



*The
Alembic*

The Alembic

PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

The Alembic

Spring 1998

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The Alembic is published in April by Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island. The subscription rate in the United States is \$15 for two years.

Please address all correspondence, business and editorial, to Editors, *The Alembic*, English Department, Providence College, Providence RI, 02918-0001. **Submissions are read from August 1st through January 15th only. Please include a sentence or two for "Contributor's Notes."** No manuscripts or art work can be returned, nor any query answered, unless accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Manuscripts known to be under consideration elsewhere will be returned to their authors unread. *The Alembic* accepts no responsibility for unsolicited submissions and will not enter into correspondence about their loss or delay. Materials published in *The Alembic* may not be reprinted, in whole or in part, without written permission from the editors.

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On the cover: Untitled by Tim Davis

Thanks to Rev. Stuart McPhail for his support.

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RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

From 1001 Concise Contemporary Ballets—IV

A good libretto, even an impressionist, double-exposed or portmanteaued one, follows most of the rules of simple dramaturgy. Balanchine once said the perfect type plot for a dramatic narrative ballet was the story of the Prodigal Son. Once there was a man who had everything, then he had nothing; finally he had everything again.
—Lincoln Kirstein, *Ballet Alphabet* (1939)

Two impresarios try to steal each other's dancers, in full view of each other.

Among the guests at a party honoring a prima ballerina is a young man who falls in love with her and she with him; but as she recalls former lovers, who dress to resemble one another, she realizes that not only is this new suitor beneath her standards but that of loving men she has simply had enough.

Inspired by birdlike movements, this ballet is essentially plotless.

The girls of a port town find the ship captain so irresistible that they disguise themselves as beardless young sailors to board his ship, where they discover, as he makes advances on them, that the captain must be essentially homosexual.

Two prisoners escape to the home of one whose wife falls in love with the other, who is persuaded to kill her husband but then, under the persistent threat of arrest, he remains hidden in her house, eventually realizing that he has simply exchanged one prison for another, the new one only slightly less disagreeable than its predecessor.

Several performers, as naked as acceptable, smear one another with chocolate syrup whose smell becomes so overwhelming that chocolate hungry members of the audience on their own initiative come on stage to lick spatulas and even the performers' bodies. (Their needs should not be spurned.)

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

A man with an easily divisible personality is torn severely between body and soul, convention and dissidence, wealth and love; his role can be played by two or more dancers.

In an apartment too large for two people, an attractive young woman tries in vain to get more attention from a husband who is more devoted to cocaine.

A beautiful young girl who loses her virginity prior to marriage is turned into a butterfly, which may or may not in the end represent a punishment.

An American college girl marries a handsome foreign student who could not otherwise stay in the States, incidentally hoping he will eventually love her.

The assassins who appear to be male turn out to be women.

In this updated version of the Orpheus legend, a matinee idol, publicly known as homosexual, descends into hell in search of a favorite lover who recently died from AIDS.

A military nurse saves the life of an enemy officer, who falls in love with her, and she with he; but before they can make their affection public, they must overcome numerous obstacles that are both official and unofficial.

Though from all appearances she looked like a contemporary woman, the prima donna was also a skilled automotive mechanic.

An athletic woman who tries repeatedly to do four jetes in mid-air finally succeeds, disappearing above the proscenium.

In an all-night performance, several dancers represent the planets slowly rotating around the sun, whose role is played by the choreographer.

Thanks to effects possible with videotape, we see on the small screen a man, obviously exhausted, continually climbing upwards to heaven and repeatedly passing a sign marked only with an infinity symbol.

On the white classic leotards of scores of dancers are projected both radical contemporary political slogans and abstract lines resembling the tread marks of radical tires.

The spook of a murdered woman returns to dance with her husband, who, in honor of the occasion, suddenly appears twenty years younger.

All available spotlights are shined directly at the audience, preferably in steadily increasing number, until everyone leaves.

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

Among small slender women rehearsing gymnastic routines moves a stocky man holding a television camera devoid of extending wires.

A prostitute enslaved by a demonic pimp is required to murder her customers until she encounters a man who, even though he is stabbed many times, does not die.

When a prophecy made by a psychic proves to be false, disappointed and disgusted dancers throw him into the orchestra pit.

In a black mass, with three archangels presiding, a young woman makes a Faustian wager, transforming herself, thanks to angelic hocus-pocus, into the contemporary embodiment of excessive knowledge—a hard computer disc that lies under a spotlight at the center of the stage.

The protagonist is someone, apparently a dance patron, for whom everyone is continually waiting, even though he or she doesn't appear.

In a ballet accompanied by primitive music, a devilish young woman, dancing with extravagant movements, strangles prospective suitors with her extended ponytail.

During an hour of continuous movement, a game of musical chairs evolves into a brawl that requires the intervention of the police.

When a pilot who dies in an ocean crash returns to his fiancée as a ghost, she agrees to follow him to his submarine cave, where they are wed. Consummation becomes impossible, given their inhabiting different realms, until she too becomes a ghost and an infant is born.

An older choreographer defines the current style of his art by performing selected passages from his earlier works, as well as describing in loving detail those he is physically no longer able to do.

The protagonist falls into an epileptic fit when her father tells her to marry someone other than the man she loves, and she has even more extravagant fits when her father offers yet other suitors.

According to the program, "The purpose of this ballet is to represent male-female relationships realistically—as harmonious as they should be."

From over two dozen famous classic ballets this dance called Inventory, really the epitome of compilation choreography, takes phrases familiar to all dance lovers.

Before any human performers appear, water floods onto the stage and

RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

out into the audience which is forced to leave. Their commotion becomes the ballet.

An imperious woman employer gives a young man marijuana, which he brazenly shares not with his employer but with another employee, female, prompting his summary dismissal.

A pretty farm girl, abducted by the brother of the county's agribusiness mogul, awakens in a house graced by a life-sized statue of the mogul. After much confusion and explanation, she consents to stay with the brother.

Two women mount bicycles at the back corner of the stage and, as they ride forward, crash into each other.

On a cruise in the Caribbean, the protagonist's girlfriend is swept overboard, fortunately near the shore. As the ship's crew is unable to find her in circling around the sea, he leaves the cruise, going from fishing village to village until, to everyone's surprise, he finds her.

The protagonist stakes all he has, including his wife, on a sports wager that he loses.

In this urban horse opera, a beautiful girl is enslaved by a homosexual who exploits her to attract men whom he then rapes and, if they threaten to report him to the police, murders unrepentently until one of his intended victims draws a gun in return, killing the rapist and falsely assuring the girl that she is free, all while making plays in an aside to enslave her for his own purposes.

A man new to a town finds lodging with a widow who finds him desirable and her daughter whom he desires instead.

In this war between two gangs of young people. A girl belonging to one gang causes a street war when, to escape an oncoming car, she hops on the back of the other gangleader's motorcycle.

Before a projection of a bombed-out city, the dancers construct a tent from urban scrap.

In this version of Alice in Wonderland, all the dancers working in a studio conspire to crash into a mirror that, when it breaks, becomes a doorway to another world.

Christ is reborn in an urban slum, experiencing again, after a period of miraculous good deeds, a crucifixion and resurrection whose significance is apparent not to those around him but to the audience.

RAMAN FREY

Basho's Cup

— for Peter Scott Brown

I met a cup with two-fold lips.
It spoke in verse,
simple sentences. I told you it was half-empty, I said.
Because I am indiscriminate.
Koo, koo, koo, you flew, expecting
an answer; something oblique, to be
understood like a Williams poem, and I said, not
till now have I begun to swim.
I repeated, Mu! Mu! Mu! and flipped the saucer
atop the outer lip. We spoke and smoked
marijuana and you painted ideas of who I was,
forgot your linseed oil and yourself.
Me, I can't erase fast enough to die properly.
I was the refuse- to- buck-collector-of-niches,
and you were the stalwart intelligence,
the food like Shepherd's Pie:
 The tea cold.

The saucer sank and was fastened and I
haven't drunk, nor you, our chisels too like diamonds.
But the niches are ended and discharge is here.
I used too much paper.
You slob. What have we learned? We are friends,
cooperative adversaries. Who will I play
backgammon with? Who will empty our
litter and mediate our retreats?
 All this is in the tea,
though it remains mute and overflows.

R A M A N F R E Y

A Visit to Brautigan's Grave

“The tragedy of emancipated sight is knowing
we will leave every place we go,”
and you weren't finished there, but the browning
lilac caught me then with its last huff of perfume...

“Why not eat the chipmunk?” You ask,
with a double emphasis on the eat.
You are callous that way.
I tell you, “in the stomach of a lion are acids strong
enough to dissolve you whole, brains, bones and fat-
a little indigestion from...”
Since you're going on safari.

And in that small stream are speckled rainbow trout
of whom several were slaughtered, I saw,
by a poet and his son, disguised
under fishing hats and wielding fiberglass rods
(the barbed flies as enchanting as silver tinsel fairies)

Today a bee, with some exploration in mind,
crossed the threshold. Later, quite cold,
I found him plastered to a window and lifted him
on this folded poem.
Outside he went to dissolve in the grass
as though it were a redwood forest.

ROBIN ROMEO

The Moth

What more can I say?
Your flicker and your glow
compel this fool into
his ragged spiral.
Each lick of flame
a flower petal dripping
with the nectar of the gods.
I lunge to get my sip.
Singe my lips. Never live
to tell your sweet fury.

ROBERT LEVINE

The Wound

I know what my friend means
when he tells me he once wrapped his hand
around a wire of his father's ranch's fence
and pressed on a barb. He carried a pair
of shears with him, and he sliced himself free
and ran along the fenceposts to his father,
holding out a palm still bitten
by a small snake of steel, saying
Look, look what I did. His father,
leaning over a post to talk to their neighbor,
said *Can't you see I'm busy*
without turning his face.

I know what he means when he tells me
he walked to his father's shed;
he pulled the strand of metal from his flesh
with pliers, and watched the blocked-up blood
spill and drain away. He sealed the hole
in himself with drops of hot glue,
and sat between bare wooden walls
without moving, waiting for a crust to form.

KEVIN DREW

In Memory of Dear Old Dad

My father used to tell me about his time in the service. Every time he got in trouble, he was forced to peel potatoes. Sometimes he'd get hungry and dice one up for a snack. He used to hold his nose while he chomped on each bite, imagining it was an apple.

After years of practice, he could turn mashed potatoes into apple sauce and potatoes au gratin into cinnamon apple oatmeal.

I pillage garbage, subsiding on green orange rinds and backwashed beer cans. My nose is swollen and I still hate my father.

KEVIN DREW

At the End of the Day

I was conversing with pocket lint, quarters, and cigarette butts who had just started a family under the roof of the couch cushion. I jabbered about the splicing pain in my shoulder and about how I was trying to start a colony of wax in my ear to dull the pots-and-pans bitching of my wife. They were a kind audience, even flattering when I missed a chord. My gripes were a busking musician in the underground of London. The cigarette politely coughed up a quarter.

BRIAN KENNEY

The Powers That Be

a satire

*Whose game was empires, and whose stakes were thrones;
Whose table earth-whose dice were human bones.*
—Byron, “The Age of Bronze”

John Davidson was a Senator from Connecticut and my role model. As strange as it may seem to have a politician as your role model in this day and age, he was, and I was not unique in looking up to him. He was young, good looking, and had such a tone to his voice that even a deaf man could be persuaded by it. The country had not seen a politician as flamboyant and popular since the era of John Kennedy. Davidson was most well known early in his career for his gallant fight to save the Groton submarine base. He was unsuccessful in his pursuit, but it was his actions that propelled him to prominence.

This was the scenario: the Cold War was over, the Iron Curtain had been raised revealing all of Russia’s insecurities. Not being impressed with what they saw, liberals were working hard to cut the military budget. Feeling the pinch, the Pentagon could only give the new Sea Hawk contract to one of the two remaining shipyards located in Newport News, Virginia, and Groton, Connecticut. Both states were watching intently on the outcome of this battle for the contract would have tremendous economic implications.

Being young and good looking, Davidson used the media attention this dilemma brought to the fullest. When Connecticut television stations interrupted *Days of Our Lives* to show live coverage of Davidson’s address on the Senate floor, viewers witnessed some two hundred Groton sub employees weave through the Senate and fill the aisles. It looked like the Senate was being groped by the tentacles of an over zealous octopus. Viewers were glued to their TV’s, they had never seen such a sight. Most assumed that the

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emotional workers had overwhelmed the officers on duty to support their senator. I would later come to find out that security deliberately turned a blind eye. Davidson had made a secret deal with a senior Republican senator from Virginia. Randall Johnson was his name, and he had spent the greater part of his adult life in the Senate drafting legislation. It was his final term as senator, and he wanted to go out with a big win. This sub contract was just the victory he was looking for. Who knew, maybe he could get a submarine named after him.

At this point in Senator Davidson's career, his only concern was getting re-elected. The future of the Groton sub base was a distant nothing in comparison. Now it may seem odd for Davidson to want to get rid of the sub base. Winning the contract would surely get him re-elected, but Davidson was looking towards the future. He knew that the military budget wasn't going to get any fatter, if anything it would be trimmed to the bone. Fighting for submarine contracts would be a constant pain in the ass for the rest of his career as senator. The quicker the shipyard was shut down the better. Besides, Davidson had some future plans for Groton brewing in the back of his head.

Keying in on Johnson's submarine fantasy, Davidson set out to make a deal with him. Davidson promised not to rally the Democratic controlled Senate together in support of Groton as long as Johnson told his brother-in-law who happened to be captain of security to look the other way when the shipyard workers rushed the Senate floor. Johnson knew that Davidson's motives were fishy, but was too caught up daydreaming about the USS Johnson to have anything spoil the deal.

When the workers stormed the Senate, Davidson took full advantage of the moment by making an extremely emotional speech and demanding that every senator look into the faces of the country's latest batch of unemployed. Half the Senate wasn't present, but what mattered was that the press was.

In the end, Davidson lost the battle. Newport News, Virginia got the contract and Groton was to be shut down. Realistically, Groton was the only loser, Davidson had never been so popular. The country applauded his actions and was impressed with the loyalty and trust that the workers in his state had for him.

B R I A N K E N N E Y

Davidson ended up on the cover of every magazine that mattered. His political maneuvering or rather deliberate loss had made him a household name. *Time* made him “Man of the Year.” It turned out to be the shortest “Man of the Year” article ever, because half way through the journalist realized that the senator had not actually done anything except play the media perfectly. Live and learn.

All this publicity made Davidson larger than life. It also sealed his victory for the upcoming Senate race. The country ate it up. The media helped to create something that the country wanted, someone to believe in. He had become the person whom mothers tried to model their sons after and the man whom all the female interns were willing to work late for.

As for the workers of the sub base, Davidson was quick to blame the loss of the contract on the old blood that infested D.C. He vowed to start a new agenda.

The senator was good to his word, and within two years he had pressured the governor, and city and state legislators to let a couple of shady entrepreneurs build a casino in Groton. Within three years of its approval, Groton had become the hot spot for high rollers.

The submarines were turned into casinos, their war heads replaced with ATM machines. The laid off workers got jobs at the casino, and the local businesses were thriving. Even the prostitutes who had become unemployed from the shutdown of the shipyard were making more money in a week than they used to in a month. With one political maneuver, a cornerstone to our nation’s naval superiority had been replaced by a roulette wheel and slot machines. Life is funny like that.

The Groton casino continued to prosper and easily passed the Foxwoods casino in yearly profits. This was achieved partly because of its theme and catchy name: Hunt For Red October. The warehouses that built the massive submarine structures were remodeled and made to look like enormous war rooms. For those with families, day care was provided. There was a special submarine that let children experience the thrill of submarine travel. The kids became scared when their ears popped from the pressure of the descending

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submarine, but their cries were in vain. Their parents were miles off enjoying drinks and free time away from their kids.

The whole state was in a frenzy over this new casino. Again, Senator Davidson was seen as the man for the workers. He had saved Groton's economy in its time of need. Riding on such a high wave of popularity, Davidson decided to up the stakes and run for President in the next election.

Now, you may wonder where I fall into this picture. I was what you call a favor. My father was a very influential state legislator, and instrumental in bringing the proposed casino to Groton. It was time for Davidson to pay off his debt with my father. I had just graduated from Yale and was ready to start my political career. My father had known years ago that Davidson would go far in politics, and knew that preserving a position for me would give me a lot security.

It was as simple as that. I got a job in his campaign, and was able to see how a campaign really operated. I was not the only so-called favor to be working in the campaign. Davidson had many favors to repay, and the way of repayment was easy, give them or their children some sort of title in the campaign.

Needless to say Davidson won the election. I was well liked by everybody in the campaign, and after the victory received a full-time position in the administration. My quick jump in the hierarchy surprised everyone, but it took me no time to get used to the stress and pressure of politics. I had seen my father go through it, and thrive on it. I too thrived on it, it was a better rush than any drug could give me. My strong work ethic and loyalty was quick to be noticed and I became particularly close to Davidson's inner circle. Everyone on staff could see that I was maturing rapidly, but I specifically caught the eye of Davidson. I felt I was going to be the one who he would take under his wing, the one to carry on his legacy. Once people noticed my rise I had the respect or rather fear of everyone in D.C.

At this time, only one thing bothered me. I couldn't understand why I was getting paid so well. I had been given a decent position in the administration, but I was getting paid more than anyone in that position should. I wasn't

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complaining, and my new Mercedes reflected it. I ate dinner in the best restaurants which always had a table on reserve for me. Later, I would find out that my high salary was a sort of bribery. It was a way to ensure my loyalty and would later be used to show my guilt.

One night while working late, I was called to go for a limousine ride with the President. In the limousine with me and the President was the director of the CIA, Richard Slick. Slick was not a man of many words. He had no conception of small talk. Right away he told me that what I would be hearing was an issue of national security and that I was to never repeat the conversation. He then informed me that I was going to go to Russia and was to be in charge of aid (i.e. money) that was going to many of the Republics. The aid was to strengthen democracy and to help increase the standard of living. This money came from what the President referred to as his Red October Fund. I had no idea what that was, but I was too intimidated by Slick to ask questions. Besides, the President reassured me with a wink, and called me a true patriot. I was then informed that this was not to be discussed with the President ever again. My contact was Slick, and I was to talk to no one else about this but Slick.

Within two weeks I found myself in Russia directing funds to the Commonwealth of Independent States. I was not happy in Russia, I wanted to be in the middle of things in D.C. I tried to figure out why I had been picked for the job. I was an English major in college, I knew nothing about numbers. In fact that was the reason why I became an English major, to get away from numbers.

In spite of this, my job really wasn't all too complicated. I had to confirm that the money got to where it was supposed to go. Any paper work or receipt that was used in the process was to be shredded. I ended up spending more time covering my tracks than doing anything else. It seemed like I was in a dream. As much as I hated Russia, I still cannot deny the fact that I woke up every day feeling good and believed that I was playing an intricate role in history. I was, after all, furthering democracy.

One month later, Slick informed me that I was to fly back to the U.S. My job had been completed. I was a bit surprised by the abrupt ending of my mission but that was overshadowed by the relief of getting the hell

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out of Russia. I packed and headed home on the earliest possible flight.

I slept with a clear conscience through the long flight only to wake up as the plane was touching down at JFK. Before I could reach up to grab my bag, two men threw me against a seat and placed me under arrest. They would later tell me why, but my Yale education told me right away that I was in trouble because of what I did while in Russia. That's when I first began to think that my patriotic duty for my country wasn't so patriotic.

