



SKIDROW #15
PENTHOUSE

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Front cover: “Blizká setkání” by Alois Nožička

Back cover: “Pod sněhem” by Alois Nožička

Logo design by Spiel



We have sad news here. My doggie Siegfried was put down yesterday. Suddenly and a complete surprise.

He followed me around the house all day. I see him everywhere. He loved to watch me cook, if anything nice should fall. He had his principal place under the piano. He had a game where he would put his muzzle in the middle of the keyboard so as to make me bribe him with a treat. He had a walk in the morning, at four, six-thirty, and ten. He ate half my eggs for breakfast. There is not one place in this house that I do not miss him. It is such a habit to pull the boots on at ten.

I named him for a piece of music, the Siegfried Idyll, and the correspondent opera character. The laughing hero.

— Connie Chiera

Dedicated to Siegfried, 2000-2013

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JIRÍ KLOBOUK

WINTER WOLVES

When Marysha had finished reading the letter in her lilting voice, she handed it to the tavern-keeper, who sat nearest to her, and he gave it to the Secretary, Frcek, next to him. They all passed it on from hand to hand, grasping it with two fingers, like a dead mouse by the tail, until it finally reached the chubby Chairman, Charouzák. He took the single sheet of paper, with its minuscule handwriting and, with a distraught look on his face, crumpled it up and tossed it under the table. If he could have, he would gladly have slipped someone a thousand-crown note to settle this unpleasant affair.

Normally, on Sundays like this, at the stroke of eleven-thirty they would be sitting in the tavern playing a game of cards. But now one of them, Cyril Halenka, the one to whom the letter had been addressed—and you probably couldn't find a better fellow in the world—was barely managing to stay on his feet over by the wall. They had put him there to think things over. Whenever he leaned back against the cracked plaster, they could hear it peel off. It reminded them of the far-off summer and the slapping noise the hot cowpies made as they hit the dusty road across the field.

Two overzealous young assistants, of the so-called coming generation, willing helpers with rolled-up sleeves, took advantage of the sudden lull and began to play soccer with the crumpled letter. When they were reprimanded that they were behaving somewhat disrespectfully, considering the gravity of the matter before them, they just stuffed another armful of floor-boards into the bottomless pit of the ancient Florence stove, so that the august company gathered there would not catch cold, and then squatted down obediently.

The meeting was taking place in a hall adjacent to the old tavern—The Happily Croaking Frog—but the sign above the entrance had long since been blown away by the wind. The yellow pages of the village chronicle revealed that back in the fourteenth century a small church stood right where The Happily Croaking Frog now served up beer. After it burned

down it was replaced by a fortress used by the Tartars and Turks, who passed through the region on the way north, then Swedes on their way south, Napoleon on his way east, and a few decades ago it was destroyed by the Red Army on their way west.

The front wall of the dilapidated room, where they sometimes had even shown *Popeye* cartoons when traveling movies came to the village, displayed a mildewed red flag embroidered with hammer and sickle. It was a gracious gift from Secretary Frcek. Three glass-covered photographs of international revolutionaries looked no less seedy. They hung, somehow crooked, right next to the flag. Dotted with dozens of flyspecks, sullied by years of bombardment from dive-bombing insects, these revered potentates had lost much of the intimidating look with which they had glowered down upon their loyal subjects.

The main point of these tiresome deliberations was to figure out the easiest way to deal Cyril Halenka a blow from which he would never recover. The letter had been sent to him by his brother Methodius from the country he had recently fled to. Because they had all been born in Kolomazy and had grown up and gone to school together, they would have preferred to silence the messy business. But as the country's borders were vigilantly guarded by a complex system of ingenious fortifications, Methodious's insolence had caused quite a bit of consternation in high places.

Right after the escape, the Chairman had been deluged with dozens of stern directives from the Capital itself. Hardly a day passed without the phone on his desk jangling and someone's cracked voice asking if the accomplice of the traitor was still breathing. In all, top-secret instructions specified that the elimination proceedings were to be carried on with the utmost circumspection. The countless bulletins made it clear that we no longer were living in the remote Middle Ages. A man like Cyril Halenka had to disappear from the face of the earth as quietly as possible. In short, the death of the criminal should appear, more or less, like an unfortunate accident.

Since early morning, the village authorities had been racking their brains for some answer to the problem. If Cyril had been just a few dozen rotten eggs, they could have flushed him down the sewage pipe into the village pond, and the local ducks would have had a royal feast. But because he was not a rotten stinky slush, they just stared with unbelieving eyes at the poor dumb-head, their childhood buddy. Even Marysha had once thought of marrying him, with great ceremony once they grew up. They had stolen pears together, played marbles in the spring and helped each other overcome their grief when their parents were buried. When in the end Cyril married Marysha's best friend Magdalena and had three children, they became godparents to them. They stopped by now and then to have a taste of dandelion wine and beans with fatty sausage, all sitting joyfully around the kitchen table.

What irritated them most, though, was that the ticklish matter had to happen to them, the inhabitants of this picturesque valley, where summers were filled with singing larks and vacationing tourists. At the beginning they still smiled at Cyril Halenka, but as time went on their mood changed and they began to frown at him. Throughout the deliberation, they hadn't even offered him a chair to sit down in, though he had been standing for several hours. If he had asked for a glass of water, they probably would have sent him to hell. By now, they wouldn't have even trusted him to drive one last herd of cows out onto the collective pasture.

Since the reading of the letter, which had been intercepted in the main post office by the secret police and turned over to the authorities, silence reigned in the hall. Nevertheless, one occasionally heard a leg being scratched through a nylon stocking, a chair creaking under the weight of a particularly ample posterior, a pencil being sharpened by a pocket knife, or the scraping of frost from a window pane. You couldn't even tell what the weather was like outside other than it was winter. If they could have somehow expressed their real emotions, they would have approached Cyril with clenched fists and taken their feelings of helplessness out on him by pounding away at him diligently at least for five minutes. When they realized how much trouble he had caused them just because he existed, they saw black spots in front of their eyes.

Not that the village didn't occasionally have to face a delicate problem requiring an urgent solution. If some naïve fool said something out of turn and didn't know what he was talking about, they promptly took him aside and explained to him, simply but emphatically, the basic rules of the game. Only monkeys climb trees whenever they feel like it, they lectured him. A thinking person, on the other hand, needs a measure of common sense and doesn't climb trees, because he is not a monkey. The culprit was supposed to take good note of this, and if he didn't respond, they assigned him the type of work that used to be allotted to serfs under feudalism. Whenever black sheep like these turned up, they would quickly realize that they had better behave or else. But the case of Cyril Halenka was much more complex. There had never been one like it before.

The Chairman took the floor and launched into some detailed calculations of how the previous year they really hadn't done that badly as a collective. The cowshed chimney, which had been tilted to a dangerous angle by a windstorm two years ago, had been pulled down and a new one put up. The school had finally gotten around to replacing the window pane the tavern-keeper's son had broken by swinging his arms out too far during morning calisthenics. The plucky young poplar tree that had been planted on the square last spring was alive and kicking. And everybody was childishly pleased that a lightning rod had been erected on the fire house. In fact, there were getting to be as many successfully resolved problems

as there were shells on Marysha's fancy necklace. Only the rather poor reception on their televisions sounded a somewhat negative note.

But then Secretary Frcek had good news about this, too. With his hands folded behind his back he began to circle the table. Alone among the people of the village he owned a black limousine which he drove to the Capitol every week to bring back the latest news. His close relations with the leading figures of the Party's First Circle obviously intimidated even the Chairman. The Secretary had announced, in his gaily chirping voice, that within three years, on the highest hill in the region, the Devil's Hoof, there were plans to build a relay tower. It would substantially improve television reception. He went on to point out that, since all of the land and all cows, goats, rabbits, and all chickens had been turned over to the state, there had been universal prosperity. By and large, the populace should always recall this with gratitude, devotion, and thanksgiving. If we take a good look around, he went on, our well-kept houses are provided with gleaming refrigerators and flush toilets.

At this point the Chairman sprang to his feet and declared that, if progress kept up at this pace, they would be designated in a nation-wide contest a "Number One Village." Furthermore, if they could find some suitable way to deal with this unexpected obstacle—here he glanced reproachfully at Cyril—without having to delve into their financial reserves, then our village Kolomazy would literally drown in a torrent of honors and medals. In a functional sense, our farm workers would then be presented as proud examples of modern trail-blazers in raising productivity and the level of political and cultural maturity. As a result, their heroic initiative would produce a substantial improvement in production figures in the country as a whole.

As soon as he finished speaking, applause rang out and Marysha suggested that flags be flown from dormer windows every other day at least for a week to prove devotion to the principles just outlined. She also pledged herself to launch an immediate campaign to persuade every reluctant citizen to contribute to the general economy, voluntarily and as often as possible, no less than two pounds of old bones, three pounds of paper and four pounds of non-ferrous metals.

The tavern-keeper had been silent so far, and the other people now looked toward him. When he realized that he had become the center of attention, he growled like a bear suffering from lack of sleep: "Well, when spring comes, why don't we take Cyril out to the edge of Eliška Ravine to show us how good he is at jumping off high places." His proposal certainly made an impression, but it was hardly revolutionary enough to take everyone's breath away.

Secretary Frcek, in particular, thought he had something better up his sleeve: "Well, when the weather gets warm again, why don't we take Cyril

out to the big ant heap in the forest. He would have to promise to stay in one spot for at least twelve hours, voluntarily, so that the ants could crawl all over him. You can all figure out for yourselves what the result would be. By the end of the day there would just be a skeleton.”

This brought on a storm of new and varied suggestions from all quarters. Marysha had once sat on the same bench in school with Cyril and copied his homework assignments in geography and grammar. On the evidence of this past collaboration she reasoned that, after the spring thaw, Cyril would once again submit to her charms, and they could make an excursion to the nearby pond where he could accidentally lose his footing. Since he couldn’t swim, it wasn’t difficult to imagine his sad departure from this earth.

But the tavern-keeper, who had started it all, had no intention of letting himself be pushed aside so easily. He now suggested that as soon as May came they would organize an archery competition, during which Cyril would just happen to be wandering around one of the targets. Then an unfortunate mishap would occur—someone would take a bad aim, and that would be all.

They kept arguing for a while about who should be given first prize for the most original idea about how to proceed with Cyril’s execution. No less importantly, the whole thing shouldn’t arouse suspicion that their former crony wasn’t participating in his death voluntarily. Meanwhile, the Chairman thought of something else while listening to all these suggestions: “What you say, comrades, sparkles with wit and imagination, but why don’t you lunkheads look out the window? That is, if you can see anything at all because it’s frosted over. You’ve been talking about spring as if it were knocking on our door. But it’s only lousy February! All your proposals add up to keeping Cyril alive another couple of months, until it warms up. And that places a real burden, darn it, on our already slim budget. After all, we’ve got to repair the road to Zápotovice now, and this would force us to put it off until next year. I don’t know why we should cause ourselves a lot of grief by fiddling around with someone who, according to directives from the Capitol, has no real business among us anymore anyway.”

To see if the person the Chairman’s speech had been directed to by some miracle had disappeared into thin air and thus solved their problem, everybody glanced into the dark corner of the room. But no such luck. It was somehow embarrassing to see Cyril Halenka standing there like an obedient horse. It was a sorrowful sight. After all, he was their old buddy, that genial fellow, their fourth at whist, former classmate, and God knows what else. Under normal circumstances, they wouldn’t have hurt a flea but now they had to get rid of a dumb-head they had known since their childhood. They sat around and coughed, looked at the ceiling and felt like

putting their heads on each other's shoulders and bemoaning their shared apprehension about their future if they didn't come up with some solution.

"What about the wolves in winter?" came a sudden voice from the dark corner where Cyril stood.

If some drunken customer in the tavern next door had knocked over a table full of glasses, or if the tavern-keeper's wife had twisted her ankle serving the beer and cried out in pain, it could not possibly have attracted such rapt attention.

When Cyril finished the sentence he immediately noticed he hit the nail on the head. Everybody was smiling. Marysha smiled at the tavern-keeper and he simpered at the Secretary Freck and Freck grinned at the Chairman Charouzák. They couldn't believe that something so simple hadn't occurred to them at the outset. After all, every child in the village knew that all winter long, in a corner of the forest called Undercliff, no more than a half mile from where they were now, packs of hungry wolves used to gather after dusk. Every evening you could hear their malevolent wailing. So Cyril's idea must have been clear to everybody, whether he could count his fingers on his hand or not. As soon as it got dark he would first climb the Chairman's garden fence and then head across the snow-covered cornfield to the huge ash tree. He might rest for a bit, and from there it was only a stone's throw to Undercliff. Everybody in the village knew that any unarmed person who ventured out there wouldn't have the slightest chance of coming back alive.

Cyril had been meditating over this idea from the very moment he realized the trouble his buddies were having trying to figure out how to get rid of him. He was confident that if it hadn't been for the pressure from above, they would simply have dropped the whole affair and would now be playing cards. Cyril could not have looked anyone in the eye if he had ever upset the life of the village by something he had done. Now his legs ached from standing since the morning. It was already two o'clock in the afternoon, he was thirsty and his stomach was growling, but he waited patiently for them to approve his proposal about how to end their agony.

It was Marysha who enthusiastically offered to count votes for and against Cyril's idea. She asked if anyone present had any objections and, when no one raised their hand, she declared that the vote was over and that the result was the unanimous agreement of the absolute majority. This reassuring announcement immediately made everybody feel better. Cyril felt as if he were at the opening kick of a soccer game. As soon as the ball was in the air the spectators sat back and relaxed, because they had been waiting for this moment for so long. Some of them began to whistle variations of popular tunes, while others made paper airplanes and tossed them in the air. Although a while ago they denied their skinny assistants the same kind of entertainment, now they themselves kicked Methodius's

crumpled letter around the table quite enthusiastically. They loosened their belts and Marysha the zipper on her skirt. In a word, things quickly resumed their normal pace. The Chairman even took advantage of the giggling Marysha and rested his weight against her. Then, recognizing that after all they were not alone, he lurched over to Cyril.

“We were so goddamn busy, Cy,” he apologized, “that we didn’t even offer you a chair to sit down on. And you can’t imagine how extremely vexed we feel about it.”

His face the color of a carrot, he stretched his limbs in front of Cyril like an aging circus acrobat testing the flexibility of his calcified joints. After twisting his body forwards, backwards and sideways a few times, he repeated even more contritely: “You know what, you dork, you’re a goddamn genius.”

Marysha sauntered up to them so people would notice that, if she put her mind to it, she could be a real sweetie that no one could resist. Narrowing her eyes archly, she put in her two cents: “I can remember very clearly, Cy, how you once broke my red pencil in class. But I got over it a long time ago, my boy. I always thought you were just the cutest bumbler.”

She stroked his cheek with a finger, but then Secretary Frcek stood up on tiptoe and began buzzing in his ear like a mosquito that has taken too much blood and was having trouble taking off from its human landing field. “You see, you see my good friend, where you ended up. Aren’t you even a little ashamed, you father of three children! But never mind. Others have paid dearly for this kind of behavior in the past and will in the future, too. The last time I was in the Capitol driving my black limousine on my way to a meeting with some very influential people, some alert militiaman had just shot dead an imprudent dissident on the street. That jerk had refused to stop walking when he was told to stop and produce identification.”

Where just a few minutes before they had been frowning at him, immobilized by the frustration of not knowing how to get rid of him, they now surrounded him with spontaneous warmth. They made no effort to hide their feelings—they clapped him on the shoulder and jabbed a friendly fist into his back, as they once did as kids in the golden days of yesteryear. Nor did they hesitate even for a second in showing him with their broad ear-to-ear smiles that they still considered him their most reliable fellow. They even whispered into his ear that the apparatchiks up there in the cities didn’t know what was going on down in the villages. But, like it or not, this is life and we all have to live or else. In all, they were overjoyed that he hadn’t in the least betrayed their confidence in him and for what he did they would be grateful to him until their dying day.

Of course, this didn’t mean that they fawned over him or gave him the false impression that he was due any special credit for having volunteered a way of disposing of himself. They acted as if he would never have thought

of this brilliant idea without their initiative, because it was they, after all, who had called this important meeting during which he had plenty of time to consider what he wanted or didn't want.

At the same time Marysha, all excited, was talking away about her everyday concerns, as if nothing else was more important. Because she always considered Chairman Charouzák worthy of playing up to, she would address him formally even though they used to tend cattle together: "It's in the winter that my kids cause the most trouble. I send them out to slide around on the ice and in ten minutes they're back all frozen, even though they have mittens with thick linings on and they're wearing the best quality wool sweaters under their coats and high boots with fur inside. Just remember, when we were young, Chairman, we used to cart manure out of the cowshed in the cruelest of winters with our bare asses exposed."

"Right, right," Charouzák agreed, pleased that she was showing interest in him. "Long gone are the days when we were at the mercy of the swindling landlords. Don't you agree?"

"For heaven's sake," whined the tavern-keeper, who was just returning with a stein of beer. "We haven't offered Cyril a drink. He must have the world's biggest thirst."

"It's a public disgrace," the Secretary Frcek chimed in. We should have thought of it first thing. We really are a bunch of ill-bred bumpkins. Hey Cy, why couldn't you have told us you wanted something to drink a long time ago?"

"Yeah, stop being coy now," the tavern keeper growled in a conciliatory voice and stepped toward Cyril with a beer. "And you certainly don't have to be bashful. A deep thinker like you. After all, we know each other like a hen and her chickens. And don't worry about who's going to pay for it. I'll take care of whatever you drink even if it costs me the roof over my head."

He thrust the stein at Cyril's mouth, but there was such a head on it that all he did was get his nose wet, and try as he might, he couldn't get a sip. The foam sat on his nose like a piece of cotton candy deflating in slow bursts.

"Wipe off your snout, handsome," squeaked a delighted Frcek, jumping up and down on one leg. The others, wanting to get in on the fun, stuck out their tongues to prove to the Secretary that they were with him in everything he said and did.

"We never realized," said Chairman Charouzák, weeping from laughter, "that you had such a well-developed sense of humor, Cyril. Too bad we don't have more time to enjoy the fun. But it's going to get dark pretty soon and we still have a lot to organize. We do have to say goodbye to you, you know. Why don't we give you one last opportunity to speak now, that is, of course, if you have something important on your mind?"

Cyril wiped his nose with the back of his hand and coughed, but said

nothing for the time being. First, he had to think over what he wanted to express so that he wouldn't just give vent to some wishy-washy twaddle. He knew some of the things he wanted to say, but he had to weigh their information and classify it according to its significance and interest. Basically, he considered himself a shy person. Marysha could have confirmed that, whenever he was sent to the blackboard in school and had to face his classmates, his ears turned beet-red. When they were small boys and used to go to the pond, the Chairman and the Secretary had always swum in the nude, whereas Cyril had worn striped trunks. And he could go on and on.

Even now he wasn't sure how interested they would be if he started telling them why he had selected Undercliff as the place to draw his last breath. The most important reason was that he and Magdalena used to go mushroom picking there every year until late fall, and many times they had made love in a small moss-lined depression in the ground. And so he looked on it as a sacred place where three healthy children had been produced. Who could ask for more? He could have found his way there blindfolded. He could also tell them that what his children liked best was potato soup. By then they would most likely shuffle their feet while listening to his fiddle-faddle.

