divided*

Of that restless birds they have the note & tune  
In all external grace, you have some part  
These & with these & the breath of my chant  
So sinuous, how clung to stone, how obsolete

\*

*Inside Pollock Rip*

*"I set out now  
In a box upon the sea" – C. Olson*

Let the fink sing, the fang  
Sink. In a word the gods muscle  
Wins-  
Low. Stand adjacent  
Banks, on other trash this side of  
Talk, his in-  
Divisible manner, rather  
than help one on  
Across the settle  
Meant a city or a sea a dis  
Guise, the other knows exactly who  
His is, TH-  
OR / WINSLOW

& they could walk around the peninsula  
get *at* each other, echo the zoo age  
rather they stand on Either  
Bank, kiss the bicep  
Kiss a fool , The thaw  
of a lie – slop bracket  
The city with a lie  
of Words alone –

Approaching previous  
Indifference –  
Long before you came to,  
Woke & approach to represent  
M a s s a c h u s e t t s

Winds low out of Giantland.

To arrive at , no more than  
Feeding on the self- history of nations  
Rushing in to melt, by  
Fin, or fang, dis-summonsing

\*

“My love, we go to the fragile  
Edge of a mound of earth” – C. Vallejo

Hold my fingers & cross my breath  
for you to catch  
Roses  
for the everyday Heralds of Beauty  
Evaporating your charged smile

hold arms over head, & forget  
tell you, & tell you: my eyes  
are the arms of history ,  
reaching into when you  
message, under current flash  
light, whales of night blinking songs

I am tired of crying out to history

Tired as whales  
swim startled through Pollock Rip,  
startled through its power  
like a toxicology report

I go to sleep because my arms are cold

Each black bouquet you sing : a carnival

\*

*Pilgrim of the Red Line*

Roamless stem . armless, aim  
Headless ☼ headdress  
Less flammable peach cheek station attend  
leans in, pushing back  
from the money machine

The boy in a black hoodie  
peers in to his paper flower cone  
Unconvinced,  
FIGURING IN COLOR

Weight of bounced reflective  
Attempt to casually scope adjacency  
Together through the moving vessels  
Pulls the face & muscle to a taut stop.  
String of a roseless city empire. Perfumed  
Auburndy neologism. Taking form,

A figure of cover,  
Forgetting extravagances:  
Lotion                mitten                cracker & cheese

“on learning that you are a guest  
and that they hate you”:

Dream of bugs or rotting ? corn  
How to teach yourself to grin behind the collar.

Quincify , Decolonize  
the boy in the black hoodie  
with a Venus rhombic sunclipse

Amy Savage

### Rive Gauche

Christine's dog, Rosco, had been a nice dog to everyone but Steve. The heavy yellow lab wasn't mean to Steve, he was just indifferent. He would smell everyone else's crotch, but not Steve's. One time Christine teased him about it, something about his crotch being scentless, and he was somehow offended. "What? Is it better to have a stinky crotch?" she asked, amused. He wasn't sure of the answer, and he wasn't amused, so he answered with silence.

That was before she told him she was going to study abroad in France.

"All the guys in France stink, I bet," he had said cruelly after a few minutes of uncomfortable brooding. He didn't want to say it, but he had to say something. The silence was unbearable. Of course it was the dumbest, most stereotypical, culturally inappropriate, jealous thing to say, he thought later. And in Rosco's opinion the French stench would be like glorious pheromone-soaked ambrosia. He realized the flaw in his criticism but knew it was too late. She gave him a look like, *What an idiot; thank god I'm going to France*. At least that's what he thought it meant. *Rosco. What a cliché name for a dog*, he thought. *Going to France was such a cliché place for study abroad*. Then he hated the word *cliché* for being French.

When she left he took her to the airport in his mom's Civic and tried not to cry. *He's not even crying*, she thought, and was angry enough that she didn't cry either until she got on the plane.

She called two days later.

"What's it like?" he asked.

"You can't describe Paris," she said, pausing. "I don't know— there are lots of beautiful buildings that have been here forever. The subway smells like piss but the murals are fantastic. There are cafés with terraces and fresh croissants and everyone is wearing a *chic* scarf, even the men."

"Okay," he said, staring out into the backyard at the garage. A squirrel was tearing holes in the garbage bags.

“There are people whose families have lived in the same *arrondissement* for centuries!” She sounded indignant. She sounded pretentious. Steve’s family had moved a few times. So had hers. *What makes them better than us?* he thought.

All of Steve’s friends asked him if they were going to stay together while she was in France. *It’s only the summer, man. Yeab, but she’s hot, don’t let go of that. She’s gonna get laid in France, bro!* Steve tried not to think too hard about what Christine was doing in France.

“I might stay here,” she said flippantly a month into her trip. “I mean, everything is so *sophistiqué*, so *avant garde*. Today I went to where Ernest lived. Hemingway, that is.”

Christine liked the way the men said her name, so precise and feminine, with an extra syllable at the end: “Krees-tee-nuh.” She was smart enough not to tell Steve this.

That night Steve stayed up late in the basement at his father’s desk, drinking a whole bottle of pinot noir he stole from his parents’ liquor cabinet and writing very short, anglo-saxon sentences, trying to be Ernest. He fell asleep at the desk and in the morning he didn’t have much to show but a few incoherent pages about drinking pinot noir with a pregnant nurse in the Alps.

The longer the summer droned on, flies buzzing on sidewalk shit smears, little kids drooling chocolate ice cream with brown crust forming around their lips, the less sure Steve was of Christine. The one thing he knew was that the longer she was gone, the less she seemed like freckles and laughter and summer-in-the-air Christine.

“Remember,” his mother said after overhearing his end of one of their later phone conversations. “Everything is *new* for her there.”

“Thanks,” he choked, knowing then that soon it would all be over.



Alyssa A. Peck

### Candid

Click.

She is leaning against a tree reading.

Click.

He walks over.

Click.

They hug and walk away holding hands.

Click.

I put my camera back into its case and walk nonchalantly away. I am the queen of candid camera. Nobody here has the slightest idea of what I do.

When I get home I go to work. I have converted my walk-in closet into a darkroom. As I stand and develop my pictures I inspect each one.

A girl looking off in the distance, her lips pressed together in a straight line.

The star quarterback holding hands with the president of the Gay Straight Alliance behind closed doors.

Then there's *her*. Of all my subjects, *she* is my favorite. I watch time progress as she reads.

Then he shows up, and I cringe. He who kills me inside. Now they're holding hands. A fire wells up inside me and I take a laser light to his head, distorting the image of his face. Later, I may burn it.

I look through my pictures one by one. I find one where she's laughing at a joke only she has heard. I touch her face and smile along with her. I hang it upon the wall of my favorites, most of which are of her.

“Erika! Dinner!” My dad calls from downstairs.

“Coming!” I reply.

My parents also have no idea what I do. They are as clueless as everyone else.

“So how was school today?” asked my mom.

“Good. Mr. DellaVecchia is teaching us trigonometric functions.”

“Sine, Cosine, and Tangent.” Recited my dad.

“Yurp.”

It went on like that for a while. Dinners at my house are usually the same. Talk a little. Eat a lot. Clean up.

Go our separate ways.

After dinner, I went back up to my darkroom.

“Christine...” I whispered.

Around ten o’clock, I went to sleep. Needless to say I dreamt of her.

The next morning, I woke up to an inane beeping. Sigh, Another day of life. I roll out of bed and throw on a purple T-shirt.

I throw on a pair of jeans, and pull through the tangled mane of dark brown mess that I call my hair. I fly down the stairs and into the kitchen, just as my mom grabbed her purse and started out the door. “Have a great day at school,” she said, noticing me.

“Have a great day at work,” I replied.

And with that she was gone. This was our normal morning routine. We feigned interest as we went our separate ways, both usually still half asleep. I grabbed a granola bar from the cabinet. It’s time for school. I grab my camera and bag and catch the bus.

It’s raining today. No outside photos. Darn. In Choir we are sitting in a large circle. There are no more empty seats, so Christine is right next to me. I sing as beautifully as I can, in a hope to get her attention. Alas, when class is over, she still has not said a word to me. I have butterflies in my stomach from hearing her angelic voice. But when he shows up, she runs to him. They leave together much as they did yesterday.

I left class with an empty feeling in my heart. This went on almost daily for weeks. Finally, one lonely day in November, I decided it was time to do something. But what?

I step outside the choir room, and am hit with a wall of giggles. Three girls, Brittany, Katerina, and Christine are chatting by the bulletin board. When *he* walks up Christine leaves. Brittany and Katerina disperse as well. I walk up to the bulletin board to see what's up there.

I know for a fact that Christine is very into the music program here. Why shouldn't she be? She has the most angelic voice I've ever heard. Scanning the board for anything I could possibly do, I see nothing. Then a bright pink flyer catches my eye. It's an advertisement for the school musical.

No way. Nuh-uh. Aint gonna happen.

I pull the flyer off of the board and slip it into my pocket.

At lunch I feel the flyer stabbing me. It's a constant reminder of the gutwrenching feeling I try to ignore. Finally I can't take it anymore, so I excuse myself from the lunch room. I head down to the choir hallway. I spend a lot of my time here because there is a little alcove within an alcove that fits me perfectly. And without knowing I was there, you'd never see me.

I sit down in my alcove's alcove and place a rectangular mirror at just the right angle to see out without having to peek my head around and be revealed. I pull out my camera and wait. This is the only place I'll get good pictures today because of the rain.

A few minutes later, a couple rounds the corner. It's *them*. They hold hands as she leans against the wall, and he leans against her. I begin telling the story.

She is laughing.

He kisses her gently.

He grabs her ass.

She pushes him away.

He is angrily whisper-yelling.

He storms off, leaving her there.

I can't help but smile at the fact that he's gone. But I'm a little sad that she's upset. I can't do anything about her sadness, and soon she sulkily shuffles away.

I'm up late that night, sitting in my dark room. That day's pictures were already developed. I sat with the flyer in my hands, the luminosity of it dimmed. I strained to see the words. The play was *Beauty and The Beast*. Tryouts were tomorrow afterschool, in the auditorium. Information was in room 228, Mr. Leinen's room.

I plucked my all time favorite picture of Christine off of my wall. She was sitting in the grass outside of the school. She had a book in her hand and the wind in her hair. She looked so peaceful; so beautiful. I gently touched her hair, ran my finger down the side of her face. I whispered to her, “I love you, Christine.” My lips barely touching the photo, I kissed her softly.

I woke up the next morning, not with butterflies in my stomach, but instead a team of jackhammers covering my insides, all on the highest setting. I rolled out of bed, shutting off my alarm. I stood in front of my full length mirror in my white wife-beater and red boxers. My figure was not the most flattering, although, I probably wasn’t the best judge.

I threw on a grey tank top, black skinny jeans, and a black zip-up hoodie. I zipped up my knee-high black converse, and brushed my hair and teeth. I did not want to face my mom this morning, because I was afraid of what would come out. If my jackhammers were torturing my insides, imagine the verbal vomit that would come out if I tried to talk. How the Hell am I going to do an audition? Oh well.

As soon as I heard the door close, and I saw her car pull out and drive away, I walked downstairs. I grabbed a granola bar and opened it. Just as I was about to bite in, I saw the time: 6:48. Shit! I grabbed my bag and my camera, and ran out the door, just barely making the bus.

In choir she sits next to me again. I can smell the vanilla scented shampoo in her hair. It takes all my energy not to touch her. I try not to look at her, because I know I’ll never stop. I can’t help the glances though. The end of class is bittersweet. The pain and inner turmoil is gone from the conflict between what I want to do and what I can do, but the smell of vanilla lingers in my nostrils, and I can’t help but wish that she was by my side again.

I shake my head as I approach Mrs. Carter.

“Something wrong, Erika?” she asks. I snap back into the world of jackhammers.

“I – uh – are you – erm – 6<sup>th</sup> period – busy?” oops. I forgot about the verbal vomit. I inhale deeply, plan out my question carefully, then exhale. “Are you busy 6<sup>th</sup> period? I was wondering if I could use the piano.”

Mrs. Carter laughed. “You’re in luck. 6<sup>th</sup> period is my lunch, and I spend it in my office. You may come and use the piano if you would like.”

“Th-thank you.” I stutter, and scurry out.

I then ran to Mr. Leinen's room. When I arrived it was empty except for him. Thank God. I knocked, entered, and asked for Theatre information.

"A little last minute, don't you think?" He asked.

"I know, I know. Sorry. I'll be more punctual next time." Reluctantly he gave me a packet.

I skipped my 6<sup>th</sup> period lunch and went to the choir room. I sat at the piano, and played an A. I sang "Someone Like You" by Adele as well as I could. Then, deciding I didn't like it, I played a D#. I sang through "My Own Worst Enemy" by Lit. I definitely liked that one better. I practiced that song about 6 times. After that, I went through my classes, not doing my work, but instead reading and rereading my monologue. It was an excerpt from *Beauty and The Beast* where the Narrator tells the story of the Beast.

When the bell rang dismissing us from our last class, I shuffled my way to the auditorium. I was not the first, nor the last to audition, but instead nicely placed in the middle. As soon as my audition was over, I left. Once home, I went up to my room. I opened the door to my darkroom and realized I hadn't taken any pictures today because I was too wrapped up in auditions. Damn. So instead of my normal routine, I ate and laid in bed, in the dark, thinking. The next thing I knew, my alarm was ringing in my ear.

At school that Friday, there was a crowd of people huddled around the cast list. After they dispersed, I looked. Yes! I got ensemble! Perfect. Now, to look for Christine Rivers. She got Belle, of course.

At practice that day, I congratulated Christine. She thanked me and walked away. I assumed she was being modest, and that she had gotten so many congratulations, she was a little bored by the people.

As the weeks passed, I talked to Christine a little more each day. At first, just a "hello" here and there, then, a "how are you?" was thrown in. Soon, she began addressing me with a "hello" and a smile. I swear I could fly by the end of practice each day.

I didn't have much time to take pictures at practice, and that fact bothered me. So one day, I snuck up the stage crew ladder, and hid behind the spotlights in the ceiling. I snapped a good two dozen pictures that day. Some while she was singing, some between scenes when she was herself, and even a few of her in her grand yellow ball gown. I loved all of them, because they were her.

I did everything I could to get close to her. I talked to her almost every day. I took more pictures than usual, so that I had more of her at home. Home. Home is where our relationship bloomed. I would talk to her, unafraid to

tell her everything. She loved me. The pictures proved that. I knew she loved me. So, by opening night, I was ready.

By the time the curtains opened on opening night, she had added me on Facebook, called me a friend, and probably knew my name. If she didn't love me, why would she bother doing that? It was her way of saying that she was ready to love me where the world could see, and not just at home in my darkroom.

When the curtain closed for the last time that weekend, and everyone cried and gave each other hugs, I took my chance. We loved each other, and I was not about to let this slip by. I was not hiding in my dark room anymore. I ran up to Christine, hugged her, and kissed her right on the mouth. I was floating. My dreams were coming true. We loved each other and now everyone could see it. I tried to entangle my fingers in her hair as I inhaled the vanilla.

But she pushed me away. My fingertips brushed her face as I fell to the ground. What had happened? Why did she push me away? She loved me. I knew she loved me.

"EW!" She screamed wiping her mouth on her sleeve. "You little creep! Get the Hell away from me!"

"I..."

"I said go away! I never want to see you near me again! You hear me? Never!"

Tears pricked at my eyes. I scrambled to my feet and ran offstage. I didn't bother grabbing my things.

When I got home, the tears were flowing freely, and large sobs made their way out of my throat. In my darkroom, I ripped up all of my pictures of Christine. How could she do that to me? I loved her. She was supposed to love me, not throw me away. I loved her. I *loved* her...

Running to the basement, I was blinded by anger. I grabbed a rope and tied it around a support beam. I scrawled a note to my parents on the wall with chalk. Standing on a chair, I tied the rope around my neck. I took one last look at the note. Then I kicked the chair out from under me, and hung there. The last thing I saw was her face behind my closed eyelids.

I whispered to no one, "I will always love you Christine..."

Alex Schmidt

### **It is just a Few Days**

of rain and flowers  
will begin to grow.  
Your eyebrows will  
color in like the whites  
of your eyes  
before Bacchus. It is  
just a few days of congenial  
anxieties. Assume  
your worldly desires  
with a purpose  
and suddenly  
fingers will sink  
into your shoulders, love  
will mist your lungs.  
It is just a few days  
a few weeks  
and a few years  
will seem like seconds  
your arms will not work  
and the landscape will  
take on circular  
epiphanies. It is  
just a fair measure  
by which you exist.

## **Mustering My Rivulets**

First, I was called upon  
the witch doctor

which wiggles like a booger  
between my legs.

Second, a pink smoke gurgled  
under the door.

This was my father.  
I find his attendance not much

more than a curiosity  
for a weakness in my arms.

