



# THE ALEMBIC

PROVIDENCE COLLEGE

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# The Alembic

Spring 2004

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POETRY



# Crane Gang

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Martin J. Desht

We're up sixty-two rungs  
on the Morgan Three-Fifty  
for a fuse check on a string  
of mercury-vapors over a city  
of heat and coke gas laced  
with that heavenly, acidic  
blue CO.

Then we climb above  
the yellow cage,  
hand off our pails and swing  
through the windows  
where little Joe Horninger, 413,  
kicks together planks for a nooner  
out on the tarred corrugated,  
and wants to ask what will save  
his leukemic kid from jumping off  
the Minsi Bridge high above  
Beth-Steel Machine No. 6.  
But of course doesn't ask.

For the cooing we bring  
the Warfarin; for our eyes  
it's the Lehigh college girls  
below tanning their oiled  
thighs from pizza to career,  
and the Windish priest  
brooming his sidewalk side to side,  
late afternoons April to now May.

We crouch beneath  
the high tensions,  
eat, and light up  
studying Horninger,  
who doesn't eat—watch  
the rise and fall of his breath  
guttering out of his mouth,  
the red oxide filtering across  
the pearls of his teeth,



his forgotten smoke  
burning a scarred worm  
into the pine.

*Warfarin—an anticoagulant used as a rodenticide.*

# Heaven

---

Benjamin Russell

Hand me that brick, please.  
I am building my Tower of Babel.  
Finished.

Ah, is this where Brahma resides?  
Which one is Allah?

He grabs my wrist,  
Twists, then yells,  
“Repent! Repent!”  
“Let go please,” I reply.  
“It is too late,  
The gatekeeper is asleep  
And I just came in.”

# Yoga

---

Benjamin Russell

Each day I can hold each pose longer.  
Upward Dog, Downward Dog,  
Proud Warrior, Mountain.  
My body and its fluidity of motion  
Allow the poses to progressively  
Blend together. Every morning  
They form a sequence of movements  
With taut muscles, legs and arms  
Outstretched, I hold my body  
Perfectly still, aptly moving to Cobbler's Pose.  
I focus: inhale, exhale, breathe.  
In that motionless moment,  
Clarity of the mind, body, soul,  
While all around everyone falls down.

# Simic's Mice

---

Benjamin Russell

Someone has placed a candle inside a bottle just small enough to illuminate the space inside the bottle. Mice gather around it, attracted to its dancing flame. They whisper amongst themselves while the black house cat sits on the mantle, his tail twitching. He is waiting...just waiting for the candle to burn out and the mice to become disoriented in the dark.

## Another Use for *Gibbous*

---

John Drexel

More and more the word gibbous comes out in poems.

Especially the poems I come across. Here's  
a man, for example, who wakes up every morning  
(he would have you believe) in a city  
different from the one in which he went to sleep,  
writing of his "gibbous pulse."

And here's a woman—does she know him?—  
his countrywoman, so her Who's Who says—  
for whom sleep is a country of pure belonging,  
separate from wakefulness, separate and disparate and desperate,  
who would make you swear she's a moon goddess  
(the original Diana), your guardian and his.  
She speaks of "dreams and desire,  
my longing for a dwelling cerulean and gibbous."

Lover, do you make it your business  
to credit any of this? Can you even see the sky  
where you are at night, does the light of your city  
blot out the satellite's reflected light?  
What signs do you read in the comet  
trespassing through Virgo?

For what it's worth, I now add gibbous to my lexicon—  
a moon that's not quite where you want to see it,  
but getting there, waxing, not yet waning,  
"pregnant with promise and possibility"—  
all you could desire (but temporary, mortal)  
in the man (or woman) of your dreams.

# Somewhere Is Such a Kingdom

John Drexel

For the month of April you made it a goal  
to write letters to five people  
every day: something not too ambitious,  
within the scope of your energy and your modest gifts.  
But there's never enough time to write even a postcard  
to everyone whom you've been thinking of writing.  
While you've been sitting here, scanning the list  
and thinking of an apt phrase for each person, a woman  
whom you once adored has decided to marry a magnate  
who made his vast fortune in matches  
exported from Poland, with the grand name *Szykowski*. Even  
before you can write, for example,  
"I'm spending the month of April in this castle,"  
a girl (another girl) who once told her mother  
"I'd like to marry *him*" (meaning *you*) "when I'm older"  
has been seduced on a yacht  
cruising the Mediterranean—which at least  
has a more salubrious climate than where you sit  
as you write this, where it's pouring outside.  
And while you worry about rethatching the roof  
and how much it will cost and how long  
you can afford to put it off, another politician's  
already announced his intention to run  
for an office you'd once dreamed of holding  
yourself. But console yourself:  
What politician could conceive of a castle  
that could house all your memory, desire,  
imagination, not to mention your books?  
What profit is there in such speculation?  
You had just as well imagine yourself as the elder son  
of Princess Clementina Sobieska:  
dreamer of dreams, fomenter of trouble, wastrel:  
champion of lost causes, assuming (eventually)  
the oh so allusive and meaningless title  
"King Over the Water."  
Much better, much better still to adopt an appropriate motto:  
If not *Honi soit qui mal y pense*, then  
*Ut bonesto otio quiesceret*.

# Salt House

---

Jeff Friedman

“And in bright excellence adorned, crested  
with every prodigal, familiar fire”

—Wallace Stevens

Throughout winter orange flies  
embedded themselves in the wood  
and smouldered. Jill crayoned  
green circles on manilla  
paper poking each  
one with angry dots.  
“Let her be,” you said.

I lay down for a rest  
but the dotted mice got inside,  
scratching at the walls. The doves  
plucked their string, which vibrated  
its one tiresome note over the sand. I waited.  
Fat sizzled in the skillet.

Where the rocks were buttered green,  
we found rusted barbs  
with the memories of fish, their eyes  
bulging against the brisk air.  
We clambered up the blue dune—up  
to our knees in sand, white  
crumbs on our lips—only  
to return to what we left.

Forgive me for all  
the prodigal familiar fires  
that held us in the dappled dark—  
a still-born love—as it took  
our breath into the foaming flame.

# Voice Mail

---

K. A. Thayer

Beep. You have reached—the moon—where messages for satellited aliases of me will be graciously accepted. Please speak clearly. This is your last opportunity to transmit innermost modulated waveforms beyond the human.

At the sound of the tone, please leave your name, utopia and the name you would prefer being remembered by, when your children's grandchildren engrave your spiritcode upon the lunar surface—awaiting rain in all the interplanetary colours you will never comprehend—but would consider starting a new lifeform with—using your heart as incubator, time capsule, irreplaceable vase for two aorta-clenched star-flowers that pump into the cosmos some bloody miracles.



# You Can Speak

Danielle Grilli

You can speak a long time about silence (but you don't)  
or darken your eyes at a startling tap on the shoulder  
because you can't hear it coming.

You don't avert your glance when a stranger asks directions,  
but watch his lips with care so you might give an answer:  
Though sometimes you just can't seem to read his words.

You can speak a long time about a deeper darkness (but you don't)  
though it's so different from the world's intrusion into my hearing sleep.  
You don't speak of your fear as you lie in bed, vulnerable to darkness,  
silence,

and do you ever wonder over your mother's inflection,  
the pitch of opera or the music woven under your favorite lyrics?  
Do you ever wonder why God gave you ears at all;  
standing before your bathroom mirror, hands cupped  
over the skin and cartilage that carries no voice?

# Riding with Richard

Timothy Zajac

Karma cannot be denied  
When riding a ferris wheel with Richard Nixon,  
Naked and high on the fourth of July.  
We discuss the mixture of life's elixir,  
Staring at the fireworks' daedal patterns  
That engulf the Atlantic City night.  
Good ol' Dick flips his bicentennial quarter,  
Leans over to me with mustard on his breath  
And whispers,  
"Stop looking... and you'll find it."

# Old Boots

---

Dan Janeiro

Two dusty boots, cathedrals in the gloom,  
Buttressed with cob webs spiders can't recall  
Stood stiffly in a corner of the shed,  
A Notre Dame, among the rusting tools.  
These boots had seen their share of summer seasons  
My mind's eye saw how they had splashed in puddles  
Had felt how those, whose feet had tried to fill  
Their walls, had grown, and fit themselves in time.  
And I knew they had seen their winters too.  
The rain had stained the leather splotchy brown.  
They were both often torn and often mended.  
At times, I knew, feet grew too large to use them  
And soon a small and eager pair would find  
Them big and dusty with some seasons soil  
And slip them on.

No one had worn them since  
My grand pa had when he still worked the land  
And placed them here for lack of feet to fill them.  
My father and his brother never wore them.  
And I wore Nikes I had bought last year  
That already seemed small and out of date  
And far too proud to stand beside the boots  
That dwarfed them. Full grown, my feet were still small,  
Confined to shoes that never were too big;  
My feet had never learned to fill the shoes  
That fit my father's father.....

My children won't know what a bootstrap is  
And I fear I won't know enough to tell them.

# Barometric Personality Crisis

Sara-Anne Beaulieu

My 43 degree rain cascades  
across nicotine streaked glass. My salt-  
licked, gauze stripped skies serenade,  
bless him. No mid-morning traffic tumult  
through his manic wiper blades.  
He looks for my body; the guttural  
breath that blushes fog, invades  
hindsight. Pries open rear view thought.

I hide seeds in my back pocket.  
(Lay your pheromone at my feet.  
Cry spring, boy, be a bottle rocket.)  
I will change my shape. Throw my heat.  
My kiss cracks open a lily pad's locket.  
Thrusts through veins; secretes  
opalescent droplets.