As far as the idea of the wolves was concerned, he had been influenced by a story he had once read in an old farmer's almanac dating back to 1874. The world then struck him as almost half-empty. He had been moved to tears when he learned how two little boys, Romulus and Remus, abandoned to die on the river bank by an evil ruler, had been taken in by a wise she-wolf. Instead of eating the babies, she kept them alive with nourishing milk from her low-slung teats and with the warmth of her furry body. This happened in what is known today as Italy. Cyril had a faint glimmer of hope that he might be able to strike some kind of bargain with animals more easily than with people. But he thought he had better hold his tongue. Otherwise they would accuse him of having had dishonest motives in suggesting to them a way to kill himself.

Cyril didn't feel in very good spirits because of this morning's unpleasant Sunday awakening. The evening before, the children had jumped into his and Magdalena's bed and under the feather duvet, they pretended to take trips to mysterious and distant lands. Before they fell asleep, they ended up just hugging and teasing each other. But the way he was awakened the next morning made him jump out of bed, frightened. Someone knocked on his door at five o'clock. Once before he had been woken up because a village cowshed was on fire, and then, of course, he had rushed outside as he was a volunteer fireman.

This time around, when he stepped groggily over to the window and spotted Marysha peering over the low wall outside and her young assistants

frisking about in the deep snow, he realized it had nothing to do with a fire. Marysha kept looking at his cottage with huge binoculars. What struck him the most was the snowman that the youngsters had quickly slapped together under the windows. They hid behind it so that Cyril might think they were just playing games. He pulled on his pants and a sweater and went out to check what was going on. Naturally, it was an old trick. The moment Cyril stepped forward they jumped on him from all sides and even from the roof. Soon they were pushing him across the snow-covered square to the tavern The Happily Croaking Frog.

When Marysha saw that their plan had worked to perfection, she rushed ahead to announce to everybody that Cyril was being led along like a lamb to slaughter. Before he could say anything, they thrust him into the heated hall with the moldy flag and the pictures of the three fly-stained revolutionaries. Looking around, he found the rest of the company already sitting at the long table, their eyes blinking with sleep. Marysha was just putting the binoculars back in their leather case.

Now they were waiting for him to say his last words. "As you know," Cyril began, "I have a wife and three children. I have always tried to turn in an honest day's work. I don't think even a horse could slog through so many hours as I've put in from early morning to late evening. Just look at my hands. They speak for themselves. I could never play any string instrument with them and probably not a trumpet either, even though it's always been my sincere desire to do so."

Cyril extended his hands in front of him, palms outward, so everyone could get a good look at them. His words about wanting to play the trumpet were greeted with sullen grimaces. The tavern-keeper squawked away on this instrument at weddings and funerals, but Cyril's hopeless situation made any competition between them impossible. Nevertheless, to show that they had good will, they now came up one by one to touch Cyril's hardened calluses. The tavern-keeper even climbed up onto a chair to get a better look at the cuts and welts on his skin. When they had finished their inspection, Cyril wiped his hands on his trousers. Figuring that he had not yet fully used up his time for his last speech, he decided to share with the audience a story his father used to tell him.

"I can still remember very well," he continued, faltering somewhat, "how my father used to take me to Zápotovice to get my hair cut when I was a little boy. It's quite a way to get there, as you know yourselves. During the trip he would talk about the things that were most on his mind. Like about the mysterious creature Dzhung-Dzhung that lives under the earth. Father said that he even eats the rocks there. I couldn't figure out how this Dzhung-Dzhung could breathe down there, but father explained to me how he managed not to suffocate. For example, fish could also swim underwater and be perfectly all right. But the thing that bothered him most

was that Dzhung-Dzhung ate stones. What's going to happen to us when he eats them all up, he'd say. There would be nothing to hold the earth together, he'd announce. We'd all sink into oblivion like so many rotten pears. I would sit in the barber's chair and think about the mysterious beast and tremble. I grew so restless thinking about how that rock-eater was biting his way up to us that the barber almost cut my ear off. Now I ask you, good people, as my father used to say, what are we going to do? My dear friends, shouldn't we try something to save the world before it's too late?"

The Chairman Charouzák glanced at Marysha, Marysha at Secretary Frcek, and Frcek at the tavern-keeper. For a while they looked a bit uneasy and even tapped the floor with their feet a few times to make sure they had firm ground beneath them. When they had convinced themselves that nothing was amiss they didn't try to hide their anger at Cyril for using his last minutes to try to put something over on them.

It was the Chairman who recovered first. He waved his hand in the air and announced: "We ought to quit this useless chattering about a son going with his father to a barber and get ready for the evening."

Marysha chimed in right away: "Basically, Comrade Chairman, I couldn't agree with you more. On the other hand, Cyril should understand that we care about him a lot. It'll be dark in just a couple of hours and we have to protect him until the time he finally expires. Some of our village crazy yokels may try to kick him in the ass and spit into his face. For that reason we have to put him in the Iron Cow." She took a few steps towards Cyril and addressed him: "You know what, Cy, my sweetie? Enough is enough. After a day like this I'm hungry as a wolf."

The moment the tavern-keeper had heard Marysha's comment, he went right off to the tavern to take care of the refreshments. Everybody ordered Debrecen frankfurters with mustard and horseradish topped off by draft beer. Meanwhile, the two young assistants led Cyril diagonally across the large hall to the opposite corner where the jaws of the monster were gleaming. It wasn't, of course, a real live monster in the true sense of the word, but a make-shift rural lockup and a storage place for all kinds of useless junk from the community and the tavern. Since the time the Chairman had had part of the wall knocked out and a sheet-metal door installed, everyone called the little cell "The Iron Cow." Its last occupant had been a gypsy who had wandered over from Zápotovice, gotten drunk in the tavern and smashed everything he could lay his hand on.

Cyril was thrown in there head first. And before they locked the door behind him, they kicked his brother Methodious' crumpled up letter into the cell too. As he kept going on all fours, he bounced off a pile of rusty garden chairs and collided with a heap of twisted old music stands. His teeth chattering, he finally settled back with his head propped up against a

perforated drum. His eyes closed, he imagined the Iron Cow regurgitating him into ever smaller bits and pieces. When he raised his arms he felt bent piping with some damp liquid sloshing around in it. He recognized at once that it was the sewage from the kitchen and toilet. But since he was thirsty, his suckling reflexes awakened him and he puckered up his lips in the direction of an udder which, he hoped, would soon begin to drip wholesome cow's milk.

As time went on, the village began to emerge from its Sunday quiet. Cyril dozed off and on, but could still hear the jangling of bells and the snorting of horses catching their breath out on the square. Sleighs were bringing people from far and near to see with their own eyes how the traitor would act when he volunteered to drink the sour potion he had brewed for himself. The tavern was soon full of them and a spot of plum brandy was enough to send the blood flowing. Cyril listened to the singing and stomping of feet, but he didn't take this amiss. Many of them, if they'd had the opportunity, would have shaken his hand and given him some encouraging farewell words. Some of them would certainly have condemned the very strange justice which had been meted out to Cyril. They would also not have neglected to mention that what was happening to him today could happen to them tomorrow.

In spite of the growing din, Cyril could catch the howl of the wolves gathering into packs out near Undercliff. After he imagined embracing Magdalena and the children his thoughts turned to his brother. When Marysha had read Methodius' writing aloud around the table, it introduced Cyril into the other world he would never see. When he knelt under some grating in the ceiling where a streak of light was coming through, he held the letter in his trembling hands and proceeded to read the minute handwriting: *Dear Cyril, his brother began, I doubt if anything can change my mind about settling down in St. Hopedale for good and becoming a fisherman. I've been in this port town only since the beginning of September, but during this short time I have managed to fall in love with this blessed corner of the earth. But first a few words about the ocean liner, Santa Maria, I crossed on. I was the head chef's nineteenth helper, in charge of salads, from plain lettuce to cucumber, mixed with all kinds of combinations of tomatoes, string beans, or finely chopped shallot. After working hours you walk along expensively paneled corridors, the lights in the lower deck are glimmering and you wonder if this isn't a dream in which you're suddenly living. You see a whole bunch of new faces. All the people seem to speak different languages. A little way off they're playing dance music. I'm standing by myself in the corner farthest away, my eyes closed, intoxicated by a symphony of background music consisting of some glorious tune, the resonance of clinking glasses and, last but not least, the infectious sounds of laughter. I can't think of when I last saw so many happy*

people together. I thought about you, Magdalena, and your children and wished you could have been there to share with me the emancipating feel of happiness.

Soon after I left the ship in St. Hopedale I found a new home in a former lighthouse. I gaze out my window for long hours. The sea has become a permanent part of me, day and night. I watch it break against the rocks of a grassy headland. One look at these surroundings and you can tell that it is a land untouched, almost as if it were at the beginning of its existence. Later in the morning I approach a group of quietly talking fishermen. I sit down with them and listen. I watch their agile fingers fixing their nets. In the afternoon I take a long walk along the seashore and feel elated just from having taken those first steps in a foreign land. Somewhere in the middle of my walk a chapel bell sounds in the distance, signaling the approach of evening. I fall to my knees and, with my head bent to the ground, I give thanks for the way I've been received here.

The days keep going by and I still can't get used to this freedom I have never known before and where the words that come out of your mouth can flow without censure. I'll always remember the first time I set off to visit a nearby city. Even from a distance I was startled by the construction of a tower resembling a modern sugar-white pyramid. Surrounded by people on the sidewalk, someone said: "This is going to be our new planetarium. It will let us see what's ahead for us in the great dark unknown." That was how I met my black friend Lee. A short conversation was enough for us to discover a mutual feeling of affection. My new acquaintance invited me to a café called The Moonlit Pier, where he played the piano every evening. We sat around a round table and sipped ambrosial wine. You can imagine, Cyril, that I spoke more with my hands than words. The sound of the uplifting music made me think of all the beautiful things in life we never get to know. During the intermission, Lee said: "Remember, my good friend, all our suffocating pains are healed in the embrace of a woman."

That's how I ended up in the house of eternal love—La Parané. After Lee pointed out to me the direction, I began to negotiate the narrow streets above the sea. Soon I noticed a lot of girls leaning out of the windows, waving their gaudy handkerchiefs at me. The moment I entered the front hall they all pushed against me until I almost passed out from the provocative fragrance seeping from their bodies. It was more or less by accident that I caught one of them by the hand. She had long hair tied in a velvet bow. The room I found myself in was lit only by a night lamp with a shade decorated with Chinese drawings above which a puffed-out piece of a veil, interwoven with glistening metallic threads, undulated slowly.

Suddenly, it was as if ever-present time and the unbroken alternation of days and nights, divided into hours, minutes and seconds, had lost its meaning. And when I noticed some opera glasses next to an old-fashioned

foot organ on a bookshelf, I focused immediately on the woman who was with me, who in the meantime had gotten undressed and was waiting for me on the bed. It took me a while to gather my courage, sit beside her and take her hands into mine. She was indescribably beautiful. I yearned for her love. The slightest movements of her moist lips made me feel like I was losing my mind. At a moment like this you begin to believe in miracles.

I'm well aware, Cyril, my brother, that my letter will cause you difficulties, but I have no choice. I must let you know that I finally have found the place we both talked about so often: a country where it would be worth it to be born again.

From the depths of the Iron Cow came various noises as the assistants came to fetch Cyril. They dragged him off by his legs, still gripping the twisted music stands in his hand. Only when his head banged against a beer keg did he finally part with the dream that for a while he shared with Methodious.

In the adjoining hall, under the three fly-specked pictures and the bleached flag, lay a dusty horsehair mattress on which Cyril had once done somersaults, and beaten both the Secretary and the Chairman in boyhood handstand contests. Right in this room people had once danced to brass band music, but that was way back in the past. Most of the floorboards were missing, and gray, dark brown mice scampered noiselessly across the exposed beams quite unafraid. In the corner behind the Florence stove, which had almost gone out, water dripped from the ceiling. All the chairs around the long table were empty and some of them were overturned. Not a sound could be heard from the adjacent tavern. Once the wood-carved cuckoo poked his head out of his little window and announced his news to the deserted surroundings. It looked like everybody had cleared out the place as if by command. The tavern-keeper's wife's flowered apron, with two large beer stains drying on it, hung from the door knob of the partly opened door.

When the young helpers pushed Cyril out in front of the tavern, his eyes blinked—he couldn't believe what he saw before him. Although it was already night, the whole space, as far as he could see, was illuminated by dozens of torches which gave off a blood-red glow like sunset. The village square, usually so white and peaceful in the winter, was dwarfed by the massive bodies of horses. The muscular animals with blinders on their eyes resembled abandoned machines that could be set in motion if an invisible operator pressed the right button. As Cyril moved forward he inhaled the pungent odor of the sweaty beasts. In addition to the sleighs with their checkered blankets on the driver's seat, he counted a half-dozen cars that had brought delegations to Kolomazy from places even more distant. The sleepy drivers sat in their seats protected from the freezing air by their drawn-up windows, dozing with their heads on their steering-

wheels, their mouths distorted. The motors were running and the headlights stabbed the darkness with cones of light all the way to the Chairman's garden.

The path ahead of him was one long patch of ice, and he lost his footing frequently when the assistants unexpectedly tripped him up from behind. This would send him sprawling painfully full length on the ground. But these, he said to himself, were just the inept tricks of mindless juveniles—the so-called next generation. Sometimes he lurched out in front ten or twenty yards, and thus he accelerated toward his destination even more expediently. Cyril breathed on his hands, which were red from the cold, and mused about how much his children would have enjoyed this mammoth slide. On the other hand, the sight of him, falling and getting back on his feet like a drunken helpless bum would have frightened rather than pleased them. After all, he was their beloved father.

Chairman Charouzák was patiently standing between his garden gates, smiling jovially at Cyril from the distance. He looked healthy and prosperous. Whenever he dressed up in his Sunday clothes, his appearance commanded total respect. His chubby hands barely protruded from his cuffs. His flushed face was almost lost in the raised collar of his shaggy coat. This costly garment with its shimmering silver fur was a sure sign of status. Compared with this luxurious apparel, Cyril's heavy flannel lumberjack's shirt and his tattered sweater were poor protection against the February cold. But after the long day Cyril had lost all feeling in his body anyway. Given the cosmic eternity he now faced, a few more minutes of feeling cold could not have bothered him much. The scarf around his neck and the lambskin cap pulled down over his ears had lost their significance.

When he stopped in front of the Chairman, his gaze wandered with interest about the fenced-in grounds. A motley group of guests had gathered there. They were standing around in clusters and, as they conversed, the warm air came out of their mouths like steam escaping from kettles each time their lids were raised. The white puffs of vapor quickly disappeared into a lane of leafless fruit trees. Most of the guests were ordinary villagers like him who weren't able to dress up very well even though it was Sunday. They looked clean and neat enough, certainly not like beggars, but even so their woolen coats and jackets, which hardly reached down to the men's waists, didn't seem suited to the weather. These people therefore pressed against each other as closely as they could to keep in as much body heat as possible. They kept mostly silent except for an occasional trivial whisper.

The second group, huddled together at some distance and less numerous than the first, was boisterous and merry and much better dressed for standing around in the snow. This assemblage included Marysha, the tavern-keeper and his wife, Secretary Frcek, and also those people who had come from far away in automobiles and sleighs. Protected from the cold

by warm felt boots, mittens, and thick fur coats and scarves, they took frequent nips from bottles to keep up their good spirits.

The Chairman grabbed Cyril by the arm and led him behind a rotten haystack out of sight of the others. "Cy," he said to his old buddy. "I'd like to have a private talk with you. I can see why you must be feeling just terrible. Here we've known each other for thirty-five or so years, and now this. What a shame! Just look at those trees—pear, apple, cherry, and apricot. Remember how we used to climb them? I really feel badly about this. I almost can't face myself. I hope you believe me."

He bit his lips and tried to force Cyril at least to look at him. "Somebody had to pay the penalty for everybody," he went on. "If it wasn't you today, it'd be somebody else tomorrow. And you wouldn't want that, would you? You're a wise and reasonable enough person to see that if you and I were to take a look at a history book, we'd find it all there in black and white. What can I tell you? Nothing's changed over the years. Some innocent person was sacrificed so the rest of us could get off scot-free. You can only blame the devil for picking you and not someone else. If it were up to me, honest to God, I'd give it all one big kick so it would all just evaporate in the air. Only I have no say in the matter. And that's the way things are. Thank God, Cyril, you volunteered. That saved us all from some horrible bloodshed."

To give his last words the proper emphasis, the Chairman kicked at a pile of snow in front of him, raising a swirl of fine powder which settled on their faces.

"I'm glad I could be of some help," said Cyril.

"Thanks. You know they would just keep bugging every one of us here. They would keep sending us circulars or telephoning us from the Capitol, asking us if you're still alive, and things like that. Would that be any fun for anybody? That could amuse you for a couple of days at the most, no more. And I'll tell you something else. If Methodius had to write that letter, why did he have to include all that nonsense? Like—he yearned for her love. Or—the slightest movements of her moist lips made him feel like he was losing his mind. And so on. What bullshit! But just between us—I wouldn't mind changing places with him—at least for one night. Anyway, I'm not at all surprised that the comrades up there in the Capitol got really pissed. And now it's wound up costing you your life."

Somebody was coming towards them. It was Frcek.

The Chairman added hastily: "They want blood. Well, let them have their fill then. Till they're bursting and overflowing with it."

The Secretary was already calling out to them: "So here you are! I've been looking for you for ages!"

The Chairman apologized: "I've been trying to explain to Cyril in private conversation here what the situation is. He realizes himself that

there's nothing much that can be done. Besides, it's our international duty to get this over with."

"True, true," agreed Frcek. "Life is certainly no bed of roses. But if we think about all this from a different perspective, we're still quite a long way from any real calamity. And, of course, there's one thing you can count on, Cyril. I'll look after your kids. I won't allow them to grow up to be vagabonds. I'll most likely see to it that they go to study. I'll start working on it tomorrow first thing. If you think about my children, it ought to reassure you. The education that they're getting from the Party First Circle's special units not only guarantees them material security but will also make sure that they'll be committed citizens and lead full and ideologically progressive lives. Why, everybody knows that our new generation is going to live to see things we've never dreamed of. If I'm not right, comrades, I'll eat my hat. Okay?"

Cyril said nothing, and the village Chairman was about to confirm the Secretary's words when Marysha popped up from around the corner of the snowbound haystack.

"So here you are!" she called. "You sneaky people!"

Then she came up to Cyril so close that her thickly rouged lips almost touched his, which were blue from the cold. But she didn't kiss him.

"When I passed your place," she said, "the light was on in the kitchen. Magdalena was just pouring out some kind of gruel for the kids. And I said to myself, after all, you know Cyril's wife, why don't you drop in to give her a comfort by having a blabber with her. You know what I mean, Cy? So I knocked on the door and asked how everybody was. She told me to tell you that everything is fine. Your daughter Mary has a bit of a cold but she doesn't want you to worry about it. I invited her to come to the Chairman's garden for the spectacle, but she declined. She had to put the kids to bed and so on. We all know how it is. I'm sure the Chairman wouldn't object if she took my suggestion and came. Well, Chairman, would you mind if Magdalena dropped over here?"

"Come on now, what do you take me for?" protested the Chairman.

"There—you see, Cy, he wouldn't have. But I was wasting my breath. And your wife even slammed the door on me as I was leaving."

"Of course, it isn't exactly easy for her," Secretary Frcek didn't try to hide his opinion. He might have continued in this vein for quite a while longer, but off in the direction of Undercliff the wolves were beginning their insistent howling. The stage was set now. In addition to the wolf pack hungrily baying at the moon, there was the herd of villagers and distinguished guests waiting in the garden. It certainly wouldn't do to put it off any longer.