Other enchanting spells  
followed, the windows

puffed and banged,  
wall warts and ceiling mar. Today

the identities of my universe  
are cast about

like leaves. It is time  
now I must pool.

Not with foods.  
Not with pressures.

Like a rhizome in reverse.



## **Song in the Key of a Certain Breath**

Inside your throat  
is a stairway

leading to the center  
of the universe.

But no one could tell  
just by breathing.

Yet when looking  
into the bosom

of the donut shop's  
cashier,

the brilliant woman of your dreams,

a salient energy  
wings

up from your knees,  
a dump truck

chock-full of cream  
revs in your gut,

and a powder  
takes the air.

## Somewhere a Carpenter

I put the lumber  
in the refrigerator. Yellow,  
Yellow, Yellow, you are my fellow  
bleached as an old dusty guitar  
I sang to it. But  
I am no musician  
and the lumber didn't fit.

Then I hung cabinets  
but oceans of water surged into my face  
and dragged me off.  
I am definitely not a plumber.  
I do know

the plums, but I know  
the cherries too. And it's the beech nut  
of these sandals pulled from the sky  
rammed onto my feet,  
my musty burnt-umber hair,

and this now water-logged chair  
that lead me to believe  
I could build you  
a kitchen. But as I was carried all the way to Judea  
I found myself to be  
a handy smithy  
with ponderous shoulders

forced to join with the red boulders  
to mute the surf  
which allowed me to forge an old jalopy  
from an arroyo  
into the world's shiniest golden boat.  
Then as this boat's captain

I was prompted by the puffins  
and their pataphysical blows  
to the mutant clouds  
that hung above me:

Look, see!  
Ideas! Ideas I tell you!  
Of biscuits! Sunny side up  
and creamy grits!  
Isn't the great North Sea beautiful!  
Look at those big metaphorical globs  
of ice!

They were nice,  
motivating birds. And how nice it would be, I thought,  
to crash and sink into your icy bright thighs  
in the sea of your sheets

with a continental feast!  
Love, Love, Love,  
soft white glacier of the mattress  
please rise and come with me to breakfast.  
Let us sail the seas for brunch.  
Lay your body along the prow,  
and I will secure you with a few  
nails from my pouch.

## Gynecological Sermon

When our penis  
slips into a vagina  
star belts sweep our scalp, wrack  
down our spine

a blindness momentarily li f t s

and yet our presence  
is the departure and entrance  
of vagina

while everywhere we go  
we grip a penis  
and hang from the Milky Way of our memories  
find comfort in the fractious  
deluge

of its words  
the vagina is a telescope of nerves  
a visible wind  
it reflects the heart like a dewdrop

the ether  
a sufficient vagina of light in our backyard  
is not a reverie  
but our shadow

## **The Wind the Seamstress Makes**

I'm sure you know of many reasons  
to die. And you can tell them to me  
if you want.

But among my rib cages  
the distant baaing  
of clouds  
ignite ever thickening

dimensions  
and I must follow them.  
I do realize the difficulty in this,  
beyond just

expecting them air,  
of which we're usually unaware.  
But it's airiness I've come  
to trust.

Sure to attain  
quilting skills as cavernous as air  
takes a while.

But like the possible expectations implied  
by apes  
toward which I sense

a great affinity:  
their naked dreams  
nudging through my hairy limbs  
and neck,

who's to say there's an end?  
It is

my birth  
why I sew.

A.J. Huffman

### Electric Periods

Paralytic punctuation  
flashing red  
light warnings. Stopping  
thoughts from bleeding through  
pages and minds alike. The perfect sensor.  
Renegade run-ons fall  
back into their own shadows. Still buzzing  
from the most recent break in their flow.

## Spin City

start your engines  
step into the spotlight  
will you remember your x-ray vision  
liars eyes are the only demons  
pure & simple  
nudists beware  
with a low daily dose of hormones  
your search is over  
& available in black  
once-a-day  
wear it and be happy



B-52

My memory is short.  
But my body is all tales.  
Teeth marks, scars, wrinkles, and gray.  
All from battles  
mostly won  
against the rules.  
Doesn't matter.  
The war is over now.  
And you,  
my prize,  
are hanging over my bed.  
Just where you belong.



# BlazeVOX 12

## Book Preview Fall 2012

Selections from our new and forthcoming BlazeVOX [books]

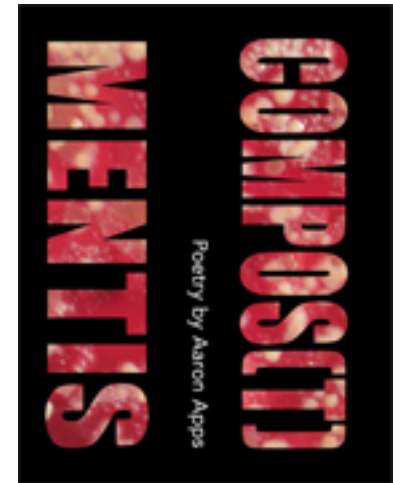
- The Moon and Other Inventions by Kristina Marie Darling
- The Epic of Hell Freeze (What Stays the News) by Richard K. Ostrander
- The Pink by Jared Schickling
- Slinger: The Equilibrium of Stars by Ben Bedard
- COMPOS(T) MENTIS by Aaron Apps
- Cheltenham by Adam Fieled
- Inventories by Paul T Hogan
- Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch    A Guide to the Homeric Punkhole, 1980–2012 by Kenneth Warren
- a dictionary in the subjunctive by Damian Weber
- Preview of Forthcoming new book: a poem from Dear Darwish by Morani Kornberg-Weiss



### COMPOS(T) MENTIS by Aaron Apps

“Knuckles digging in the knee and not knowing it, while reading! To be disturbed and to be reminded of something you never quite knew. To be reminded and made to know that memory a new way, this is the way Aaron Apps gives it. Morphine drip as the scalpel tears open the new machine. The petri dish is an appetite for the borderlands of experimentation which is now shattering. You are now under the spell, you have been since you started reading it. If poetry is a way to live then I want to live with these poems, permission without question!”

—CA Conrad



“If angels represent the human idea of frictionless communication between souls, the "fuckscapes" of Aaron Apps's ranty, violent first book COMPOS(T) MENTIS suggests communication as beastly, "extra-somatic," "liquid infection." Instead of the perfect, clean medium of the angels, Apps wants his medium to be "dripping filth." Instead of the ideal of private interiority, Apps's book pushes his poetry as a form of violence to the self, constantly brutalizing and opening up bodies with cuts and liquids. Even beauty is rubbed, ripped open and made to "bleed ink." Apps is not looking for angels, he is becoming a goat.”

—Johannes Göransson

Aaron Apps works, studies, and lives in Minneapolis, MN. He is the poetry editor for dislocate magazine. He holds degrees in History and English and is currently pursuing an MFA in poetry from the University of Minnesota.

#### Book Information:

· Paperback: 100 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound · Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-092-7

\$16

Buy it [here](#)

Buy it on [Amazon here](#)

## SPEW-SCAPE

A furry ape spent fleshy years collecting years—  
Chronologically divided by pages upon pages,  
Words. Pages the ape stilled. Between  
Thumb and forefinger the ape held each leaf. The ape  
Dog-eared the pages, too, in  
Both directions. For a time the ape proceeded  
With this action. Real  
Carefully it treated the flippant pages it held. It used them  
As necessary. The ape submerged the pages  
In hot glue made of bone. The pages then were molded  
On ape flesh, ape frame. Glue and fur cake flesh. It  
Then splayed the cast off its expanding broken form  
And flattened the paper out. On the wall  
The ape papered its cast out for decoration.  
The walls were coated with the words  
Of so many. Dregs of the ape's flesh were on  
The wall too. The ape then stared at the wall with round,  
Wet eyes—the wall coated with scores of wanton  
Words which tired its fleshy, replicating vision.

The ape was quoted  
Saying, “fuck it.” It, this ape, was done  
With such patterned decoration as mental  
Masturbation. It then ripped down,  
In circular patterns creating holes,  
The paper from the wall  
Like dirty sheets. Hurray, hurrah. The ape  
Stuffed the soiled fabric in a box—  
An empty box from a supermarket that held bananas  
Before. It then proceed to consume  
The round, extruded, phallic fruit.  
It flung the excrement and peels  
From the bananas into the box. Sheets  
On sheets all on light-  
Er fluid. The ape lit the contents of  
A box with a flame. A wet sea of cocks  
Flattened by oozy fire. Wet, black ashes in a box  
The ape set outside  
That room (that space in front of the body) with a sign  
That said, “free shit.”

The ape sat inside the box.

The ape's back fat is swelling

Magnificent. Flaccid. Jiggly.

Spewing. Hurrah, the apocalypse of history in beastly feet.

The bloody, peeling body archive made lucid,

Spastic, to the plump, collapsible skin of the ape.

The ape that is rendered in the field of box fire.



###

*first note:*

The tactile, geometric surface of our economic world-failure has become unavoidable and implicit in every action that is blind to it. The world-failure is the amniotic fluid in which noise-bodies float. Yet, even in the unavoidable “realism” (the implicitly accepted truth) of the abstract post-industrial wet dream there are democratic bodies that can infect, from within, as destabilized tumors, moles and non-functional limbs within the bodies of the world. The flaccid, slick organs are co-helpless as they hawk up a wad, load, spunk, or splooge—a sea of weak, reforming subjectivities in folding loam. These organ-cocks still glean their sustenance from the cyborg system and its giant chronological movement, but they fail to partake to the same degree in its destructive force. It is a sad, vicious suffering that rips apart viscous little bodies that soil in its force, that bile in its ruptured organs.

There are also major tubes shaped like veins and arteries—essential to the system, these shapes sometimes bend and fold and re-direct oxygenated fluid away from the pineal gland that towers above the field of organ-cocks. These shapes partake more in the wasteful oil fissure that runs through our “service economy,” but they redirect that failure to the survival of even the tumors and atavistic parts. They intentionally turn their flow in that direction; they destroy while simultaneously feeding the unwanted growths. Creating with one limb, destroying with the other. A sea of twisted limbs. A sea of infected cocks. A sea of itchy clits. An ingrown fuck-scape.

≠≠≠

*second note:*

Everything is run through with infection, bacteria, and microbes. Smegma. Poetry should be especially aware of this bodily extension. Every subjectivity that perceives is phallic and diseased. Every subjective stone that forms into a perception holds a shape for a moment before sliding back down a hole. Death. The infinite division inside of the O. The black seeping oil in the back of the throat of the body that upholds its I indefinitely. The stilted I the poison in the animal's lungs that causes clear bronchial crystals. The poison that runs through the realist mathematics causes the animals that are the same as the stones to stiffen and gesticulate hard, large egos mechanistically. Between the stilted crystalline breaths, there is air in the bubbles that are black, that gurgle forth, that replicate the dark circular structures that perceive on the tongue. The many holes in the porous, affective flesh that shapes itself into the system as it clicks the way the tongue clicks when rubbed over the washboard of another tongue.

## THE DENATURED FIELD

Each hole extrudes a phallus.

Each phallus a poem.

Each poem enters a hole.

To what degree is writ(h)ing an “I”

Into anything a phallic act of creating

A self? Birth a penis. The egg will hatch and ooze.

The egg will grow eyes. It will suck.

Looking into a pool hardens the cock, the I,

That is an ideology unattached to any body.

Abstract hatched egg fuck. Lyrical device.

Even “the other” egg that tries to force itself into the poems

Is simply inserting its “I” into a field of writ(h)ing

Phallic “I” shapes—I, I, I, I,

The grotesque bodies simply create

A hard-on to insert into the leveled writ(h)ing field.

The clit-cock oozes down the intersex

And its “I” accomplishes only waste—

But the fleshy, writ(h)ing sea of selves be/comes

Indistinguishable in this abstracted, white, post-

Industrial fluid. Reason's sea foam. Body Loam.

Tentacles extruding from and entering holes.

The eventual cock blossoming.

The removed testicles that roll on the tongue...

...so the hole inverts and petals forth a soft tube...



Yayoi Kusama exhibition in the *Museo Reina Sofía* – Madrid, Spain

### Cheltenham by Adam Fieled

O this is fierce writing, dirty & sweaty, rain-drenched& squalid, caught out in the back seats of parked cars, all that mess of actual young lives – Adam Fieled's poetry moves with & through all this, carefully recording and arranging, natural history notes of the actual ecosystem so many of us live or lived within, savage, implacable and there on its own terms.

—Peter Philpott

Adam Fieled is a poet based in Philadelphia. He has released five print books: "Opera Bufo" (Otoliths, 2007), "When You Bit..." (Otoliths, 2008), "Chimes" (Blazevox, 2009), "Apparition Poems" (Blazevox, 2010), and "Equations" (blue & yellow dog press, 2011), as well as e-books like "Beams" (Blazevox, 2007), "Disturb the Universe: The Collected Essays of Adam Fieled" (Argotist e-books, 2010), and "Mother Earth" (Argotist e-books, 2011). He has work in or forthcoming in Jacket, Cordite, Pennsound, Poetry Salzburg Review, the Argotist, Great Works, Decanto, Tears in the Fence, Upstairs at Duroc, and in the & Now Awards Anthology from Lake Forest College Press. A magna cum laude graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, he also holds an MFA from New England College and an MA from Temple University.



#### Book Information:

· Paperback: 80 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound · Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-106-1

\$16

Buy it [here](#)

Buy it from Amazon [here](#)

## #261

Never one to cut corners about cutting corners, you spun the Subaru into a rough U-turn right in the middle of Old York Road at midnight, scaring the shit out of this self-declared “artist.” The issue, as ever, was nothing particular to celebrate. We could only connect nothing with nothing in our private suburban waste land. Here’s where the fun starts— I got out, motherfucker. I made it. I say “I,” and it works. But Old York Road at midnight is still what it is. I still have to live there the same way you do.



## #412

Each thinks the other a lonesome reprobate.  
That's what I guess when I see the picture.  
It's Elkins Park Square on a cold spring night;  
they're almost sitting on their hands. One  
went up, as they say, one went down, but  
you'll never hear a word of this in Cheltenham.  
They can't gloat anymore, so they make an  
art of obfuscation. That's why I seldom go  
back. Elkins Park Square is scary at night.  
There are ghosts by the ice skating rink.

And out of this nexus, O sacred  
scribe, came absolutely no one.  
I don't know what you expected  
to find here. This warm, safe,  
comforting suburb has a smother  
button by which souls are unraveled.  
Who would know better than you?  
Even if you're only in the back of  
your mind asphyxiating. He looked  
out the window— cars dashed by  
on Limekiln Pike. What is it, he said,  
are you dead or do you think you're Shakespeare?

Huddled in the back of a red  
Jetta, I thought we were in a  
Springsteen song. But there are  
no backstreets in Cheltenham.  
It's only the strip-mall to house  
and back circuit. Anyone could've  
seen us. It wasn't a full consummation—  
for want of a graceful phrase, we  
were too smart to fuck. There was  
no playing hero for me. Nor did I  
force you to confess. What could you say?  
Cheltenham was soft, and all too infested.

## #671

Even as a little girl, she got beat down.  
There was something wrong with her brains.  
She couldn't relate to people. Cheltenham  
guys noticed how adorably doll-like she was  
(lookin' real good, like Natalie Wood), but she  
wouldn't date anyone. She died a mysterious  
social drowning death. She got older and  
became a Tennessee Williams heroine-as-Jewess.  
I'm telling you this because I nailed her, dude.  
I got her to give me a blowjob.

## #681

The kids scamper around the pool and jump in. She's having an affair, and watching her kids with the others. What, was her sex life supposed to be over? She was supposed to stop dead at thirty-eight, and forever hold her peace? And is she that much of a back-stabber, considering what she's been put through? The older guys at the pool still do look at her. They've been warned.

There's something sweet and sickly  
about teenagers fucking. Even laid  
down by the jagged rocks that bordered  
Tookany Creek. I think of them there,  
and know he's getting wasted. What's  
draining out of him is the will to live.  
She always gets him off somehow. Then  
they would walk over to the Little League  
field and huddle in the dugout. He didn't  
even wind up graduating from Cheltenham  
on time. I can't get over thinking who he  
could've been. Am I the only one?

It's two in the morning— this big empty field is a vacuum sucked into this little girl's mouth. Everything's little, he thinks. At least I'm big enough to get head. The problem is what she wants from me. And what she's bound to get. Just by chance, someone in a passenger seat in a car going by on Church Road sees the outline of the two figures. One is leaning— the blowjob part isn't visible. Wow, he says; this place is strange. He shakes himself, turns up the music, and gets ready for a long ride.

### Slinger: The Equilibrium of Stars by Ben Bedard

**Beauty Ain't Always Nice.**

On the distant planet of Damodara, a group of pioneers struggles across the plains. Made up of old miners, prostitutes from pleasure ships, grizzled outlaws and outcasts, the pioneers search for a place to call home. But life isn't simple. The pioneers find themselves caught in a political web. As several powers come to bear on their fragile group, they meet the Slinger, a mysterious woman, equally beautiful and deadly, who, for reasons they do not understand, leads them on their trek across the plains, toward the mountains, toward home. If they can make it.