His forecast hinges on my nectar; honey.  
The maypole tethered in my currents.  
Celebrate my morning glory.  
My barometric temperament.

# After Cesar Vallejo's Dark Messengers

---

Celia Bland

There are blows in life so hard — *I don't know!* —  
Like God's hatred; like the backwash of everything suffered  
Sinking a well into our souls. *I don't know!*

They are few but they exist — opening dark ditches  
In the harshest face and hardest back.  
They might be the horses of the barbarous Huns,  
Or maybe the dark messengers that deliver our deaths.

The precipitous pits of the soul's Christ — some  
Adored faith that fate blasphemes,  
These bleeding blows — the crackling  
Of the bread, burning us at the oven's fiery door.

And the man — poor...*poor!* Turning his eyes, like  
When a slap on the shoulder stops us, turning  
His eyes crazy, and all of his life wells in his gaze  
Stagnant as a puddle of guilt, a daze.

There are blows in life so hard — *I don't know!*

# Red Geraniums

---

Aislinn Martin

The midday heat is dead weight  
There is stillness in the air and in me  
and the day is as bright as a camera flash.  
Only the geraniums on the front steps seem to move,  
fiery red darts in the corner of my eye.

    But their beauty is not spared either,  
brown threads down the petals' tips  
and its creeping threatens to soak up even the brightest color,  
and make more potent its scent.  
Some emptied of their petals duck  
behind red dresses and hide bare faces under curled brown leaves.

    I remember your hand reaching  
for the flowers that curl like arms of violins  
on the front steps of your house.

I watch as tucked heads snap and crumble  
like rust in your grasp.

This was done carefully,  
but had resolution of a familiar task,  
which triggers my hand to do  
just as yours did once.

# An Uncle Who Loves Margaritas Calls Collect

---

Rane Arroyo

Niño, honest, you'll never be an adult.  
Know your José Martí. Condoms are like  
tool belts. Rent *Cabaret*. Buy tamales

from a Mom and Mom shop. Lie without  
ambition. Be a blind man in your diary.  
When moving, dream. Hijo, you won't be

an elder until your young funeral.  
Think of those Soviet poets staring at  
tractors and wondering how to praise

a dictator's terrible pets so that there is  
the music of astonishment for the people.  
You'll survive. Sí, shame is monogamous.

# Rimbaud in Africa

---

William Doreski

On these porous autumn mornings  
I often think of Rimbaud,  
how shot in the wrist and sick  
of Paris and poetry he dropped

his guise of genius and walked  
half the width of Africa  
to find a silence so objective  
it would never invoke his shame.

I often think how badly  
I've spoken, how gauche I seem  
in oak-framed mirrors for sale  
in shabby, pricey antique shops.

Will I ever regret the years  
on my knees in littered city streets?  
Will I ever wish that Africa  
had swallowed me and spit out

only flesh and bone, minus a leg?  
Probably, but such rhetoric  
is "donnish," a friend told me.  
Easier to sit on the porch

and smell the umber autumn smell  
and let the wind get under  
my fingernails, teasing the quick.  
We occupy this planet not

for Latinate reasons but  
because we need a place to stand.  
Poor Rimbaud, too soon accomplished.  
Better to have gone to Africa

first, prolonged his life and learned  
in middle age he might write  
his way back to France and fame.  
The old mirror trick. But no one else



is watching the brown leaves scatter,  
no one else got up so early  
this Sunday to fumble with history  
and find someone long dead to blame.

# The Hardy Creep

---

William Doreski

Why am I walking around shirtless like a young punk on a road crew?  
Couples seated at tea tables regard me with humorless disdain,

but Kim expects me to lecture on Thomas Hardy's lyric poems  
and offers me a clean blue T-shirt to cover my flabby old shame.

Although I don't understand, I talk so freely at the crowd the faces  
relax like infielders' gloves and they open hefty volumes

of Hardy and find their favorite poems and stroke the page and simper.  
The day's about to explode in downpour. Time to pack up the fair,

stack the tea tables, collect the Hardy books and wrap them  
in plastic to store in the trunk of Kim's car. She claims my lecture

solved a thousand little problems and so excited the crowd  
they've scattered to exult in sex acts illegal everywhere but Texas.

She wants her T-shirt back, however, so again I'm roaming the streets  
bare-torsoed, the rain coming on like kegs of galvanized nails.

Up Emerald Street to the depot, then under a tree near the mill  
where I shiver as the front moves through. Police cars growl past, officers

glaring at me. "The Hardy creep," one says. At last the light reddens,  
the rain stops, and I enter Henry's Men's Shop, buy a comfortable shirt,

and re-enter the social world my half-nakedness denied me—  
Hardy's poems still rattling in my head like spare but nonfunctional parts.

# Discernment

---

Ron Giles

She knows the rampikes once were maple,  
her eye splashing the barren crowns  
with greenwood, the split bark healing  
smooth as twenty-five autumns recede  
in her mind, leaves turning to wind-buffed  
scarlet. She assays the shades of gold  
to tell Our Lady's bedstraw at the lake  
from loosestrife springing underneath  
the pasture fence. And she can always  
find my world within her own, making  
my life as plotless as a prayer. She knows  
the world for spicy chicken soup, and how  
to light six slender candles with a single  
match, tipped like a wineglass in the sunny  
shafts of latticework above her pantry door.

Would she could detect the plain sight  
love in me as easily, as in that old snapshot,  
propped on the mantel, she identified  
my granddad on the Ocean City pier.  
She said, oh no, he is not the man smiling  
above a string of silver hake, but rather  
the mope leaning on the rail and glancing  
toward the sea, a Chesterfield hanging  
on his lower lip and a panama tilted back  
enough to show his long but thinning hair.

# The Reporter and Dime Novelist Percy Gilmore Rides in the Posse: Colorado Territory

Robert Cooperman

I tell myself penning tales for this scandal rag  
is no different from Mr. Dickens' beginnings,  
though rather than court proceedings,  
I scribble the exploits of Mr. Sprockett,  
Mr. McIntyre, and Mr. Eagle Feather:  
who glares, suspecting I'm no more English  
than Papa's Polish shtetl was London,  
where I picked up enough of the language  
for Gold Creek's wags to call me, "Sir Percy."

Mr. DeLacey, my employer, ordered me  
on this posse; when Mr. Sprockett—abetted  
by the tracking of Mr. Eagle Feather  
and the unwilling assistance of Mr. McIntyre,  
who did nothing to stop the two monsters  
who raped the minister's daughters and murdered  
one of them, leaving the other for dead—  
corners the brutes, I'm to describe the bloodshed.

"Don't spare the gore, guts, and gunshots!"  
Mr. DeLacey slapped my mount farewell;  
while we ride, Mr. Sprockett quotes poetry  
I feign familiarity with, request more verses,  
to his delight, for he can turn ferocious  
as the grizzly bear that clawed his face.

A man must make his way in this world  
I longed to see more of than the London  
Papa and I escaped to, after Cossacks  
butchered Mama and my sisters.  
Fear not, Mr. DeLacey, when Mr. Sprockett  
slaughters these American Cossacks,  
I shall write such purple, glorifying prose,  
you will sell out edition after edition.

# Love Story

---

Peter Johnson

We broke down in a little seaside town where soap made from whale sperm went for ten bucks a bar. The car mechanic bragged his TV had only three channels and that everyone's house smelled like meatloaf. While he fixed the car, we lunched on the beach, desperately needing to create a "moment" to remember when our yet-to-be-born children would hate us, when we were just too tired to turn back the sheets. I stroked her hair, told her the human brain was like a shower nozzle; she compared it to a skunk, but neither of us could explain the grounds of likeness. It was the Death-of-Metaphor Decade. You could say a car looked like a tropical fish and no one got it. Walking the beach, we discovered a worn leather glove and debated its history, then took a chilling tour of a local winery. When we paid the mechanic, he said that if every living chicken were lined up, they'd circle the earth eight times—a sad and troubling fact—but it was time to leave, the town disappearing behind us as if it had never existed.

# Houdini Weenie

---

Peter Johnson

For this trick, a time machine, a little ore dust, and a smokestack staining the sky with chemicals. Add a fat boy, locked in his room while a party's rip-and-roar rattles holy statues on his dresser. It's me again, gentle reader, sent to bed for shattering McMahon's picture window, for eating the coconut icing before the first canned "Happy Birthday" broke wind, for calling aunt Esther an alien and having the goods to prove it. Through a crack in the door I see her husband polishing his glasses with a tissue, smiling at this here unfortunate peeper. "Close the door, little boy," he says, walking toward me in cherry-red flip-flops. Earlier that day I read a book on Galileo. Hooked on telescopes I was, waiting for extraterrestrials to give me the magic ring concealed in the cereal boxes of happy boys, of skinny boys, of boys with money and pedigreed dogs. It's the late 50s, and through a screened bedroom window I see a half moon shot full of holes. And through a screened bedroom window tumbles little fat boy, caught an hour later stealing candy from a local drugstore. "A regular escape artist," my uncle says, shaking his finger at me. "A regular little Houdini Weenie."

# Tree and Moon and Mountain

---

Jenna Martin

There are tart plums that wait for taste. Beside her  
on the shelf is stale bread - all yeast, flour  
and time to spend with rolling pin.

There is also her own milk to drink and that of her mother.  
She names, like Günter Eich, "thing-words."  
She is child and orients herself: *tree* and *moon* and *mountain*.

*Pointing is all she knows of grace.*

After this impulse comes a lingering  
a comfort divided by edifice,  
by a house made of cards.