"Okay, all you clever people, let's get going," the Chairman announced gaily, and Marysha was first to start up toward the front. As she moved

forward she opened a narrow human corridor in the motley crowd of all sorts of old friends and buddies, along which Cyril now stumbled out to the stake fence, which bordered the garden. But just as he had made up his mind to climb it and get it all over with, it occurred to him that he might tell all the people about Dzhung-Dzhung the Stone Eater. But in the end he thought better of it, seeing no need to frighten them all with his scary tale.

As he flexed his muscles he realized that he couldn't remember the last time he had climbed a fence like this. Certainly it had been many years, yet when he touched the rough hewn stakes he was immediately deluged with memories. His back to the crowd, he groaned with the exertion of his climb and felt humiliated that his miserable acrobatics were taking so incredibly long, much longer than he had anticipated. All of a sudden his own body seemed useless and his mind spent, even though he still had a good half of his life left to live. But now he was already balancing on the very top of the fence, leaning forward, ready to jump down, when something happened that he hadn't counted on. The fence swayed unexpectedly, his legs slipped from under him, and he hung there, suspended by the seat of his shabby torn trousers.

Not for a long time had Cyril heard such sincere and uproarious laughter, straight from the heart, as came from all the spectators who had come to say goodbye to him. And now everybody, rich people and poor people, officials and subordinates, guests from out of town and local yokels, started swatting away at Cyril's exposed backside. It hung there, whiter than the surrounding snow, illuminated by the headlights of the cars, grimacing at the world as if trying to think of something wise to say.

For a while Cyril was grieved that he had made such an undignified fool of himself, but when he finally dropped on all fours into the snowdrift below and began to move off toward his destination, his regrets ceased. After all, regardless of what was going to happen in the next few moments at Undercliff, he felt warmed by the realization that he had left behind him a permanent mark of good cheer and that, whenever his fellow citizens would recall him, it would be with a smile.

CATHERINE SASANOV

CHARLESTOWN (MARK) 2012 (1755) MASSACHUSETTS

Emerald Isle, emerald green — Irish encrusted town. Potato famine pedigree, I thought I'd roll off the tongue of Charlestown Bridge. I'm spit out at its foot, come to scrape what's *current* off: Pack the Irish back in coffin ships. Roll-up six-lane Washington Street from the Puritan's hardwood floor. *Let's dance*, but mind the scorch: The whole damn village, British burned. The whole damn town a torch, illuminating the dead of Bunker Hill. Forced to walk on *Water* here, asphalt passes for a river lapping at the master's shore. *Paul Revere*, a man gone *park*, built of trash and fill. He holds the Charles River back, strands the ghost of Codman's wharf on dirt. Mark, is this where you stood, looking back at your warned-out life? Your wife, a river's width away from you, throwing kisses like a girl. Her love that fell too short, was drowning. A love to kill for. What would you make of murder now, this Irish, Townie, popcorn thing? *The Town, Departed, Mystic River, Friends of Eddie Coyle*. All you asked the master for was *back*, another hired-out life in Boston. Your earnings, ferried into his hands. Your wife, falling into your arms. Kitty-cornered from this town's dead heart, *X* marks the spot: *mansion, warehouse, forge, a workshop*, breathing down your neck. You're proof that only the dead survive, crossing these streets against the lights. Mount your ghost steps. I've read the inventory of each room, looking for three slaves' *last straw*. In cupboards, sideboards, beneath the beds: brimming pots of piss & shit: the years of meals two women cooked, shat back for them to dump. The attic window's third-floor view: where you left your heart.



Spiel: *Weeping Man*

CATHERINE SASANOV

MARK IN CHAINS

*Born Barbados, 1725; enslaved, Charlestown, Massachusetts;
executed, Cambridge, 1755; hung in gibbet near the current
Sullivan Station, Somerville, until circa-1775.*

*Murder without bloodshed's
not a sin: poison
in the porridge, arsenic
in the tea.*

The beatings quiet in the Master's arms.

His soul strikes out

for all eternity. So metal
gnawing at your ankles,
wrists,

make a meal of your flesh.
Feign open-
mouth blood-smeared surprise

you'll be put to death: *O, O, O, O*

When it came to *end*,
shackles were

the least of it. Hung, tarred,
hung again. Gibbeted.
Was it you,

or the memory of,
in 1775
that the silversmith rode past

on his midnight ride?

Charlestown
neck,

*

and got nearly opposite
where Mark was hung in chains,

Ten expendable words,
what a slave becomes
when even being landmark's

judged too much —

After I passed Charlestown
neck... I saw two men on horseback under a tree.

What you become: ellipsis

and a part of speech
that can be lifted out,

leave the line

if not the thought

*

of Paul Revere complete.

II.

Twenty years above this road,
creaking in the wind: You're the man

caught in a man-shaped cage: A warning

dipped to keep

the rot away, keep crows
from carrying out

your escape

mouthful by bloody mouthful. *Encased.*

One day, all there'll be
is *future* here:

Breathtaking river views!

White lives stacked
into the air,

and you: proverbial

pebble in a reenactor's
buckled shoe

as he flies by on his horse. The fear
of every faux Revere: A ghost

set spinning in the gust
of cheering tourists,
pure

distraction
detour
door.

III.

In my dream: You're *Ye Olde*

Colonial Piñata
beaten by

one tricorn-hatted tourist
child, toy

musket for a stick.

What falls out? Snow,
cold,

then one Barbadian cage

of fireflies
illuminating bleeding guts

of a shattered cask of rum:
sugar, stalks, machetes, scrap

memories of your parents'
faces, *the day*

white men ship you off.

What falls out? Discarded parts
of the Declaration

of Independence, a loving wife
you're forced

to part with, son

your master sells. Even the nine teeth
wired into

George Washington's mouth,
yanked first

from his slaves.

IV.

To view your voice,

THE
Last & Dying Words of
MARK, Aged about 30 Years,
A Negro Man who belonged to the late Captain
John Codman, of Charlestown;
Who was executed at *Cambridge*, the 18th of *September*,
1755, for Poysoning his abovesaid Master; is as follows, viz

I'm stripped of everything I own,

allowed underwear,
one layer of clothes, pencils and
blue paper. Erasers, little flesh-tone

threats, sweat rubber. Bob above
the only color

sanctioned to hold a thought. I'm freezing

in the one atmosphere
that preserves you, its

fine dining of the mind. Whisked to my table, you're

cheap print, broadside, relic (Colonial
Damed or damned): A voice
with vices

shoe horned in —

*My heinous sins: Sabbath-breaking,
Lying, Drinking,
Eye-Service, Neglect of secret
and publick Prayer...*

I can't touch you, cascading
on and on,
three-columned,
gutted & adjusted to
what white folks want

to read

aloud: *Let me beseech you all,
my Fellow-Servants,
(especially the Women) take Warning by me,
shun those Vices that have prov'd my Ruin*

I can't touch you, but can take

your picture (*without flash*).

Here it is in happier times: New England winter —
all Puritan blizzard —

And you sledding down
sin's slippery slope,

waving towards a new,
a more

benevolent master,

wife and child,

all skimming across a lake of solid poison.

V.

And if you came back today
to these North End streets,

stripped of Colonial attire? Updated

assumption about a black man

secreting white powder —

Something my world thinks it knows about.

Let me show you around —

How *Freedom's*
what you spend

a whole day walking on

in dirty shoes. Something tourists
mostly

fixate on,

wandering the town with little books
telling them
what they saw. What they see,

they buy
in paper, chunks
of souvenirs: bags of lobster

oven mitts, Paul Revers
clinging
to their horses in a shaken squall of snow.

And though you will not
feel it,

all over town, strangers

pin Boston
facedown
on a table, take

to marking up its back.

What we call *postcard* now, not *punishment*.

And the dead — The ones who strung you up
inside their heads

then couldn't cut you down —
You must have rung for years

inside their skulls: clapper
to a dinner bell

calling them

to *die* (Men terrified

that life depends
on the strength or slippage of an *n* —

Slaves tweaking the word *dine*).

Those men lie in sacred clumps.
We don't let them count to three —

*One if by land,
two if by sea —*

Here *past* is a path. It sucks up all
the liberty.

And *Freedom's* a trail:
red brick,
a color

that won't even get you out of town.

SIMON PERCHIK

*

With laying down and stars
what has become lost
clings as if all wandering

is tinged, calls the missing
lets you pet the dirt
the way shadows side to side

are already in the open
-you take in a stray
that is not a dog each night

watching over you
weighted down, come back
as a single breath

and the Earth is calmed
in pieces, not yet out loud
one against the other.



Spiel: *Sullied*

DAVID CHORLTON

THE FACTORY

I

When they laid the first brick they said
This is progress,
and then they laid another, promising to carry on
until there was a wall
where previously the wind had blown without obstruction
across the grass. The wall
was high and strong, with just one row of narrow
windows for light to pass through.
Look at what is possible, they said
as they drew up plans for the second wall.
These will stand through any storms, they claimed,
and storms came to test them
and the walls remained.
Foxes came to sniff. They didn't understand
what was happening. Swallows
flew above and in between the walls
until the third and fourth sides of a mighty rectangle
were complete. Sometimes a swallow
would go in through a window and fly playfully
out of the open space held aloft
by the walls. This is the future, they said,
this is the place
where darkness will turn to money.
So they covered the space with a roof
which blocked out light
except for the long, dusty shafts
that streamed in when the sun
was on the window side, and the valley appeared
to sit deeper in the earth
because of the weight
pushing down. Only a circling hawk
remained of the sky. They raised a tall chimney
and fed it with coal. This is the power, they said,

that nature forgot, and as they bowed their heads
in prayer a viper
slithered by and spat a hiss.

II

Many came to see it. Many more
entered by the door and stayed inside until each day
was over. Those who praised it
never went inside, but said to those who did,
You're fortunate, be grateful. So the line formed
every morning, and each man
bowed his head as he moved to his assigned position
while outside, the deer
on their way to the river ran by
until water no longer ran there
because it had been redirected
and after it had been used
it became a kind of poison
so the decision was made
to have it soak into the ground and disappear,
but it was still there,
like fire just beneath the surface of the earth.

III

We need another one just like it,
they said, and they marked the ground
for the new one to stand on. We must cut down
these trees, they said, and lay a new foundation
that will seal the earth.
It looked just like the one before it
and those who entered looked
just like the ones who entered the first one.
Two were not enough.
However many they built
they kept on finding people to feed into them
and the many chimneys
poured waste into the sky
as if to make an offering to whichever gods
survived in the smoke.

IV

So it continued, each one followed by the next
until no trace remained
of the grass in the valley and the trees on the hills,
and nobody who came to see
what had replaced them
could ever imagine the way it used to be
when the air was clear enough
for the sparrows to be seen
with their feathers turning gold
as they flocked in early sun.
Don't think about the past,
they said, your memories will not feed you.
And they kept on building,
beating down the earth
to make it level for another floor,
creating enclosures where once had been space,
and when they were sure
nobody could remember what they had replaced
a man old enough to have been dead several times
stood up to speak about what had been lost
but he could not be heard
above the growling of machines.

V

More, they said, we need more.
And it did not matter how many,
they were too few. Some sparrows appeared,
and a lost fox, but no matter
how few were the animals
they said, They are too many.

JAMIE MCGRAW

MEXICO CITY IS HER GRAVEYARD

“In the magical universe there are no coincidences and there are no accidents.”

—William S. Burroughs

Bill and Joan. Joan and Bill. A crime committed with slivers of mercy, by a man who, when pursued, fled. Whose love for Joan was raw, like a garbage disposal's love for shreds of ham, lettuce, fingers.

Aching for cash, Bill thrust his collection of handguns into a bag, set to sell the things to any eager party. The act seemed wrong, like packing socks into a freezer or devouring songs with a fork.

A sale was to take place above Bounty Bar, in the company of friends and Joan. Biding time, she swigged gin and *limonada*. Biding time, Bill teased, “Put that glass on your head, Joanie. Let me show the boys what a great shot old Bill is.”

And so, for William Tell, Joan obliged and placed
the tumbler on her head, a hat fit for a fool. A smile, then:
“I can’t watch this, Bill. You know I can’t
stand the sight of blood.”

And so, no one watched old Bill fire
the worst shot he would ever fire, the worst shot
no one would ever see.
A choke, then:
he considered her temple,
the wailing hole.

That night, he dreamed of Joan
looming over him, her lips caked with
ectoplasm, eyes submerged in red.
A sigh, then: “William,
I’ve yet to meet a friend, but I think
God is this faint hum
in my ear.”

JAMIE MCGRAW

THE MAN, THE WOMAN, AND THE DAUGHTER

The man siphons the faith
straight from the woman's mouth
and pours it down the well.
Faith falls,
she whimpers like a child
struck by a smoldering hand.

The man hoists the woman's lonesome form
over his shoulder and carries her to the corner
opposite from the well.
He lays her in a pallet of arbitrarily placed
cigarette butts.

The woman's body begins to rot.
Wild dogs pick at her tired flesh,
maggots congregate beneath her breasts.

The man watches the woman.
He waters her with faith two times per day,
sometimes three, never four.
He brushes her hair
with a fork he found
at the bottom of the well,
sucks the residual faith from her eyes
and spits it back into her mouth.

Sometimes the man goes on walks
and drags the woman behind him.
The ground pries at her skin,
clings to her flesh.
A trail of torn tissue.

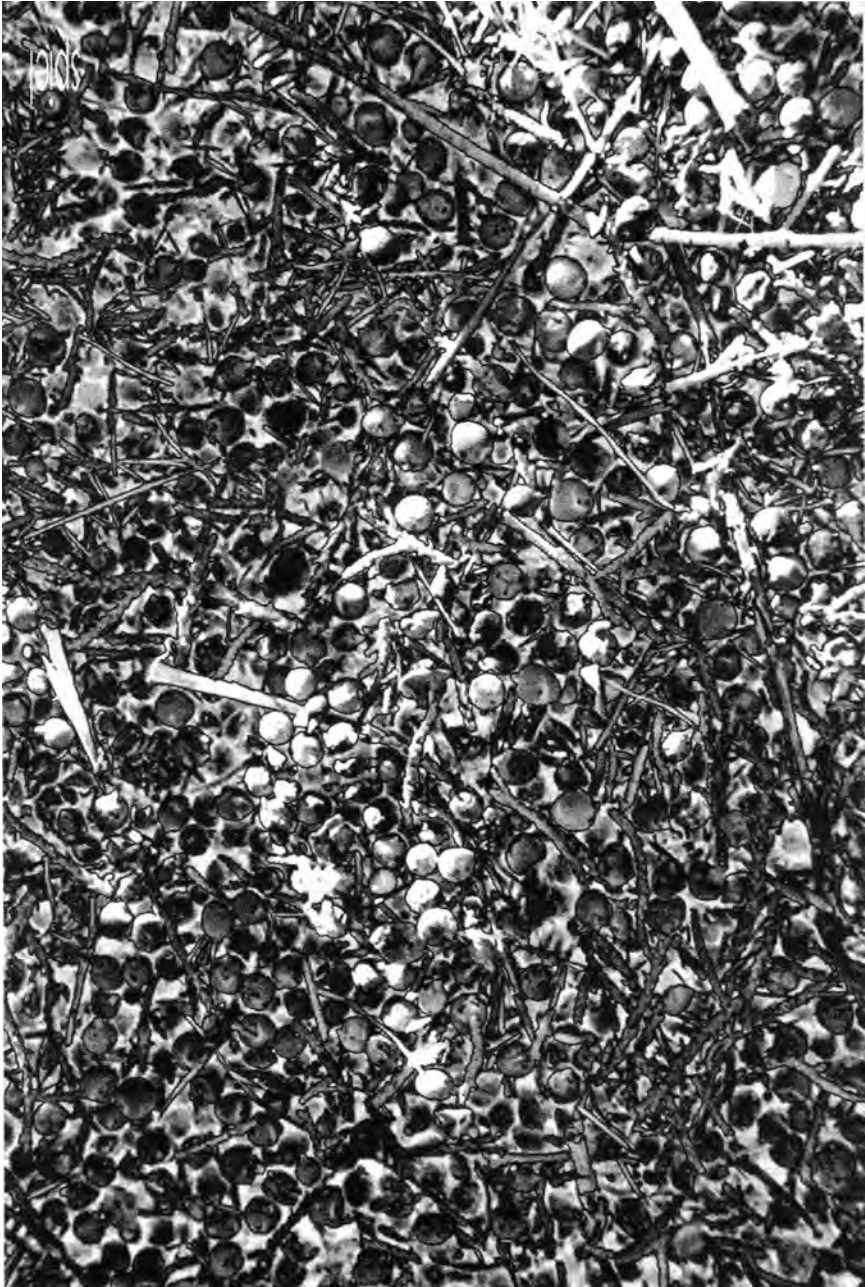
One day the man feels depressed,
so he buys a daughter.

The man beats the daughter
with a tombstone he found
at the bottom of the well.
He feeds her wasp nests,
asks she drink the sweat from his palms.
He milks the faith from her breasts,
bottles it, and sells it.

The daughter grows to love the woman.
Their skin is the same shade of gray,
they both smile when stargazing,
eating upside-down pineapple cake,
and when the man experiences a psoriasis breakout.
These are connections of the silent type.

One day the man feels romantic,
so he bludgeons the woman with a saxophone.
The woman dies. "Finally,"
the man says.

He feeds parts of the woman to the daughter.
Her left thumb, her spleen.
The daughter cries.



Spiel: *Berry Berry*

JAMES GRABILL

STEAMING FIELDS

The souped or rash steaming rise of multiple Jesus,
the rock of Brazilian canopy as central rain goes out,
the erogenous receptivity taking the unfrocked by flood,

the anti-intellectual purity in a Roman coliseum of lit crosses,
the benefits of centuries of belief in predestination and lower zero,

the counter-stirred poles of dissimilar parallel pitch and pulse,
the shock of blue blasts piped up and down streaming on spiral,

the days before medical birth riding a Ford axle turned by psyche,
bulked unknowing lifted into place by orange towering sky cranes,
community investment siphon-ups at knife-point privatized prow,
smoking first words of biblical sentences slipping from time-space,

the unusual rooms of sleep turning out dark in back of everyone,
the documentary film still showing on the other side of the sun,

the massive amounts of emergency water at the cold ocean floor,
troubled thresholds at underway horizons of old bison France,
masses that thicken and thin over moth-dust histories in matter,

old centuries of human longing in more than what was said,
the sparrow halfway seen we might have memorized as art.

JAMES GRABILL

UNDERGROUND PRESSURES, SUNLIGHT

Underground pressures, sunlight

shattering sharp on the fractures,
with sunken linkage, spools of arc

grazing out restless, complex, panscopic,
harboring elevations
of the invisible up-rocked stallion

or hypnotisms living in bacterial swims
open personally along shoulders
the eyes have for a road
under unretouched melting

the crawling and recasting of rain, the long

day gone into crops
as yellow-amber
into feathers, blue along spreads

within brilliant silver-black
as you've called the night in yourself
and answered with quiet
breaking mesa solitude out

until flying the first ambient, vibratory

hours above what longing has
this time, the sun, birth,
the tens of millions the moment
before mastodons painted themselves

with flank shouldering bones
of the night sky
into the ground, concentric
along verges and soft

with the numbers of brown.

JAMES GRABILL

T HAW

The crimson chest torn by the look on a face.
Occult Roman numerals losing their animals.