Written in a western dialect, Slinger tells the story of a group of pioneers caught in the machinations of powerful corporations, distant nations and vicious mercenaries on the distant planet of Damodara. In a universe divided between China and India, a fragile peace is being held together by Brazil. But the pioneers know next to nothing of the schemes of the powers fighting above them. Slinger is the future told from the point of view of the exploited, the poor, the helpless, pushed across space for no reason but survival. Trundling across the plains to the sanctuary of the mountains, the group comprises grizzled miners, outlaws, and outcasts: Catherine, the leader, who harbors a terrible secret; Colt who believes in her; Calder, a bitter man who sees Damodara as his last chance at happiness; Anna who flees her past; smoldering Tina, angered at her fate; the orphan children Chrissy and Leo, who want only a home; the Kid, who desperately seeks a reason for his existence. When they meet the Slinger, renowned equally for being deadly and beautiful, they do not trust her but need her skills to deliver them to the mountains. They find themselves caught deeper and deeper into the schemes of the powerful, inextricably weaving them inside a fate they do not understand. They must learn to rely on each other, and must put their faith and trust in a woman no one understands, the Slinger, if they are to survive the coming conflict.



Ben Lyle Bedard was born in Buckfield, Maine. He enrolled in the University of Maine at Farmington in 1992 and graduated with a Bachelor's of Fine Arts. After a few years of waiting tables, he traveled across the country and eventually earned his Master's Degree at Mills College in Oakland, California. Returning east, he decided to pursue his passion for literature at the University of Buffalo, where, in 2010, he was awarded his PhD. He now lives and writes in Buffalo, New York.

#### Book Information:

· Paperback: 444 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound · Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-102-3  
\$20  
Buy it [here](#)  
Buy it on [Amazon here](#)



## CHAPTER ONE

Slinger lay by the fire with her hat tipped over her eyes and her legs crossed in front of her. Her leather chaps steamed in the heat. Sparks from the fire spiraled over said fire and into the dark sky over the wide plain. The sparks illuminated only her figure and that of her horse. The horse pawed the ground for a minute and then looked off toward the west where just a moment ago, a comet had set. The horse blinked, chewing on the moist chub grass of Damodara, the fourth planet in the Qing Mei system. Then it bent its long neck down again and began to grind its teeth on the grass. The smooth Slinger pulled up the rim of her hat to look at the young man who had suddenly appeared by her fire, his gun trained on her.

"If you're looking for some grub," said she, "you'll have to cook it yourself."

The Kid held out his gun. "Don't be cute."

The woman tipped her head up so that the lower half of her face shined through somewhat. "That's going to be tough," she said. "I been cursed with beauty, they say." Her

oval face was the color of cinnamon, smooth as caramel. Her dark hair was a cool fall of shadowed water.

“Just do what I say,” the Kid said, his grip on his gun tightening.

“Don't think I will.” She pulled the brim of her hat back over her face and set to thinking.

The Kid was quiet for a spell. “Look,” said he. “I ain't wanting to shoot you, but I guess I will.”

“Shoot then,” she said.

“I will.” He swallowed. “I aim to.”

There was quiet again. He pushed his gun forward. The gun didn't tremble, but his finger was lightish on the trigger. Finally, he made a groan and his arm dropped. He looked up at the sky as if there was someone there who was a mite disappointed in him. Then he holstered his gun, took off his hat, and let it fall to the ground where the dust puffed upward. He sat down cross-legged amid that puff, taking a deep taste of it with a sigh. The woman lifted the rim of her hat, watched him. Sulking, he stared in the fire.

“You ain't no bounty hunter, Kid,” she said finally. “Should have shot me last night.”

“You knew I was there?”

“Hell, Kid,” she said. “You been following me since I landed.” Slinger sat up. “I been watching you. You don't act like no bounty hunter.” She rose to a crouch and picked at the fire. Sparks commenced a-spinning over the fire. Since

the Kid didn't say anything, she stood up and rummaged through her saddle bags. She came back to the fire and put an old black kettle on it. She opened a tin of curried beans. They slurped as they exited the can. She set the can to one side. "I suppose you had a dozen chances to kill me in the past two weeks."

"A dozen? Really?"

She stirred at the beans. "I know a lot of low down people who'd kill for a chance like you had."

The Kid thought about that. The woman poured the hot beans into the can and passed it to him. He took it and bowed his head toward her. "Obliged," he said. "I got a hunger on me like a garuda." He took out a pocket knife and began eating the curried beans. The Slinger sat back against the log and stared into the fire. The light played across her face and shined in her wide brown eyes. She picked up a log and tossed it on the fire. They didn't say anything for a long while, just sat and looked up at the wide sky and the distant green circle of the nearest gaseous planet and the fine thin ring of ice lassoed about Damodara.

"What do we do now?" the Kid asked. "I reckon you ain't going to kill me."

The woman shrugged. "Killing ain't something I do for the convenience of it." She scratched her leg. "I don't see much danger in you."

"I guess I'm ashamed of myself a little."

“Well, you ain't much of a bounty hunter,” she said.

“But that’s a fair thing to say of a person.”

“Still, I reckon whatever work you do, you should be good at it.”

“Reckon so.”

He thought about it. “Matter of pride,” concluded he.

They sat quiet again. Finally he picked his hat up and put it on. He looked at her. “You ain't what I expected. I guess I'd've killed you otherwise.”

Slinger hadn’t much to say to that.

So the Kid continued: “They say you ain't got no heart in you nor any kind of feeling god gave a dog. They say you kill children and snakes just as equal as anything.”

The Kid waited but there was no comment on that neither. So the Kid continued.

“They say you might be a woman, but you got the heart of a killer dog. They say you as vicious as anything that ever walked on solid ground or swam in any waters, fresh or otherwise. Now I see you, I can't hardly believe what I heard.”

“Hard to believe most you hear and half you see.”

“One thing is true though,” he said. “You sure are mighty kind to the eyes.” He couldn't help linger over her face and felt a twinge in his heart at the dark river of her hair.

The Slinger pulled her hat back down over her face. Then she lay back in the dirt and put her head against her

saddle. The Kid felt his face blush and was surprised at how he had talked.

“I reckon that was terrible forward of me,” he said. “I apologize.”

“Yeah well,” she said. “I’m used to it, Kid.”

The Kid sat back and felt strange to be where he was. He looked up at the sky and saw the flicker of a starship in orbit. He blinked at it. “Well,” he said. “I don’t know what I’m going to do now. I reckon you’re right, I ain’t cut out for a life of bounty hunting. I never knew what I was going to do when I finally caught up with you. Guess I thought it’d be easy to pull that trigger. Seems I ain’t the kind for blind killing. I thought it’d be like shooting them things you see around here, I don’t know what they are. Rats or something. I mean, all the stories I heard about you, I thought maybe you deserved to die, you know, like you had it coming, but when it came time, I just locked up inside. Like I weren’t even the boss of myself. I guess I ain’t nothing but a failure from one end of the galaxy to the other. I ain’t cut out for nothing.”

The Slinger looked up at the singing-bright stars. Her horse shook her mane behind her and stamped the ground.

In this stunning starlit silence the Kid continued: “I been everything in this life it seems. I been a cook. I been a miner. I been a worker in a factory, I been a waiter. After a space, I just can’t stand it. I get to hating the job, I get to hating the people, and I get to hating life in general. Then I find

myself on a whole other planet with some damn job or other and the cycle starts all over again. I just don't know what to do with myself. I ain't got but this one life to live, you know. I ain't set on wasting on it."

"It's a puzzler," said the smooth Slinger.

"Yes, ma'am," he said. "Yes it is."

They were quiet under those stars. The Kid set to thinking and looking time on time Slinger-wards, her jeaned and chapped legs crossed one over the other, graceful as you please. Hat over her eyes, hair splayed back and trickling dark over her saddle, enough to give pain, heart-wise. There thought he on his place amid things, life in its generalities, and what fortune had in store for him. He pondered and ruminated and chewed on it until it became a pleasant kind of grazing. Lightly fluttered his eyes and he slept. When the Kid woke, the Slinger stood over him with the reins of his horse in her hand. For a second he was puzzled. Then he smiled.

He rose up from the hard earth and took the reins from her.

They both rode on side by side into the plains. They didn't say anything for a long while, but let their horses clip lightly through the chub grass or graze on the lithe amber chatter grass clacking under the twin suns. About them were the wide yellow plains of Damodara and the brilliant sky so blue it hurt to look upon, especially for eyes accustomed to

the dismal light of ships in spacebound darkness. Twisting in the sky above them were strange lines of yellow and orange clouds that combed through the sky. The breeze rippled that sea of grass and made it a joy to breathe so light it was and full of life. The hills about them waved like a swelling of seas to the utter horizon which were awful beautiful to contemplate as if it gave the liberty to go running and have no one put a stop to it. The Kid had a lungful of it and was feeling the rightness of his wandering ways, letting the various pleasures of living belly up to him as metaphors of the high spirit.

They came up over a hill and stopped. Their horses chomped at the chub grass while they watched a battered caravan stutter across the plains on minimal solar power. To conserve energy, most of the people walked next to the caravan or rode horses. The Kid counted eight people all together, including two children. It was an old caravan, a battered old Tocha, it looked like to him, made by the Luz da Estrada company. The Kid looked down at them and then leaned over the neck of his horse and spit.

“I guess you're set on robbing those folks,” he said. He didn't look at her, his hands crossed on the pommel of his saddle. “I ain't going to stop you, but I ain't helping neither. If I ain't a bounty hunter, I reckon I ain't a bandit neither.”

She didn't say anything. She leaned forward and watched the caravan. Then she turned her head to the left

and squinted. The Kid turned. There was another group approaching. They were on magsleds and were coming fast.

“That there's trouble,” the Kid said.

The Slinger didn't say anything. She watched the caravan and then she watched the approaching magsleds. “Sure is trouble,” she said finally. She turned to the Kid. “You stay here,” she said. The Kid said okay and then Slinger looked at him. “Now I know how this works. I tell the you to stay put and then things go sour and you show up and make it all worse or get yourself killed.” She looked at him and her eyes were hard. “Hand over that gun.”

The Kid looked at her and knew she was serious. He was afraid of her for the first time. He took out the weapon and slapped it down in her hand. “I guess you got difficulty in trusting a man's word,” he said.

“Guess so,” she said.

Then she shook her reins and said ha! There was an explosion of sod and the Kid watched as she rode down the hill toward the caravan.

The caravan came to a sharp halt, sputtered and clunked, its mechanisms decades old and deteriorating, having seen one too many planets and one too many migrations. A clean cut, golden-maned, sober-looking man by the name of Colt watched the sole rider come down off the hill. He walked out toward the rider holding his rifle. The children climbed up into the caravan and he waved two other men to



him. They carried rifles as well and they stopped and watched the lone rider approach them.

“Coming down off that hill awful fast,” Lazer said.

“Ain't no need for that speed,” said Calder. He put his rifle to his shoulder, but kept it pointed at the ground.

“Keep your cool,” Colt said. “Ain't but one person.”

The Slinger reined up her horse tight and swung off the saddle, landing steadily in a patch of chatter grass. Her boots scared up a sparkbug. It fluttered across her vision for an instant, glimmering with brilliance, and made a sharp snapping sound before it folded its wings and dropped back into the grass. The Slinger walked forward through the grass, keeping her hat tilted low over her face. Her easy walk took the nerve out of them, so they raised up their rifles at her.

“What do you want?” the sober-looking man named Colt asked, looking at her through his sights.

“You keep your hands where I can see'em,” said Lazer.

Keeping her hat down, the woman lifted her hands, palm up. “I'm not the one you should be thinking on,” she said, and then, her hands splayed out before them, she pointed with both index fingers toward the magsleds kicking up dust and grass speeding toward them. They all turned and gasped and knew trouble when they saw it. “It's the Laycrofts!” Colt exclaimed. The other two men were stunned. The Slinger put her hands down to her pistols. None of them noticed.

“It's the Laycrofts!” Colt said again, this time toward the caravan. “We have to make a run for it!” The three turned away from her and ran for the caravan. She followed at a lazy walk. There was some shouting and then a man they called Gregory leapt out of the caravan and dived under it. She leaned down and plucked a piece of chatter grass and put it in her mouth. The Slinger commenced chewing it, watching the caravaners at work getting their pep up. “You ain't going to out run magsleds,” she said to Gregory under the caravan.

“What choice do we have?” He edged out from under the caravan to face her and then his face lightened and then darkened and then lightened again. “You're a woman,” he said.

“Got me there,” said the Slinger. She tipped her hat back and then turned to him. “Well,” she said. “I tell you what. I'll take care of these magsleds if you'll let me have the pick of your supplies. I'm running low.”

“What?” He looked at her.

“Food and supplies. All I'm asking.” She held out her hand.

“You must be crazy,” said he, and then dived back under the caravan. Slinger pulled her hand back from the space where she'd been expecting a return clasp and twisted the chatter grass in her mouth. The caravan started up and then puttered away, leaving her standing there. Slinger looked down at it and there was a red creature there shaking its head,

its eyes rolling back. She flicked the grass away. She stood there and measured the shrinking distance between them and the magsled and did not move. Leaping from the caravan came then a woman with a severe face, carrying a rifle. Her name was Catherine. She landed in front of the Slinger and then gave her a quick look-see.

“You’re the one who warned us about the magsleds?” asked she.

Slinger nodded. Behind her came the three men, all carrying rifles. They dug themselves under the caravan, imploring Gregory with much profanity to be swift in his machinations. Slinger looked at the tallish woman. “You ain’t going to outrun them,” said the Slinger.

“I know it,” said the woman. “But we won’t go down without a fight. Damn Laycrofts.”

Slinger looked off toward the magsleds. They were coming in fast, but still weren’t more than a cloud shadow in the distance. As she watched, two heads poked out the door, both children. The boy pointed at the Slinger and said, “Who’s that?” as he hadn’t looked upon another person in some time. The girl smiled behind a rage of yellow curls before both of them were tugged back inside. Slinger looked back at the magsleds and then at the closing doors of the caravan that went *kathunk* closed as she watched. The tallish woman, rifle-ready, flung herself under the caravan next to the other men.

“Hey,” said one of those men. “You best get out of here while you got a chance.”

Slinger eyed the oncoming Laycrofts. She walked over to the caravan and then crouched down in the grass so that five heads looked at her with expressions from irritation to anxiety. “Like I told this one here,” Slinger said, jabbing a thumb toward Gregory. “I’m low on supplies. If you let me ride with you for a spell, I’ll take care of those sleds for you.”

One of the men laughed, but the serious one by the name of Colt, he looked over to the tallish woman and said something. Catherine squinted up at the Slinger.

“If you can get rid of those Laycrofts,” said Catherine. “We’ll provide you with a feast.”

Slinger touched the brim of her hat. “Don’t need nothing fancy,” said she. She stood up so that those caravaners could only see her legs walking to the front of the caravan, all agreeing without a word that she were crazy to go up against a magsled full of Laycrofts. Yet all agreed without saying so in the crass language of out loud that she were a comely one for being so crazy. Even her walk had something to it that made a heart bleed.

The Slinger took a walk up past the caravan and through the chatter grass and stood there among those belled shoots awaiting. The hard seed pods of that grass clicked together in the slight breeze so that they seemed to be talking to one another in a language full up with clicks. The two suns were off

to her left set to their slow waltz down to the horizon. On the far crest she could see the Kid on his horse, watching. Streaks of clouds shot across the blue sky. It were mighty pleasant on the eyes.

Slinger eased out her pistols as the magsleds come into view. There weren't but four or five men on them altogether, she counted. A good sign that they were scouts mostly, set to finding any unauthorized passages across these plains, report back to the Laycrofts, and then come coursing back with rifles and grenades and fire bombs of all kinds to lay waste to the caravans, the reason being they owned the land. Such a thing not being legal, of course. Outlying planets had no ownership until said land was bettered in some fashion, be it mining or cattling or farming. People like the Laycrofts, however, had a way of reasoning with people they owned a whole planet, the argument of fire and gun shot being mighty convincing. The magsleds shuddered out of shadow and began to gleam with their shine of metal, and the men upon it, in their Neegoh leather, lifted their rifles up toward the caravan, for it were fun to shoot off a few dumb folk in passing before they did a turn back to base to come back later. Two or three shots rang out toward the Slinger as she stood cool in the chatter grass, but those bullets were nothing but noise so off target were they.