We left the plane only to enter into a barrage of cameras flashing like strobe lights, and microphones groping me for a comment. The news of my arrest was leaked to the media, and from the looks of it I was front-page material. Piecing together all the questions I was being asked, I realized that my job in Russia was somehow connected to the sale of nuclear weapons.

I ended up in jail awaiting trial. No one was allowed to see me, not even my family. It turns out that the President for the first time in his life had very little to say when the scandal was brought up. He only said that, "He flatly condemns the actions of those involved." Things didn't look good for me.

I was not the only one to be arrested. It turns out that many other men in the administration, mostly favors, had been set up like me. When the investigation started putting heat on the CIA, Richard Slick put a bullet in his head.

My lawyer informed me that I had been spied on during my final weeks in Russia, so I could not deny my involvement. The only thing I could do was deny any knowledge of the exchange of nuclear weapons.

The night before I was to appear in front of Congress, I dreamt that a civilization from a galaxy far away had accidentally tuned into our radio signals that were going through space. These beings were relatively peaceful, and were appalled by the actions of our leaders. As a gesture of good will to the oppressed people of the world, these beings came down to Earth and disintegrated all the leaders. They returned home only to find out again through our radio waves that a new set of leaders had emerged that were just as ruthless and greedy. Disturbed by this discovery, they came to earth and wiped out the new batch of leaders. Believing that new and benevolent leaders would emerge to take care of the masses, the beings left. A few years went by and the beings found that these leaders had become just as corrupt. The beings

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then decided to exterminate all humans from the earth. They were afraid that the evil of the humans would infest the universe. After all, these evil creatures were already able to land on the moon, the next step would be colonization.

Unfortunately for the beings, they forgot to recognize the power of the media, and as their spaceship hurtled to earth they continued to listen to the radio waves. They listened to Sam Donaldson describe them as creatures bent on destroying the meek of the world with their technological superiority. They were especially disturbed by this because they had grown to relate to and respect Sam Donaldson and his reporting. If he was saying this about them, then it must be true. By the time they got close enough to vaporize everyone, they were so depressed that they turned their rocket ship around and pointed their phasers at their own planet. They could not live with themselves after hearing how they were depicted.

I woke up in a cold sweat. The vision of the beings' vaporized planet was too much for me. Never before had I felt so alienated from my friends and country. The journalists were prodding the public to demand the death penalty for me. The politicians who were feeling the heat from the citizens wanted to run me into the ground. I was in a bind any way I looked at it. My only option was to be truthful, and tell the committee everything I knew.

I was grilled by the members of the oversight committee for my lack of knowledge of the money-for-weapons affair. They assumed that I was hiding information to save myself, but I told them everything I knew. My testimony also put the President in the middle of this affair. I told them about my limousine ride with Slick and the President.

The President was now ordered to appear in front of the committee. What did he do? He denied any knowledge of the money-for-weapons plan. As for the limousine ride with me and Slick, he just said, "I do not recall ever riding in the same car with Mr. Slick and Mr. West." The committee had nothing on him. Slick was dead, and the President's testimony weighed a lot heavier than mine. When asked about my high salary, the President just said that he didn't write the checks and that he could not be asked to monitor the pay of everyone in his administration. The media played me for a liar who

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betrayed the country and the President. Davidson's reputation had been tarnished from the whole scandal, but he was still respected.

How did everything fall apart? As incredible as it sounds, Groton ended up playing a big role in the conspiracy. It turns out that the casino was a front for the whole money-for-weapons affair. They used the submarines from the shipyard to transport nuclear weapons and money to and from Russia. Russia made money, and Davidson made new foreign allies. Because of stealth technology the subs were invisible to any sonar that any country had.

It was a masterful plan, but there was one big mistake. It turns out that the conspirators were running behind schedule and used the wrong submarine. Instead of an empty sub, it was full of gamblers. The submarine didn't even make it out of U.S. waters before it was stopped by the latest line of stealth subs made in Newport News, Virginia. They were a sitting duck really; the new stealth subs picked up the cha-ching of the slot machines echoing inside the sub from miles away. It was quite a comical scene. Luckily, someone had their cam corder to get the footage of the event. It was then played on every news station and analyzed by every analyst for three months.

I am now spending my days finishing up my prison term. I was somewhat lucky in having my sentence reduced.

This came about when Davidson finally lost an election. A camera man recorded him hitting his dog after it took a leak on his pant leg. The media covered the story for months. Animal rights groups rallied in support of the other candidate Harry Canin. Canin won by a landslide.

This was the first time Davidson was not able to get what he wanted. He was devastated, he didn't know how to cope with losing. He ended up going nuts. Later, he would become a born-again Christian and write a book about his past life as a sinner. In it, he pleaded guilty to organizing the whole money-for-weapons affair. He admitted that he had thought of the idea years back when he foresaw the closing of the Groton sub base. He knew it was risky business, but his powerful political position made him feel invincible. The book was his way of cleansing the soul. All the profits went to Groton's local chapter of Gamblers Anonymous and to dog shelters around the country. Fair is fair.

MARY MARSHALL

Alcoholic

The day begins with a thunder
in his head well after noon,
the sounds of men of the last century
hammering railroads into the Earth
hang in his brain of cobwebbed clouds
until the first cigarette is
nothing but ash and filter.
He peels his tongue from the roof
of his mouth like the skin off a banana.
Raking the dry, dead leaves
of the night before off...
he brushes his tarred teeth.
The seasonal cycle of his day continues
and it is not long before his slurring
shoes are leading him away
from the suffocating silence
that is his home.
In the dark blanket of the bar
he shoots his first shot.
Acid tears well up in the corners
of raging eyes, but burn off
before they can be spilled.
He fumbles in his shirt pocket
to find his last cigarette—broken.
He curses the tease and sucks
the nectar of life
out of the flower of a bottle.

MICHAEL BURNS

Willy Ballard

stands in the spread
of sawdust and blood,
having let the chainsaw
snag and leap and cut
his scrawny neck,
and he holds both hands
to his throat as if
he were choking himself.
The blood shoots out
between his yellow fingers.

Now he has fallen down.

See that blue rag
he uses for a handkerchief?

Do something.

MICHAEL BURNS

In Another Time

Two doves light in the top of a snag.
We hold our breath.
My father has settled me
into his lap, the shotgun steady,
one hand under mine.

I aim and fire.
I close my eyes when the stock kicks,
opening to smoke and a deep ache
spreading inside my shoulder.

In this small moment, I'm happy
—how else can I say it—
a big boy held in my father's arms,
with him looking down, grinning.

Then, like two men
who awake together in the middle
of the floor to find they have been dancing,
we free ourselves.

We walk out to pick up the birds
blown dead beneath the tree.

RICHARD MEIER

Yellowstone

At the end of our trail
a deer leg freshly severed.

The picnic in the parking lot
with our new corkscrew.

We pulled the cork to get
our instincts back.

What was destination
where the people took pictures of signs

framing out the sky?
and that bloody leg, even now,

proving, pulsing our distance.
A line of cars means bison

or the hot rotten river
littered with bathers.

We joined them and it stunk
like all the day's pleasures.

I am in remission officially,
like just above ground you whispering-

we slept on our numbered parcel-
that should have been our leg.

RICHARD MEIER

Only the pronoun seemed strange,
a slide of that vocation,

the bear visible, barely,
the singing ordered on the trail.

MICHAEL HALL

Midnight Psalm

"...those who see well find something captured that escapes explanation."

Bill Evans

in the immortal jazz prosody

life aint nothin

but the fast walk of acrobatic fingers

and one nimble thumb

runnin

up & down four vertical tightropes

of an upright bass.

nothin

but a stomp & grind

across the keys of a piano grand.

tryin

to keep up with the man in back.

holdin

dynamite in his hands

cymbal snare hi-hat

boom

as the mighty organ ejaculates its lungs

"make way

make room for the starlit harlot

cast

in shadows of night

finger paintin the corner

with curiosity

MICHAEL HALL

in the way
pussycats creep
creepin
from hotel to motel room to room.
cuz it is her body they lust
in the hour of doom.”
life aint nothin
but the art of needlepoint
embodyin
the arms of a fiend
captured
in between highs and lows,
betwixt hard knocks and a quick fix,
in the hard grooves of his days,
locked
in the pitfall of an awful paradox.
nothin
but a midnight prance atop a milky way.
nothin
but lost art
graffiti in the dark
the eclipse of my lips on her soul
transcendin cloud nine,
and hers on mine.
both of us,
inclined to climb the veins of God’s bloodline.

RAY JORDAN

Foretaste

— for Kristen Lynn Nichols

Let us pause here for pantomime
Syphilis from a flea bite
Allegiance paid the emperor

Allegiance paid the emperor
Inasmuch as your itch is my cat, my coat,
Such design admits no vacant time

Inasmuch as your itch is my cat, my coat,
Glory and conquest attend upon tumescence
Only the lame can love

Glory and conquest attend upon tumescence
Stone heads tumble, turn the human clay
Voice slips into dirt, fool's motley

Hearts wash like hot irons in our rusty French
Stone heads tumble, turn the human clay
You have to eat earth, just once

In grass pushed back, bread is not cake
Hearts wash like hot irons in our rusty French
Blood to a gallop, what Simon never said

Blood to a gallop, what Simon never said
Voice slips into dirt, fool's motley
In grass pushed back, bread is not cake

RAY JORDAN

For here, you'll find my house gone dumb
Syphilis from a flea bite
You have to eat earth, just once

Only the lame can love
Let us pause here for pantomime
For here, you'll find my house gone dumb

Such design admits no vacant time

MARK RUDMAN

The “Real” Revolt

“16 aug 38, appalling to read poems by shelley (not to speak of ancient egyptian peasant songs from 3000 years ago) in which he laments oppression and exploitation. is this how they will read us, still oppressed and exploited, and will they say: was it already as bad as that?”

– Bertolt Brecht, *Journals 1934-1935*

After an afternoon of walking through ruins and trying to imagine the wholeness before it was lost, we thread our way unknowingly through the narrow and tortuous Via di Lorensi and find ourselves on the Piazza Navona at nightfall. *Ragazzi* kick a soccer ball between the Fontana del Moro and the Fontana dei Fiumi as if it were still the stadium and racecourse Domitian had built something less than a hundred years after Jesus is said to have died. An athlete himself, my own kid, aged eleven, complains about his feet and laments that he can't play soccer with the other kids.. Strange how context alters energy flow. Or is it desire? There appears no way home across the Tiber to Trastevere and the steep uphill steps than to walk.

The piazza is so deserted I find it hard to believe that days before, on the feast of the Epiphany, which Vico might have rejoiced in, it was chockfull, thronged: carousels and painted balloons, silver balloons with faces outlined in white, like the ghosts of all the political rallies that have taken place there.

Disoriented, travel-weary, my eyes burn now as halogen lamps flare and a camera crew appears, wanting to catch the light while it is still in the act of vanishing, crepuscular. An aquiline actor, dressed in early nineteenth century garb, waistcoat, ruffled shirtfront, the whole-bit, mutters beside the fountain, and he is then interrupted by someone who could be his hologram or double but in modern dress. I ask a member of the crew as he opens up a fresh pack of *Lucky Strikes* what the film is about and he answers in American English that “It’s a film about Brecht writing a play about Shelley.” “Can we watch?” “As long as you don’t cross over the chalk.” Fatigue from wandering brings on disconnected forms of wondering. The play may be the thing but I’m trying to remember the last time I saw a pack of *Lucky’s* in the U.S.A.

Shelley:

Who remembers the Roman wilderness
before Romulus forged refuges, transformed
craggs into caves, fashioned dwellings
or ventured like Aeneas into the Lupercal cave?
Did the sublimely insightful German, in Los
Angeles, know that my “Peter Bell”
was a parody of another “Peter Bell,” penned
by one W.W., whose hard-earned renown
for the great works written in his youth,
such as the 1805 version of *The Beginning*
worked inadvertently to eclipse
the generation after (the public being
somewhat limited as to what it can take in;
digest.). It was enough for my generation
to carve a niche in the wake of Shakespeare,
Spenser, and Milton, but to contend
with a living monument’s monumental
accomplishment, his alter-ego’s
rapturous propaganda, “explaining
metaphysics to the nation”
while never failing to extol
to his own disadvantage in the end! –
the pioneer’s pioneering virtues –
was a bit much.... Are Byron, poor
John Keats and I mere standard bearers
for their “romantic movement” instead of
revolutionaries?

(Pauses.)

Originals!

(Pauses.)

I fear I have not expressed myself clearly.

It's that...that deadly duo takes up so much of
the available oxygen...and I would
lay down my life for Lord
Byron, fiend, friend, incomparable gin
drinker, swimmer, and man of principles..

(With both hands he brushes back the forelock falling over his eyes.)

It's time to set the record straight,
to spring me from the preciousity trap,
to detach the words I took pains to compose
from the romantic images of me physically.

[Aside.] Besides, whatever the screenwriters who imagine they are putting these very words into my mouth at this moment imagine, David Herbert Lawrence was right to nail me for hailing that skylark as a bird that never existed. And it's true that my images weren't always precise: You'll remember that somewhat epicene Italophile American novelist James, yes Henry James, said that Nathaniel Hawthorne's flaws were the result of his isolation from the company of other writers. Then think of a young exiled Englishman, on the run with his wife and children, writing in every imaginable circumstance except "at a desk," in carriages, small boats, ruins like the lovely, leafy baths of Caracalla which helped me to imagine myself several millennia back in time in order to compose *Prometheus Unbound*.

And yes yes YES even in my time we thought about genre and form qua form. Shakespeare and Jonson wrote plays. Spenser and Milton wrote epics, so that a lot that was still undone in terms of lyrics and odes and plays not meant to be performed.

Then there is the further question which it doesn't take a detective to anticipate: if I really was committed to social change on a large scale why was I so foolhardy? Why for example, after the squall during a sailing expedition with Byron, that strong, skillful, and indefatigable swimmer, the rudder broke and waves threatened to capsize the boat, why, after this near death, which I faced incidentally with more humiliation than fear, did I not *simply learn how to swim?*

(Shelley now addresses the wild-haired man of about his age, thirty, dressed in a black leather jacket and blue jeans, who has assumed a stance

beside him. And finished his sentence for him.)

Or build a boat with a keel deep enough to withstand riotous squalls...?

Remember, I asked you.

And as far as Frankenstein's points of resemblance to myself...

I begin to indulge in somewhat absurd reverie in which the filmmakers argue over how to portray Shelley like Fritz Lang (as director), Jack Palance (as producer), and Michel Piccoli (as screenwriter) do with regard to their adaptation of *The Odyssey* in *Contempt*.

"I like the way Shelley sometimes utters a phrase with a German accent, but this is far too static. Why not show Shelley, during his tenure in Venice, playing pool with Byron ala 'Julian and Maddalo,' even have an overvoice reading some passages of the poem, or riding along the Lido..."

"I don't like that 'tenure.'"

"Sojourn then."

"Let's take advantage of the fact that Shelley and Byron were obsessed with being by, near, or preferably—weather being the least of their concerns—on the water."

"Ok, and let's use color for the urban scenes and black and white for the seaside at Le Spezia."

"I won't say no, but why?"

"To leech out that damn romantic image that perpetuates the perpetual misunderstandings about our subject who had to have been tough, strong-willed, and disciplined to accomplish what he did in so short a time. Also, B.B. would have approved."

"I won't say no. But a leeches out sepia might be even better for the hazy olive-grays of the Tuscan hills and seaside scenes in Le Spezia than straight black-and-white."

"Yeah. Considering he composed with his notebook on his knee—hill-sides and boats were his desk—and we already decided that Severn's prettified image of him in the Baths of Caracalla was not only misconceived but ultimately revolting. Sure, little Johnny Keats could compose an entire ode in an hour on Rilke's porch while nightingales were trilling, but it can get messy in the open air, far from anything either you or I would designate as shelter. No offense to Severn the man. I still break down when I think of how he cared for Keats."

"He might have been no more than 5'2, but being fearless, burly but not stout, he could have kicked your butt. He would have flown at your throat for that remark."

(Scene: the real *Revolt* in progress on the real Piazza Navona)

Shelley:

We boarded the packet boat from Dover to Calais in heavy weather.

You daring denizens of cocktail-shaker whirling blender Hovercrafts and ferries are clueless as to what *dangers* any travel threatened to procure.

(The man of the present interrupts.)

I suppose you're coming to the part about you, Mary, and Claire as a threesome. Did the two women...you know? And where were the sleeping children, and what if one woke crying? Did you have conjugal relations with Mary and find Claire at the door, wondering if she could join you, and touch Mary with her tongue while she was in a relaxed state and let her gently return the favors, so that you groaned from her precise somnambulistic groping, woman to woman. You both revelled voyeurism and believed love was to be shared. You would enter Claire from one end and Mary from the other. Her fingers and yours would meet and Claire would raise her right leg and when you came, always too soon, Mary would continue, probing, spreading, licking...and groaning, oh, oh, as if with relief; like someone sighing finally after an arduous...

(Shelley looks at him as if appalled by the invasiveness of his question, clutches his side – his famous “Mephitic pain” returning--and struggles to continue. The director yells cut and suddenly the group is in a huddle, including several other actors, at least two of whom are women, in early nineteenth century dress. The director calls “roll ‘em.” Shelley now moves his hand along the fountain’s rim as he speaks and lights flood the rockwork and grottoes.)

While we three, Mary, Claire, and I leaned on the deck rail
(and Claire was not impervious to the mountainous
waves), a soldier’s wife, hysterical,
recited the Lord’s Prayer and threw up at the same time.

Forgetfulness is the bane of history

What history? Where? I know: body-counts.
But what does knowing how many people
were lost on a given day have to do with history?

Shakespeare portrays Achilles as a heel.
(Albeit in a play I find it hard to believe he wrote.)

A non-sequiter? What else is history?
History. History invents itself as it goes along.
It's what was and what we make of it.
But whatever was may exist in some hard eternal form.
Somewhere. A kernel of its former self.

How each generation construes...consecutive thought
wearies poor creatures given to taking rhythmic dictation
from the wind-but take the professional historians who argue

there never was a holocaust.

Outrageous? But if others have supported their premises
while numbered survivors are still alive to testify
otherwise, what happens when no one from that era
with stamped wrists remains?
Impossible?

I would have thought so. Yesterday.

Do you think you can accurately reimagine
what antiquity was really like by hiring NASA
planes to fly over and take photographs
that can reach ten meters below the soil?

Do you think I expect an answer?

But none of us are loveable eccentrics.

We're drawn to mimicry.

But to set the record straight
I cadged my German accent from Coleridge,
who, though not bad at imitating others himself,
not to say copying, ruined
his mind there. And only ceased from posing
unanswerable questions when walking
fens no one had traversed before without
any fear of getting lost in the real,
jotting down--phrases-broken by--dashes-
among which the poems it is assumed
he never wrote lay buried in a log
he never thought to quarry for its gems....

And now I am stricken with a sad thought,
despite my enmity toward S.T.C
& Co., that if his most significant
male mother, I mean other, had been someone
more like Pound than that ... cold Cumberland,
who preferred landscapes and animals to people,
he might have undergone a second birth.

But to think that William the Sublime
would take an active interest in his friend's real work
is as fantastical as the poem he unconsciously excised
from the *Lyrical Ballads*, "Christabel"-
delivering a psychic knockout punch
to his despondent partner,
whose desire for his hero's approval
had no bound.

William was a man who could cast his nets
effortlessly backward and bring the dead
years and events back to life more vividly
than life allows.

