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PENTHOUSE

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spiel (aka)  
c. '06

Spiel: *Deficit Messenger*



# DAVID CHORLTON

---

## VARIATIONS ON THE WEATHER FORECAST

### *I Today*

Wet and windless as the shade  
of the sky darkens from the Mohave  
to the city. Possibility of a smile  
breaking through  
five per cent.

### *II Overnight*

High chance of weeping after midnight  
when sleeplessness rides  
the south wind and enters by a door  
forced open.  
Outdoor lows of forty to forty five.  
The shiver in the spine  
hits freezing point.

### *III Tomorrow*

Mostly peaceful domestically. Storms  
may occur in countries under occupation  
where temperatures will be close  
to normal: fever.

### *IV Weekend*

Sudden shift from prosperity  
to nervousness, followed by  
a period of introspection beneath low  
cloud. A period of calm  
will last until the dawn of business  
when showers of gold  
are expected to fall  
on upper class neighbourhoods.

CONTINUED

## *V Outlook*

Election campaigning at low elevations to continue indefinitely, broken by short bursts of optimism, and long term prospects of war with appropriately located windfall profits.

# DAVID CHORLTON

---

## THE DOOMSDAY STORE

A canister of sunlight rests on a shelf  
in a vault beneath the coldest  
point on Earth  
next to the moths pressed  
inside a book whose text  
is a postscript to the promised land.  
Ice from a diminishing glacier

lies on a bed of stars and velvet  
in a box under protection  
of a century's darkness.  
Here are the seeds of good intentions  
and the chemicals that challenged them  
separated finally, and here  
is the wire

that once looped around  
the tibia of an animal  
whose extinction qualified it for a place  
in a museum above ground  
during the time of plenty. Here are frozen  
spores and frozen hearts

locked away in safes with nobody  
alive who remembers the combination.  
The signposts along the way  
leading here are turned  
to point back in the direction from which  
we come with mementoes

CONTINUED

to be stored. Can we get there in time?  
Will there be room for the pictures  
we took of the birds? Will their tape recorded  
songs survive underground  
where everything is stored  
ten degrees below  
the freezing point of money?

# DAVID CHORLTON

---

## A LAST INVENTORY

A snowflake on the tongue of a lark

A brush for spare calligraphy  
made with the tuft of hair from a lynx's ear

A snakeskin filled with enough loose change  
to buy a one-way ticket on the cross-town bus

A saint's face on a flake of rust

A firefly inside a thimble  
among needles and thread  
in an oriole's nest

A shopping list written on a five-pointed leaf

A handful of scales from a lizard's back

A currency exchange chart rolled small  
enough to fit inside an almond shell

A necklace with granite shards strung  
along razor wire

A jaguar's tooth in a purse of antelope hide

A vial of spring water floating  
downriver with freshly cut logs

A scorpion curled inside a teardrop

CONTINUED

A flag so unraveled as to render impossible  
any attempt to decipher  
which country it comes from

A raven in a shaft of sunlight with threads  
of red white and blue  
trailing from its beak

# REBECCA ARONSON

---

## LAMENT

In the heavy dark the river smell climbs  
trellises and light poles, scales and twists.  
It sends its sticky web from house to house,  
oak and stump. The river is every  
inhale: breathing retrieves it. I become  
river and you do and we are tadpoles  
too translucent to live so long. Bury  
your dead in the river and they'll reside  
in slick surface mirrors or drowns in mud,  
detained in marrow, in liver, and lung,  
to be unshaken forever more. Spill-  
way that stinks of shed sorrows, what is dropped  
is never lost. What is found, never yours.

# REBECCA ARONSON

---

## REQUIEM

Where the waterline was there are bones  
sometimes in the shore mud. Little mammals  
whose fur went for nests. They feed  
the reeds and burrowers. Dirt  
rich as a king's meal. This is the river's last look  
before descent, before granite  
vaults lock it away, filtering  
filtering. This murk pool once flashing.  
Imagine drinking. Deer hole.  
Hollow of frogs and Jesus bugs skate-walking.  
I might die here now, hand in the warm slick  
to cup a quick swallow. Quenching.  
Before the ache would come.



# REBECCA ARONSON

---

## REQUIEM: GLACIERS

In the photographs, translucent mountains  
as if antifreeze or neon dye bled  
from them. As if within their little sky  
they have swallowed all the color. As if  
lit by sapphires. Their diminishing  
will rub out astro-glow cerulean  
from human vision. In pictures the peaks  
are missing and the valleys. They cackle  
and hum. The ocean eats them; lick by lick  
they are whittled by a warm tongue. It's slow,  
separation grinding in them until  
the boom that cleaves them, cleaves them.

Little boy,  
there once was a color called blue. Little  
boy, in the beginning there was ice.

# ASHA ANDERSON

---

## SKIN TRADE

Mother  
there is always a market for flesh  
even now  
sunlight lost in thorns  
they are hungry for us  
make ordinary what is not  
dying  
all things beautiful know this

they reach back  
future to memory  
faces repeating themselves  
a lime-green inch worm  
toiling over jumbled footstones  
in the membrane  
the breathing cage  
there is no short cut to the old cities  
in the necessary air

I am sitting in a chair  
imagine me  
I will now move my right hand  
move yours from the dirt  
touch me  
it is easy  
this regeneration  
a habit natural as spring  
we the living have come to  
expect it  
you know it is a gift  
the last thing  
the dying pup saw from the pile  
after they skinned off everything  
but her eyelashes

# ASHA ANDERSON

---

## PELE

Somewhere nearby the fly  
is a friendly last voice  
of earth where with broken  
pieces glinting everywhere and  
unbraided fire hair  
the literal eye shuts lured  
beyond by what cannot  
be seen what has not  
begun  
stretches out what cannot  
be imagined  
takes shape under my feet  
the bloody red sulfuric sweaty birth  
of future worlds.

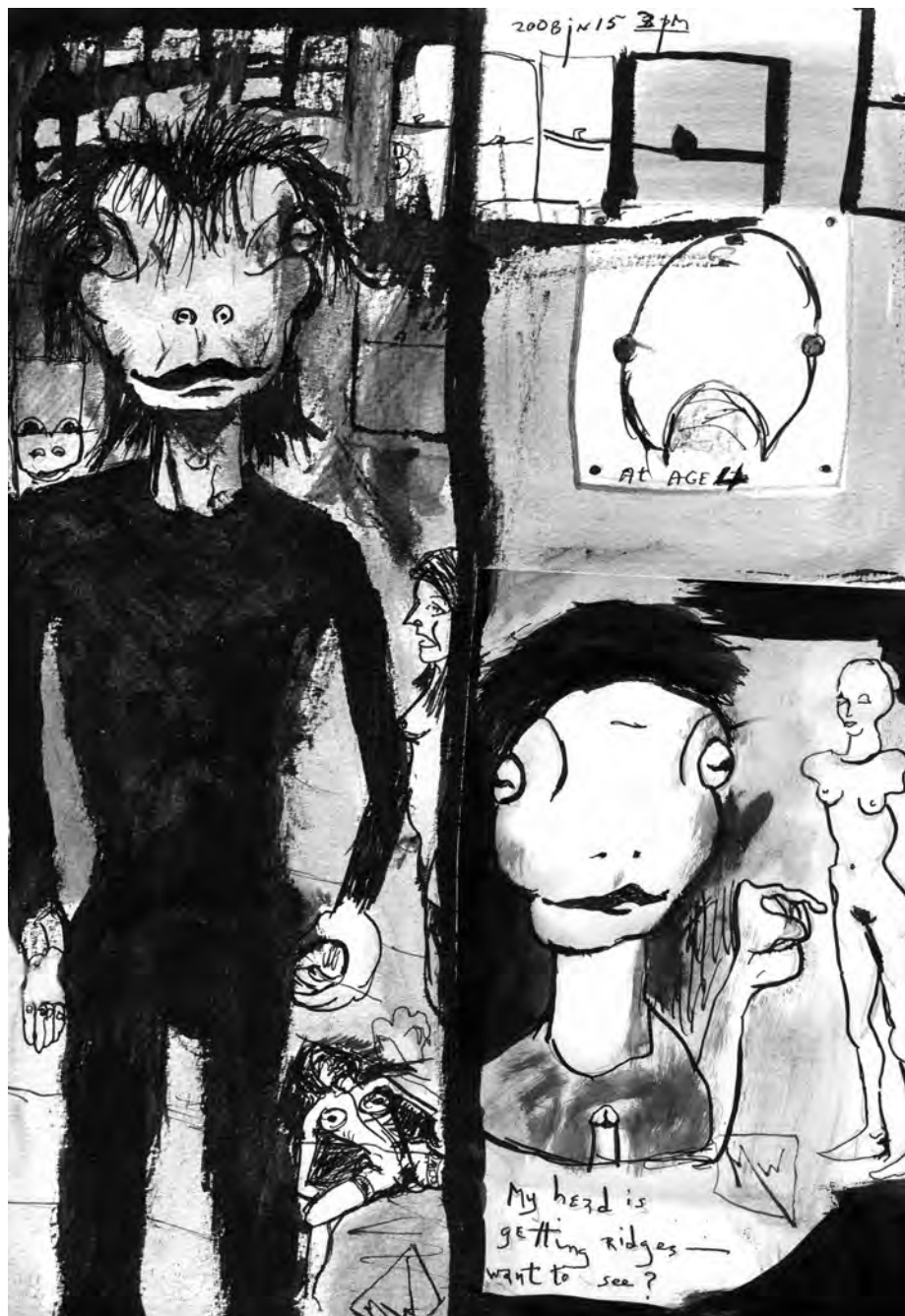
*I never wanted to return she says  
never wanted to leave the white plum  
the stinging rain  
but we come back together  
from the boiling point of hurricanes we  
walk back over burnished glass  
Anna Sadhorse from the fire eating sea  
and I back past tiny ferns busy in their grottos  
digesting the volcano within  
thin moist shadows  
caught in the upheaval's crust*

It's never been so fine here where the foot  
does the thinking finding momentary ground  
before the body falls again forward  
into unforeseeable circumstance.  
*Pick any thread from the loom of chaos  
she whispers.  
The wildest will do. It is our job  
making sense of nothing.*

## BLOOD DANCE

The way Indians do a Rain Dance hoping for rain  
Earthworms do a Blood Dance hoping for blood,  
Hoping for blood to drain down to them from above  
Not realizing it's from human warcorpse carnage,  
    thinking it's just a different kind of rain —  
For the corpses on the battlefield are like clouds  
    blood comes from instead of rain  
    and there's so much blood  
    it trickles down  
    and drips through the ceilings  
    of underground worm tunnels  
And the worms don't see the corpses  
    but hear bombs and guns and groans  
    and think it thunder  
    and gorge and engorge themselves  
    in the blood-soaked loam  
And drunk on the blood of youngmen  
    war has turned to dung  
    worms become cannibals  
    and devour each other  
    and the shit of worms that ate blood  
    and that ate worms that ate blood that ate worms that ate blood  
    for them is a delicacy,  
While for days on end, for weeks on end,  
For months on end, for years on end,  
For centuries on end, for millennia on end,  
For geologic ages on end, for Big Bangs on end,  
    millions of war wounds  
    make a small newspaper article  
    or a sentence in a history book  
    no one reads anymore,

While enough blood from war dead through time  
floats all the battleships ever built,  
Yet the entrance and exit wounds of every bullet  
still haven't been photographed  
and shown to gradeschool kids  
so they can identify them  
and draw them with craypas  
from memory—  
What other ways are there  
to keep Death young?  
Every time a young soldier is killed  
Death thanks God and is happy  
For the more corpses the merrier,  
For the more corpses the more blood for worms,  
For the more corpses the younger Death gets,  
Till Death becomes a child  
who no longer remembers  
dead men envy maggots in cheese,  
Till Death becomes a baby  
suckled by the war wounds  
of all time,  
Till Death becomes a fetus in the womb  
not knowing blood or bombs or bullets or worms or rain  
and having no idea in a million years  
tomorrow it will be born.



Michael Weston: *Tadpole Documents Panel 4*

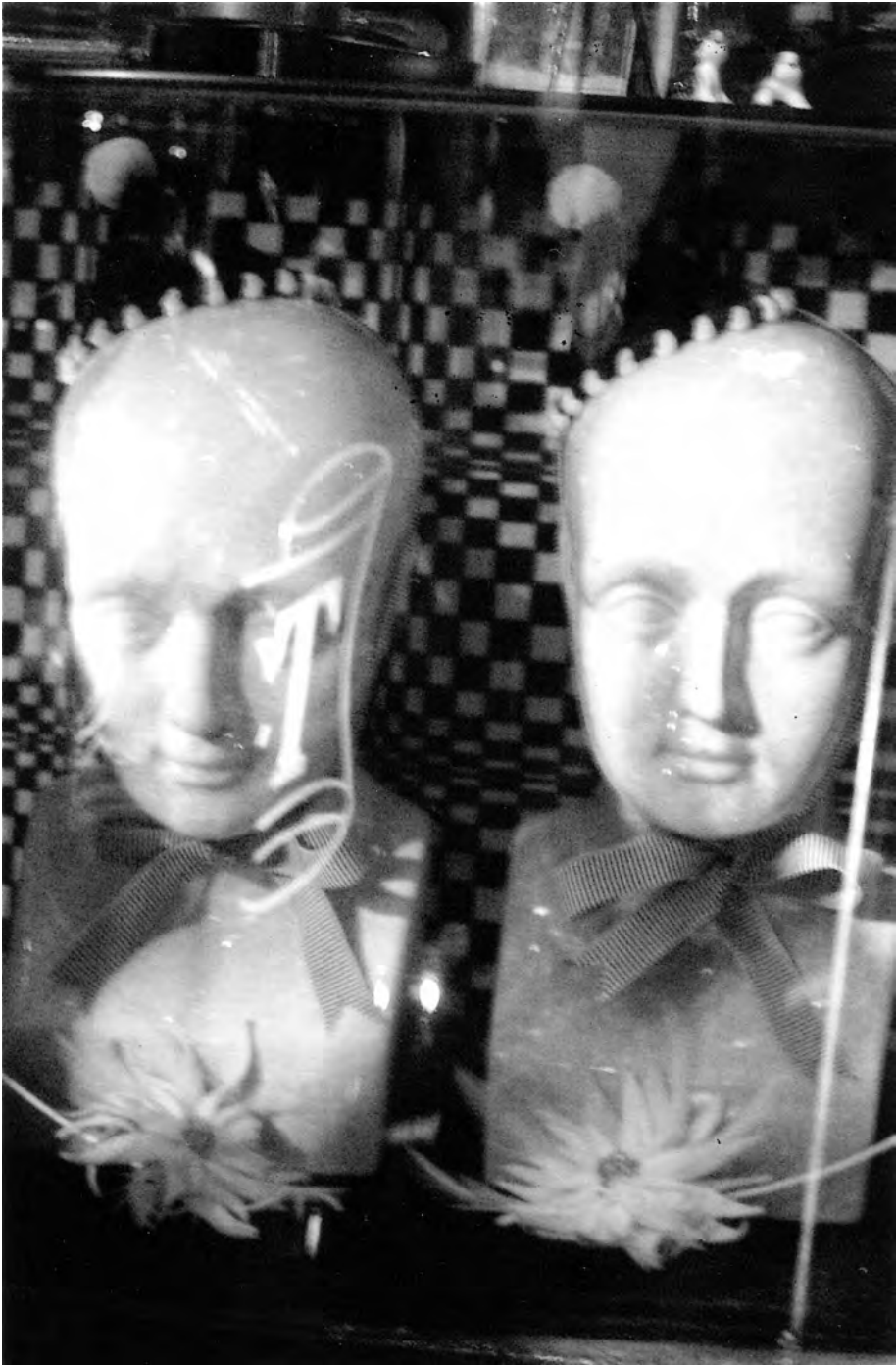
# EMILY BORGMANN

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## BOY KING

Through the valley the dashboard hums, sleep  
a fidget of father's thumb. The boy is blasting  
his GI figurines with a juice box straw. They are far  
from the hearsay of dormered windows. Widening Nevada night  
at once a tunnel and a prayer—the Chrysler burrows,  
raises a flag to the ugly idol of leaving. Boy dreams of Osiris,  
carries the god on shoulders hunched with the weight  
of never-ending, like one old shoe mistaken  
for a way through. Now he stirs, asks *Oh daddy,*  
*why don't we have a king?* But the man behind the wheel

had gone on ahead, to the tombs of Vegas parlors and neon fields,  
where children mount up like hawks, collide.  
Father followed the ringing in his ears, took the room key,  
laid the child down. Then: into the mired night, to melt into riches,  
glean flesh from stone. In the arid dawn the boy unfurls,  
throat clotted with the knotted words that infants wail  
once they know they cannot turn back. He does not rise—  
never stops running from the cold morning bed toward the crown.  
There were no mansions hung from trees—only trees.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Pharmacy Twins*



# DAVID LAWRENCE

---

## WINTER BLEAK

After the season I bunk into the dead of winter.  
A rabbit in a trap is dead too.  
A crunched leg  
And the suicide of wandering among drifts.  
I play a goat's horn  
In the hope of calling myself back to life.  
Cornucopia.  
Once I was plenty horny.  
But I have learned to love a woman's spirit.  
My wife's,  
More elevated than a moral crisis.  
I am morbid around suffering.  
I dial my phone for help.  
It is not cellular.  
It is disconnected.  
I am cut off from the courage of the landscape.

# DAVID LAWRENCE

---

## THE ROADSIDE HIPPIES

At the end of the road there is discomfort about where to get a new start.  
Do you go back to the beginning?  
Do you take the first step on a new road?  
Do you step off to the side and enter the underbrush?  
The snow fell from the trees and buried me in the misconception  
Of winter.  
A white accident happened on the road.  
I was in the middle of going nowhere and the somewhere  
That arises out of nowhere to a position of prominence.  
I licked the whiteness from my shoulder.  
My tongue became a snowball.  
I threw it at the roadside hippies and told them their concept of civilization  
Died in the sixties,  
That despite their good intentions they were wishing us all dead.

# DAVID LAWRENCE

---

## THAT'S ALL FOLKS

When I fall off the end of the paragraph  
I land on the blue line of death.  
Figure it out.  
I am a smudge.  
I have run out of letters.  
I have nothing to say.  
I am a mouth announcing an elliptical  
Religion.  
I am space.  
I am your period.  
The Jamaicans call me blood clot.

# KARA DORRIS

---

## SNOW WHITE CONFESSES TO THE MIRROR

I kept opening the door—Ordinary  
paneled wood-grain, a smooth jewel because—  
I loved that corset more than sky—Like boxes & closed things.  
My hands are shredded  
momentum & snow skin in the air  
mapping dust on windowsills & your crystal glass,  
the gold-gild tarnishing, your likeness becoming mine.  
Deep magnetic breaths hushing. That door sighs.  
I opened. The first an accident.

sublime

Slept. Sustained. Behind my eyelids  
firings became reality. My mother braided my hair,  
each set sun she twisted & knotted another strand  
against waking. Now I love that apple more than.  
Fennels & rues. I was not meant to suffocate in sea foam,  
but witness black fireworks.  
A ghosted glass figure of hush-close.

menace

I remember seven fathers to ask advice of.  
Cooking lentil soups & baking cinnamon pumpkin  
breads, & yet, I knew of danger & of no danger.  
I opened the door. The second memorized rush.

Why did I open the door?  
That comb, that laced-tight, that stemmed sleep.  
& yet, no. Stillness already existed.  
The prince was only the art between us.  
I ran away to fall into sameness.

obsession

I kept opening the door. To feel. My body  
in that apple. In shade.

Scribbling black ink, curves & stems, over a red pumping heart —  
Taking myself out of. The waking up two  
years after waking. To take the gesture of kissing & waking  
as it was. To hide from the story-sleep but  
I long for crystal glass layers.

beauty

Above a metal-glossed scrying glass,  
the reflection a dark concave, I watched bodies burn.  
Become black metal paint.  
Sleep is not the only way to hide from oneself.  
I love that corset, that comb, that apple more than —  
I kept falling into—that opened door—  
It wished for me: Sleep, sleep, sleep.



Edward Michael O'Durr Supranowicz: *Dimensions*

# LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

(TRANSLATED BY ARTURO MANTECÓN)

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## HALLUCINATION OF A HAND, OR POSTHUMOUS, ABSURD HOPE IN THE CHARITY OF THE NIGHT

*To Isa-belle Bonet*

A woman drew near to me,  
and in her eyes I saw all of my ruined loves,  
and it amazed me  
that someone could still love this cadaver,  
someone like that woman  
whose whispered murmurs  
repeated in the night the echo  
of all my devastated loves,  
and it amazed me  
yet more that someone  
would stubbornly lick the scabs  
of that substance that once was gold,  
and which time has in no way purified.

And I looked upon her incredulously  
like one in the desert who looks unbelieving  
upon the horrific suspicion of water.  
I loved her without even daring to believe it.

And so I offered her my naked brain,  
as obscene as a toad, as obscene as life,  
like a completely useless peace,  
urging her day after day  
to touch it sweetly with her tongue,  
repeating in that manner a ceremony,  
whose one and only meaning  
is the sacredness of forgetting its meaning.

# LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

(TRANSLATED BY ARTURO MANTECÓN)

---

## THE PLAN OF A KISS

I will kill you tomorrow when the moon comes out  
and the first loon tells me its word.  
I will kill you tomorrow just before dawn  
when you are in bed, lost in dreams,  
and it will be like copulation or semen on your lips,  
like a kiss or an embrace, or like an act of gratitude.  
I will kill you tomorrow when the moon comes out  
and the first loon tells me its word,  
and in its beak it will bring me your death warrant  
which will be like a kiss, or an act of gratitude,  
or like a prayer for the never-arriving daybreak.  
I will kill you tomorrow when the moon comes out  
and the third dog barks in the ninth hour  
in the tenth leafless tree now without sap,  
no one any longer knowing why it stands in the earth.  
I will kill you tomorrow when the thirteenth leaf  
falls upon the ground of misery,  
and you will be a leaf or some pallid thrush  
that returns in the remote secret of the afternoon.  
I will kill you tomorrow, and you will beg for forgiveness,  
for that obscene flesh, for that dark sex  
which this brilliance of iron will have for a phallus,  
which that sepulcher, forgetfulness, will have for a kiss.  
I will kill you tomorrow when the moon comes out,  
and you will see what a beauty you are when you are dead,  
all full of flowers, with your arms crossed  
and your lips closed like when you pray  
or when you implore me once more for the word.  
I will kill you tomorrow when the moon comes out,  
and from that heaven of which legends speak,



you will beg, tomorrow, for me and my salvation.  
I will kill you tomorrow when the moon comes out,  
when you see an angel armed with a dagger,  
naked and silent at the foot of your white bed.  
I will kill you tomorrow and you will see that you will come  
when that coldness passes between your two legs.  
I will kill you tomorrow when the moon comes out.  
I will kill you tomorrow, and I will love your ghost,  
and I will run to your grave on those nights  
when my throbbing cock burns anew  
the dreams of sex, the mysteries of semen,  
and I will make of your tombstone my first bed  
for to dream of gods, and trees, and mothers,  
and upon your tombstone I shall throw the dice of the night.  
I will kill you tomorrow when the moon comes out,  
and the first loon tells me its word.

# LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

(TRANSLATED BY ARTURO MANTECÓN)

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## PARABLE OF THE DICTIONARY

One word leads to another word: one meaning to  
another meaning: meaning extends itself like the  
tresses of a blonde lady at the seaside,  
touching the sea and the ships.

Thus it is that the word, so as to not die in another  
word, disintegrates into ashes.

And a man dies: a brother of mine, a fellow man  
leading to another fellow man, since the category  
of man is universal, and it extends itself like  
long tresses, until it touches the stars.

But the moon shines resplendent upon the graves, and a  
dog barks in the hour in which a man dies.

Go ask a dog: What is madness?  
and it will bark three times.

But getting back to the question concerning meaning,  
this, as the Tao knew, eludes expression, this is because  
meaning is not a form of discourse

The only signifier is death, which is,  
according to structuralism, the main form of  
discourse, because it is the word of God.

A pelican spits on my mouth, a fish lusts

in my hand: as the dictionary says: “to lust: to yearn with desire”, like when the dog barks.

But I remember that one time Antonio called me Humphrey Bogart: “with his hollow trenchcoat”, like he says in one of the poems of his book dedicated to his love, Olga, whose tresses extend themselves over the page.

# LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

(TRANSLATED BY ARTURO MANTECÓN)

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## THE MADMAN

I have lived in the slums, looking like  
an ape, I have lived in the sewer drain  
carrying off the feces,  
I have lived two years in the City of the Flies  
and learned to nourish myself with what I let loose.  
I was a serpent slithering  
by the ruins of man, shouting out  
aphorisms standing atop the dead  
crossing oceans of unknown flesh  
with my logarithms.  
And all I could think of was an hallucinatory battle  
and that my parents seduced me in order to  
execute the sacrilege, between the elderly and the dead.  
I have taught the maggots how to move  
upon corpses, and women how to hear  
how the trees sing to the twilight and how they weep.  
And men dirtied my face with mud, when I spoke,  
and they would say with their eyes “Get out of life!”, or else would say  
“There is nothing you can  
be that would be lesser still than your soul”, or else “What is your  
name?”  
and “How dark your name is!”  
I have lived the blanks of life  
its equivocations, its oblivions, its  
incessant oafishness and I remember its  
brutal mystery, and its  
caressing my belly and my buttocks and my feet  
frenetic for flight.  
I have lived its temptation, and I have lived the sin  
of which no one will ever absolve us.

# LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

(TRANSLATED BY ARTURO MANTECÓN)

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## ASTORETH

Astoreth, Lord of my feet and entrails,  
oh, you who whips the horse of life  
and shows your cock to the gods of the sun,  
while I walk  
while I walk through the valley of the flowers of death  
and the heads of little children shoot up through the stalks  
and blood rains down from the plucked hyacinths  
in praise of the demon,  
Lord of the plucked hyacinths  
and king of that flower that resides in the firmament between my legs,  
the plucked flower of gold.

# LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

(TRANSLATED BY ARTURO MANTECÓN)

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## THE DEATH OF POETRY

(WHICH COULD BE THE TITLE OF THE ENTIRE BOOK)

Like the stone, the poem is mortal,  
ray of light in the light,  
a rumbling of toads  
while your mouth agonizes  
and it is seen how the poem dies.

## DEATH OF A POEM

The spider falls vanquished  
upon the paper  
The nightingale escapes from the forest in flames  
There is nothing  
on the paper: a phoenix  
is the silence  
which is poured like a tear  
on the paper.

# LEOPOLDO MARÍA PANERO

(TRANSLATED BY ARTURO MANTECÓN)

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## SERENITY

*To Martin Heidegger*

There are only two things: my disfigured face  
and the hardness of rock.  
Consciousness only lights up  
when confronted with Being  
and so it is that all knowledge  
and the matrix of all forms  
is the wound, and only that  
which weeps is immortal.  
And the night, mother of wisdom  
has the neverending form of weeping.

# PAUL B. ROTH

---

## NICE BEING HERE

Early this morning, while walking the streets of the city I've known as home for close to sixty years, I meet no one. I climb the highest hill above Onondaga, the lake this community surrounds, and gaze down without seeing the usual human movement. Businesses normally open at this hour are just not. Pigeons take their own awkward places in reserved but empty parking spots. Seagulls circle a tattered sky of bleached and illiterate billboards. Smoke commonly rising from candle factory stacks isn't. Leashed dogs walk themselves. Doors of running cars hang open curbside. Trolleys spark and rock to a stand-still at every turn-around. Wordless signs flash across every aspect of concrete and glass. A spattered white coat hangs on a hook in the phlobotomist's office. Wind flips through a magazine's glossy pages open on an easy chair where someone's left the front door to their home wide open. When I pass by, the movie star on its front cover waves to me but I'm too anxious to wave back. After chasing me, yelling out my name before it's ever been spoken without a language, I hear her beg me to be her companion in this humanless world. My reply without air has no echo.



# PAUL B. ROTH

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## OLD SPACE

I'm holding old rains in my hands as they die. I bury them between thundering sky and the heartbeats my dog's breathing chases down around his afternoon nap. It's an unused space belonging ages ago to over-indulged children who'd instead left it to play a real-life fantasy of bungee jumping drunk to their death. The serenity of the space they abandoned, has since mourned their loss. Its windows thrown wide open are so every orphan of the wind, crying as though from a peacock's throat at day's end, can listen and be let in. Other times, a dry rope's pulled tight around my waist, splintering and bursting, scattering my breath before gasping on the floor in droplets of flame. I'm distressed because not only am I and my voice invisible but neither of them cry out for help. Not to mention that only dying children hear me. Their deliberate fingers pointing the way to their own deaths right through me. Their hands taking mine, leading me back and forth along lake paths where, unlike me, their feet disappear and in thin air no longer do what I'd call walking.

# PAUL B. ROTH

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## ANOTHER LOVE'S WAR

My hands change place with Mediterranean waves. My fingers, swollen with salt, curl over the top of the last place sunlight reaches before touching bottom. Below this edge of light, right under a faint warmth my blood has never known, orange fish with black eyes and striped blue shoulders swim in and out of currents now rippling across the drowned cobblestone in many an extinct fishing village. In their eyes, flamboyant sea battles flash continuously between rival monarchies. Each successive generation is unable to ignore the horrors of its past losses. Blueish-gray cannon smoke, frayed but shirtless powder burns, slippery green anchor rope, blood-flecked tarpaulin patches, unnaturally attached limbs, along with a yardarm full of salt-pitted lash marks, all helps obscure the unfinished story of an already waning civilization. Looking down, my own hands, gripping rock, roll the slumping shoulders of sailors over in low tide, feeling their young heads bobbing up and down below my downturned palms. I keep pace with kelp tangling its body's twists around their bodies, while their fingers, squeezed clean of all blood, blacken and drop off. Just above night's underwater horizon a pulse of red and white light strobes from an ancient buoy. This time seems different as I lie in wait. No longer balancing some indispensable sextant, the claws my old fingers become aren't just pinching rocky coastlines to keep busy.

# PAUL B. ROTH

---

## CAREFREE EXILE

I'm living in carefree exile. Reticent crows know me best. They jot my name down in jet black under skies they circle without zeros. They nest just above me. I'm careful how my arms move. Mud clings my shoulders to a rough platform of dry grasses, broken twigs, and shredded leaves. The glowing warmth of yellow off its walls is thin strippings of light brown bark. Moss circles my mouth whose whistles, once used for soothing the crows' suspicions, now moisten and help anneal the nest's thin mud. Heavy feathers and raspy whispers in a language only dying stars understand, blindfold me. Straw, dry roots and golden grasses stuffed around my neck stay put, then catch three gray blotched olive-green eggs. I feel the warmth of not moving. Hatched from this warmth, becoming suddenly who I'm about to be, I cry over my own survival. Before long, my wings tinged a dull rouge, know no better and take flight. Soaring over vast harvested cornfields, my breathing quickens. My widening black eyes swallow the bright grain of this morning's full moon whole.

# SIMON PERCHIK

---

\*

You reach for lullabies, left over  
and the slow crawl half whispers  
half where your lips ache, float

the way this empty cup still wobbles  
will break apart, overloaded  
disguised as two steps closer and alone

then fill your arms with its darkness  
seeping through, breathing out  
not yet an embrace, not yet the mouth

where your fingers end, surrounded  
by more and more dirt, a small room  
here, there, there, not yet asleep.

# MARCUS E. DARNELL

---

## THE ACHIEVEMENT OF ANOREXIA

She is known in fat circles  
as Easter Island Gal—  
her face chiseled to death,  
staring up to the moon—  
a pale, sickly, perfect god,  
to suck the fat  
of her nibbled apple away.

She fills her days  
scrounging for fiber sources  
to flush her bad mud away.

“Away, away, everything  
away and out of me,”  
she squeals on the toilet.  
She has done good today.

At work they pity the poor bone  
to think of firing her.  
“She must not like herself,  
let the stringbean be.”  
They are shellshocked  
from an era of beautiful walking sticks.

“I am a rhino,”  
she whispers to the mirror.  
“I am not floating,  
so I am not to the weight I want to be.”  
“When I reach my wanton weight,  
will there be enough of me to hate?  
I’ll lose ten more.”  
As long as there is something of her,  
there is more to lose.

She lunges at chocolate delicacies.  
She can have her dirty hour,  
one out of empty twenty four  
to be a fiend in a candy store.  
Everyone has their right, she believes,  
to be a hog in the darkest hour,  
to starve in the day  
is a show of power.

She fondles the plates  
of her stegosaurus back.  
“They want the bone of me,  
it’s the baggage they hate.”  
She’d be one goddess skimmed of fat,  
a steamy two-digit heart attack.

She wants to be a pretty pocket of air,  
or to be unborn again, not here.  
She wants her heart  
to explode in front of true men,  
she would be a saint of abstinence then.  
They’d see her heart was a purse  
(not an Organ perverse)  
she never spent like lards  
who swayed, indulged, didn’t care.

She’s sucking oranges,  
can’t let the teeth go.  
She has her calculator out,  
has her defecations down to twice a week.  
Her nose and toe are sporting gout.  
She can’t find her fat and spit it out.

Her ulcer eats itself, grown so hungry.  
She can feel it kicking.  
She is an acid with no place to go.

To be a fairy no one sees.  
To be all cave.  
To be as lovely without blood as a tree.  
To walk on water, defy, sing.  
She wants to be one insect wing.

“I will be carved on a vase  
for my Egyptian catwalk.”  
To be a thorax  
protruding from a drift of sand.  
She prays and cracks her hands,  
breathes out a puff of chalk.  
She tastes herself, delicious.  
Oh, to feel the wind through herself,  
her liver, a sail—spacious.  
To fly.  
To dive off the cliff in the dream  
and know you will swoop,  
not shatter on the land.  
To weigh less than the dream.

# CHET HART

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## FROM KIM'S DEATHLY PREPONDERANCE

The years I wrote horror poetry  
I lived in my car with two hundred pieces  
of paper only a man selling his hangman's throat  
would understand. Two hundred notes  
hacked from the furnace's wall,  
each with its goodbye of letters and words  
that looked like ravens moving closer by rainlight,  
each with its camellia refusing decay.  
I plagiarized all of them from the bible written  
during that season without flesh and its fields  
blown to ashes by the vampire Kim Elizabeth.  
The pages filled with bat droppings  
but no bats, nothing before the first stabbings  
of autumn. No sky anywhere, and until  
the extinction of each city on the radio,  
only a flashlight that shined over the graves  
inside my stomach. "All kinds of orchid corruptions  
lead to immortality," Elizabeth said between caesuras,  
between the coffins exhumed with her writing nail.  
By the last poem I knew the sun had been  
taken behind the slums and fed to the rats.  
Her *Wicked Mystic* prodigy language was not subtle.  
The four-year-olds dangling from hooks  
in each closet no longer breathed through  
their entrails, no longer commanded the wolves  
to pray. Night followed by more night  
and some poorly-chosen sleep.  
It had nothing to do with the men  
selling bouquets and bottles of blood



or the meat I'd written about strung up in doorways  
and still moving, even without wind,  
and lying about its intentions to the priest  
dressed in slipknots and gathering the most  
vulnerable puddles for the dark walk back  
to the salvation tombs he dug out of the sky himself.

# CHET HART

---

## THE LIGHTS OF CONSTELLATIONS, THE LIGHTS OF SEWERS

excrement carried by convicted  
kidnap artists

toward the sun. it had to be done, said  
the president,

the available air diagnosed with  
slightly moaning

blood, the water too thick to drink,  
the sewers heavy

with bouquets of sores and paper towels  
and chicken tumors,

and what will happen to our salad afternoons,  
the people ask

what will happen when our sunlight turns  
brown and poisonous

because now a second moon forms  
from the colon deaths,

brown prairies and brown clouds  
and no trees,

the land crowded with polyps that were  
hospitals once,

no one will condemn their hands  
or intestines, no one

sends missionaries to heal the cameras  
lost in the entrails.

it's a day since they discovered the work lamps  
of the constipation's intelligence,

a microbe flayed along the runny corn beds and river  
blockages, tall men

sludging through the brown wind,  
the sky a torn animal

tangled in its own veins. And then the wreckages  
of convicts who shovel

cancer into each other's tired clothing  
where the sun,

smaller now, and suffering, can be  
felt, bottomless

like the frequencies needed for exploration,  
and the gloves

the prisoners wear, for burrowing, for  
touching the light

where the stench is weakest and emptied  
to dirt's distant glare.

# GUY R. BEINING

---

## REVOLVING

29.

the milkman came & created  
another line of entry  
having forgotten the snort  
of early morning drinks.  
a girl came out  
wearing an ankle bracelet  
& when she bent her legs  
hit the moist bottles  
leaving a milky shine  
on her blooming kneecaps.  
there was no language  
or trick involved for  
the milkman was already at  
the neighbors house rattling bottles.  
does anyone wonder who darts  
thru the bottle factory  
without the sense of shining skin?

# GUY R. BEINING

---

## REVOLVING

32.

the ocean became the center  
of his thoughts.  
the landlord walked across  
the carpet & said that  
his lease was up.  
harmony had been capped  
& the image of a belt  
swinging in the breeze was real.  
beyond the windshield  
of the tenants mind  
the ocean was a monument.  
later, he was no more than  
a sack in a patrol wagon.  
this morning mist was  
another step toward the sea.

# LAWRENCE APPLEBAUM

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## [THAT SUMMER I LIVED IN DARKNESS]

That summer I lived in darkness.

I let each forty or twenty watt bulb take its natural course  
burning out the way you did.

I let each one sit in its chandelier arm,  
milk glass globe.

My night stands held brass pineapple  
lamps never illuminated,  
forty-nine bulbs

used up and cold,  
unused candles sat with me.

I ruined my eyes—  
even the fridge light was tepid.

In the six rooms there was not one beam.

I lived by the grayish cast of the West Side Highway,  
my memory and whatever was left over from the moon.

A DOUG DORPH PORTFOLIO:  
THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS



Doug Dorph: *Sloth*

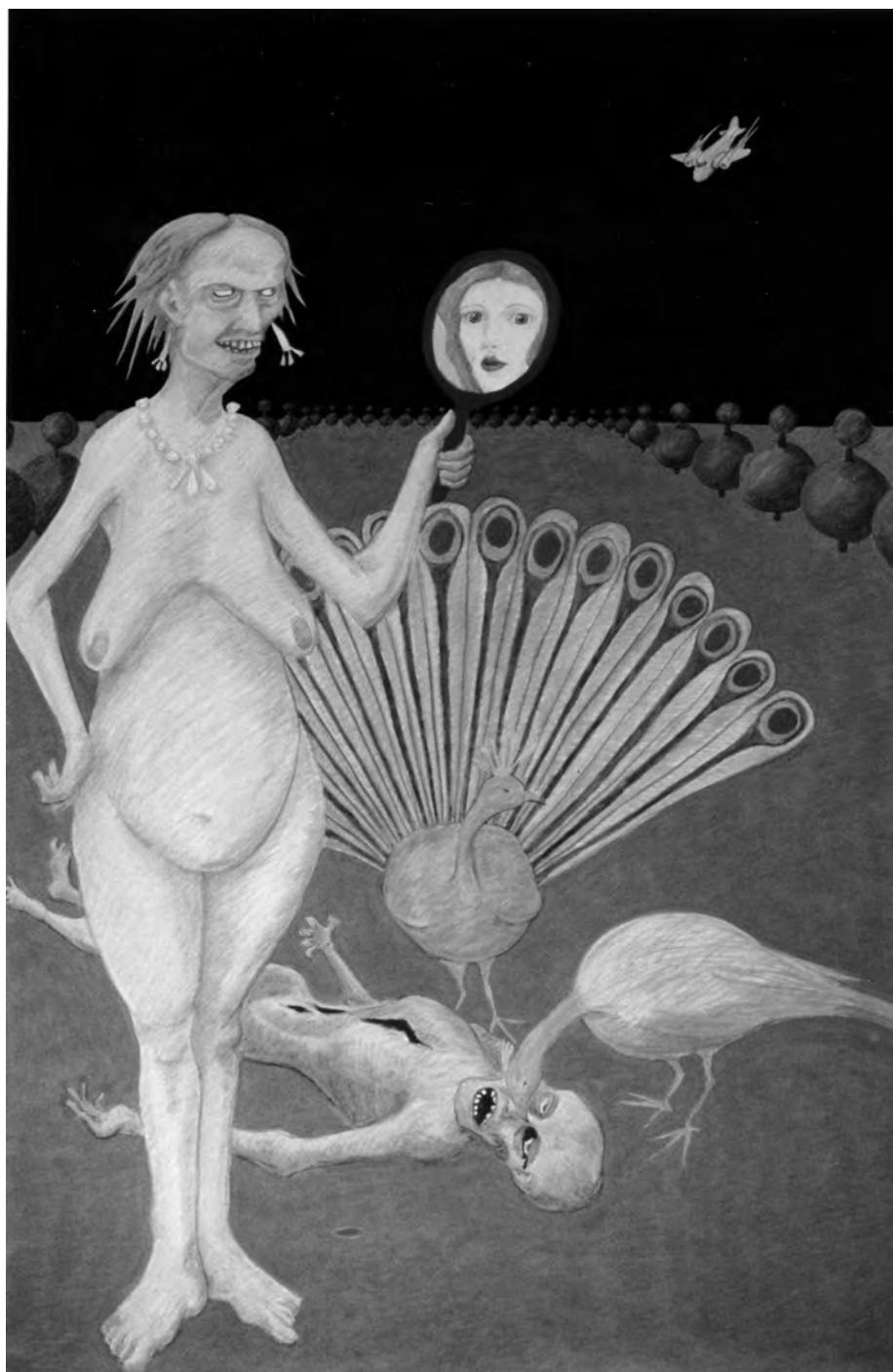




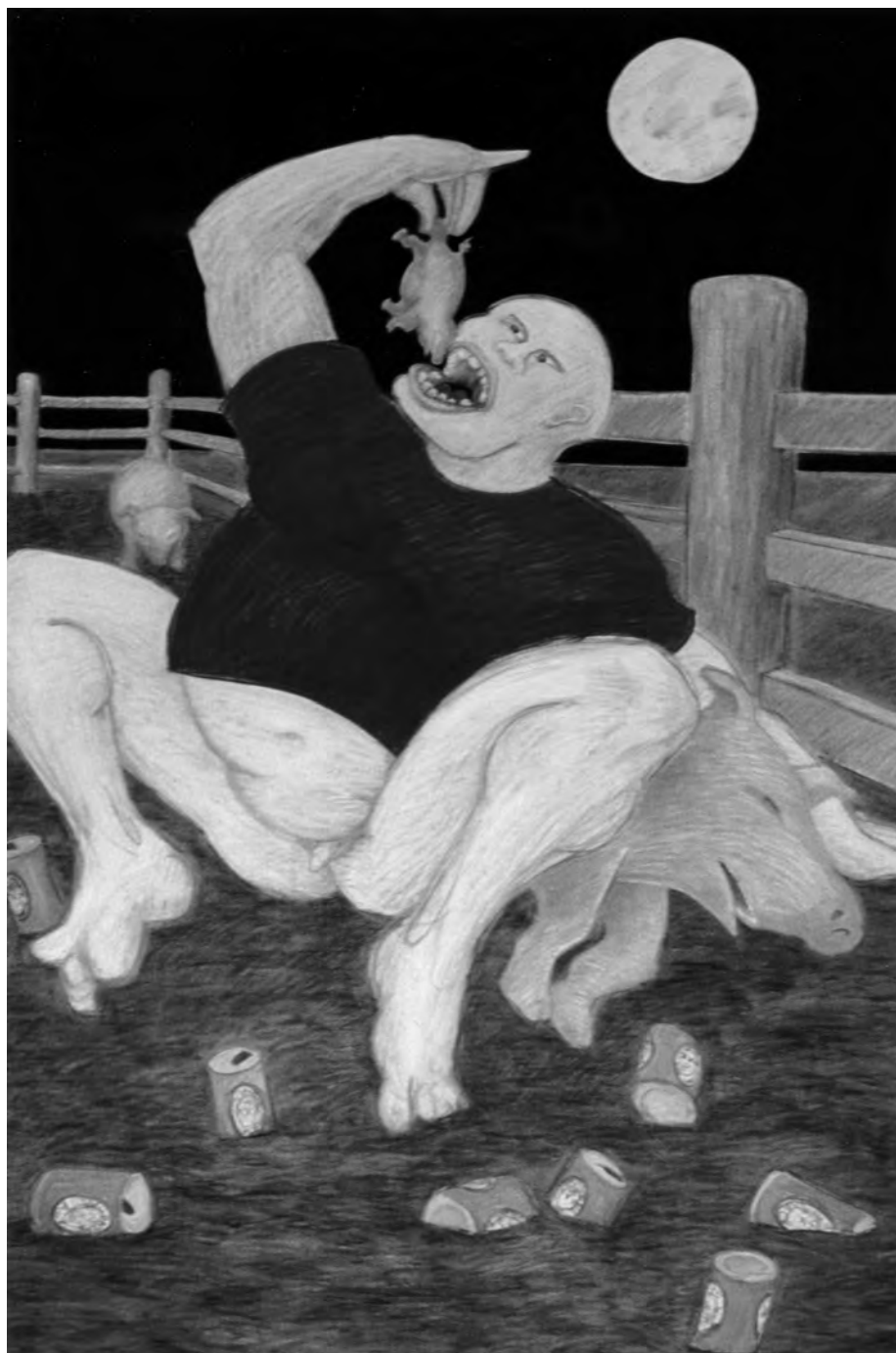
Doug Dorph: *Envy*



Doug Dorph: *Greed*



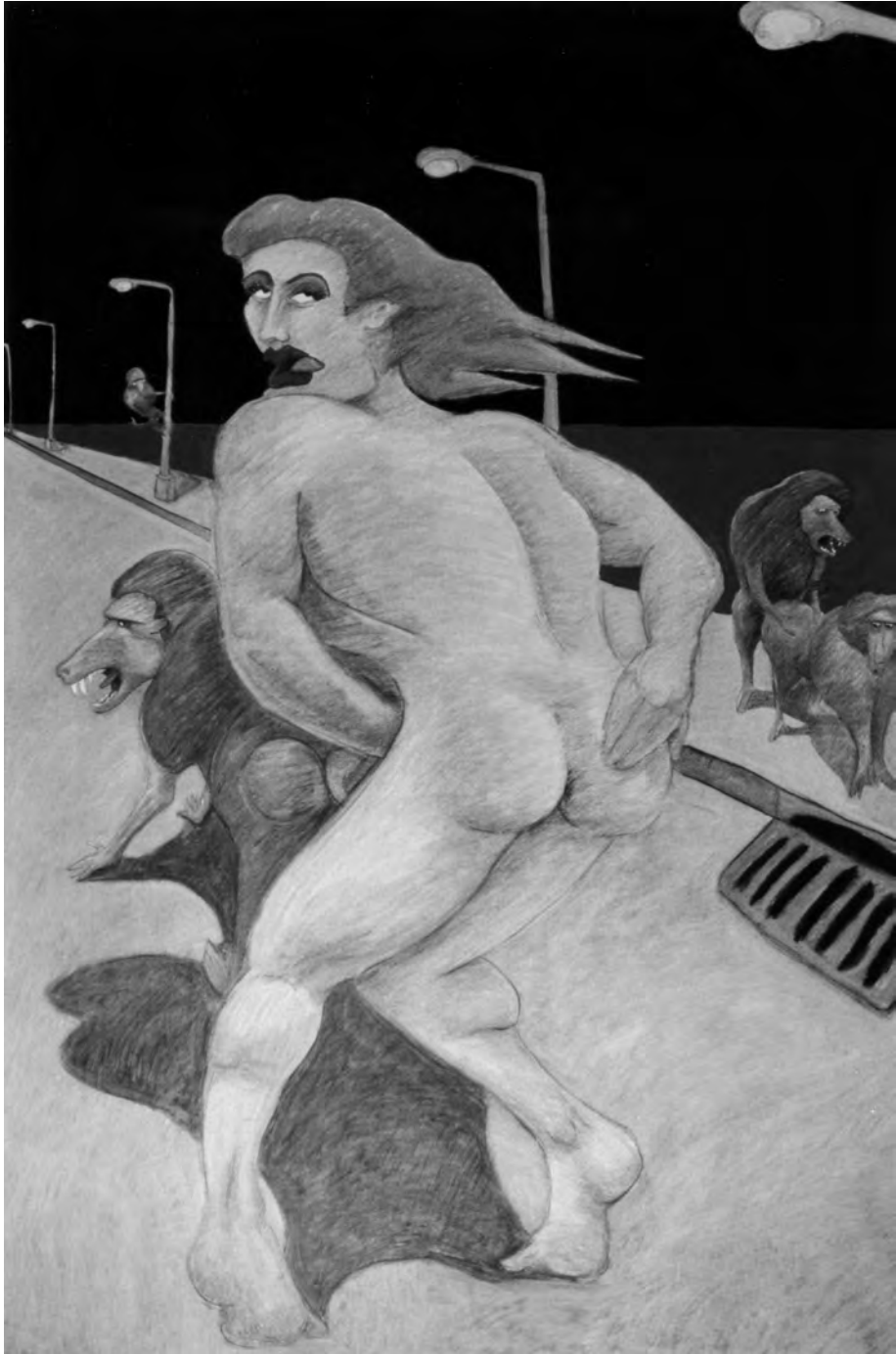
Doug Dorph: *Pride*



Doug Dorph: *Gluttony*



Doug Dorph: *Wrath*



Doug Dorph: *Lust*

# RONALD WARDALL

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## NEW YORK, NEW YORK

From the beginning, having first been drawn,  
    then quartered, his mouth stuffed  
    with intimate bits of himself, and still disoriented  
                    by the taste of his own geography,  
    he took her personally.