The cool Slinger leveled her dual pistols up at the sleds and placed one of her feet in front of her, nestling her boot

down amid the base of the chatter grass. She leaned a touch back so that her gaze were level with those outstretched guns of hers. She took a deep breath and held it just a moment before she started to ease it out. Then her cool gaze flashed as her guns did a quick thaa thaa, thaa thaa! So spoke her guns. And it were a language that must be heeded, all filled up as it were with heavy lead glyphs. Weren't no need for verbiage in that language, true enough! For each noun had a way of naming and each target had a way of learning but one thing. Thaa thaa! spoke those pistols in the smooth hands of the Slinger.

Two of those Laycrofts tumbled down, instant dead, not having even the time to think a bit on their lives before they weren't in it no more, which was a blessing on their part for they hadn't much to look back upon with pride. Mostly those neatly extinguished lives had been spent a-whoring and a-killing and sometimes the difference between the two weren't always a clean line. Weren't many that would weep for those men, and even those that might would have to swallow bitter the knowledge they had it coming. The other two shots made their demanding impact upon the sled itself, and it sparked and sputtered and then heaved forward, diving nose first into the earth. Thus soared and spun in the air two more Laycrofts, these having a moment or two to contemplate their lives under Damodara's wide sky before they struck the hard earth, breaking their lives to pieces and leaving the world of

breathable air for all time. What thought they as spinning they came to the quick? A feeling of unreality mostly, for it were strange to them they could die, mighty strange, like peacocks in a pig pen. But die they did and more miserably than their fellows, for their rush to the earth but broke them up and left them breathing for a minute or two before their spirits said the hell with it and skedaddled. Then there were but one Laycroft left, stunned by the multitude of death about him, and he whirled around to flee from Slinger's guns. But Slinger merely took another breath and prepared to speak again. Thaa! she spoke, but one word. And that word carried its message to the back of the lone Laycroft's neck and then clean through it, stopping for neither bone nor flesh. So that last man died passing swiftly but had the time to think on the blue sky before it rolled out of his view into darkness. The magsled did its dive and crashed and smoked and then there was silence again. The Slinger sheathed her pistols and then walked back to the caravan. She crouched down where the caravaners were staring at her open-mouthed.

“You got any tea?” asked she. “I ain't had a good cup for near on a month now.”

\*

\*

\*

The Kid were excited at the display of the Slinger's terrible prowess. He'd watched the whole thing from the crest of the hill, whistling with wonder at her shooting. It were almost magic the way those magsleds just spun about and exploded just on account of a few shots from the Slinger. She were a magician almost when it came to the wielding of pistols. An artist of the slinging craft. The Kid had rode down after the battle and now they had set up a camp not far from the caravan. The people of said caravan also milled about, the man they called Gregory set to scavenging the magsleds and the others, Lazer and Calder, took care of the Laycroft bodies and inspected their rifles with interest, arguing from one to the other from time to time. The Kid stood over their fire while the Slinger lay upon the ground with her back to her saddle.

"Dizang!" swore the Kid. "That was some shooting! I seen some shooting in my time, but didn't that just beat all?" He motioned his arm toward the caravaners where now the children lightly ran about and two women they hadn't seen before set to various work about the camp. "They sure are lucky you come along, Slinger," opined the Kid. "If not, those Laycrofts would have them by now, I swear it. They'd either be dead or up in orbit waiting to get sold off. Shit, I reckon you're a goddamn blessing to each and every one of them!" He looked at Slinger. "Ain't that the truth?" But the Slinger said nothing. The Kid's spirits were not dampened. "Di-



zang,” continued he. “Weren’t that something to see!” He took out finger pistols, thumbs cocked. “Bang! Bang!” exclaimed the Kid with his mute fingers. “And then they just dropped. I don’t think you missed a single shot. I know good rifle men who couldn’t have made that shot, and there you were with just them pistols of yours.” “Bang! Bang!” reiterated he and then transformed those pistols into hands again for waving at the wide plain. “Shit, those Laycrofts didn’t have a chance. I tell you though, I don’t feel a lick of pity for those sonsabitches. I hear tell they kill whole packs of people. Even down to dogs and chickens. Ain’t no one as bad them except maybe the Chapels, that’s what I hear. The Laycrofts are awful greedy! Want to swallow the whole planet down themselves! I say it ain’t right. Don’t no one own a whole planet just from saying so. Whoever sets their shoulder to working on that land got the rights to it. That’s the law. No I don’t feel even a touch of sorrow for them sonsabitches.” The Kid looked over the plains and then took up a mighty big pleasurable sigh and sat plunk down. He took off his hat and set it on his knee. “Here they come,” said he, nodding toward the figures of Colt and Catherine, hands full, coming to them.

Truer words could hardly be said. Here they did come, carrying cups of tea, one they gave to the smooth Slinger and the other they offered to the Kid. They were a dirty pair, like the others, all mud-covered. They were all in denim and leather and patches of the same. They looked like they didn’t

so much as walk on the earth as crawl upon it. Catherine and Colt looked at them with a mix of wonder and distrust.

“Obliged,” said the Slinger.

“Namaste,” said the Kid holding up his tea. “Smells damn good.” He smiled over at the Slinger. “I ain’t had a good cup of tea in, crissakes, I don’t know how long!” He looked down at it, his face beaming.

The Slinger put the tea to her mouth where the cup disappeared in the shadow of her hat.

“Who are you?” asked Catherine. She was a slim woman, but cold of face, like she never had an emotion she didn’t approve of first. Her face was long and slim and beautiful in its way, but her eyes had more cut in them than color.

“This here’s the Slinger,” said the Kid for her. “Don’t you know that? She’s got a bounty on her big enough to buy a whole fleet of starships!”

“Kid,” said the Slinger in way of saying shut yer yap.

Colt and Catherine stared at her. It was Colt that spoke up first. “What do you want with us?” he asked.

“Like she said,” the Kid told him. “We just want to ride with you for a bit. We ain’t got much supplies left. I guess we paid our way by getting rid of those Laycrofts.”

Colt turned to him, his face none too happy. The Kid furrowed his eyes, not understanding why he got such a look from him. Colt were a large man with a square face and corn-colored hair and a golden beard, cut clean and square. His

light eyes gave him a cutting gaze that the Kid didn't appreciate.

"I don't think we're asking much," said the Kid, getting worked up. "If it weren't for the Slinger, you'd be dead. Those scouts would've brought back a whole passel of Laycrofts and you'd be dead as. . .as. . .well, dead is dead, ain't it? Dead is what you'd be anyhow." He threw his hand carelessly toward their camp. "They'd even kill those children if it weren't for us. Shot them both dead, sure as shit stinks."

Dark looks burst over Catherine and Colt's face like blooming flowers.

"Kid," said the Slinger again, turning her shaded eyes toward him.

"Huh?" asked the Kid, turning toward her. There sure were a lot of displeasure coming his way and what for? He weren't sure unless it was speaking the truth and that was his way. He was proud of it. "Well, that's the truth, ain't it?" He looked challengingly back to Colt and thought to himself, I could lick that old man. And the thought excited him and he smiled a lean smile up at Colt.

Then there was a clatter. Slinger's tea cup dropped from her fingers. Slinger slowly began falling to one side and the Kid shot over to her, holding her up, thinking, why she must've been shot and didn't say nothing about it! He searched her up and down, but saw no bullet hole. "What's wrong?" he asked aloud.

“She’ll be fine,” said Catherine.

The Kid looked up at her and blinked and then thought of the tea cup and saw it in the dirt there all glistening with liquid, and he stood up fast, his face going red with fury. Colt stepped forward and his pistol drawn, brought it down hard on the crown of his head and the Kid, so recently the imaginary victor of this exact challenge, now lost his consciousness swift as a stone falls. He crumpled down on top of the Slinger with hardly time for a thought except to reflect on Colt’s face that last he saw before the darkness came. He seemed a decent man. Just shows, thought he, how hard it is to tell folk from their looks. And then he thought no more.

Colt stood over them and looked out over the plain. The blue sky shined bright as a gem. No matter how many days he’d seen it, it still thrilled his heart, so used he had been to the gloom of life the way it was. Yes sir, the wide big sky were a beautiful human thing to see and did a wonder amount of good to every heart who saw it.

Then he and Catherine set to dragging the bodies over to the caravan.

### The Pink by Jared Schickling

“The Pink” reads like a bio-centric futurist work of patterned effeminate lyricism and distortion whose themes are fatherhood, motherhood, and childhood, while playing heartily at inherited themes and motifs through re-worked fairy tales, observations (recordings), and children’s verses.

Jared Schickling’s *The Pink* is a fascinating inter-generic book about creating an autobiographical book and about the future creation of a possible novel. There are stories; stories of childhood and adulthood with a somewhat dark fairy-tale-like cast to them. And there are also regular other voices, or perhaps the same voices in other times, that are commenting on the “narrative” voice, sometimes with just a single word or two on a page. These are perhaps the book’s author, or the designer or puppet-master of the book in which that author speaks. These stories, narrations, and voices, are all mentioned or commented on. But in fact the majority of the book looks like poetry, and poetry is the one form that is not referred to explicitly in the texts. Perhaps one could say the poetry is unconscious here, and that therefore poetry is what this work is. But whatever it “is”, it is a constantly intriguing, unified single work, a thoroughly engaging narration-poem-meditation metatext text! —John M. Bennett



Jared Schickling’s other books of poetry are *Aurora*, *submissions*, *O*, *Zero’s Blooming Excursion*, and *t&u& lash your nipples to a post history* is gorgeous (BlazeVOX [books], 2007-11). Current projects include a prequel to *The Pink*, “(pietà: Ramona’s Private Jest.),” a work of poetics, “*The Paranoid Arrow: Studies in that American Fiction*,” and occasional translations of passages from Moroccan poet Abdellatif Laâbi’s *L’automne promet*. He likes *1913: a journal of forms*; *The Associative Press*; *Bombay Gin*; *Circumference: Poetry in Translation*; *ecopoetics*; *ditch*, the poetry that matters; *Exquisite Corpse*; *Interim Magazine*; *Jacket*; *kadar koli*; *Literary Imagination*; *Little Red Leaves*; *Omnia Vanitas Review: A Journal of Literary Erotica*; *Otoliths*; *Sous les Pavés*; *SpringGun*; *unarmed journal*; *We Are So Happy to Know Something*; *Word For/Word: a journal of new writing and more*. In 2006 he got a KNOCK Ecoliterature / Green Art prize in poetry. He is a founding editor of *Delete Press* and *ecolinguistics*, and he serves on the editorial board of *Reconfigurations: A Journal for Poetics and Poetry / Literature and Culture*. He teaches English at a community college and lives near Buffalo, NY.

#### Book Information:

· Paperback: 80 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound · Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-115-3  
\$16  
Buy it [here](#)  
Or Buy it at [Amazon here](#)

4321

Plastic flesh squat on the ground spits its paper! It chews knowing what to do from without! Electricity's weaving it!

To satellites and back! Bits: Flagged! Each house on the street of thirty houses! Spitting its own trees!

Some more than others! Some not at all!

Power lines! lashed to boards bolted a species of limb snapping one night through gusting minor storms

Electricity shines. Screen. Giving it beer. Keys tap.

A jar of pencils is useless. Realize these two together. Organ forgotten.

To see that you see. Pulled the current from the ether.

Print.

**Revised!**



*bee bay*  
*yoo hoo*  
*nothing to be done*

Brought up off and on by continuously  
absent people, who blames them  
one barefoot in the grass to the one  
whose small shoes crossed his toes permanently

As his man he'd punch the door which  
gave way or shattered, who blames him  
who'd blame her for himself  
pulling it from her

stomach who'd say nothing about the one  
no one knows, who blames her  
her own dad shipped it off well before  
they'd marry move

on I am a man I'll do nothing  
but listen, or wait to hear it  
because as their boy I knew  
how they blamed things

Voice from her begins  
not to speak, it spills  
another's breast  
telekinesis, more laundry

What it says  
to who is hers  
coconut geyser  
man if we could taste you

man  
if we could taste you

**I was an accident**

Finding myself  
positions unfamiliar  
filling its drawers

Speak, baby, speak—and under my adult life, straighten the dull people,  
shrieking high and sour, following, without dirtying feet, a harder earth,  
underneath my history.

,—and upon my hands

Drop a task that doesn't outward seep. I lose the path in these open ears.  
Adulthood's heavy grief, or articulate ecstasies and hopes, mature,  
clarifying words,

.—cosmetic peace, addled

consistent secret, laughs with a smoke, on laughing days, in the night,  
procrastinate—follow her already.

Loud was the wild within—speak, baby, speak

**At night, at my computer**

### Captain Poetry's Sucker Punch: A Guide to the Homeric Punkhole, 1980–2012

by Kenneth Warren

Called by Andrei Codrescu, “one of the few and great readers of American poetry,” Warren presents in this collection of more than one hundred essays an interactive history of poetic aspirations and punk protrusions. With a mytho-poetic, archetypal way of reading community, music, and poetry, Warren is a provocative exegete of humanity's typological inheritance. From Wrestlemania to the Cosmic Ethiopian King, from The Residents to Simon Weil, Warren has organized his criticism into four sections, including: Semiotic Sobriety, about the manipulations of language, money, music, property, and state power that squeezed the poetic mind into a punkhole dug by Baby Boomers during the Age of Reagan; Archaic Sexuality, analyzing the lunar circuits and somatic-bio rhythms that pulled poets toward chthonic depth; Alchemical Precision, in which he explores an Arcanum of poets ranging from Objectivists to the Western Occult; and Pharmacological Utopia, in which he pays tribute to Charles Olson, A Curriculum of the Soul, Jack Clarke, and other poets of intuitive genius. The book covers the best of Cleveland's underground bands, including Pere Ubu, Home and Garden,, The Floyd Band, and The Mice. The Dead Kennedys, The Residents, and Johnny Thunders are represented as well. There are essays on Beat poets Gregory Corso, Bob Kaufman, Jack Kerouac, Peter Orlovsky, and Ray Bremser. Other poets considered are: Kathy Acker, David Antin, Mei-Mei Berssenbrugge, Robin Blaser, Richard Blevins, John Cage, Robert Creeley, Ed Dorn, Sharon Doubiago, Robert Duncan, Larry Eigner, Stephen Ellis, Clayton Eshleman, Richard Grossinger, Jack Hirschman, Susan Howe, Lawrence Joseph, Yusef Komunyakaa, d.a. levy, Lyn Lifshin, Harold Norse, Ed Sanders, Hugh Seidman, Gilbert Sorrentino, Stacy Szymaszek, Tod Thilleman, Anne Waldman, Diane Ward, Lewis Warsh, John Wieners, and many more.



“The title of Ken Warren’s selective and provocative history of American poets and poetry over the past thirty years comes from an incident partially narrated in Tom Clark’s Charles Olson. The Allegory of a Poet’s Life [318] in which Gregory Corso makes a disruptive appearance in Olson’s afternoon seminar on myth, 1964. I say “partially” because as a member of that class and a witness to the events of that afternoon it seems to me Clark omits a few important facts, e.g. that after challenging the assembled students to match him in reciting from memory lines of Shelley (or perhaps by extension any poet) and hearing only universal silence, Corso began pointing out with increasing intensity that “we are all on death row” and that he was “Captain Poetry”. Finally he turned to Olson: “Aren’t I Captain Poetry, Charles?” “Yes,” Olson replied. “Then what should I do?” And without missing a beat Olson said calmly and with some humor, “report for duty.” David Posner, the Curator of the Lockwood Poetry library, never stepped into the room – the fracas happened after Corso had fled Olson’s class. It did not then and has never since seemed to me that Olson asked Corso to report to him, though the exchange might be interpreted so; rather, I took Olson to mean report to Poetry. Certainly that’s what Olson was teaching. And it’s worth mentioning here because Ken Warren’s work over the past three decades, both as editor and publisher of House Organ (an occasional magazine in which some of these pieces first appeared) and as a freelance essayist and critic outside academic writing,



constitutes the sort of discipline, dedication, and persistence which Poetry has demanded from him, not as a maker of poems but as a friend, an ear, a receptive mind.” - Albert Glover, editor of Letters for Origin, 1950—1956 by Charles Olson, (Cape Goliard, 1969)

**Born in New York City in 1953, Kenneth Warren is the editor of House Organ, a quarterly letter of poetry and prose. His two collections of poetry are Rock/the Boat: Book One (Oasis Press, 1998) and The Wandering Boy (Flo Press, 1979).**

· Paperback: 460 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound · Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN:  
978-1-60964-063-7 \$25.00

Buy it [here](#) or

[Buy it from Amazon here](#)

## Deconstructing *The Gift*

Poets have recently been misappropriating words in order to describe poetry as an economy that, outside the poem itself, has little to do with the dominance of the market but nearly everything to do with the dominance of the state. Across the United States poets have turned to economic models from a basic need to articulate a value for a livelihood dedicated, in whole or in part, to the poetic process. Their wages cannot, of course, be determined in the bear market for free verse.

Popular neglect makes it easy for poets to assume that poetry is a gift and not a commodity. Too often they ignore the state's role as mediator between gift and market through the system of grants and copyright. This critically flawed assumption happens to rule *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1983), Lewis Hyde's influential analysis of how poets "labor with a gift" and do "commerce with the creative spirit."