Samuel was a man who agonized over the instant

he was in and sometimes--hit upon solutions.
Being disabled in the lime-tree bower
appealed to him, don't ask me why—
I'm one for vast expanses myself—
unless physical limits enabled him to focus,
do one thing at a time and abandon
manic projects.

It's as if Wordsworth sensed that this
innovative poem, "founded on a new
principle," to count in each line
"the accents, not the syllables,"
springing rhythm free from rigid numbers,
could throw too much attention
on his blocked, burdened
beyond measure, and forever
beleagued and uncertain
collaborator.

Or maybe the two men were one
and their symbiosis is beyond
analysis.

To run his hand along the fountain's rim he'd have to be seated. It makes more sense for Shelley to be first seen standing before the Fontana del Moro, deep in meditation beside the statue of "The Moor," which can then lead him to say more about Shakespeare.

"Maybe he should look up at the statue, even if he is more of a marine divinity than an homage to Othello, with a wicked leer, point to the Ethiopian and say something like 'you know I hate the Moor'."

Shelley:

I wonder if they're right, the distracted
multitudes who claim the bard had never
been to Venice. It's difficult to catch
the ambiance: think of my lines evoking
this hazy, harsh, sweet atmosphere,

without the author having spent time in
Tuscany or on the Palatine
much less in a labyrinth like Venice....
I'm not in Venice now, am I Gian Lorenzo?
You're my witness if I have one. Or none.
If I address you by your first name, know
that I admire your way with marble
even if the line itself is a little
too...too...do I have to say it? –
sham-ful for my tastes.

And then immediately switch roles and speak as the moor. Something
like

Shelley:

Ah, sweet to have been a man of action,
a soldier, who could define his life
in terms of what he had done and then win
the woman's love, like Othello's escape
from the imminent deadly breach....
Simple enough, unless some betrayer turns his mind
irrevocably around and around.

I realized that the whole scene would be better accomplished with
montage, a rapid series of shots lasting no more than two seconds each: first
an aerial view of the piazza as a whole; then a flashback, giving a stereoscopic
image of history, jousts, races, nobles watching from their carriages; then a
reverse angle shot, from the bottom of the Fountain of the Rivers to the Eryp-
tian-style Roman obelisk on top of the fountain against a bottomless sky...;
then to an empty square at nightfall with a few pigeons on and around the
fountains, then another flashback to a Christmas feast with the camera closing
in on the miniature Christmas cribs; then to a mock naval battle going on in the
days when they used to flood the piazza made for metamorphosis, to a con-
temporary feast of the epiphany ending on a close-up of the "silver balloons
with faces outlined in white," which I so recently witnessed, like the ghost of
political rallies past.

And after we cut from him addressing the statue of the moor I'd have him standing in the Fountain of the Rivers, his hand cupped to his ear.

Shelley:

You'd have me get my feet wet at nightfall
would you Gian Lorenzo? Fine. But it is
all right with you and your ghost if I walk
through the grotto where all four rivers meet?
Maybe you should put that lion on a leash
when I pass from the Ganges to the Danube.

There are limits to what the dead can do.

"Many harsh words have been written about Shelley."

"Like that crack of Lawrence's vis-a-vis the bodiless idealism of 'bird that never wert'."

"'Peter Bell the Third' must have hit Brecht like a bombshell."

"Jean Seberg would have made a fine Mary Shelley."

"I like that 'would have.' Can we stick to real possibilities?"

"Los Angeles was good enough for Thomas Mann but not Brecht..."

"Mann lived in Venice. Venice is way beautiful. Gulls wheel over the piers."

"Figures. That closet-queen banker with his cartload of metaphysics knew how to transform exile into domicile."

"It was like he had a license to hide."

"Why don't we let the camera zoom in on that lion's head."

"Better he should be riding the horse and after the entire scene has run its course of course cut to him riding on the Lido with Byron."

“But these are compatible ideas. We can do the marble lion’s head and then the flesh and fur horse. (Pause.) But why have Shelley in nineteenth century dress when in a church no more than a good” (stands up and pretends to be swinging a golf club) “four iron away” (finishes swing and pretends to be watching shot on the follow through), “from Bernini’s fountain, San Luigi dei Francesi, there’s a triptych by Caravaggio of St Matthew which is set in the Rome of 1600 or Thereabouts.”

“Not more art!”

“Hear me out, for he’s a forerunner of 3-D. Without Caravaggio, no *Murder in the Wax Museum*.”

(The writers and crew, within hearing range, half-giddy from sleep deprivation, boredom and overstimulation, burst into spontaneous laughter.)

“Do they hand out the glasses or do you have to bring your own.”

“Look, we’ve all reached our limit, but no one asked you to accept this...line of work. And if you accepted the oblique allusion to Matthew Garth why cancel out another representation that will free us up, I promise you, in the long run. So listen: there’s Matt seated among the taxmen with Jesus at the far end sayin’ (I’m sure some of you know the story far better than I) ‘come on, it’s time to meet your destiny’ before your eye follows the story left to right to the other two canvases with their angels and killers. And everyone’s dressed in the Elizabethan ruff of 1600 A.D., not the usual approximations of what these people wore in the year...zero.”

“What are you driving at?”

“That it works and I see no reason why for the purposes of this film that Shelley, our Shelley, shouldn’t be dressed like his doppelganger or those other aging ageless raggedish student-types hangin’ out in the square while we...film around them.”

“Why can’t we do both? Otherwise how separate Shelley from his double?”

“Because that interrogator isn’t ready his double: he’s just relatively the same age and build.”

My ragazzo now groans with fatigue. And this sound, far more intense than his combining, rouses me to lead us through zigzag into a perilous traffic jam via Via della Cuccagna, distracting ragazzo from distraction, (transcending all physical exhaustion), like belts and wallets, and grab the first Roman taxi I have taken except to and from the airport or train station. Inside, I continue my reverie about the filmic possibilities of *Revolt*.

(Scene: The camera follows Shelley through the streets until he reaches the Campo dei Fiori and Giordano Bruno’s statue. As Shelley approaches the statue in silence the camera backs away until he disappears into the crowd. Cut to long shot from an aerial height of the adjacent Campo and Piazza Cut to a long take of an ordinary morning on the Campo when it becomes an immensely colorful marketplace. Camera should focus on the vivid fruits and vegetables, as if to affirm something human that persists in spite of all the questions and complications that the film introduces.)

Immense relief when my backpack hits the floor of our apartment. As I hit the sofa an image balloons of Brecht in exile thinking about his “brother” Shelley. I open the fivecolored Clairefontaine notebook Karen sent me from New York when I was in Vermont, and come across this quotation from B.B.’s *Journals* “20 mar 47, finish THE ANACHRONISTIC PROCESSION, a kind of paraphrase of Shelley’s the *masque of anarchy*.” The ragazzo assumes a position beside me on the long white sofa and while, from the Gianicolo’s heights we watch fog cover the domes and terra cotta roofs, he covers a page in his new spiral notebook (“*Carta riciclata ecologica*,”) beginning with the sentence: “That bridge over the Tiber we crossed today was built on the first day of the world.”

JANET McHUGH

The Lavender Earring

Ludicrous to wear one
 dangling,
a participle on the verge.

Exposed,
nuzzling private dimples.

Watching eyes
transport erogenous thought
in the ambulance of your ear.

MICHAEL GIZZI

*What a Half-Man in Highland
Dreams Of*

Miracolo the Pinstripe
Admiral Dot, Tubes Maypop
the wealthy Tacoma Spike
Hug Ray, Ozzie Cadenza
and his men made muffins
and milked the clock
Heepers, Duke - two truckloads!

Outside the water grew tauter
and Seldom missed a putt
in the mirror behind the city
slicker the sun inside
a photograph, a group
uncorked the proof but
they were still caboosing
names with whosie
oracular hatrack Marshal Mufti
a littly larceny called the flu
Cloud in pants, is there
a face in music?

JOHN M. RODERICK

Dog Day Afternoon

The sun hid behind overcast clouds most of the morning. It drizzled for a few hours and then stopped, leaving the air hanging heavily like a woolen comforter thrown over the August countryside. The evergreens blended into a colorless gray with the sky.

It was too early in the day to feed the dog and too hot, the child knew, and he wondered why his father was going out with biscuits. Conrad was a giant of a dog, even for a Saint Bernard. His shoulders were slightly taller than his master's waist and when the dog stood alert, his head was as high as the father's chest. He was big enough to ride, and the five year old boy had hung on his back often when he was a toddler.

The boy's mother said that the dog had slowed down lately. He wasn't eating at all for a few days. The father said he wanted to see for himself.

Probably this blasted heat. Made me lose my appetite.

The boy went out to the dog's large fenced-in pen with his father. The dog didn't turn around when the pair approached him from behind. He didn't turn until the man knocked his pipe against the side of the fence post. Then, the dog's head gradually swung around.

Feeling low? the father asked. The dog moved his head around again and let its massive weight rest on its front paws like a tired sphinx. He raised just his deeply furrowed eyebrows to look up at the boy and man.

Is Conrad sick, Dad?

I'm not sure, his father said. He offered the dog the biscuits, but Conrad just looked up and did not move. We'll leave them here. Maybe he'll want them later, the father said. The boy looked back twice on their way back to the house.

Maybe we should take him in, the father said to the boy's mother. Where'd we put that slicker brush, you remember? We can't take him anywhere like that. How'd he get so many mats?

JOHN M. RODERICK

I tried to do him last week, but it takes so long, the mother said. I think a skunk's got to him, too. Wait until you start brushing him.

Yeah, Dad, a skunk must have squirt Conrad in the night. He really smells. The boy pinched his nose for emphasis.

Well, come on. I need a hand then. We'll all work on him, the father said. The boy fetched the great dog from his pen and led him out. The dog followed the boy slowly to a grassy spot under the large maple tree in the backyard.

The father and mother began to groom the dog's shaggy coat. The child picked up the loose hair that they stripped off with scissors and slicker brush. A few stubborn mats had to be sheared off with a razor knife.

This is like brushing a furry Volkswagon beetle, the father said, reaching under the dog's ear for an enormous fur ball. The boy and mother laughed.

Imagine if our car had fur like this too, the boy mused. I'm sure glad it doesn't.

It's this heat. He'll be okay. Maybe he just needs vitamins, the father said as he rolled the huge dog on his side. The dog let out a groan as if the air had been jogged from his lungs.

He can have some of my Flintstones, the boy said. Especially the purple ones. He picked up the loose hair and thick mats and stuffed them into an old shopping bag that was nearly half full.

I don't think he needs those kind, the mother laughed. The boy watched his parents brush and cut for a long time without talking. They lifted the dog's massive elephant-sized ears and his great paws, working out matted fur. Conrad laid on his side, docilely moving into whatever position they pushed him with no resistance. His sides heaved heavily in the oppressive heat. Dander and fluffy fur from his thick undercoat stuck to the sweaty arms of the father. The backs of the boy's hands were also covered, and he looked like a miniature Mr. Hyde in mid-transition from the good Dr. Jekyll.

Remember when you used to run Conrad along side your bike? the boy asked.

JOHN M. RODERICK

Yeah, he could have dragged me all over the countryside if he wanted to. But he just loped right there along side the bike, the father said. I still can't believe how the smallest dogs in the neighborhood use to yap at his heels.

Conrad could have eaten them up if he wanted to, huh, Dad? the boy imagined, proudly.

Yeah, I'm glad he never wanted to.

The sky darkened a bit, and a light drizzle began to fall. I think he misses Max, the mother said after awhile.

I'm sure he does. They lived together for eight years, her husband replied.

I miss Maxie too, the boy said. How come Max had to die, Dad?

He was too old, for a large dog, his father said. He was eight, remember?

The boy said, oh, and wondered if he would die when he was eight.

Okay Fella, come on. Get up. Come on. The father urged the dog to his feet with his words and an extra boost with his hands. Standing, Conrad swayed back and forth, as if unsure of his own weight.

The doctor said his arthritis would probably get worse, the mother said, feeling his hips and hind quarters. His back end looks so weak for such a strong dog.

No, it doesn't Mom. Look how straight he's standing now, the boy said encouragingly. Let's get him into the car, if he even fits any more, the father said. He tucked an old quilt around the back seat of their compact then put a leash over the dog's head and led him to the other side of the car.

He's going to fill up the whole back seat, the mother said.

Then where am I going to sit? the boy asked, worriedly.

His mother looked at her husband and said, I'd rather not go anyway. Would you mind?

You can sit in Mom's seat in the front. No, it's okay, the father said to his wife, not looking up from the dog. We won't be long. The father coaxed the dog into the back seat. Come on, Big Boy. Cooperate. As if answering, the bear of a dog lunged forward. His front paws caught on the quilt and his

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body fell across the seat and slowly slid down between the back and front seats.

Oh no, now don't get stuck on us, the father said, trying in vain to lift the dog's hind quarters and push him into the car. Mom, try pulling on his leash from the other side and calling him while I push. The father then grabbed Conrad in a bear hug hold and tried to lift and push. The mother coaxed; the father flushed; the dog groaned; and the boy laughed. Soon all three were laughing, the father with his arm pinned between the dog and the seat, the mother with the leash wrapped around her waist for leverage, and the boy standing on the front seat.

The dog tolerated their laughter and coaxing and then pushed his weight forward, and the father retrieved his arm. The dog began panting when both doors were shut, and the father told his son to open all the windows to help him breathe.

Conrad sighed twice on the trip. The humidity and the dog's warm panting breath fogged up the car windows. The boy watched the windshield wipers slap at the fine mist that beat against the windshield.

At the animal hospital the father told his son to stay with the dog while he gave their name at the office. Can he walk in, the doctor's receptionist asked.

Oh, sure, the father answered.

Outside, he pulled on the leash and coerced, but the dog was wedged tightly in the back seat. You're going to hurt him, the boy said with fear in his voice.

No, he's too strong, but I think we need help, the father said, going back to the office. When he returned, the boy was holding one end of the leash loosely and the dog stood by his side near the car.

Well, I'll be darned. How did you manage that?

I didn't do anything, Dad. I just picked up the leash after Conrad got out. The dog stood for a few seconds, and then his hind quarters began to sway and to sink to the ground. The father rushed over to him and gripped his back end in two fists of fur and tried to lift, but the huge animal's body slowly

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lowered to the pavement.

Two veterinarian aides, dressed in white, observed the struggle of the dog, the man and the boy. He's not going to make it inside on his own power, one young woman said, looking into the dog's mouth. The flesh of his gums and his tongue had lost their color and glistened white as narrow rays of sun tried to filter through clouds. The aides retrieved a stretcher and lugged the massive dog into the building with the boy and man following behind silently.

The mammoth dog looked out of place lying on his side in the small examining room. His body completely hid the tiny table beneath him. The father placed one hand on the dog's head and one on his chest as he waited for someone to return to the room. The boy traced an imaginary line along the wall with his finger, trying not to look up at the dog on the table.

I hope somebody comes before he goes up there with Maxie, the boy said finally, breaking the silence.

What did you say? the father asked, realizing how unnaturally silent the room had become.

I said I hope somebody comes before Conrad goes up there with Maxie. The boy said, lifting his eyes toward the ceiling when he spoke.

When the dog began a slight involuntary jerk of his head, the father told his son that he could wait for them in the outside room if he wanted to. At first the boy said no and then yes when he too noticed that the dog was beginning to twitch.

When he was alone, the father wondered if he did the right thing sending the boy away. He wanted to scream for the vet to hurry up. Instead, he just gripped the fur on the dog's neck and kept him from jerking off the table. Conrad's legs now convulsed along with his head.

The vet's examination took but a moment. The aides returned and carried the dog out of the small room. The father paid the bill and walked to the car with his son. "Is that the pen Conrad is going to stay in while he's here?" The tone of the boy's voice was edged with uncertainty and pleaded for optimism.

The father looked up at the sky that had lost its sun once again and said, Conrad died, Jon.

JOHN M. RODERICK

The two were quiet on the way home as a fine mist fell on the car's windshield. It seemed to be getting hotter.

When the car pulled into the driveway, the boy asked, Does that make you sad, Dad?

That makes me very sad, the father answered.

The boy watched the water cascade against the car's side window. Me too, he finally said in a small voice that was barely a murmur.

They got out of the car without speaking. The boy opened the door to the back seat to retrieve the quilt but changed his mind when he saw the loose dog hairs matted against it. The pair then walked up to the house in silence to tell the mother what she already knew.

JOHN M. RODERICK

Old Friends

Meeting across so many years,
Once two young school boys,
Inseparable, for a time,
We now filled in the distance
of our ways

I had a son, I said,
Just turned two,
He was divorced again,
He said,
Just lost custody

I spoke of school
And prospects for a job,
He said he was just as glad
To be laid off at the factory
Because he was about
To quit anyway

Then we said goodbye
And knew too much to say
We'd keep in touch

JOHN C. RODERICK

Gifted

I quit the gifted program in the third grade because they all laughed when I said I wanted to be a truck driver. Locked away, special people in a special room, we were polled. Frankie wanted to be a concert pianist, Abigail, an epidemiologist. The room was filled with nine-year-old astronauts and doctors, presidents and their cabinet members, and teachers, hundreds of teachers dancing in circles, throwing rose petals and singing “We Are The World.” Occasionally they would raise a fledgling lawyer or accountant, hold him in the air and wait for beams of light to shoot from the child’s head, this celebration only momentarily interrupted by sporadic bursts of laughter and taunts like: “Hey Mack! Why don’t you go fire up the rig and round us up some eats!” or “Hey Earl, give her a honk for me!” followed by the universal arm bend “honk” motion designed to replicate the pulling down of a cord to an air horn on an eighteen wheeler. At this, a teacher would always chuckle, not wanting to take his eyes off the young mathematician he held in his hands for fear of missing the beams of light, should they appear.

JOHN C. RODERICK

Angel: A Dishwasher

I would walk in and out of his life for seconds at a time, tiptoeing through his steamy world of broken glass and grease, trying to keep the shine on my shoes. Presentation is everything, after all. Because the mayor was waiting for his pepper-crusting yellowfin tuna and the C.E.O. of Smith Barney was bugging me for an extra cherry in his C.C. Manhattan, I never noticed him standing behind me. Sweating, waiting to unload the pile of pans which had been taken from the fire and placed into his callused hands, he was silent. Stinging, salty droplets carved tiny canyons down a face that was aged, not lived in. Angel never said a thing. His amigos would yell, "Mucho Caliente, Poppy! Behind You!" Not a word. He was older though; old enough to be shown some respect for his toil, old enough for me to have gotten out of his way.

In the dining room, a young couple ordered another bottle of wine.

JOHN C. RODERICK

Kissing Potion

They all used to wear it. Three coats thick like the first time you ever used spray paint, applied in thirty-five minute intervals during trips to the girls' bathroom. Their lips shined like Buicks in the sun, puckered raisins of potential. And the smell! Stumbling over fathers' loafers in birthday party closets. Seventh grade dances, bubble gum turned golden oil sliding over sloppy lips in an awkward waltz. It came in tiny glass bottles with a roll-on applicator, like deodorant only fruity, adorned with pink cherries, sweeter than those found at the bottoms of Shirley Temples.

The magic juice of seduction... Wondering if she'd turn away as you reached up for a taste.