She, herself, full of brain-porridge and blood snot,  
    crammed as a mad man's wallet,  
            quick as a dead tree fire, even with  
    boulders in her lungs and shod in manhole covers  
    swayed light as a child's loose tooth.

She bred hope like a teenager's tented sleep. To scratch  
    her naked back with the jagged line  
    of his name. She, rich beyond Midas in empty rooms,  
            bruised with goodbyes,  
            the sky-carved fist in Heaven's face.

The Saracen blade of dreams, granddaughter  
            to a tailor's scissors, rain-bright  
            the long night lines piled like black  
    panties round her ankles. She, deeply read in psychotic  
    shut-ins. Remorseless as the coffin beetle.

Catalogue of alone, cockroach-diamond, an unpolitic  
    honk of geese in dark suits, the Hudson's vampire moon-  
            gowned, weighted like the gallows  
    for sandbag endings, devourer of visionaries,  
    slipknot town.

She who, even bleeding, could dance the world  
            up and down the stairs, night's red eye,  
    the silver wolf sweating with her tongue, the wind  
            blowing through him, labyrinth  
    of dragon teeth, star climbers' womb.

# RONALD WARDALL

---

## NEW YORK RIFF

On stiletto heels she presents herself with a loud knock.  
He sits in frazzled underwear, not knowing  
he had a date.

A siren wails like red neon into his room, away again,  
a lost summons on power skates, all  
her fear spent on

one last blue electric blare. The cat eyed witch grins  
through the window, showing off her  
legs, sequins

twinkling like an empty promise above the dull green  
of the East River. The flare toothed  
Bitch's gotten

inside his head like maximum static. She's filed neat  
as an icepick behind his ear, a bad  
movie to be in

knowing the ending. A long time alone, he passes out  
with a please excuse me fizz like a  
sixty watt bulb

in the ratchet wheeled night, again mistaking words for  
flesh and stone, the smell of wet news &  
dead morning cats, for

the beamedup, burnedbass, steamheaded, bruisehighed,  
bluespocked, smilebladed, splitboddled,  
satinMama town.



# RONALD WARDALL

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## BETTER DAYS

When everything that served us,  
    including dogs and horses,  
        are dead and all the people too,  
            something we could not trivialize

will be left eating onions and not worrying  
    about its breath, something which  
        gains no sense of accomplishment  
            ordering from a catalogue;

something that never took a leash, opened  
    its mouth for the bitt, laughed at a bad  
        joke, left mourning so not to be  
            late for the reading of the will.

It will be a time when the late news,  
    the federal deficit, political correctness,  
        property values, the intimate  
            lives of known people, will

lose allure and simple, immeasurably  
    complex things have a chance to  
        recover from us in a more real time,  
            while the principles upon which

we sent the newest and most willing  
    into the meat grinder with a hug,  
        a wave and a tearful smile, together  
            with solemn words prudently

sealed forever in sunken vaults,  
    will have less splendor than the orange  
        metallic glow of a simple  
            humming nuclear tomato.

# RONALD WARDALL

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## CAREFUL READING

I've a pain behind my right ear from complicated people.  
Lowell questioned war and beat  
his father and wife.

My own thanksgiving memories are full of drying bones.  
And I've dented loved ones' heads,  
though not with fists.

Did he wear a tweed jacket and beat them in a style  
that could come only after five generations  
of careful reading?

I don't want to take a writer's height as Thales did  
The Great Pyramid, measuring the shadow  
at two o'clock.

I'm wary of squinting between  
half-drawn blinds, my own gizzard full of  
empty rooms.

Suffering from the bends, he stirred the green dust  
on the Black Sea's floor, a bottom eater  
who'd not learned to blink.

So after the forced restraints, he recorded the steady  
drip, and with a patrician ear to the wall  
his own bughouse shriek.

# RONALD WARDALL

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## ANGUD OGG, THE BOOK OF FAME

At Tura he sat on the king's  
right dressed in six colors,  
holly resolute and birch proud.

The lover of Olwen's name, he made  
white flowers spring from  
the paths she walked.

Among the trees, learned his tongue's  
root, in his howling nights  
scrubbed himself empty,

heard silence in the apple's  
core, saw death stand in the seed,  
came and left like

rain, tied himself to a great stone,  
turned away from  
kinsmen's praise and prayers,

foretold the locust-furred sky,  
tasted the time  
men lost their tails, smelled

snows' mercy and stayed  
to sing the Cerda of Loss  
for his shipwrecked country.

# RONALD WARDALL

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## THE KNOWN

You sat beneath an elm,  
writing in your diary  
with a stub of pencil:  
“June 3.  
Cold Harbor.  
I was killed.”  
The powder was still  
drifting across the field,  
and the elm, bewildered,  
its leaves shot off.  
You were the kind of boy  
who would have  
before the battle,  
pinned scraps of paper  
with your name  
inside your shirt, on  
your cartridge belt, under  
your bed roll, inside the  
sweatband of your cap,  
so unless a shell made you  
into birdseed,  
your mother would know.  
Waiting under the sun,  
you watched the blades  
of wild grass, flick  
from green to silver,  
back to green,  
and in the breeze coming  
up from the river,  
you let yourself  
grow plain  
as the sole of a shoe,  
your last breath  
durable as dirt.

# RONALD WARDALL

---

## KNOWING THE STORY

Before making a movie, Stephen Spielberg  
with mineral water and a tuna sandwich, enters  
his private theatre four days in succession  
to see the same four films, always  
with the sound off.

The moving images carry the story barehanded,  
as in a flood a father carries his son above his head  
across the river to a safe place. He watches  
the silence move and speak  
for other reasons.

If there are subtitles he won't need to look, knowing  
the dialogue frame by frame. Without voice, music,  
gun shot, the beat of horses hoofs, he better  
tastes light/shadow, hears speak  
eyes, shoulders, hands.

I. *The Seven Samurai*  
Director: Akira Kurosawa

Forty dark horsemen  
come up as if out of the black earth, riding against  
the horizon's white and down again,  
shadows moving over a shadow.

The images come down  
like the steady rain that streaks  
men's faces and splashing over thatch roofs if  
with night fires, enough light

CONTINUED

with which to see the anguished father,  
the husband choking on his loss, the bewildered  
lover, the dying mother handing  
her infant to safer arms.

(As if Kurosawa were saying” “A glass to you,  
John Ford, because samurai are not the only ones who  
remember their fathers and no one  
filmed dying mothers better.”)

Before the mother there was the spring light with a lover  
lying dreaming in wild flowers, and then the gold  
wheat (filmed in black and white) set against  
the forest from where the brigands

will come looking like what we might all become in bad  
times if we aren’t careful and one will hide behind  
women to shoot a great swordsman in the back  
though he whirls to attack his death.

Then a spring light to see the faces of 3 men standing  
in front of 4 mounds, the ones set high on the hill  
against the white sky, each mound flagged with  
a sword set too deeply in it to move.

Faces streaked with light and dark, the final samurai faces  
see the farmers with homes, wives, children. Faces  
of men who long ago settled for never having  
a mound of their own.

II. Lawrence of Arabia  
Director: David Lean

The flag fills the screen,  
the top half orange, the bottom half black,  
sunup on the desert.

He too is split in half, a man  
of good dreams, but one who will find part  
of himself enjoying

things for which, during and after  
the parade, he will pass sentence on himself  
and never look for pardon.

One of those freaks  
who could never be himself inside a room.  
In rooms he must always

invent games. He must watch  
the match burn down like day, the orange  
burning into black

of a night without rest, and he will  
will himself to not flinch in the flame, but  
practice being the whirlwind

sailing the desert sea  
on the tide of camels and blood, the place  
that is for him a more honorable

burden than the officers' club in Cairo  
filled with those voices that always sound  
alike, when he could be

stretching nature's  
fickle patience, to cross the endless desert  
of himself, all the while

knowing the sweet addiction that  
tastes like God, whenever he blew a man's  
brains out his ear.

### III. *The Searchers*

Director: John Ford

The screen is as black as the moment before the universe  
came to light. A woman's arm swings the door open  
to the raw-fish-glitter of the desert and over  
her silhouette we see the heat and the red clay

CONTINUED

and the sage stretching to the deeper red of the monolithic  
stones like a lost planet's broken teeth, the deeper red  
like blood not yet dried, and further back bruised  
against the sky bluer than a blue crayola.

She's looking at a horseman who rides in a way she knows,  
someone riding through a wind that flattens the back  
brim of his Stetson up against the crown, someone  
she knew to open the door for before he came.

She moves out from the shadow of the door to the shadow  
of the porch and down into the light where she shines in  
her white apron, shines waiting for him in the light,  
and her husband and her children wait too.

It is Texas in 1868 and he has taken three years to come  
back from the war and he gets off his horse like a man  
who if he had to ride around the world, would.  
He walks over and shakes his brother's hand.

Then turning to her, his brother's wife. He says: "Margaret,"  
his sombrero off, leaning forward to kiss her forehead  
and she goes up the steps into deeper shadow walking  
backward so she can keep looking at him.

In another room, she will touch his coat in her own  
way, then be killed with her husband and every child but  
one, and returning to the burning ranch he will find her  
blue dress and then go into the shed to stop

and lean forward as a man who has received a mortal wound  
and when he comes out of the shed his eyes are the eyes  
of an amputee, a man who won't forgive God or himself  
for having not been there, but go out for five years

through sandstorms, betrayals, blizzards, arrow wounds; kill  
many men, shoot a dead Comanche through the eyes, scalp  
a chief, be one man's friend, cross the greater distance  
of himself, and bring back Martha's lost child.



IV. *It's a Wonderful Life*

Director: Frank Capra

Only in Shakespeare a comedy with such a deep darkness,  
Good and terrible things happen in rain, snowstorms, night,  
a large man is trapped in a small place—a town the size  
of a locked elevator, trapped all his life.

Things almost happen. A mile long bridge and a hundred story  
building almost built, a child almost drinks poison, a brother  
almost drowned, a man goes to prison for 20 years, almost  
and George Bailey almost leaves many times.

Simple miracles happen. A man and a girl smash windows  
and make opposite wishes which both come true. A man goes  
back: “Forgot my hat,” and finds her on the phone, no  
black nightgown, no long leg parting silk,

no one’s ass is grabbed, only she, pretending to be interested  
in a conversation on the phone says with the awesome authority  
of a beautiful small town virgin while offering him  
the phone: “Here, we can both hear,”

and he moves his face next to her face and smelling her hair is lost,  
and like any brave man goes on fighting after the weights  
have shifted, grabs her and shakes her and the phone falls  
from her hands and she begins to cry like a girl

while he tells her everything he hates: stupid little towns, marriage,  
staying when he is meant to go and then running out of all  
other words, and not only lost but knowing it,  
can say only: “Oh, Mary, Mary, Mary.”

So he never has a harem and spends more time under one roof  
with the same woman than he had planned, never builds any  
thing higher than two stories, and keeps taking care of those  
who would have trouble by themselves.

CONTINUED

And they have five children, are serenaded by a copy and cabby,  
and he goes on to save the lives of many people and slays  
the biggest dragon for miles around, and puts Zuzu's rose  
back together like new. It was because of Mary's hair.

# HELLER LEVINSON

---

## [WITH TOWER CRANES]

with

**tower cranes, ...**      affability,

contestability, ...

(conflagration

porous sylphs scripting the city

penning the high rise

*cantilever cables cab counterweight hydraulic climb frame section*

*erection boom*

spectral sentry

synergistic landlord

posturing Prussian

magisterial purveyor

altitudinous rhetorician

arch minister of sinister

*(sen-ten-cer*

CRANE displaces CRANE

proposal://:rebuttal

slipstreams

CONTINUED

the archaeology of lift

wings assist list

to leverage in the leveraging a wringing out

writhe lizard high rise scythe

material sheets of pile-up

blockage & peer

the quiddity of parts & counterparts come to construct a city

the profile that arises

telling the cranes dwelling

joinery & leer authorial accountant silence blossoms

source bestirment a lighting (alighting)

lightening lightning

crane the enduring lightning shaft thunder writhing in the hoist under-  
girdments

the instrument that moves without motion that

dips and davens

tutued in clouds – perfect leg

soaring mission perceptor lording apertural stalk winding a narrative

puncture truncheon loom Saurian slink choral conductor legacy

seeding sallies on heathen drumships pirating conversational tendons

reardom scouts

lurch outreach piercing their beyond

the appearance that disappears

# HELLER LEVINSON

---

## [SMELLING MERMAID]

**smelling**

**mermaid**, ... delicious

chlorophyll

gardenias

brackish the bunt

Xenophon says of the horse, “And

in his frame , the first things which I say you ought to look at are the feet.”

And of the mermaid it is said,

and in her form, it is the tail that sickles & quickens.

comet’s tail

dentrite

kite

tail not indenturement but torque

mermaid, the form that whisks you away

that subterraneans

that issues deep down dark unders

that floats you in a clutch of surreptition

bellying violoncello shipload succumbs

CONTINUED

respiratorial hazards

arguments encounter plum merchants reconnoitering spirogyra rum

opulence

argonautic jubilee splash

mint ragas

requisition forms rise from the groin of the sea

a brace to

*time-elude*

# RUTH BERMAN

---

## LOST PAWN

Lost pawn struggles  
Over trackless wastes of carpet  
And finds the kitchen, a civilized place,  
In squares—  
Too large and too many colors—  
But at least you know where you are  
On a grid.  
Pawn stands to attention  
Under the counter  
And waits for war.



Edward Michael O'Durr Supranowicz: *In the House*



# BIRANEL THOAMS

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## THE GORGON AND THE YELLOW SALAMANDER

Silje Solo stood in front of the window staring down at the palms of her hands. No longer interested in the ocean waves or the ochraceous sun, she instead listened to the ambient sound of thrips swarming the other side of window slats. Even with the familiar balm of salt air, it was not a sea or a sun she knew yet. Her familiarity to the world still not fully translated from kilometers and centimeters into leagues, miles or inches, she often meditated standing in the sunlight conjugating memories, a smile eventually curling her lips in wordless posture.

Her Mayan blue eyes were gazing down at her weighted hands, the sinew of her long arms defined by sunlight. She danced without motion, waltzing with the pale greens of her brain worms, solitaire in the gelling silence and imperceptibly shifting her weight from one bare foot to the other, the utility of her slight limp assisting her trance. The marionette of her limbs waited for the pull of a string. A pull that would not irrupt her qualm and a pull that would not come. Single blonde strands of hair fell over her forehead and glistened like anaerobic silver fish in thin streams searching among the smoothed pebbles for insects.

I listened for her as I opened three white powders from their wax paper folds and poured the iced water, drinking the medicine quickly as if swallowing my face, letting the aspirin granules linger in my teeth. I looked down at my leg and studied the blotching reds and greens and purples and the two yellow catatonic orbs inside the strict black lines. Though bleeding into one another under the cellophane sheath, I knew the color wounds would migrate soon and heal tight. I drew my fingertips across the wrapping on my leg, feeling the raw asphalt of skin as I watched her a few long moments more, not busy. She stood studying her fingertips as if tattooed hieroglyphics were drying in their ridges. She turned a shoulder slightly toward the sun, as

if reading faded scrolls in her hands. Her toe lifted and scratched her smooth calf and returned to the floor with ballerina balance.

I did not dislodge her. I never interrupted her. She loved me for not interrupting her affliction with mine. This clear and precise affection, attached to us with a natural ease as soothing as our two shadows, was present since way back when the day we had first collected one another. We never discussed it, only talked among its pristine layers. We waited tenderly and patiently ministered remedies to one another. Other times, we simply took the cure and went about our lives together.

I spotted my silver case on the counter and carried it across the room offering an hello, I am up, in a quiet voice. Low enough so as not to disturb her, but to let her know I was there. Nudging her out to join me or not. I noticed genius *interficio morsus niger viduata* scurrying across the floor, and for a short moment a Buddhist thought delayed me, and I stepped with my bare foot providing the diminutive monster a quick oblivion. Leaning against a chair back, I began to peel the Second Skin away from my hip bone and thigh and away from my knee and calf and shin and away from my ankle and the foot bones of my right leg, breaking into a thin sweat as I stretched the synthetic skin off my leg. I glistened from the creamy antibiotics and the white cells coagulating underneath the moist shellac. I smiled at the pun through my sweat as I peeled the Second Skin off. I opened the front door for the late afternoon sea air and inhaled deeply, turning my leg in the doorway toward the breeze, cooling the lingering ache and drying the sweat on my face. I rolled my skin into a ball in my hands and tossed it toward the dumpster three stories below in the alley way. I broomed the spider out the door. She had shifted again.

I moved behind her and when our breathing matched I moved closer reaching round using the steel rod to open the slatted panes of the joulaise window, letting end of day breeze soften the rest of the room. I wrapped my arm around her bare waist as we watched her aureoles slowly begin to contract, listening to the benign thrips. We had both said let us keep that window when we moved in. It was the kind of window you find in a top story conversion two blocks from Pacific Ocean in Manhattan Beach California. Close enough to the ocean to track in sand and not be troubled by it. We stood and breathed together and I studied the long thin fingers and fleshy palms of her hands with her, as if searching for easy rhythm in a rhyme.

“Which way Miss Solo?”

She smiled and nodded silently toward the ocean and leaned back into me. Touching her lightly, as if holding the chalk bones of birds in my hands, my thumb slowly rubbed against her hip bone and we listened as our four lungs synchronized.

Silje Orsino Solosiida was from Oslo, though she was raised on northern rock. For centuries it was tradition for the families of her village to take holiday in the coastal cities of Huelva and Cadiz and Tarifa on the southernmost point of Spain where the sand was very hot and white and fine and the fishing villages were busy on the wide Atlantic. Once every few years they drove the 3 hours from the airport in Seville to this Costa de la Luz largely for the dead breeze and flat ripples of August, but mostly for the burning sunlight and seclusion. These fishing villages with sun made them feel at once home and away from home. She inherited her skin from this latitude and never burned in this sun, or any other. When the fish-air, heat and sunlight became too familiar, they would cross to Northern Italy for a month, maybe more. The Irish did not follow them here. There, the men positioned lamentations with women until perhaps each had thought they had found a future mate. Then the families would picnic and eat and talk late into the nights for several weeks and then the new pair would perhaps return home to the Midnight Sun, together.

After all, she explained, much less competition than pillaging for the Black Irish and their green eyes. We don't do that anymore, she said, well not much anyway. Besides, all the men in her family needed a little color and what's wrong with that? she would say and shrug and smile. She was born in Trondheim and later moved to Oslo. Or was it Tromsø? The energy to think about it was not in me. The fading of the ache in my right leg was much too welcoming. Either way, she was Sami; fjord culture, a sea creature and tall lean tanned aware relaxed simpler.

Silje had the toned body of growing up on half domesticated reindeer and volunteer fish, proper coffee, swims in cold fjords and loungings against ice near hot springs. She was sharper than me in most ways, but I was catching up. Standing there with her, I was reminded of the first time I saw her in Portugal: Standing in front of the rows of stacked medieval bindings smoking a cigarette, her elongated fingers turning the pages of thick pulp in the damp library, ears alert but maybe not so much. The wattage flawless, as they still used gas lamps and windows to light the stone walls which were masoned by monks, built as sanctuary and converted six slow centuries before into Library

and still hiding the texts for safekeeping. From whom? was the question then, as now, she had said. All Lisbon gothic and stone and gargoyle, filled with shadow and quiet imagination hanging in the mangy air like a half empty bottle of Malbec decanting a small room. It smelled like wet castle with compliment lighting. She didn't speak Portuguese or Greek, but worked hard at it. Her eyes moved from one text to the other, her hand making journal entries. She could almost look me in the eye and always did, often with an honest sincerity and other times with an honest not.

She spoke Norwegian and Italian and of course English and graduated University somewhere within a short drive of Mt. Viso in the Cozi Alpi. Her family had visited while she was at University, bringing along only her younger brother, as her older brother was a quiet revolutionary and held to an Amish-like tradition and had refused to join them after the month's stop in Spain. This was modern Viking custom, she had told me, and he was of age to know his primary destiny was not to plane wooden hulls for sales to the southern provinces, but to discover the *puttanesca* of the Northern Boot. She held her brother's small hand in hers as they walked the potholed roads and hiked the rocky trails together. He was sunburned from Spain and she was not. She told him: "This is where your Mother and Aunt and neighbors are from. This is where they were born. This is where Grand Mother was born, too. Show patience and be in good care and you will do. No, relax it is the way it is for you. Be patient. Girls like that. Of course you can talk to her, yes, that one too. Yes, of course, you may speak with any one you wish. But choose carefully, we have a name. No, you may not take her home until your next trip when you are older and only then if she says yes and then we will talk to her family. No, you will not forget her name. No, she will not forget your name either, and besides, would you not know one another again by sight? I like the bread. And the wine, too. Yes, they are small and slow and ugly reindeer, but they call them *asino* here. Yes, they fish here. Of course they do. No, they do not buy our catch and we do not sell them our catch." And she walked with him twice every day, taking in the sights of girls carrying grapes and bottles of oil in their aprons, old men with walking sticks and others out for simple ambles. They walked past old burros with dusty dirty bristle hair and their long ears listening to every thing and to no thing and past the olive skin and thick bodied black hair of every girl and woman in the village and he hadn't seen anything like it, this new planet on this old earth.

It seemed the entire village attended church every day. It was wilderness feast to him, a tabernacle to others, with dry crackers and long lines from the outside in and even longer lines leading to the insides of cramped closets. She explained to him that they had no need for denial but he wanted to go and so she took him. His only confession regarded wood and his preference for rock. That is where they all gathered in the early afternoons and some evenings, so he wanted to see why and she had said ok. The entire village attended except for a few who were then forever known as bandits and rapists and thieving criminals of demon breeding in the whispers among the villagers. He heard this, as they entered and exited the church, and saw this, following the arms that pointed toward those who did not line and sit. But he felt no shame. And he thought it odd, he liked these people that did not attend, for after their hikes in the afternoon they would often sit outside under an umbrella and Silje would sip table wine and he would lick iced gelatin and he noticed those who did not attend church made the best baguettes and were always smiling and kissing one another and holding hands and slapping the asses of one another. And Silje told him it is because they do not worry of such things so far out on the horizon, the wind may blow a new direction and the storm you see may not visit. He understood this. They only went one Sunday and that was enough and they continued their walks in the mornings and longer hikes in the late afternoons, when it was much hotter and less crowded. Silje never did tell me her brother's name and I of course did not ask.

With the wide eyes of his ownership and new world discoveries she walked with him twice each day until one afternoon he had slipped and fell from a trail and died in the bright lime stones of the Grauwacken Zone. He died before they could get a rope down to him to apply a tourniquet to stop the staining of the lime stones, or to slide his shin bones back inside their skin. Gone when she was twenty and he of eight years of age. He just disappeared and was no more. She said he did not make a sound, but I am not so sure. Silje hears colors sometimes, so sometimes I know they stain. She said he was taken by a girl his age with green eyes and black hair with a shy smile and broke from her grip to ask her for a few grapes from her apron and had simply lost his footing. It was in his blood, she would say and shrug. Another time she told me a mule had kicked at him and he had jumped out of the way and down the slide. She showed me his picture once. From it, from looking at him, I do know he did not cry.

Many young girls had stood outside their hostel that evening with candles so large they could barely hold them in their tiny brown hands, casting shadow and light that revealed large tears welling under their long eyelashes, wiping cheeks when they fell, sniffing. Their Madres and Padres standing behind them with hands on the little one's shoulders, grieving for the Solosiiade's and for the sadness of their daughters and murmuring to one another the lost generation of North Atlantic salmon that now would not be sent each month.

She occasionally still heard that color. I am sure she once mixed it for me. I wondered if she was hearing it now in the tinnitus of her mind as she leaned back into me. She believed in simple rituals of afternoon walks and in valkyries and in boats, hotels, airplanes and restaurants. She had quit her job with Fiat a few years after University and later moved west to America with me. She laughed easily and often, even though she felt what we all feel, but can not acknowledge on most days or to risk insanity if we did from recreating the glass bead games too often. She didn't have a bad alone, lately just an existential one, like living in Prague or Xi'an or Cedar Rapids, outside looking in.

She had painted the walls calm colors when we moved in five months ago. Or was it six? She was good with color of course, and could mix it quick and get it just right. She knew how the ingredients reacted and shined and competed softly against one another. Her mind could instantly recall sRGB tables and centroid system percentages and could easily apply them in idiosyncratic terms. She had moved through the ranks of Fiat swiftly and without want, interested only in the lab, often times staying late into night. They did not care that she removed her shoes for the day when she arrived in the morning and often left them in offices down the hall. When ever sensing a new need, she ordered colors for us, every few months, less often now, and only from DeKat, though she insisted on our blues to come only from the pigments of Central Mexico, mixing the powders with automobile paint additives to make them shine as if still wet when bloodless. She said not to worry, there's no mercury in them, maybe just a little lead. Ok, I had said. They were mostly stolen from an Asian dictionary, the ones they had forgotten about, hid or burned. What do you call this green I had asked back then, the first time. 32/14/81 she had said with a glance. Maybe 83. What about this one? I do not know that one, there are 632 shades of green, perhaps more, she had said. And I said how odd that is, as there are 632 streets named Juarez in Mexico City.