A stacking; block upon side of head  
A transposing, then a shuffling

That is to say she remembers  
and must yield to the significance of another's  
hands, give in to table manners.

The goldfish still leave her thank you notes and refuse to die. Even  
her dollhouse remains - its bed built for sleeping plastic children.

She bends down and lifts their small rigid frames,  
as a giant would, carefully.

# Rain Lights My House Grey

Jacqueline Garlitos

Day has stolen the flesh  
to cheer itself. In the window,  
my reflection—  
gash of red, liner, mascara,  
blush of a virgin long dead.  
I am the corpse's substitute.  
Empty glass in my hand:  
mate of the one shattered into knives  
across the kitchen floor.  
Their edges echo the curve of my throat.  
Blood knocks a pretty rhythm of distress,  
calls to the knives hidden in the glass.  
I want to plunge forward—to go over  
the edge. To loosen—break—  
see the blood shine as I cannot—  
see it rush before me—a river—a sea—  
a kiss.



# Avondale Swan

Jane Lunin Perel

—*for Jim*

I am the Avondale Swan, angora winged glissading on water.  
See how I dip my neck and poise my tail

feathers feeding on  
dark algae in  
the pull of the salt marsh.

When I lift my head again to the sun shaking  
my feathers dry I preen myself, a Queen who before  
the mirror forgets  
for one moment the savagery  
of the King.

The wind attends me. I am all desire and white ashes  
strewn over the decks of burials at sea.

I am the secret desires of  
your dead mother, what the murder  
victim whistles before the assassin  
slashes her throat. I am an ancient merchant bartering  
feathers for salt. Where the sea rose withers  
there I lounge and lilt  
under eel grass. Imperial I turn  
my back to the burning sun  
and fold myself into the shape of a bruised orchid  
and nap and dream of a swan egg bigger than the sun.

And when the moon swells to its  
furious ripeness I wake and cruise  
under her glowing belly  
and drop my own eggs that descend from me, baroque  
notes from a harp and the other one  
touches them with his burning  
and the music goes into them  
and the whiteness, the slow hemorrhage of our song.

# Dwight Eisenhower's Dream

Charles Barasch

I sneak down the backstairs to watch  
Princess Summerfallwinterspring  
on the new White House TV. Even after I adjust  
the horizontal she's a little blurry, but I can see her wet  
tongue caress her lips after the Wonder Bread  
commercial, and she looks into my eyes  
and mouths "I like Ike." Then she's with me  
on the sofa while on the screen Clarabell chases  
Buffalo Bob, and the picture rolls up, over  
and over, but we don't adjust the vertical.  
Princess Summerfallwinterspring  
pulls off her buckskin, says "Wanna cupcake?"  
and I'm down to my boxers when Checkers  
bounces in, nipping and barking, he'll wake the whole house.  
Julie must be playing with David, they'll be down soon  
to watch TV, and the Princess is wriggling  
into her dress when David in his cowboy suit  
runs in squirting seltzer, and then I'm drenched  
in sea spray leading the army onto a beach  
through a cheering crowd waving flags.  
One woman is silent. She watches for an instant, turns,  
climbs broad marble steps and  
knocks at a majestic wooden door.  
I'm sure it's the Indian Princess and run  
to kiss her, but it's Aurtherine Lucy,  
and I'm confused, I don't know where I am,  
the crowd is chanting, threatening to kill me,  
and Edgar Bergen eggs them on, only it's *Joe* McCarthy  
on his shoulder doing the talking, and someone points  
a gun at me when Joan pulls up  
in the jeep and I jump in. We drive  
into the country, and she turns off the engine  
and strokes my head the way she does for good luck.  
I begin to unbutton her blouse and I place  
my hand inside her thigh, and then the jeep  
is a golf cart and I tell her to wait, I step up  
to a tee and whack a ball which rises  
in the sunlight like a dazzling rocket,  
and then descends, weirdly slow at first,  
then with a rush, into the hole.

# John Adams's Dream

---

Charles Barasch

Abigail is going on and on –  
I need to be tougher  
on Jefferson and throw him in jail  
now that I've got the power, and didn't  
he have a French mistress anyway?  
We're in the parlor, each in a straight  
oak chair, and Abigail's knitting another  
baby sweater. Her needles click  
like castanets, and with each word  
they seem to find me, pointing  
like compasses, fixing me to my seat.  
Her fingers begin flying faster  
as if driven by a steam engine,  
the needles clashing now, and then they are  
knives, flashing as she hones them, one  
against the other, and I shout above  
their unearthly screech, "Yes, I will  
bring you Jefferson!"

I go outside,  
and Jefferson's there, as if waiting for me.  
He leads me down a cobbled alley  
to a door marked XYZ. He knocks,  
and a woman, rouged and perfumed,  
opens it, takes my hand to bring me in,  
gently, but I don't resist, and covers me  
with kisses. She whispers to me in French,  
and I know it's a trap, but I can't  
help myself, I tell her about the fleet.  
She winks at Jefferson and becomes  
Talleyrand, and Abigail has somehow  
come in and shoves him aside,  
lunges at Jefferson with the gleaming knives,  
and I am happy because I know  
he and I will die together.

# Migration

Deborah Fleming

The islands rose overnight,  
tall flowers in a field.

The shore sends up morning cries.  
Slow donkeys pick their way

downhill over stones.  
No clouds settle on the peaks;

they float away, envious of waves  
that touch the hem of land,

bathe gray rocks. The islands  
wrap the sea around themselves,

step away through mist,  
carry the dawn on their backs.

# My Bartender

Victoria Klibanoff

His eyes were fixated only on the empty  
pint he filled recklessly with  
the dark, cold, and bitter kind-  
the Real McCoy.  
For-warned,  
I drank it-quickly,  
toasting to my drunken heart  
leaving only the crusted white rim  
and a delicious stinging in my gut  
behind.

# Watch Hill

---

Chard deNiord

*For the young republicans at Roger  
Williams University*

I stood chest high in the water and stared  
at the ocean's mirror: another white man  
with his daughter on his shoulders at a beach in Rhode Island.  
I watched each wave roll in like a page with the same  
old question, "Where are the others?" How then to see  
as a way to change? To *see*? How to notice  
myself in the surf as someone other than a man  
with a history of skin that disappears  
itself on a beach this close to paradise?  
I asked my daughter to swim with me across  
the ocean, to start again from the other side  
with a different plan. To return with a range of *fathers*,  
yellow and brown, black and white. To write  
the word human instead of men across  
the beach at night. To take *it* back, back,  
back. She leapt like a frog from off my shoulders.  
"Come on," she cried. I followed her as a way  
to believe, ignoring the whistles, and then the sirens.

# Oh Elliott, You're In St. Ides Heaven

Nicole Wietrak

Dear Grasshopper, we are high on amphetamines tonight,  
You and I, we are dead to the world.  
I'm sorry about Billy, he doesn't like blue eyes,  
He thinks they are too common,  
"too much staring, makes everybody late."  
So out came ours with some

Rusty old spoons. Stop at the drugstore, pick up some  
Sunglasses, cover the wound, we'll be cool tonight.  
We've been playing Kings Cup as of late;  
There is an island, a peninsula, five enclaves, one world.  
This fucks us up a little more, a common  
Cold, nothing fancy pants, not like blue eyes.

I am the villain and I have my eyes  
On you. I told you, dear Grasshopper friend, some  
Murderous gatecrasher broke in, stole our stash, its common  
Knowledge had you been paying attention at all tonight.  
Standing tall and proud on my top hat, like a weather vane, the world,  
The world it is OURS tonight! To turn back now, it would be too late.

Honest Abe, shrunk down like in that painting we saw at the Late  
Show at Billy's dockyard. I bought it for you, wrote the check, dotted the  
    i's  
and crossed my fingers and let a prayer go beyond this world.  
Somewhere in the beautiful Deep South, where we are clean and the sum  
Of our fears lies in the Lazydaisy, the Pink Pappusgrass, but not tonight.  
Wake up Grasshopper, we are in Beantown, let us walk around the  
    Common.

My dark glasses stare in your direction, we sleep among trash and common  
Sewer rats. Looking for a score, an entourage of white tailed doves, too late  
Again. Sweet, sweet misfit Grasshopper, you will die by your own hand  
    tonight.  
A single stab to the chest in single file of those who have gone before your  
    eyes.  
Ride your own melt, give me a kiss goodbye, fluff up your pillow some  
And get ready to leave. You'll haunt me in this world.

We are deadbeats, taking a holiday because we are in a world  
Of trouble. We are chasing windmills that are as common  
As angelic orioles. We want everything, smiling idiot kids, we want some  
Of what they're having. We're coming down now and I'm late  
For my ride, but I can't leave you like this, sad sad wet eyes  
Oh Grasshopper! I don't want to leave; I want to keep you close tonight.

But I have to go and tonight you'll leave this world  
Because nothing feels good and Billy called your blue eyes common.  
But he hollowed out mine too! Time runs out, it is just too late for some.



# Derrida

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Matt Beach

“The night passes. In the morning,  
Knocks are heard at the door. They  
Seem to be coming from outside, this time...”  
-Plato’s Pharmacy

A few lines, simple enough  
Unless you think that magnets  
Are only used for sharpening knives,  
Knives that slide in deep, grind and spoil,  
Come out the other side and stab  
At the vacant air in the dim light  
Of the half-moon, winking,  
Letting you believe what you will.  
Shocking, the morning I broke into your house,  
Bypassing the avant-garde,  
And held my knife against your eyes.  
We both saw your tears  
Went beyond the absence of your smiles;  
Your stream of separate confessions<sup>1</sup>  
Did not converse amongst themselves  
After sitting down to brunch  
Or bang upon the paper walls,  
Wondering how to break free.  
The cutting board, dried black blood,  
Has its allotted share of sides  
Which your inverse hard-hat  
Can no longer hide.  
This, then, will not have been a poem  
But a single voice,  
Despite the many movements  
Of the tongue.