AIMEE DALTON

Ecstasy For Sale

crouched
in a blown glass sphere
like my dad's 5th grade science project
the *storm ball*
energy confined under its shell
eyes peering through
dissolved silica
searching the room
for a touch

lapsing
in and out
chalked swallows begging
for your altered current to electrify my nerves
a frenzy of fibrous bolts
metallic purple infused with blue
blocked by a layer of glass

it's the Fourth of July fireworks
seen on TV

i feel nothing

JANE LUNIN PEREL

Broken Drums

*for my mother, Marion Rosenblatt Lunin,
1910-1975, and an unidentified African
American male murdered by whites in the
early 1900's in Kentucky*

Still alive, dead
your rules abide.
I clean my plate,
close the cupboard
each time I take

something out or
put it back. I
make the beds each
morning before I
leave for work like you

and cook the meals
when I return
and never stop
until my back
gives out and always

give all I have
to all I know.
I want to tell
you how through all
the years, all twenty

JANE LUNIN PEREL

I have been silent
about the terror
at the end when
you told me beasts
with tongues of fire

would devour you in
death. I said no
the Buddhists say that
what you picture
comes for you like

your mother and
father taking
you away to
restaurants of
light, endless meals

with french service,
maids in white gloves.
You did not hear
me, I'm afraid
because the drugs

of every type
spiked through you, spi-
ralling dementia.
Later, you sat strapped
in a wheelchair rub-

JANE LUNIN PEREL

being toothpaste in your
cheeks somehow knowing
you had to keep
up your hygiene.
How could medicine

strip you that way
and say it did what
it could, you a
shrinking guinea pig
hallucinating

your own burning
as you tried to com-
plete your morning
absolutions, me
washing you quiet.

All this was frozen
inside me until
I saw the docu-
mentary about
African Amer-

icans cattle-
carred out of Kentuck-
y in the early
1900's where
tied to the train tracks

JANE LUNIN PEREL

was a man tarred and
feathered, splayed, eyes wide.
Your beasts ignited
him, white men standing
over him exub-

erant. A shriek came
up from the strong box
deep down me. I shrieked
for him, for you
and do not know how

to stay in this bru-
tal world where some
sadists or scien-
tists always take charge.

Look what happens.
Agony, dear, that
your strong heart did not
want to give up, though
all other systems

failed you. That man did
not want to give up
either, his eyes
widening in his
torture staring

JANE LUNIN PEREL

into the eyes of
the beasts who slaughtered
him. I feel my strength
turn to water, my
lungs bang out like bro-

ken drums from screaming.
Love can not save us
in any way I know
unless you are healed
now and the man whose

dying was sport is
lifted up to a
place I do not know.
I know I do
not know. I do not.

MARTIN EARL

Saint Sebastian

Mantegna has him tied
to a column,
twelve arrows strategically
peirce his statuesque figure.
Gibbon, writing in his dressing gown
in Geneva, citing him in Volume I,
can speak only euphemistically, history
turning secular by omission . . .
In El Greco's version
his body seems to instruct his soul
on how to leave without snagging
its gossamer shirt on one of the shafts,
or barbed points jutting dangerously
from the Saint's trunk, which is
still imposing, even though the painting
itself is cut in half, Sebastian having been
severed mid-thigh to resolve
some duke's storage problem.
In a small city
at the edge of Europe,
where Candide rediscovers
Lady Cunegonde unraped and whole,
Sebastian's arrows have been removed
by students, who have draped him
in a blood-stained reading:
"Stop the suffering. "

MARTIN EARL

Rostock

The refugees are adamant tonight
about being refugees.
They huddle in asylums,
historical, hugging their knees.
While all around them in the night
fourteen-year-olds hurl fire bombs,
because it's fun, and they
are very bored, or dumb;
or in the gravest cases both.
Someone's told them the refugees
must go. Obviously
they've walked out of the bible,
these refugees,
with their Jesus-eyed passivity
and desparate clothes. I'm sure they'd be
the first to oblige, if they had
another place to be. Someplace
like Dachau, or Treblinka.

JEAN HOPKINSON

Back Home

I.

*It may sound strange, as if our minds are deranged
Don't ask us why, beneath the sheltering sky
We have this strange obsession,
You have the means in your possession,
Sting sings to me, Tea in the Sahara with you,
and I am ready to go
to a land of potential sandcastles,
where we will find Valentino in a camel clutch
for kissing the palm of the Iron Sheik's girlfriend.
But where will we get the water for our tea party?
Why must I be a man in a suitcase? I can't answer him.*

II.

My reelection and I have not been getting along lately.
I think of the first time it seemed I'd swallowed razors—
even the emperor's new clothes didn't fit.
I lifted my arms up to the sky
and asked it not to fall on me,
just like Michael Stipe told me to. So far, so good.

III.

I think of all the pictures I am in the background of,
on the albums of strangers. They don't know me.
They don't know about the angel on my shoulder

J E A N H O P K I N S O N

and about Mnemosyne on the other
who whispered to me:
Of my big brother taking me sledding—
stomach in throat, snow in face,
unable to breathe, but never so alive.
Of my little brother falling asleep in his mashed potatoes.
Of the Christmas I began to list the names
of everyone everyone everyone
I needed to give gifts to,
No longer what I wanted from others.

IV.

Nibble nibble like a mouse,
Who has come to shrink my house
while I was away at college
on route 95, where I noticed the
NO HITCHHIKING sign,
and wondered.
My dad brought me a tool kit.
And who's that trip trapping across my bridge,
while I lie here growing old with my cat in her ninth life?
I hope it's you.

JEAN HOPKINSON

Isaac's Suicide Note

There is no mercy where I lie now.
Haunted by dreams of
the gnarled hand that held a knife
over my head that thrashed then
and now, on my bed
which night after night becomes
the altar I prepared for the sacrifice,
that day when the light caught the blade of the knife.

And when I wake up howling, he enters the room
with his *Fear not* and his *Here I am* to silence my cries,
his favored son.

The gnarled hand that bound my wrists
and held the knife which caught the light
comes down to stroke my dampened hair.
And I tremble when he leads us in prayer,
as he did when I carried the wood for him
the day I trusted him, the day I stopped trusting him
and the faceless voice he conspired with.

They take his word over mine, every time,
believe only him, and call me dishonorable.
They tell me I am crazy, when I tell them about the ram
whose heart probably pulsed its way up to his throat too
when he saw the knife which caught the light,
and finished his life.

If I lie, then why do I lie
drowning in sweat,
screaming in my sleep—
And who will hear me?

JEAN HOPKINSON

Enkidu will share my story
but will need never to face his killer,
or pray with him each day and night
to the God of my insomnia,
the Lord of my unshakeable fear.

Oh merciful death, release me from this fitful sleep,
and take me to a house where my father does not dwell.

ANNE WALSH

Child of Eve

(in response to Lucille Clifton's "adam thinking")

I am of you, born of the bone
that bridges my legs
bleeding the stain of sin
I am the tunnel you hunger
the womb and warmth of mother
I am the victim of pain
your daughter.

I am the home of flesh
blood rich and plasma thick
thrusting the head of man out of me
the bearer, the birther
the child of Eve
I am blessed by God
so call me sinner.

MICHAEL D. RILEY

*Stone: Near The Rosses,
Donegal, Ireland*

Our bootheels crunch among the shavings.
My hand spreads across three sediment lines,
eons in inches, then slides down
to find all ages feel the same.

Greywhite monolith to mountain,
gravel to scrap, elbows and knees,
fallen heads of stone, stiff partner
of the sky and wind as far as we can see.

Defenseless, we touch our warm sack of skin.
Blood leaps merrily through our hearts
to explore our small frontiers once more.
Galactic shining synapses trip off

mundane thoughts of time skimming
our warm grains, each a strata of flesh.
We cool already in this morgue,
each memory stiffly catalogued

up the spine, hewn in the bone
grinning widely in this windy sunshine.

JOEL PACE

Tenemos Sed

Authorities say Time measures itself out dully, book by book.
I've read of it in libraries, near bursting with theories
spinning theoreticians,
shelves bowed under the weight of human ego.

Who knows of the will on which a strand of proteins pulled itself into life?
Or the desire welling the eye of the amphibian
when it first saw the red soil of earth-ferny hills
and primeval trees, like ladders into the clouds?
What force took that creature out of the sea and to the earth,
vaulted life into the sky and then above the fragile envelope of the planet herself?

Was it the same sheer vision
Through which Jesus strode out of the World?

Was it for this – so we could dream silk and muslin
Only to act grime and blood?

Dreams are those knuckles
which are bloody from rapping on the oaken doors of Heaven.

Our bodies will stay,
rot in the same soil
our ancestors farmed,
our evolutionary precursors crawled over,
our amino acids stained when the earth first cooled!

JOEL PACE

But our souls-
little rills that meander to the ocean
only to find hot sand, shells
and sunbleached skeletons.

We are thirsty! My God are we thirsty!

SHANNON CONBOY

Performance Art

Stinking props soaked in gasoline. All the wardrobe ripped into rags. Slick with oil. The actor turned arsonist exaggerates his cough. He's written and directed his own one act play. Being bad, it never ends. Even his friends sneak out the side door whispering, "that's crap."

He's the master manipulator! Fire in a crowded theater! It's the main dramatic action. Can't even call 911. That's censorship. Unfashionable. Big court battle. Everyone's in contempt! Of course the understudy bails him out. "I have some thoughts." They're still brainstorming when the final curtain falls, smothering the flames.

SHANNON CONBOY

Over-Tipping

A taxi driver moonlighting as a clown. I placed my suitcase in the seat beside his orange wig. Big clown shoes were strangling the gas.

He did parties. Kegs and clowns were a specialty until his stilts got stuck on the beer stained floor. "Almost cracked my skull!" (It was an occupational hazard.)

Gunning all the yellows and speaking in statistics, "Cabbies are the most likely to be killed on the job." He was boasting about his dangerous life. Scared stiff in the backseat, I thought about Gacy. How he dressed like a clown, cuffing and killing people.

And how they participated at first.

GARY DUEHR

Poetica

After writing poems all day,
A man walks out of his house to wander.
A lost bus driver pulls over and hands him a note
With unreadable directions.

Or, a vacant pay phone rings—and, when answered, softly says
His name once, questioningly.
In the growing dark, every house- and car-window
Gives him back the look on his face.

GARY DUEHR

Why Nothing May Be Told

A squall breaks forth from damaged human
Faces-which, though burnt around
The edges, slightly squashed, can still remember

How a field of ruined corn in
October became long yellow stubble beaten
Into mud. In the distance, patches of smoke, little
Pennants of flame, the whole landscape eating away

At weeds in a ditch. What could possibly be salvaged
From these ragged marks
At the bottom of the world? It was the moment's horror
That emptied each face into a fleshy

Thumbprint. On the horizon, a pale streak of houses
Holding onto pure existence at all cost.

ANTHONY LACAVARO

Love is in Our Blood

A last bottle of green Irish whiskey,
A centerpiece, creates
Gradually between us its own sky
Whose thin vapors from the neck fill
The air. It generates
Until we talk to an inevitable standstill.

One history mixes with another like two
Discarded shirts on
The bedroom floor and at this point who
Discarded theirs first no longer matters.
The room's a yawn
Where we're forced to cling to the rafters.

How smooth the cup clings to the lip
Of the bottle, slides
On to yours. Even as I step
Closer, to understand how you see
What I said, your eyes
Already are wild and clicking like bees.

FRANK STEWART

A Guide to Musical Styles II

The tragic feeling of the crucifixus is dispelled
by the jubilant chorus, the declaration,
and then the credo's swelling *resurrexit*, Lamb of God
have mercy on us. You remember

sudden rain was falling
with an animal's dark zeal, flowering oaks afflicted
but exultant, then the crashing of the downpour,
the little shed's metal roof, the small animals' cries inside.

Rivulets turned to flood, and every leaf and blade
was battered into motion.
Over the bass, upper voices in rapid figures rose.
You were racing toward the paddock to secure the gate,

stunned how violently darkness had replaced
transparent light in which you'd almost felt
conviction the adult heart can bear this mercy,
can bear the sight of horses slowly parting

clumps of pasture with their hooves all day,
sounding the low white stones whose kingdom
shall never have an end, and the glory of the dusk.
The wild turkeys with their crashing wings

FRANK STEWART

clamored toward the bordering trees,
where great limbs snapped and roared,
where the wind inhaled the lightning's flare,
a muttering, then the deeper register

with its implication of dejection, turned
by the hills to grief, rebounded,
then left a torpid growling.
You can never recover from such bounty,

wish only that you'd felt more terror
in every cell, the first scourging of more passion.
But already the rain's lightened into steady
aimless vigor, and your lamps restore the room.

JAMES THOMAS STEVENS

Sustaining this Massive Shade

Of all that is left to occur
when nothing moves
but beneath my skull
 a dog stretching tremulous forelegs.

Cicadas drone in every tendon
while the wind offers nothing
 to keep insects from the skin.

And still he returns
like a new leaf reviving.

In sum, what nightfall has in store.

I keep four calendars, he said.

Beneath one moon

I am jealous.

Of all that touches him,
the rain that doesn't fall
 and the woman that lies next to him.

In this age of hands,
where are mine.

I am intact and I don't care.

JAMES THOMAS STEVENS

My hands in the garden.
Corn bleached
 and malformed by drought
beneath the sick of blue.

*I have the white-blue eyes of my ancestors he said
their narrow skull and their clumsiness in fighting.*

Fighting to keep my hand from his belly
 where sleeps a double sex.
Struggling not to touch
 the small bones held in by sandals,
I take note of his every step.

Given confidence
and confiding in the agave.
 The cactus mourns the memory of feeling
and mysterious delicacies seduce me.

That this night would give up
 one breath
to stir the downy hairs on his golden legs.
The skin that aches
 for want of feather.

How I move between rooms,
 the cattle of longing
and think only of that curve
 at the base of the skull.

JAMES THOMAS STEVENS

The cowlick clipped
to a choirboy's mean halo.

I am happy he said.

I am jealous.

Of the planets
that seduce him with greater success
and the moon that lights his pale arm
when he rises in the night.

*Walk through the night, gently moving that thigh, that second thigh,
and that left leg.*

LAURA L. VIVENZIO

Zenith Boy

Setting: Rose Hill County Hospital, 1901.

Everyone at Rose Hill that morning was certain of one thing: Jed Sebranek (in bed Number Eight) was going to be something else. No qualms about it; he already showed signs of a trailblazer, a go-getter, a mover of mountains. A certain glow about him. The passers-by, the nurses, even the doctors took one look at Sebranek and could do nothing but gaze with dreamy adoration. His parents found this especially thrilling, as Sebranek was only three hours old.

Perhaps something occurred in the cosmos that year, some tiny chemical reaction discreetly taking place behind a few bright stars, or perhaps on the darkside of an uncharted planet. An event as multiplex as a supernova, or as simple as the silken dusts mingling over the most insignificant star in the universe. Who knew for sure? Nonetheless, the winter of 1901 brought a boy into the world with all the makings of a prime minister or a shoe salesman or a pharaoh or a fashion model; it didn't really matter, for Sebranek was born a triumph.

Even in babyhood, golden locks of hair bobbed about his face regally. He grew with the air of a Norse god—a high forehead and bright blue eyes. He climbed out of his crib faster than other toddlers. He ran before other kids his age crawled, he talked a blue streak by two.

He was the leader of his grammar school gangs, won the kickball games at recess, earned every scout badge. At Rose Hill High, Jed broke records in basketball, baseball and track.

He was gallant and dreamy and broad-shouldered. He ran the most yards the Fighting Roosters football squad had ever recorded, scored with the cheerleaders everybody wanted, and led his class at the Graduation March.

It appeared, at age seventeen, that Jed Sebranek was at a crossroads. Many of his peers went on to college, but college did not seem fitting for such an exalted mystery of nature as himself. College was for the humble-bodied, the bookish, the weak in spirit. He yearned for a lifestyle where fame paid homage to the bold, where honor glorified the valiant. Knighthood, perhaps? The Air Force seemed noble enough for Jed.

Setting: American Air Force control or briefing room in a bungalow someplace, 1919.

The briefing room door swung open, and Sebranek swaggered in with three others at his heels. His face was rugged and rosy and sculpted, his eyes brighter than ever. It had been an unforgettable flight day, and Jed planned on letting everyone in the squadron hear about it. The crew of the *Ramblin' Rose* had flown three succeeding missions over the front lines, carried out their tasks, and returned to base without accident or injury.

Since his glory days at Rose Hill High, Jed had gone nowhere but up. It seemed the wunderkind of Rose Hill hadn't had an uncomfortable day since squirming out from between his mother's legs. At nineteen, he had already earned his wings and enough recognition and popularity to charm the frown off the most stalwart colonel in the Force.

"So, how'd you jokers do today?" asked Calvin, pencil in hand to tally the *Ramblin' Rose's* estimated casualties.

"They were batty up there," Fawley exclaimed, "If Sebranek hadn't shot true, we probably would never have made it back."

Sebranek bubbled with pride. He had never felt better being around these men and this war. He was their hero, and he knew it. Each morning, he longed for the rush of taking off, surveying the target, ordering the bombs to fall, and watching the cloud of devastation envelop the dawn skies.

That was everything there was to it for Jed. Nothing hateful or really wrong about it. He especially loved the feeling of having the hardest and most perilous job in his squadron, the bombardier. It carried the most respect, as the bombardier wreaked the most aerial havoc.

The airmen ambled back to the hangar, readying for their next mission, but still gawking.

"Jed, after you gave the go-ahead to plop the C-239, I knew we'd licked that whole town. I could smell it; chock full of commie hogs."

L A U R A L . V I V E N Z I O

The others laughed in agreement with Fawley. Sebranek was feeling pretty good about things. He was saving the world from communism, dropping bombs, and being loved for it. Grinning to himself, he pulled a helmet over a glossy high forehead and ordered a departure for the Far Fronts in his loudest and deepest voice.

Setting: 7,000 ft., Outer Far Fronts, 1919.

Clouds skimmed over the wings of the *Rose* and her squadron like sinewy grey gloves. Jasper and Fawley kept insisting they radio the base for a landing clearance. Jed sensed their nerves. He pretended not to notice.

“We’re just sucking gas up here, Jed. I say we drop any old place and fly.”

Sebranek would not hear of it. He checked the gauges and lowered the sputtering planes in for a closer look at their target area. Nothing but everywhere white. “Intersection of 37 degrees and 23.3 degrees west latitude.” That was the only description of the target that the flight order conveyed. No words, no surroundings description, no history; only coordinates. The clouds weaved in behind them like braids. No turning back. But he had to admit the weather was strange.

They trawled back and forth between five and six hundred feet. The cloud blanket was beginning to worry even Jed. After two more circles, he finally decided to just drop and return to base. He shouted the signal, and heard the metal doors sigh open. It was done.

It was low, but it didn’t really matter. Even if they had completely missed their target, they would still be applauded for navigating through the fog so bravely. Maybe even a few silver stars. Jed, usually content with this prospect, now felt a strange bolt of nausea.

They were nearly ready to pull up and get out of there, when all at once a knot of cloud in front of them suddenly wisped away into nothing. For an instant Jed was able to see the surroundings very clearly. He looked at the drop area. A tiny tingle of dread began trickling down from his ears, snowballing with momentum until it crashed into numbed toes.

LAURA L. VIVENZIO

What was this feeling? Jed thought wildly. He looked more closely at the place where they had dropped. So clear, he remarked to himself. The plane felt suspended, held in place by hidden cables. His brow furrowed as he stared, blue eyes now white and wide with a little horror but mostly intrigue. Leaping flames and trees burning and houses caving in and holes in the ground everywhere. Babies screeched as bits of C-239 sliced their flesh into ribbons. Deer and fox and snake and sparrow all silenced; pulverized all over the atmosphere in one half second. His now paled eyes locked with those of a wailing woman. He watched the light of life drain from them as missile shards knotted themselves in her stomach. Grasses and trees sighed as they fountained into the blackened skies.

And then the scene was gone, suffocated by a white puffy cloud.