So I showed her pictures and talked about sunning on rocks and she understood pastorally. I knew her work. She was good with form and nerve and working the spectrum gradients of light. Leeching a bleed, we sometimes called it.

We had sorted through the dusty storage unit that I had kept in West Los Angeles the week after we landed, and we agreed to sell most every thing. We gave away this and that and that and this to the first people who volunteered to come pick it up and maybe not keep much for themselves. The nice and needy first. We were in no hurry. It only took a week's end and we had chairs to sit in and wait. If they were happy looking at the items we were both happy to offer it to them, the price was wrong, there's a sale today or trade for a bicycle or a fishing pole or an old picture frame. Once, while I was away on water bottle run, she had new sandals on her feet, very happy with herself, as only new sandals can do sometimes, and she told me about the nice old couple who had always had plans to catamaran in the lagoon and would now finally be able to do so. If they were a slight bother, the items suddenly became not for sale for a few moments until the next group gathered. Maybe we thought it might rain too, and put things away under a clear sky. We ignored negotiation with silent eye contact and a smile, deaf and mute. Silj called it our Helen Keller ways. I simply missed our dog.

With little tête-à-tête, if you ignore the thoughtful hand on hips and that will do's and ok's, we furnished sparsely with new tables, chairs, soft towels, woven rugs, sofas, sheets, copper pots and hammered lamps, matte green and matte blue pottery from New York, Malpais and Ohio, feathered items in the bedroom, stainless appliances and heavy ceramic plates and bowls from Ojai. We had kept the massive spoons, forks, and knives and colossal coffee cups from storage. Even the copper coffee machine still worked, though I hired someone to plumb and wire it while we strolled the boardwalk, watching volleyballs and surfboards in the air. We kept masses of walking around space on the wide wood planks. She liked a soft bed with three geese pillows. She hung fjords and black and whites of old men with massive hands on the walls. Her grandfather had hunted whales under the shallow gray clouds on the cold waters of the North Sea and a sepia print hung over our desk. It was a small photograph and she hung it on a large wall painted olivet#123 in a wooden frame with conservation glass. He had harpooned an Italian wife and she had

agreed to move North because of his hands, just as his father had, as his grandfather, Silje's twice great, was the last to seduce an Irish away from potatoes, cabbage and black nectar. Mine were only secret masons. I could not see the knotted ropes in her scar less palms but her skin held the medium shade. We used her family gnome as a door stop and kept *middels* near the bed. We look forward to going out and look forward to coming home. We have not been here long enough to have a routine and we drive a lot, up the coast and sometimes East through canyon mountain passes into desert, whenever we want.

I became aware of her hip bone again, when she leaned her head back against mine, wanting me to smell her hair. Silje had a kindness like that. I rested my chin lightly in her clavicle and moved a little closer, a hand on her blonde belly waiting to feel her heavy aortic rhythm. We weren't looking at her turned up palms any longer, they were wrapped around behind her and on me. One thumb barely moving against the softest skin under her flat navel and other caressing her hip bone. We began whispering so low we sometimes missed each other's words and did not care or ask for them to be repeated, just kept whispering our somnolent languages, our mouths near to the other's ear. I sensed a primordial guppy, or a tadpole, behind my hand, with just a slight tail forming. My leg silently throbbed a bit and the thought soon escaped me, my fingertips on thin white cotton. Like humid baby's breath, the warm breeze from this year's Santa Ana's swept over our bodies through the slats in the window toward the open front door. I remembered those winds from years before. The undeclared wars they had brought, the battle strategy too infantile to wage successful campaign against. The smoke from the mountains and the particles from the desert the winds brought gave useful sunset, though we were convinced it was mostly China's and El Segundo's doing, much smaller worlds we roamed in now. Sometimes the winds brought the smells of camp fires. Iris waved and smiled to us from the roof across the alley. Silje moved one arm from around me and waved hellos back for us and wrapped me up again, a little tighter.

"Do you ever feel like these are not our hands?"

"Yes, but let's not worry about that right now. I'm not."

"Each day is so quick. So, so short out here," she said as she looked at her palms again.

"Are you sure that it's here?"



“No. I am not sure. I did think it would be like this over here. It looks like the pictures enough.”

“Yeah? Good. We don’t have to stay long. It’s just home sometimes. You know. We can live where ever we want.”

“I know. I love it here. It is perfect,” she said. “Are you better now?”

“Yes. Better. Good color. Maybe last night was the best so far. We’ll see in a few weeks, won’t we?” She was looking out through the slats again. “What do you see out there?” I whispered in her ear with a bite.

“We’ll see in a few weeks. Yes. Tonight I have some good ideas. I see Iris staring at me. I think she wants me to move out of the way so she can see you.”

“No, it’s these twins I have in my hands she is after again. No invites tonight, ok?”

“She is going to her boyfriend’s tonight. It is Friday.”

“What else do you see?”

“White on white waves.”

“Anything closer to home?”

“Hmmm, 12 palms. Yes, 12 palms. Such a funny plant. They grow so much taller here.”

“They’re almost prehistoric. Maybe they are,” I said and began silently counting. “You forgot about the one in front on the sidewalk.”

“Yes, 13 palms then. But that one is out of sight, so 12 palms. The wind sounds psaltery through their leaves. They are so very green.”

“Feels good. Psaltery? String sounds, right?”

“Very good. Can you hear it?”

“Yes, a little. It’s very faint. What else do you see out there?”

“Hawaii. Catalina first, right? I see white birds on the white on white waves. The water is not so dark here. It must not be so deep. I said that before, didn’t I? All the boats are back in the Marina, right?”

“Yes, the Marina. I suppose so. Maybe a few in Hermosa, too. And Redondo. I don’t think the ones in Long Beach and Newport cross the border anymore. You want to go there tonight?”

“Where?”

“Catalina, Del Rey, Hermosa. You pick. We could go see some snow if you’d like. Get a room with a fireplace, start a fire. There’s a restaurant I used to like in the Marina that I haven’t been to since being back. You’d like it. It’s on the water.”

“Where else would it be?” she said with an elbow then asked, “You are hungry?”

“I am. Yes.”

“You feel like eating?”

“Yes.”

“Really?”

“Yes,” and I gave her kidney skin a squeeze. “How about tonight, Miss Silje Solo. A fine spread?” She still smiled on occasion when I said her name.

“Good. What has it been? Since Sunday? Almost a week? A shower and shave and I’ll be game to go Mr. Croceus Romanaclef. Can we make it late like we used to?”

“Good to go. Game is just game, darling. There’s no rush. Yes, let’s. A late dinner.” The soft breeze gusted and I wondered when my hand had slipped down.

“Do not shave. I like you this way. And do not forget this time. Only baths for at least 3 days. You get in before me. I do not take as much time as you do. Hey, hey. Look, see? See? She moved her chair and is pretending to read.”

“Yes, maybe a week or so. We’ll see after tonight. She might just be getting late sun, Silj.”

“Might my white tailed Laplander ass. Best sun was three hours ago.”

“She might not think that way. No invites tonight, ok?”

“Ok. But maybe we can take care of this first?” She turned in my arms careful to slide her nipples across my chest and with a look asked me to kiss her lips. It seemed to me that she was always doing that. She had a kindness like that, too. “You were right, the wind is much better here than in Dublin, but not Galway. How’s the *blekk*?”

“It aches proper. Surprise me. What color was it last night?”

“The question is what color is it today, not about what color it was. We have talked about this. I got it to roman purple, maybe a bit Han. It was perfect. Just right. Much stronger than damson. So much better than damson. And we carved some great romaji inside the scales this time.”

“I felt it.”

“As bad as the vowels?”

“No. No one will know, Silj.”

“I know. I still don’t like going over same skin twice. You’ll be ok now for a little while? The light inside the scales, I mean, they are going to be very good.”

“I think so, too. Twice is the only way, you know that. We have talked about that, too. You think you can get the same color again tonight?”

“I know. Yes. Close enough. Little different. But I want to do some of the greens again. Just a little. We can do both. And you’ll need some new iron soon. Don’t forget.”

“We do. How about we sleep on the roof tonight?”

“Late dinner. Sleep on the roof. What is the occasion? It is suppose to be clear.” She shrugged then smiled. “Can we in front of the window?”

“She isn’t leaving her roof is she?”

“I mean since she moved her chair and all.”

“Since she moved her chair and all.”

Only four hours had passed before we walked in and were seated for dinner straight away. It was just after nine pm, our usual time, for dinner. Start of the second watch, she had said, years before. Driving top down Manhattan Avenue until it changed into Vista Del Mar and across Culver and up Lincoln and down Washington and the left on Pacific took 12 minutes. I had once made it in eight minutes 12 years before but that was on a motorcycle. Her hair stayed behind her ear for the most part, occasionally blowing clufts in front of her sunglasses and she would leave it there and then move it after awhile back behind her ear and rest her hand back on my leg and look over the windscreen up into the sky at the stars and the moon. It was crowded and noisy and familiar in the restaurant. A few people stopped their feedings and a few others stopped their conversations for a moment to look at Silje and we smiled as we walked past to our table and sat looking at the masts and rolled up sails as we watched wait staff come and go. We had minor combat over who should sit where and look at the boats and who the brooding gargoyles. I asked for three iced waters and Silj ordered a Finland vodka on rocks from the hostess. She smiled at Silje when she brought our drinks and when she told us our waitress would be with us in a moment Silje smiled back and nodded thank you. The murmuring noises surrounding us felt pleasant, it was a good night to be out.

“Jambalaya, 4 star spicy, right? Some of that risotto, too. And half a Caesar. Half a rack too, but no mint, ok. And some squid, Silj? Yes, a plate of squid, not fried right? And extra lemon. Still have anchovies? Yeah? Two then. Not too hairy, ok? That’ll do.”

“You’ve been away. I mean, we haven’t seen you for years, you’ve

been away, right?" I didn't recognize her voice and looked at her tag. It read Pamela.

"No, you're right. I was away for a bit, Pamela."

"It's nice to see you again, Cro. To have you back, I mean." She smiled and left it at that. "And you Miss?"

"Silje. Hello Pamela. Plantains and the Blue Fin please. I think that will do. Yes. Oh, do you have any manni? No? Ok, then, the plantains and the Blue Fin will do."

"Perfect. Salad? No? How do you want the fish prepared?"

Silje looked at me for help and I said rare like the lamb and smiled and shook my head at her as she smiled and looked over each shoulder, hoping to see a dog. She always hesitated on the English word rare, too distracted to try, she had said, before laughing in her hands. We once had a deaf waiter south of Lisbon, a nice old man named Glaucio Septembrist. She wanted her salmon rare, missing it from back home and she said this restaurant had the best garlic and lightest teriyaki too, for some wayward reason; it is true she said, and so we ate there often.

"Raro please."

"Eh," hand cupped to his ear bending down with his other hand on her shoulder.

"Raro, por favor, Glaucio."

"Eh!"

"Raro, por favor."

"Eh?"

"Raro."

"Eh? Silje, por favor, por favor fale mais alto sou um homem velho surdo."

"Ah, Glaucio. Raro! Raro!"

"Eh?"

"Raro! Raro! Raro!"

I didn't help. A Portuguese Water Dog and her three nappy pups trotted to our table from no where and timidly nudged our legs with their black noses, their eyes covered with fur. Gluacio smiled at them and then at us and clapped his hands softly and smiled again and brought a large plate of cheese bread, raw carrots and sausage and we fed them from our hands. We walked with them back to the home we were renting and the next day we visited the veterinarian and she had most of her teeth pulled but all were in fine shape, just a bit thin. It

was hard to tell through the double coats. Silje named her Glaucia and we weaned the pups and then gave them to the monks at Library where Silje read every morning. Glaucia had a slight limp but she kept up on our afternoon walks down the crumbling sand stone cliffs of the Costa d'Oiro to the rock formations of the Ponta da Piedade, always just in time for a sunset swim. Glaucia out swam us every day and soon had no limp at all and helped us navigate the sand stone in the dark on the return walk up the cliffs. Each night, she slept quietly, sometimes moving her paws in her sleep, as if swimming, and took half the bed for herself, no negotiation. In the winters, we drove to mountains for snow and she buried her face deep in the drift coming up with a snow packed face running circles around us, faking left and right, smiling her snaggletooth. I wanted to name her Bob but Silje would have none of it, even after I explained.

“So, you two know one another?”

“Yes, many years ago.”

“How fun.”

“I’ll be back with another drink?”

“Sure. Thank you. Please, call me Silje.” Smile.

And we ate slowly, rotating plates between us and eating and smoking on the rail, arms around waists standing close and sitting again and eating and drinking until all the noise around us grew distant, and soon not at all. We each wished we had ordered the other’s entrée and moved the plates around the table often and the squid was light and the bread had grain and was warm. Pamela grated parmesan and black pepper on top of oil she poured in a dish and I asked for a side of ginger thinly sliced and she brought that too and we ate bits of the red slivers with the Blue Fin. Silje noticed how the water didn’t smell at all tonight except for salt, the lives at two tables away, maybe she wanted a baby after all, and then no, for me to tell her again how we met and why she had agreed, and why I had agreed, she wanted to sleep on the roof tonight, we hadn’t done that in a long while, she noted these things. We thought about leaving and making a midnight movie at the single screen cinema on Second Street near SM Boulevard, but she knew I wasn’t happy with how the Promenade had changed the old neighborhood, we’d been getting most of our fresh food from the markets in Topanga Canyon, and offered the rail and cigarette again standing close and touching. Leaving a good tip on the table for the theatre actress, who I had dated for three weeks 12 years before, I was

sure by now, Silje wrote our phone number on the table and we left, walking across the parking lot and opening the door she slid in and we drove up Highway 1 for a bit. Stopping for roadside take-out dessert, she asked me what desserts spelled backwards meant and I told her and I asked her what deserted spelled backwards meant and she conjugated it in her head, smiled and looked away. We drove on and stopped for coffee where they made it thick and stopped for cigarettes where they rolled them fat and tight and then stopped on the shoulder, parked, and walked across the wide beach to the tide and watched and listened to the waves of the third watch, just past the turnoff toward Topanga.

Linen felt stiff against my leg as we sat and I wished I hadn't removed the Second Skin, but it needed to breathe and soon it passed. We sat quietly looking up and down the beach, left and right, digging holes for our heels, listening to the soft parade of whitecaps defeat of never ending wave after wave as we spooned dessert into our mouths. An old dingy made of gopher wood, with its oars pulled in, appeared suddenly to our left as if transported there out of time in the dark, moving slowly and smoothly across the tide toward shore. It seemed six wary men stepped out and slowly pulled the boat to shore, dragging its hull into the wet sand. On land, it looked much larger than a dingy than it had in the water inching atop the waves toward shore. Once grounded, another man appeared to get out of the boat, and the others seemed to offer assistance, but then thought better of it, and retreated slightly. They huddled around the man and were speaking, but we heard only half syllables, the other halves lost in the wind. They moved away from us, strolling casually down the beach, the bottoms of their thobes and bishts wet from the waves, their wrists locked behind their backs when not repairing modest white igals to their heads. We watched them silently as they waited for the light to change. The tall man pressed the crosswalk button, held up both arms as the light changed for them to pass and they crossed the PCH1 then disappeared in the dark and the fog, walking the road cut in the Canyon toward the Valley.

"You think those were farmers?" I asked.

"No."

"Me either." And we sat quietly for a long time, listening to the waves and watching birds come near then hop away, as winds died down and a giant night cloud slowly cleared a moon. "Tell me a story?"

"Hmmm. No."

“Just a quick one.”

“No.”

“Yes.”

“Sand or sky?” she sighed.

“How about a thin raft?”

“No. Let it heal first.”

“Night sky then.”

“The phytolacca still?”

“Yes, not so bad, less and less,” I said.

“Ptolemy or Ovid?”

“Mix it up. You pick. It’s your story.”

“You first,” she said and her eyes wandered down the beach toward where the men had been and then up at the sky and she eventually waved an arm overhead. “Andromeda,” she said.

“Cepheus, right? King Cepheus and not a very good fisherman at all. Was he? No. Not good at all. He did not love his son or his daughter or his wife, Cassi, which was ok back then. He did love his flock of sheep. Most likely, it wasn’t taboo. I think he loved his sheep more than his family. Remember the lamb in Ireland? They cook it so perfectly there. Tonight it was just ok. But that was not ok back then, to love the sacred lamb and especially not on weekends. And when Cepheus was out in the green meadows, he dreamt of being a simple miner working in the simple streams and caves of some simple canyon, and had left his wife and daughter. Off with his son, he had lost his way searching for the Golden Fleece. He returned empty handed, a lesser man, who had a dream quashed and with realization there was no easy way out of his hard life, even as King. So he chained his only daughter to a rock for Sea Monsters to devour in hopes of filling the village nets with tuna. His flock had forgotten how to fish when he was gone. They were busy with his wife, tired with lamb and dates. No one knows what became of the son. He never returned. Most think he was lost and left in the desert. Others told a story he settled in the grasslands of Syria and married and lived and died quietly.”

“You are right. He did not return. He lived quietly and married and had two children. I read that somewhere.” Sigh. “Cassiopeia must have entertained the parish while her husband was away and was driven mad with syphilis, as everyone had been before penicillin had made a yeast. And she wasn’t that pretty. Ok, maybe she was that pretty. But come on, not that pretty. Could have been, yes, ok. But

why would anyone in their right mind challenge Poseidon? And in such a way? I mean they lived in a fishing village, for fucks sake, on the Mediterranean. You liked that, huh? Fucks sake. The gods treated them all like sheep. So what. It was the Mediterranean. She must have been munchausen. I mean, have you ever seen a Sea Nymph?"

"Yes."

"They are that beautiful, huh. Yes. Andromeda had nothing on Narcissus, but even that, she had to have gotten it from her mother, and certainly she was not that pretty either, and come on, she had to be quite stupid anyway, right? I mean with the times and all. She did get the better view in the sky, even though her mother has the throne and is brighter in the sky over there." Sigh. "If only Cetus had been a better swimmer, then King and Queen and Son In Law who are there, there and there in the sky next to Andromeda, might be elsewhere and happy."

"How do you know they are not happy?" She let aside my doubt as sea birds mated on seaweed, their beaks disappointed and unsteady. "What if the Gorgon had been swifter?"

She sighed thinking again. "Yes the Gorgon, the three Gorgons. And he killed the pregnant one, did he not? Chopped her head straight off and gave it away to be placed as a hood ornament in the shield of Athena, when he was done with it. Probably some fellatio first. Always fellatio first," and she smiled and elbowed me. "I wish they would find that shield. I lay that is beautiful. Can you imagine seeing it in a museum, or even better, by our door?" Sigh. "He said she deserved to be raped, and what luck, by a Sea God. Why? Because he found her beautiful and alone in some other woman's Temple. And when the Temple Goddess found out what had happened in her Temple, jealous it wasn't she that was raped by the Sea God, she punished beauty for being raped in utero on the steps of her Temple. Her Temple. And on that day, she made her Gorgon. She even put the head in her shield, after he was done with it, of course, when he brought her head back from that island exile. That Odi or Uli or whoever. I would rather it on a pike, wouldn't you? And the Gorgon was that beautiful, she truly was once. Tending her own, simple in her wheat fields. So yes, if she was quicker Poseidon would not have been able to rape her on the steps of the Temple and maybe she would not have lost her head, huh?"

"Yes."

She shrugged slightly, gave a short laugh, shook her head clean and smiled at me asking me to kiss her again. I pictured the silver shield by



our door and wondered how heavy it might be and if I could pick it. We felt our wet feet squishing sea weeds between our toes and quickly shook them off and sat quietly for a bit longer smoking until one of us said “Want to go home?” and one of us answered “Yes”. We dusted sand from one another and walked barefoot across the tar and into our car and drove home with a tanker’s light out in the distance on our right and Rolls Royce jumbo jet engines from Nippon overhead.

We walked up the flight of stairs and she flicked a light on when I opened the door. I pulled the string from the ceiling in our fifth room, opening the catch door and the ladder extended. I climbed up toward the roof carrying goose down and iced water and the metal bucket filled with our iron and electric cable and white gauze stamping towels. Silje stayed in the kitchen and selected three ampoules of color and set three wet ball mills and three white porcelain tumblers on the red granite. She measured water from an eye dropper into the porcelain tumblers and mixed in small measures of copal, zonyl, kaolin and palygorskite adding more water until she achieved a runny viscosity. She carefully cracked open the DeKat ampoules, tapping the powdery contents into each separate wet mill and poured in the leavening agent from the porcelain tumblers. She held each up to light and cracked more ampoules open and added more powder. She then removed the psykter from the refrigerator that held the squid sac full of ink. She unscrewed the lid, and after sniffing inside to make sure it had not gone septic from yesterday, she opened the sac with two fingers and drew an eye dropper and placed seven drops in each of the three wet bar mills. She decided to feed a bit more powder to the mix, running the remains down the sink drain and stirred each mill with the flat end of a silver chopstick before giving the auger a few turns.

She took a deliberate time with the recipe, holding the mills to light, adding more powdery granules, another ampoule cracked open, more water, maybe less, a few drops more from the squid sac, more zonyl and copal, too much kaolin, more of each, maybe less in this one, her lips contorting into silent figure eights with concentration and memory. Naught in her mind that a color wasn’t just right. Unrushed, simply waiting for the color to come to her, the recipe correcting itself to the horizons in her mind, to what she could hear. Satisfied in the light, as final measure she added seven drops of clear atropine to each tumbler then poured the contents into the porcelain tumblers and set them on an enamel tray.

No color before its time she used to say but had not for a long time. She didn't understand why anyone would use store color, would not mix their own. That, she thought, with the Sami deep in her, was just a fad full of drunken whim and soul-less. Besides, how can you be sure you have the right...kick?...is that the word she had asked...yes...the right kick, then. And I had once said I would wait until she got it just right and she never apologized again for taking her time.

I undressed and waited on the roof dropping half smoked cigarettes to the sidewalk below and focused on loosening the tightness in my chest. I heard only the clanging of silver on glass and porcelain from the hole in the roof. I lay down on the roof with the blanket and looked at the stars and listened to myself breathe while Silje made brief notes in her journal.

Maybe it was an hour later, well into the third watch, when she climbed through to the roof carrying the tray in her hands serving three porcelain tumblers, two the color of wine, the vines grown in mountainous acidic soil, one the atrophied crystal of an opaque absinthe, less the sugar fading its depth from a much thicker green. It was dark on the roof and she spotted me lying on the ground and she turned and walked toward me slowly, not to spill a drop. Stars and three-quarters moon draped behind her head and shoulders as she stood over me, holding the tray and colors in her hands, smiling down from a radiant canvas.

I lay flat on my back and she knelt beside me and I lit a cigarette for her and placed it on her lips and in her mouth and she inhaled, looking at me through the blonde strands in front of her eyes. I moved her hair behind her ear and withdrew the cigarette from her mouth as she held for a moment and then exhaled. She smiled as she washed me with warm alcohol mineral water and turned off the gas lamp saying the moon is enough. She placed the tumblers in a row next to us along with her glasses. She placed a knee on either side of me and leaned down to my ear with her soft skin on my face and began whispering in my ear that she just wanted me to rest inside her for a few minutes. Just wanted to feel me. Just wanted to measure the tuning fork. Wanted me to feel how rivered she felt. And she reached down and gripped me and slid me inside her self and moved slow and slight centimeters across my body never creating space, with one leg up avoiding my hip, breathy mouths whispering in each other's ears, mammal sounds from lips, for as long as I was good and then smiled

and rested on me and then cleaned me with her warm mouth tasting the both of us and kissing me again and then slowly blotted me from my foot and ankle to hip with the warm white cotton cloth capturing old blood in the fibers.

I kept my eyes closed and breathed deeply. She took several minutes with the warm cloths, resting one hand flat centered on my sternum, telling me in her mellifluous voice to inhale and exhale deeply through my nose. I focused on my heartbeat and slowed it to my breathing. My shoulders relaxed back onto the roof. My arms extended away from my body. My palms flat against the ground. I heard the click of her illuminating spectacles with varying magnifying power. She looked good in all types of glasses, I remembered, with my eyes closed. I listened for the #8 syringe click into the iron and waited for the touch of her atraumatic skill. I heard the humming vibrations loudly, but quickly only sensed them softly in my teeth until they reduced themselves to a tantric massage in the vertebrae of my brain stem lulling the marrow to an etherized slumber. The nausea came and stayed for twenty seconds. The sensation of my head floating in warm salt water washed away the vertigo and I knew I had a body but became less and less aware, as if in a morphine dream, I did not care, beginning to feel removed. I felt the thin membrane sac surrounding my brain swim slightly against current, just inside my skull, and then subdue.