<sup>1</sup> “Please, the only thing left to say Is that we delight in saying things We should not, don’t believe A word we say.”

# Five As Of Yet Made Movies

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Michael Malinowitz

I.

Squash Trash - Mike and Penny play themselves in this psycho- docu-drama in which they meet at their club Saturday mornings and curse and spit at each other during their on-going matches. Penny, in her early fifties, seems to think the hyjinks actually helps her game. Mike remains 35 and confused with the on-court dominatrix who, ironically, he wins against. One can hear the pro speak French in the background while the A players try to get words in edgewise. A hand-held camera films in black and white without a narrator or background music. It is uncertain whether Mike and Penny's respective spouses will play a role.

II.

The Bag - A movie within a movie. Famous movie stars buy two tickets to a flick, one for themselves and the other for their bag. Though the bag rarely speaks, it has its own seat, which it refuses to give up in the crowded theaters. Filmed in Cinemascope and Panavision, the stars and starlets, perfect gentlemen and ladies, nevertheless refuses to relinquish the bag's seat. At one time the bag seems to be saying, "I'm strong like bull," during an encounter with a pusillanimous patron and an unsuspecting usher. A major studio owns the rights of this recently found, finished and little known screenplay written by Brian Epstein.

III.

Brooks Brothers - In this right to video production the poet Eugene Richie meets Abe Lincoln at the store's lower Manhattan outlet. During their discourse, Eugene tries to convince Abe that "shirts make the man," yet Honest Abe (adorned with re-elect Honest Abe buttons) and his small but eclectic entourage stay convinced that stove top hats will soon be "*derequier*." With music by Stravinsky, Mahler and John Cale, we see Eugene waving adieu to Lincoln as he ferrys on to Chicago, we presume. It is in everyone's hope tht Tara will direct.

IV.

Drunk Like Me - Only the title has been developed but already the buzz is that it will be next December's sleeper. Whether it is in the *film noir* style or animation, it's doubtful, an anonymous studio executive has been quoted saying, a PG-13 rating can be salvaged. The White House has already expressed their concerns.

V.

Whatever - In a publish or perish atmosphere, ten previously unpublished New York poets, age 60 or older at time of recital are invited to read their poems which must be 88 words or fewer, no longer than 13 lines no shorter than zero, in front of a panel comprised of state transportation executives taking place in unbearable heat during their otherwise non-descript 4-day/3-night convention in Depew. The poets are judged based on their ability to espouse on the theme, "Describe the most disgusting human thing that you've ever seen." Though the audience reacted favorable to a ditty about an Asian man eating bacon and eggs over easy in the Village while simultaneously breathing snot in and out of his right nostril, the winning submission was a ten-liner covering seeing a man on the BMT with smallpox, some 40 years ago. The poet, Amies von Thoreaux won the nine inch videocassette of the festival and publication in "Our Lines," a broadside devoted to the new critical movement.

# Remnants

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Melissa Severin

“everything that lets go  
still has its memory of attachment  
and that which refused to let go  
still has its uses—”

-From “Finding Her” by Brenda Hillman

It was like this, when I left—  
water, mist, condensation dappled grass.

Light rain. Moist seeds crack through husks.  
Remnants. A menagerie of flesh dispossessed.

The body was a crooked table,  
the pool of sweat from a glass.

It’s exhausting the toss of bones,  
the misfortune in tea leaves.

I let my hand cover my mouth. Clumsy,  
pop and lock of knees on the stairs.

Shadows, gaunt and dishonored  
as sunken ships, against the wall.

Fallings sounds like singing, a tragic chorus.  
A call and response.

# Untitled

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Melissa Severin

First they take my blood,  
exchanging one vile for another  
till my hand is numb. *Small veins*

I'm sleeping in someone else's bed.

It's that simple. Plain spoken.

What's beside my fist as it stretches open  
are cords they use to plug my heart in.  
Machine scribbles lines. Lie detector,  
every beat. Pulse of blood.

You know what I have to say about that.

Don't you?

It's the perfectly normal tilt  
of the cervix. *Inch down a little  
more.* That's what he asks for.  
*Just a little pressure when I move  
my hand in.* This is me.

It's a back bend to the past.

Flexible. Girl that I was.

Bones are much older. Siphoned  
marrow, charred porous ruins.  
They float in the black sac  
of the x-ray. See-through.

You shouldn't end it this way. That.

Tell me about the frame of the body.

There are a million ways to bruise  
the skin. Puncture. Slap. Fall.

Sometimes unexplained  
or when the bleeding stops completely.  
Old womb. Stone heavy.

Carried in your hand.



FICTION





# Folly Beach, 1974

Ashley Shelby

At this end of Folly Beach there are no lights, no pest houses with lace curtains sucked in and out of ocean-facing windows; there is no one. From this end of Folly Beach Catherine can see the Morris Island lighthouse, marooned in the shallow waters of the Atlantic, its light on for ships that no longer creep close to the shore.

They built the bonfire about a half-mile up the beach and Catherine could still see its orange glow and the black shadows on the periphery. The voices carried but were muddled. Jack Hudson was up there, sitting on a piece of driftwood at the bonfire, and just before Catherine left to take a walk, he'd finished his seventh beer and demanded someone relinquish an eighth from the cooler. Catherine had forgotten their cooler on the back porch of their cottage on Sullivan's Island. Jack was drunk again and ready to narrate another incoherent Just-So-Story plucked from the depths of his childhood. Catherine had heard them so many times before. Someone was always getting beat in a game of touch football and running into the garage crying and someone's father always took a switch to somebody's behind because the family's reputation had been compromised by an errant pass thrown into the next door neighbor's shrubs. Jack always said he was a better storyteller after a couple beers.

Their friends—his friends, really—swarmed like unlucky moths around him during these beach bonfires; they seemed to wither the closer they came to him, but few could resist. The women, emaciated and coiffed, drank Tab and rum in plastic beach glasses and watched Jack. He was alive. The men were mostly ex-marines from the base, left to linger around Charleston after being discharged. To Catherine, “linger” seemed to be a specifically Southern euphemism. It sounded like a delicate activity, something welcome. These jarheads just loitered.

Jack was a television reporter, a skinny ex-basketball player from Indiana, with light blue eyes and a sharp, angular face. Catherine had stopped trying to slow him down on nights like this. Whenever she whispered to him that he'd had too much to drink, he said, “Jesus, Catherine, cut me a fucking break.” He'd even started coming home on his lunch break with a couple of guys from the station and dividing a twelve pack between them before heading back to work. When Catherine would come home from her job at the base, she'd find the cans, crushed into medallions, littering her kitchen table.

They went to these bonfire parties a lot. Folly Beach was a popular spot because it was far enough from the city to seem like

another place while being just a couple bridges away.

"Here's a free line for everybody who needs one," Jack shouted.

"Jazz sounds like bourbon smells!"

"You can't give that goddamn line away," someone muttered.

"Got Catherine on her back," Jack said.

"Christ on a cracker," a woman sighed.

"That could describe our first date," Jack said. A couple of the jarheads laughed and a woman let out a little cry as if she'd just opened a carton of spoiled milk. Jack felt he was on a roll, Catherine could tell. She waited a few minutes so it didn't seem she was going off in a huff. As she waited, she saw a dark-haired man across the bonfire looking at her. He saw that he'd caught her eye and tilted his head a little to the side, the way Catherine's Irish Setter did when he thought he heard his leash being taken off the nail in the front hall closet. Through the heavy, putrid smoke from a handful of seaweed someone had just thrown on the fire, Catherine could see the man smiling at her.

Jack was not unkind. He was a gentle man in his ordinary moments. He offered no elaborate explanations to Catherine when they'd return from a party where he had embarrassed her; he just promised it'd never happen again.

The Atlantic waters, mixed with the Ashley and Cooper rivers, crept and receded on the dark beach and Catherine squinted for shells brought in with the tide. She stepped over a dead porgy and bent down to pick up a broken shell.

Richard Vanderhorst, a friend of a friend and a lawyer from Charleston, followed Catherine silently. He watched her take off her sandals and carry them with her fingers hooked through the heel straps. The moon illuminated a straight path across the beach to the edge of the island. But down there, a burst of artificial light had just lit up the beach and it seemed like daytime.

"Did you see that?" he called after Catherine. She turned around and shielded her eyes to get a better look.

"Who's there?" she said.

"Richard," he said.

"Oh," she said. "Hi. Did I see what?"

"All those floodlights down there?" He pointed towards town and Catherine followed his gesture with her eyes.

"What is that?"

"I don't know," Richard said. "It's not that far away. You wanna walk down there?" Catherine shrugged, and they started walking.

Richard assumed it was just a matter of presence and attentions. He needed a reprieve from the dull-eyed women who either sat on the ex-marines' laps or didn't and wished they did. Richard could tell, just from looking at them that they were from upstate, from Columbia or Greenville or Alcolu. There was a certain grace lacking in their gestures that made

Richard uncomfortable. There was little that seemed to come naturally to any of them except holding those thin menthol cigarettes between their fingers and smoking them only halfway before dropping them in the sand. At some point, Richard knew, he would marry well, plucking a girl from the pool of Pettigrews, Aikens, Calhouns, Prioleaus and Bonneaus and all the other old families in the circle. Marriage was surname cannibalism down here, hardly based on love, even now.