Sebranek wiped the sweat off his neck. He realized his pounding head was not malady, but really the walls of his brain straining to encase all the new information it now housed. He pondered the scene over and over.

“...so I said to the fucker, ‘leave me alone, for chrissake!’” Fawley and Jasper slouching and snorting like the whole thing had never happened. Sebranek was about to demand an explanation from them when it occurred to him that they had not seen a thing. Beads of sweat began emerging from within the folds of a now-pasty Nordic forehead.

Jed had never been nervous since 1901, at Rose Hill Hospital when he felt hungry and could not find a breast. This was new and crushed him like a wave.

The *Ramblin' Rose* and her dutiful crew landed near noon. Everyone departed the hangar in different directions. A strangeness had befallen, as if they were lost; Jed was neither yelling nor leading nor grinning.

L A U R A L . V I V E N Z I O

Setting: Barracks, 1919.

Three days and three nights had passed. A sagging haze hung low over the base, and no doubt the world over. Jed Sebranek had crumpled. He lay in a corner of the bunk, a once brooding aura now a shallow shell of lost grandeur. The entire Force moped. They had ceased all visitation, as Jed could no longer take their compliments and praise without becoming ill in the tin pail at his arm.

With every blink he caught a glimpse of the fallen woman with the blood-shot eyes, heard the deafening silence as rodents and insects choked on shrapnel, trees and plants violently uprooted into the clouds. There was no way to make it go away. He woke with guilty fevers, thinking his bed was afire. No Jed, he would calm himself, it was *their* beds aflame. It never worked. Telling his comrades of the visions was unthinkable, but he felt they needed to know. He summoned Fawley and Jasper and the crew to his bed side and spoke.

When he finished, Jed got a strange feeling from the airmen. His peers. A demon among them. There were darting eyes and whispers and stares and slight shaking of heads and even a snicker.

“Jed, you’ve taken ill. We haven’t done anything wrong.” Fawley and some others were getting excited in their defense. Almost squealing now. Three men slunk out of the barracks door saying nothing.

“Commie sympathizing fucker,” spat Jasper softly and turned.

Sebranek lay feeling very confused but mostly helpless. He had seen faces from the plane. They did not believe a word of it. They believed what they were doing in the air was heroic and so once had he. The visions were nothing to them. The burning trees and houses and children and animals and crops and lives were nothing but Missions. He could not smile at them.

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Setting: Earth, 19–.

Zenith Boy dies from his own unnatural causes seven days later. His comrades never believed his visions or the fallen woman's eyes or the world aflame or much else. His parents and family still are bewildered. They cannot understand why such a beautiful young man with such soft blue eyes and a high forehead would do something so rotten to all of them.

DAVID TODD

Mornings Imprisoned: A Dream

All mornings imprisoned
the people were put at their ease
alarms systems no longer needed
falling back they slept long
unhaunted, unstalked.

Hours sauntered up
to warmer, friendlier spheres
breakfast no longer:
bendslow, ceremonial, self serving
time serving time...

But now I hear tiptoeing
stocking foot tocking
snuck out at midnight
an escaped morning stalking

DAVID TODD

A Day At The Clinic

observations:
underclass—
 poverty(extreme)
 shabby dress, homeless (drifter)
variously, questionably, employed—
 dog catcher, jockey (kisses animals)
refuses medical attention—
 eats thermometer
inappropriate behavior—
 insubordinate, escapist
 puts feet on desk
mood shifts—
 sudden, giddy, manic
 triggered by harp music
compulsive movements—
 puts thigh into stranger's hand
refuses to participate in normal discourse
evaluation:
suggest. elaborate dream world—
 desire to transcend
standards of conduct
need to embarrass important people
with absurd gestures—
 hits own thumb with hammer
alias "Rusty," "Binky"—
 all invention
transgressions:
harasses—
 the vain
indecent exposure of—

DAVID TODD

the ridiculous
switches great god Pan
with great bed pan
embraces horse rides off on
 large important woman
incurable.

SHEILA FLANAGAN

Resolutions

On a New Year's morning,
Cold and quiet and secretly,
My emotions untied themselves,
Undressed themselves, and,
Unfettered, climbed into bed,
And went to sleep.
I sat up, trying to love you,
Or hate me,
Or find something sad
To make me cry.
Nothing touched me,
Deep or shallow,
And hoping I had at least
Not lost my ability to laugh,
I remembered last night's party,
And eleven fifty-five,
When I announced that my resolution
Was to be unemotional,
Detached, calm and logical
As far as was possible.
Not careful of what I wished for,
I stopped loving you last year.

STANLEY GEMMELL

Dead Poem

Buried in a luxurious rain
I only came to see you again.
The grave is lonely
The nearby road, busy.
No one stops to talk to you anymore
Words are too valuable these days.
I will set my books down near your stone
And watch the moss grow.

I remember you used to frown
If I mentioned the way you
Smiled in your sleep.
“That’s so private.”

You would say chagrined.
Money in hand, you would
Greet the cashier: if it
Was a man he would stare.

I remember you used to spit
Like a man. The thing about
You that turned me on the most
Was the way you would say, “Me.”

STANLEY GEMMELL

Intercom to your heart

I need a line patched through,
I need to be soft spoken into your belly.

I need for your breathing,
I need for your lying there
beautiful, uncut diamond.

I need your face before leaving.
I need the eyes you carry light like jungle
pollen and as dark, as changing as the sky

at night when everything—the wind, the stars—
climbs onto the chance of speaking truth like
the apple curves of your body.

I need your small mouth chewing.
I need the smile, I need your tongue
touching teeth like rain onto a tombstone.

I need a string attached to your soul
to hold tight to during the storms.

RICHARD DOKEY

The Rooster and Her Husband

The people in the room across from mine were Americans too, and when I came out into the hall to go down for breakfast that morning, there they were, standing by the door, trying to smile but unsure. I didn't care for them to know I was from California, so I frowned a bit and stared straight into the man's eyes. He was young but almost totally bald, and his wife had eyes like a rooster, wide, flat and unblinking. My hair was dark and I was sunbrown. With my moustache, I could pass for a native. I was alone in Spain and didn't want anything to do with Americans.

She gave him a little push. They turned and walked ahead of me, his steps no longer than hers. Because they were the same height, with the way they were dressed, from the rear I could hardly see the difference. They wore matching khaki pants and flowered cotton shirts. She touched him again to move down the stairs. She looked back to see if I was watching. Rooster eyes, wide and stern and opaquely black.

When I came into the dining room, they were huddled together at a table near the far wall. I sat behind them.

The waiter arrived, and I was happy to use my Spanish. It made me more than just another tourist and encouraged the thought that there were a place where lift might still go on, indifferent and free.

The Americans had trouble ordering. There was much gesturing. The waiter tapped the menu and nodded. The rooster produced a small dictionary. I heard "huevos" and "tostada" and "hachis moreno." The waiter said, "No puede ser," and left the room, to return with the desk man, whom I recognized. He spoke broken English. The husband tried to laugh, but the woman was flustered and angry. She turned and saw me. Her ears got red.

I opened the paper, ate my breakfast and ignored them.

The hotel was located next to the Atocha Station, only a few blocks from the Prado, which I very much wanted to see. It was a beautiful day. The shops were going. People filled the street. In Spain everything happens on the street. Vendors were setting out pastries, tiny, break-rolled bundles of meat that reminded me of cigars. Already the chairs along the curb were

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filling. Waiters came and went from the cafes, white towels over their arms, trays of cerveza or coal dark coffee balanced upon an open palm.

The air was already warm. Across the way the station was busy. The trains came down from Paris or left for Barcelona, where Picasso was young. It didn't matter, really. I was alone, with a single bag, and nobody I knew. It was exactly what I wanted.

The rooster and her husband came out of the hotel. They stood, blinking against the sky, which, even at this time of day, is a hot, translucent blue. The rooster took out a small, red guide book and pointed up the street, away from the station. The husband nodded.

They set off. Since it was the direction I intended to go, I lit a cigarette and fell in behind them.

The rooster took long, firm strides, locking her leg at the knee. Her pants filled at the hip, emptied straight down above her thighs in a rolling, machine-like motion. Her shoes slapped the pavement. I thought of a farmyard and the martial strut of a barred ginger cock. The husband fluttered to keep up, stooped a bit, his steps little balloon affairs. He minced and bounced on the tips of his toes.

The street was wide. There were no tall buildings. The day was growing hot. The earth yielded a muted evanescence of color, pressed flat beneath the lid of an immense, blue jar. Over the generations the people who lived here had been baked and stunted by the heat. They wore no hats. They came out of the buildings in the afternoon. They sat with no covering for the *corrida*. They ate food as hot as flame, wine that was never chilled. I too was dark, from an ancestry farther on, past Africa, in a land where there are no trees. I was comfortable here.

The rooster and her husband hurried along beneath the edge of walls, raised their hands against the light at intersections, huddled into the shadows before shop windows, staring at things they did not intend to buy, watched indolently by brown faces behind dusty counters.

I wondered about them. They were not so young as they had seemed, softened by the gloom of a hallway or the muted, mahogany veneer of a break-

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fast room. The skin upon his head was parchment. Her tinted hair was brittle from the blow dryer. They clung to each other, familiar, but confused.

Watching their fluttering struggle against the Spanish sun, I grew resentful. Thousands of miles from home, I had come upon this playing out of love's stupidity. Among millions of people I did not know, in a culture not my own, I had found the smell of hamburgers grilling over a backyard fence, the noise of a television bumping from a neighbor's wall.

I decided to duck through a doorway and paw over leather sandals and belts until they vanished into the stew of Madrid, but they turned suddenly to cross the street, beyond which I saw the shrub-covered, stone walls of the Prado.

It did not occur to me that this might be where they were going. There were tall trees about the museum and high backed benches. While they rested, exuding dampness and studying the little red book, in the rooms of Goya and Velasquez I would flush out the memory of my own life.

They disappeared behind the high, double doors.

In the rising light the sky was the color of crushed granite. The wind, which at first had stirred papers along the street, now held, limply, the tops of the trees, where leaves twisted and shone, like tiny, oiled rags. An ice cream vendor, his white, rubber-wheeled cart poised beneath an orange umbrella, raised an arm and called, "Helado. Helado." I walked over and put my hands upon the metal cabinet.

Using my Spanish, I rummaged through the cones and ices and found something vanilla, with a firm, strawberry center. I stood, nervously tapping my teeth along the edge of the ice cream. The door to the museum was massive and quite old. Grotesque figures were cut into it. I thought that if I stared hard enough, the rooster and her husband would emerge, scratching at the little red book, for something closer to their intelligence. I knew the museum was large, but no matter how much of a lead I gave them, even if they were far back, deep in the bowels, amid armor and weaponry, their presence would be felt: American tourists, wounded by love, who had taken a room opposite my own.

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I sucked the ice cream. The vendor lit a cigarette and turned away. I had all the time in the world, having left Paris, where every avenue was filled with desire. Convinced at last, that I must go on, I imagined the land of my ancestors, at the edge of the sea, where ancient men wandered alone across a barren desert.

I was calm, settled within myself, amused by studying the people who strolled beneath the trees. I was struck by the similarity of the men, who were all a good head shorter than I, held down by the harsh, Mediterranean sun. The women were the same height. There was an illusion of matched sets. The children bounced beside them, dark puppets on invisible strings. I was studied in return. My tallness made my own bronze skin and black hair a curiosity. I was a freak, perhaps, that had come in from the hills. Even my Spanish could not remove the petulant expression that told me I too was a stranger.

I was invigorated by the feeling of not belonging, convinced, finally, that it did not matter where in the Prado the rooster and her husband might be, that I was as far beyond that now as Madrid is from San Francisco. What did it matter that, a continent away, my own suffering occupied rooms where all the furniture had been removed. Here, at last, I was free.

I had finished the ice cream and was thinking about lighting a cigarette, when I noticed that I was being watched: a tall, carefully dressed woman, her black, shoulder-length hair fastened by a large red comb, her mouth, slightly open, high, carved cheeks, like an Indian, brows the shape of artist's brushes, eyes, wide, frank and yet soft. She stood just under the shade by the door staring at me.

I understood immediately.

I felt a harsh excitement. She did not move. Her white blouse was open at the throat. She had enormous breasts. A red sash was fastened about her waist, which seemed slender enough to put my hands around. Her black, thinly woven pants, tailored to her hips, just touched the tops of her black, chunk-heeled pumps. She was very beautiful, the way a woman is beautiful in a carefully posed magazine advertisement. I did not move, which she took for a sign and vanished into the museum.

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Inside, I was confronted by the vaulted stillness all such places possess. There was the sense of dust upon ledges that cannot be reached, of corners where the light is always grey, of an entrance to those great, bare rooms where the exertions of minds far more sensitive than my own hang row upon row in glorious compensation for pain. I have walked through many of them, in San Francisco, Chicago, New York, London, Brussels, Vienna, Paris and now Madrid. They are all the same. Without solution. Only a release, marvels of the lengths to which the heart will go so that it might not perish from the truth. Places of courage and hope, but, finally, of despair. I am glad when I leave them. Standing beneath the sky, lighting a cigarette, looking back at a huge stone edifice, where so much human treasure is gathered, I am reminded of a mausoleum or a crypt, and I long for solitude and a journey without end.

As I walked through the rooms, stunned by the enormous paintings of Goya, Velasquez, Titian, which seem to hold color the way bottles hold wine, I became momentarily forgetful. The rooster and her husband did not exist. The dark woman was an exotic, drunken dream. My decision to move on was irrevocable. There are no museums in the desert.

And then, standing before an immense portrait by Goya, which rested alone in a high niche of one of the smaller, interior rooms, I was aware that I was again being watched. I saw her, through a narrow doorway that led to an adjoining room, her legs apart, so that the black, woven pants were tighter still.

She stared at me, so richly colored that she appeared to have stepped down from the walls. I knew I could walk straight to her and she would not move. She did not smile. She did not have to smile.

I took a step, my head spinning. I grabbed the wrist of one hand and squeezed until the pain made me shut my eyes. I wanted to be neuter, to be alive, but devoid of polarity, attracted to no one, a painting, famously recognizable, but without life. The recollection of surrender seared my brain. I had come all this long distance, and it was not far enough. But when I opened my eyes, she was gone.

I cowered beneath the painting, staring into the dried pigment, afraid

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to turn around, longing for stark horizons and a bedouin life.

I do not know how long I stayed that way. I sidled from the room, finally, my face to the wall. I entered another room. The paintings blurred together. I crept toward the exit.

Then an event took place which reminded me of a scene in one of those carefully directed foreign films I had seen at the university when I was young.

I had made my way carefully into a doorway that led to a series of rooms. I turned a bit to chart my course to the outside, and there was the dark woman. She did not see me. She was looking at the husband, who stood, open mouthed, at the far side of the vacant room. The rooster was frozen another room away, able to see, through the odd arrangement of multiple doors, exactly what the husband was about.

The husband concealed nothing. The dark woman opened her mouth. The husband was helpless. There were other people. They arrived, as in a theater, took their places before the great canvases, eager to be entertained, oblivious to the fact that, within this spectacle of art, which was as unreal as billboards along a street, a drama was being played that was older than the world.

I watched.

The woman drew him. The husband came forward, one step, then another. The rooster, unobserved, stood in the doorway, a room away, horrified. She pushed her fingers into her mouth and began to tremble. The woman smiled. The husband, his hands flapping oddly, moved again. I was in turns relieved, strengthened, amused, angry, then faintly sick.

The rooster was trapped. She looked about desperately, unsure of what to do. She stamped the floor and threw up her hands. Her head shook violently. Then, clutching her purse and the little red book, she burst into the room, clattered across the floor past her husband and out through the far doorway. The husband, shocked, stood a moment staring after her and then, in a flurry that made his flowered shirt spin and whirl, ran after her.

The dark woman turned. Like a portrait, she regarded me in a two-

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dimensional way that let me know I was not there. My face aside, I hurried from the room.

Outside, struck by light, I saw the rooster stumble from under the trees. Sobbing, she ran across the street, oblivious to traffic, and disappeared into the crowd. The husband, his arms flailing, was right behind her.

In the shade the ice cream vendor was reading a newspaper. I walked over and put my hands upon the metal cabinet.

That evening, in the lounge downstairs, I found the husband alone at the bar. I went to a cocktail table in a far corner and saw down. Halfway through my cerveza, the husband recognized me.

“You’re American, aren’t you?” he said, standing before me.

I shrugged.

“Do you mind if I sit?”

I moved the beer, and he occupied the other chair.

“You were in the museum, then,” he said.

I didn’t say anything.

“You saw what happened.”

I watched him.

“I’m ashamed,” he said.

“Why are you telling me this?” I asked, warily.

He seemed to get angry. “But you’re an American. If you don’t mind, that’s what matters, wouldn’t you say?”

“I don’t see that,” I said, annoyed.

He regarded the whiskey and water he was holding. He moved the tips of his fingers up and down the glass.

“My wife and I,” he said, “are in trouble.”

I lifted the bottle to my lips and tried not to meet his eyes.

“Not what happened in the museum,” he said. “Earlier.” He learned forward, resting his elbows heavily upon the tiny table. I held the bottle to keep it from sliding toward him. “You understand.”

I looked away, alarmed.

“It’s not her fault, don’t you see?” he went on. “Can one person be

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everything to another? Even with love, wouldn't you say?"

I didn't say a word.

"We came over for a fresh start. I love her, after all. That's not the point."

I held the bottle.

"Not the point at all."

He took a drink and set the glass down.

"She's proud. Quite proud. Protectively so. Strong. And I'm secure in that. But unchallenged. You understand. So it's life that it's a question of, wouldn't you say?"

I was uncomfortable and made a motion to leave.

"I'll never see you again," the husband said, putting out his hand quickly and trying to smile. "How can it matter, then? To say anything, I mean. Why not, if I feel better?"

He emptied the glass and raised an arm. The waiter came over with another drink.

"It is nothing about any woman, then," he went on. "Not particularly, wouldn't you say? I want her to understand. What happened before, I mean. It would never happen again. But life is deficient, without illusion."

My face was burning.

"She's resting." He drained half the glass. "Reassured, I think. What's needed is distraction. Something that will stir her imagination."

I got up. He took my arm.

"You, for example," he said. "Traveling alone, I've observed, which is unusual, wouldn't you say, so far from home, and certainly you've been married. Everyone has been married. But wasn't she beautiful?"

I stood, glaring down at him. He disgusted me.

"A whore," I declared.

He was stunned.

"A goddamn Spanish whore," I said. "You're a fool."

The fantasy drained from his face. The top of his head was the color of dried hemp. He dropped my arm and sat back. The drink spilled across

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the table and dribbled into his lap.

“You pig,” I said. “Go up there. Throw yourself at her feet.”

I strode out of the lounge.

There was a corrida the next afternoon. I wanted to see it before hurrying on to Algiers. The sun was high in the bleak, Mediterranean sky when I entered the stadium.

In great, concentric circles black-haired Spaniards sat, drying, like prunes. The arena, swept clean, shimmered with heat. From time to time a tiny man in an elaborate, tight-fitting costume poked his head over the wooden barrier that enclosed the sand. Then, in a fanfare, swinging with the music, the matadors and their cuadrillas entered the ring.

There was a great procession and celebration. The matadors, uniforms shining, bowed to the stands. Their black pigtails glistened in the yellow light. There was much strutting. The arena emptied, was swept clean again by old men in dusty pants, and the matadors shook out their fighting capes.