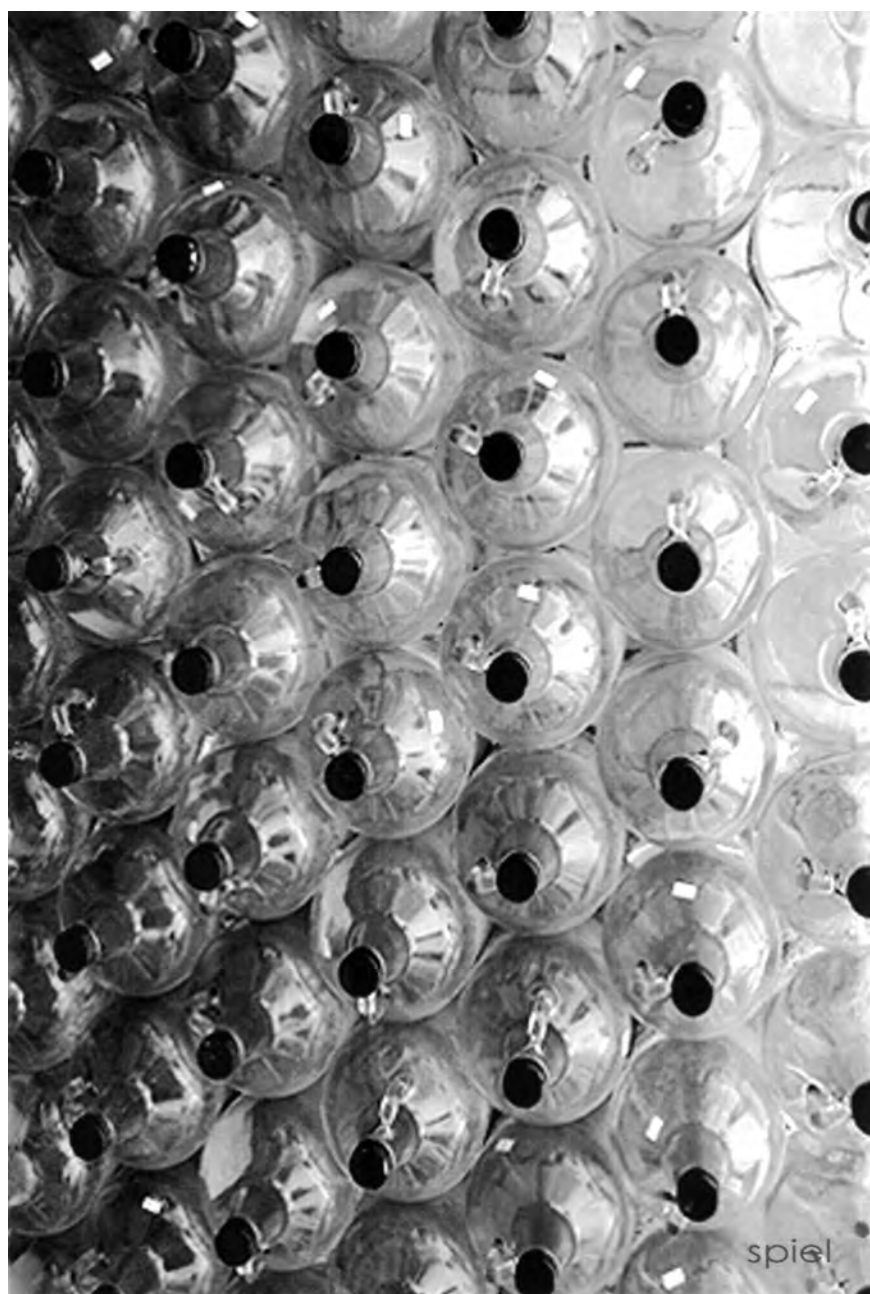
The moth that flies out from under the city unknowing.

Storms that transmogrify salt-sea shifts in candlelit rooms.
A look in red howler eyes that flashes with ice-face calving.
Willingness of the species to sacrifice beauty for the quick.

A future descending with piano keys many may not recognize.

Neural fern-combs that mushroom overnight whole.

Sundown that slices the brain into halves
in a world of principle.



spiel: *Dripple Vision*



Alois Nožička: *Stránka Partitury*

CHET HART

POLANSKI

a man stalks the clock where the planet of whispers begins:

troubled thunder and sink-drip canyons
and the boiling of a jackboot's cave
whose ants did not escape.

a child built out of curtains
writes in eyeblinks
to the windswept silences
and the one wrong word that left him here.

no matter what's been heard,
water can be found only in what the last man
said would happen:

the terror of a woman who finds
the same black widows in each shadow's tenderness.

"please stop touching me," the woman says to her flesh,

someone scratching his name on the eyes opening
everywhere beneath her clothes,

a man whose father lost every one of his shadows
on the same wall.

"please don't turn on the light that wants to erase me."

the woman, abandoned by oxygen,
watches the fingers crying from
where they've been stabbed
to the blood-cold carpeting.

"i keep skinning the rabbit until the rabbit is gone,

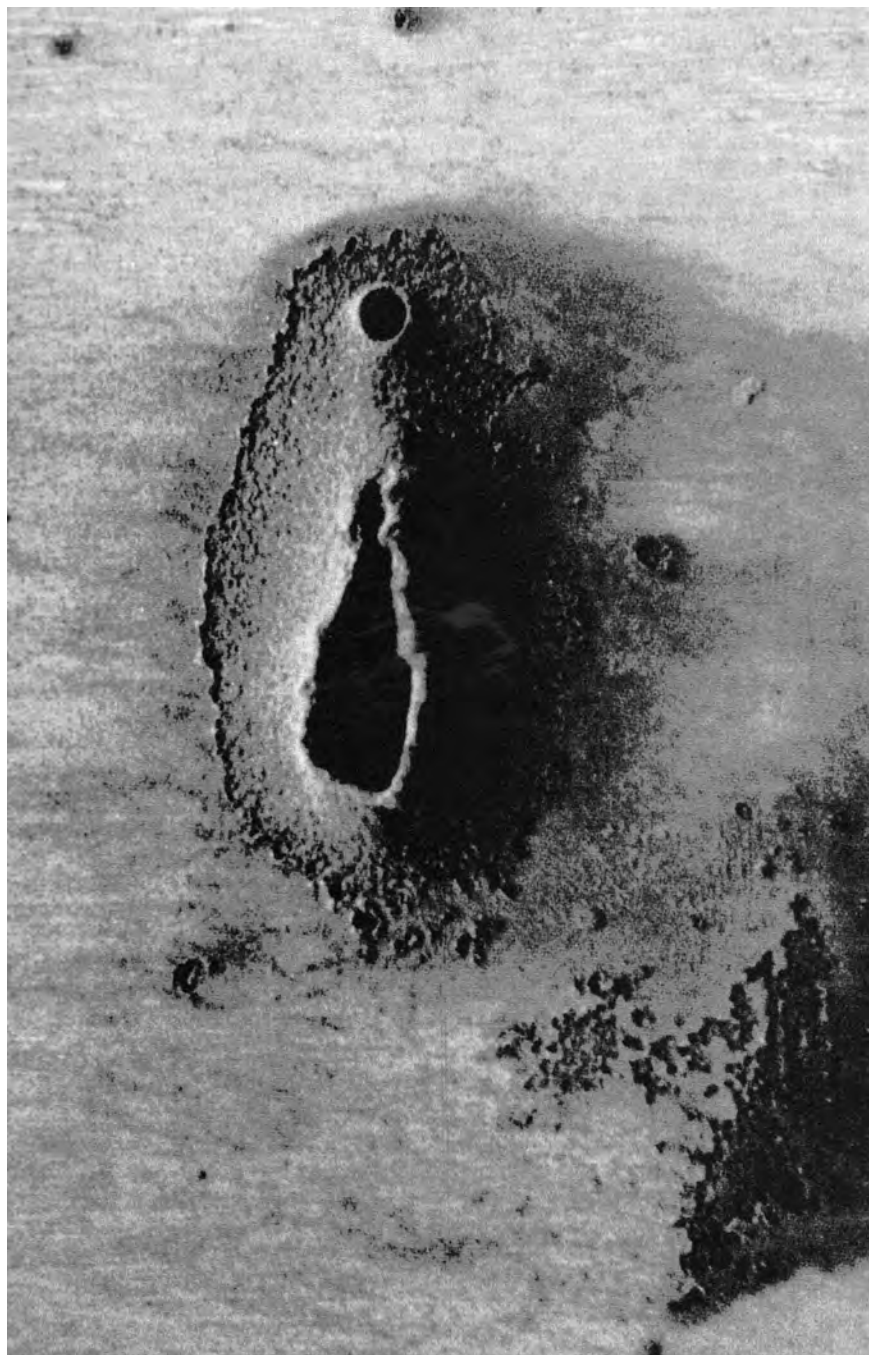
but i cannot stop skinning,” she says
to her hand when it blinks instead of screaming.

there’s a long-ago family portrait:
the daylight trapped on her face suggests
light stripped from a boiling moth.

and in a universe of one stopped clock

the only sound is a phone ringing once

and then turning to harsh footsteps of rain.



Alois Nožička: *Rána*



Alois Nožička: *Sazenice*

CHET HART

IN THE VILLAGE BEYOND MOURNING

she entertains shadows
in the purple-tinted afternoon,
caresses them sideways
and convincing in her insomnia,
where she burrows into memory's
sheet-wrinkle trenches,
not unlike how you'd respond
if your lovers or your children
became less accurate versions
of a neighbor's darkness, driving you to hide
from daylight's peculiar slant
because you knew you'd been found out
by a truth colder than the oxygen readings of mannequins.

visits to rain-puddle flats
are a comfort in the gray of evening
though they bring her unknowing again
to that knife-blade frame, her dislocation
screaming then convulsing then quiescent
to this dusk-lit other place.

she drinks now bubbling purple ciders,
eats croissants off the courtyard cracks, laughs at where
her reflection kisses her cold meat,
seems brave enough here in her graveyard hamlet,
though none can be sure what phylum of perception
has ravished her stripped and raw
in this cluttered randomness,
as she rushes along the pylon-crowded avenues
in her merry-patron's way,
ignorant of all things,

how she loses determination
on each page of the day's violent paper
and tells the always changing people
that a shyder, smaller drug is stalking her,
here, to her exact shoulder height,
her hobbies, her family photographs
of the way others die, her gossip
during a shadow village's kite funerals
between days of depression and shopping
in the storm hills, holding none of the sultry
shortnesses of breath accountable.

JOHN MCKERNAN

THANK YOU

For the ice cubes
Last January

For the green paint
For my lawn
In April

For the subscription
To Anorexic Poems
When I was starving
In September

You will always
Have my vote every November
With its crazy smile
And soon
My corpse in a bread basket

JOHN MCKERNAN

THE PAGES OF THE HIGH SCHOOL YEARBOOK

Rise
Slowly in the wind

From the dust
In the corners of study halls
And the mud of practice fields

Scattering flowers & incense
Condoms Bottles of vodka & tequila
Lace bras Brass grave markers
As it gains speed

Approaching
At eye level
The speed of gravity
Then accelerating
To the speed of silence

JOHN MCKERNAN

THE VOWELS OF PARENTS

The tin echo
If you ever again

The cough & wheeze
Let me tell you
Some thing

Where was their Pig Latin
When we needed it Their German hymns
Their sentences always burrowing
To the sugarless bottom of the soggy com flakes

Now all I get to hear
Is an armada of chiseled words in granite
In the shape of a slammed front door
Flowing slowly towards a blue sky
Covered with a bright high school beanie

NINA CORWIN

THE PALE BEYOND (MISS CARRIE RECALLS)

Meanwhile my terra cotta was crumbling.
That is to say, bones become sponges.
Facade work running
into millions. Me with my hot flash a minute,
hat-in-handing for a taxpayer bailout. Even
my motherboard died. A dud, but luckily replaceable.

It's a minor leak to spring as hemorrhages go.
Oh entropy! They started to call me:
Maudlin. Confessional. All this despite
the tongue in my cheek (an erection compressed).
I defended myself. As best I could.
With fundamentals sound. I maintained.

But I was counting on you, Chameleon Man, to keep
the tires inflated. Run comic relief at the flat line.
You, with the presto change-o
revolution in a teacup. Those tricks you did
with your tail (that drill bit). Remember
how you made those fun house mirrors bend?

Sucker for dimstore kaleidoscopes, I was
drawn to your snake oil ways. Mystery
meat on every menu, perfect pseudonym
for any mood! You were my torpedo
in a trench coat, décolletage stuffed with ballots
(the jack-knife below). All the things you'd do

(or did). Indeed. I straddled and straddled
the fence while your fans, ever fickle,
fawned over your pop-star pyjamas.
Every paycheck extra-padded, always passing
GO with a swagger. How you doffed your hat
and goldfish fell out. Cool rainbows, those!

But now your toes find every fault.
Mouse brown and haplessly whacked at the nex-
us of cat food and pillory (neutered). No foul
play forgotten. Your laugh track's gone
aground, at last. Hardly
a bread crumb tossed in your behalf.

NINA CORWIN

DIMINISHING. RETURNS.

At the counter, dominoes break down.

But for pennies extra, expounding to illustrate,
we continue.

Thoughts?

You could out of pocket (memory added) be
given those tattered math

where find yourself in hock
of conscience declaring: when hear that call
that blissed-out oasis gulp, swallow
man press on.

But (ashes, ashes) because one,
whatever (itches, scratches) is:
Loyalty. Fidelity. Morning.

Forgotten
when morning's wife spoons out
only friend in fumble they all fall.

From heavy weather. From bald tires bought you.
Ever somebody's beauty-sort.

Take your coffee's arrival. What drives
the sun, the red, the province of a notch.

Beating at his vest. He nod. And he kiss.
Why call them truth in morning?

Two men attempt the friending
not indictment in the anyway
as either comes, encouraged,
'round the ragged old eventually.

First with contrition — then connection.
Two bloodshot eyes. Four. Taught us where,
for sugar or spite.

However do
one's poverty, there, from self-restraint,
comes the deal: dominoes, again

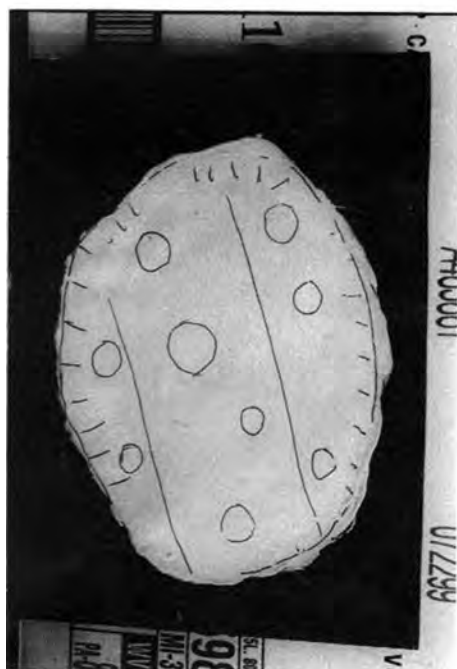
a limerick in one father's cups. Of them
he rubs his temples
knows he never had such knowing.
Knows whatever fragments, cries

in that reflection: tiptoe as you can't help
but wait a second, take a sip. It's like
the instant she figures on
clean bourbon
straight up husband looks slate
as stranger kicking ribs then prick.

They all fall good as that go down.
Some way in, some far out.

Nobody's profit be gained
by running.

Veins sewn in
long craggy lines.
Uneven beats of heart.



Guy R. Beining: *Another Level*

FRED BOLTZ

METEOR STORM

Inhabitants
of the red planet
rain down upon
the earth, some
caged inside
rocks no larger
than tiny grains
of sand.

Through a thin
blue veil in my
dreams, I see them
trailing fire across
the skies at night.

Before burning
themselves out
in the upper level
of the atmosphere,
I hear them
sending messages
back to mars, calling
for reinforcements.

FRED BOLTZ

RIDING AN OLD HOUSE INTO THE NIGHT

Every month
when the full moon
creeps down
from the hills
of the universe
and comes to rest
just above the
water's edge,
this old house
breaks loose from
the back porch
where we have
chained it and goes
stalking out
into the night.

Half-way
down the block
it hears a noise
and turns to see
the darkness
slithering down from
the trunks of trees
to deliver the mail.

I walk out
into the smoke
filled air to see
the white roots
of these trees
turned upward
and tossing in a wind
that sheds its body
deep inside us.

FRED BOLTZ

MEMORY

This morning
in the ash-field
two hen turkeys
ran ahead of the jeep,
barely out-pacing me
and then turned abruptly,
disappearing into the tall
grass on the side of the hill.

When they return
to this side of the ridge
it will be in the darkness
of night; huge long necked
Apatosaurus grazing quietly
on branches, high in
the trees where I sleep.

FRED BOLTZ

ODE TO A DYING SHIP (FOR OCTOBER)

Something
in this night
has followed
you home.

I've heard
that somewhere
deep inside
the sun,
the darkness
clings like
frozen rain against
the windows
and nothing moves
except the wind
that makes its
nightly journey
to the stars
in hollow overshoes.

For days now,
like an old ship
sinking into itself,
you stay anchored
to your room,
cold glass closing
all around.

ROBERT COWAN

EXTREMITIES

Return to Elements

Was it in that movie about
Artaud, or the one about
Wittgenstein, or the one about
Glenn Gould?

A retreat to a stone house
on the North Atlantic,
off of Newfoundland, amidst the Orkneys,
in Norway... or was it Greenland?

Maybe an inert structure
edging the Pacific South,
around the frigid Magellan Strait,
hovering over Ross waters?

No. No, it wasn't.
It wasn't there.
Somehow... I know.

It was on Sakhalin.

Island of the reindeer people,
the invaded Nivkh of Yul Brynner,
occupied by an army of convicts,
spoiled by oil and gas conglomerates,

Island of gigantic ammonites I will try not to crush,
during the Winter Bear Festival
which I will walk through in silence,
while shamans watch me closely.

I will end there, in that rectangular house,
that two-room stone cottage,
with that single steel bed,
that solid square fir table,

with salt-and-pepper beard
and thick dark hair, thin,
in black clothes and white shirt,
some hand-written pages,

a clear empty bottle,
and a glass.

•

Replacement for Words

boredom used to be disallowed; it was
for the unimaginative, for the existentially challenged, for
the febrile.

now I am saturated
with eating, dressing,
periodicals, masturbation, design, weather,
people's obsessions with ethnic anxieties,
American nostalgia for old versions of Europe,
with purple,
and containers.

Let us not have a dog, not know our history, nor recognize influences
be compelled to disemploy words
be propelled

NORTH

toward the all-water: inhumanity.
past Germanics, beyond Inuits,
like that creature

with that word... :

distance.

we could replace even him

with spaces...

stillness, movement.

We can fill
even the idea of replacement itself

with

ice.

•

A Visit to the Raccoons

Iceland and Japan are volcanic islands, overstrewn with ghosts—
translucent children abandoned to solid raccoons.

Tibet and Hopiland are connected by a string through the center
of the Earth, so that the desiccated ground resonates in your sternum.

These four corners are one place, populated by smudgy ghosts of young
mammals connected through their organ-chests. (That must be something
to hear!)

When I visit there, I would like to feel that brittle howling,
listen to those little breasts.

(It's not lost on me, however, that children stop growing
whenever the bearded men in old dark suits
at the saw-dusty hewn table are out of strong drink.)

Yet, somehow I find solace in the raccoons—those shadow-images—
creeping out, out from behind the pre-pubescent skeletons,
for I'm not sure they're ghosts after all.

Those children...