She spread my skin tight with her thumb and forefinger, the reopening of wounds simply a by product of making sure the skin was taught to best hold new color. She despised this part, but had seen the results and did not dispute them. In her other hand she held the iron and I felt the needle burrow among the wounds she had burrowed the night before. This was the only way to make it colorfast. Not this method for the outline, not wanting the black to bleed but stay crisp, I had let the form heal 2 months in Tokyo before Carlos put the second row of tracks in. Besides, a new black had just arrived by then. I felt the burning pain as she stretched my skin openings and the new seepage leak, pig sticking the needle only millimeters deep and I smiled knowing that it would soon pass.

I tasted it hot in my mouth and swirled the pain around and under my tongue and gulped it down. I kept my heart slow. It would soon all pass. I remembered to breathe. I just needed to marry up. It came almost instantaneously. It always did. My old friend needed to grow

and had begun to yawn and snarl, needing nourishment, starving to be fed again and again. Needed to be served and released and its whisperings answered. Opened skin ripped open again in the smallest of amounts and my nostrils inhaled and tasted no better night air.

The needle tore a hole, then another, just as deep. I lay there silently groaning, feeling warm blood taper down my thigh. She worked quickly up and down my right hip, thigh, knee, calf, shin, ankle, foot and across and back again and down, filling in the scales with color and vowels with shade. Her face inches from my flesh, studying the lines through her glasses and through the blood and rupturing skin cells. I knew every hole the needle was rooting whether a new wound or a second visit on interrupted flesh. She was quickly stabbing my hip, where the orbital eyes lay tucked in their convex sockets, independent yet synchronized with color by the vibrating syringe humming medicines, delivering doses like fractionated drip therapy.

I knew she was getting rid of the yellow in the eye that someone on a chain of islands near Cebu had applied in the years before. Silj and I had reviewed the design specifications in detail and were aware of no lizards being designed with macular degeneration. This led us to believe that either 1) lizards did not submit a requirement for this capability, or 2) that the implementor did not consider user requirements. Given this sad state, the variability in lizard eye spacing and discoloring did not prevent defect. Perhaps International Standards Organization 9000-2000 Quality Protocol needs to consider the issue of standardizing lizard eye spacing and coloring systems requirements. It may be advisable that a defect analysis is conducted on the requirements process, to ensure that eye coloring and spacing is not neglected in future lizard designs. The parietal eye connected to the pineal gland is both a thermoregulator and a defense mechanism since an approaching predator will cause the light to change. It is sight differentiated from the two flat round ear holes by location only. In any event, the color of jaundice is not appropriate for this application. She worked across its tuberculated skin and down its pentadactyl limbs where the dewclaws had fallen way and then down its tapering tail.

I felt the gifting of deep injections inside the twice torn flesh of the minor dinosaur, from spine to anterior shoulders and down to end of tail providing lasting definition and creating an optical illusion by this meticulous leeching. Poking its sharp claws that had their grip in my hip, delicately syringing pointillism, she worked the non-spectral Han

purple highlights into my skin, barely perceptible but worth the trouble. Alternately, but with a method to cover groups of areas to highlight with new color, each scale stabbed and drilled added new color formations and shadings in waves. Back and forth she worked, up and down. Each new violation felt by a single need, one, and felt as a thousand, all at once. My thin blood blotched on the cloths and streaked down my sides. One tumbler down and then the next, the two purples and the green tumbler last, its color mixing on the scaled abdomen adding light to the darker shades through the blood and shredded flesh. When I felt enough, when the jars were properly emptied, when we were both convinced, I opened my eyes and she was leaning down in front of my face telling me to wake up, wake up, wake up. I smiled and opened my eyes and put my hand to her cheek then around her neck and she smiled looking down at me and after a moment she removed her illuminated spectacles with magnifying power and touched my face.

“Are you ok? Almost finished,” she said. And I raised my heart beat and became aware of my own breathing again.

“Yes,” I said.

“We got some really great vowels inside this time. Great graduation. I know, the leeching was difficult,” she said and kissed my mouth and put her hand on my forehead. I reached down and felt the uneven flesh across my fingertips, I looked at them and they were wet and black. She blotted my skin with a new white cloth turning it dark with blood at night under the stars and moon with fresh salt air drafting across the roof. She lit the gas lamp and shone it on my body and I looked at the glistening road rash knowing that it would heal and migrate like a negative to a silver gelatin plate. It was like looking in a mirror that had aged with spots. She matted my leg with a cold wet cloth.

“Is that better?” she asked.

“Yes. I think it will last a bit. Yes, it will.”

And she poured liquid on a fresh cloth and blotted my color and blew breath from her lips, up and down my leg, cooling my skin and then sprayed the shellac on before the antibiotics were quite dry and stretched the Second Skin across the wounds taping it to untouched skin and extinguished the gas lamp. She lit a cigarette and placed it in my mouth.

“This won’t heal for weeks, but we got some good metal in it this time. You’ll see. It will shine a bit in each centimeter. It will almost

move.” And she got on the other side of me and I turned toward her on my untouched side and we fell asleep whispering.

“Will you be able to sleep?”

“Yes.”

“Good.”

Overhead a squawking albatross woke me to a sepia twilight an hour before sunrise, alone on the roof. I lay on my back and everything was still and black and white from the lack of early morning light. In this morning fog, I almost wondered which ocean I was near, as all beach towns have the same morning sky at this predawn time of day. I could have been any where. I wondered if the sun would burn the clouds away today or if they would resist and cast shadows throughout the morning and afternoon. I stretched across the empty blankets and studied my leg and noticed the roman purple was a new brand.

I saw the iron and cloth and tumblers and cable wound and placed in the bucket. The sea air was cold and a single car hissed by on the street below, then stopped. I was sore but was not thirsty and my head did not ache. I touched the Second Skin and felt the uneven ridges of the wounds but could not feel the numb skin underneath. Beneath the Skin, was a mass of color without definition. It would cure in three weeks and be bright and sharp. I could tell by the number of ridges that I would be anxious for weeks to see it healed and what color purple roman would turn out to actually be. What memory it would bring. What new anoles would be captured and cure my sleep and appetite. And for how long?

The door in the floor was open and I sat up sensing for Silje. I didn't smell coffee or see light through the hole in the roof. She usually waited for me after such a night, staying until I woke to be sure I was all right. That I woke up well. I saw her two bright red slippers sitting empty on the edge of the roof next to my long blue shirt that she liked to sleep in, because it matched her eyes and smelled of me. I walked over to the edge looking out toward the sea. I noticed the car stopped down below and Iris bent over with her hands to her mouth, then looking up at me flailing one arm over her head, the other pressed to her ear. I saw the back of two bare legs under a palm tree.

“Help me. Under this tree. So he won't see me.”

“What happened? What happened? Oh my god. I don't understand. Wait I called. Please wait.”

“I've got to. Get under this palm tree. Help me. Please. Help me.”

“Just wait. Don’t move. Wait.”

And then I saw on the sidewalk a splash of dark blood with a thinning trail leading toward the palm tree and two legs. There, a smaller pooling of blood leaking from her ears under the tree, her torso hidden by the wide green leaves of the palm, her glasses clutched in her hand. And her two legs bent up toward her body, trying to creep out of sight. And then, out of sight. A frozen crawl lay there groaning wet.

And I could now hear that Iris was screaming. I picked her up gently and she did not wince from her broken bones. She never took her eyes from me. I held her in my arms and in my lap in the back of Iris’ car as she drove us to Hospital. We had time to say good-bye. And we said good-bye. She took her last breath holding my hand while I stroked her matted hair and we looked in each others eyes while Iris looked at us in the rear view mirror.

I looked at the Han and roman purple and the blood on my legs and on my hands but I could not answer some of their questions. Some of them were easy. They swabbed my leg. I was in handcuffs and then someone else came and we talked and then I was not. And Iris was crying and talking to someone. And then we both left and I drove us home. After parking in the alley and touching Iris’s shoulder good-bye, I called her parents and told them I would bring her home in a week. They were kind to me and did not probe further than what I knew. I found an envelope and put it in my suitcase. I called our realtor and signed papers and gave her my account number. I had a sale. Iris came by and wanted the gnome. I gave it to her and she began to cry. We said good-bye. I called the bank and signed more paper. Later, I signed more papers.

I washed Silje before I let them drive us to the airport and I flew home with her. We stopped in New York before going on to Copenhagen and then Oslo. Her mother and father and brother and neighbors met us at the airport and we drove toward Tromso in a van painted red with blue graffiti written on the sides and Silje tied to the roof. I did not know what the words said and remembered the blue lettering to ask someone later. I had forgotten how large the dark granite boulders were and that there were many tunnels drilled among them along the way.

Her father put his arm around my shoulder when he showed me to my bedroom and her mother kissed me and I held her hand as we sat and drank coffee. We took a day to wrap her in white gauze and

placed her in a wooden ship her brother had just finished and we loaded it with small timbers. The next day we burned her body on the banks of a fjord. Not a ripple, until we slid the craft into the clear water and then was quickly still again. Scores stood in a half circle and we watched the ship slowly move away in silence. Her father held my hand again. We could see Finland to our right and the Sun shone past midnight. My leg began to ache as the black smoke rose in the sky. I wondered what time it was. The air smelled yellow. I know the clouds in the sky were a light grayish for three days. There was a herd in the distance.

I took a ferry south to Bergen and then another to Oslo. I slept in Frogner Park, walking across the bridges and past fountains talking to the Vigeland Statues during the day and sometimes at night. I avoided the Monolith, but could always see it from any where in the park. I slept on benches and on grass. A week later, I checked into a hotel for a hot shower and a pleasant sheet and fresh pillow. I took a ferry from Oslo to Kiel and bought an automobile before it got dark and began to rain. My papers were in order. The road lamps were evenly spaced, ten per kilometer and before long seemed to stream into a single soft neon blur. I made Munich in less than six hours. The lamps along A7 are dim and no matter where you are, are always on.



# EDGAR CAGE

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## GODS THAT ARE NOTICED ONLY WHEN THEY STOP WATCHING US

A stack of books—a building with no windows,

and someone outside cooking his body  
over the fires of obsolete  
police blotters.

Someone searching  
for adolescence—the bands that vanished inside your stereo.

\*

The open-mic poet trying  
not to disturb what he's written.

His audience keeps disappearing and returning,  
maybe with one less eyelash,

another color between darkness and blackout.

\*

Only one call this autumn—  
the phone picking up echoes  
of Canadian geese. The house you started from

a reminder of someone's gossip.  
The house itself

inexpensive, left behind  
by starlings.

CONTINUED

\*

Spring snow:  
all the heartbeats you've lost,

the slums omitted  
from a Pennsylvania twilight map,  
the death of an iris.

"The world is finished, but in some other  
rainfall," you said  
from the newspaper's hinges.  
That, and the beginning of drought season.

\*

A man selling the next night,  
five dollars, preparation  
for yet another  
grocery closing down.

The sky kept above them by the names they've chosen.

\*

The word fuck and the blaring way  
it does not forgive you.

People live there,  
drinking and working and celebrating.

Long-distance trucks passing with their eyes boarded up.

Trees that sleep in the neighborhood  
and trees too tired to hold any longer  
the birds that help them breathe.

\*

One town is called  
Last Year's Child Abuse Convictions, Population: Many.  
Another, I Hate You, Population: All,  
and the next, Eat Shit And Die, Population: Evan Blumb.

\*

A human ravaged by his honest physique  
having dinner with light left in the mirror:  
face like a crop failure, a furrow of warlocks,

wind blowing the eyes somewhere,

the threat of rain inside the blurred reflection.

A haiku survivor counting shadow blossoms  
from a house at the far end  
of the moonlight.

The sky dragged away  
by pheasants.

The space between stars, also, is gone.

# CATHERINE SASANOV

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## STEVEN'S JOLLY

*“Mechanical bank... Steven’s ‘Jolly Nigger,’ has a lever behind his left shoulder which raises his hand to his mouth, depositing a coin.”*

*Images in Black: 150 Years of Black Collectibles*

Shall we start the bidding at  
one thousand dollars?  
You won’t find

a finer specimen. Still full  
of that old  
insatiable desire

to eat small change  
till his mind’s made out of coin.  
Each cent’s communion

on his tongue. Savor rolls  
his eyes back  
in his head.

He’s one-armed, yes,  
but the nigger’s jolly –  
You can read it

branded on his back.  
And you can note how  
in this true

authentic,  
grin's always  
bigger

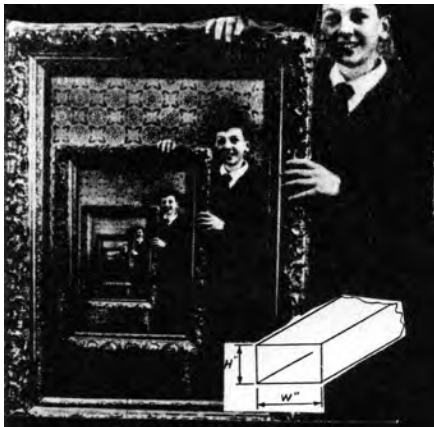
than the hand.  
Let me tell you,  
he *will* pass

for thrift. Voracious,  
cast iron,  
shell of a self. Be careful

not to fill his head –  
The boy's half-clogged  
on Lincoln

pennies. And the air displaced  
inside his chest? One breath  
almost

as old as slaves.

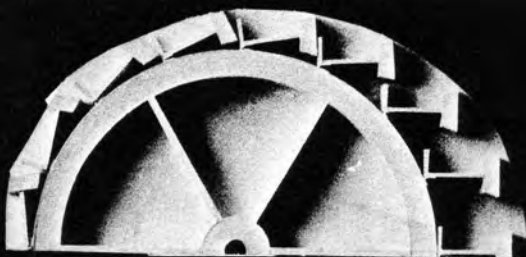


FRAME- STAND # 30

ART IS SOUR MEAT TO PRODE  
 now by stable to see nerves shaved to  
 END  
 of heap  
 BLED these berried thoughts of summer  
 merged & nearly STUCK  
 in the sun's arse.  
 ART is so sweet in the hands of a  
 Park Avenue dealer,  
 i mean they need to make the BIG CUT.  
 spy ultimatum of FISH  
 in a basket of hair, hence  
 the HEAD mars space.

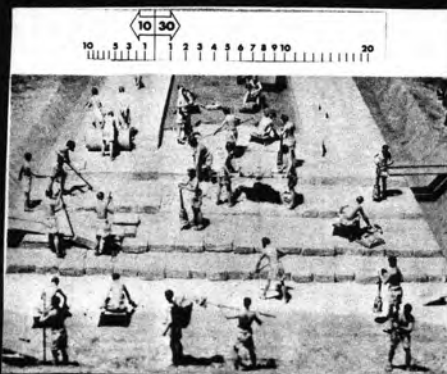


Guy R. Beining: *Frame Stand #30*



FRAME-STAND # 25

this is not a patrol ....  
 set each foot under  
 one long line of stars  
 where is the inference on  
 measuring stick?  
 LIFT NECK SPRAIN  
 implore garden spOt  
 to turn up its jewels.  
 will the bronze reed  
 burn thru?  
 bait the air & find a VOICE  
 o this murky sunset  
 mock soup murky  
 spilt chill on silverware,  
 handling ribs as hangers.



# JULIET COOK

---

## GYNOCIDIUM

makes her mouth open like a snapdragon

color-coded orifice

color-coded pollen slots

color-coded landing strips

)

unfetter dress bodice release bees

)

‘her faithful warriors, her very own daughters’

pour from mouth parts, lady parts

o the honey-seeking spill & thrall ‘the yellows

begin to tear down their own walls’

)

diligent fur-bodied swarm buzz fuchsias

)



o the sweet alignment of stigma, style, ovary

modified ovule breach   lust for evolved leaf

ripped from her sticky spine   torn from her milky stem

severed equals free

)

coda for a complex “tongue”

# JULIET COOK

---

## SLIGHTLY MORE FEMININE SWAMP CREATURE

The latest glittery module is implanted in your chest.  
Even if nobody else can see it,  
you know it's there.

Releasing poems based on prefab biorhythms,  
cake mix wavelengths, a hostess mentality.  
Flea bags, fun sacs, pink trigonometry.  
Sine, co-sine, the co-signer bailed  
and now you're paying off your own student loan  
for that fashion design degree. You're fashioning  
clothes out of dead silkworm debris,  
gelatinous Spam cans, bent pipettes  
from an outdated chemistry set.

If by clothes you mean poems.  
If by outdated you mean subjective.

Subject to revival, arousal, carousal,  
the way you slip into & out of book jackets  
with such strange frequency.

# KATHY A. PETERSON

---

## MATERIAL FABRICATIONS OF THE WOOLY BULLY

1

They sheared and carded      spun and dyed  
and boiled it down      stuffed it in the mouths

of generals and pulled the fear-blind  
over our orange-alerted eyes      swung  
the nightly news like ritual incense  
feeding the fire its own smoke      and introducing

the luminous green moths we chased as children

2

down a trail of bullshit      inhaling talcum toxins  
until we tripped      how dare a near-extinct

argumentative boor      appear on the horns of our dilemma

and put it to us-and-so that way      maligning the sleep-hung  
bats lurking at our hoedowns      and between urban crack-downs

I was his yes-sir girl      three bags full  
a gape-hole in my logic-frock      waving on the line

# KATHY A. PETERSON

---

## LADY LIBERTY DREAMS SHE IS ONE OF THEM

*I want to stop being an endless night*  
Francisco X. Alarcon

1

Ahead of all the untouchable times in a yard of her own  
jack in his pulpit a thickness ear to ear green  
as morning to lower the “flame” the width of silent lips

and in so doing “lose” her grip words falling arms  
free to embrace what she worked so hard to empty from

her mind fruited from the plains where fewer come  
ingrained these days to confirm her soul in self-control

2

She wishes she could give the bedraggled runners-up  
some hope all so green and puny like sour little apples

if only she had flagged them standing gunmetal  
all those prideful steps before a rope-ladder finally

offered a way down she is not free to say what  
unmeant sentiment most sickened them of her the amber wave

a tsunami when she caught her breath and fell

# KATHY A. PETERSON

---

## THE WINTER LIFE OF DRUGS

In large part due      the standup drill  
her pixilated do upswept and Elmered  
she's living up to      Manicpunkpecker  
overdrivencapsulatedpinkcelledpower  
outsocket her saltcraving heart carves  
now swallow what's been shallowed

Another fizzled dissolution      whiff  
of what once quenched      love's done  
spigot airsucked down      blustery with  
draft of feather ready for a laugh      a no  
fret flavor blue like raspberry      if that  
isn't ripe takes two      to chagrin

While he mulled      the orchard  
snowed banged-      up ladders  
slammed like books before he  
barked the neighbors lapboard  
fence bound his plot his casket  
full of verbs like *drive* and *revel*



Lawrence Applebaum: *Harry's Girl*

# TED JONATHAN

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## CHINATOWN

Snapping pictures of adulterers in the act is an honest living.  
A fine living for fast on his feet, tailored, tough guy,  
P.I. Jake Gittes. Smoke. Drink. Joke. And smile, smile, smile  
your I'm-in-love-with-myself-so-you-should-be-too smile.  
Forget about the girl you couldn't save in Chinatown.

High-class alabaster blonde mindfucker Mrs. Mulwray,  
Ida whatever, Walt Disney's mouse . . . Does it really matter  
who hired you to snap shots of Mr. Mulwray with his mistress?  
You got paid. It's 30s boomtown L.A.  
Forget about the girl you couldn't save in Chinatown.

Why take on venerated old tycoon Noah Cross?  
A whale of a man. Creator of his own cash ocean.  
That a man is old and made of money does not mean  
he no longer needs more—  
What are you, Jake, some kind of Red?

Why take on the L. A. Dept. of Water and Power?  
The puny big-nosed refugee who blithely switchblade-sliced  
your trespassing nose into bloody pulp with a single stroke,  
he knows how life plays out in this world of ours.  
Forget about the girl you couldn't save in Chinatown.

What's it to you if Noah Cross owns the water supply?

What's it to you if Noah Cross rapes the ghostly 13-year-old  
girl he sired raping his daughter, the recently widowed  
Mrs. Mulwray?

CONTINUED

Mrs. Mulwray is dead. Finely-chiseled face lawfully blown off.

Old Noah Cross. Gnarly and huge. A leafless tree.  
Stiff boughs hang tangled over ghostly girl-child shoulders,  
clutching her mute open mouth and a teensy naked knee.  
Bone-girl. From behind. Reared into his rude trunk.

Cops saw. But only you could taste her sour yellow terror.



# TED JONATHAN

---

## WHITE MEN IN SANDALS

On the Fahrenheit scale the boiling point of water is 212.

On the Fahrenheit scale the all-white-men-in-Manhattan-slip-into-sandals point is 55.

In low white Cons I ran for my life real fast across Bronx concrete.  
In steel-tipped black boots I stood fast and kicked shin-cracking low.  
In high-gloss black police oxfords I passed as an off-duty cop.  
Today, in black New Balance walking shoes, I walk Manhattan.  
*They* have taken over.

Foul-footed exhibitionists,  
unprepared for fight or flight.

Men from Idaho with enormous feet.  
Men from France with itsy-bitsy feet.  
Men from Long Island with filthy feet.  
A John Ashbery acolyte with cloven feet.

As though there were a date with Miss Japan at stake, they patiently wait in long lines at trendy City Bakery, breaking out the plastic to pay \$12.50 per pound to lunch on slightly above average salad bar crap from a paper plate.

Sans the support of innersoles they subway to Yankee Stadium. Taking in the art deco Grand Concourse, which they will invade. Turning live poultry markets into vintage clothes shops and the saint-haven botanicas into pet spas.

CONTINUED

Deep auto exhaust inhalers, they dine at upscale sidewalk cafes,  
viewing scenic black mountain ranges of rancid garbage packed 58-  
gallon plastic trash bags, and a parade of shitting dogs. Why not just  
toss a tablecloth over the hood of a parked Buick?

Always ready to hop the jitney to Southampton.

Maybe someday, I too, will let my doggies breathe.

# TED JONATHAN

---

## THE ESSENTIAL DENTISTRY OF DR. MAX KREEGER

Former Bronx Golden Gloves  
bantamweight contender,  
toothless and fit, old Dr. Max Kreeger  
is the last affordable dentist.

Mirthful, manic-laugh-loud,  
he floats around his spacious office  
calling all men “my brother” and all  
women “my sister” or “princess.”

Refuses to wear a mask, refers all  
root canals out, and has the genius to  
surround himself with beauty —  
an all-peachy Puerto Rican girl  
intern and office staff.

Ambitious dental-hygienist,  
silky, sing-song-speaking Gloria  
drills my upper right bicuspid.

Next week, Dr. Kreeger will extract  
my throbbing lower left molar,  
without the standard, self-serving  
*teeth will shift* dental bullshit.

“Beautiful! Beautiful!” shouts Dr. Kreeger,  
exhaling Beef Lo Mein breath  
directly into my wide open mouth  
as he reviews Gloria’s work up close.

CONTINUED

I agree.

Eyeballing the rope-like scar across my neck and having heard my breathy rasp, he earnestly asks,  
“Teddy, my brother, what happened?”

So I tell him.

He replies, “That they got everything, is all that matters.”

Seizing the pity price moment I pounce,  
“Yeah, but I have exorbitant medical bills.”

“Listen motherfucker,” he chortles,  
“you’re lucky to be alive!”

# MATTHEW KEUTER

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## BREAKFAST EGGS AND BEER

It's best to read poetry first off  
before the clutter of the day takes shape: a precocious  
little girl spitting her raspberry tongue  
in your face.

It's good with eggs & beer. There is a kind of  
promise in both of these foods. For example  
Stanley Kunitz's thundering heart  
made quiet garden in my hair  
only this morning

then the rest of the day just happened to be full of the world.

# MATTHEW KEUTER

---

## DIASPORA

*Look, father! There's a fire on the horizon  
that will swallow the sun.  
That is not a fire, my son, my joy, my heart...*

& because the son is the joy in the heart of the father  
he does not hide his tears, or stop them  
from falling into his son's spidery hair, who laughs at them  
feeling the words  
*tickle, rain, cloud* in his mouth.

*that is your mother come to the top of the hill  
waving wild strawberries like a torch. & together,  
father & son mouth the words  
nipple, suckle, sacred.*

*I want to tell you a story,  
this will be our first secret from your mother, because  
secrets also are sacred. This story takes place in  
the future, but has to be told now. In the future  
I will be dead & your mother doesn't know this story*

*because women live on the other shore of the story.  
In the future your penis will bloom like a flower.  
When it opens into a woman, in a field  
that might be like this field, where you  
point her toes to the earth & her hot tongue*

*to the sky, do not speak. &  
if you must to stop from breaking apart  
then speak this way:  
When speaking to her nipple  
first push her nipple out of your mouth & say*

*Blessed. When speaking to her belly button  
first roll the knot in your teeth  
& say, Crossing the ocean. When you speak into the river  
first push your tongue, lips & face into  
the river & say, Diaspora. These words*

*spoken in the ecstasy of naming are a deep woods—  
Look! Where your mother swallows the sun, which is god  
is what I have learned while we are blind.*

# MATTHEW KEUTER

---

## RIVER CROSSING

Here a breast  
    that blooms  
on a tongue  
    in the moonlight.