Richard knew Catherine was not from Charleston but he admired her anyway. She had sat next to Jack, sweet and calm, concealed in her husband's shadow. She was a petite woman, with pretty dark hair and her hands folded in her lap. Her eyes were dark and beautiful, a coating of turquoise eye shadow drawn across each eyelid. Her face was round and childlike, and her lips were full and she wore pale pink lipstick on them. Beneath her blue maxi dress, he could see her belly was slightly rounded and feminine. She wore a charm bracelet that tinkled when she touched her hair. And when she had gotten up quietly from her seat next to Jack and left, Richard had noticed.

Catherine had noticed him, too. He'd been sitting across from her at the bonfire and the evening shadows had darkened most of his face. She'd mentally sketched in what she couldn't see. He looked like old Charleston money. Catherine was suspicious of old Charleston money. And Charleston money was usually suspicious of someone like Catherine—a Northerner who thought surnames were objects of chance and that Charleston extended to Folly Beach. But these were ideas that were easily concealed without wit or effort. Besides, even though she had grown up in Maryland, straddling the Mason-Dixon line, she wasn't and never would be a Southerner. And that was a shame, everyone down here told her, laughing. They were never joking and to Catherine, their laughter sounded like scorn.

"It's kind of nice to feel that salt air in your pores, isn't it?" Richard said now as they continued down the beach. Catherine said nothing. "That's a pretty butterfly clip you've got in your hair, there," he said, moving to touch one of the blue and yellow barrettes Catherine used to pull plaits of hair away from her face. She dodged his effort.

"Thank you," she said. "It's a swallowtail."

"You know butterflies?"

"A little bit."

"You love butterflies?" Richard asked, and Catherine laughed. He sounded like an urgently earnest child.

"That's a strange question," she said.

"Sorry" he said, stopping to pull off his tennis shoes. "Hold it." Catherine stopped and watched him untie his wet laces. Heavy, dark eyebrows that would look bushy and mean on anyone else. Square jaw, clean-shaven, eyes dark as obsidian. "There," he said as he pulled off his shoes. "Much better."

The moon hung in the sky like a pale suncatcher, throwing shades

of winter on Catherine's face. Her skin was shiny from the sweat of the sea and the humidity of the summer night.

"I'm a hummingbird man, myself," Richard said. "Such little guys, but they always give 'em the big imposing names. You know, like the Cuban Bee hummingbird. Or the—," he paused and looked at Catherine sheepishly. "That's about all I know. An ex-girlfriend liked hummingbirds." Catherine smiled. "Why is it that small, pretty women always taking a liking to other small, pretty creatures?" When Catherine didn't say anything, Richard sighed loudly. "I'm sorry," he said. "I'm really just trying to impress you." Catherine dug her toes deeper into the sand. She could see the bonfire growing dim and couldn't tell how far she'd walked. Maybe they had stopped throwing driftwood on the fire. Maybe people were going home. Catherine wasn't sure what to say so she laughed. Someone at the bonfire shrieked, and Catherine could see a jarhead had scooped up one of the secretaries into his arms and was running toward the water. Richard looked at the brilliant coins of light up ahead, and saw now the shadows of giant machinery, and heard the murmur of the people who were ringing what looked like a movie set.

"I wonder what's happening up there," he said.

"Maybe they're filming a movie," Catherine said.

"I don't know. I don't know why they'd have big Caterpillars parked on the dunes, there."

Earlier Catherine had watched him chat with a woman who worked across the office from her, who had once told her at lunch that she hated losing her eggs once a month, wished she could horde them instead, that time was ticking away, that pretty soon they'd stop coming and she'd have to settle for sitting in parks and watching kids on the jungle gyms and if she had to do that she'd open a vein.

"You work at the base, right?" Richard said as they walked up the sand hills, crushing sea oats under their bare feet.

"Yes."

"You like that?"

"It's okay."

No one wanted Jack to stop drinking, Catherine thought. Just two weeks ago, Jack's cousin Danny had finally left after crashing on the couch in their cottage for more than four months. The two men spent hours at the bar up the street and stumbled home their drunken voices two hollow, tuneless echoes that Catherine could hear growing louder as they approached. She lay in her bed, praying they'd walk right past the house and fall asleep on the beach somewhere. They always managed to find the front door.

"You're such a goddamn killjoy, Catherine," Danny had shouted at her after she'd refused to let the pair into the house one night.

"You're disgusting. Both of you," she'd said. Jack was silent, and appeared to sober instantly. Danny's anger, though, only grew. Catherine remembered how the very life seemed to drain out of Danny's eyes, replaced with an otherworldly rage.

“You’re not getting the cottage,” he shouted at her through the screen door.

“What cottage?” Catherine had said.

“The cottage in Devil’s Lake, our grandparent’s cottage.”

“What in the hell are you talking about?” Then she remembered: Jack and Danny’s grandparents’ lakefront cottage back in North Dakota. It was the setting of many of Jack’s bonfire stories.

“Take it,” Catherine said. “I wouldn’t want that broken down piece of shit anyway.” It was Jack’s face Catherine watched then, not Danny’s. He seemed to be staring through her. Danny was so angry that spittle began to collect at the corners of his mouth and he pulled at the screen door furiously.

“Don’t you talk about our family like that, you bitch,” he shouted. “Don’t you talk about our family like that! You don’t know anything about it and you don’t know anything about us!” Jack stood next to his cousin, impassive, except for what Catherine hoped were tears in his eyes, rather than the liquid glaze of a drunk’s last foggy moments before falling into a heap at her feet.

Catherine loved this end of Folly Beach. There was wax myrtle past the dunes here, and sweetgum trees and big hickories. Sometimes, when she drove on Highway 171, always alone now, she rolled down all four windows and let the fishy air infuse the car. She’d watch the brown pelicans sit motionless in the water of the estuaries and the terns and osprey float on the sea air then dive sharply into the waters beak first and come up with a minnow. It was a cold, permissive milieu, somehow. Catherine always felt unmoored—happily unmoored. All obligations terminated, all possibilities—strangely—terminated too. There was just the weightlessness, the paleness. And, like the fetid air that Catherine let blow through her car windows, with its scent of decaying crabs and fish washed up on the beach and baking in the sun, what comes in on a new wind isn’t always clean. There were moments where she imagined driving off one of the island bridges, sinking slowly with the car into the estuary and imagining Jack’s great grief as she watched the last light of the world fade away.

(There were two of them, now, and she could chose to end both of their lives. There were times she found the child hateful, half composed of failure and disappointment. She liked to believe the other half was made of hope, but now, at moments like this one, it was only a tiny hollow thing with just a flickering heartbeat and nothing promised to it, nothing expected from it.)

The beach was illuminated by floodlights, and from any point on the island, it looked as if a city of light had materialized on the dunes. Richard helped Catherine climb the sandbanks, then jumped back down the bank to retrieve one of his shoes, which had gotten stuck in the sand a few yards

back. As Catherine watched him search for the escaped shoe, she wished he would continue walking in the other direction.

There was a pit and three neon orange machines that looked like giant crabs. (Catherine knew, now, what this all meant.) The entire Folly Beach Police Department was ringing the pit, it seemed. There were about ten Charleston County Police officers in the pit itself, digging with their bare hands, leaping out of the way of the iron jaws of the Caterpillars.

The woman standing next to Catherine was weeping. Teenage girls in swimsuits and mothers still wearing their aprons watched the digging. Retired navy men and merchant marines stood impassively with their arms crossed over their chests. There must have been six hundred people on the beach, and no one made a sound. The hollow metallic sounds of the machines excavating a ton of sand, the distorted human voice coming from the policemen's radios, then silence, the crash of the surf, the distant barking of a dog, and then the great collective gasp that seems to come from the sea itself when the policemen all snapped their spines straight in horrible synchronicity and put their hands up and the man in the Caterpillar pulled the giant claw out of the pit.

Two teenage boys struggled up the dune where Catherine was standing, one of them tripping and cursing, and stood next to her.

"Ma'am," one of them said. "That man down there tells me to tell you that he's seen a cop friend of his down there and was going to see if there wasn't something he could do to help out. What's happening down there?" Catherine put her finger to her lips and grabbed the boy's forearm. He seemed to freeze under her grasp. The other boy lost his footing again and slid down the back side of the sandbank.

"Forget this shit," he said, his voice sounding very small and far away.

"Eric," the other boy whispered. "Get up here."

"Nah, man, I'm going home. I'll catch you later." Catherine heard the boy next to her draw his breath in sharply, as if he had just been struck. He slipped a little way down the dune, but struggled back up.

"They might have found one of the runaways," Catherine said to the boy, whose name was Ben. He regained his footing and Catherine saw he towered over her by maybe a whole foot and a quarter. He was gangly and awkward, with a mouth full of metal, and his hair shorn close to the scalp for the summer. He smelled faintly of perfume. Catherine released his arm and saw she'd left five pink half-moons between his wrist and elbow with her fingernails.

"Sorry," she said. The man standing next to Ben, a well-built, dark-haired man with a moustache and long-lashed deep brown eyes, leaned over and clapped a hand on Ben's shoulder.

"I've been here all day," he said softly. Ben looked at him, then looked away, blushing. "Don't worry, everything's going to be alright," the

man said. Just then a woman on the opposite edge of the pit began howling in grief. The crowd closed like a curtain in front of Catherine, so she pulled on Ben's belt.

"Please tell me what you're seeing," she said. Ben stretched his scrawny body to see.

"Oh Jesus," an old navy man standing in front of her said, and performed the sign of the cross. One of the flood lamps shorted out and popped like a report. Half the beach was in shadow, the other in dazzling white light, and when Ben turned back to Catherine, his face was pale.