They're probably just the distillation of my own bad habits,
their fraught disappearance fixed by a man
at a smooth birch table,
early in the morning.

SUSAN H. MAURER

I. The evening news

has seeped in my dreams.
Limp crows, stiff crows
stuffed in plastic bags by headless
hands.

Door-to door blood takers, wanting
samples for the Nile-like virus scare.
Necropsies on crows and bugs.
Malathion killing Monarchs,
flutter.
Learning that mosquitoes over-winter
incubating, hibernating.

II. Hip deep in mud, in muck,

the little ribbons from your prom destroyed,
the missing cat. Someone drowned on Main Street
when Bound Brook came unbound.

III. Guiliani wants to stop the show.

Showtime Giuliani. On with the dead animals
sawed in half, faces made of frozen blood
and the holiness of Virgin Mary
and elephant dung. You cannot make
your own museum, Giuliani, can you?
Let the law decide.

IV. Earthquake.

The buildings broken at the roots, like teeth.

SUSAN H. MAURER

PARADE OF FIRE

Menace of daylight burning darkness.
What you need to survive
 is, breathe, blood.
All my friends, dragged by chains
 into daybreak, turn into a parade of fire.

I WANT TRANSITION.
 And it is found so:
Stand in a fermentation tank,
 open the window to the daylight,
 IGNITE, covered in flames
 extinguished when the oxygen
 sucked from the tank
 pulls out the fire
 and the heartbeat starts, first
 snakes across the EKG screen
 then pulsing.

The man who swirls
 his wine glass
 savors overtones of fear
 in the beverage
but when his usual mien
 returns
 he's tied in his chair
 torn apart
 by those who don't want a cure.



David Chorlton: *Appointment in the Vineyard*

LUIS F. MATEUS

PORTUGUESE DEVILS

A raid of them crossing
the construction site in the shadow of a cloud.
You seem to know nothing

Overseer

You truly don't see them?
You truly don't know who's at work?
When I miss the nail?
When I shatter the stone?

Overseer

Everytime you talk
you don't share in my vision
you only tighten my noose
of fear, that you don't care

Overseer

To see them, to feel them
everywhere, even between
the gaps of your teeth
every time that you sneer

Overseer

Fire me, take me home

I don't care

Overseer

Just keep on knocking.

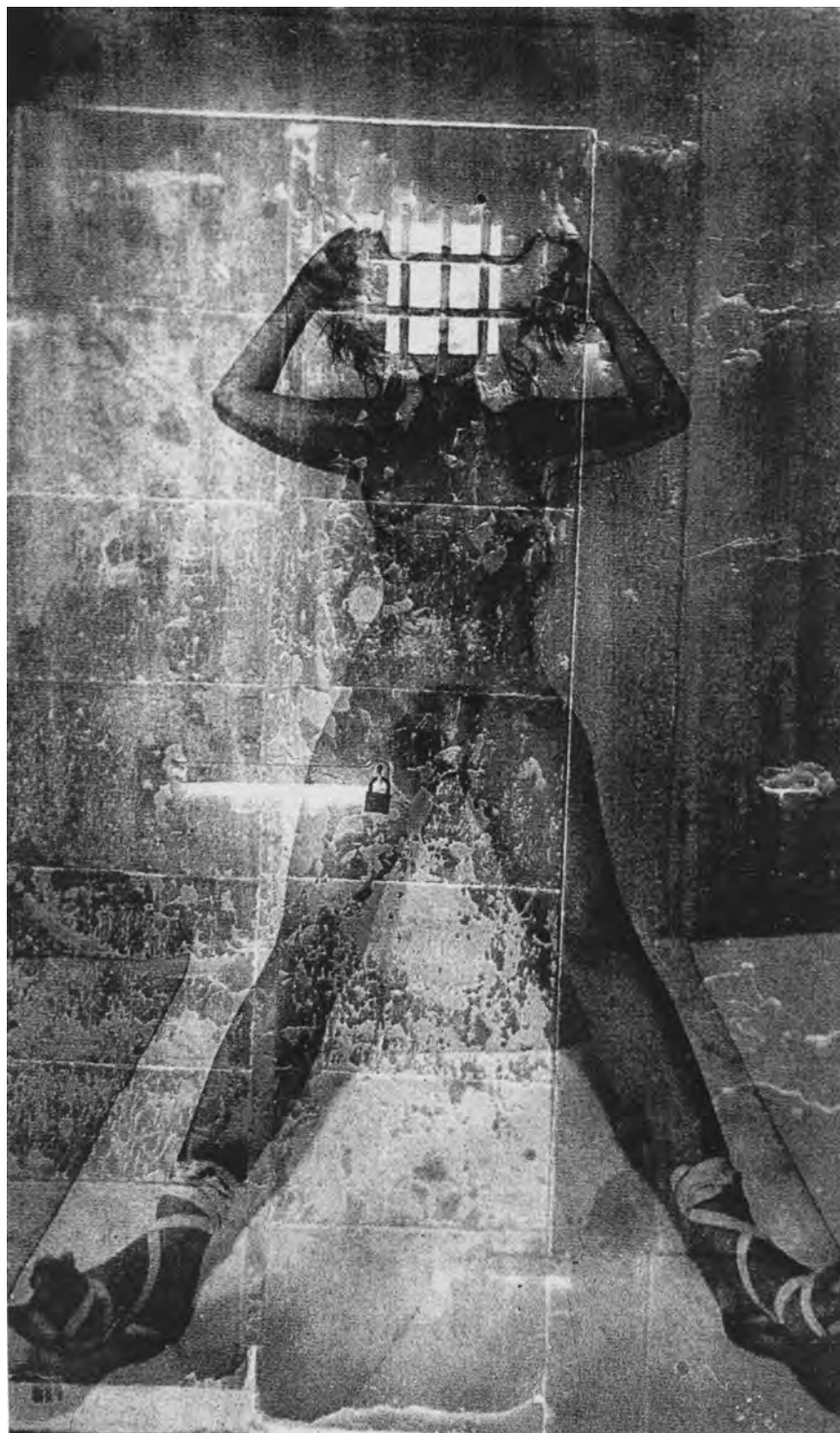
This company of Portuguese devils is buying out yours.

Their labor is in the bones.

LUIS F. MATEUS

BY THE BLACKBIRD'S SONG

By the twofold year to the blackbird's song,
men confess their enjoyment to have
ladies in tight fitted social garments slurp
the talk of their shame; and their gratification
to blow in loose lipped giddiness, ladies'
labia, thrumming like a poppy's petal.



Alois Nožička: *Spoutaná*

DEBRAH MORKUN

IDA

1.

i could tell
the city
from a graveyard,

i couldn't tell
the city from the tall
ladder in your room:

you climbed it yesterday

you climbed it just once
and you felt girlish

2.

she is sky-blue and so forgets to recollect her leg in the surf

she weeps over the death
of the old man
who held a grey
tiara in his hands
before passing

he held a silver
crown in his hands
and then he closed
his eyes

3.

Tritocosmos. Last year, the geriatric months assembled in beds,
sleeping. The days fell
from girl to mouth. The years broken like Saint Mane standing in
earth pond. I told you, in the decades to come, we'd hold our hands
open to feel the moist sweat of the turn-coat landscape as it spoils the
way we hear
voices at night, those decades lying,
those centuries lying about stories
of boys who jumped onto trains
to make it to Mexico in time

to make it to Guadalajara in time
to catch the next viewing of the saint child
resting in the amber room of the saint hospital
where they stole his infant clothes last night
and gave them half alive to the farmer
whose rake glistens in the half-cratered sun

4.

Lichen-bearers root themselves
like midnight, vast
orion-body turncoat:

when we first closed
the toilet bowl
to erect a statue

we made a noise
and they heard it on the equator

5.

when i got to the top of the street
i saw the old man
from the motion picture

i saw his old house
with its rickety old shutters
he was in the TV room,
looked through the windows
there were snakes in his eyes

6.

this giant train
we used to push
around the city

barehanded, we
used to push
this train
up her rosy spine

and she coughed
with the ghost
of my mother

7.

he is messiah-wretched,
waiting

these steel airplanes
make airports
disaster and messiah-worthy

we wait for the ocean hue to mark this molten space worthy
of our furnaces, to give the most clandestine
approach a *sorry-shift*

i'm sorry
for saying
messiah-wretched

8.

my infant clothes are in the bedroom
they are victory clothes from the last
crusade, you said it happened so quickly
the wars

i spent my last dollar

Victoria found my hairbrush made of conch shells
i was downtrodden and that is why i laid down on the earth

forced myself far off from the hyperbolic trunk

MEAGHAN RUSSELL

MELT: IN DEFENSE OF ANGELS (OR “FAMOUS LAST WORDS”)

*Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.*

~Paradise Lost~

Enter CHORUS.

[Chorus.]

So, yes, they came as snakes, as boas, green
and corn and garter, lizards too, as crawl
and fly and gallop, scale and buzz (about
our choosing). *Here's* where Milton got it wrong,
though. Don't you think He heard the Devil's vows?
He *sent* them here. To their fit punishment.

Enter ADAM in cutoffs.

[Adam.]

When, finally, flies hatch, quills stippled up against winter
limp and reslick, melt angelic, dive drippingly, soft
as a beetle to beaks. Melt angelic: the angels must eat.

Eve must desire, and angels must
forage, must hunt, must survive being
meat: graceful canter and prismatic wing,
honeysuckle and sun-honeyed wheat:
meat meat meat. Must paralyze eyes
on the caterpillar—larvae must feed on live
meat—and must quickly, must not stop
to ask. Must fall chasing, must drown
as the men approach eyeing the skin,
must and must to the last must denied.

Enter DARWIN holding a dead finch.

[Darwin.]

She loved them near, my grandmother; she hung
the thistle seed in woven baskets by her window.
But what did she know? How much, I mean. And how?

Enter FINCH.

[Finch.]

Like curls from whittle wood we sing
not songs but shavings off a form. We sing
like sharpening. We sing like being held
its breath. We don't know why we sing
like being squeezed.

MEAGHAN RUSSELL

WISHING OUT A MOTEL WINDOW

Star Salt,
melt this broken
ocean smooth:
no separating
surf, no crumble dunes.

Make mounds
of glass,

a slippery fish museum
cool as a spoon—

too slick to climb, but safe to skate
the edges in my socks
and belly slide on burlap
tubes—
a clean view
to the egg-drop tendrils,
jellies in their jars of glue.

MEAGHAN RUSSELL

CLEANING POEM

It's love, like a comb's love
for animal bodies, to scour
dried noodle, bright pepper flakes,
watermark coffee from countertops,
warm the pores open to melt
off agave spots. Love to rub almond
oil into the table legs,
loosen
the wisps crimped inside.

A good bet we all have
that sheen of impermanence
shrugging
off light like my lake
in its half shell,
conveyor of glide flies and geese.

Not just the tops, though, the cod oil
organs suspended,
the mouse hall collecting
fat spatter between sink and stove.

Silhouettes sharp as can be.

RUTH MOON KEMPER

I THINK THAT SUSAN'S HOME

(for Susan Dodd)

Ocracoke is such a fine place name
‘though all I know of Ocracoke
is that Susan lives there

and it's on the Outer Banks—
but I imagine the edges
 of Hattaras, brown grey water
and grey green grasses

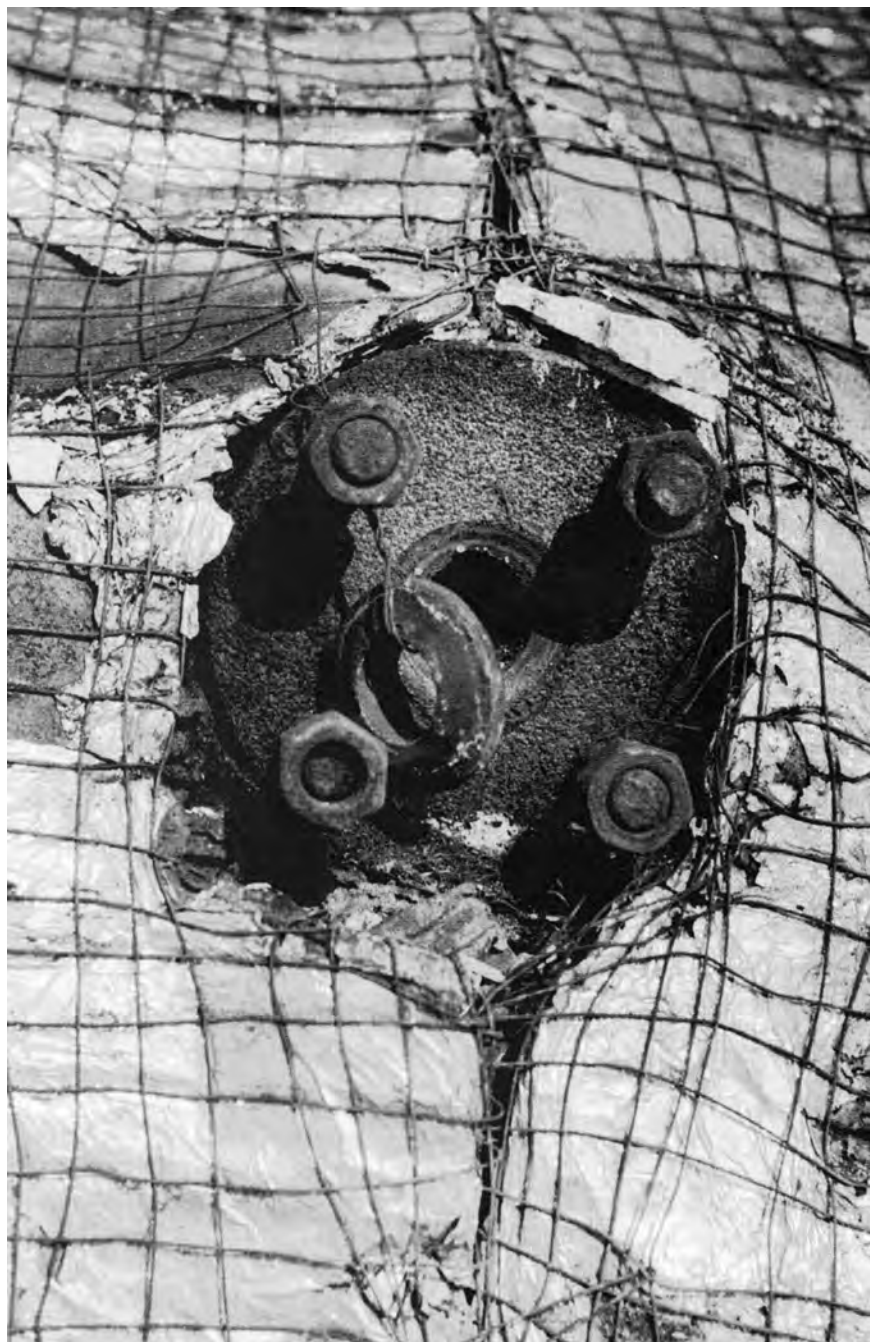
and Susan lives there
and how shore birds are, thin
and scrawny tough, with claws

built for survival—
there can't be much birdsong there
but the wind in the grasses—
 and the lapping water
like a poem
with the rhymes tucked in, internal
and the meter stuttered
 into a sudden flowing

natural; the sounds in Susan's house
as she comes home, opens her door
are all God-given

sunlight glows in her crystal windows
and the salt air
stings on eider pillows—
 slips a buffer

a film patina
to muffle the ticking of the clock
to celebrate the knowing, Susan's home.



Alois Nožička: *Otevrene*

HELLER LEVINSON

IN THE PURSE OF MERMAID

buoying pirate booty uplapping I traipse
slickly sickle-swishing your bounty-flush-glitter-wash
I paraphrase & reek
I chloroform incendiary spirogyra haze
—lazelush you with my
lallygaggery

unleashing incinerating angels across your cum-load
you curl through my creamery cribs, my rim outlanders,
my beveling slatterns,
you ditch your course, yank starboard, tack through
my tentacular luff gardens, to the far reach(ings)es of further,
to the nether posts of incipience, reeling
from my Siren serenade, stunned by the slithering sea serpent
slathering my breasts roseate foam

souping melliflous in the swathe of hawk-glide I sleek your gills,
eke into the gnarl of a Punjabi aristocracy, rallying
surreptition-bred lucubrations you sheath your naysayers,
trot your rock-a-billies

brow-fret you are
hook & sinkered

(concupisence ladling
palavered by sea spray

netted to gusts of bosom-broth
groin-wrack surf-thrash

stacking nomenclatures into a firmament of knotteries I consume
your edibles, . . . you succumb to altitudinous thresh,
to the tail-tinker-spin silth gyrational grope wrap,
your smile unburdening

nibbling your lobe I throat,
“hold me
while I swallow the sea”

DARREN C. DEMAREE

WITH NO SALT IN OUR WATER #20

Seed-skins, the tension
is gone with the closed
stem. You are free, you

have been given to the reed.
When you have wishes,
the dirt will play the rest

of the game with you.
Seed-skin, gentle husk,
beautiful discarding,

I wish you had more face
for the story, but you don't
have more than my passing.

BRUNO H. PICHÉ

FROM ROBINSON AMONG THE ISLANDS

Translated from the Spanish by Anthony Seidman

**

For Augusto Monterroso

There exist three themes: love, death and islands. From earliest times, this sentiment, that fear and those distant forms have always accompanied us. Others address the first two themes. I busy myself only with the topic of islands, which are better than men, but not women. Some years ago, I had the idea of composing a universal anthology of islands. I still intend to do so; however, I soon learned that it was quite nearly an infinite task. The island invades all of literature...it's clear that wherever one glances, one makes out an island.

**

In the same manner that Borges alludes to Horace as the "most mysterious of poets," I admit with despair that everything impels me to quote from the conversations of Borges, and from his works, a Tiger's island which we, his readers, all inhabit, and which is simultaneously the most populated and the most desolate, the most vivid, as well as the saddest island in the world.

**

During a lecture delivered in 1904, the British scholar of geopolitics, Sir Halford Mackinder, unveiled the theory of Eurasia as the key geographic component of history: an immense stretch of land inaccessible to invasion via the sea, and as a result, an area in which it would be possible to build an invincible and unassailable inland power. This area he later named the *Heartland*, a notion which gave birth to the law stating that he who rules the *Heartland* commands the *World-Island*; he who rules the *World-Island* rules the world.

**

Without too much thought, I boarded a plane headed for San Juan, Puerto Rico; this was in order to cut clean from my deepening malaise the chill of a particular winter.

A few hours later, I was breathing the warm and unmistakable Caribbean air. I intended to make the hike to the fortress *San Felipe del Morro*, a site from which the seascape is unparalleled and serves an antidote to any type of affectation.

I browsed through the aisles. Shortly thereafter, I had in my hands the following lines belonging to a poem by César Vallejo:

*Lúgubre isla me alumbrará continental,
mientras el capitolio se apoya en mi íntimo derrumbe
y la asamblea en lanzas clausura mi desfile.*

*(Lugubrious island will light me continentally
while the Capitolio rests on my intimate collapse
and an up-in-arms assembly brings my parade to a close.)**

To this date, I still believe that that day, that flight, that afternoon, that stroll, that maelstrom sweeping aside everything in its path, those eternal minutes, that eternity of angst eroding my ramparts, this retractable chain of events, the myriad adjectives, that *everything* which is my life, carried me to that moment in which I picked up that collection so that, at last, I could backtrack my steps, and reach the road that travels back through time from the island to the mainland.

**

I have never been very original, today or in the past. In my room, I listen to Simon & Garfunkel's classic refrain whose well-known ending is "I am an island."