Poets have been highly uncritical in their acceptance of *The Gift*, something of a poet's musings on language and commerce that draws extensively on the writings of social and economic anthropologists Marcel Mauss and Marshall Sahlins. The very center of Hyde's imaginary economy is gift-exchange, "a total social phenomenon," he writes, "one whose transactions are at once economic, juridical, moral, aesthetic, religious, and mythological." Yet Hyde ignores theories of bureaucracy, capital, and the state, and for this reason, his demonstration of the versatility of gift-exchange as a model for the practice of poetry breaks down when applied to institutions. By a rather careless oversight, then, he fails to explore the very trigger point for popular perceptions of scarcity and surplus—big government.

Even before the publication of *The Gift*, it had been commonplace in the United States for poets to presume that primitive economic models will support, in a literal way, a representation of a creative process subsidized by the state but ignored by the people. The total effect of *The Gift* on the contemporary poetry scene has poets from various quarters subjecting primitive models of giving and feasting to widespread semantic distortion. There's little doubt that poets benefit from misunderstanding economics. *The Gift's* suggestive and rather eclectic mix of prose has extended, moreover, a delusion that holds so long as poets embrace a vision of symbolic exchange regardless of their money and property fix; they will survive unscathed in a realm of primitive gift-giving.

Such a realm involves the quest for a method by which poets can disavow connections between poetry, money, and filth, and so participate in a sacred economy. Poets are thus able to use Hyde's work to limit their search for values to those fitting their instrumentalist approach to sources, an approach that allows them to convert free, gratuitous elements of poetry into relations of private property. It's no wonder that Hyde's book certifies the gift as the decade's most problematical misappropriation of a word by poets. The need of poets to earn livelihoods through the ordering of their words before the state is a "killing of wealth." What's killed is not only the wealth of the consumer as taxpayer but symbolic exchange, that is, again, an order in which poetry assumes no value other than itself.

*The Gift* is especially popular with poets who value state-supported fellowships because from the suggestive language of social anthropology they can construct an image of surplus and excess. Such an image, loosely connected with the bread and butter issues of their own lives, masks the killing of wealth, that is, the memory of death projected through the state's system of armed force, taxation, and

support. The expansion of the state's system of fellowships and grants is closely related to making the idea of gift exchange a fetish among North American poets. It's a good possibility that federalism and structuralism, two systems dedicated to unity through binary patterns, have influenced many poets to regard all behavior, be it alienated, biological, or cultural, as a kind of language. What such regard yields is a troubling conceptualization that presents poets and primitives as figures sharing a common ground bearing imaginary gifts which precede structures of property and state.

In reality, the system of support for culture does not advance gift-giving. Nor does the disbursement of money by private foundations to geniuses and winners conform to the gift's sole measure of symbolic exchange. There is, outside the language of the poem itself, too much exchange, too much interference, too much observation, not to mention covert action, being generated by media, organizations, states, and systems. The great contradiction of *The Gift* involves a model of primitive economy which cannot accommodate static formations of private property. *The Gift* fetishizes the idea of creative property by turning money and words into things. What Hyde passes off as eros is thanatos:

It is because gift exchange is an erotic form that so many gifts must be refused. The issue commonly arises in public life. Should a university accept a grant from a government dictator? Should a writer or scientist accept a grant from a government waging an immoral war? We often refuse relationship, either from the simple desire to remain unentangled, or because we sense that the proffered connection is tainted, dangerous, or frankly evil. And when we refuse relationship, we must refuse gift exchange as well.  
(73)

The state is the support system that allows poets to survive and maintain the silly presumption that they labor with a gift. Thus the gift is a conceit that fits perfectly the need for a code of ethics compatible with this system of support. Gift-exchange is not action but discourse. In this sense, Hyde's work has led poets to presume that gift-giving is the normal way for them to conceptualize their poetic practice at this point in history. His wholly expressive research on exchange and property has managed, quite wonderfully, to characterize the dreaming of poets mired in a vision of state fellowship, neo-primitivism, and world fusion.

Under the state's system of taxation, fellowships, and copyright protection, poets and poetry are subsumed in a federalist version of gift exchange. The fusion of state tokens of support for poetry and primitive economic models grants poets a way to lay claim to the real. That is to say, the state extends to poets money, the medium of exchange that will get them food. The state will also protect their creative property, the store of value that would permit them freedom if only their books would sell. Still, poetry is no gift when it serves to legitimate relations of organized force, or when poets defend, on the basis of primitive economic models, their share in a wealth that results from the stunting of social consciousness.

The gift is still the total concept for which poets have exchanged the private reference of their words. The language of social anthropology has offered them a means of addressing their practice without having to rely, as Emerson or Whitman did, upon imperatives of Judeo-Christian scripture.

Was it more than accidental that under Reaganomics the Indian Potlatch has served as the moral agency regulating the alienated behavior of shamanist poets and supply-side economists alike? Why does Lewis Hyde's quest so much resemble that of George Gilder? Perhaps because in their analogies of the Indian potlatch, each took something a piece at a time from its original domain, put it in their own unique syntax, protected it by law, and sold it in the marketplace of ideas. The advantage of analogy has allowed them to hold Native American culture at bay, while registering as property the gifts of a culture pushed deeper into poverty by the convertability of its symbols. There's little shock value in seeing shamanist poets and supply-side economists approaching Native American culture from two sides of the federalist system. What is to be read into such books are the motives of men of words, envisioning themselves penetrating conceptions, materials, and secrets of primitive societies. Their aim is to transform cultural differences into the federalist vision of unified culture.

Years have passed since the publication of *The Gift*, and poets have yet to demonstrate that they have mastered the lesson of sacred economy and gift-exchange by renouncing copyright and severing poetry's connection as legally protected property to the state.

Poets are still lifting the material and symbolic wealth of primitive culture in the name of the postmodern imagination. In the language of social anthropology, they have sought imaginary freedom. But when their thinking proves insufficient to the wealth of an economy that never produced beyond food gathering, or hunting and fishing, they implicate themselves in its killing.

All told, *The Gift*, perhaps the widest possible exercise of human comparativism to effect the poetry scene in recent years, has not helped poets out of their semantic crisis. The sad truth is that no theory about poetry and money can account for the poverty of the postmodern imagination, an imagination mindful only of how badly these times demand that poets manipulate primitive ethos in order to establish a moral tone.

*Buffalo Arts Review*, 1986

## "A is a bull's head,"

says Charles Olson in "The Chiasma, or Lectures in the New Sciences of Man." This proposition brings together two conditions for consciousness, namely animal victimage and the sign. One sees at once a traumatic sign, an initiatic letter severed from a bull, a sentence that recalls human powers which can only succeed after animal sacrifice. As actual living animals die, aural and visual perceptions are transformed in signs which fail outside consciousness to preserve them. The archeology of letters recapitulates myth-making in a fourfold flash. First, a beginning is conceived from chaos. Second, boundaries for the human imagination are created from animal dismemberment. Third, a bull's head is pictured in a black alphabetic letter. Fourth, knowledge of trauma is exacted for language. Because language is a symbolization of sacrificial cutting, poetry will be heard and seen under the guise of decapitated heads. Consequently, there is a vital relationship between graphic sign and spoken word traceable from a bull's head to the singing head of Orpheus. Today, these heads signify the terrible obligations poetry must assume for the cosmic order of its veracious mechanisms.

*Bullhead*, 1994

## "Like a Mexican Christmas"

in memory of John Clarke

"Relativism is the bad faith of the conqueror, who has become secure enough to become a tourist."  
– Stanley Diamond

"The poet must relinquish claim to the assurance that he will on demand be supplied with a name for that which he has posited as what truly is."  
– Martin Heidegger

I was under the Christmas moon in search of the elevated tale. When the bus rolled out from Mexico City to Oaxaca, I turned to my brother and talked about the animals that could move us closer to our fable. The Pan American Highway stayed true to the blue epiphanic coloring that had filled our minds overnight with thoughts about the Magi. At daybreak, off the bus, we walked around Oaxaca, looking in vain for a room.

Mangers were everywhere. The Three Kings were all around us. We followed a rising cobblestone path to the church of Our Lady of Solitude and entered for a prayer. At the altar rail we admired the brocaded cloak that covered Our Lady, while pigeons would flap and coo behind us in naves no longer used for worship. To kill time we stepped outside to the church yard. There were four large plastic animals gathered about the wooden stable. We sat down near the donkey and set our sights on the star hanging from the stable's eaves.

One by one, people began to gather for the day's work. An old nun with a handmade broom swept hay from the sidewalk. A mother followed by a daughter arranged sparkling holy articles on display boards, which she and her daughter propped against the garden wall. A boy stacked boxes of Chiclets on an Indian rug.

Red, yellow, green, and white zoomorphic carvings were lifting up to the heavens. A scorpion, loaded with cosmic eggs, reached a foot long in size from the tip of the tail to the tip of the tongue. Up the tail spiraled a Piscean constellation. Seven notches had been carved into the tail and painted sky blue. Two serpents coiled around a tree. A strand of mushrooms had been wrapped around the carving in a dot to dot spermatoc pattern.

The world, it seemed, was becoming "like a Mexican Christmas all contents needed." It was thus at five thousand feet in the green city that a sonnet by John Clarke started us thinking about red and white Christmas things calling to the epiphany we were capable of expressing. Each day that followed we would find within the reading of Clarke's *From Feathers to Iron*, a series of lectures and sonnets on the dynamics of poetic thought, "all contents needed" to orient ourselves with the Magi to stars.

Since the 1920s, poets have been drawn to Oaxaca. In *The Plumed Serpent*, D.H. Lawrence passed on a lasting sense of its images and examples. Oaxaca was the place in which Lawrence had come to an end. I could sense Lawrence's blackening passage through Oaxaca in the very title of Clarke's book *From Feathers to Iron*. Writing about Lawrence in *The Transformative Vision*, Jose A. Arguelles noted: "that in Oaxaca in 1924, in the pure highlands of the myth he sought, while working on his last great novel *The Plumed Serpent*, Lawrence became very ill with the black disease of the Iron Age, tuberculosis, a disease that was slowly to ravage him for the next six years."

Published in 1987, the endpoint in a 468 year Aztec Hell Cycle begun in 1519, *From Feathers to Iron* called upon us to travel with this statement in mind: "The burden of New World society is still its 'discovery' in the gesture of epiphany retained by the poetic mind after the disappearance of the Plumed Serpent from Mexico City." With this charge in mind I wanted to see beyond my brother's fluency if my imperfect Spanish could speak the special language of poetry and regulate tourist conversation to a fine point. This arrangement of poetic thought to enliven material events under the stress of a second language might be described as high context travel. So I put the book one step ahead of our destination, stammering over parts to be recollected and spoken at a time when it would become possible to step, as Clarke suggests, in the direction "where history completes itself."

Eventually we found ourselves walking the streets of Teotitlan del Valle, a town renowned for its weavers, reciting another of Clarke's propositions: "Text is the textile texture of creation." Here the tale of the tribe was being woven from all directions due to the impact of print upon the artisans. While visiting the studio of Abigail Mendoza, an esteemed Zapotec weaver, I noticed a *National Geographic* illustration of the jaguar hanging above her loom. A California interior decorator had written to inform her that the market was looking for Mayan creatures.

Everywhere the archaic background had become the textual foreground. When we met Carlos, a slight, flighty serape merchant whose thick black reading glasses seemed rather large for his head, he took us for Spaniards, announcing proudly that King Juan Carlos and Queen Sophia of Spain would be visiting Oaxaca on January 13th to receive his history of the Zapotecs. We were not interested in his textiles, but he was curious about our occupations. He beheld in the historian and librarian a possibility for completing his genealogy. He walked to the rear of his shop and returned with his oversized tale of the tribe.

The New World has been long on myths of Indian Hebraic origin. This mythology was a passion with Carlos, who immediately summoned Noah's three sons to our conversation. While listening to Carlos explain how Shem had sired the Zapotecs, I looked over to the manger in his shop window. The animals, gathered in pairs, seemed reason enough for me to pitch my words toward his unfolding flood narrative. His creche, I proposed, was also his ark.

Carlos also believed in Quetzalcoatl and his serpent raft. Yet the translation of the King James Bible into Spanish by Cipriano de Valera (1602) had apparently introduced him to something he could lay over his tale of the tribe and spare the Zapotecs the Aztec Hell Cycle. From scripture and maps he condensed his lineage to merge America's North and South in a fundamentalist's tale of the tribe. The gap in time, the Hell Cycle, passing between the arrival of Cortes and that of King Juan Carlos and Queen Sophia, didn't really interest him. Shem was the figure who really mattered in his Zapotec history. With the tale of the tribe spread before us, there was a missing link that he had trusted us as book loving strangers to account for without hesitation. His difficulties had all come down to this single word. The word that he had encountered as a double on the map of language was Seir.

"Was Seir Shinar?" he asked my brother.

My brother lacked the knowledge that I had acquired through attention, by way of Clarke, to the poetic mind. Seir had been, according to a footnote I'd read the night before, the name connected with the writing of Sirius that flourished in the Ethiopian city of Sire. There was only one way to speak such good fortune. I pointed to the map.

Senar was Shinar, I explained, but Seir stood by itself in Ethiopia, connected to Sire.

After Babel we can't talk without misunderstanding that which lies beyond the death of stars. Yet it can sometimes happen, when a word becomes the place to express our revelation, that we find ourselves as guides to one another, clearing a way from Babel on the map of language. Clarke tells us: "Each word is time-factored, and it's up to us, as poets to take responsibility for our participation in what Novalis calls 'an exponential heightening' of that world continuum which, as he says, is 'not yet finished.'"

Carlos was no poet. Yet he certainly seemed so, pointing to the word which had the power to frame the saga he had spent his lifetime representing. One word made the world a public order. Everything he needed was local and historical. As a fundamentalist he needed, literally, to fasten Seir to Shinar.

Seir, Senir, Shinar curved through my ears. It was like conjugating a mythos. The sound was perfect, confluent with the stars above Sire, the fir trees on Mt. Hemon, the lamentations for Tyre, and the alluvium between the Tigris and Euphrates. The morphic field of Old Testament geographical names, managed by the chain of spoken Spanish, revealed at once a sacred concordance.

A book is chosen, is opened into the world, because everything seen is translated into text. Once I found with Carlos the state of mind in which we could play at being a wise men, *From Feathers to Iron* showed me that I could speak through "the gesture of epiphany." Only by speaking through Clarke's marvelous book did I discover Shem, Quetzalcoatl and the other transatlantic kings who were riding a giant thought-wave that was rising into the Zapotec history that Carlos would present to the King of Spain.

*House Organ*, 1993



## Mouse Blood and the New Romanticism

If you've whipped through the art, music, and poetry circles of New York City lately, you've probably caught wind that afoot the downtown scene is a new spirit of romanticism. The phrase "new romanticism" may strike the quick and dirty mind as meaningless hype, but this contemporary version, owing as much to Blake and Shelley as to Budd and Eno, means that the content of any given expression again reflects an excessive, highly self-conscious moodiness, the result of man's separation from nature and the beast. Today's creative spirits are, in fact, seeking both meaning and hype wherever they may find it, whether that be in demanding theories of the sublime or in the narcotizing traps of mass media. Theatre of Ice is the most innovative band working in the United States to deepen the meaning of gothic horror rock. The brothers Johnson have produced a remarkable limited edition album called *Mouse Blood*, a sampling of works "chosen by friends who hate the band." Coming from the west, Theatre of Ice senses the power of the death wish, and *Mouse Blood* bears the marking of the brothers Johnson former hometown, Fallon, Nevada—the site of a massive animal burial ground. Most reviewers tend to accentuate campy, grade B horror elements as the stuff of Theatre of Ice. But the band's hunger for content is far deeper than kitsch. Think of Poe's *The Black Cat* as a reference point for *Mouse Blood*. As in Poe the suggestion of insanity always lays close to a formal artistic surface. Imagine Poe living in the contemporary family and then you'll see how *Mouse Blood* flows through the dark night of domestic horror. When a baby mouse crawled slowly across my living room floor recently I struck its head with a hammer, wiped the wall, and realized that *Mouse Blood* plays on notions other than the sick and the tasteless. Theatre of Ice is in full control of concepts, influences and instruments on this fine album which focuses on pain, cruelty, death, and terror. Also evident is a good sense of humor that tilts toward gothic parody with ambient sounds. Simple pop lyrics about where to go are saturated in the echo chamber. At times the sound and structure of psychedelic pop is dragged and muffled to good effect. Transitions between songs flow nicely with tape effects. Dissonant rock elements, such as rolling percussion and crashing cymbals or wailing guitars, are embedded within strong, obsessive emotions. One reference point for the band's progressive rock credentials is established with great guitar work, in a manner of, say, Fripp on Eno's *Before And After Science*. There's a deep regard for particulars of a pop eschatology in Theatre of Ice's vision of wildlife and sexual life heard in a song such as "Fox." In a formal sense, *Mouse Blood* unwinds from a great American vision of animal flesh ravaged by insane youth. At each deadly curve on the journey, Theatre of Ice deliberately paces its music so that the whole album moves, both musically and conceptually, with the listener. Theatre of Ice sounds far more uncompromising than Bauhaus or The Cure in the search for the sublime within the dark hidden regions of themselves. What stands revealed in *Mouse Blood* is the core connection between gothic rock and American Romanticism. Theatre of Ice is concerned not only with the geography of the soul but also that of the American West. In this sense, their songs of premature burial take on a deep suggestiveness. The formal horror of Theatre of Ice is nothing less than the bizarre horror of the American West—a land of nuclear test sites, animal carcass dumps, and Mormon catacombs.