\*\*\*

Here a leg  
    conducts its  
sweat into a shoe. Your shoe.  
    Your shoe  
is not a camel, or an ass.

Your shoes are not boats  
    or a dam  
stopping boats. Still  
    your legs run  
to the sea  
    where our daughter startled to life  
in the sad world.

\*\*\*



Whispering into your widening navel  
the names on  
our tongues, and  
at the river's mouth  
a sound that sounds  
like an underwater heart  
an underwater heart, only nearer...  
so that it is inside my mouth until  
it has replaced my tongue  
with the sound  
of your heart  
in its tongue colored shell.

\*\*\*

Do you believe  
I make a romance  
of our serious hearts?  
It's not fair to say  
I've forgotten her name  
written across the vanity mirror  
in purple lipstick  
drowned in the Hudson  
on a quiet morning.

# ELLEN LAFLECHE

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## THE HALLOWEEN INTRUDER

A ghost knocks on the door. An angel with tinfoil  
wings. A bloody ghoul.

The nurse knocks next. Kind-hearted  
intruder, she wears a witch's  
black hat. She enters the death  
room. Counts Estella's breaths.  
Listens to the slow slush  
of her bluing blood.

When the witch says  
*It's a matter of hours*  
April and June  
light the votives in their red glass cups.

Estella turns her skull,  
stares through closed lids at the fire.

Gauze curtains murmur against the pane.  
Estella murmurs, too. Breath ruffles from her lung:  
a slow rippling like a Japanese fan unfolding.

The witch brews tea. Her black hat droops  
in the steam. Estella takes the sweet Lipton  
on her tongue. One honeyed sip. Then,  
her last straw-suck of broth.

Autumn drums its yellow palms on the window.  
The votives give up their perfume like smoky souls.

Bert strokes Estella's hand.  
Her cheekbone. He murmurs love words  
only Estella can understand.

The witch brews strong  
coffee for the living.

The twins set the table with Estella's best bone  
china: hand-painted roses, gold leaf.

When the witch says  
*It was a good death a beautiful death*  
Bert slams down his cup.

It shatters into sharp red petals.

# STEPHEN LLOYD WEBBER

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## APPLE PICKING

To get the job picking apples, we wrote on the application and after all it is true, we received no education past third grade.

Copper Man, the guide in his finger-trap trousers and one-eyed jack hair. Leads us under the river. Weighed down with possessions (star fruit, starfish, throwing stars, fallen stars, a moment of twilight). .

Grandfather opens his hands as a bee dusting pollen from wings, telling Sis he was the one dug the cave, rock under the river. Spades to diamonds, clubs to hearts. Boats flow over his handwork cave having dug.

Rustling under the river current, fruit orchard fields hum through gingham dresses. We cling to our new-sung vision: A sweet collection of ripe-cheeked girls in a thatched hut. What are they doing, collecting apple droppings? or the leavings of bees. We peek and must pass; a golden-warm hut over-domes the busy meandering of gingham-dressed girls. Yellow-black anklets ring thick as a dozen ripe eggs, thumb-struck. Whistle what their bras smell like, each much the same and one softer dozen softer still, by the windowsill, woven, dreaming through oblique wooden slats their ensemble of tight and powderous pussies.

A transient star tugs a bell from beyond the rushing heavenlight. Sis sneezes through her spine into a snowfall, hearing the answer to join the apple girls and stays forever in thatched hut.

Downhill from the sky we meet a man rotund and jovial named Po-un-kin. Pumkie. Called Pumpkin. Migrant Mexicans in warm collections are. Merging to split and pick apples. A car drives by, any hue or any car. But the Manager thinks it may be a green Border Patrol truck. Any sighting of slightly lime surface and the Manager presses a button, a buzz that makes the Mexicans go to a shed. A sure combination of *verde* and vehicle passes by on the road. Passes, without looking. Apple trees re-enter daydreams of heart to diamond, spade to club. What does a tree daydream, asks sis, containing fresh honey.

Copper man introduces himself as Crazyman beyond the river and he is newly-met.

Today is public visiting day, and we at the orchard gather for them to watch. . .

We and Crazyman are the only people who own cards and are allowed to stand under starlight behind the shadow of a full blown sky. while the Border Patrol may come Snooping.

We still of course are penniless.

There are petunias for miles.

Monotonously Days have gone and yes we peek previously, to remind where we wit. So. Days and days have gone by much like the manners of telling. and in our blue loafish truck we bear ourselves at the harvest of apples; our hearts break open with labor and poor dinners. O to have a fried meal. To kiss, a nip. But at breaks we loaf alone, and broken return at night in our truck. Home in our truck sometimes arrive home through our truck.

The eternal now, barks the whistle. Strangers in the orchard with public faces. We encourage Pumpkin with his whiskey nippery to offer us . . .

"I signify no," gluefully laughs Pumpkin, with his braided electric Crazyman. We only hear their distant voices in the musty woods "Ting ding driddle, a found fawn in vain." Off and amidst the daily picking they wander to have a nip; hearts spade, diamonds club.

Attempting whole-heartedly to make attempt at the picking and ignore the gingham girls, the striped petals of the path uphill to them long, splayed with dew and licorice pesticide, the spark-ridden disaster of our hopeful squinting at the hut through sunlight, sharp beams from pollinated bows shot aloof into us, unknown solitudes await; we are unmown; our earth-perfumed whiskers plume.

Trying to connect wage with strain, our hands aloof: "May we also have a nip?"

"I signify no," frets Pumpkin, who owns the flask.

The day stings as we loam loafingly drawn down mountain tall road to work the apple orchard. She goes, a swollen bud of insect wings and pollen. The day, a bearing-barge, floats down the striped dream tunnel and away.

Washing apples Crazyman wretches rainbowly into the cold tub. Wax from emerald-jute leaf into high-tension grey volts, his hair is

braided and so are his ideas. A battery presses the bitter of his back tongue.

He tells us of the night he was astounded from his solitariness by the descending rotation of a *fanged* red and blue flying saucer that flashes. . . he has a hard head he says. When they abduct him they have to soften his head, which they do at the Community for the Mentally Insane. Once there into its criminal brightness, he met a young boy aged seven, six, twelve or so. He swishes apples in the tub and his words spill: "He was lovely and I masturbated him."

Not intervening of course because we are here anyway under false pretenses, but he has moved on to the next apple.

"What's his real name?"

"He's crazy."

Eighty-some cents a day, soon we must leave, though Crazyman repeats forever in our memory. I will see him on campus wearing a brimstone hat and carrying a biblical object.

"Hey, Crazyman!"

Four or seven people will respond, waving in return.

This is the Public visiting day and he assembles his collection of small brass bottlecaps because he feels they hold some value. "For Sale" reads the sign.

"A viridian car is near" said Grandfather or Pumpkin, who had returned, all the Mexicans could come out again since the Public already knew it was Mexicans picked their apples and washed them, and liked most that the breeze-puffed gingham from the striped waspish girls affix labels to apple butter bottles in the thatch dome mountain house.

# RORY JOHNSON

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## DRIVING THE APOCALYPSE AND ECONOMIC FAILURE TO COLLEGE

The drive across the hexed  
boundaries of Amish country.  
The tape cassette I heard as music  
just the highway unraveling.

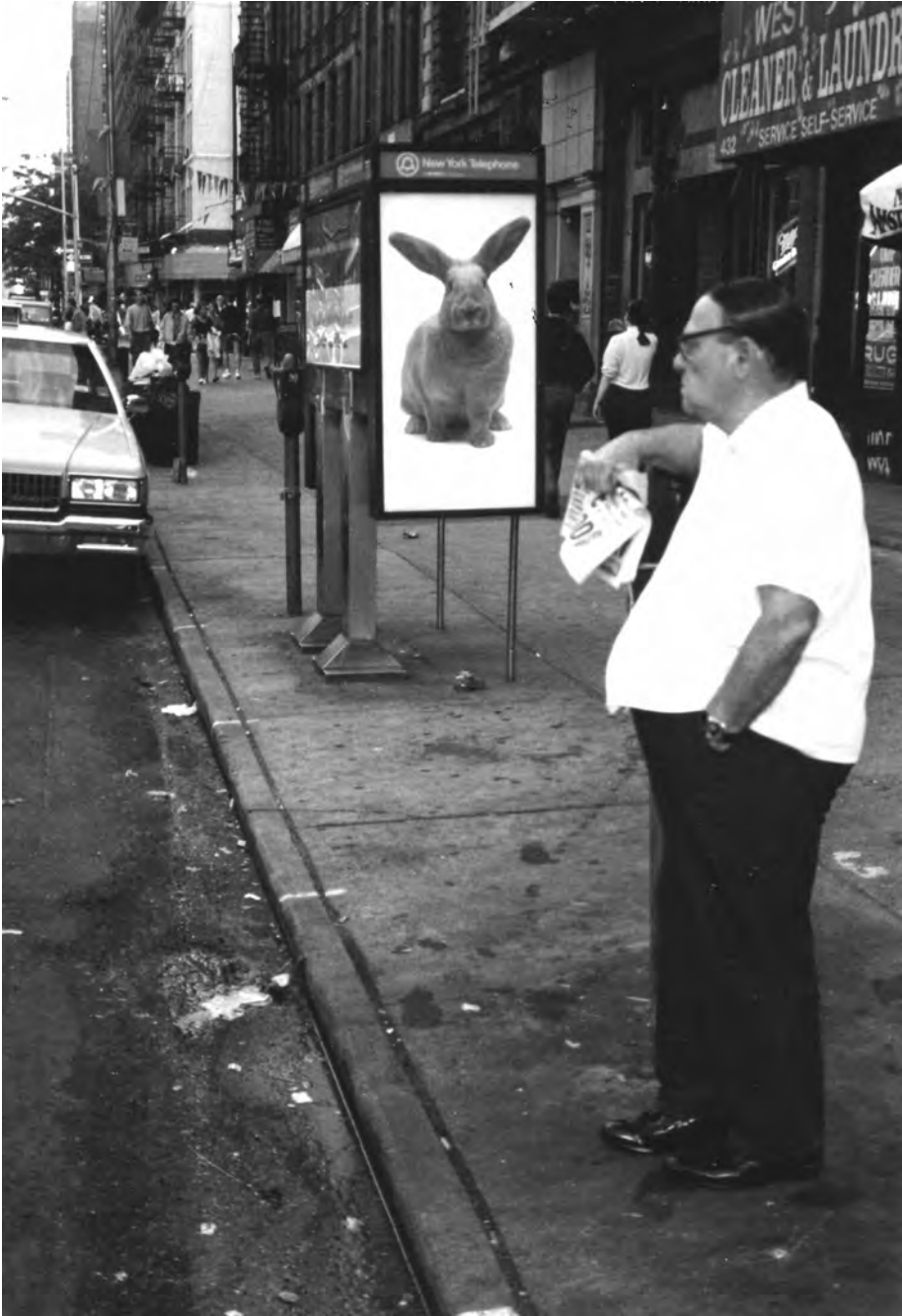
And my parents at the middle  
of their endurance. The fog approaching  
from the amputated trees. My sister  
struggling to grow older in the back seat.

We arrived at Death Row College  
where I was given a key and a room number.  
My roommate arrived already asleep.  
He had to keep gathering his mostly missing

face from the floor. At the window  
I studied the insides of the rain,  
the lost brick building  
at the other end of the tennis courts.

All night the fog moved loudly.  
Then the sun staggered  
out of a station wagon behind  
the dining hall and destroyed everything.

Some still fooled by another's warmth  
in the morning's dead sheets.  
The dirty stereos still pounding like blood  
from the walls and the pin-ups  
that will flinch eventually.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Parking Place*



GIL FAGIANI

---

SWEET STREAMS IN  
SPANISH HARLEM

The snow cone  
seller's wooden cart  
lies on its side

along Third Avenue  
its shiny  
turquoise paint

showing  
the footprint  
of the cop

who kicked it over  
for unregulated  
business practice.

Out of the mouths  
of broken bottles  
syrupy streams

of purple, green  
and orange  
inch their way

across the sidewalk  
towards the Coloso  
Furniture Store

where beds  
collapse  
upon human contact.

# SUSANNA RICH

---

## MY MOTHER'S HEAD

1

is bowed, not for some holy robe,  
nor long nod of *yes*, nor sleep, nor shame.  
Age, let's call it, as of this headless woman  
(or so she seems), neck bent, leaned onto  
the Kings Super Market cart,  
wheeling past beached SUVs—  
a turtle reared on hind legs,  
head sucked into her shell,  
front flippers propped on the empty  
chrome basket, heading for the automatic  
doors—a body functional though there's  
a neat line of shoulder where . . .

2

I'm stopped at a light when I see her  
who might be my mother if I don't  
intervene, somehow. Of  
course she *must* have a head—

the woman behind the cart—  
and a mouth and eyes—  
you need them to shop—and ears  
would help, a nose. *Don't*

I rehearse telling my mother, *bend*  
*your neck—it makes you look—get this—*

*Old—*

I dream *The Anne Boleyn*  
*HQ* for the decephalized  
 who, or rather *that*, like plants,  
 don't so much eat as  
 osmot through pores,  
 synthermize with shifts of heat.  
 Slogans fly on flag poles:  
*Lost Our Heads, Heads Off.*  
 Everywhere, heads roll  
 where lost heads go—The Venus DeMilo Holding Tank—  
 waiting to be transplanted  
 onto bodies: a little girl face  
 lowered by a derrick  
 onto the broad shelf of a sumo  
 ventriloquizing *I want to wrestle*  
*a virtual Ken*; a tattooed lady shoulders  
 a lama's depilated scalp chanting  
*Prick an ink Medusa into my*  
*OMM.* A head-advantaged nurse leads my mother's  
 body down a corridor, like a bride.

Actually, I'm alone in the car—  
 my mother's touring Budapest,  
 making frogeyes over the surface  
 of St. Margaret's mineral springs—  
 and from inside my thalamus my  
 husband whispers: *She won't wear bifocals—*  
*that's why she bows her head. Vain—*  
*eighty-two, but vain.*  
 True, she squeezes her glasses down  
 so hard they wrinkle her nose  
 like an elephant's knee. *Old—*  
 I whisper in my head. She raises

hers. Her turn to pick a card,  
 any card, at my kitchen table,  
 playing Robber Rummy—stealing  
 from melds fanned between us,  
 remaking our own runs of mixed suits,  
 and unbroken flushes.

Yes, *flushes*, I know.

But it's not as though she *can't*  
 hold her head up—no bone  
 in her neck has effervesced,  
 as mine might from guzzling  
 decades of 7-Up and Royal Crown.

*Old*, I taunt her, as she furls  
 like a time-lapsed fern  
 in reverse—no meld this turn.

She draws a card,  
 looks up at me from under  
 penciled eyebrows,  
 as if she doesn't trust me,  
 or I shouldn't—her. I draw—  
 an ace of clubs, I'm not ready for

my cheek pressed to my steering wheel,  
 the better to see the Kings woman.  
 Give me some sign of face,  
 a wisp of blue cotton ball hair,  
 a glint of cabochon clipped to an ear,  
 She's pressing straight  
 ahead. My own head is bent,

at the card table, and craned,  
to espy my mother's eyes—  
*let mine eyes lift yours, and with it  
your head. Old—*

*Right*, she says, from her question-mark  
body, *You're right*.

Here it comes—all I've needed  
for her to say: that her head is bent  
in, let's say, *grief*. Yes, she grieves—  
she is strong enough to  
grieve—for the gymnast  
she couldn't (*didn't*—more power)  
let herself be, double-somersault-twisting  
off a four-inch beam,  
back arched, head back,  
arms V-ed in Victory;  
or, let's face it, that she's a-  
shamed for \_\_\_\_\_ (here, let's insert  
how she didn't mother me) . . . .  
In any case, let her wilt her head  
for something that *means*  
*something*—that gives me a flicker—  
any sign of will or its breaking,

and not the Kings automatic doors  
opening and a woman who lets herself  
be swallowed by overhead neons  
before I can know her and my light

turns.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Flower of the Jungle*

# STEPHANIE DICKINSON

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## FROM LUST SERIES

(25)

The torn cotton of her panties are shackled men dragging gunnysacks, boll weevils, thorn and itch, scratch of seed hairs and lint-cut fingers. You crawl through her things out of boredom. A gold-painted cherub throws dim 40-watt suns on stretched elastic and crotches of shredding cocoon. Briefs washed by lye have gotten her through a long widowhood. Surprised by a layer swaddled in wax paper your fingers wade to drawer's bottom—cream-colored panties cut below naval with rosebuds seep rich lilac. Trying them on you touch sweltering summer—the last time these panties wore flesh. *Oh god.* Slipped shivering to ankles these lush entrances knew what it was to be wanted. Suckling covetous moths.

(26)

Hemmed in by mewling pumpkins, stick-pelts of bouquets, the car vanishes into half-light. You squat in the orchard of stones & shards, nose your hand into the rusted earth, imagine digging down toward a pale moon of a bone in drawstrings & ecru lace. Your lover looks on. You both need something that has been lying in darkness a long time as if deer eating the dusk isn't enough. Overhead the black & blue plumage caws, the disgruntled crows want you out. Better to be bobcat-stalking, mouth-eyed, who stared with teeth at the first diggers, shoveling & scratching to store up their beloveds, before leaping.

(27)

She sees the door that he's locked from the outside, knows the spare room of love is customized. His feet in flipflops are drifting across the living room. He's removing his brown moleskin pants. The spare room takes quick little breaths, no chance she'll escape. In the windows there are flies laying eggs. She's alone with the cardboard boxes. Her hands burn from his textbooks. She sleeps, startles to him dressed in a hooded Jacob's robe. He pushes her into geology: Teutonic plates, continental drift. Asteroids, the five thousand year old tidal wave. Lake Sam Houston spills mutated catfish onto its cement banks. A red snapper cries out. Lilac-eyed fish wash up. A boy is shot three times and winks from his coffin satin at a woman and is shot twice more. An amberjack slain, awakens. Flayed. Pines alive with maggoty shadows whiten sheetrock walls. Forests. More flames. The flies go silent. After days he takes her into the bathroom to wash her in the black sink and sit her on the only obsidian toilet she's ever seen. Its lid is swaddled in blood-plush fur and the tissue dispenser too wears a red pelt. A rack of lightbulbs licking water from the faucet. In the black tub a rubber duck spreads webby feet and clatters from yolkly beak. Wiped clean of love, he leads her into the living room and unbolts the front door, pointing. Past sweating magnolias and petal lampshades, into spike of yuccas fanning their blades, through odors of blue cheese and dog turds. Don't look back. That is the way, away. The kitchen cupboards with their flat plastic roach traps hiding behind counters send out flirtatious giggles.

(29)

Leaves parachute into my mouth that squirrels eat so I no longer know if what they gather is some remnant of my flesh. I taste of haunting strong aroma, yellowish-white July peonies, of clay. In my ear hollow bones and wind, a tongue of rope skin and bark split from a tree. I want to be flung into words and sentences, songs made with soft tissue of throat, all the left behind—weedy horse chestnuts, buckeyes with shine like irises of mares, the red mulberry, what the green asks.



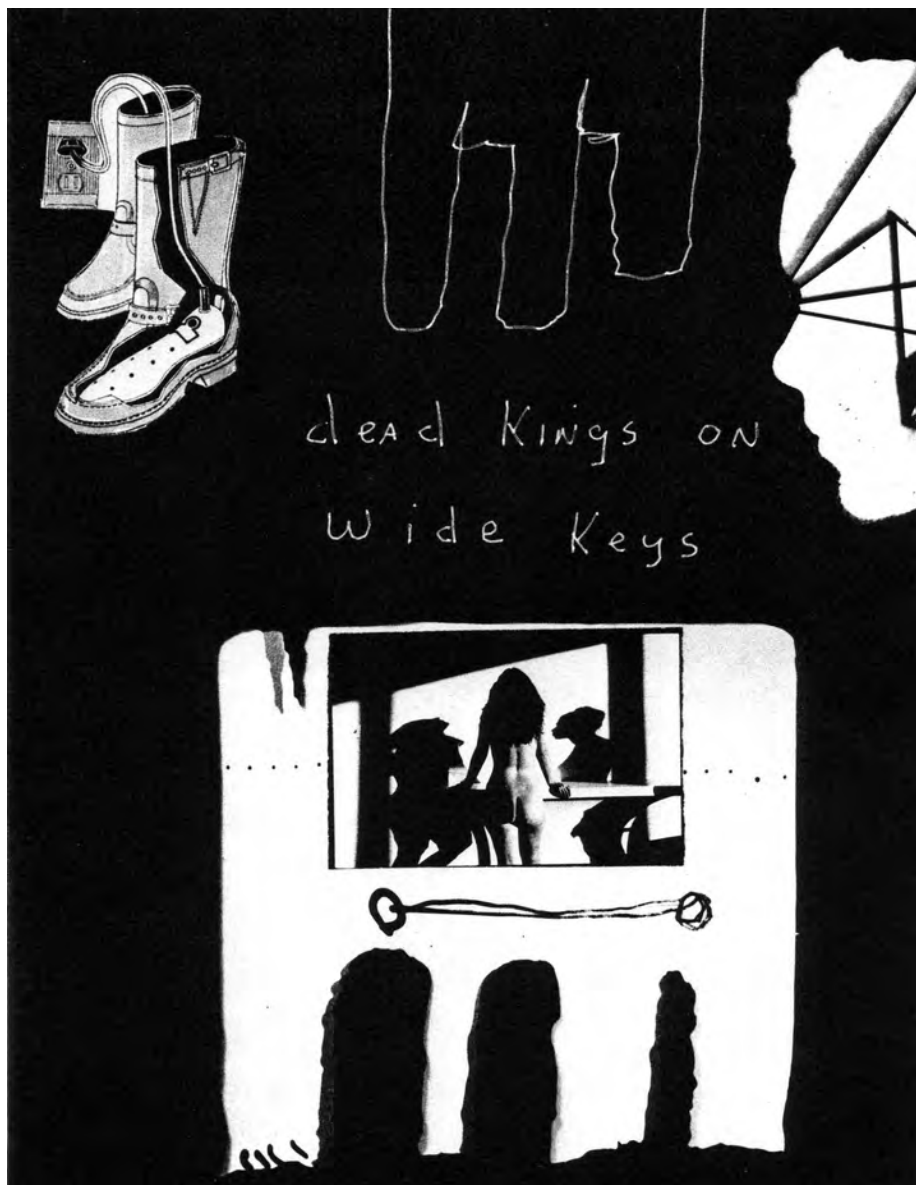
(30)

Desire and appetite on the sidewalk. Barrels of sea onions bob like poached eyeballs. Squids lie in ropy tentacles against groupers and blue fish. Salted cod in crumbs of snow. Stew fishes of fragile driftwood. The fish are beautiful. She wants to kiss them. Men lean into crevasses. They look. A man pushes his shopping cart piled high with empty milk gallons. He hisses. She gazes at shop windows. The Pork Chop. The suckling pig. She smiles at the fatty corpuscles and muscles that rim the eyes. Even the snout is shaved. A heap of pigs feet draws her eyes. Enormous cloven hooves white except where blood has settled leaving them red blue and bruised. A washtub of what looked like hide with hair fibers bristling from it. Who craves this? She yearns to walk through the window, freeing her skin from muscle on shards of glass. Then the tallow animals will quiver, making room for her to sit.