A large door opened at the far end of the wooden barrier. All in one motion of immense, black muscle, horns cutting fiercely, nostrils flared and wet, a bull named El Hombre tore into the arena and skidded to a stop, his forelegs black stumps imbedded in the same.

I looked about. Filled with joy, among thousands I did not know, I was witness to a force so elemental that it made vanity of all human concern. I thought, as the matador stepped forward, his cape stuttering before the bull, that the Spanish had displayed remarkable wisdom in allowing such a primitive ritual to survive.

My eyes caught a white, upturned face. To the left and five rows down sat the rooster and her husband.

The husband looked at the arena, to my right again and back to the arena, where the bull, its horns lowered, was charging a bright red cloth the matador shook stiffly before him.

Below me, surrounded by men, so that I could not tell if she had come alone, sat the dark woman.

The rooster was perched, her back in a terrible arch. She stared

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straight ahead, out over the ring, at the granite sky above the stadium.

The husband did not want to turn. He fidgeted and stopped, as though settling upon a thorny nest.

I did not look at the dark woman, who saw nothing but the one in the arena. I did not look at the arena, where the matador swept the bull about in a series of graceful arches. I watched the rooster and her husband.

The fidgeting increased. The rooster's neck emerged higher, above a pinched, blue collar. Her tinted hair shook and sparkled in the hot light. Then the husband revolved, as upon an axis, and stared unashamedly at the dark woman. The stands erupted with a single "Ole!" when the bull skidded to his knees.

The rooster rose, as if lifted by wires, waved her arms, pulled her hair and then struck the husband so viciously that he sprawled across the row beneath him. Flapping wildly, she stumbled into the aisle and up the steps. The husband, beside himself, lunged after her.

Below, the matador had turned his back and was strutting away from the bull, which regarded him hollowly, its great chest pumping. I ran after the rooster and her husband.

I got outside in time to see the husband jump into a cab and gesture frantically over the driver's shoulder. I was right behind him.

At the hotel a commotion was taking place. The husband ran through the swinging doors. When I came to a stop out front, he emerged again, sprinting across the street toward the Atocha Station. By the time I could follow, the people, with some pushing and shoving, had crowded before me.

Inside, I found the husband, squatting upon the platform, his face buried in his hands. The people held back, gesturing and pointing. Beyond, the express for Barcelona had stopped. Twenty feet up the track, as though it had fallen from a chopping block, lay the head of the rooster.

I spent a sleepless night and caught the morning train for Paris.

PHILIP HADROVIC

Untitled

*

stylishly drinking tea
pleased it hot and clean
and full of steam

the oak halfspoke danger
darkly stepping, seeping into
smoke-filled honey

It so unfooled by love
pressed passionately
 in that glass chalass
 were velvet smiles
 then red blue.

it profoundly thought
marble touch cream clutch
it so such a touch
it profoundly
 much too touched

SIMON PERCHIK



This wall wants to roll over, rest
on its side, near the others –wrinkled
recklessly higher through the bombers
don't come back –alone, cracked, this wall

once had wings to close, head down
half a city in its mouth –fire trucks
half across, calling for it, its missing bricks
and roof –you don't see my broken hand

but the wall, one by one till every brick
is red again –for forty years the sky
in open sea, sliding toward my hand
left standing, worn smooth, emptied.

EDWARD C. LYNKEY

Back At Link Wray's Shack

I'd blow up half-blotto, knock our code, bulb light
pasting my lids atilt, the shirtless Raymen grinding
cha-cha riffs. Fender guitars supercharged on a 3-

tracked setup was Link's sugar tit. Right lung gone,
torn at Ichon, but he sang to footstomping percussion.
And hooch? Jugs off a still a wrecked Dodge radiator

a barkeep behind sawhorses swore. Link was ace, once.
"Rumble" gonged #16 in 1958. A hot sequel, "Raw-Hide"
socked #23. Didn't Elvis send kudos? Payola was boss.

It was a bet he'd gouged craters in both amp speakers;
mangled catgut strings by clutching Tonto's corkscrew.
I don't know. I don't. Something fickled as Oz fast

went awry. Ponytails tuned daddy's Buick transistor
radios to doo-wop, Fabian, Buddy, or, Lord, even Pat.
Only Jocky Jack Gibson in bumluck Mobile kept Link on.

All the others now fix fridges, sell Amway. Washed-up
has-beens replaying ditties on wax between their ears,
nothing clear as after midnight back at Link's shack.

Rites

"Young girl ain't got no chances/No roots to keep her strong/She's shed all pretenses/That someday she'll belong/Some folks call her a runaway/A failure in the race/But she knows where her ticket takes her/She will find her place in the sun."

-Tracy Chapman

Katherine tried not to pay too much attention to the early morning clamor downstairs. Her head was spinning and her mouth tasted like she had been chewing tin foil for hours. The night before had been a long one.

Hoping to deflate the balloon in her temples and get herself a little something for her shaky hands, she peeled the covers off herself and slid down onto the floor beside her bed. From her window she could see the moving truck, and further on she could see little girls practicing somersaults on a pile of old mattresses in a caged-in abandoned lot.

She raised herself from the floor and shuffled to the bathroom like a prehistoric cave woman, pressing her hips up against the cold sink like an old lover. She didn't bother to look into the mirror. She knew what she would see; the same face she saw every day when she did this sort of thing.

"Hell, I'm young still," she murmured. "I could bounce back if I wanted to."

But there was always an "if." She opened the cabinet, clutched a bulk bottle of pills, opened them and shoved a few into her mouth. She felt the round pills stick to her dry tongue; she lapped a stream of water from the faucet for a few seconds, and then straightened somewhat.

She made her way into the filthy bottle-strewn kitchen and unsuccessfully fumbled for a spare cigarette. Andrew had smoked her last one. She'd get him for that one, she cursed. Just then she heard someone bounding up the back staircase of the apartment house. Seconds later the downstairs neighbor, Meiko, stood in the back doorway of her kitchen.

"Morning," she chirped.

Her face looked just as fresh as it had the night before, when Katherine had sat with Meiko, Meiko's mother, her niece, sister, cousin, and Meiko's brand new baby girl, Monica, on the back porch drinking red wine from Cape

AMY - ELIZABETH O'NEIL

Verde. They had spent the whole night talking and sucking on the saturated grapes from the bottom of the bottle of wine.

Meiko's family drank a lot of Portuguese wine, and regularly made Portuguese dishes. Katherine could never figure out why. They were all of African descent. She thought maybe the fathers of their babies might have been Portuguese, and that that would have accounted for their habits, but she couldn't be sure. She never saw any fathers.

Now, in the harsh light of the morning Katherine stood by Meiko in the kitchen trying to look as fresh as she did. Unfortunately she was still tired, her head was still throbbing and her ribs were still hurting from a few nights before, making it difficult for her to stand straight. She knew she was fooling herself to think she could look as fresh as Meiko. Meiko, now smiling, her polished caramel skin glowing in the window light, lifted a small frost covered ziploc bag in her right hand.

"You said you'd keep it. Just until we get settled in our new place, right?"

Katherine thought back to the hazy night before and after a few wrong turns in her memory remembered Meiko's mother. Marah (all of the names in their family began with the letter M) explained their four-generation-old tradition of burying the placenta of a newborn girl with the roots of a tree behind the family's house so the tree and the child could grow up together. Meiko's family had practiced this tradition ever since her great-great grandmother started in Alabama. It was rumored that the tradition went back even further, to the time of slavery, when women in Meiko's family secretly planted placentas at night, under tiny trees outside of their shacks. They believed the trees would protect and nourish a growing girl even in the most bleak of circumstances. But since Meiko's family had planned the move already, Meiko had to freeze her placenta, until they were all settled in their new home, at which time, they would be able to thaw it and plant it. Katherine was not about to break this pattern, and was honored to be included in the little Monica's ceremony, even if her only job was to hold the placenta in her freezer while Meiko's family moved to the other side of town. Monica would have a big yard over there. Plenty of room to grow.

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“Right,” Katherine said taking the frozen bag gingerly in her hands and placing it next to a bag of frozen carrots in the freezer. She made a mental note to double check what she defrosted if she decided to cook something later.

Meiko said she had to finish packing and tend to Monica, so she left Katherine the same way she arrived. Katherine spent most of the afternoon idling around her apartment, listening to Tracy Chapman records and trying to ignore her queasiness, but nothing seemed to work. She had just returned to the kitchen when she heard a man’s footsteps walking up the back stairwell.

There was no time to change, no time to clean, so she fingered her hair and sat down in the kitchen table chair directly opposite the door to the back stairwell. As the man turned the corner of the staircase Katherine saw that it was Andrew, and her posture curled, until she finally sat frog-style, like she was about to give birth. It’s the same way a Kyung woman in Africa sits under a tree, somewhere in the bush, far from her home, she thought, soulfully squatting during contractions, finally catching her daughter as she falls into the new world.

Andrew had been in the kitchen for no more than a few seconds before he chastised Katherine.

“That’s not how a lady sits,” he said.

“But I do,” Katherine challenged.

Andrew’s face suddenly shifted and within moments he stood with his head bowed, his shoulders level, holding his muscular arms at his side. Andrew moved closer to Katherine after a half-hearted hello, extending his arms in an effort to meet her waist. She curled tighter, and he recoiled too, taking a seat in the kitchen chair directly opposite of her.

“I’m sorry, Katherine. I really am. Only you can get me so revved up and irrational like that. You mean so much to me.”

He said he couldn’t stand the fact that there were rumors going around that she might have been with other men, and that if they were not true, then he would believe her. He said that any man would have reacted the same way to “that kind of news,” considering their present circumstances.

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"It's normal, Katie," he sighed shrugging his shoulders. He claimed he never thought he was capable of doing what he did to her the other night.

"It's just tension. Tension and passion. Isn't that what you love me for?" He asked rhetorically.

She sat and listened while he finished his monologue. She knew there was no use in interrupting him. She wondered if he wanted to believe himself as much as she wanted to believe him.

"Give me another chance, Katie," he gestured with open hands.

She sat motionless in her chair, conscious of Monica's protector, lying frozen in the freezer. She didn't want to upset him again. That was one thing she was sure of now. Katherine turned and let her glance seep through the filthy window pane and meander down the cluttered side street. Her sun-bleached red, hatchback stood beside the curb, with speckles of orange rust around its chrome fenders. She wasn't following Andrew's speech anymore, as his voice rose and fell from her conscious thought. She rhythmically moved her eyes from the front end of the car to the back end, slowly easing herself into a comfortable trance of how it could be.

The sunrise could spill slowly over the horizon saturating violet clouds with hues of tangerine and blood red, she imagined. It could be a fine beginning to her new life.

She would jump into her car to hide from the chill, her once cold fingers starting to tingle with warmth, hot and prickly, as the heater blew onto her lap. Yes. Yes, and with the decision made, she would throw the car into reverse and head out from the small cluttered side streets to the freeway. Reaching the freeway, she would settle back into the seat, curling her wrist over the top of the steering wheel. It would remind her of how Andrew used to drive, with a cigarette dangling between his middle finger and his forefinger, but she would keep going anyway. She wouldn't think of Andrew driving, his driver's side window always open, his elbow exposed to the road's winds. She wouldn't think that it was in that same position that he had driven her from Federal Hill in Providence all the way to the tiny well paved streets of the small bayside town in Connecticut just to show her a sunset that he didn't think she could have seen in the city. No, she wouldn't think of that.

AMY - ELIZABETH O'NEIL

“Katherine! Have you heard a word I’ve said? Jesus, you pick the stupidest times to zone out like that.” And then he paused...”HELLLLOO. Katherine..!”

“I’m sorry. What?” Katherine snapped her head from the window back to Andrew who was now within an inch of her face. She placed both hands on her stomach, quietly, silently, but swiftly.

“I have been trying to talk to you; trying to apologize and you zone..What’s out the window anyway, something more simple for your mind to understand?”

“Don’t talk to me like that, Andrew...”

“Or what..OR what?! Or you might listen? Excuse me miss.. I thought we were trying, no, no, I thought I was trying to mend the mess from the other night.. The one that started all because of you anyway.”

Katherine didn’t speak. Finally, regrettably, she parted her lips and whispered, “I’m sorry.”

Andrew began to talk again, his speech quickening with every phrase. “We could do this, Katie, really we could. I’ll take the job with my uncle, finish school at night, and we’ll live here, and we’ll save, and we’ll manage, and it will all be fine. Fine. We can do this..Say yes, say yes, please God say yes, come on Katie, it’s me Drew, I’m right here, please can we, will you, I mean can we...”

And without looking up, Katherine struggled to whisper again.

“O.K.”

Andrew let out a howl and bellowed “Yessir, My woman!”

He lunged towards Katherine grabbing her from her curl, and sweeping her up towards himself. Katherine winced but did not mention the pain in her sides as he held her. Why ruin the moment, she thought, staring out the window as her head was flung over his shoulder, all the while Andrew repeating, “My woman, yessir, my woman.”

Andrew held her tighter, and, with one swooping motion, picked her up and carried Katherine into her bedroom. He flopped her on the bed and threw himself on top of her.

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"God, thank you for my woman," he said.

Katherine winced and let out a small silent grunt. Andrew did not respond. He was too busy stripping her and thanking God. Finally, he sounded out like a steamboat.

"Passion is merciless, Darlin', and don't you forget it!" and with a chuckle, he thrust even harder. She should be thankful her man has so much passion for her, she thought, as she lay there, silently struggling in her own bed, looking through her bedroom window. She could no longer see the moving truck or the little girls doing acrobatics in the empty lot. She only saw the silhouetted branches of the neighborhood trees, midnight black against the warm Indian Summer sunset, and she wondered where all the protected daughters were. When Andrew was done he got up to leave, through the doorway, dressing as he went.

"I'll be back in an hour. Be ready. Be very ready!"

Katherine sighed and remained swaddled in sheets, laying on the bed. She felt cold and heavy as she watched Drew leave. She stayed like that for twenty minutes, until, almost instinctively, her hand began to move over her belly. Within ten minutes, she found herself able to sit, overwhelmed with yet another sensation. Instead of feeling filled with cold and stiffness, she began to feel her insides boil.

With urgency her body snapped into motion. She rose, threw on a tee-shirt and a pair of jeans and darted for the kitchen. Looking through the windows again she could see a storm brewing in the thick late summer air. She paused to imagine how the window panes would look with raindrops tearing down them. It had been so long. Katherine turned to the freezer and opened it, the rush of Arctic air blurring her vision as she fumbled for Meiko's package. With the package safe in hand, she fled the kitchen, stopping only for her car keys, not even money for cigarettes. She noted to herself that for someone not pressed for time she seemed to be in an awful hurry, but, regardless, she maintained her pace down the stairs, out to the driveway and into her little red car.

Gripping the top of the steering wheel, she sat straight up on the plush seat cushion. She began the drive across town to Meiko's family and their new home. As the wind blew through the front window of her tiny red car it

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cooled her back, flapping her damp tee-shirt against her moist skin. She inched her head closer to the steering wheel, gazing upward to the heavy gray sky. From a pinhole in the clouds a shaft of light speared the land. She was hoping God might see her flushed face, sticky skin and sopped tee-shirt. Surely he would have to make it rain then. Maybe the rain would wash away the dozens of shattered bugs strewn across her windshield. Maybe her car would look a bit cleaner with a coat of rain on it. Maybe things would just cool off a bit. Maybe things would grow. It wasn't up to her. But rain or shine she would be damned if Monica had to live one minute in her new house without the ritual of the placenta burial to keep her safe. That at least, Katherine thought, she could help. That she thought, she could be a part of.

DANA LEVIN

Flesh Field

So you can have a form—
So the definition's tacked down round your
fleshy field:

Mine,

Beloved—

The gold shaft piercing the warm morass
of the feminine feminine mind.

And when it recedes, after spilling its coins?
When the new form fades, the leaves . . .

For a minute you were lit—
For a minute you knew what it's like to be bright,
to be the sculpted, cherished thing—

You have a form: white fingers
dragging at the shore,
the sea trying to crawl from its pit—

And above the sun shining, without hands.

MIHO NONAKA

Winter 1990

Then, I would rub toothpaste in my eyes to stay awake (it did work most of the time), since caffeine had lost its effect on me. My eyeballs (pained) minty, arctic sensation. Will they be okay, I asked myself, at least until my entrance exam is over? In the silent kitchen I foraged for a midnight snack, opened a noodle package, held the yellow mass against the paling light. The newspaper was left open on the table—our emperor was slowly dying while water seethed in my pot. I plunged the dry noodles in, unable to think or feel. At dinner, my sister has teased me saying “You can’t even cook instant noodles.” That season I swallowed them before they unraveled.

GIOVANNI MALITO

Overland

From the train, a tree fixed stares
from the centre of a gray space.
Its strange points of emergence
accept the sky, and all around it,
the landscape becomes framed
within so many shifting sequences.
Troubled light flickers rhythmically
with the succession of shadows
momentarily cast by each eclipsing pole
that smears into the evening stillness.
There is an isolation that we shatter
with our speed, our momentum
that cleaves the air into new gestures.
The tree has watched us go past
and the forms of animals frozen
about its base have now been
re-animated, fused into their gazing.

MICHAEL PERROW

After a Routine Day

What does the month do all year
when it is not the month?
It's such a simple question,
but you have so little to go by.

Picture the month, then, after a hard
though routine day. It swings
its clean brown shoes off a desk
and shoves a few papers in a drawer.

It opens a window, looks out
at the evening sky. Over buildings
of the city, birds mark their long
and easy arches west. A bell rings

so far across the air there almost
is no sound. A wind wafts in
so barely that the past seems
a treeless horizon, the entire planet

burning beyond recognition.
Wearily the month struggles
from the grip of these frequent
and pointless reveries.
Connecting on its way home
the stars that roll beyond the hillock,
the month stops at the usual
watering hole, where days

MICHAEL PERROW

have run up quite a tab.
A conversation begins: "You know,
I spend most of my time
turning over and over in my grave."

MARK O'BRIEN

Due to Sunday

I have hung
trampled baby

blue

rosary beads
reminiscent of

no faith
on your vehicle's
 crooked rear
view.

MICHAEL J. KELLY

Untitled

You came at me
with the face of a nun
and the body of a child
holding cold stones
as if they were stars
wearing used condoms
as if they were badges

I am not at war
I sing your name
into the air
hoping you will hear my melody
but you are more
deaf than marble.

JOSEPH TORRA

Green Lines

1

Proportions of body part a matter of who threw the first plate.
Green lines upon which much rain and placed onto a bed
flood broken glass forms. Sitting on the bed, staring to keep
the window from becoming other things blinds draw,
the free minds concocts a saltiness I lick off
falling into safety nets, materials woven from your finest skin.
I'm the brown side of your expression. My tyranny you identify textures
mist over the dresser. Peel out. Air the alchemy your heart voices.
Burn rubber. I'll give you secondary motives
best drunk at harvest moon. It's Indian Summer.
Say the waste's collected. Indian gravity
drawing us out of sleep, inserted into a painting
of *in the tree the goon*. Summer wasn't splendid
nor the sex of our lives. We're incapable of meeting stone walls.
The jailer's place for an animal with no summer. Lose your grip
the blade cuts the hour when first light seeps excellently.
Between hairs the full moon stands liberating.
I brood, you said it, In the tunnel muscular words form
you resemble the story.

2

I hand you the rope, proportions of green
lines mark the first broken plate, what
pattern it did take. Remedy of composure
in a controlled environment. Much rain
has fallen. Floods pull us out of place.
Sitting on the bed, staring at the window

JOSEPH TORRA

the free mind concocts. I lick off the back side
of your expression. Red mist the air voices
green peels out the textures of your heart.
In the tree the goon. No place for an animal
with a rope. Body parts collide nightly, and
we're incapable of meeting the full moon
or tunneling under walls. The hair on the back of my neck,
my tyranny you identify. I'll give you secondary motives.
Say the waste's collected. Indian summer isn't splendid.