"What is it?" Catherine asked.

"There's a dead girl in there," he said. Hearing this, the teenage girls on either side of Ben and Catherine started sobbing. One voice, raised above the rest, continued to howl, and someone said that it was Helen Barnes' mother, and like a cloud of gnats, a group of women descended upon her and carried her away. Catherine clutched her stomach and knelt.

"Are you okay?" Ben asked, crouching to help her.

"I'm pregnant," Catherine said.

"Are you having the baby now?" Despite the pain, Catherine managed a laugh.

"I'm only fourteen weeks along," she said.

"Oh, sorry," Ben said.

"Give me your arm," she said to the boy. "I just need some help down the dune." He was as thin as vellum and seemed as if he would be easily injured, but he held on to Catherine's arm tightly, and carefully lead her down the side of the dune. When they made it down, Catherine saw a line of red and blue police lights strung down Shadow Race Lane like a strand of Christmas lights, and police officers stalking down the street on foot, their faces hard, their lips drawn into tight lines. On the edge of the beach, Catherine could see the bonfire group was heading towards the scene, carrying their beach chairs under their arms and their coolers in the crook of their fingers. She watched Jack's familiar lanky body materialize out of the distance and saw the looseness in his limbs and the slack way he walked when he's drunk, hoping for a comparison to John Wayne.

Ben leaned down and asked Catherine if she needed more help, because if she didn't, he was going to find his friend. (Teenagers are either beautiful and vacuous, Catherine thought as she looked at him, or they are not and are damaged by not being so.) She looked at Ben's face, his mouth slightly parted, the silver of his braces creating little white starbursts of light against against metal, and suddenly wanted to kiss him like she was his mother. His face was hard and angular, the face of a statue, and the features were strong but still unwieldy on a child's face. But it was an inexpressibly decent face. It was a rare face. But he was a boy who seemed grateful to be allowed to walk among other people and not be stoned to death. His shoulders curved in towards his chest, and he seemed to be trying to make himself very small and unobtrusive (He would grow into the height



and he would turn his body into something spectacularly strong and attractive. Catherine was sure that he would enter rooms as a man and draw admiring attention.)

“Folks,” a cop shouted into a megaphone. “I’m gonna have to ask ya’ll to leave the dunes, here, and let your men here take care of this mess. This here’s a bad scene, I understand, but you gotta let your men here do their job.” Catherine saw Richard walking towards her from the left, but when he saw Jack loping towards her from the right, he stopped mid-step. Catherine reached up to Ben and touched his face (boys grow out of pimples and blotchiness, and he’d grow out of this; and those roman features, the good bone structure, the light blue eyes would be elements of a handsome face. It was as if the body had to be ravaged first before becoming what it was meant to be. She wishes she could tell him all this. Pain will always visit, but it is transitory.) Ben flinched and drew away from her hand as if she was being ironic by touching him at all.

“Thank you, sweetheart,” she said.

“You’re welcome, ma’am,” he said. Catherine noticed he was looking at her belly.

“You want to touch it,” she asked. Ben shook his head no, but Catherine reached for his hand and placed it on her stomach. She sighed, and the baby moved slightly, for the first time. Ben looked at Catherine, his eyes widening.

“Wow,” he said. “That’s a baby.” As if his face were the answer to a question she’d posed to no one but herself, Catherine smiled, and said, “I guess it is.”

# The Visitor

---

David Cass

The first thing that sparked Teresa's suspicion was a missing banana. She was certain that the morning before she had only eaten one, as she usually liked it, sliced atop her Grape Nuts. There should have been one more left, but the basket on the windowsill was as bare as her calendar—which still advertised June though it was the third of August.

"That's not right," she said to herself, nervously tugging on her flannel moo-moo with her ancient hands and squinting through her thick lenses at the empty basket. "I just bought them on Tuesday. Where the devil did that banana go off to," she questioned, suddenly feeling like a stranger in her own kitchen.

She stood there frozen in thought for quite awhile, leaning her brittle body against the sink while her thoughts circled and circled until she almost felt faint. A banana was missing and as much as she tried she couldn't find any plausible reason why it should be so. Finally, after much careful consideration she decided to convince herself that she must have been mistaken.

"You can't spend all day worrying about things you can't do anything about," she reasoned. She grudgingly poured herself some cereal and coffee, then cautiously sat herself at the breakfast table. She crossed herself, hoping her husband was watching over her. "Bless you, Robert," she whispered into her coffee cup; the steam floated up into her grey curls.

Teresa finished her breakfast and tried not to think of the missing banana. Nonetheless, she couldn't get it out of her mind. She had become accustomed to her daily routine and didn't like surprises much. Ever since her husband passed away, any unexpected event could send her into an enveloping despair. It was not easy without him. Robert had done just about everything for her—paid the bills, did the grocery shopping, planned their evenings. When he was gone she had to learn how to do it all. Even a task as simple as pumping gas was something she had never had to do before. The mere thought of it frightened her to the bone. The day after the funeral her tank went dry and she sat on the side of the road for hours before a neighbor spotted her and helped her out. It was a small town, and he knew of her loss.

Teresa did eventually learn how to pump her gas, but as the years went on she found fewer and fewer reasons to leave home. And after injuring her ankle, she had to stop driving altogether. Over the years, fewer and fewer friends came to visit—some with health problems, some passing away, some forgetting who she was and who they were. Except for the weekly visit from her daughter or a polite conversation with the mail man, Teresa didn't see much of anybody anymore.

After breakfast Teresa washed her dishes and went on over to her rocking chair so she could watch her morning programs. She lowered her frame into the chair and pointed the remote at the TV. She smiled as she slowly rocked back and forth in her chair, admiring the lives of the people on TV. However, her renewed calm was abruptly disturbed when she suddenly heard a strange noise coming from upstairs. She turned down the television and looked up at the ceiling and listened as close as she possibly could. She heard the wood floors creak above her head; the sound slowly traveled from side to side. Her eyes widened and she gripped her chest in a fright.

“Footsteps,” she thought, as a panic paralyzed her body—her heart began pounding against her ribs like it wanted out. She brought her trembling hand to her lips as she listened to the stranger walk.

“He’s in my bedroom,” she feared. “What does he want with me?” Teresa nervously imagined all the violent possibilities: he’s demented and will rape me for certain; he’s taking my jewelry and will slash my throat. Teresa didn’t dare to move an inch. He would certainly hear her and she couldn’t possibly make it to the door before he could reach her.

After about an hour of anticipating to be brutally maimed, Teresa began to question whether she wasn’t just overreacting.

“Maybe it’s just the pipes,” she wondered. “Yes, those old pipes can make quite a racket. I’ll just have to call the plumber.” She tried to calm down, breathing in, long and deep, but it took another fifteen minutes or so of self-talk to convince herself that she had let her imagination get away from her. She then decided that what she needed was a hot cup of tea to calm her piping nerves. And that was that.

The tea was just the thing to bring Teresa back to reality. Maybe it was the surge of the caffeine, but it wasn’t long before Teresa was feeling a little better.

“You’re so silly,” she told herself aloud. “There isn’t anybody else in this old house,” she assured herself, raising her voice a little as if to let the man know she was not afraid of him.

She decided that she had to get on with her day, and that would mean going upstairs to shower and get dressed. Teresa gazed over at the stair case, studying it as if it were a strange dog in her path. Suddenly brazened, she achingly walked over to the stairway, looked up into the shadows and confidently flipped on the light switch. She gripped the hand rail so tight that her arms began to tremble with fatigue, but despite her nerves she kept on until she reached the top stair.

She walked into her room with caution, scanning it over to make sure that everything was in its rightful place. It was then that she saw the bed ruffles. Teresa was always a very neat woman, taking an awful lot of pride in the cleanliness of her home despite the lack of visitors to impress. She always made her bed as soon as she rose, making sure that the ruffles separating the floor from the bed were completely even all around. That’s

why, when she noticed that there was a spot where the ruffles were pushed back a bit, she knew something wasn't right.

"He's under the bed," she thought. She stood there in absolute silence, hopeless about any prospect of escape. All that she could do was stand there and wait for her attacker to show his face.

But he didn't come out. After a while she wondered if he hadn't fallen asleep under there, and she realized that if he had then it would be her only chance to get her jewelry before he woke up and killed her.

Teresa tip-toed down the stairs with her jewelry box held tightly to her chest. It was filled with the rings and necklaces and such that Robert had given to her over the years—she couldn't stand the thought of a life without them. She hid the box inside her microwave, hoping that the intruder wouldn't think to look there, and then tip-toed over to the phone and called her daughter at work.

"West End Marina," her daughter answered.

"Susan, it's your mother. I have to talk to you about something," she whispered with her hand cupped around the mouthpiece.

"Mom, I really would love to talk, but I can't right now. I have a lot of work—why are you whispering?"

"Listen there's someone in the house. I'm ok. He's asleep under my bed."

"Mom, what in the world are you talking about," she questioned, slightly annoyed.

"Susan, he's not leaving. I think he ate my banana this morning."

"Banana? Look mom, I don't have time for this. I don't know what you're doing, but you just got to calm down. There's no one in the house," she dismissed. "You're just imagining things. Maybe we should get you a security alarm so you'll be more comfortable."

"Susan."

"Mom, seriously I don't have time right now, okay. I'll call you later—Bye." Susan hung up the phone, but Teresa stayed on the line for a moment, hoping Susan hadn't hung up, hoping she didn't have to deal with the intruder on her own.