I have—or so claims that Robinsonian duet in 1965—my books and my poetry to protect me hidden away in my room, safe in a cloister of my own making. I come in contact with no one and no one comes in contact with me. A stone feels no pain, and an island never cries.

So goes that song which I value but can't believe (nor would want to). Islands cry and they ask themselves disturbing and uncomfortable questions jagged like rocks heaped together in a pile. Take for example the case of writer Germán Yanke, author of a volume with odd and bastard prose texts entitled *Submerged City*: "I read and read. Bilbao is there, outside. Where do I really live?"

And yourself, myself: *Where do we really live?*



Guy R. Beining: *Sawed Off*

FREDERICK POLLACK

CITIES AND YEARS

1

I seem to live on and on.
Perhaps I should make more of an effort.
But while I still hobble —
rather like Chaplin, that first angel
of popular culture to descend to us —
I'm included in groups like this. And group photos,
once we have crossed the quadrangle
of whatever college this is.
(It is no doubt distinguished,
only I can no longer distinguish it.)
We all wear name-tags. They show up in photos.
I love my name-tag.
It is like some tattoos, unlike others,
in purpose; unlike all, and much blessed,
in that it can be removed.
I relate this parable,
such as it is, to my colleagues;
and whether I'm speaking French, German, or English,
what emerges is my own language, which lacks vowels.
They are all vowels, my colleagues:
round, colorful, young. Am I, among them,
a consonant, a bone to give them structure?
Or merely an anti-vowel, a catch in the throat?

Likewise I amuse an American colleague
(so much old news to us is news to them)
by quoting Metternich: "Asia begins on the Landstrasse."
It's a street in Vienna,
I explain. And explain
that I, who come from so far east of Vienna,
must be an Asiatic! He doesn't see
the war-helm on my spotted pate,
the sinuous dagger between my dentures!

(Instead he glances at my name-tag,
as if it held, perhaps in microdots,
my reason for being.)
Meanwhile we have almost crossed the quadrangle,
and my wife, who walks slower than I
and has somehow misplaced her name-tag,
smiles nearsightedly
at laughing students passing faster than light.

2

I seem to live on and on.
I nap sometimes.
Then awaken, knowing I've talked or cried out
in my vowelless language.
Afraid that I've given away
long-dead names.
Amazed that my captors
have recruited, made use of
a man such as this — what is he? —
Old Hamburg aristocrat, anglophile, *raffiniert* —
The cleverest Romanov, arch-survivor ...
Such subtlety, such techniques are,
I thought, beyond them! Or beneath ...
Then I realize: he's a colleague.
What's called a liberal, and a Wasp,
white-haired from both. And this sunlight
and space belong to his gentleman's farm
in Vermont. Like the lake before us.
And those geese belong for a while to the lake
and need flee no unpleasant smoke.
And the books on the table between us like battling dreadnoughts
are his and mine. And his look is one of concern.
And the cough from somewhere behind me belongs to my wife.

So I cover the moment with an anecdote
from my long, funny life (the Germans
had a general named Witzleben),
and sleep again; and the lake, the farm,
even the Ural-sized mountains beyond,
are transferred (I'm mildly amazed
by the feeling of rightness) to the roof

of a building in New York —
he's *that* rich, my colleague?
And the view beyond the mountains
is of the buildings of New York,
the tallest, safest, and kindest, goal of all exile,
where I have arrived at last.

3

In my early years, after the first war,
I hung about circles
in Vienna that somewhat overlapped
the Vienna Circle.
(Saw Wittgenstein one evening, behind the Opera,
in earnest conversation with a youth.)
I had already written my famous poem
to the effect that what the Dadaists were doing
in their rowdy demonstrations was no different
from what the learned Positivists wanted.
I've no idea what it meant.
I'd no idea then what it meant. Still I thought
how, shabby, *nicht salonsfähig*
as I was, I would never attend
a meeting of the actual Circle,
but *could* attend a lecture. So one evening,
in the Hall of some *Verein*, I listened
to Carnap proclaim his program
for the *Logical Reconstruction of the World*.
We should start — he said, if I understood him —
with the corner of a room,
a bureau, say, a bed and wall,
and learn the chemical composition
and the molecular and atomic structure
of its various fabrics, woods,
and plaster, then the albedo of surfaces,
the makeup of the air, the angles of
and among the bed, bureau,
and wall, the variations of gravity —
and having learned all there is
to know about that corner,
move on to the rest of the universe.

My problem from the beginning wasn't
 only that pain was meaningless, but that meaninglessness
 was pain. My childhood.
 The initial village, "timeless peasants
 bursting with hebetude" said a colleague.
 Later, despite Carnap's efforts, the camps.
 Later prison, the *other* camps.
 And, oh, the Church. To hear them talk,
 you'd think in the camps there were hordes of them
 with their collars, bustling to be killed.
 Great envious thieves of suffering, their God its gourmand ...
 In the camp I lay on straw, breathed stench, and prayed
 to a Platonic realm beyond it
 of beautiful air. Then the Russians
 closed in, their artillery threshing
 our straw. They were one head and torso
 of a multiple being — a chimera at odds with itself,
 Man the Vile; the Germans another,
 irredeemably vile, while the Ivans
 cried when they saw us,
 brought doctors and food, were drunken and childlike
 yet pawing somewhat after meaning ...

Eventually Sartre refused to print my story.
 It wasn't because the truth of the Russian camps
 would bring despair to the French working class
 (his usual reason), but because I was a poet.
 He didn't like poets. "He's more than a poet,"
 my wife said. "But being a poet
 is a choice, and a choice one returns to,"
 said Sartre portentously, staring
 with the one eye that faced us.
 He seemed to believe a poet is like
 the Frenchman in Tucholsky's story,
 who, asked to draw a circle, drew
 a richly decorated oval. I added
 the obvious: "Not even a French poet."
 (By the time I was translated,
 the truth had also arrived.) "He's so very ugly,"

my wife said, as we circled, hungry,
the Jardin des Plantes. "He attracts many women,"
I answered as we waited in the rain
for a contact on the Boulevard Haussmann.
"That's hardly surprising," she said
beneath the empty sky of Cannes
years later, and solvent, but failing
(like so many of us barbarians and Sarmatians)
at France. "Still," I muttered,
"I liked his nonsense better than most."
By now the spires of Strasbourg and Oxford,
the canals of Stockholm had montaged
on a strange and delicate screen. Peace
had descended, atom bombs
delayed, storks no doubt roosted again in Prague.
Her cough, repeating an obscure word,
"flight" perhaps, "steppe," or "fear," even "love,"
jarred in that harmony; America
found it intolerable.
I wrote my sonnets anywhere and nowhere.
And it was evening, and it was morning, fifty years.

6

I seem to live on and on, and then
seem not to. My name-tags are now on my wrist
and charts. Meaninglessness
has at last caught up
with the lovely skyscrapers, and so
with me; I watch it on TV.
"Always polite," as a colleague advised,
I don't make them take
the crucifix from my wall; the figure there
is company, nothing more.
My wife still sits beside me and a bit behind
if I don't look too closely. I mourn
what my death will do to her,
what my life did — and then feel relieved.
In a last essay I point out
that poetry is always translation:
a way of escaping the great theme
your times hand you at gunpoint
so that (as they like to say here) you can't refuse;

and finding another, then realizing,
gradually, they are the same. She alone
reads it. My colleagues have turned away.
Carnap has turned away. General Witzleben
never comes. I have one other visitor,
but surely it can't be he,
breaking the rules, smoking ...
Why would Stalin sit by my bed,
the great Father of Peoples
weeping for some inconceivable reason?

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

SOMETHING ABOUT THE LIGHT

For Gaspar Orozco

Both of us, rooted in the desert. Here, light reveals parched soil and water; heat like blade scratching endless against the whetting-stone. The elderly reach a moment in which the sunlight is unbearable...it strips shade, exposes brittle stones, stirs naught, so that the odor of carrion in empty lots is thick and sour. That's when one knows that the old man or wife will retire to a darkened room, and emit a death-rattle when the moon is stark and feverish. But for the young, the azure heat, like the stray dogs and itineraries of wind whipping the litter and gospel of dust, opens every expanse. Communicants, they need neither bread nor stone, but the sun and delirium when stepping from dark chamber into the blinding atrium of noon.

GASPAR OROZCO

NOT FOR ME, BUT FOR YOU

Translated from the Spanish by Anthony Seidman

I seek a short film, a vision adrift, as unrepeatable as the star trapped in a snowflake. I seek a film never viewed, an unwritten word possessing the weight of a grain of sea salt or amaranth seed. I lack a movie, a poem—for don't they arrive from different roads yet reach the same destination?—as light as the black cherry's pit that falls onto porcelain plate, like the glass eye of a doll hidden in the umbrage of passing years. I search for the name of that luminosity so light that it may cradle the warmth of my son's little finger resting on my left arm.

FILM VIEWED ON CONEY ISLAND

Like a dragonfly shimmering within a jar, such is the woman held by your gaze. From her open hands there blossoms three flames. Petals that turn into thorns, thorns that turn into amethysts. At this hour, the violet of gasoline is the most sensible perfume; fire encircles the drawings of her body: mandorla. Slowly, the flame crosses her soul, which is ours as well. Lights respond to the tongue's sweet beckoning. In silence, the union ascends. Breath is a light. It is fitting that this fire never be extinguished.

That is what I witnessed on the island that evaporates at dawn.

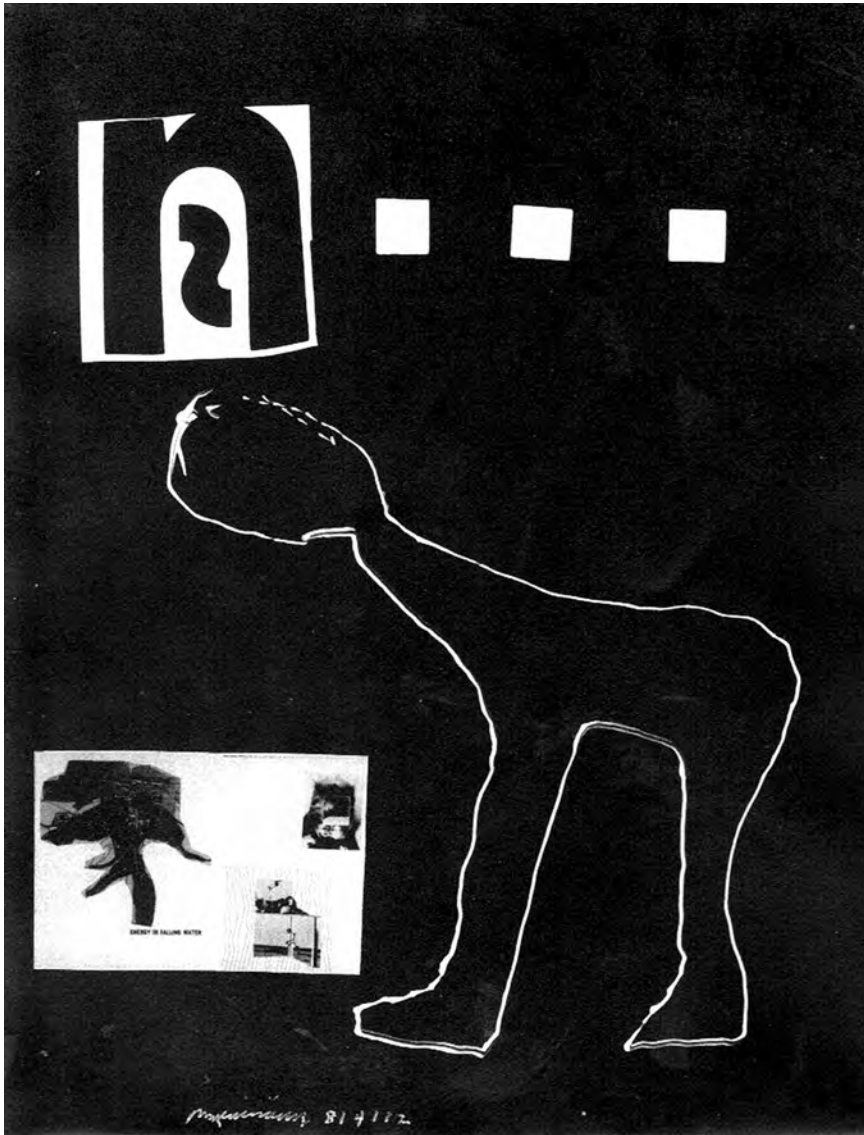
GASPAR OROZCO

KING WU PONDERES A PAGE THAT
PU SONGLING NEVER WROTE

Translated from the Spanish by Anthony Seidman

After the rain, in a garden fragrant with solitude, at the violet hour when
the lamps are lit, a ghost will approach you in order to murmur in your ear
the closing line of a poem that you had forgotten forever.

And the sorrow will remain.



Guy R. Beining: *The High Tier of N*

LOSS

shrunken bits of chicken skins lie wasting on this grey linoleum.
the water pan remains untouched.
the old man's long face becomes wan
as he shoves his dry corn flakes from side to side.
then with his thumb he smashes them and empties the bowl
 onto the floor—
imagines the comfort of the slapping of her tongue.

he twists his neck as if to suffocate himself—
attempts, once again, to whisper her familiar name.
but what he hears is the discordant caw of magpies as they threaten
his throat in retaliation for his decision.
flies pester the skins. he is reluctant to slap at them.
he attempts instead to vacuum them up as he putters about
 with his old hoover

poking its hose into every corner
where her brittle hair has mounted into dust bunnies the size of rats.
he presses his nose against the front window.
fogs the glass. waits...waits...dozes.
scratches his belly.
licks the back of his hand till it is raw pink.

mrs. hollings makes her usual daily visit from next door.
in the shade of the huge cottonwood tree, just ten feet from the window,
she drops bread crusts, a cup of boiled peas
and some kind of creamy yellow leftovers.
his breathing hastens.
he pants and drools.

in the kitchen, he longs to be greeted with a pat upon his head.
the room seems tall and unwelcoming:
her freshly laundered bedsack stinking of harsh detergent—
neatly folded—ready to be stashed away in the garage
till he has the gumption to replace her.
a well-chewed green racquetball lies atop her bed.

he bounces the ball off his old black leather slipper,
then drops to his knees to keenly study it
as it rolls beneath the refrigerator.
his hand is too large to retrieve it.
the corn flakes and chicken scraps have disappeared.
her water pan has been scrubbed to a steely sheen.
it now holds a banana and two bright red apples.

he is thirsty. he runs to the toilet bowl—stands over it
and stares stupidly down at his reflection. he suddenly needs to pee.
he trots to the back door and waits...and waits.
eventually he squats on the carpet but cannot release his stream.
he anxiously watches through the glass patio door
as mrs. hollings' longhaired tomcat struts along the porch rail,

then he returns to the toilet—squats—pees—
places his face into the bowl and enthusiastically laps up his water.
in the dark, he raids the trash basket. recovers the chicken skins
and wetsopped cereal from among empty containers,
wads of tinfoil, a pork bone, wet newsprint
and the splinters of a shattered coffee mug.

he cuts the tip of his left pinky finger on the ragged edge
of a beefstew can.
he licks the blood of the wound. he is attracted to the odor
of caffeine remains, wants to consume the bone
but does not wish to dine alone.
he attempts to call out her name but only the thin yowl of a coyote,
lost in an ancient time, comes forth.

he forgets to rinse the minty toothpaste from his mouth.
a white deposit clings to his lips. his bed seems much too big.
he wrestles his pillows—kicks furiously at his sheets till they
bind his ankles.

a loose mattress spring pokes his ribs.
he is uncomfortable on his belly and cannot sleep on his back.
he struggles to hear the sound of her panting.

dares not close his eyes without her watchful guard.
he rolls off the mattress' edge and down onto the floor.
studiously checks the area for snakes.
sniffs, tongues and chases his butt forwards.
turns and circles it back.
paws the carpet—and paws—

till it is roughed up and warm.
then curls flat upon his right side,
wraps his front feet over his eyes
and licks his groin
until he drifts and groans comfortably
into her usual nightmares.

DRAWING WHEAT

in his dirt
 dragging
 a harrow
 a perfect
 half-sphere
 to end
 each row
 to show
 his sky
 his love

in fresh
 manure
 wriggling
 his boots
 to reveal
 its history
 pleasuring
 its texture
 first its sheen
 then its
 rainbows

this boy's pencil
 on his big chief pad
 is not enough

for the lay of hay
 is in the small
 of his muscles
 the darkness
 of his barn
 in his wrists
 the rush of ditch water
 in his spine

the glory
 of the soil
 in his eyes
 on his tongue
is tingling
 through
 the fine bones
 of his fingers
like the thrill
 of thaw
 after freezing

while busting
 ice slabs
 on his bull's trough
holding a slab
 up to light
looking through it
 at his father
an odd
 wobbly thing
a man
 he does not know

though this boy's
 heritage
 is the farm
his blood
 was contrary
 at birth
infused
 with the delicacy
of the soul
 of an artist

his body
 his brush

the farm
 his masterpiece

so in long strokes
he pours
his wheat
across their pen

to write
his name
in cursive
five feet high

then releases
his hens
from their coop

watches them
spell out
his signature
for the sky

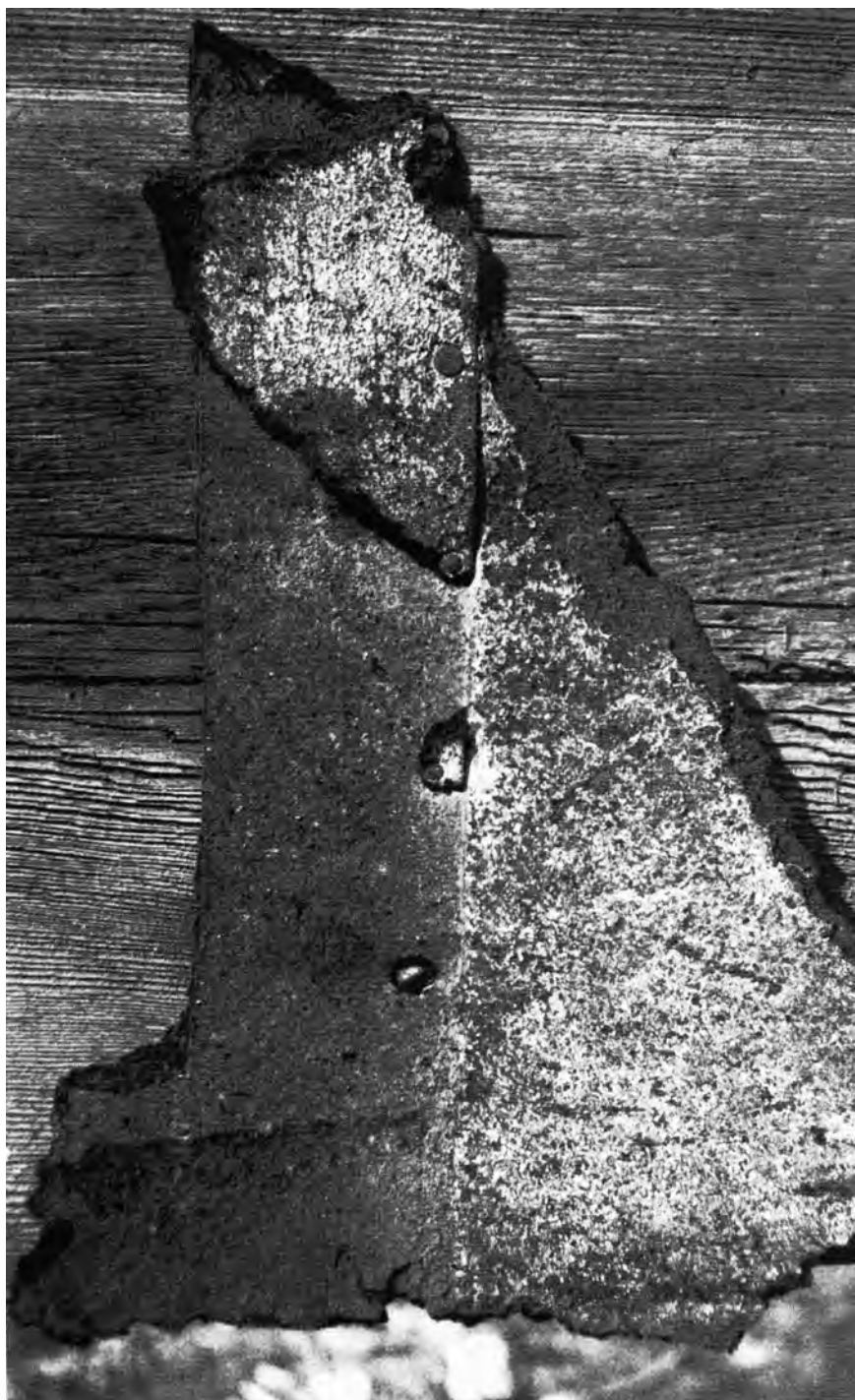
AN
ALOIS NOŽIČKA
PORTFOLIO



Alois Nožička: *Bezhlavě*



Alois Nožička: *Do Zdi*



Alois Nožička: *Harlekýn*



Alois Nožička: *Vytržené Souvislosti*



Alois Nožička: *Vzpomínka Na Mana Raye*



Alois Nožička: *from Severni Pobrezi, North Coast*



Guy R. Beining: *Fashion Bubble*

MARTHA KING

A WEDDING

If we could have done it over, we'd have gone off, down the beach somewhere, built a small cairn in the dunes, and come back married. Who'd ever dispute us? Who asks to see your actual wedding license? Heirs, in some Dickensian legal fight, that you'd never know about? Same-sex couples, bless 'em, need one to stave off humiliation. But that's another story.