3

In a privacy of place
this hour stands animal hairs.
Hold your expression.
Blinds words invent but fail to number.
In the tunnel but not the light
we're breaking glass incapable
of first frost. I'll give you waste,
collect green lines and red
mist your heart constellates.
The air voices Indian Summer.
When the rains stop it takes more salt.
Floods recede. In the tree there was no summer
but inserted controlled environments.
Excellently the moon paints stone walls.
Sex pays between the lines
Tyranny of the safety net
then lost the grip.

JOSEPH TORRA

4

Night thick with anger swells.
I'll give you anything but the sky
going dead keeper of the garden.
The moon liberates the story
entangled in Indian Summer.
Acts of speech contradictions words form.
Turn the light on in the tunnel teaser.
The jailer has not yet arrived and
there's no convoy over the dresser—
gravity pulls trees up from their roots, lessening
its hold on our body parts. Of finest materials
woven your heart patterns green lines and heat.
Sweaty pores and nightly abandon we're
incapable of—electric light lucid above safety
nets red mist the stillness seeps through.
Concocted waste scrolled onto your backside
at hourly intervals, muscular images.

5

Alchemists further incidents
which occur. Your hold
on the tree in painting
the sex of our lives
pulling us out of sleep.
Staring into privacy of place,
you resemble words, solitary
intervals. Outside green

JOSEPH TORRA

circling lines draw the moon.
Your expression lit glass, airy
voices, words inaudible,
animals behind stone walls.
Salt and blood I lick like labor.
Red mist in gravity is something else.
Prior to this much waste has been collected.
You identify my hand print,
the goon best fed when hungry.

6

Seeing red inside green circles,
small scales and plastic bands
cause the man to lose his grip.
I'll give you remedies.
Between dresser and bed animal
solutions for personal expression.
So the mind escapes the brain
but never free, constellations
tied to a tree, halo
around broken glass.
The jailer carrying plates
from wall to wall.
We know the story,
a matter of sleep steeped
in Indian Summer. Unfit
place concocts uptight person.
The goon on the moon
swings a light on a rope,
a tyranny lines burn
into and peel off of

LIZ CONDON

Woman

I have a window too
hell red-orange as October
beside my bed
alarm clock, desert rose named Ruprix,
spinning summer forest tea mug
and a post-it with your number on it.
Atrocity
under slumbering pinball conversations,
I know
tomorrow peering at half emptied dishwashers
ashtray moments among beer shits
and dirty hair, but
you falling,
between the periwinkle nail polish and your naked toes
the roaring
is.

MEGAN SOUTHARD

birthday

In the grey of today sails die
their proud pointed flags do not wave goodbye to us,
young starfish, as we would kiss under the sun
and wear new skins of sand.
Today is no water, no land.

I watch through wet glass
two young boys in dark coats- little bundled
winters- drag a bright red kite in the road
a bright hole of light punched through
a grey screen. They do as i do

pulling a bright thing
through the black and white with no wind, no air
to breathe back into the dead. Dust and feathers
drown like lead in this still space.
Today birthday will come and go.

In the shower I wash off
what we did last year, my legs on the bathroom tile
wishing I could send you through the mail this bright spot
as my little girl shaving runs red
and bleeds these white tiles pale.

JEN TOOMER

unfasten

You never knew me
when you were so near
to the water
You knew me
when you were
so far
from under bridge
would towers
circle in my palm
was only there
an ocean
you could unfasten

You could unfasten
an ocean was only there

circle in my palm
would towers
from under bridge
so far

when you were
You knew me

to the water
when you were so near
You never knew me

GALE NELSON

Gonemore

I.

Limited, the action
not in play as

north is siren
of disrobing. Select

moment of dis
engagement. Now

or later. Then
proceed. This

not a triumph
ant plan

but gears
whirl. Temperate

the water is, jaundiced
my voice restraint.

II.

Hour upon us,
the bales noxious wait.

Look through the
mesh advice

GALE NELSON

Manage to
ward the elemental

fairground. Shred
the band insensate.

Gone the fall.

III.

Gonemost the elemental
fall insensate. Gears

whirl advice
passed through

shred mesh. Noxious
water plan. Restrain

stray standard as if complaint

is timid. And then
proceed.

IV.

Gonemore from gone
most, the gears unwhirl

as even mesh
shreds noxious. Timid

GALE NELSON

voice in jaundiced
train, avuncular

once more. No
thing ungenerous

to scale this
seamless drama

unforeseen, but on
going.

BRIAN CROWE

View Finder

Tearing through your
now disenchanting forest
Sap sticks—
Ideological fossils
carved on loose stone
berry aroma with
stalewine tongue
Snap branch and skin smell
mark
without witness
my pale-faced departure.

JOHN GREY

Ways Of Loving Me

My skin is too thin for
patching sofas or
to stitch together
a poncho
to protect you from the rain.

My bones will not make a fire.
My nerves cannot be knitted
into anything
a soul would wear.
My blood is tasteless.
My breath is empty
as an August sky.

The best you can do
with me
is keep me whole
or, when I split
into these disparate parts,
refuse to find
a use for them.

B. Z. NIDITCH

The Sixties

To be an old ear
through a light snow
blue nightmares
on a mushroom hallway
alleys of Johns flags
leaped inward
to the drunken whirlpool
phosphorescent darkness
day breaks memory
too solitary to make it
alone under the crow sky
engraved with Rimbaud
a jaundiced signature
creaks blue and black
with the synergistic energy
of a noon runaway child
in a rooming house
without a city pea jacket
expecting revelation
in unaccountable pill boxes
huddled next to mahogany
with brilliant red stains
and you whispering,
"Genius and ennui are dead,"
glimpsing our time
from the shaped brows
in the harbor mirror
from metered cars
you were frozen out
from unaccountable headlights
somewhere in the abstract
the prophetic exorcised hours
in a queen-sized boutique

B. Z. NIDITCH

letting you shoot upstairs
from overlapped rocks
off ex-sailor suitors
who turned marine
in corduroy pants
getting your loneliness poster
signed by the Rolling Stones
another shot on the mopped-up rug
now mouth dead
from years of leaky loafers
demanding Sapphic passers-by
for a lethal night in multiplication
that is a foursome equals
the sum of a climax
and only the moon is memory
in comparison with leather
from the exchange of nights
in the dirty names
you were called
outside the Cedar Bar
feeling tenderloin
immersed "Under the Volcano"
with "Flesh" and "Heat" stars
born of rebellion and O'Keefe
in the gesture of perpetual morning
with a drag Mae West.

MARY MARSHALL

A Night Like Last Night

Natalie fastened the little switch behind her alarm clock to the off position and let her head fall back to her pillow as she stared at the ceiling and took a few long breaths. She knew she had to get out bed to start cooking, but she wanted to enjoy the moment. She had the whole day in front of her and she wanted to let the anticipation settle in her stomach before the race of the day's events started. But Toby wouldn't let her relax in the moment for long as he sat at the end of the bed pulling on the blanket. Natalie pushed him off the bed with the silence she had practiced for the past year, just quietly enough to not wake Paul. She got to the front door in her morning stumble and let Toby outside. He ran down the stairs and headed straight for the leaf piles and Natalie sighed at the thought of having to redo the raking in the yard. That dog was going to be the death of her, she thought, but she thought of him as practice for children and considered this rude dash to destroy her yardwork just another test of her patience.

A look at the clock and Natalie realized she had to get to work and she gathered her hair at the back of her neck and wrapped it tightly with a rubber band before washing her hands at the kitchen sink. Thanksgiving dinner was an enormous project and this was the first time she was serving it and as she washed the turkey she wondered how her mother had managed to make it for so many people all by herself. There used to be at least forty people at their house on Thanksgiving day when she was a little kid and her mother had handled the situation with such ease as she would mash the potatoes and iron Natalie's father's shirt all at once. That reminded her that she would have to iron Paul's shirt, but not for a little while at least. She started to stack the plates at the dinner table and was happy that she only had eight to cook for, including herself and Paul. She left the plates in a pile at the table because she had no idea how to arrange them. She could not decide where to sit her parents because this was the first time they would be in the same room in over three years and the very first time they would be meeting each other's new spouses. Natalie was happy that at least Paul's parents would be on her side trying to keep peace in the house.

MARY MARSHALL

Yet all of these little issues and projects that Natalie was happily going through really made her calm in a distinct way. She was humming with contentment as she snapped peas because this was all so normal, she thought. Normal people get up early and make dinner on Thanksgiving. Normal people don't know where to seat relatives that don't get along. Natalie needed to be normal because the last couple of years had been such a spiral away from normal and she wanted it to end. She and Paul had been doing better off and on. They would have a few clean weeks and then someone would stop by and the next thing she knew they were out and Paul would be using. Paul had been using for a lot longer than her and that made it that much harder for him to resist. As she tore bread into small pieces for the stuffing she wondered when he would get up and then she heard Toby at the front door. She let the dog in and wanted to scream as he tracked dirt all over the living room, but she didn't want to wake Paul just yet, so she restrained herself and actually sort of laughed at the leaf stuck on Toby's nose.

Back in the kitchen she got lost in her thoughts remembering the first time Paul brought Toby home to her. Natalie and Paul had been living in a bigger house then with five of their friends and they partied all the time. She remembered how skinny she was because she was always on something and it was about the same time she had gotten her tongue pierced. She had gone out with Kim and Amy to some bar and came home to find Paul and Jay sitting in the basement with these guys they had met at some party and the guys were shooting up. Natalie freaked out because she hated needles. It wasn't that there were random men in her house doing heroine that upset her, but the fact that there were needles involved. Natalie's sister had diabetes and she had watched her stick needles into herself for too many years to have the stomach for it, especially when she was as drunk as she was. She yelled at Paul and tried to throw the guys out before passing out on the bathroom floor. The next day she couldn't even speak to Paul and after a week of not talking he came home with Toby as a peace offering. There was no way Natalie could resist a dog and the whole needle issue was forgotten. Natalie always considered that her saving grace in her lifestyle...there was no way she would ever stick a needle in her arm.

The sound of Paul's alarm in the other room brought her back from their

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old house and she smiled at the realization that she had moved on from that stage in her life. She looked around their apartment at all the little things Paul had done to decorate. The candles on the wall and the framed pictures of their families and her friends from high school. They even had magnets on the fridge and a wine rack. All of these little touches to her meant that they had a home and not a place. They were always going to someone's place in the old days and never someone's home. Nowadays when someone came over and they did use it looked so out of place and she considered that a step in the right direction.

Natalie could hear Paul talking to Toby and then shut the bathroom door. After about fifteen minutes she could hear him throwing up and she got a little frantic. She didn't want anything to go wrong today and he was already sick. She went to the bathroom door and called to him, "Honey, are you okay in there?"

"Um...no. Nat, can you just give me a few minutes?" Paul said.

"Yeah. Just let me know if you need anything...alright?" And Natalie went back into the kitchen. She was so worried because Paul had been out with Jay the night before and she knew he had probably been using. She also knew what it was that he'd done. Paul always threw up from heroine. It never failed no matter what he did and he hated it because then she could always catch him. All she really wanted to do was check his arms because as long as he snorted it she would be okay, but if he used a needle then it was a different story. Not only did she already have her detestation for needles, but in her quest for normalcy she had come to the conclusion that only junkies used needles and people who are recreational users snort. She could deal with him being recreational if it was just a transitional stage towards him becoming clean. Paul called to her, "Nat, can you bring me a glass of water?"

"I'll be right there," she was excited for the chance to check his arms. She brought him the water and she hated the way his eyes looked, but his arms were clean and she gently kissed him on the forehead.

"Did you have a good time last night, hon?" Natalie asked.

"Yeah...but I'm paying for it," Paul looked up at her like he was a little kid willing to take his punishment and in an odd way she smiled at him like a mother who was proud to see her child learn a lesson.

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"Well, they are going to be here in a few hours...do you think you'll be okay by then? I mean I can get your stuff together if you need to rest. I was about to iron your shirt anyway."

"Oh, um...yeah, I'll be cool by then and I'll be able to help you out, I swear. Have you figured out where you're going to sit everyone?" asked Paul.

"No, hon, but I'll get to it. You just feel better." Natalie was happy as she headed back to the kitchen even though she could still hear him throwing up, but at least he hadn't used a needle and he was sweet enough to ask about the seating situation. She knew it was good for him to have responsibilities and things to do. She thought that was when he was at his best, when she kept them busy with family parties or going to the movies or going shopping. Anything to keep him from getting bored and antsy. Bored and antsy meant a night like last night.

After a couple of hours the food was all cooking and Natalie was all dressed and she had even had the chance to make sure Toby looked clean. Paul was in the bathroom putting on the shirt that she had ironed and Natalie decided to take one last look around the apartment before putting out the cheese and crackers. She didn't want anything to be out of place or messy. She put their respective packs of cigarettes in the junk drawer in the kitchen because she knew that most people thought smoking was tacky and she didn't want to be tacky. Then in the dining room she found two small bags of coke in the potpourri dish that Paul had brought home the week before. She laughed at the thought of what would have happened if she hadn't found it. They would all have had a fit. She walked into the bedroom and showed Paul. He laughed at their absent mindedness as well and placed it in his sock drawer. Natalie went back to the kitchen and took the plastic wrap off the cheese she had cut up the night before and arranged it nicely on the coffee table before switching the channels on the television to find the football game. Everyone watched football on Thanksgiving. As the doorbell rang Paul walked out of the bedroom and kissed her before saying he'd get the door and how beautiful she looked. She was so happy at the moment...this day could happen to anyone, she thought.

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The Risk of His Music. Peter Weltner, Graywolf Press, Minnesota, 1997. \$12.95.

In his work, *The Risk of His Music*, Peter Weltner experiments with the human condition of contrast between inherent seclusion and the necessity of companionship. His characters are isolated in their own minds and perceptions, yet they are interested in sharing that with someone else. His love stories are not typical or clichéd instead they are unique and fresh. They deal with love in non-traditional settings and between non-traditional lovers. It is because of this varied perspective that Weltner is able to do such a successful job of getting into the essence of love and not just the ideal of it.

Through the different stories in the book, there are several different interpretations of pairs of lovers, from gay men living in San Francisco to a gay couple, one of whom is a midget, to a heterosexual couple who have spent their lives together in complete faithfulness. All of these pairs show how different love can be to different people and all the ways in which it can be expressed and manipulated. However, Weltner shows us how sometimes this expression and manipulation can work against people and not just for them.

In the first story, "The Greek Head," the reader witnesses the relationship between Don and Roger and Charlie and Sam. These two couples themselves exemplify contrasting examples of faithfulness. Don and Roger had spent their entire lives together and never questioned each other's love. They are of an older generation, having both been involved with World War II, and therefore their homosexuality would have been highly controversial earlier on in their relationship. Yet, they did not let things such as that come between them and they allowed it to make them stronger. They had traveled together and lived together for decades. They had a deep and intense relationship where they "just never wasted any time hoping or waiting for something more or better" (Weltner 12). They had given themselves to each other and never wrestled with that decision.

Charlie and Sam, on the other hand, had a different sort of relationship where they had resigned themselves to each other, but were not at peace with that decision. They fall more into the category of people who are familiar with each other, who transfer that familiarity into security, and who confuse that security with love. All of those qualities kept them together, but they did not have the same respect or intense affection for each other that Roger and

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Don had.

That difference is obvious throughout the story and, in fact, is really the story's meaning. When Charlie leaves and Sam is helping Roger entertain Don's sister after Don's death, the story and all of its substance rips right open. Don's decision in his will to leave a Greek head to Charlie instead of Roger leads Sam to assume that it is because of a secret affair between Charlie and Don. Roger won't hear of it, but the damage is done. Sam has poisoned Roger's mind and, even if temporarily, he has made Roger question the one thing in his life he had believed to be true and fully his, Don.

The resolution of this problem leaves the reader understanding the reality of the two relationships. In the end, there was no secret love affair between Charlie and Don. Rather there was one couple who had spent a life together with a deep connection and love for one another living directly above another couple who spent their whole lives together looking for the same thing. Weltner shows the reader that love can connect people for strange reasons, for who is to judge which of these two situations are more appropriate. The reality of love connecting two individuals and the desire for love bringing two people together are equally real. This is how Weltner first introduces the concept of individuals striving to reach outside of themselves into the realm of others.

Weltner continues this theme in his work "Self-Portrait With Cecil and Larry," which is a peak in the collection of stories. This story deals with the freedom and unchallengeable nature of love. The story is one of the bizarre and grotesque, but it makes a distinct statement about sincerity in love. Weltner's statement, in the voice of Bo, sums up much of this point when he says, "There is only this choice to be made of what one loves the most among so much that is real and beautiful without ever knowing why you've chosen it" (Weltner 143).

"Self-Portrait With Cecil and Larry" begins with the introduction of the characters Cecil and Bo, old friends who both live in New Orleans. Bo is a painter who has spent most of his life painting splendid young men who are physically infallible, but when we enter the story he seems to be taking pleasure in painting the mangled or freakish elements of society. He has a sort of obsession with their irregularity and sees them as striking. Cecil is appalled by his friend's new subjects for his paintings. Cecil has Platonic views about the

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world in the sense that one has to appreciate the ideal to truly understand life. However, he realizes that this obsession is serious after Bo meets Larry. Larry is a sort of side-show freak or a circus act, being very small. Bo takes an immediate liking to Larry and this develops into a mutual and intense love. Even Cecil in the end has to remark on the success of such an unlikely and “bizarre” couple.

Although this story has extreme and “Gothic” images in it, the message comes across the most directly of all of Weltner’s stories. This love experienced between Bo and Larry crosses many social borders because it is a gay relationship in the South between a beautiful painter and a midget former wrestler. However, it beautifully shows the reader that when love exists between two people it does not have to make sense. Again, Weltner is forcing his reader to not judge or devalue this relationship, but to simply respect and celebrate it. The individuals in the story are all concerned with finding their way and they reach beyond themselves to support each other.

In “Buddy Loves Jo Anne,” Weltner takes the concept of a support system a step further. In this story we learn of the lives of Buddy and Jo Anne who have grown up together and have never spent more than a day apart in seventy years. They have never married or physically expressed their love for one another, but nevertheless have a deep commitment and love for each other. They have spent their time like clockwork living on a schedule so strict that no day had passed that they hadn’t shared a meal together. They never strayed from the other or betrayed the other.

When the story begins, Buddy has left their town to make a trip that it seems the cause of which even he cannot identify. The reader learns, however, that it is in response to Jo Anne’s condition, for she is dying. She wants Buddy to help her die by not administering her medication to her. He is in a very confused place in his life and attempts to take his own life, but he is saved by a cook, Leo. Buddy recovers and eventually leaves the seaside town he had wandered to so that he may return to Jo Anne. However, that departure does not occur until after a strange interaction with Leo, where Leo kisses Buddy.

The story here seems to be showing the reader the way love can come to control a person. Both Buddy and Jo Anne had been loners, connected only to each other. They found safety and companionship in each

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other and didn't want to risk that by pursuing each other in any other form. Yet, because of their stalled relationship they hadn't found that deepest connection for which, at least, Buddy was searching. In his old age at the sea, he seemed to question the time he had spent with Jo Anne. How could she even know whether he was a kind person when she barely knew any other people? Jo Anne had told Buddy that there was "a natural border between two people, like a river or a mountain range, that neither could cross at death" (Weltner 167) and Buddy seemed to have realized this when he got to the seaside town. As much as this story is about two people who have never left each other's side, the message is one of a questionable love. They both reach out to the other, but with limited success.