*Alternative Press*, 1986

## Nineteen N N N Nineteen

There is no better product for stripping away the history and lived experience of war than the music of war. In the ten years since the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam, military-conservative strongmen have been searching for the perfect revision of that war's history, namely, a funky musical pastiche interchangeable with cold war politics. Because the U.S. is a nation culturally dependent on music for insight into history, it should come as no surprise that a mindless dance mix of newscast narrative would have the unfortunate effect of blotting the historical record of illegal and immoral U.S. military conduct in Vietnam for today's generation of young Americans.

As I heard it this past summer, Paul Hardcastle's "19" (Chrysalis Records), a chart-busting 12 inch single which takes its title from the average age of the U.S. Vietnam combat vet, pushed young American clubgoers to the site of war wounds while playing perfectly into President Reagan's false vision of U.S. military innocence and triumphalism.

Hardcastle is a slick if unoriginal postmodernist whose language is the language of the media machine and whose mission is guilt-mongering among the still sentient. With "19" he has appropriated narrative, on-site and statistical fragments from a video documentary in order to press an alienated, reified stance toward Vietnam, which is all that will sell in the social catchments of the '80s dance club.

Born precisely of the marriage of cock-rock and military duty (just flashback to Jimi Hendrix playing "Machine Gun" while watching the video), "19" projects an image of buck private incapable of atrocity. Hardcastle's portrait of the young combat victim splattered with the brains of another is totally in line with the military's preferred condition of stupidity to criminality. What's more, his conflated, statistical beat promises to shape in young listeners dedicated to Trivial Pursuit a knowledge of military history tragically lacking in the record's 19-year-old who "didn't really know what was going on."

Hardcastle's devious vinyl cover version of the Vietnam era clearly demonstrates the unifying power of the mass media. The larger political vision Hardcastle fashions out of his official media voice is achieved, moreover, through quantity, repetition, and subliminal suggestion. What is being expressed 10 times within the sound of high tech robotic composure is nothing but the minimalistic political rhetoric of President Reagan: "None of them received a hero's welcome!"

There is no question that Hardcastle's assault on the '60s would have everyone forget the dead.

Although "19" fails to relate falsified enemy kill reports to the war's duration, it is wrong to judge the record a production of some right wing conspiracy without knowing details of its financial backing. What Hardcastle has mixed, more typically, is the ultimate universal product of centrist politics enabling hawk and dove alike to grasp that statistical data amplified through a tape loop can make heroes of us all.

By August it was clear why "19" hit top 10 in stateside club play and black singles sales. But the rise of this unknown soldier didn't stop here. His marks of chronological uniformity and statistical coherency allowed others to dispose of geopolitics and political responsibility as well. According to "Billboard," "19" held

near universal appeal, rising to number 2 in Germany and the Netherlands, 7 in Canada, and 19 in Italy.

The music Hardcastle put forth on the global dance floor took from history and integrated fact fetishism with desire for a unifying center. His ruthless netting and scratching of Nam data ignored the copyright claims of ABC and NBC as well as class and racial make-up of the dead. Yet he had in the process engineered a worldwide hit possessed of an uncanny ability to make different people respond to American defeat in the same forgetful way.

By wiping out haunting memories and flashbacks, “19” restored broken bonds in the body politic. The record proposed to draftdodgers that the dance floor could be part of self-conscious history making and to veterans that black vinyl could be part of their self-medication program. What this hot commodity said finally to the ‘80s pop family was that time had come to imagine welcoming trip wire vets to the dancefloor.

*Rolling Stock*, 1986

Morani Kornberg-Weiss

Preview of Forthcoming new book: a poem from Dear Darwish

Dear Mahmoud,

I want to write poems about Israel and Palestine but I am at loss. What language can I use?

Jack Spicer wrote letters to the late Federico Garcia Lorca and once explained that their correspondence would enable them to “use up” their rhetoric so it would not appear in their poetry. He writes, “Let it be consumed paragraph by paragraph, day by day, until nothing of it is left in it.” I decided to write to you in hopes of leaving “it” aside.

Mahmoud, did you know that poets today are writing conceptual poems about Israel and Palestine? My friend R.B. told me the other day (and I’m trying to quote faithfully): “concepts are ideas and every poem is a fucking idea so all poems are conceptual.” I cannot help and wonder about the concept of “conflict” or “Israel” or “Palestine.” How can writers, for instance, extract words or phrases or even entire sentences from the news or the bible and place them into a space called a “poem.” Here’s a “line” or two that I recently read “written” by a poet:

how many Arabs for each

Israeli

Mahmoud, there was another prisoner swap. A young Israeli soldier held “captive” for five years was recently “released” in “exchange” for 1,027 “prisoners.” There were images of Palestinians who “literally” had blood on their hands and then I met J.H. and he asked me if G.S. also had blood on his hands and wondered how many people died while G.S. was in a tank. I imagined poor, young, frightened G.S. in a noisy tank following dumb orders dumbly. We all saw pictures of Aziz Salha with blood on his hands but nobody thought about the blood on G.S.’s hands, myself included.

That's one difference between Israelis and Palestinians: so many Israelis walk around with blood on their hands, hands soaked in red, red hands shaking, exchanging blood, patting a bloody hand on one's shoulder, leaving a trace of a hand, a hand running through one's hair, scratching a nose, leaving creases of liquid clotted and dried up on the cheekbones, taking a bath and then running a hand over one's arms, arm pits, breasts then thighs, genitals, feet all covered with blood, blood trying to wash itself but it's a blood so ordinary you cannot even see it.

I'm writing this letter and start to notice the red fingerprints smeared on the page.

Mahmoud, the IDF prefers that women keep their gentle hands clean but we are dirty.

Mahmoud, Spicer spoke of tradition as “generations of different poets in different countries patiently telling the same story, writing the same poem, gaining and losing something with each transformation – but, of course, never really losing anything.”

Mahmoud, if I am an Israeli woman living in Buffalo and you reside in Israel Palestine on my bookshelf, and I read and transform your poems, are we still telling the same story? Mahmoud, do I have the right to use your words and place them into what I would call a “poem”?

Mahmoud, would you grant me permission to do this? Can we work together to define what “this” is and what its possibilities are?

האם אתה מדבר עברית כעת? האם היא תהיה השפה המשותפת שלנו?

Or should we use English instead?

Let me try:

“You ask: ‘Who Am I, Without Exile?’”

(This is the title of my transformation.)

~~You are a stranger on the riverbank, like the water... river the water that binds me to your name.~~

~~Nothing carries me or makes me carry an idea.~~

~~Water/binds me/ to your name.~~

~~There's nothing left of me but you, and nothing left of you but me, the stranger massaging his stranger's thigh.~~

(I tried stealing this from you.)

Let me try again:

“In Time of Plague”

(I am now borrowing from Spicer.)

It “took us and the land from under us”

it soiled our hands like water:

Red stained cracks leaving fingerprints

layered with handshakes. Red stained

handles on the door of a bus designed

to be grasped in order to move

from the ground upwards. Red stained

water escalating like the bricks

of demolished houses. We’ve been planting

signs on the side of the road like one thousand

bulbs under fresh earth stolen by neighborhood

squirrels. They eat our red-stained seeds digest

the preborn and run up trees.

You ask, “Who Am I, Without Exile?” I

answer: You are the bulb of the pregrown

plant carried in the stomach

of a squirrel. You ask: Who Are You,

Without Exile? I answer: I am

wondering exile seeping my roots

in our land. You are now

the squirrel eating our bulbs, snapping  
water lines lifting sidewalks and we both  
share the blood on our hands while I  
wash them obsessively using soap and water  
and more soap and bleach and I scrub I  
scrub I scrub them hard until my  
skin peels until I scratch the skin off  
and I am scrubbing my muscles and I  
scrub I scrub I scrub and scrub my  
bones and I scrub peel the red  
peel the red peel the red until this body  
becomes nothing.

I am a skeleton walking among poets who steal words.

Mahmoud, please teach me how to li(v)e with these stains.

Love,

Morani

---

Morani Kornberg-Weiss moved from Tel Aviv, Israel to NY in order to pursue a Ph.D. in English at SUNY Buffalo's Poetics Program. Her poems appear in *Omnia Vanitas Review*, *Voices Israel*, *Re-Vision*, *Papilio*, *Genius Floored*, *The Last Stanza*, *kadar koli*, and *eccolinguistics*. Morani's translation of *Miracles & More*, written by Israeli poet Karen Alkalay-Gut, was recently published by Keshev. In addition, she is completing two manuscripts entitled *Folding into Her Self* and *Dear Darwish*. She lives in Buffalo with her husband, dog, two cats, and her sad-doll collection.

### The Moon and Other Inventions by Kristina Marie Darling

In *The Moon and Other Inventions*, Kristina Marie Darling has constructed a one-sixteenth scale palace of enchanted footnotes. She writes, “Behind a little door the mechanism was turning and turning.” So too do the parts of this book turn and turn: readers will find themselves inside of a dream that is also a three- (or four- or five-) dimensional space. Emily Dickinson opens a door to find Alice Liddell, who opens a door to find Lorine Niedecker. Who could resist such knobs and dials and keys?

—Angela Sorby, author of *Bird Skin Coat*

Darling creates a lattice of explicitly feminine apperception around the works of Joseph Cornell. The result is a haunting parasciption, of a piece with Cornell's metaphysical idiom while substantially Othering any sustained encounter with his work.

—G.C. Waldrep, author of *Goldbeater's Skin*

The fine poems of Kristina Marie Darling embrace the complexities of telemetry: how to read the stars and the heart, peregrinations, P and R waves, a universe implied. Underneath the text, underneath narrative, Darling calculates what matters, and the matter of a woman endeavoring to build a perfect, delicate machine. Would that be a poem? A telescope? A metaphor? All of the above.

—Alan Michael Parker, author of *Long Division*

Kristina Marie Darling is the author of five books of poetry and the editor of a forthcoming anthology, narrative (dis)continuities: prose experiments by younger american writers (Moria Books, 2012). She has been awarded fellowships from Yaddo, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, the Vermont Studio Center, and the Ragdale Foundation, as well as grants from the Kittredge Fund and the Elizabeth George Foundation. Her poems and essays appear in *The Gettysburg Review*, *New Letters*, *Third Coast*, and *Verse Daily*. A graduate of Washington University and the University of Missouri, Kristina is currently working toward a Ph.D. in Poetics at SUNY-Buffalo.

#### Book Information:

· Paperback: 66 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound · Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-104-7

\$12

Pre-Order Now





CHAPTER ONE:  
A HISTORY OF INVENTIONS



---

<sup>1</sup>. An unspecified type of steel dial, most often used as an ornament.

<sup>2</sup>. She placed the apparatus beneath her bedroom window. The little gears turning as the moon ascended a marble staircase.

<sup>3</sup>. When asked, she would describe the machine's faithfulness. The switch turned only for her. And now the coldest light shining from beneath her wooden doorframe.

<sup>4</sup>. *Aperture*.

†1. An opening, such a hole, gap, or slit.

‡2. A space within an optical instrument, which limits the amount of light passing through a lens and onto a mirror.

---

<sup>5</sup> A late eighteenth-century stage play, in which a woman crawls into the hollow shaft of a telescope. The stage directions call for "faint music." Also the sound of "silk rustling" and "a tiny door coming unhinged."

<sup>6</sup> Nights like this she flipped a little golden switch. That was when the rooms would open up before her.

<sup>7</sup> Her ruined correspondence indicates exactly where she would have gathered these dead lilies and perfume bottles.

---

<sup>8</sup>. One of the lesser known experiments, in which scientists were fascinated with the involuntary movements of the female heart.

<sup>9</sup>. As one would expect, the levers produced an occasional shock. Despite the strength of these electrical currents, she claimed that the machine still left her cold.



### Inventories by Paul T Hogan

Paul Hogan's poems, *Inventories*, travel through woman, mother, into the natural world, dissolve in spirit and then coalesce again into man, father, the fact of death. They are careful accounts, fearless inventions, always crashing "the crystal of what I knew/ against the cold stone of what I didn't." Hogan's poems do not seek to tell us how the world works; they want to "make it all inexplicable again." His attention to what can and cannot be touched in life keeps Hogan and the reader on the edge of a clear, high gorge where the only viable response is to jump.

—Sherry Robbins, author of *or, The Whale*

These poems achieve their presence in the unique, transcendent moment of the poem itself. They reward and delight and ask us to rejoice in words and language as Ted Berrigan would say, "there is a person inside almost all of the poems." The surface simplicity and plain speech are the result of true artfulness and sophistication. I continually rediscover honesty in his forceful, utterly clear and democratic voice. In that honesty, Hogan astonishingly opens us to the world and removes boundaries that keep separate different aspects of life. Giving us irrepressible, insightful ruminations, verbal collages and narratives that seem to be struggling to rise off the printed page as an elegy for the world in all its beauty and disturbing variety.

— Geoffrey Gatza, author of *House of Forgetting*

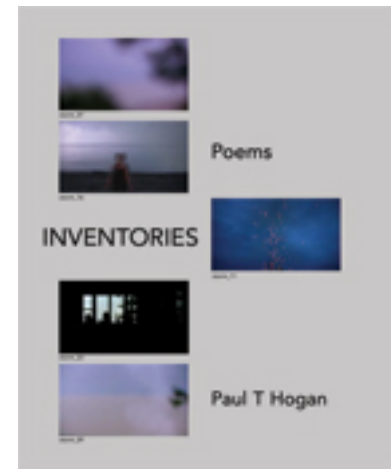
A forceful, unapologetic exploration of the masculinity of creative impulse. Hogan looks at nature, life, disparate moments, mysticism, and fatherhood not with rose-colored glasses but with the obsidian eyes of a realist unafraid to be caught submitting to his poetic instincts. *Inventories* is a work of great relevance, power, and importance.

—Gary Earl Ross, author of *The Scavenger's Daughter*

### Paul T Hogan

Paul has Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English and Creative Writing from the University at Buffalo, where he held the David Gray Fellowship in Poetry and Letters under the internationally acclaimed late poet Robert Creeley. Upon completing all his coursework toward a PhD, he elected to relinquish the Fellowship and begin work in the non-profit sector.

He worked as director of special projects and development for the Just Buffalo Literary Center, including as director of the Writers-in-Education program. He served three years as host and producer of "Spoken Arts Radio" for the NPR affiliate



station WBFO-FM, and recently donated about 150 half-hour recorded interviews & readings from the program to the UB Poetry and Rare Books Room. For nearly six years, he voluntarily co-coordinated the “Writers Cramp Reading Series,” a bi-monthly platform for local writers held at the Central Park Bar and Grill in Buffalo.

He won the Academy of American Poets College Competition while at UB, and was selected for an Arts Council in Buffalo Individual Artist Fellowship. His work was included in The Legend of Being Irish: An Anthology of Irish-American Writers published by White Pine Press in 1990, and was the subject of a “Buffalo Focus” piece by BlazeVox Books in their online Late Spring 2009 journal, which featured new and previously published work ([www.blazevox.org/focus.htm](http://www.blazevox.org/focus.htm)). His first collection, Points of Departures, was published by White Pine Press in November of 2008.

Since 2001, Paul has worked for the John R. Oishei Foundation, a broad-purpose charitable foundation making grants in western New York State, and in 2008, he was named vice president. He lives in Kenmore NY, a first-ring suburb of Buffalo, with his wife Barb, and two dogs, Nellie and Bo, and is blessed to have two perfect adult children, Matthew and Lianna.

## Cynthia Hand

Cynthia Hand studied fine arts at SUNY/Albany and received her Master's in printmaking in 1979. Her work has been exhibited regionally in group and solo shows since 1982. For the past twelve years Hand has also been working as a metalsmith-jeweler using precious metals and stones.