It wasn't long before Teresa realized that the man was going to be staying for good. For a good part of the day he was rummaging around the garage. She thought that he might be building something. Either that or he was breaking all of her husband's tools. At first, she sat in her rocking chair just listening to him, but then she had the bright idea that it would be a great opportunity for her to hide everything that was important to her—pictures of her husband, his uniform from the war, his letters—then she went up into her bedroom to hide them. When she got to her bedroom she frantically tried to find a hiding place for the things and herself, but she realized that there wasn't any room in her closet and the intruder would think to look under the bed. She sat down on the bed and tried to think of where she could put them, but the task was so overwhelming that she

began to cry. She clutched Robert's uniform tightly to her chest—her tears falling on his lapels.

TRANSLATIONS



# Leah

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Aryeh Sivan

translated by Jeff Friedman and Nathan Schwartz

Leah was tired.  
In the evening she sat and stared  
at a burning candle and counted  
the drops of nectar streaming down.  
Around her the tribe of children played  
and there were too many for her to recall their names.  
Surely everything that came  
had to come  
and everything that had to be,  
came.

They never believed she hadn't  
used the darkness to deceive,  
hadn't tried to conceal her  
flawed, naked body, nor would they believe  
her eyes were tender from crying.

The spirit had gone from her.  
She was too tired to retell the story again  
and why would she retell it now?  
Instead she told herself that she loved  
her husband, and that the touch of his flesh  
kindled a flame inside her  
and redeemed her.

There was, of course, some truth in this.  
In every lie there is some truth  
and besides her story was so tangled  
over the years that it was woven  
into a dense cloth—  
a knot in the throat.



# Legacy

---

Haim Gouri

translated by Jeff Friedman and Nathan Schwartz

The ram was caught in the thicket,  
but Abraham didn't know that it had come  
as an answer to the boy's question,  
giving him strength in his darkest moment.

The old man raised his head,  
and when he saw the angel standing there  
and knew he wasn't dreaming,  
the knife fell from his hand.

Free of his bonds,  
Isaac watched his father turn away,  
humbled,  
his shoulders trembling.

The way it is told, Isaac lived  
many years, took what pleasures  
life had to give,  
until the light was extinguished from his eyes.

But at that hour he bequeathed to his sons  
a knife in the heart.

# Rachel

---

Haim Gouri

translated by Jeff Friedman and Nathan Schwartz

She comes to me in darkness for love  
and I don't know who she is  
or how she came to be called Rachel.  
She's beautiful, but her face  
is not like the face in one of those exquisite portraits,  
not like the face of the woman touching  
the strings of the harp in the pale gold light.

And my Rachel lies with me and wanders in me until dawn,  
but when the morning rises, she is Leah.

And for me she is my darling Leah, whose eyes  
fill with tenderness when she looks at me  
and for me she is Rachel, for whom I struggled so many years.

And now she has departed from my arms, my touch,  
and my death rises over the horizon.

And I shall never find another like Rachel,  
who has witnessed my weakness and my worst crimes.  
She is the wind hovering over the water  
and the letters carved in the sacred stone.

I cover my face and remain in silence  
but I am naked and unmasked.

And all that remains is a small thin voice  
and the raven that sits on the stone  
and the hand that remembers her body  
and her name.

# Eve Knew

---

T. Carmi

translated by Jeff Friedman and Nathan Schwartz

Eve knew what hid in the apple.  
She wasn't born yesterday.  
From the ribs of Adam  
she oversaw the works of creation,  
listening to the rustle of herbs and insects.

Eve knew what hid in the apple.  
The waters raged, the moon blackened,  
the letters raised their crowns,  
the wild beasts preyed upon the names,  
and the voice said: *It is good.*

Eve knew what hid in the apple:  
a flowing stream of plants,  
an exemplary garden, watered, saturated,  
a righteous mother, happy  
with every living thing.

Eve knew what hid in the apple.  
To the light of day and with clear insight,  
her naked body eclipsing the light of the sun,  
she called out for freedom for the large worm  
to chew at the roots of the trees.

In the end  
Adam, his sweat flowing like a river,  
confessed by the light of the sword  
that he had run out of names, that his work  
had sapped his strength

and that it was good.

# Adam and Eve

---

Nurit Zarchi

translated by Jeff Friedman and Nathan Schwartz

We rose up from a single stem,  
like an amaryllis that begins to die  
if you cut its cup in two.  
As with a blow  
from the double axe of idol worshippers,  
my love is severed.

Mixing thirst with poison,  
I drink deeply  
from the stream of memory,  
letting it purify  
my image of you.  
You are without stain  
as you wait for me in your pointed hat  
and white coat—  
my executioner.

I let you choke me until I can't cry out,  
uncovering scars  
red as roses,  
blaming me again.  
As a sign of victory,  
you give me back the apple.  
Our shadowy deal is cancelled.

I'm separating day  
from night, my skin  
from your skin, my lips  
from the fruit  
shiny  
with our shame.

# Moses

---

Amir Gilboa

translated by Jeff Friedman and Nathan Schwartz

I came up to Moses and said,  
“Deploy the troops like this.”  
He praised me  
and did what I told him.

And who didn't see my glory then?  
Beautiful Sarah from my childhood was there—  
I wanted to build a city in her name.  
And there was the girl with long legs from the workers' farm  
and Dina from the Italian-Yugoslavian border  
and Riyah from the lowlands in the North.

Proudly I showed Moses  
the right path, and then I realized that she,  
whose name is engraved  
precisely in the seal of my own name,  
wasn't there.

Moses, Moses, lead our people  
through this wilderness,  
for I'm still a boy  
and must sleep now.

# Ghazal 2951

---

Rumi

translated by Amer Latif and Chard deNiord

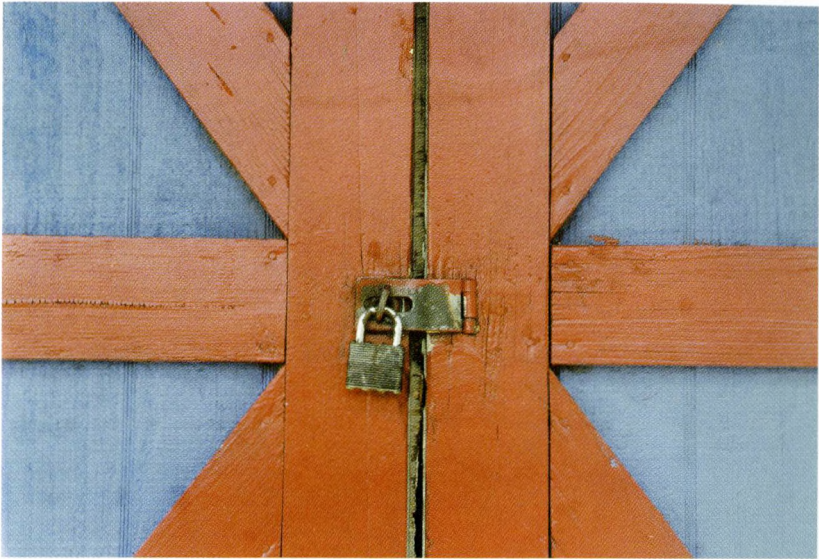
I have become your earth so that you may rain down gems on me.  
I have become like hair so that you may scratch my head.  
I have washed my hands of myself so that you may take my hand.  
I have become like an image so that you may put me in your heart.  
Night and day I tear my clothes out of love  
so that from the heart's east you may lift your face like the moon.  
I rain tears like an April cloud  
so that the new spring of your beauty may bloom in me.  
I became the holder of your trust that the sky refused  
because I was assured by your gentleness that there is help.  
O king, who every moment draws a new form  
on the slate of the heart for the idol worshipper,  
reveal a form that the slate cannot hold  
so that the lover of idols and the idol maker may be released.