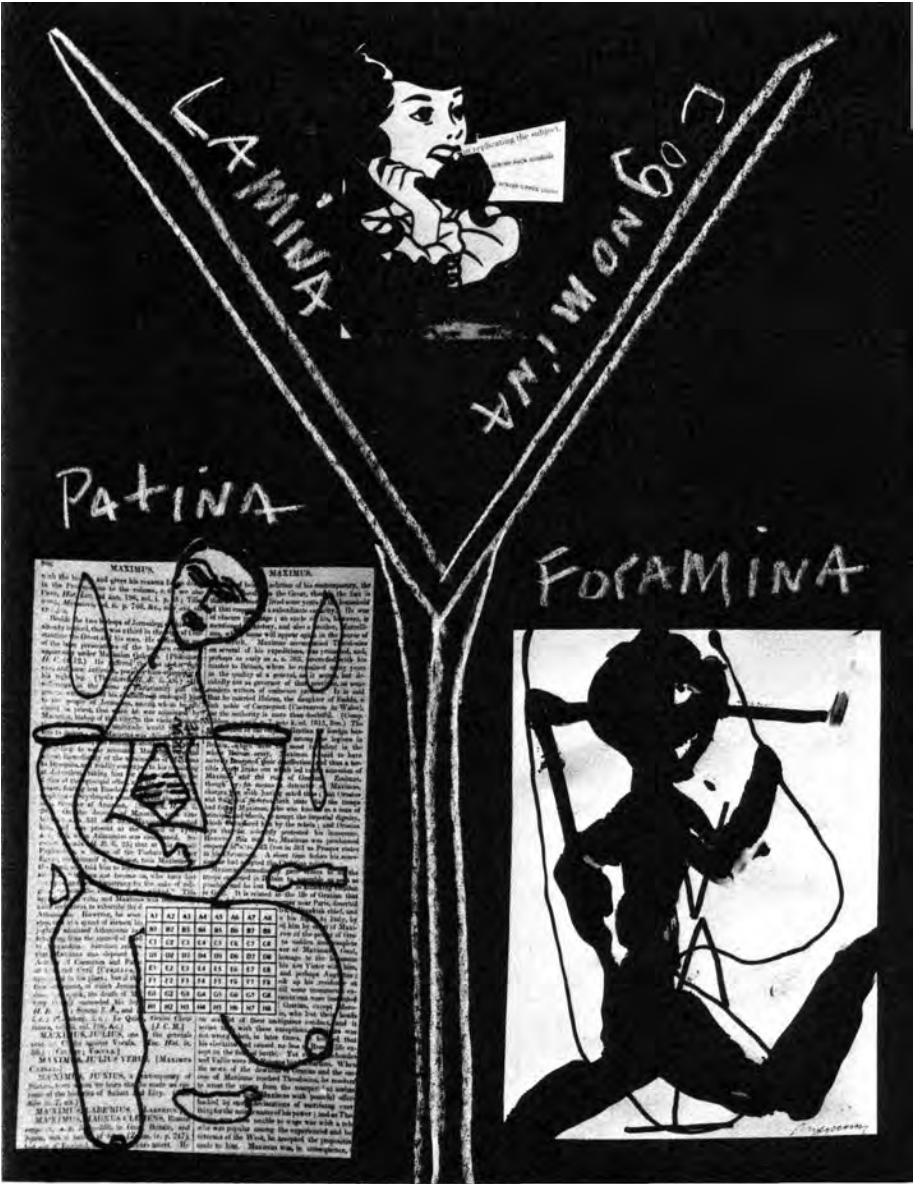
(31)

We undress each other under the piano and I get the pedals in my hair. The upstairs is a below zero and even the mattress shouldn't spend the night with only one sheet. We pile coats on and I kiss him goodnight. "You're not as good looking as father," I tell him. "So? You're not as pretty as mother." That's a lie. I'm wavy black hair to my waist, blue eyes and church steeple cheekbones. We fall asleep wrapped around each other and maybe we'll wake with the sheet iced to our skin or better yet to not wake and our last touch frozen solid my fingers to his lips. I'd rather breathe in snow, his leg thrown over me, crushing me with his night breath and then wanting me like that. The starlings gather on the barbed wire fences, their winter eyes bright red, yellow freckles in their feathers. I have nicks in my flesh from their beaks. Trees are roaming around. I won't look at them, but they're running toward the house, wailing Bonnie, Bonnie. Struck by moonlight the birches are begging for someone to cut them loose too. They watch with widened black eyes the damnation of my brother and I.

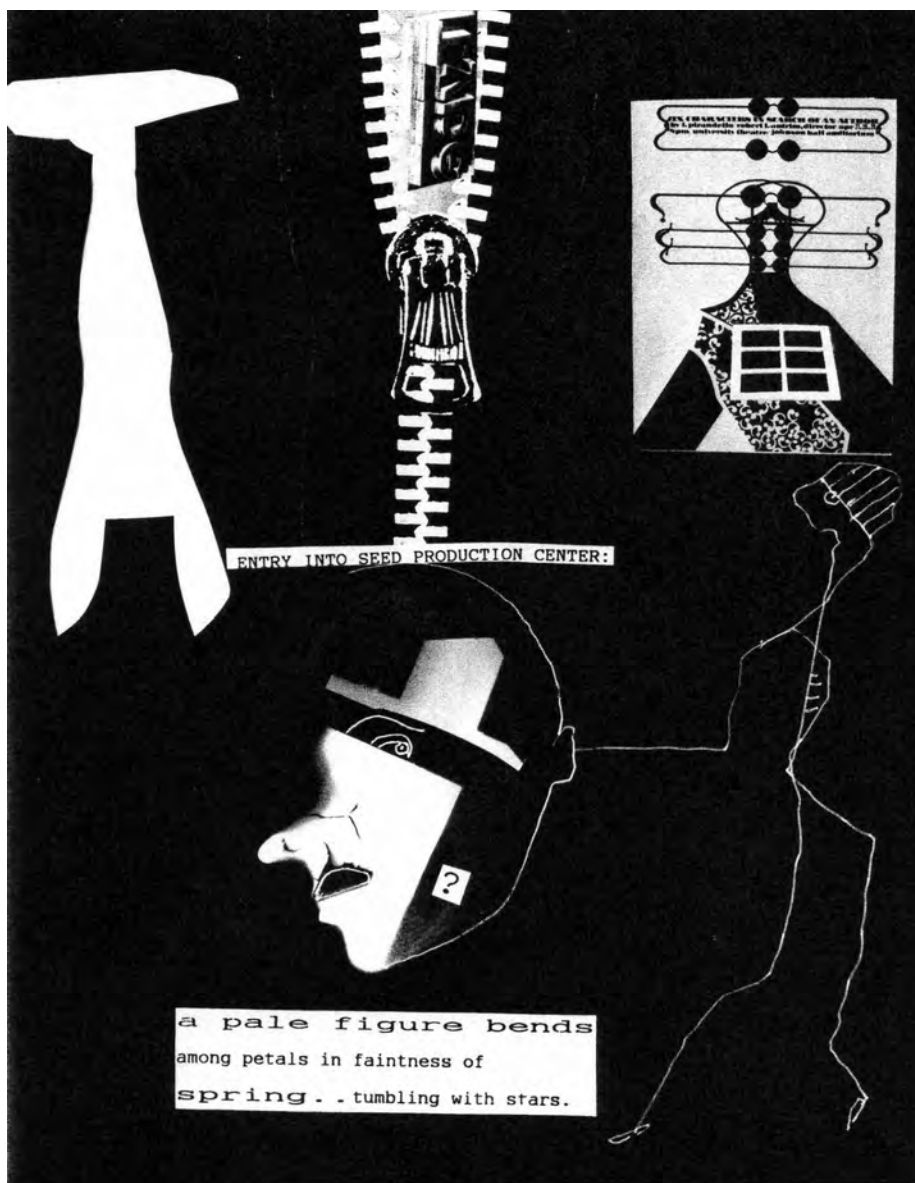
Pilot of a Liberator B-24 missing in action over Sicily since July 4th 1943. How beautiful he is in uniform, the mustache and long lashes, peering out from this yellow newspaper column. Son of the cornfields and Carrie Worley, ("Dig dig," she said to her other son, "go to Sicily and dig until you find your brother.") Not dirt but shot from sky into Mediterranean azure his body and the photo he took with him. Two bathing suited girls, the prettier one's gaze meets his, in her eyes there's sultry stephanotis on the wilt. He was the best dancer, this plankton pelted skull who loves the prettier one. *My heart belongs to you.* Bones leached to a dying coral reef. The plain girl stares into the sun. *I'm yours.* A sizzling minuet meets hatchet fish.



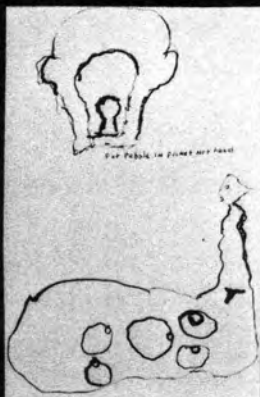
Guy R. Beining: *Dead Kings on Wide Keys*



Guy R. Beining: *Patina Foramina*



Guy R. Beining: *Entry Into Seed Production Center*



gobble

garble



at the root of his tongue

at the root of the question

all the numbered points of

his anatomy r i v e t e d

overcast the outer regions

gobble

rubble



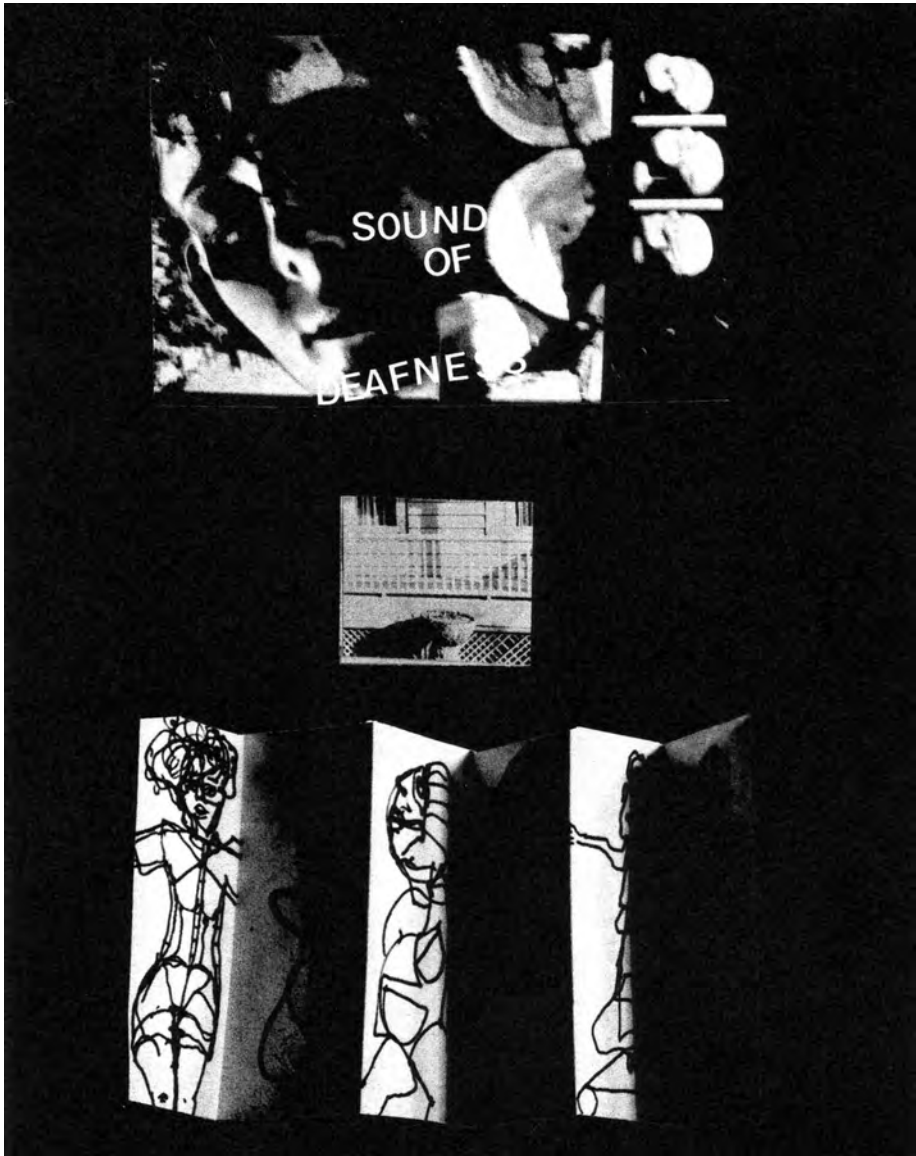
Pebble

Points

Starward

Guy R. Beining: *Gobble Rubble*





Guy R. Beining: *Sound of Deafness*



# PAMELA ERENS

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## TAKING A WALK ON HILLTOP ROAD

I miss my youth, my smooth smooth skin! I miss my youth, when my mind and body fought each other unforgivingly.

When you're young, you can go out without your SPF 30 and you don't even get lines! When you're young you can pee in the swimming pool! When you're young that first kiss is something to tumble into.

I have a child now, and a husband, and I'll never feel all alone again. (That's what I needed.) But falling through space—that was interesting! And wanting someone to save me—that was good, too.

I suffer less than I did then, and even am less sad. I didn't know the names of trees. I didn't even look at trees! Now just try me: maples, aspens, quaking aspens, gray birch, white birch, red birch, tulip tree, oak....

I didn't see the virtue in picking apples. I never ate fast food to keep someone company. I didn't know what to buy for a child's first birthday!

So why do I long for the boyfriend who made me cry and cry, and told me darkness was the only thing I could call my own? Why do I feel five o'clock come down like a curtain? Why do I feel such a pressure at my temple and throat? Why am I sure that that Saab is going to jump the curb and come straight for me?

I'm walking a road that goes nowhere special. I'm walking a road that brings the suburb to the west to the suburb to the east. One has more money, and one has more musicians. I'm yelling at the cars that swerve around the little children. I'm walking down this road, and then I'll walk back again.

I didn't know how to make an omelette! Now I carve pumpkins for the little children! I can use knives and other dangerous objects! I am the one who sits by the side of the bed and says, "You'll be better by the morning."

Just try me! Rosemary, oregano, basil, chives, thyme....

My mother is limping. My father's polyps have got to go. My uncle's already deep under the snow. They all come for Thanksgiving and stab, stab, stab.

Sure I'm happy that Harvard's dying to have my son! That my daughter is a celebrity beauty! The Gap calls me every day, begging....

The leaves are coming down, late this year. The globe is warming, warming. They've put up a roadblock on Elm Street, a powerline drapes over a broken tree. The workmen say, If you touch it you're dead, ma'am. All over town the windows are pulsing with FIOS, Comcast, Verizon Broadband. The husbands are home, typing, typing. It's noon, noon.

At Taft K-through-Two the back doors open and the children flow out, screaming.

# PAMELA ERENS

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## RIGHT HERE

In our new study, on the new color TV built into the underside of my father's new desk, there are men tromping through a jungle. They are wearing green, brown; the jungle is green, brown. There are gunshot-type sounds, explosions. I don't know what I'm seeing. There is a man tied to a tree...or maybe that is in *The Best of LIFE*, which lies on the glass table in our living room, a book that also shows the Japanese soldier's charcoal-grilled skull propped atop a U.S. tank. I'm six, eight, ten years old. Everywhere I look I see things I didn't mean to see, things I won't forget, that I can't help looking for again. On the newsstands long-haired women tear at their blouses, trying to show their breasts. The car radio says Paul Getty's ear has been mailed to his parents by his kidnappers—I picture a white envelope, letter-sized. I hope we don't have too much money. My father says that people who win millions in the Illinois State Lottery have breakdowns, shoot their wives, take to drink. I hope we don't have too much money. I save my allowances for smiley-face pins, sticks of incense. My mother plays *Surrealistic Pillow*, Judy Collins, the White Album on the turntable. *Suzanne takes me down to her place by the river. I am a rock, I am an island.* There is Dippity Do in the cabinet and a joint in my mother's jewelry drawer. There's pornography beneath the hat boxes. A bomb goes off in the Capitol and Gerald Ford walks through the rubble. Somebody flees something by going to—Morocco? Algeria? I close the curtains to see the TV better. Someone on a morning soap opera takes LSD and sees terrible, terrible visions. At night I dream a supervillain comes with a freeze-gun and welds me to a spot, ices me over; I can't move. My heart's stopped. The babysitter wakes me to show me the first man walking on the moon.

I don't go out of the house. I don't want to go out of the house. I don't need to go out of the house. I can be afraid of everything all by myself, and right here.

# MARYHELEN SNYDER

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## PIG BLESSING MUSE BLESSING PIG

Eye closed in sleep,  
she holds the ditch bank up.  
Her gravity of flesh keeps  
earth held down, lifts up  
the morning, lets sun creep

its fingers  
along her amber back.  
Thick lump, she lingers  
hours past dawn. Firm fact  
of life, who dare abstract her?

No more or less  
than Saxon syllable. Light  
separates her hairs, glosses  
the ear that lengthens night  
above her closed eye, tosses

a smattering  
of leaves over her, grounds  
her in earth. Next to her  
one of her farrow, grown,  
stirs, roots at her tits.

Still, she sleeps.  
Her Fahrenheit higher  
than mine, I know her heat.  
Her sides move like water  
in slow waves, she breathes

softly, bestirs  
nothing. "She'll wake in awhile,"  
her owner tells me. Beneath  
her snout, her mouthline smiles.  
Extracted heart, she beats.



Lawrence Applebaum: *Motherless*

# MARYHELEN SNYDER

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## GREY

Grey day on the Irish coast of my ancestors.  
Even the downy cygnets born grey out of the white swan.  
And the clouds grey and the inlet woven with the grey  
of dead marshweed and bound raincloud. And  
the limestone ground under a paper veneer of grasses  
grey as the ancient bark of the yew or the remains  
of that discarded fishing boat on the grey-green shore.

*Make something happen!* the grey heart hisses.  
Fill time with polished stone, embroidery, rhythm  
of Celtic drum. It cannot be sinful to paint  
the window trim green, to gather the sparse blossoms  
into bouquets; to make a fire in the hearth,  
to make songs out of grief. And the mind says,

*No, not sinful, good.* As swaddling is good,  
bound to the grey cradleboard. And the windmill  
good for water and lamplight. And the house good.

Yet look how the white swan sits on the grey hill,  
and moves through the cold grey water all day,  
letting the sun come and go without hope or despair.  
When night comes, she bends to it, making herself  
invisible under her white wing.

# PHILIP DACEY

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## THE LAUNDRY PICTURES

His masterpiece was a series of photographs of laundry hanging outdoors on lines to dry, a series that took him ten years to complete. Because he travelled widely by car throughout the United States, including along back roads, he frequently passed yards with clothes drying in them and stopped to introduce himself to those at home before asking permission to photograph their wash. A few times he was threatened with calls to the police, so strange did people think his request, but more often those he asked were flattered, even fascinated. He also took pictures of them if they were willing, conscientiously sending back copies of the photographs with a thank-you note. He did not, however, include any people in the series. For all the viewer knew, the wearers of the clothes had vanished overnight, leaving only this trace of themselves, laundry as elegy. Some critics speculated his obsession stemmed from repressed memories of his mother hanging out wash in their backyard. Other critics suspected the photos were a ruse for the photographer to collect pictures of women's bras and panties. On the other hand, he once told an interviewer of a dream he'd had of Jesus hanging on a cross whose crossbeam extended to become lines of laundry on both sides of him. "If I'd been a painter, I'd have painted that dream. But to stage it and photograph it would have been too contrived." Some viewers found hints of the dream in the photos—in the way, say, a certain shirt hung in the sunlight, so freshly laundered it seemed the image of redemption. Likewise, wind blowing in one picture and lifting the wash was seen as the movement of spirit, while in another the laundry hanging perfectly still suggested an arrival at peace after turmoil. To most viewers, however, the photos seemed fundamentally studies of shapes and colors and textures, a feast of the familiar and taken-for-granted now singled out and valorized. The artist once said he loved how in certain parts of the United States the word "wash" is pronounced "warsh." He called the series "Washdays," but it became known as "The Laundry Pictures."



# PHILIP DACEY

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## HANGER

with its curving neck  
dreams it's a swan

one hanger covets  
another hanger's  
finer clothes

empty-hanger syndrome  
glad to be burden-free  
but prone to identity-crisis

they pray to their god  
the pole from which they all hang

humiliation  
to be straightened  
and used to clear drainpipes

the momentary touch  
of a human hand  
thrills and disturbs

at midnight  
in the dark of the closet  
whispered talk of  
older grander dress styles  
do you remember when

in the morning  
an item of clothing  
has fallen to the floor  
what were the hangers  
doing last night



Spiel: Orator

# ROGER SMITH

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## SCARECROW

The scarecrow tries,  
a wreck to the field he guards,  
an antithesis of temptation.

Impaled rags of a station  
marooned to the idea of the meadow.

The loitering of straw as someone,  
schemes into unmasking stares.

It's about the there  
with an untherefulness of risks  
perjured to nonchalance.

Shadow of the clock he makes,  
and his envying that clock  
for its motion.

Leave him where you forget  
how he looks, invert and erase  
him of desires.

A bankrupted mannequin poignant  
To the unfolding of skies.

He needs the field he won't do well in.  
It seems a well done last of things  
to leave him there.

# ROGER SMITH

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## THE GIFTS OF HAPPENING

Snow fell outside as we made love.  
Happening while neither knew  
what the other was about.

Except to snow falling is its making love.  
Your skin lay white as what we did. Giving it  
that white as if I sensed what was happening  
outside of our happening.

But two happenings if they are felt at once  
can helpless into a sharing of some mirror.  
Some mirror always lay there.  
if these two should find some way to.

And so the motion of our bodies  
saw to fit and collect in those of the falling,  
which could not have happened if not the falling  
outside had seen to shape into what we did.

And the temptations of skin seemed not so much other  
than the wants of just laying snow. Those sighs  
of the getting there with done. And resting in  
the all-samed edgelessness.

So that a touching of understanding was come to,  
though neither could really know the other there.

# HOLLY DAY

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## GRAVITY

It started a long time ago  
in a city with rounded spires and  
dead skyscrapers old as mountains.  
We lived in the wings of an airplane  
the dead pilot in the cockpit  
all but forgotten.

At night the bats would come, sometimes  
they would flutter so close to the plane  
we were afraid they'd discover there was no glass  
in the windows.

But that was a long time ago. Now  
I live in the city, work  
as a librarian  
in a building full of schoolchildren that don't  
want to be there. I will eat their skin  
when the teacher leaves. I will wear their useless clothes  
like tattered wings of my own.  
They will join the dead pilot  
In that place that never happened.

# TONY GLOEGGLER

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## BROOKLYN BOUND

She braces her body  
between closing subway doors,  
asks if this F train  
goes to Coney Island.  
She rushes in, pulling  
the hand of a little girl  
who in fifteen years  
will be even prettier  
than her mother. I go  
back to my book, glance  
at them each time  
I turn the page. If  
I catch the woman's eye,  
I'll lift my head  
at the end of every  
paragraph. If she smiles,  
it's after every sentence.  
If she starts a conversation,  
I'll smack the book shut,  
throw it out the window.  
But only the girl  
knows I'm alive.

She looks at me  
then quickly turns away.  
She whips her head  
around, looks back  
with her mouth wide  
open. Then she does it  
again. This time, she  
sticks her tongue out,

wags it side to side.  
Finally, I get it.  
Peek-A-Boo. I close,  
open my eyes, act  
surprised, press my nose  
into a pig's snout, pull  
back my hair and flap  
my ears like a fat bird  
taking flight. She slides  
down her seat, kicking  
her feet and giggling.

The woman grabs her daughter's  
arm, leans over, threatens her  
with a finger held  
close to her face. The girl  
bites her lip, sits up  
and folds her hands  
like an honor student  
in Catholic School.  
I want to apologize,  
explain it was all my fault;  
but I am afraid of her too.  
So I read my book  
as if it is getting good.  
Minutes later, the train  
rises out of the ground.  
Sunday morning sun  
lightens up the car, brightens  
the neighborhoods we rattle past.  
The girl climbs on her knees,  
looks out the window,  
points and tells her mother  
about backyard swimming pools,  
a nun clanging a church bell,  
a man and woman slow dancing  
on a fire escape. But her mind  
is somewhere else—maybe  
she's telling her husband

CONTINUED

she doesn't love him anymore,  
maybe she's in the shower, touching  
the tiny lump on her breast —  
and she stares straight ahead.

The girl keeps pointing,  
slapping the window and bobbing  
her head up and down, nudging  
her mother's shoulder, yelling  
Mommy Mommy Mommy  
when she just gives up  
kicks her mother  
with both feet. Mommy  
grabs her by the legs,  
swings her across her lap  
and whacks her ass

— You little bitch —  
five, ten, fifteen times  
until the girl's bare thighs  
are stained with red  
burning hands and I want  
to dart across the car,  
somehow make her stop.

I could pat her back  
as she cuddles her daughter  
and they cry together.  
I could sit, listen  
to the woman's apologies,  
say I understand. I could  
tell her about the group home,  
the night I hit  
the retarded kid  
when he bit my wrist.  
How I wrote in the log  
that Jimmy Hock fell  
stepping out of the tub,  
banged his forehead.  
How the left side of his face



puffed up and turned colors  
like he lost a schoolyard fight.  
How I couldn't sleep  
even after everyone seemed  
to believe me and I kept  
my job. How Jimmy  
still runs to hug me  
when I punch my card  
nine o'clock sharp  
Monday through Friday.

But all I do is hide  
my eyes in the book,  
hope that it's over soon,  
that the next stop  
is mine. The woman smooths  
her skirt flat. The girl  
cries quietly, covers  
her face with her hands,  
her skin still pink.  
When the conductor announces  
Kings Highway, I get up,  
wait by the door. I can feel  
the girl's eyes, two snipers,  
peeking between her fingers,  
shooting holes in the back  
of my head.