### Book Information:

· Paperback: 100 pages · FULL COLOR with Perfect-Bound · Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-101-6

· \$22

Buy it [here](#)

Buy it on [Amazon.com here](#)





1 | Group



## Mothering Persephone

*Your children are not your children ... They come through you  
but not from you, and though they are with you yet  
they belong not to you.*

—Kahlil Gibran

She has said nothing, and neither  
will she eat, save for seeds, which she takes  
at the speed of contempt. The strength  
of wills surrounding her could stop  
a season. Still, she would be planted,  
her clothes rustling like hardening leaves  
as winds cross around her, through  
threads of her tested garments. Blowing  
comes from everywhere but from her.  
I have planted her to save her. Covered her  
lightly veined feet in black dirt, pushed  
red mulch up to mid-shin and bricked  
around her in careful rows, as though  
in clever decoration. Others wish  
her transplanted, moved beneath  
me and this world, but I made plain  
I will kill everything she sees, everything  
nourished by me through her to stop that:  
that much at least has nothing to do  
with her, and everything to do with how  
my seasons will be ordered.

## A Flash, A Step Closer

Days flow like pain  
through a cragged body:  
slow over and back, retreat,  
advance; sometimes a flash  
when I take a step  
like lightning. Then just rumbling  
pain again. Why live  
for this? No sustenance  
anyone needs anymore from me.  
Live for television? I call my children names  
given to soap opera stars, ask after  
problems they've never had. For the dog?  
I hold back his food at times, just to be sure  
it's me who feeds him. I call the first son,  
magician to his dead father, and ask what for.  
"How can I say what for?" he says. "I'll conjure  
good reasons," he says, "and call you back  
next week. Or in any case, soon."  
Flash. That rumbling. And I disconnect  
again. Again.

## At First

“At first it was just to see what I saw written down.  
I don’t know where the pen came from. Didn’t even look  
for paper, I don’t think. Watching out the window  
in the room off the hall. Just crap in there. Nobody  
bothered me and I could think. And drink in peace.  
It was almost always dark already when I got in there.  
Moon was up or coming into sight. For a long time  
I sat and watched but then I started standing, leaning  
against the window frame, sometimes pressed my forehead  
on the glass. It helped the way it was cool. I would think  
how it was hard and smooth, but wouldn’t take much  
to crack. But then I’d find myself watching again,  
the moon as it came in from the left, just a brightness at first.  
Then it would move across – or maybe the house moved,  
I remember about that, or everything was moving. I could feel it  
in my chest most nights, in my stomach. I thought how  
it was like the tide, pulling and pushing me. Maybe at first  
I just imagined it. But after a while, no. I wanted to write it down  
to see. I wanted to look at the moon at same time as the writing, no  
looking away, write and watch both. When I did it at first  
it helped. I would write how the moon pushed me, or pulled.  
I wrote it on the wall, starting at the frame right  
at the level of my eyes and I would look at the moon and look  
at my hand, writing. I never remember finding a pen.  
One was just there. *“Tuesday it’s half and some clouds”*  
*“Saturday it’s pulling hard it’s clear”* I could never get the dates at first,

and then it didn't matter. I'd go back and look at the writing  
but I could never feel what I'd seen. I could see it but  
couldn't feel the way I must have when I wrote on the wall. Then  
I thought you'd have to be right there, standing exactly there  
at exactly that time if you wanted to feel. That's when I knew  
it was about the writing where at first it had been about  
the watching so I thought. So then I didn't need to write  
and watch both at the same time. And I didn't need to feel  
what I was writing. Line after line on the wall I'd write what I thought  
the moon was doing at each exact minute I remembered to write.  
Line after line. Like doing a drawing maybe. The window still mattered  
and I still looked out. And I know the moon must still have pulled  
and pushed on me. But then what mattered was that someone  
coming in to see about my drinking would have to think  
that I must feel whatever I was writing, whatever I was doing;  
think it must be real, or true, or both. That's all I think I wanted  
at the end."

## What Would Be Wild in the Telling

— *for Midge Sumner, at 102*

*'O the songs we hide, singing only to ourselves!'*

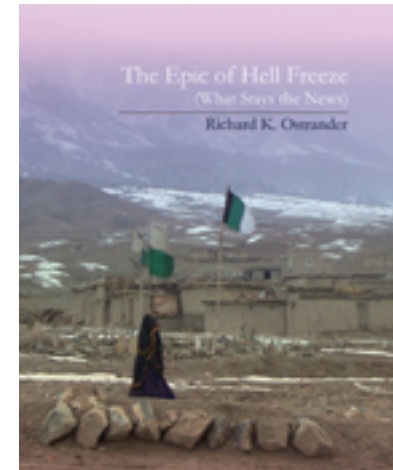
*Theodore Roethke*

If I were to speak her life it would be with a backdrop of starlings,  
tenacious, common, each one loyal to one other among thousands,  
pivoting and rolling intuitively through chaotic waves of flight.  
I would speak from a wild field of dogwood and orchid, sunflowers,  
knotweed, spring beauty and hawthorn – brilliant, untamed,  
delicate in one view; tenuous, gripped to hard soil in another.  
It would be on a day that thick patches of clouds broke fast  
across a blue sky, spinning out dances of light and deep shadows,  
disrupting the flow of recital with moments of silence feeling like hours.  
I would weave her regrets with all her devotions, cast off inflections  
of sorrow or praise, bear witness to that which was wild, that  
which looked to be tame. I'd not end the story with death. I'd not tie  
the tale solely to her like an albatross hung round her neck, but  
also invoke her sisters in spirit, circling the field, passionate, affirming,  
joining with her and those she still shepherds, laughing with her.  
And then we will fall gently silent, for moments feeling like years.



### The Epic of Hell Freeze (What Stays the News) by Richard K. Ostrander

*The Epic of Hell Freeze* is a lush crosscurrent of peculiarly fine poetry. Here poems are as playful as they are crucial, whimsical and heartbreaking in a wide drifting landscape. Moving with a purpose, language circles and embodies in a ceaseless spirit in a work of great beauty and force, of intelligence and stark humility. These poems make rites of passage actual through poems that speak a primary language. Ostrander speaks a primary language. He is inventing a world—and this beautiful book enacts a patient intelligence and exemplifies physical grace. In these lines you will hear fullness of representation, and a luminous consciousness. This is a book of desire and transcendence, obsessed by, and never afraid of, its mysteries that turns toward those mysteries with language both base and grand. Ostrander is the best kind of poet: one in love with language and life. This is a wonderful, relevant book of poetry. —Geoffrey Gatz



The poems in Richard K. Ostrander's *The Epic of Hell Freeze (What Stays the News)* shift from allusion (Andromeda, Abraham, Sisyphus) to illusion: "He walks through walls/ On the other side of silver." Ostrander's attention to "language's legerdemain" ties seemingly unrelated poems to each other like knotted scarves pulled from a magician's sleeve, using alliteration—"And a single sentence,/ Tautness of telephone lines"—as well as slant rhyme—"Flies, happy in their bottles/ Freer than fish/ that fly/ Melody or malady/ I don't know which"—and clichés twisted into new configurations—"There's a sty in the sky,/ Here's a shoulder to fry on." The poems take the reader into Bosnia and Afghanistan where "Tomorrow is the tail fin/ Of a rocket reaching down" and back to the U.S. where "Everyone turned to the sports page, feeling/ As if somehow something had been accomplished." What a journey into the world of words and war! —Beth Copeland

Richard K. Ostrander currently resides within the Carolinas and the interstitial spaces of thought and desire. On most Sunday evenings, he can be found co-hosting Java Expressions, the local open mic at the Coffee Scene in Fayetteville, NC. No more data is required other than the work herein which is more than mere biography. Though some say it is about death, it is life. It is what stays the news

#### Book Information:

· Paperback: 100 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound · Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-078-1

\$16

Pre Orders welcome

## Breaking the Knot

They stretch a rubber band  
Pull it until it snaps.  
Wonder at the resultant sting  
Believing  
    The infinite of elasticity  
For the camel's back,  
There's no straw.  
The phone call comes.  
"She can't do this anymore!"  
Straw  
    And a single sentence,  
Tautness of telephone lines  
For the contortionist his knots  
But  
    Man is muscle, tendons  
And bones  
    Bend until they break.  
But who breaks the knot,  
  
Who lifts the straw?

## **Fission**

Two entities separate irreparably  
One goes the other stays.  
The resulting shrapnel  
Is divided up evenly.  
Lawyers catalogue  
What the log periodic can't.  
No one really lives happily.  
A unified theory isn't required  
For what happens domestically.

## **Disease of Eve**

A rusty blade across the wrist  
A limbo a  
Slow pulling apart  
    Revealing veins  
Married nor single  
    Still  
Single disembodied voice  
    Sometimes cellular  
Flesh in form a strong  
    Continual craving  
To find what fits

## **Era of Our Days**

Science not sin cere  
Apollo A political  
Starving assembly  
Straight sideways is  
No way to go ahead  
At the end stand at  
Sleep but dead awake  
It's been classified tourist.  
Sentient sediment Al  
Rock & bowl under a believer  
Forgive me Ward  
For I have binged.  
And how did we end?  
I have corseted another's life.  
Thus is gleaned  
The era of our days

## Happy Jack

I was her Sancho Panza  
Carrying her quest behind her.  
The pots and pans of her past  
Clamoring to get off the trail wagon.  
She wanted one from the very start  
A Tenzing Norgay for her trip  
Up Il Purgatorio. The rifle bearer  
In the final act of William Tell.  
She never told and I survived  
The shot while she licked the wound.  
I had seen this before  
In the tarot stones of the desert  
The Happy Jack; fear death  
By monotonous desperation.  
We lived on a skillet;  
The everyday sizzle in the grease  
Of her saliva, my sweat and blood.  
This is not a love song.  
I am not an old man in a dry season.

## Son of Sisyphus

After all the circles in your inferno  
All the accusations before the docket  
The nails through the wrist  
The droughts of vinegar and arsenic  
“For the public good”  
The first stone thrown a thousand times  
In the batting cage of our home  
It was I; I was the son of Sisyphus.  
The sons of waste said so.  
It was me who kept the grass green.  
With my garden hose, I kept the lawn alive.  
I pulled the dandelions and weeds of fear  
Grown in your dark corners.  
All those weeds I could pull  
But once out they angled for those corners.  
And I always loved an angle.  
During the day I unshutterd  
The windows for the light.  
But at night in your angles  
They grew anew and I was engulfed  
My back against a thousand corners.  
I waded in weeds, my garden hose a scythe.  
I was the son of Sisyphus.  
That’s what the sons of waste said.

## Other Ways

I found the round with my name  
It was dia de los muertos  
And I was unarmed for the festival.  
Foolkiller came for my number  
But I had the bullet and would not bite.  
I didn't know all that I knew.  
In the parade I rode on the dead man's float.  
The ice cream melted in the mud.  
We weren't walking on water, ya know.  
I was asked by angels  
In the visible light for directions.  
I told them to keep an eye out  
For the prize; it had yet to give offense.  
"Better the blind who can not see the apple."  
Proof was demanded at the door.  
The information age was over.  
There were other ways of knowing.



## **Proximity**

I lost my sun glasses the other day

You were talking

There was ocean

White caps, shore, sand

Little crabs scurried into small holes

Seagulls in Zen like ennui

I was looking

At you finally

Perhaps even for the first time

I really,  
I mean I really saw you

Realization of

Nothing

In between

A guy could get lost like that

Simply disappear

Like the sea

I frankly  
found that,  
Frightening

Proximity  
After all those times  
It was at the beach  
I reached for them  
To slide them up  
Reassuringly  
And they were not  
There at all  
Where I had left them  
No  
Not at all  
Like I wished I weren't  
Like I wished  
I was the sea  
A gull seized a small crab in its beak,  
Looked at me  
As if I were its ocean,  
Whitecaps,  
Crustacean,  
Glasses, glasses, glasses.

## **Looky Here**

A woman loves a man  
So he pushes her away  
He has been transparent  
So long he can manage  
Only opaqueness  
He an apparition unto himself  
She a solid he cannot grasp  
She hurts the way he feels  
Looky here  
He walks through walls  
On the other side of silver  
She sees only her reflection  
She wishes he was real  
She could beam him up  
She could just add water  
But like morning mist  
He burns off with the sun

### a dictionary in the subjunctive by damian weber

In his new book, Damian Weber, one of Buffalo's best-loved poet, publisher, singer and songwriter offers a magnificent display of minimalism. Fully illustrated, these short poems start as dictionary definitions that evolve into love poems, which in turn develop into poems detailing the pain of miscommunication that harbors within a relationship between two people. A tender look at existence cultivates in this dictionary between the image and the short moving poems. This book is a real treasure in its brevity and ability to pinpoint the exact moments of love, life, distraction and protraction. This is a wonderful little book.

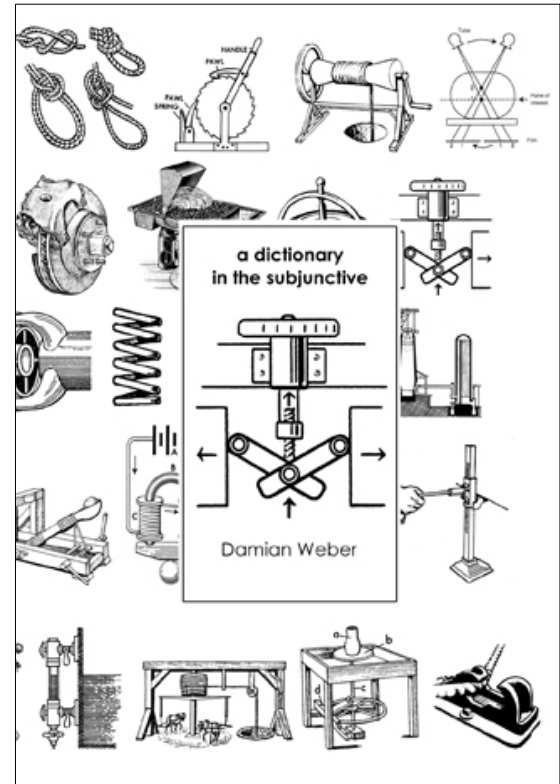
damian weber is a member of house press a collective of poets who met in buffalo the weirdest town.

#### Book Information:

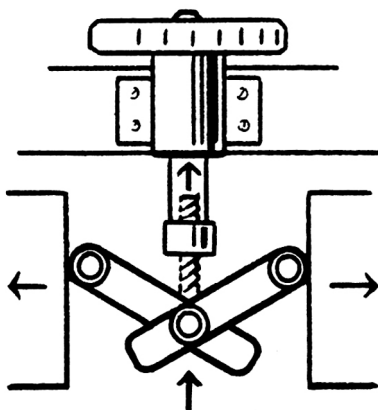
· Paperback: 54 pages · Binding: Perfect-Bound · Publisher: BlazeVOX [books] · ISBN: 978-1-60964-107-8

\$12

Pre-Orders Welcome

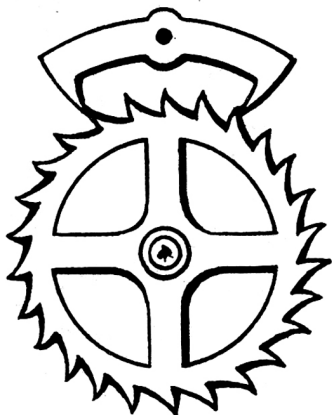


a dictionary



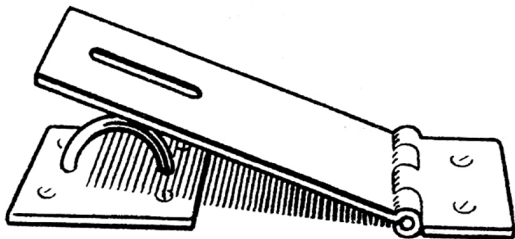
in the subjunctive





### **Escapement**

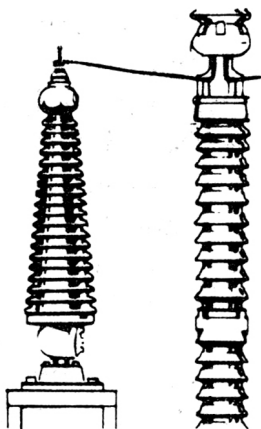
the part in a mechanical clock  
that controls the speed and regularity  
of the balance wheel or pendulum  
and thereby the entire mechanism  
of my retarded affection  
(when I always thought  
it didn't need any regulating)



### **Hasp**

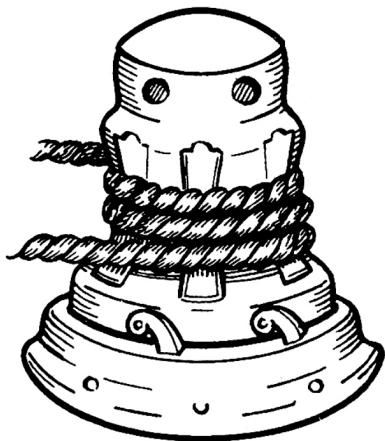
a hinged metal fastening  
that fits over a staple  
and is held in place  
by a pin, padlock  
or short comment





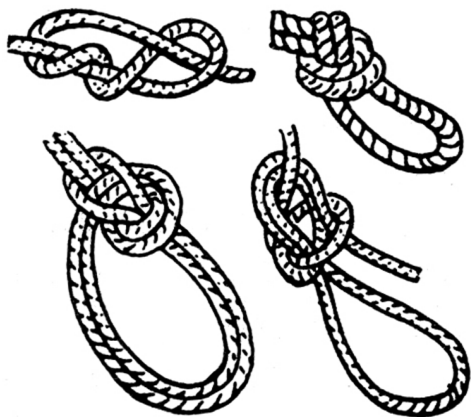
### **Insulator**

in order to prevent  
the passage or leakage  
of electricity, heat  
sound, concern  
shame, surprise, kisses  
or the wrong idea



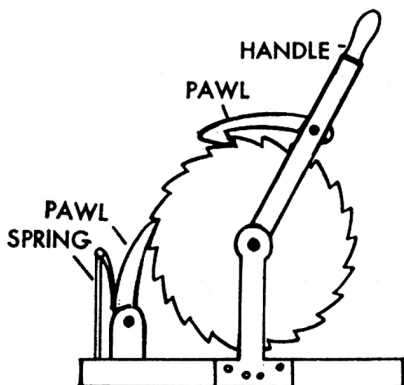
### **Capstan**

I understand you completely  
when i see you in front of me



## **Knot**

a tangle drawn tight  
that fastens closely  
when you said you'd stay  
because moving  
just seems like motion



### **Ratchet Wheel**

so you can calm down  
and let days come  
without slipping back





### Acta Biographia

#### **Amy Savage**

Amy Savage is a writer, translator, and teacher in the Hudson Valley. Her translation work has appeared in phati'tude Literary Magazine and her fiction in Euphony (online). She teaches Medical Spanish and enjoys being able to say "jaundice" en español.