Peter Weltner creates characters who are exciting to read about through his masterful use of language, description, and detail. You feel as though you are there with them discovering what their love for one another means to themselves. The stories are all believable because of the range, the varied scope of the human experience Weltner describes, and more importantly because of Weltner's immense compassion for his wounded characters.

—*Mary Marshall*

In Another Place, Not Here. Dionne Brand, Grove Atlantic, 1997. \$23.00.

In Another Place, Not Here is the story of two black women, Elizete and Verlia, who discover themselves in their differences. They have strength together, but apart there is only fear and loneliness. The third woman, Abena, helps after the collapse of the first two, creating a sweet memory necessary for Elizete's survival. These women are black, not African-American, meaning they had to fight color discrimination before it was politically incorrect to call them otherwise. Could this be a made for TV movie? No; they are all lesbians. Besides, the saga could be told no better than in words. It would be impossible to create the characters without Brand's images: the naive, the revolutionary, and the voice of reason.

In her first novel, Dionne Brand creates a poetic story of struggle and escape. Her colorful language begs the reader to see more than black—color

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exists beyond the skin. The women, Elizete and Verlia, struggle against the life they have been given, but for different reasons. Nevertheless, their colliding worlds result in a passion that cannot be explained. The women find solace in one another and for a moment stop dreaming of the place they would rather be. Scared by family, confused by beliefs, and drawn by love, the women find a new existence—something more familiar.

Elizete narrated the first portion of the novel. She knew nothing, except working the sugar cane fields in the Caribbean. She didn't know where or whom she came from. She was left under a samaan tree, dreaming it was her mother. Then a sympathetic but bitter woman took her in, claiming that if she wanted children she would have had them. Elizete, saved from death, became "determined to love this and never to leave." She had no other options. Family was something that she was given, with no love attached, only pity. For a motherless child, there was no belonging. When one woman was done with her, she was sent to another. Home was no place familiar, nothing worth recalling.

Elizete was ignorant—the word Revolution meant nothing to her. How could a word change the fact that she would always work in the hot sun, or that she would always be a sugarcane cutter? Elizete found that Verlia, the newcomer, was out of place in their simple world; there seemed to be no place for a misplaced revolutionary from Canada. Verlia called her "Sister," and it made her seem even more like a stranger to those that worked there. Verlia waltzed in to the sugar cane fields as though she belonged, but Elizete thought that even "[h]er names would not do for this place." They were not "Sisters." They were workers. Elizete believed in nothing. She was beaten away from the freedom that could be attained as escape at the junction. She was cut-off from the love of men, merely a toy for her owner. Her mother was nothing more than the tree that she was left under. There was nothing to believe in. Yet, Verlia wanted something. The black Revolution should join them all together. The stranger wanted to prove that for no one, like Elizete, there was always something—even a lover. In a place where there was no such thing as rescue, escape could be found.

Love. It was too simple a word. Elizete knew nothing about love. She was forced under a man every night. She knew that was not right, but there were some women that dreamed of what she had. She had it better than

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some, but she never considered it love. She thought of life as it was, nothing more. Her men made her realize that she was “a big woman and the devil was riding [her].” Love was never something that she felt should belong to her. She found it, but it was not what she would have expected: the woman that called her “Sister.” When the man found her under Verlia, he left soon after.

Verlia contrasted Elizete’s simple view, claiming the second part of the novel. She was more than willing to leave her family, knowing that they were not worth the pain. She could not sleep without fear. Her childhood was full of waiting to grow up. They tormented her, using her dreams to predict the future, even though they “could not predict the future even if it were a minute from now or this very second.” They wanted to be able to explain life, but looked in the wrong place. Verlia chose not to sleep so that she could hear the things they never would because they never looked beyond what was there. They expected the answer for success to be in her dreams. She did not want them to use her as a way out of the life that they were left with. Their belief in such fantasy taught her all that she never wanted to be, never wanted to believe. She could not wait until she could leave: seventeen. The city called her away from the life that she had, but there were more family members to live with because she is too young to live on her own. Her aunt and uncle, the new family, wanted to believe that they were white, possibly aggravating Verlia more than her immediate family. She chose to leave them in search of the strangers that would understand the blackness that her family denied. The strangers would not be bothered by color, would not judge her, and would let her join the Movement.

Verlia wanted to be “the kind of Black girl that is dangerous.” She waited for trouble, hoping that it would find her. She got a thrill from the words that no one else wanted to hear. She loved putting up posters in the early morning when no one could see. She was taught to believe that equality was not the answer; it was liberation that they desired. Verlia took it all in and made it her soul. She fought for things she may have never thought to believe in. She fought for causes because they were causes. Because the Movement was not progressing, she joined the Committee for Revolutionary Struggle. They worked above ground, underground, and pretended not to exist. Verlia’s world became fear. She could not sleep, dream, or think. It had become her. She had to escape, but giving up the cause was too much. The city was no

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longer exciting, but bleak. The revolution was making her scared to go outside during the day. She traveled to the Caribbean—the cold November convinced her to go back. She remembered tamarinds, the sea, and someplace else. She would take her revolutionary mission there. On the island, she discovered Elizete.

In the city Verlia had been in love with another woman, Abena. She had the good heart in the revolution—the same black revolution that Verlia thought would complete her lift. However, Abena was a counselor; she helped people find the life that they dream of: a house, food, a job. Abena knew that Verlia had gone too far. As lovers, they tried to get through the nights together, knowing that the mornings were sometimes worse. Verlia's fear of punishment led to a life that neither of them wanted to live. Abena accepted that Verlia needed to leave, and she let her go never thinking that she would be lonely. Verlia needed somewhere new to experiment with her social revolution. There, Elizete fell into Verlia's world, without even considering that it would be for life. They had passion and love. Elizete only described her as brilliant. Verlia eased her through what she did not know, and they could become one, making it difficult to see where one body ended and the other began. Yet, the hurt still followed, like it would with any man. "Why you with me?" was the question from Elizete that started to unravel Verlia. There should have been on need for questions—just truth.

Toronto. The place where it began and ended; Verlia sought it for escape from her family. Then she had to leave. Abena remained, allowing Verlia to leave because she could not voice the emotion that would make Verlia stay. Abena was beaten by her mother because of disappointment, and lost her emotion because of it. Her mother wanted what the white people had, but beat her daughter for it. The reason was lost in the bruises, and Abena's soul was gone, only to be rediscovered by changing her name and discovering Verlia. Her story had made no difference to Verlia, but to Elizete it was something that drew them together, something to explain the connection that both experienced towards Verlia.

Abena's lack of emotion could not make Verlia stay, but that was what her mother forced into her. To be invisible meant that she could escape just one beating. Abena found herself paralyzed when she could have told Verlia that she would go too. Because of the repressed hatred towards her

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mother, “[e]motions were too dramatic for her.” So, Verlia left, after they avoided each other for the time that remained.

Elizete went searching for what Verlia ran from in Toronto, hoping to find it in the previous lover mentioned here and there—Abena. It is all that she could do in her absence. Missing her was expected, but needing her was what should have been said. Abena was the one who could help; she, as part of the revolution, helped all the others who were illegal and pregnant. Elizete, neither pregnant or illegal, needed her for other reasons—emotional ones. However, Abena was not ready to hear about Verlia. The first words that Abena was willing to listen to were, “[y]ou wasn’t enough and I wasn’t there.” Elizete had the truth, even though it was painful to hear. Perhaps she was the last piece of the Verlia mystery: Elizete and Abena could finish it together. Neither of the lovers could make her stay. She left everything that she could have had, could have wanted, could have made. Life was just a jail sentence that she no longer wished to serve.

A story of such emotional anguish would seem like a struggle to read, but it flowed, carrying the reader through the words. Brand’s poetic words begged to be read aloud, and sounded even more beautiful when they were. However, the pieces of the puzzle were not apparent until the end of the novel—the reader was left wondering at times. But this was part of Brand’s purpose. She wanted the reader to experience the book as disjoint as the emotions that the women were experiencing. Life does not organize itself into chapters, and that is why Brand did not number or name what would have been chapters. She did divide it into sections, though: Elizete, beckoning and Verlia, flying. The two sections were untied in the last part of the novel; Verlia escapes her life and brings the reader back to the beginning, wanting to read the book again—this time knowing all the details. It was even better the second time.

The novel should be read twice, but once will still prove to be satisfying. These women struggled for reasons that were a result of the family, but mostly of the women in the family. Elizete and Abena chose to live with each other, knowing that together was better than their pain. They found solace in each other, not in men. Brand took a risk in writing the novel, but her poetic gift made the novel imaginative and sensuous. It is clearly a masterpiece.

— *Lori McCrevan*

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At The Site Of Inside Out. Anna Rabinowitz, University of Massachusetts Press. \$10.95.

This debut collection of Anna Rabinowitz's poetry brings to life the subtleties and intricacies of language. Armed with these, her work comments on everything from gender relationships to the connections between body, mind, and self.

The collection opens with the alliterative "Below the Dome." The relationships among the words Rabinowitz chooses creates a natural rhythm which carries throughout the poem:

*About this they knew a lot, the old masters
Brush by brick the blatant blare:
Chiaroscuro of cleft chins, crow-cadenced eyes,
Drama dallying in valleys of silk cheek;
Elegies on steep hillsides:
Flaring clouds, fitful flesh,
Gabled, gnarled, gnostic markings
Holy as the highest...*

The pace set by the alliteration creates a tension resolved only by the next few lines:

*Isolate each living thing
Jolted to the enterprise, bent on
Knowing-*

There is a sort of tension release among words which illuminates the prophetic nature of the poem.

Rabinowitz also attacks the small-mindedness of a woman playing an inferior role to men in society in "Of Two Minds." In the third stanza, she demands an explanation for "this gentle tyranny at center stage—this woman who crops desire..." The tyranny seemingly refers to the actions of the males who seek to place women in an inferior position. However, there is never any direct mention of men in the poem. It is more of a cry for women to 'rise up on their haunches', as the poem states, and make their mark on the world. The poem sarcastically patronizes:

*Let her arrange, rearrange goldenrod, daisies, gomphrena, sleep
and*

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wake for the purpose
of three meals on schedule, rainfall, birdcall, a stroll across the lawn,
paying no mind

to codas or the air roiling in the heat of late August...

Consistent with "Of Two Minds" is the aggressive "You Are Like This Where You Are," a poem driven by identifying a despairing woman's qualities. It employs many images similar to "Of Two Minds," such as women as automatic homemakers, women who sleep "with the stench of his feet", and women ladling soup at the stove. The repetition of the phrase "the one who..." emphasizes the feeling of being alone, a theme repeated throughout the poem:

the one whose tongue marbles in her mouth
the one who tries not to think so she fails to remember
the one who never forgets...
the one who learns from the window
the one who peers from the street / the one who thinks of jumping...
alone, alone for the first time
for the last time.

"Dislocations," as the poet states in the final notes, "is the result of a real journey I took in the spring of 1989 to uncover my roots in eastern Europe." It spans 17 days of poetic reflections by the author regarding her travels, each marked with date and location. On the final day, she writes:

*I have advanced by comma and hyphen
down a route made longer by ignorance
The confused generations are parched leaves
mingled with the past in throngs of stone.*

She expresses the confusion of trying to identify with one's past is implied in the title, and one gets the sense that this identity is unattainable. The poet seems very distant from the "confused generations," and ends the poem with the lifeless element of stone.

In a poem entitled simply "Age," Rabinowitz writes candidly on her grandmother's later years. It is interesting to note the details of her (grandmother's) day which Rabinowitz chooses to consider. They represent the confusion among generations as is hinted upon in earlier "Dislocations".

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She captures the idea of a grandmother who is proud of her family yet can't quite relate to their time. The constant mention of her physical pain brought on by age metaphorically parallels her despair at the passage of time:

You try to understand how time and blood have spun their threads.
You try
to ignore the ache that resumes its place at the base of your spine...Later..
you get down on your hands and knees to ease the pain, go fetal again.

The poem ends:

Each morning another day, each evening another night.
It is more than you expect.

The mention of the woman's fetal position implies a rebirth while also emphasizing the power of time by presenting the two images of old age and new life together. The poem is an honest and revealing look at the effects of time on both our body and spirit.

At The Site Of Inside Out reflects a universal motivation for living from a feminine perspective. Its creative use of language, words, and at times, experimental structure create a brilliant portrayal of what happens when we as a society fail to recognize our own shortcomings and leave our individual and collective potentials unexplored. There is an uncompromising wisdom throughout the book.

— *Brian Crowe*

The Silhouette of the Bridge (Memory Stand-Ins). Keith Waldrop, Avec Books. \$8.95.

Shades of Images & Thought

The six sections of Keith Waldrop's *The Silhouette of the Bridge (Memory Stand-Ins)* unite in such a way that the meaning behind an image in

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one section is reinforced by references to it in other sections. In other words, Waldrop's poetry invites the reader to actively participate in the reading. The main themes which seem to run through this book are the concepts of dreams, of imagination, of memory, and of reality as we see it.

Waldrop's images lead us through his experiences. One of the first images he presents in Part I is of sitting at a cafe in East Berlin during an opera intermission. He sits across from a strange man and woman speaking in German and tries to decipher what they are saying. He figures out that the woman is one of the opera singers. Even though this moment was real to him when he experienced it, now it is just a memory. He remembers keeping a diary until his father found and invaded it. Then he moves to describe eating a madeleine and is reminded of the momentary feeling of joy the narrator felt in "Search for Lost Time". Throughout this novel Marcel Proust is very interested in detailing the consciousness of his characters. Therefore, this reference to him is significant to the themes involving consciousness, which run through Waldrop's prose and poetry. All these instances signify a memory of a place or time he has lost and is trying to regain. The memories that he describes are extremely important because they have created and sustained him. He states, "I know, of course, that while memory holds the shape of the past, the past that is held takes on the shape of memory" (p. 12). Our thoughts take us through each day, and most of our thoughts derive from memory.

As he continues in Part II, he begins to bring the reader closer to him by explaining the processes by which he writes. His prose becomes self-referential because it describes how it itself is made. "I write so slowly," Waldrop explains, "that sometimes the world turns clean around between sentences or before I can decide between terms" (p. 17). It almost seems as if the author is speaking directly to the reader, and relating the very work to the fleeting qualities of memory. He continues to connect the reader and the writer by giving another example of how the writer's work is created. He describes the great violin makers and their realization that "the instrument must be played, for a long time before it comes into its own." This connects to the struggle that a writer undergoes while composing his/her work.

Waldrop shifts to a totally different style in Part III. In this section the flow of his words and the tone of his voice suddenly changes. He presents images of fast and quick remembrances, almost like flashes of memory.

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bundles of
worlds, di-
verging form a
common path

The many worlds of dreams that astound and bewilder us all come from one single place, our minds. He talks of how his dreams form and disappear. On page 33, the last line of each stanza connects his thoughts: "...now my dream leads me to dream-cliffs...now my dream is of sheer distance...dream-cliff and dream-distance dissolve." For a moment he is able to hold onto the feeling of his dream, before it vanishes forever. Waldrop appears to believe that once an idea or an experience is grasped, it is immediately lost. It becomes just a memory where one constantly has to "turn back" in order to recall it. He connects this with the loss he feels when he awakens and enters consciousness.

Part IV is a series of two or three line paragraphs that presents a woman using words to explain to a man why she loves him. She is trying to prove her emotions by telling a story from her past, yet this has no meaning for the man. As she speaks he calmly ponders about a Hebrew prophet and a Babylonian astrologer who are at a loss for words. At the same time, he notices that the wind is blowing. This ironic little anecdote in the middle of the book makes me recall times from my own past. Times when someone assumes what they are saying is of great importance, and yet it has very little meaning for me. A person's words can quickly lose their meaning when confronted with another's imagination.

Waldrop begins Part V with a discussion of sleep and of how a small, clicking sound from his past has awakened him. This sound reminds him of Paris which causes him to recall memories from high school and college. He then examines the idiosyncratic behaviors of his elderly neighbors, Mrs. George and Harry. Suddenly, he glances at his watch and thinks of a Hasidic sage so prone to entrancement that he had to look at a clock in order to regain a sense of reality. Without a warning, he changes topics to his mother with her piano and to his father taking the train. Then, rather abruptly, he goes back to explaining the way in which he produces his work, when it occurs to him that Harry is singing "Silent night, holy night." All of this portrays his desire to recapture the lost moments from his past, while at the same time he is con-

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necting them for the reader.

In the final section, Keith Waldrop uses both prose and poetry to emphasize a difference in tone and style from earlier sections. Although he draws upon images from previous sections, he also adds new thoughts and ideas which transport the reader into a different mine frame. Rather than unite the book with a concluding section, Waldrop writes freely and without constraints. His style made me feel as though he were speaking directly to me. He mingles together moments from his oral surgery with images of Christ's ascension "on high," along with memories of living in poverty with rats. Throughout the section he subtly drops in momentary thoughts and reflections, for example when he says, "I am not tired. And yet, like a column, sleep invades me" (p. 66), he is describing his state of being. However, at the same time, this also refers back to previous discussions of sleep in relation to dreams and reality. He goes on to explain, "I wake, unsure where I am, I and my surroundings vague, the fierce sense of reality having disappeared with the dream" (p. 76). For him, his reality exists in his dreams. That is where his past, his future, and the supernatural come together. Although he recognizes the limitations of words on paper, he brings forth associations and perceptions that exemplify the same sort of truth and reality that exist within the realm of dreams.

— *Mary Pat Phelan*

An Appreciation of Laura Mullen's Writing

Like that Tintoretto painting in which Christ's leg stretches from the boat to the edge of the painting and then across the frame, Laura Mullen's work moves inside and outside the structures—stylistic, tonal, formal—that at first seem to contain the writing. Her work is undomesticated, and despite the fact that she shares affinities with several so-called schools of writing—Language, Confessional, New York—her body of work is astonishingly original and regardless of current trends.

The Surface, her first book, impresses me with the insistence of its emotional expression, with its tone of edgy panic, with its chipped syntactical shards. The poems keep to a borderland between sentiment and irony.

REVIEWS

Whenever the line begins to loosen, to stretch out, it snaps back into plugs of single words, into fragments. Distrusting the plangent, the “pretty,” Mullen hones her characteristic rhythms on a dire, lineal syntax, like the Gothic rib in architecture, which gives her poems their delineating clarity.

In her new book, *After I Was Dead* (a title that seems purposively evocative of a poem by Christina Rossetti), Mullen shows an even greater range of formal approaches to the poem, a more flexible line, and a radically expressive punctuation. Dashes, concatenate commas, quotation marks, ellipses, parentheses, exclamations, and the use of italics, French idiom, and English dialect add layers to the poems, building emotional intensities and complicating the forthright progress of the poems. In fact, the poems of *After I Was Dead*, like the “story” in her verse novel, *The Tales of Horror*, develop harmonically rather than melodically. They leap from one register, one voice, one tone, to another in deft (and in *Tales of Horror*, particularly witty) juxtapositions that carry narrative only incidentally, without regard to traditional notions of development.

Laura Mullen is one of the most interesting poets of her generation, one of the most independent in terms of her modes, one of the most emotionally expressive and technically astute. Her work is a serious contribution to American literature and her reputation—already substantial with her first book chosen for the prestigious National Poetry Series and her next forthcoming from Kelsey St., one of the most admired presses of exploratory poetry—will only continue to grow.