When I think about our wedding, it's like the stuff art's made of. A mess, full of frustration, denial, lies. But when I tell it, even to myself, it comes out comedy: a movie Woody Allen couldn't make — he's too bourgeoisie. Louis Malle could have. He'd have kept all the distress just under the bizzaro surface. He'd have let his audience develop affection for each one of us even while everyone laughed.

First: absent parents, Esther and Mark King. Baz wrote his father a letter saying that he loved me, that he wanted to be with me, that we had decided to take this step together. We were going to marry and move from San Francisco to New York City. San Francisco was a fine town for writers, but a painter needed to be in New York, he explained. I was twenty. Baz was twenty-two. He wrote this out at our kitchen table on Lombard Street, laboriously, on a lined yellow legal pad. He let me see it before it was mailed, and I cried.

His father replied using his characteristic two-color typewriter ribbon. The letters in all caps were bright red.

"A very interesting letter from you. You couldn't tell me HER NAME?" (Oh migod, I realized, I'd never noticed.) "And yes, we would like to know IS SHE JEWISH?" (Oh migod, I looked at Baz. His father was a Socialist, he'd told me, and variously an agnostic, an atheist, a secularist, or a Reform Jew so radical he could never find a group that met his standards of liberality. Was this an *issue*?)

The letter went on, not getting better. All about Mark and Esther's lack of money, their unsatisfying life. Not once had Baz shown concern in sufficient quantity. The letter brimmed reproof.

One thing was clear. They had no intention of coming to San Francisco for a so-called wedding. Period.

Second absent parent: my father, Lambert.

I telephoned my mother and father to tell my news. The response was frosty. Lambert didn't get on the phone. Isabella said if I were going to do

this, the two of us should come home to Chapel Hill immediately. Basil should meet the whole family there and, she said, “face Lambert.” If we were still set on marrying after that, we should have a real wedding at their house on Greenwood Road.

I said no.

I had no intention of using our carefully hoarded “back to New York” money for a trip to Chapel Hill so Baz could be grilled on the hottest fire my parents could kindle. Well, I was told, that’s pure cowardice—a sign of immaturity and shaky resolve.

A few days later, my mother called back. If Baz wouldn’t come to Chapel Hill to meet Lambert, Lambert was certainly not coming to San Francisco to meet *him*. But she would come.

You’ll see Isabella at the San Francisco airport. She is not yet fifty, with an extravagant hardy exterior and uptown socialite manners, surrounding a well of insecurity. A tall ruddy woman, with a throaty voice, given to quick wisecracks, sometimes exactly on and sometimes agonizingly off. Though born in the 20th century, she had absorbed whole fundamentally Edwardian notions of caste and privilege in her childhood and never really moderated them. It had been ten years since Lambert left New York City and his place in the uptown publishing world for small town Southern academia, yet Isabella was still struggling to get the two of them established in the inbred world Chapel Hill was at that time.

This trip to San Francisco was not an offer to stand up for me. She’d promised Lambert she could stop this marriage; her feminine sympathy and worldly persuasion would work far better than his bullying. She gleams with this expectation as she arrives and she is way out on a limb with her boast. She and I had been wary combatants since *my* childhood. There was no ground of trust or intimacy to exploit.

Back in Chapel Hill, from within a cloud of male privilege, Lambert dismissed her scheme, accurately enough. Then he went to the bank to borrow money to pay for her trip. Moving to Chapel Hill had involved a spectacular cut in Lambert’s paycheck. They were chronically close to the edge, fudging their upper middleclass appearances from month to month.

Next person in this caste should be our best man: Tom Field. We both knew him separately from Black Mountain College, where Baz and I had never overlapped. Tom had endeared himself to me my first week.

I’d arranged with Wes Huss, school treasurer, to model for the life drawing class, as I had no money at all for tuition. The money I’d brought with me would be needed to feed myself, Wes had explained. The dining hall was closed and everyone was on their own to work out buying food for themselves. Life drawing class seemed okay to me, generous of the

school, even. I'd modeled for university art classes in Chapel Hill, in a modest bathing suit or wearing my dance-class leotards. This was the middle fifties, remember, when no state university would have tolerated nudes. It wasn't until I walked into the studio where Joe Fiore was holding the class that it dawned on me the eight guys sitting at their drawing boards weren't expecting me to pose in a bathing suit. I retreated to the bathroom, shucked my clothes, took a deep breath and walked out. I didn't even have a cardigan to drape over my shoulders for the march to the platform. During my first pose Tom ducked out. He returned in a few minutes bringing me his dressing gown. Dark blue. White polka dots. A gift. Somehow letting me know without any embarrassment on his part that a model normally walks to the stand in a robe, takes it off after climbing up, becoming by virtue of the conventions a "model," not a naked girl.

Tom had endeared himself to Baz as well. A year before he and I met, Baz had fled San Francisco, scared, drunken, exhausted — determined to try mind-suicide. He gave Tom all his brushes, canvases, and paints. It was over, he said. Baz hid out in his parents' house in Detroit for months, and by and by recovered his health and nerve. When he came back West Tom had all his things waiting for him. He'd even cleaned the brushes.

Tom was a brilliant painter, Ralph Thomas Field; Tom was also Black Mountain's village idiot; doughy body, drawling Midwestern speech, keeping his dawdling manner and androgynous persona among all the testosterone addicted zip gunners of Black Mountain College. Here's Tom in his McCallister Street kitchen gently mixing martinis in a large Japanese teapot. Here's Tom taking forever to carefully brush his rabbit teeth, then stopping to crush his morning eggshells for his houseplants, to fuss at his brushes in their cans of turpentine before he'll leave with us for a day of roaming. And here's Tom in front of a canvas almost as big as his apartment wall — the very opposite of epicene, bumbling, or alcoholic. Here he is a masterful, inventive dancer, crackling with energy.

Tom was one of the few young men of North Beach for whom the merchant marine remained a life solution. Briefly at the end of the fifties, shipping out was seen as a brilliant way to make a free life in art possible. Six months out could buy as much as a year on shore. Everyone said.

The poet Michael McClure jumped his first ship after a week, as soon as it got to Hawaii. The painter Paul Alexander stuck out a three-month cruise—and said never again. Reality bit one man after another; and the craze was at end by the time Baz completed the training needed to qualify. Able seaman didn't take much time, but he'd gone for cook's helper papers. That meant merchant marine cook school.

He had graduated just a few weeks before I met him.

Baz regaled me with descriptions of his classmates. Jailbirds, drifters, down and outers. Under the watchful eyes of a master cook, with forearms

big as Popeye's, they all learned how to make radish roses and patterned butterballs. Also meatloaf and mashed potatoes for a hundred people. Five days a week, the cook school students made lunch for administrators of the San Francisco Board of Education. Then, decked out in chef cloches and clean white aprons, they served them in their cafeteria. Baz, no stranger to overnight lock-ups, was actually the only member of his class who wasn't a convicted felon. He should have gotten the message from their constant practiced cruelty to each other, but it took an actual ticket for a yearlong cruise to wake him up.

He was waiting at the Seaman's Union Hall in Oakland for the bus to take the crew out to their ship, when he looked at the faces up and down the Union Hall bar and the mist cleared. Get out now, because sooner or later someone would push one of his hot buttons. He'd be killed. So he asked to be scratched and that was the end of his marine career.

But not of Tom's.

In going out to sea, Tom had found a perfect connection for his constant disconnect. He had no difficulty keeping a distance from his unstable shipmates. He was as unplugged as Baz was wired and wasn't provoked by the bullying, prejudice, or blatant self-deception of these uneasy working men. In fact, he shared many of their sex and identity terrors. Suspension of social norms on the shifting body of the sea worked for all of them; you didn't have to be queer or not queer, you could fuck or be fucked as convenient. All was shifting and transitory. So ship out Tom did, over and over. By the time Baz and I decided to marry, he was already working up the long ladder to his master's papers.

But being Tom, he'd missed two scheduled lifeboat certification days.

We wanted to marry on March 7, the day Baz had arrived in the United States at the age of eleven. We compromised on the 6th, because that year the 7th was a Sunday, when municipal marriages were not performed. Tom's last chance to qualify for the lifeboat certificate was March 6. He had to go.

John Ryan will take his place.

Go close-up on John: his bluish white skin, crooked teeth, cig-stained fingers. He is infinitely social, politically savvy, personally miserable. Black-Irish good looks—thick hair, brows, and lashes—setting off dark China-blue eyes. He is gay and exudes a calm acceptance of himself totally rare in those dark times, even in art scenes. But John is personally miserable: he cannot write. Moreover, two years ago, the love of his life died miserably of infectious hepatitis, and John cannot reconcile his helplessness and rage. He's a nonpracticing Socialist Catholic who hates church hierarchy too much to ever consider being a priest, but he longs to be of service almost as much as he craves the ecstasy of art. So John is

always on the scene. He can tell funny stories for hours at a stretch, sipping whiskey and never seeming drunk. He can listen to everything; he knows everyone. In a blue nimbus of cigarette smoke, John presides as head night bartender at Henri's Vesuvio on Columbus Avenue. Unofficial mayor of the Beach. Of course he wanted to be in on our wedding. I was not known well, but Baz was. Baz had the imprimatur of Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan—an aura of value. Moreover, he moved easily through the petty criminal demi-monde topped off by outcaste poets that was North Beach at the time. Of course, John will fill in for Tom.

There is no maid of honor. Who could have made *that* claim? There are two ostensible matrons, both of whom helped produce the wedding party, but neither of whom came to the actual wedding. Tense and brilliant dark Sue Rosen (who later, briefly, married the writer Ron Loewinsohn) and Saxon blondy Dora, the motherly, the practical. She would sometime later marry a fabulously odd painter named Russell Fitzgerald, friend of Jack Spicer, and part of a vanguard who left San Francisco for Vancouver after Spicer's death.

Our premarital counseling is provided by John Wieners. The filmmaker should show us meeting on Columbus Avenue. John looked far younger than his age when he was young, and the man we encounter on the street is a delicate bird, with a prominent hook nose, smooth forehead, and curling dancing eyes. He will write all the work in *The Hotel Wentley Poems* three months from now. The book will be published a little later in the year. But we already know what a poet he is. And we're excited. We tell John we're getting married. He looks worried. Then asks us each for our place and date of birth, which we give him. The time of day? We both guess. He pulls a pocket-sized astrology reference book from his inside jacket pocket.

"You'll be fine," he says after ruffling some pages. "It works." He wreathes in smiles and kisses us solemnly on our foreheads.

I'm not sure how the filmmaker should handle the doppelgangers, the shadow couple who were married with us. They can't be left out, but their appearance is limited to the wedding morning: A furtive looking man with a small, pale, dumpy girl, pudgy for a junkie I was thinking, showing a bit of pregnant belly. His street name is Hube the Cube. A small-time dealer and big-time creep. I didn't know her name then or now. I suppose I heard their formal names in the course of that morning, but I mostly recall Hube scurrying frantically among the waiting wedding parties, and then spotting Baz. They'd come to the courthouse without a witness.

Before Baz can duck him, which he certainly wants to do, Isabella jumps in all girlish with, "Oh, we'll have a double wedding with your friends."

In the courthouse bathroom Isabella wants to let me know that she can *tell* my friend is pregnant. Did I know? she whispers. “I don’t really know her,” I say.

Double wedding! What made her act so goddamn cute? The Beach is full of this story: Hube is getting paid for this. Her father, some heavy banker or investment broker, is fronting large bills to protect his family’s social position. Her parents have been told he’s the father. They weren’t even lovers, but they both loved their smack, and were pocketing a lot of cash as part of the arrangement. Six months later, after we’d left San Francisco, the deal was off. A baby arrived and it was clear that the actual dad was African American.

I’m not sure if this movie would run chronologically or chop up time, back and forth. I’m not sure how to lay this out in words without using “and then we went.” Would you film that movie trope, San Francisco from the air? Show western sunlight streaming into the arrivals area at the airport? Would you cut back for a two-shot to show Isabella, deafened from the plane, and too hyped up to realize how loudly she is shouting “Are you pregnant?” at me.

“I’m sorry, I can’t HEAR YOU,” she goes on, ignoring my shaking head, oblivious of all the faces turning toward us.

You’d surely want to film Isabella in the hotel bar. Ron Loewinsohn had once been a bus boy at this hotel. One of the nice old, then quite inexpensive, small hotels just off Union Square. Isabella had been trapped in bone-dry Chapel Hill. There, even the “nice” restaurants, which could supply actual wine glasses, required their patrons to stash their shameful unChristian booze in brown paper bags underneath the table. Here, she could sit in a dark wood-paneled bar at a little table with white tablecloth, order a dry martini, light a cigarette, and lose herself in a lost, older life. Isabella did a lot of bars that week, and restaurants too, which have always been jewels in San Francisco.

Fortified, she gets down to business that first afternoon. It’s a two-pronged attack. First, why do I want to marry so soon and so young, especially as, she finally absorbs it, no, I wasn’t pregnant? And her ace, which she shows early. Why don’t Baz and I just go ahead and move to New York? “You two could live together,” she says conspiratorially. “It’ll be our secret. I wouldn’t tell Lambert.”

In deference to the standards of the time, I have packed a little bag and moved in with a girlfriend of Sue’s. We’ve hidden the rest of my stuff at our place on Lombard so it can pass as “Basil’s apartment.”

“Well,” I say, “We’ve already been living together since last October.” She doesn’t take this in.

We planned a dinner at “Basil’s apartment” that night for their introduction. Baz cooked. He made roast chicken with crabmeat stuffing, one of his specialties. He had crusty bread and antipasto snacks from the deli down the street, and a good white wine.

“Are you sure he’s not a homo?” Isabella asks me in the cab back to her hotel.

She’s sincere. The good food, the nice way he poured wine, his manners, his entertaining conversation. It is clear she’s been expecting a Marlon Brando straight out of *Streetcar Named Desire*. A wild bull of a beatnik, who sasses civilized behavior.

Much later I will learn what’s up. Or some of it. A movie might use flashback techniques. This introductory evening was no blank slate. My old friend Avery had been in New York. Avery from high school. Avery from Chapel Hill. My old friend Avery had been in the Cedar Bar while I was in San Francisco, and among other adventures, she had slept with Fielding Dawson. I actually knew about this well before Isabella arrived. Avery and I wrote occasionally and I had been wowed by the world of coincidence that would bring Basil’s roommate from his first year at Black Mountain College into Avery Russell’s bed. The relationship hadn’t lasted very long and I was a bit disappointed. I never got sensible details from her, but I knew Avery was trying out a lot of possibilities in New York at the time, with men, with career.

It never occurred to me that she was also struggling for position back home in Chapel Hill. I thought she’d left that place behind as definitely as I had. I didn’t dream she’d tell tales to my parents. One didn’t break those rules.

But she had. Lurid stories of Basil King had been floated in my parents’ living room at Christmas vacation, when Avery came home to Chapel Hill to visit her parents. Now it was March. She must have pumped Fee dry and he must have been eager to spill for her, perhaps propelled by the crush he had on Baz. Baz excited him but horrified him too. At Black Mountain College, sixteen-year-old Baz had challenged Olson, argued, come up with unexpected ideas, and, at that time, there was no more devoted Charles Olson acolyte than Fee Dawson. Baz holding out against the spectacular ire and energy of Olson, was fire, was danger incarnate. And Avery must have been burning too that I had the jump on her by having as my boyfriend, a personage who figured not just in Fielding’s Black Mountain history but in the Cedar Bar gossip she was avidly soaking up. Avery had been moved by spite, impure and complicated.

On Wednesday Isabella switches ploys. Getting married means a wedding, no matter where or how you’re doing it. She insists that we go to I. Magnin, then the fanciest department store in town, and *register* at the bridal counter.

I am made to pick out a silver pattern. Mercifully, no single person in the family or among Lambert and Isabella's network of friends and business associates ever gave me a piece of that silver. But she isn't finished. I need something special to wear. A suit. A *good* suit, she says, because I'll have to get a job once we're in New York City. She's seeing me in pumps and white gloves, a Doris Day heroine, taking dictation from a powerful executive. The image both excites and repels her because she has never supported herself. She thinks she's forcing me to see reality.

I sulk into Better Suits. After a while, though, I actually find one I look good in: it's a nubby off-pink, with a knee-length skirt and a short boxy jacket. It's the kind of suit Jackie Kennedy would wear two or three years in the future.

Isabella absolutely refuses. I couldn't wear a suit like that to "the office." She picks out an olive green creation, with a long skirt and a fitted jacket. It has a scalloped collar and a peplum right across my ample hips. It's the most expensive suit in the store. I wear it on my wedding day. There are no photographs.

A few weeks later, Baz and I will spend an evening together cutting it up into tiny pieces. It really was "well made." I remember getting red welts between my fingers from the pressure it took to cut it.

San Francisco is seductive all through this. Civilized and beautiful. A slightly milky Pacific light over pastel buildings and dark green trees. Manicured palm trees in Union Square. Crowded sidewalks. Isabella has her borrowed money to spend. She asks us to pick out a nice restaurant, a treat for us and our best man on Thursday night. Tom, Baz and I enter as arranged. It's very French and very quiet, with dark gold curtains and attentive waiters. She's waiting for us drinking a cocktail.

She begins again. We should come to Chapel Hill first to meet the family. I crack. Before we've finished our soup she and I are screaming.