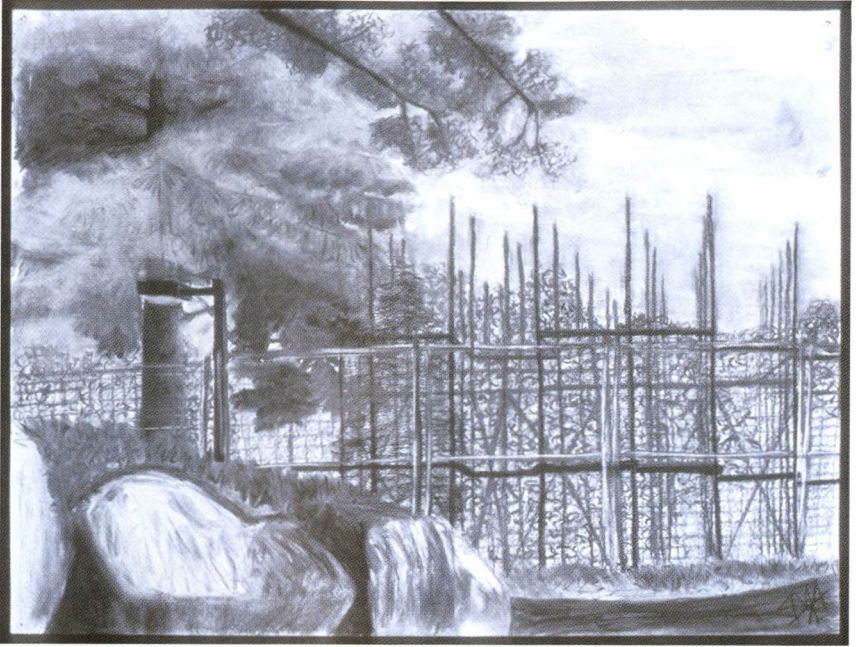


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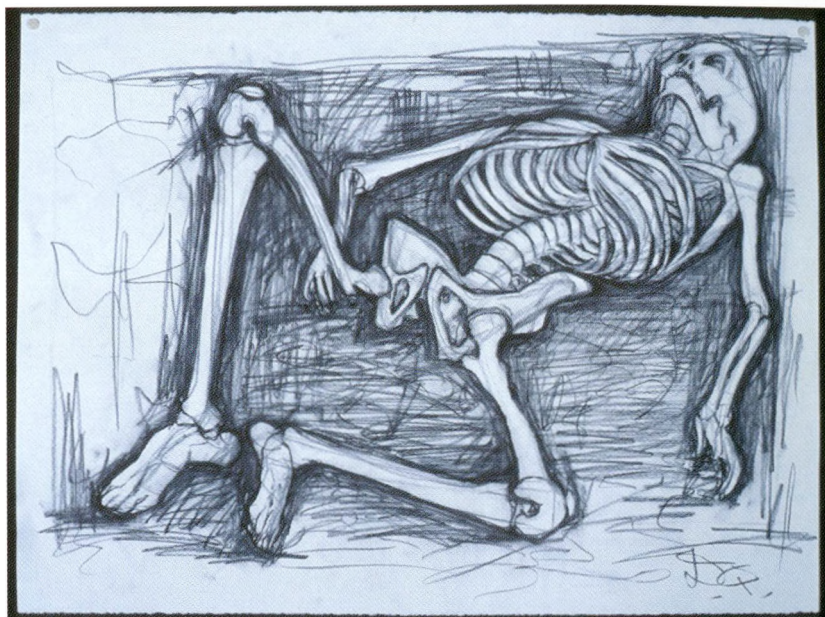




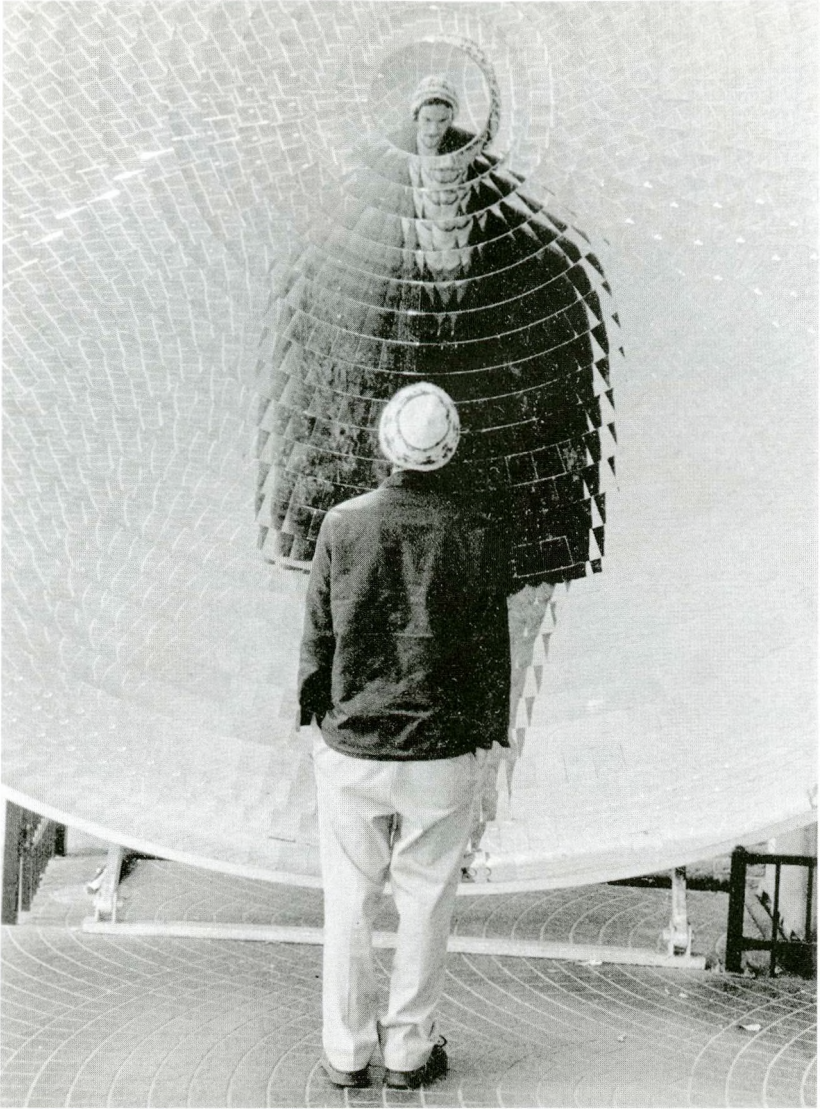




















CONTRIBUTORS'  
NOTES



**Rane Arroyo's** fourth book of poems is *Home Movies of Narcissus* (University of Arizona Press). He has published many poems and plays, the latest appearing in international places such as England, Russia and the Caribbean. He is writing poems about Roswell, New Mexico.

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**Charles Barasch** is writing a series of poems about dreams of the presidents. His poems have appeared in several journals and anthologies. He lives in Vermont, where he works as a speech-language pathologist.

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**Sara-Anne Beaulieu** has been a resident of Jamestown, Rhode Island for 25 years. She has been writing for 15 years. She is currently a graduate student at New England College in Henniker, New Hampshire, enrolled in their MFA Program in Poetry. It is her goal to hone the craft of writing and to explore the vast terrains that is the written word.

**Celia Bland's** collection of poetry, *Soft Box*, will be published by CavanKerry Press in Spring 2004. She is the Director of College Writing at Bard College.

**T. Carmi** (1925-1994) grew up in New York and studied at Yeshiva University and Columbia University. He published his first poems in Hebrew while still living in the United States. He immigrated to Eretz Israel in 1947. In addition to publishing numerous volumes of his own poems, he translated and edited two volumes of Hebrew poetry, including *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Poetry*.

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**Robert Cooperman's** latest collection, *Petitions For Immortality: Scenes From the Life of John Keats*, was recently published by Higganum Hill Books. *The Widow's Burden* was runner up for the Willa Literary Prize. *Main Street Rag* is reissuing a full-length version of *A Tale Of The Grateful Dead*.

**Martin Desht** is author of the documentary photographic exhibit *Faces From An American Dream*, a nationally traveling exhibit that concerns America's de-industrialization and its transition away from an industrial manufacturing economy to the service and information economy. His work is in collections at Harvard University, Lafayette College, among others. He lives in Easton, Pennsylvania.

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**Marisa Dikeman** graduated from Providence College in 2003.

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**John Drexel's** poems have appeared in *Hudson Review, Paris Review, Salmagundi, Southern Review, Verse*, and in *A Fine Excess: Contemporary Literature at Play* (Sarabande, 2001). He has been the recipient of the Amy Lowell Poetry Traveling Scholarship and a Hawthornden Fellowship, and is a contributor to *Contemporary Poetry Review* ([www.cprw.com](http://www.cprw.com)).

**Deborah Fleming** has published poetry in many academic journals. She also writes scholarship about W.B. Yeats and Robinson Jeffers and lives on a farm in Ohio where she raises horses.

**Jeff Friedman** is the author of three collections of poetry: *Taking Down the Angel* (Carneige Mellon University Press, 2003), *Scattering the Ashes* (Carneige Mellon University Press, 1998) and *The Record-Breaking Heat Wave* (BkMk Press-University of Missouri-Kansas City, 1986). His poems have appeared in many literary magazines including *American Poetry Review, Poetry, The Antioch Review, The Missouri Review, Manoa, New England Review, The Forward, 5 AM* and *New Virginia Review*. He is a core faculty member in the MFA program in Poetry Writing at New England College.

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**Amir Gilboa** (1917-1984) was considered one of the major poets in Israel. He published numerous volumes of poetry and won most of Israel's literary prizes.

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**Danielle Grilli** lives in Santa Monica, California. She is a recent graduate of the New England College MFA program in Poetry. Her work can be seen on [www.smailspiralnotebook.com](http://www.smailspiralnotebook.com), *The Mag*, and <http://dmgrilli.diaryland.com/index.html>. She is currently completing her first manuscript.

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**Jenna Martin** received her BA in English from the University of Texas at Austin and her MFA in Poetry from New England College. She comes from a place of riddled grace, steeled in the shape of Texas' best monument, yet distanced, the perception of perimeter. She comes nonetheless, comes to contemplate the world's birds and worms and middle of the sky gliders. This is her nature.

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**Jelaluddin Rumi** was born in 1207 on the Eastern shores of the Persian Empire, which is now Afghanistan, and finally settled in present day Turkey. His poetry has been translated into many different languages worldwide.

**Benjamin Russell**, originally from upstate New York, is a senior English major at Providence College. This is his second and final year as editor of *The Alembic*. He plans to begin work on his MFA in Creative Writing Poetry starting this fall. His poetry is forthcoming from *Pigeonfisher Magazine*.

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**Aryeh Sivan** fought in Israel's War of Independence as a member of the elite Palmach unit. He has published 8 collections of poetry and a novel. His poetry has been widely translated.

As a boy, **K.A. Thayer** received poems as birthday gifts from his father. First studying Architecture, he completed his BFA in Experimental Film at Rhode Island School of Design. Born in Pennsylvania, former resident of San Francisco, K.A. is a cancer survivor since 1997. He will receive his MFA in Poetry from New England College, May 2004, and leave the previously known world, again.

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**Nurit Zarchi** was raised on a kibbutz in Israel. A pronounced feminist, Zarchi is a poet, essayist, novelist and author of books for young readers. She is considered one of the leading voices in contemporary postmodern Israel fiction and children's literature.



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Jackie Gaudioso  
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Danielle Grilli  
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