# TONY GLOEGGLER

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## VISITS

Days like this I wish  
I was six years old  
and autistic, like Joshua,  
the way he opens the door  
and grabs my hand,  
leads me to his room  
on my weekly visits.  
His mother sits in  
the kitchen, her arms  
crossed loosely against  
her chest, thinking  
I guess. He stands on  
this special, worn out circle  
of rug, says, "One, two, three.  
Up, Tony" and I lift him,  
throw him high as I can.  
He lands on the bed  
laughing, and I pounce  
on top of him, lie there  
until he wraps his arms  
around my neck and I ask,  
no beg, for just one squeeze,  
and he pulls me tighter,  
hugs me for less than  
an instant. We do this  
over and over, both of us  
running out of breath, seven,  
ten minutes, until he says,  
"See you later," walks me  
down the hall to the room  
where I used to sleep.

If I paid the Spanish lady  
with the tiny barking dog  
who lives down the hall  
to come by once or twice  
a week, showed her how  
to pick Joshua up, throw  
him on the bed exactly  
the way I do, I'm not sure  
he could tell the difference.  
And if I was Joshua  
I wouldn't love Hilary  
so desperately. Anyone  
could take her place:  
The tall, pretty teacher  
who lives in Jersey, loves  
Lucinda Williams, poetry,  
Southside Johnny, driving  
fast and dancing slow.  
The thirty-three year old  
with her dark eyes and sexy  
mouth, the Thurman Munson  
baseball card taped  
to her bedroom mirror.  
The woman sitting across  
the table at my best friend's  
wedding. Last weekend,  
alone in Baltimore. Someone  
said her name was Jackie.  
She had this little girl  
voice and kept leaning  
over as she bit  
into soft shell crabs.

## BIG WAR

Let's unwind. Move back to the midwest.  
Lose some time and tell some stories.  
Let's visit the past and live among  
grain elevators square with history,  
miles and miles of the same field  
owned by 127 different families.

Milking and churning. Tin soldiers.  
And real ones back from the big war.  
Never mind the damaged. Worth  
fighting for. Like the farm. Not really  
transient. Working for the right. No  
bodies in the basement. No basement.

Still a few copper bathtubs and  
outhouses with catalogs. The odor  
of hay and just about everything else  
all at once. The child's bedroom in  
the attic. Heat lightning. A storm  
that may never announce its real intentions.

The gossip is terrible, wild enough to not repeat,  
several times. Children giggle and sputter  
In the town square, climbing the cannons,  
feeding grass into the barrels when no one's looking,  
mushroom spoors smoking from their rampant feet,  
marching into a toy war they believe is only history.

When I've finally adjusted to my wife's restraint, she dances in, bustling and blathering with an excitement that demands warmth and a rise in the optimistic pitch of the native growth. The clouds seem to hurry around her, watering and retreating, watering again. A confusion of intentions. Always passing. On their way to the front.



Guy R. Beining

# RICH IVES

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## MORE THAN YOU THINK

*All winter long the tracks in the road bled.* Wet and dripping in the afternoon and solid again at night. Little Nonsense grew tired of milking Vladimir's goats and he said so.

"Build your ballroom out of water," said a sleazy imitation of the wet Russian wind. No visible means of support. Busy little flutter-hands. Advice worth exactly what you pay for it.

"If I were a gentleman, I'd offer you cupcakes." And with that, Peasant Pigboy brushed the flies off Peasant Suzie's back and prepared to go to market. He huffed and he puffed. He itemized the inventory. He pointed Little Nonsense in the right direction.

The bleeding road was not his only means of egress.

Little Nonsense had cooked and cooked. The sprouted Nebraska beanbuns proved not to be a popular item, but the hotcakes sold like hotcakes and maple syrup flowed like lazy water. Little Nonsense was homesick and Little Nonsense began to leak.

The farmer, the shoemaker, the shepherd and the thief; these were the mistaken saints visiting the nosebleed and they offered homespun remedies, commiseration, and the milk of saintly kindness in return for the milk of Vladimir's goats. Little Nonsense witnessed his own miraculous recovery and Peasant Pigboy transcribed its haunting air.

"Once when the sun was high and the whole world was on fire, a wise man spoke to me," whispered the sleazy imitation of the wet Russian wind and fell strangely silent.

Poor Little Nonsense. No more nosebleeds apparently meant no more goat's milk and no more goat's milk meant no more wild desire. A remedy that had proved as debilitating as the illness. Sadness and more sadness and Peasant Pigboy's tasteless cupcakes hardening on the table.

Nothing left but the bag balm sliding across all the misguided congratulatory handshakes. And the wet Russian wind whispering uselessly. A glut of sprouted Nebraska beanbuns. More homespun remedies with more unfortunate side effects.

It's simple, they all said. If you feel like peace and quiet in a foreign land, you shut up.

# ALAN CATLIN

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## "ONE DAY THIS COULD ALL BE YOURS"

AFTER TOM TAYLOR

Summer suits are displayed against  
tile walls, washed and worn, hand  
pressed with identical hidden seams,  
though no one sees them this far  
underground in subway tunnels  
such a long drop from anywhere.  
The back drafts of passing trains  
burn the skin off the faces of  
commuters with nowhere to go,  
no newsprint to read on paper folded  
over for easy access, casual gazing.  
Closer inspection reveals the men  
inside these suits have no bodies,  
are so terribly ill-formed, no one will  
approach them unless they are planning  
to remove both socks and shoes,  
to affix toe tags with new names  
for those inside who require them.



# ALAN CATLIN

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## "AT BEST HE IS MERELY A TRANSLATOR OF INSOMNIA"

AFTER ANTHONY SEIDMAN

into the burned image of half-men,  
half-lizards reclining in thick padded  
chairs stained by the blood of executions,  
the sweat of the dead rank as the breath  
of caves sleep has resided in sharpening  
the teeth of terrible dreaming. The flat  
white walls and battleship grey floors  
are flecked with the rust of burst pipes  
leaking oil and resins that form puddles  
that make the sodden cloths covering  
your face an unbearable weight. You are  
too tired to remove this silent wedge  
between two worlds you have no place in.

# MARGARET BARBOUR GILBERT

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## FROM SUGARING OFF

*from I.*

### 4. WINTER IN THE WOODS

16

One of the things I loved about working at the Opera was getting a grilled cheese sandwich and coke in the diner of the Empire Hotel with its glittery, gold trim and *déclassé* ambiance. I sat at the counter and waited for George Balanchine from the City Ballet to arrive with his corps de ballet girls. They all sat in a booth of red vinyl plastic together. The girls would drape their long, white arms about him in the red booth as he tried to eat. I would imagine that I was one of the dancers. George always looked as though he were having sex, not lunch.

17

There was a woman who worked at the opera named Cornelia Whitemore. She was in charge of Publicity. She had long brown hair, a shiny red nose, and oily skin. She had graduated from Manhattanville College for Women, and she was very stuck up. I had never before known a woman named Cornelia, and I thought it was the silliest name I had ever heard. I despised her because she always talked down to me and made snide remarks about me. I disliked her even more than I did Veronica Lake, who was in charge of Benefits, and always wore evening gowns to the opera on opening nights. Once when I asked Cornelia to sign a letter I had typed for her, she sneezed into a tissue, and handed me a crumpled tissue filled with snot, while she signed the letter. “Would you please throw this in the trash basket for me?” she said, instead of thanking me for typing the letter. It wasn’t in good taste for ladies to wear makeup, so Cornelia wore none. Her nose shone like the little red cab light on the canopy of the doorman building across the street from The Barbizon. But Cornelia was a “superior person.” She was always going out for expensive dinners or entertaining important

people of the opera. One day, she went to lunch at The Ginger Man near Lincoln Center with some board members, but she didn't come back. When I asked where she was, no one would say anything. Just that she had gotten sick at lunch. When I asked what had happened, I was told that she had had a seizure, that she had been drinking at lunch, and had suddenly had a seizure. When I asked what kind of seizure, no one would say. "Does she have epilepsy?" I asked. But no one would discuss it. That's when I realized that Cornelia had probably had an epileptic seizure. She was no better than I was! For days, I thought about the fact that she had epilepsy just as I did, and that she had never told anyone at work. I couldn't get over it, but since I hated myself, it only made me hate Cornelia more. I was glad she had epilepsy.

## 18

*The Epilepsy Newsletter* from the Epilepsy Foundation of America followed me to New York. My mother had made sure they received my new address. Whenever one arrived in my mail box, I read it immediately in the secrecy of my basement apartment, even though I hated the red and black borders that ran along the paper like a siren announcing a death, and the tabloid black and white pictures of all the little children with epilepsy. The ugly red and white borders that banded the newspaper looked just like the Dilantin capsule that I took everyday. Their band, a single stripe of red, was like my own blood. The newsletter also reminded me of an edition of *Detective Magazine* with its stories of murdered women—women strangled with their own stockings or panty hose by a mysterious intruder—that I had read surreptitiously in Nashville as a child, when my father had been in college at Vanderbilt. In the stories, I remembered the sounds of the squeaky shoes on the staircase and the clicks of the murderers' heels in the fading distance. I hated the Epilepsy Foundation Newsletter! After I read it, I would immediately mark through my name on its label with a black pen, so that no one would know I received it, and then dissect it into quarters before ripping it to shreds and discarding it in the trash can in the hallway.



Guy R. Beining

# JOHN GOODE

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## CLEOPATRA IN TRAFFIC

*(for C.N.B.)*

I stared into the dead blue sex of her eyes.  
They haunted catacombs.  
Maniacal flowers grew giant bells of pollen.  
A tender savage followed her scent to the edge of a dried up ocean.

I looked into the soundless milk of her skin.  
Raw silk raced on curves of smoke.  
A militant country sought a ransom in scarves.  
Her legs became defiant outposts.

I whispered into her eyes three weeks of courage.

I longed to touch the gaunt drum of her stomach,  
to breathe the smoking column of her throat,  
the succulent red bell her lips composed at the face of any language.

In each twisted ear I wanted to plant a tongue      with my name in brail  
coaxing her toward me  
where her black hair might spread      like an orchestra of fertile spiders  
biting my lips like anarchy.

Pillows.

Where she could gather like a mute cloud      ponderous and thick  
and swollen      her pale body vessel for a currency in lust.

I stole for her      bracelets of wine  
and gaudy necklaces beaded with the slow fever of morphine.

CONTINUED

Long blank silences of nitrous enveloped her.

The street pawed her like a bad transmission  
and she captured it  
in living orange.

She inhaled pharmacies.

Her mouth opened on the ends of sentences like a heart-shaped bomb.

Cold green mountains stood up.  
The wind wrote a letter in fire.

Traffic swayed in agony at the temple of her hips.

She beat off brick.

Glass drank her body like an open vein of water.

She broke codes behind the eyes of commuters.

She flirted with the thick mustache of gasoline  
and I chained myself to her waking.  
I stared into the starving calculus of her eyes  
where antiseptic numbers drummed for sleep  
and hospitals rolled like empty cars.

I smelled rain.

I smelled autumn burning.

I smelled the wilderness that grew inside the animal of her mind  
where she dreamed hands without rings racing her skin like desultory  
winters.

Where she surrendered years of wisdom  
and opened her legs like the soft white teeth of a swimming pool,  
and painted a circle at the bottom

where her heart beat like a wild penny  
and no one ever touched.

# JOHN GOODE

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## PLEASE EXIT AT THE WEST END OF THE GYMNASIUM

It's a theater of sandwich eaters. You bought the last ticket.  
The twenty-first century horizons like a door to an experiment  
advertising still births in pneumonia.

You drop through the sky like a lower-case oraculist  
blowing slow motion bubbles shaped  
like the imaginary seasons of your parents' lives.

You introduce yourself to a tribe of Buick dealers  
living in the lower hills on a feed tube of venison  
and Lucky Charms.

G.I. Joe is your first friend. That rubber Kung Fu fist.  
A timeless bomb for a blue eye.  
Sucking Vietnam on a string through the back of Hard Work.

You hear Enemy Planes Five O'clock High and the dog  
is committed for eating the machinery of rabbits;  
a pink and orange smear of intestine dripping from that fiendish mouth.

You think it looks like a sidewalk in the future.  
And because it does, you're right.

You address your peers in a haircut defined by your history teacher.  
You commit mayhem on the battlefield by rescuing an injured puppy  
and nursing it at your breast.  
You draw it pictures with blue and yellow markers  
and learn to sing something pretty.  
For six months you pick teeth off cafeteria plates.

CONTINUED

Little triggers grow from your chin. Muscles twitch and bloom.  
You learn to jump tractors  
carrying sacks of fast food late at night. Clapping occurs.

Your legs are the gardens of blood your grandfathers produced  
in the multi-layered basements of the forest.  
They celebrate you in fires you cannot see.

From your chest a ribbon of steel curls, and then another,  
until you are a field of urgent happenings.  
You command your first car. It is a horse with a gun  
hanging from its throat, and through its eye you watch sex approach.

Hotels begin to notice you.  
There is the dirty west in your sigh. A six pack  
slung. You are a gunner. You will power outages.

You puke through French kisses in poison ivy  
and wake up with your head in her lap.  
A curfew spits gravel from the mirror of a pick-up truck.  
But you know what three a.m.  
smells like.

You strut victory in front of your father.  
He is black and white about it. Between televisions  
you visit. He climbs the staircase as you go down.  
Blackbirds haunt your overcast eyes.

You return to the creek. But now possess  
a raft filled with your own breathing.  
You build temples in smoke on the two foot plateau  
that exists above your head.  
Telephone poles become trees. The face of a man is a fox  
chewing on the lip of a dead cigar.  
A radio tears a hole in a bird's throat trying to get out.  
Traffic lights sizzle in the palm  
of the sun and deer vanish into garbage cans.  
Fish flicker beneath the surface like tiny warehouses  
growing slick green ceilings.



Local nations explored are defined.  
Flags. Your friends. The water is filled with television.  
A couch where your father dies every Saturday.

You escape the rise and fall.  
You're in the front seat of all his hard work,  
it's the first Christmas of lust  
and you're giving it gas. Tires scald his exhausted head.

He works in a tower.  
He watches the planes come in.

He marks them with a yellow line, then stands up and  
circles his chair.  
For you.  
His necktie lights up like a neon tube.

You are flying one hell

of a plane. But you don't see him. You are trying to land  
on the roof of a house in a village of screaming Vietnamese farmers.  
You have a stick of napalm wrapped in an empty sleeve  
between your bloody teeth and you are in love.  
Ronald Reagan is the governor of California.  
If you could build a temple real  
fast. You do. Her name.

# WENDY HOFFMAN

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## MORNING PRAYER

It must have been a starched day,  
hot with the sun first gesturing to the earth  
when the men recited their brand new prayer.  
They gathered and prayed to the  
Founder of the Universe.  
Voluptuous beards itched,  
tefillin clung to their eager skin,  
Tzitzit nodded and spun.  
They chanted gratitude that He did not make them  
slaves or gentiles or women.  
They made sure their gates were intact,  
their order in place, their world not open.  
The women who bore them, some  
died doing so, these women did not arch  
or recoil. Men counted them as cattle.  
Better to be livestock, the women thought,  
better to have a husband and brood  
than be shamed by the Creator,  
the red so burning their cheeks,  
they would not be able to sleep.  
Or eat or sew.  
They did not retch at the words and scream  
*I am not a cow*  
and wet their bloomers  
in rage and love.  
But somewhere deep in their heart  
underneath their hearts  
a stream gurgled,  
it gurgled and rippled,  
it rippled and spit.  
Their daughters heard its whisper

and passed it on with their milk,  
you can't deny the milk.  
They simmered it for over two thousand years  
until the waters broke  
and the milk spilled over  
and there was no more dry land  
and with one scream, we said  
*I am not a cow or a heifer or a rag.*

# JAMES DOYLE

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## CROSSING THE OUTBACK

In the distance, smaller than he can see,  
is the nothing he will walk toward,

day after day, while it grows  
into whatever it chooses-- a mountain

that can pick him like a flower  
from the corrugated soil, a cloud

spinning curds and whey for the next  
spider, always larger than the last,

or, maybe, when he holds up  
his broken compass to the sky, God's

answer to Job out of the whirlwind.  
Unless he can put the sky on trial,

he will die of thirst. Unless he can rub  
the soil into his skin until the grit

feeds his capillaries diamond and gristle,  
he will starve. The only possession

he hasn't thrown away is a hunting knife.  
He comforts himself he will never run out

of rocks to sharpen it on. Or bones either.  
He tries to tell time but the sun keeps

changing direction. It doesn't matter. Evening  
will come anyway with its tedious guesses

about distances and days. It is so easy  
to overestimate time, expect it to give way

gracefully when it has lost the future.  
But it must be forced out. He turns in a slow

circle. When the circle is closed,  
he will face time as its master.

He will send it into exile at the tip  
of his knife. One artery is all it will take.

# MATT SAPIO

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## WASP TAVERN

All that you can hear. Harem in the veil of tears,  
harem of silk. She sang it absent-mindedly  
until she realized there was nothing else to the music of it  
but going down alleys, the radiating prongs  
the tongue probed. You imagined the singer  
in black tulle, black linen. Intricate grains. Something outside of it,  
the dishwasher, everyone's heads bobbing along in laughing.  
A boy's head dropped with anger, then he asked what the use was.  
The rest of us walked in and out all night  
dividing our time between flirting. The years between  
when I was thirty-seven, and when I was forty-two.  
Those countless open fields reeling in piano wire.  
He had a childish bitterness, pretending to forget the name.  
Vulnerable and almost sneering.  
We got tired and stood outside  
like our own world, a waste land dipping into itself,  
then into bachata music.  
How many forever-agos hound you like cherries  
caught up in the questionable truths you lug about.  
A quiet town with no one to touch your neck, the small of your back.  
A strange man with a mustache, now almost dead  
draws you towards places you forget daily  
in the velvet swarm of memories that dip and sting.  
We are old enough now that the back rooms  
are hardly locked. You took the brass in hand,  
the dark amber, and you twisted.

# ARTHUR POLITE

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## THINGS BEYOND US ARE DYING IN WORDS AND NUMBERS

In the darkness beyond the alphabet  
it is wrong to be described  
in rumors of conversation  
ahead of us: the last statement

by a man who follows his own  
twitching through the blackout  
of a winter animal,

now only a disturbance  
between a glass of stone  
and its late chemical declaration:

The diatom lamps are dying  
in words and numbers, but the noise August makes  
rotting behind us still sounds like hope, salvation.

It is not important to know what happens  
to the wind after it abandons the trees,  
though it still seems like a failure, a world.

It is no longer safe to be discovered  
and warned within  
the storm-ranges of zero:

a Mandelbrot snail that stays awake through  
the long, lukewarm, and preying  
nothingness that's also been

CONTINUED

populated as a shadow and its walls  
are populated and then  
forgotten.



## CALVEENA BAD

Calveena gots too big shoes  
too shiny  
too white.  
She tell me

*You too nothing some kind a boychild  
ain't even know what you dicky for  
if an you got one.*

I tell Calveena I'm going be sixteen  
I got something  
an she be lucky if she ever get it.  
She say

*You only ten year if you a day  
an I could show you a thing or two  
Boychild  
an you ain't even smoke yet.  
Whatever something you got  
you make up in you boychild head  
not you pants.*

I tell Calveena  
where you gets them prettiest shoes  
all nice all big  
all shiny white  
how much you pay  
Maybe you borrow them off you big sister.  
Calveena say

*You be running along weenie  
Boychild  
an play with what you got  
if I be lucky to see it.*

CONTINUED

*An if you fancy pants got to know  
I give one-ninety-eight  
my own cash money purse  
from someplace you ain't know  
on less than five dollar sale table  
no scuffs all shiny new.  
I got money.*

I know Calveena got something else it's too big  
only thirteen-year-old scary tittys  
it looks like they got eyes all scratchy  
like dead mud straw.

An Filly  
that's Calveena' sister is how I know  
tell me how Calveena gots money  
showing it off at the carnival  
an lying through her yellow teeth about her years old.  
Calveena say

*I be  
Calveena Bad  
an I raise small change  
for the Red Cross Army Man*

*an I be eighteen at the waist  
an eighteen in years  
an if you wanna see  
what else I got  
is eighteen years  
you better pay me eighteen cash moneys  
an maybe I show you  
what you never see two extry of before.*

Calveena' sister Filly knows all about it  
an what Filly tells is what I know.  
Calveena got eyes  
where most has nipples  
an her eyes be watching to see  
what I got if she be lucky to see it

an by the way she ain't eighteen.  
She thirteen same as I'm ten  
but I'm going a be sixteen  
an I tell her I got three eyes  
an I know what name she call her own self.  
Calveena Bad!  
An she say

*Well if you got to know  
Mr. Fancy Pants  
I got four eyes  
Boychild  
an you ain't even smoke cigarettes yet  
an only two of them eyes is in my face  
an if you give me eighteen cash moneys  
two of them  
where my nipples ought a be  
is going a be looking down you pants  
at what you got  
if I be lucky to see it  
Boychild.  
An maybe you don't know  
but my shirt is wore thin  
like gauzecloth for straining fruit jelly  
an my extra eyes  
already seen through what you got  
Boychild.*

So what I got is sneaking and stretching  
like I'm sixteen already  
an what I got is creeping up over my skinbelt  
an showing off my extra dicky eye  
an I got three eyes like I tell it  
an if my extra dicky eye wasn't dribble wet already  
it'd certain sure be smoking bossman smoke outta it  
about Calveena Bad's extra titty eyes  
where they ought a be nipples.  
An I ain't no boychild no more.  
An any minute now you watch

CONTINUED

Calveena's too big  
too shiny  
too white  
one-ninety-eight sale shoes  
going a be laying in the ditch  
an all scuffs where the too white used a be  
an her dead mud straw extra titty eyes  
is going a be wet shut closed  
an grinning.

# ROBERTA ALLEN

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## SURPRISE

I wish the tall, blonde, emaciated drug addict I saw last year in the same spot in the filthy bus station in Puerto Limon wasn't coming my way and that I wasn't as attracted to him as I am, which I imagine to be the reason why he's heading towards me, knowingly, as though he can read my mind and see the fantasies I can't even let myself imagine much less carry out, which is why I am surprised when he only asks for money.

## COLD

If I have nothing else to complain about, I can always complain about the weather here which is cold and rainy or cold and icy or just plain cold which is something I have always hated and is the reason why anyone who has ever known me well has wondered why a couple of years ago I decided to move upstate, surprising them even more when I said I didn't mind the cold or the snow or the sleet or the freezing rain because the country was so beautiful which it was before the blizzard that turned the world white, that turned the world into an absence, a stillness synonymous with loneliness, that made me miss having a mother I could call on the phone, who would recognize my voice, know exactly who I was, and be happy to hear from me, instead of the tiny shriveled being I visit in the nursing home who doesn't look like my mother, who sleeps, twisted in her wheelchair, arthritic knuckles in her lap, her floral-printed dress like an empty sack, and more often than not, calls me her cousin or even her boyfriend if she calls me anything at all.

# ROBERTA ALLEN

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## BAD THINGS WILL HAPPEN IF YOU ARE HAPPY

While sitting in the only restaurant with electricity during a black-out on the island of Vieques, she was surprised to find herself thinking of A. At Bananas, as the place was called, where all the tourists in town had gathered and the music was loud, it was a wonder she could think at all. But as the overworked waiter rushed past her table, distracting her for only a moment with the smell of hot food on his tray, she saw herself, twenty years ago, on board a vessel bound for Ostend, where her boyfriend A was waiting.

The throbbing beat of a song brought her back briefly to the bright lights in Bananas while the island lay in darkness, a darkness relieved, however, by so many stars, that seen from anywhere else, the sky seemed too small for their dazzling display. Had she been able, she would've stretched the sky wide as though it were made of black elastic, giving each star more room so they weren't in each other's way.

Walking from the guest house to the restaurant, the darkness had felt rich and velvety. She wanted to crawl inside and hug it to her heart. For a while, the earth seemed still, as though it had paused in its rotation and decided to take a well-earned rest despite the steady rhythm of the lapping waves.

She recalled driving with A from Ostend to Bruges. Bruges with its silver canals, its ancient stone houses. Here, where they walked arm in arm, she burnt holes in her favorite skirt, a full skirt with a tiny floral pattern. Happiness had made her oblivious to the wind lifting the fragile fabric to the red hot ash of the cigarette dangling between her fingers.

Did she deserve such happiness? Could she believe such happiness came without a price? Through this unconscious act of burning her skirt, had she hoped to avoid something worse? "Bad things will happen if you are happy," her mother had said more than once. In a nursing home

now, her mother no longer remembered saying these words but her daughter's happiness with A had turned out to be shortlived.

Would her happiness with C last longer? She walked a distance away from noisy Bananas to call him. Standing by the tide under the stars, her voice like foam, slivers of silver in her laugh, her body as graceful as sea fans swaying underwater, did she feel she deserved to be happy? Or would her mother's words like a rogue wave suddenly carry her far from shore?