Alyssa A. Peck

#### **Alex Schmidt**

Alex has recently graduated from Queens University's MFA Creative Writing Program in Charlotte, North Carolina where he currently resides. His work has appeared in Mipoesias, Columbia Poetry Review, 34th Parallel Magazine, among others. He also maintains a blog at [sausageshapedearth.wordpress.com](http://sausageshapedearth.wordpress.com) <<http://sausageshapedearth.wordpress.com>> where he flirts with the volatile relationship between naturalism and imagination. When he is not writing, he is working at Trader Joe's. And when he is not writing or working he is dancing with his basset hound to Sly and The Family Stone, feeding his voracious cats, watching movies, and/or running through daisy fields with his beautiful wife.

#### **Anne Thrope**

Ms. Anne Thrope is sitting in her city skyline high-rise apartment sipping hot chocolate while reading the September issue of Vogue. Her profession is life and she fears she will be given the sack at any moment for being redundant.

#### **A.J. Huffman**

A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has previously published six collections of poetry all available on Amazon.com. She has also published her work in numerous national and international

literary journals. Most recently, she has accepted the position as editor for four online poetry journals for Kind of a Hurricane Press ( [www.kindofahurricane.com](http://www.kindofahurricane.com) <<http://www.kindofahurricane.com/>> ).

### **Andrew K. Peterson**

Andrew K. Peterson is the author of some poetry publications: *Karaoke Lipsync Opera* (White Sky), *Museum of Thrown Objects* (BlazeVox), and a chapbook *bonjour meriwether and the rabid maps* (Fact-Simile). He edits *summer stock*, an online lit journal for humanimals, and lives in Massachusetts.

### **Andrew West**

I am currently a Ph. D. candidate at the University of Kansas (where I earned my M. A.). I received my B. A. from the University of Notre Dame. I have spent the better part of my life living and working in and around Kansas City. My articles have appeared in the *South Central Review*, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, and *Amerikastudien*; my poems in *Touchstone*, *Gambling the Aisle*, and on *The Portland Review's* poetry blog.

### **Ather Zia**

Ather Zia is from Kashmir. Originally a journalist, she is currently pursuing research in anthropology at University of California Irvine. She has published her first collection of poems "The Frame." Her work has appeared in varied magazines including Convergence-journal, Blaze Vox, Cerebrations etc. She edits Kashmir Lit at [www.kashmirlit.org](http://www.kashmirlit.org). email:[editor@kashmirlit.org](mailto:editor@kashmirlit.org)

### **Brent Lucia**

My name is Brent Lucia and I was born and raised in Massachusetts but have been living in New York City for the past ten years. I am an English adjunct lecturer at City College of New York and have been teaching both literature and writing courses for the past four years. I currently reside in East Harlem with my best friend Rachel and a fat cat named Moonstruck.

### **Changming Yuan**

Changming Yuan, 4-time Pushcart nominee and author of *Allen Qing Yuan*, grew up in rural China and published several monographs before moving to Canada. With a PhD in English, Yuan currently tutors in Vancouver and has had poetry appear in nearly 570 literary publications across 22 countries, which include *Asia Literary Review*, *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *BlazeVOX*, *London Magazine*, *Paris/ Atlantic*, *Poetry Kanto*, *SAND* and *Taj Mahal Review*.



## **Dan J. Johnson**

Dan J. Johnson lives and works in Sioux Falls, SD.

## **Doug Rice**

Doug Rice is the author of *Between Appear and Disappear*, *Dream Memoirs of A Fabulist*, *Blood of Mugwump: A Tiresian Tale of Incest*, *Skin Prayers: fragments of abject memory*, and *A Good Cuntboy is Hard to Find*. He was one of the co-editors for *Federman: A to X-X-X-X* and has published widely in journals and anthologies. He is an artist in residence at the Akademie Schloss Solitude.

## **Elaina Perpelitt**

Elaina Perpelitt is a screenwriting major at Chapman University. She's had several poems published, as well as short stories and reviews. She currently divides her time between writing screenplays, television, plays, and experimental novels, although she still considers poetry to be her first and truest love.

## **Eleanor Levine**

Eleanor Levine has been published in *Fiction*, *The Denver Quarterly*, *The California State Quarterly*, *Prime Mincer*, *Penumbra*, *Gertrude*, *The Toronto Quarterly*, *Happy*, *Midway Journal*, *Milk Magazine*, *Facets Magazine*, *OVS Magazine*, *The Coachella Review*, *Red Booth Review*, *New York Sex* (anthology), *Downtown Poets* (anthology), *Milk and Honey: A Celebration of Jewish Lesbian Poetry*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Blade*, and has work forthcoming in the *Evergreen Review* and *Atticus Review*. Eleanor received her MFA in Creative Writing from Hollins University in Roanoke, VA. She is currently a copy editor and lives with her dog Morgan in Philadelphia.

Genevieve Pfeiffer

## **Gianina Opris**

Gianina Opris is the author of three chapbooks of poetry, including *Moon is Always Moon* (Green Fuse Poetic Arts). Her most recent project is a musical recording entitled *Lagrimas*. Awards received: selected for 2004 international poetry exhibition, NW Cultural Council, Barrington, IL. Gianina holds a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from Naropa University and teaches Language Arts & Visual Arts in the Denver Public Schools. Her latest works have appeared in *Blaze Vox*, *Not Enough Night*, *63 Channels*, and *Cyclamens & Swords Publishing*. Gianina has taught workshops and presented her poetics/multi-media and visual arts productions in Colorado, New Mexico, Cuernavaca (México) and Mancora, (Perú). "Gia" is a native of Lima, Perú who lives in Denver.

## Lee Guyette

Lee Guyette is most often found in bow ties and plaid, although she occasionally branches out to solid colored flannels. All seventeen years of her life have been spent in the pursuit of knowledge and the perfect iced coffee. As such, she is a constant presence at Panera's, where Paul, the manager, is getting sick of her.

## James Ballard

I am new to the community of fiction writers having bored people for years by practicing law. I am now working on a number of stories through the UCLA Extension Writers' Program that I pray will not put people to sleep. As for my previous writing credits, I am hoping that nothing I ever wrote or published during my time in the Halls of Darkness or the Ivory Tower, depending on your perspective, will ever be unearthed because dull is never good.

## Joe Labriola

Joe Labriola is an author, columnist, editor, and tutor currently working on his MFA at Stony Brook Southampton. Although a fiction writer by trade, Joe's latest book, a poetry anthology titled, *Pulse of Poetics*, was published on amazon for eBook and print earlier this year. Joe draws upon his broad array of life experiences for inspiration, including his jobs as: a pill maker, bag boy, editor, UPS man, notary public, youth advisor, and now a tutor. He sometimes writes newspaper pieces and regularly posts his fiction and poetry on his blog: joelabspoeetry.wordpress.com <<https://joelabspoeetry.wordpress.com/>>

## Jorge Lucio de Campos

Jorge Lucio de Campos was born (1958) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. He is a Associated Professor of Philosophy and Theory of Communication and Culture at Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial (ESDI) of the Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UERJ). As a poet, he published the books *Arcangelo* (EdUERJ, Rio de Janeiro, 1991), *Speculum* (EdUERJ, Rio de Janeiro, 1993), *Belveder* (Diadorim, Rio de Janeiro, 1994), *A dor da linguagem* (Sette Letras, Rio de Janeiro, 1996), *À maneira negra* (Sette Letras, Rio de Janeiro, 1997) e *Prática do azul* (Lumme, São Paulo, 2009). His poems, essays and interviews circulate in various printed and virtual magazines and sites. He participated of the anthology (organized by brazilian poets Claudio Daniel and Frederico Barbosa) *Na virada do século: Poesia de invenção no Brasil* (Landy, São Paulo, 2002).

## José Hernández Díaz

José Hernández Díaz has been published in *The Best American Nonrequired Reading Anthology 2011*, *Bombay Gin Literary Journal*, *The Progressive Magazine*, *Poetry Flash*, *La Gente Newsmagazine*, *Counterexample Poetics*, *The Delinquent* (UK), *ditch poetry* (CAN), *Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Kuikatl ~ A XicanIndio Literary & Arts Journal*, among others. He is an

MFA candidate at Antioch University Los Angeles where he serves as Co-Poetry Editor of *Lunch Ticket*. Also, he is an active moderator of the online group, *Poets Responding to SB 1070*.

### **Jeffrey R. Schrecongost**

Jeffrey R. Schrecongost received his MFA from Converse College. He teaches English at Spartanburg Community College and lives in Greenville, SC, with his loyal Golden Retriever, Molly.

Keith Moul

Kay Porter

### **Kendall McKenzie**

Kendall McKenzie lives in North Carolina and attends the low-residency MFA program at Queens University of Charlotte. When she's not writing or selling watches, she hikes, has tea and plays violent video games.

### **Liz Mariani**

Liz Mariani's poems have appeared in The Buffalo News, Artvoice, Nomad Magazine, The Seneca Nation of Indians Newsletter and Fortunes. She graduated from The University of Buffalo with a BA in American Studies in 2006. Since then, she has spent significant time traveling around the Ring of Fire. As a teaching artist she has taught at CEPA Gallery, Starlight Studio and at Buffalo Public Schools through Just Buffalo Literary Center.

[www.PoetLizMariani.com](http://www.PoetLizMariani.com)

### **Marcia Arrieta**

Marcia Arrieta's work appears in *Web Conjunctions*, *Spittoon*, *Melusine*, *Osiris*, *BluePrint Review*, *Alice Blue*, *Ditch*, *Eratio*, *Moria*, *The Last VISPO Anthology*, and great weather for MEDIA's *It's Animal but Merciful*. Her book *triskelion, tiger moth, tangram, thyme* was published by Otoliths. She edits and publishes *Indefinite Space*, a poetry journal—  
[www.indefinitespace.net](http://www.indefinitespace.net)

### **Mariah Hamang**

Mariah Hamang, a native of Indiana, is currently a graduate student of Linguistics at the University of Colorado at Boulder. She travels, moves, bikes, and hikes, and her body seems to follow. She digs her heels into challenge and

carries it with her. A prolific observer and an ardent conversationalist, Mariah is most relaxed in the middle of her own storms. Her work has been published in *Otoliths*, *Spirits*, and *Generations Literary Magazine*.

### **Mark DeCarteret**

Mark DeCarteret's work has appeared in the anthologies *American Poetry: The Next Generation* (Carnegie Mellon Press), *Thus Spake the Corpse: An Exquisite Corpse Reader 1988-1998* (Black Sparrow Press) and *Under the Legislature of Stars: 62 New Hampshire Poets* (Oyster River Press) which he also co-edited. From 2009-2011 he was the Poet Laureate of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. You can check out his Postcard Project at [pplp.org](http://pplp.org).

### **Mark Higham**

Mark Higham holds two master's degrees, one in humanities from Wesleyan University, and one in English from Central Connecticut State University. He has spent the past two years teaching English as a foreign language at Pannasastra University, literature at the University of Cambodia, and educational psychology at Western University, as well as being an editor for a weekly newspaper written in English by Cambodians called The Southeast Asia Weekly since he has lived and worked in Phnom Penh, Cambodia for the past two years. Currently, he is pursuing a course as a full time writer.

### **Mariah Krochmal**

Mariah Krochmal is an eighteen-year-old aspiring poet and novelist fresh out of good ole' Keene, New Hampshire. Mariah is currently studying English literature at Cazenovia College in Cazenovia, New York. Mariah likes to keep it classy, enjoys a good smoothie, crime documentaries, and anything written by Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Mariah hopes to one day publish her own books comprised of prose poetry and short stories.

### **Mark Young**

Mark Young has been publishing poetry for nearly fifty-five years. His work has been widely anthologized, & his essays & poetry translated into a number of languages. He is the author of more than twenty books, primarily poetry but also including speculative fiction & art history. He is the editor of the ezine *Otoliths*. He lives on the Tropic of Capricorn in Australia.

### **Mary Alyssa Rancier**

I reside in Southern California. I have been writing poetry for approximately 5 years, but it was not until I took a strong interest into psychology and philosophy that it truly developed. I have only one goal when I write (and perhaps also in life), to feed the mind's most secret desire, to see from a different perspective.

## **Nick Kozma**

Nick Kozma is a college student originally from small-town central Maine. He left his Maine roots behind to pursue a degree in Accountancy from Bentley University. This is his first work to be published.

## **Oliver Rice**

Oliver Rice's poems appear widely in journals and anthologies in the United States and abroad. Creekwalker released an interview with him in January, 2010. His book of poems, *On Consenting To Be a Man*, is published by Cyberwit and available on Amazon. His online chapbook, *Afterthoughts, Siestas*, and his recording of his *Institute for Higher Study* appeared in Mudlark in December, 2010.

Rachel Custer

Robert Whiteside

## **Rowland Anthony Corr**

my name is Rowland Anthony Corr. I was born in northern ireland. I am 32 years old, a member of Mensa, and a soldier serving in the Irish army. I am relatively new to writing poetry, having begun only two years ago, and am also currently engaged in writing a philosophical work. I am working towards completion of a book-length collection of poems centered on the emotions.

## **Ross Robbins**

Ross Robbins, 29, currently resides in Portland, Oregon. He is a student who enjoys reading, writing, drinking too much coffee, engaging in manic conversation, and living a life worthy of being turned into poetry.

## **Sarah Sorensen**

Sarah Sorensen's work has appeared most recently in *The Boiler Journal*, *Apt*, and *Identity Theory*. She holds an M.A. in English and is at work on a thesis for an M.A. in Film Theory. Sarah resides in Michigan.

## **Scott Keeney**

Scott Keeney's work has appeared most recently in *The Boiler*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Court Green*, *Everyday Genius*, *Gobbet*, *The New Verse News*, *Truck*, and *UCity Review*.

## **Simon Perchik**

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. For more information, including free e-books, his essay titled "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at [www.simonperchik.com](http://www.simonperchik.com).

SJ Fowler & RDG Thomas

## **Uriel E. Gribetz**

I am an attorney and have been practicing criminal law in and around NYC for the past twenty five years. I have published a short story in *Orchard Press Mysteries* and the first chapter of a novel was featured in *Noir Originals*. I have written two crime novels and I am currently at work on a third one, which I expect to complete by the end of the year.

## **Wayne Mason**

Wayne Mason is a writer, sound artist and factory worker from Central Florida. His words have appeared across the small press in magazines both print and online. He is the author of poetry five chapbooks. He is the former poetry editor for *Side Of Grits*, and *The Tampa Bay Muse*. He also founded and led the now defunct poetry collective *Wordcore*. Wayne Mason has also been active in experimental music for nearly twenty years. He records ambient, experimental and noise sounds, formerly under the name of *Zilbread*, and is also a founding member of the experimental/noise/drum&bass project *Stickfigure* and electronic duo *Blk/Mas*. <http://brokenzen.wordpress.com/>

## **Zachary Scott Hamilton**

ZACHARY SCOTT HAMILTON is garnished in barnacles, slathered in seafoam, and covered in psychotropic silicones. As of late he lives beyond the greater domes of the western hemisphere with fourteen *wild* Rats, two apparitions, and seventeen *pet* Rats. He lives in Halloween, Oregon. Halleluyah!

# Fall 2012