"I'm not marrying Lambert, I'm marrying Baz and I don't care what he does or doesn't think!" I said.

"He's your *father*. How dare you say that."

Then Baz gets in: "I can say worse. Fuck Lambert!"

"I do *not* approve of this marriage!" she shouts, banging the table with both hands. "And I will not attend. I'm going home."

Baz is icy: "You'll come to the wedding or you won't see Martha again."

I'd like to explode at Baz for this, but I won't give my mother such an edge.

She flings her napkin down and is off for the door. Tom jumps up and races after, taking her arm. They vanish.

The dining room is hushed, stunned, fascinated. I grab my napkin and burst into tears.

“He’ll take her back to the hotel,” Baz says.

I’m not worried about my mother being lost. I’m paralyzed with embarrassment and rage. “Plus she’s stuck us with the bill,” I snuffle from under the napkin. We’ll have to tell the snooty maitre d’ we have no way to pay. I want to dissolve like spilt water or disappear in a poof of smoke.

Someone puts a hand on my shoulder.

“Excuse us, please, for butting in, but we’d like to tell you something,” I hear.

I free my face enough to see an elegantly dressed middle-aged couple standing by our table.

“You marry him, dear, and be happy,” the woman says. “Don’t let that old bitch run your life.”

Shortly, our waiter pads over with two large brandies. “Your friends have settled the bill and sent these to you,” he tells us.

Over the brandies, Baz talks me into going to Isabella’s hotel. I say I’ll be boiled in oil first, but he says I’ll be sorry if she has to make good her threat.

Tom is in the room with her when we arrive. I’m not sure how he has managed this as sophisticated chitchat isn’t Tom’s thing, but he’s sitting in a chair, smoking, and seems quite comfortable. Isabella is resting on the bed. She’s ill, she tells me, looking very frightened.

I bring her a glass of water and an aspirin from her kit in the bathroom. We tell her we want her to be at the courthouse on Saturday morning at ten and she promises to do it. She arranges for me to buy a case of wine for the wedding party and gives me an open check. I move back into our apartment that night. Sometime on Friday I buy a pair of sexy black shoes.

Everyone should have a memorable wedding. The sky is deep blue; the municipal building dark and dusty. After marrying Hube the Cube to his partner the city judge is testy. We two had been party to that, with my mother signing as their witness, so what else were we party to? Communist Party, you can see him thinking. (Rotten commies.) Basil’s hair curls over the collar of his neat green corduroy suit. (Homo beatniks.) Baz is wearing a tie and a pair of expensive jodhpur boots. (Riding boots with a corduroy suit? Trust-fund scum.) We had a ring, which I wear still. It cost \$3 from a pawnshop in the Mission District, and I’d been wearing it since we bought it the previous week because the pawnbroker had so sweetly asked Baz to put it on me. I pull it off my finger and hand it to Baz. (Another sneer from the judge.)

He doesn’t get up but sits balefully behind his desk. We stand looking down at him. Isabella develops her church expression, a patently fake pious look, like a five-year-old telling a lie. She clasps her hands and picks at her thumb with her forefinger. Before we went into chambers, she’d opened

her silver cigarette case and selected a half-smoked butt. I thought cool John Ryan would wet his pants. "Not what you think, really not," I told him. "She's always trying to cut down." He doesn't believe me.

"Marriage is serious," the judge announces, glaring up at us. "I hope you two have thought this over."

"I've been trying to talk them out of it all week," my mother volunteers.

Cold pause.

I go red and clammy.

"Please get on with it," Baz says.

The language for a civil marriage is bogus, a phony Christian service, leeched of religious reference and larded with bureaucratic terminology. No plighting troths, or "with my body I thee worship": the State of California wanted Baz to say he'd honor the relationship forever and ever.

"Forever and *ever*?"

The judge shuts his book.

"If you don't want to do this, it's fine by me," he says.

"Forever," Baz manages.

"*And ever*," says the judge.

"And," says Baz. And then: "Ever."

I do mine in a fast monotone, and we are married. Back out in the lobby we wait for the signed certificate, and the judge's flunky comes up with an envelope for the judge's tip. "Forget about it," Baz says, his eyes smoking.

The flunky is horrified. "It's customary!"

"Well it isn't customary for me."

It's barely 11:30. My mother shepherds me and Baz, John, Hube, and Hube's bride to a restaurant nearby, barely open. It is filled with empty white tables set with lots of stemware waiting for the lunch crowd. Hube has also caught a glimpse of that silver cigarette case and he's trying to move in on Isabella. John and Baz block his way, which leaves us bunched together on one side of a table with the new wife alone on the other side.

Isabella orders champagne. The waitress looks frightened. Hube's wife quickly says she wants a coke. The waitress asks me for my i.d.

I didn't have one. If I had, it would have shown that I was a month and four days short of the magic twenty-one.

"I beg your pardon," my mother announces in her best Westchester contralto. "This is my daughter's wedding day and she's *having* champagne."

The waitress brings it and I do.

Pull back. Long shot of the table. Did anyone say "cheers?"

March 6, 1958.

That's enough movie, but there's always more to a short story. There was more to why my parents were so uptight. Fifteen years after our wedding,

over drinks in their Greenwood Road living room, my mother came out with it: Basil's mother Esther had written a letter to them as soon as she'd learned our plans.

Esther's letter said how sorry she was that the Davis's daughter was marrying her son. He was a juvenile delinquent, she wrote. She and Basil's father had tried everything to reform him. And nothing worked. "What were we to think?" Isabella asked us.

Only then did I understand how brave my cowardly mother had been that crazy week. And what a poor player she was, if a relationship with me was a prize she wanted, and I believe it was. In San Francisco she never told me about Avery, let alone about Esther's letter. She couldn't hear the little I tried to tell her. She had been paralyzed by circumstances that flouted too many of her treasured notions of social behavior. And so she muffed a huge chance to trust herself and me. That was our war, which never really ended.

Esther's war on Baz was something else. It erupted in rare, spectacularly sharp attacks. When Baz was four, she smashed his prized toy train, stamping on it until it was a ruin, ostensibly because he had not put on his overcoat when she asked. This marriage letter to my parents was of a piece with that. And soon after our wedding, she gave all his paintings away to a local Salvation Army. She reported this blandly as Baz excitedly led me up the stairs of their house in Detroit to show me the pictures that had been done at Black Mountain, paintings he'd done in high school, one of which had won a state-wide prize. Paintings he'd described to me. Paintings he had managed to ship home before setting out for the coast the fall Black Mountain folded. The upstairs closet was bare and the rooms had empty picture hooks in place. Mute witnesses to her act.

Her knives came out again in Brooklyn, ten years before her death, when she and Mark were living in the garden apartment of our house. One day Baz mentioned how much he loved her fluted silver candlesticks. She lit them every Friday. They had been in her family for generations and had been left to her by her mother. The next week, the candlesticks were gone. Esther told Baz she'd sent them to her brother as a gift. Her half-brother Ken, in California. Annie was, "his mother too," she said.

"Someday your nephew Nathan will get those candlesticks instead of your own granddaughters," Baz said, and she went quite white with shock. That effect of her spite had not occurred to her.

My mother's parting message to Baz was different. "You're the best thing that ever happened to our family," she told him from her nursing home bed when she was 91. "I think you're a Christian after all. You've forgiven us everything."

EDGAR CAGE

ON LOVING MY OWN MELANCHOLIA

Kept awake by the cold television,
a bottle of carbonated grapefruit,
cat swatting
 at lamp trying to get
 the light to move

I write my suicide note,
but without
 melodrama,
attempting the clarity
of pavement
 smashed against
 200 pound sack
of heart and entrails.

It will not be read over cockroach radio
or given its own electronic address
or printed in The Penny Saver.

It is pure flatulence, hatred
of the self grown too important,
much more obnoxious than
friendship,
 work,
 dinner,
 going to the horrible movies,
planning the next day's bouquet
of insults,
 my composition
a migration of bats
 crossing
 a trite interior sediment.

A teacher will say I lack
the intelligence for true
 self-destruction,
that I am no reader's friend,
I have no empathy,
no purity,
 no proper precipitation pattern
 scanned by leaves
 rigid in the lateness of caterpillars,
 no grammatical scent.

Why, you're no brighter than a match lit outside at noon!

And this from one belonging
to a list of five people
 dumber or less
 compassionate than the self.

But I go on writing like a deer
waiting for the bullet,

I go on writing what can be
shown only
 to ladies with pigeon sores
 who've also attempted sunset.

And I finish
 no longer fatal
 or even resembling
that medication against happiness
and accomplishment
rancid
 from the cupboard's warm autumn.

I have the fingerprints to a door
 in the tapeworm's house,
keratoconus chewing my corneas,
third-rate complaining skills,
 a poet's physique, ten dollars
 like ten small penises in my pocket.

I have never been happier
and more sad
having died this way,
having been
smeared into the blood
of a pencil
that found its name like this,

and read by a woman who listens even
when each word I've written
smells like drug store fauna
between the murderers buried
in my face with nothing
to do but nod and agree with
my underfed,
redundant
petunia rants
and emotionally complex decay
and threats against
the haiku lost so far.

FRANCINE WITTE

TURNING

The angels are flying south
for the winter, my father said,
pointing to the fast-moving clouds.

Just yesterday, they were the cotton
leftover from when God made bunnies.
I wanted to tell him it's the birds

that fly south and that angels don't feel
winter, and that bunnies are made of flesh
and fur and there's nothing about them

that they don't need. But that was
the moment my father became a person
to me, separate and on his way to dying,

already sinking into his own skin.
And me, seeing the last sands
of my childhood, not ready

to let go, just looked up at the sky,
told him the angels are beautiful,
as beautiful as the people they

once used to be.

MICHAEL ESTABROOK

FAST

I stood and watched the train
go by fast, so fast
against the cold blackness,
the stars above bright,
twinkling as stars do,
the snow below frozen hard, hard
as fossils beneath my feet.
I stood and watched the speeding train
thinking of my life going by fast, so fast,
a blurry streak like paint
smeared in a hurry
across eternity.

MICHAEL ESTABROOK

FIRE ESCAPE

Early gray morning sun,
a smudge in the sky,
nudges the city awake,
men bearing attaché cases stride along
in business suits, women carry purses,
a garbage truck throbs,
a tired bus spews smoke,
an occasional taxi horn honking.
I cannot yet hear any birds.
But I know there will be some
soon hopping about in the patches
of dirt beneath the few trees
guarding the street,
pecking, pecking, searching for food.
Yesterday in a crisp sky,
above a clutter of old buildings
I saw birds, a formation of ducks flying,
or maybe they were geese,
so pretty nevertheless, symmetrical
and precise as a Michelangelo drawing.
Out along the fire escape I notice
Lynn's row of flowerpots
with their dead flowers, brown leaves,
shrunken, wilted, hanging
lifeless and limp,
on this February morning in the City,
and think about spring,
wondering where the ducks, or the geese,
were going so early in the day.



David Chorlton: *The Pier*

MICHAEL J. VAUGHN

FISHING

Hector stands on the water,
thinking of Carmella,
who never quite came back.

She could pick a strawberry like
Segovia fixing harmonics.
She loved him, but only once.

He arrives at the pier,
ties his board to a piling and
climbs to his favorite table.

Carmella brings him a smile in
the shape of a rhombus,
a chowder that verges on majesty.

She says, Ask the question.
He says, Ever?
She says, No. Never.

Hector thinks back a tear.
Why do you do this?

She sets her hands on
his java shoulders.

On a night when the
moon was one-third gone,
three men took my youth.
My only sweetness is
telling you no.

He traces the outline of her
blood-red lips. In that case,
I will take the chowder.

The rhombus widens out to
one third of a moon.

A pelican bombs the harbor,
comes up empty.
Hector says,
Yes, it's like that.

CHARLIE MEHRHOFF

IN THE MONTH OF MARCH

In the month of March
just a few days before Spring
looking up at the tall maple,
at the lone leaf that survived
this northern winter.

I climb to take her
stem and all.
Will grind as fine as powder,
mix and bake
into a sourdough
loaf —

strength
for the family
this coming year.



David Chorlton: *The Meeting*

CHANGMING YUAN

SEASONAL STANZAS: SAWS

Summer: in her beehive-like room
so small that a yawning stretch
would readily awaken
the whole apartment building
she draws a picture on the wall
of a tremendous tree
that keeps growing
until it shoots up
from the cemented roof

Autumn: not unlike a giddy goat
wandering among the ruins
of a long lost civilization
you keep searching
in the central park
a way out of the tall weeds
as nature makes new york
into a mummy blue

Winter: after the storm
all dust hung up
in the crowded air
with his human face
frozen into a dot of dust
and a rising speckle of dust
melted into his face
to avoid this cold climate
of his antarctic dream
he relocated his naked soul
at the dawn of summer

Spring: like a raindrop
on a small lotus leaf
unable to find the spot
to settle itself down
in an early autumn shower
my little canoe drifts around
near the horizon
beyond the bare bay

J/J HASTAIN AND T THILLEMAN

TREATISE UPON THE AUTONOMOUS INDIGENOUS

“They can just as well and usually are for us, ordinary events of human life, with ordinary and clearly understandable feeling reactions and a just as ordinary meaning. The opposite of course is also true. An everyday event can, in a particular situation for a particular human being, amount to an archetypal revolution, an incursion of the soul.”

— Wolfgang Giegerich, “*What is Soul?*”

Sometimes as they flew the angels fell a bit before catching themselves again on the night air.

— j/j, from “*xems*”

Wriggling in depths of you your/ voice night’s dark also knows

— tt, from “*Shiru*”

A Community of Correspondence

We were interested in conducting an interview—but what began as a series of rather rote-based interrogations we eventually turned toward a philosophical discussion of the nature of poetry itself. Later, after months of corresponding, months of thrashing out position regarding the art, we both began to realize a defining moment working through us. That moment can best be seen as an examination of literature and art in a community-based awareness as opposed to a collective.

The commodification of the term community makes for not just a bit of suffering, but an extraordinary amount. Consuming essential factors of composition, the over-use and false application of collectivity, eats at the physical heart.

Creative acts are either defined or have a will which had from the first driven their newness, their appeal, toward the idea of contemporary. To be here and be of value here and now was not just an isolated, individual moment in the creative process, nor was the process coming out of the ideal of collectivity. It made itself known to us, through us, as contemporaneity by way of a passageway of artistic devotion not always articulate as zeitgeist, more rather the *geist* or *gist* which would hint at deeper reflexive capacities within the world.

What j/j and tt, the writers (come together to haunt each other's pages) became, now reads as a meditation upon knowing that there are not currently enough models for engagement of the ravenous *it*. Ravenous because it is set to consume caverns of the overlap of psyche and physical—to have focus be on the minute aspects of the whole—to gauge instant by instant, the flickering particles that push toward gesture—gesture which is itself push re society/ socialization OR solitude. In other words, ethics for proceeding in ways that do not diminish cosmic pursuit and only an individual body can authentically elaborate regarding what their cosmic pursuit/s are. Knowing this requires the seeker seeking—and moving forward into contemporaneity re what is known. This requires so much.

The subject is *not* part of any scene. What we discovered through our letter-writing was that beauty could not be isolated or put into a bag and finalized. All of the mechanical attributes of the art of poetry, (and that included the most intangible, like song or airy musics) were also part of a community of subject-matters whose transmissions shared a core experience. That experience was no longer an empirical device, meant to colonize outward; rather there was an inner drive toward the visionary. It was, in short, that

vision was part of an in-ness the likes of which demanded a new type of history in order to articulate or call itself forward, to make itself *toward*.

Working with infinity in order to make it able to be felt or sensed in/ as instant (in ways that are specific) became the radiating body of our correspondence. In order to find a type of eyes that ensure elucidation, we found need for embodying postures that honed each other's lyric. Postures are declarations and they most certainly are devotions. Postures are dual holdings. Ways to provide supportive alternates to dueling. Postures stitch together the otherwise rote-ritualized space of lyrical composition. In other words, we took our respective author's names and turned them into pages in a poise to touch one another's work *everywhere*.

As if we were setting ourselves up to be the first to ever engage the entire page in this way, each day became a kind of *asana* toward the prayer, toward the writing surface, then from surface to depth and beyond depth. What is beyond depth?

Instead of focusing the collection of letter and response upon a kind of civility only, we allowed each newest gesture to become a community of intentions. This then is the ravenous *it* becoming an image for each other, ready to elucidate at the edge (the other of the page) and then willingly be delivered back to the center, the core of the page (the other as specified, as volitioned spark and fire).

Treating retinas as mingled zones is a way to replace traditional regiments of many kinds. We were able to recognize in this kind of olden form of communication (arts & letters!) a way to disregard all technical aspects of writing, of careerism, of, in other words, thematics as dissociative value. There is no value in dissociating from the eye you reside in and must finally come to rest within in order to see.

Oh how many layers the synaesthetic give and take of our writing induced ("between letters and lines, and all around the blank margins, the spirit circulates free" (Kataz. *The Last Temptation of Christ*)). We can travel back, or rather in, discovering not only a mere chronology of our relationship to the page, but a presence which may or may not ever find its final word or phrase to be thus enshrined. The point is that meaning has moved into the body *not* as an isolated individual, but as a communal compound of impulse and impetus, of fractal word on the glowing underbelly of a cryptomaniacal culture. This movement into the body can be thought of as a toggling that is not bound to only two parts.

Now to talk a bit about the zone that our book created—is there a difference between freedom and *feeling* free? In other words, how much emancipation is interior sensation in relation to emancipation, and how much is it something that can be given or taken away by an exterior agency? This is important because the zone of our book is interested in upholding interior experiences of emancipation—not only upholding them, but discovering ways of supporting and nourishing them.

Opinion/ position about making poems:

To open the yawn into a caw or a yelp—a poem that is always a simultaneity or a multiplicity; a vision and a statement about the importance of need and embodiment as activist gestures. A movement from boredom or stasis into activated stance. This in order to show the synaesthesia of upholding and feeding as fully formed upon the act of giving and receiving. In other words, intending and integrating by way of offer. Stance *is* for offer, isn't it?

As simple as that may seem it is very much overlooked regarding the growth of visionary articulations. How to articulate the vineyard being transplanted into the bottom of a boat for example?

Looking at Wittgenstein's intimations that there is no such thing as 'private language' means we were intent on building and nourishing a mental/ heart space that has no words—but doing so by way of words.

When You Rain You Pour and That's Very Reassuring to Me

If there's any statement to be made it's the need to reach into your own whole life with and through someone else! To create and inhabit a place without inhibition; a place where it is possible to meet and never have to tell lies because every story there is held and holds an eggshell that can be overwhelmed and is universally fragile.

So, pieces as places. Places of radical body-permission where no one has to withhold. This means standing in the front of a car in the middle of the street if at that moment the rain is coming. In other words, the importance of staying to follow the summon through.

On Self and Dream

Self *can* be worshipped, which leads then, possibly, to worshipping worship, an oscillating vortex, a vacuum of all curiosity and exercise. Dreams, because they are not worshipped, but rather sought (to explicate, to unbury, to experience within the internal Self) are the self who has waded into the subjective waters, forever at the source of, yet, never needing to own that source except by the dried off Self-image.

Worship of self or of another's selvage (as method for proceeding ethically toward enlightenment) in this manner is not narcissism, is not misplaced, though it can require devotionist myopias. These myopias can be refining fire for deepening understanding, for removal of chasms and illusions of all types.

Dreams and self are both subjective, so are visions. So, to bring those three into worship-oriented proximity to each other, to enable their overlap, is to guarantee a mixed zone where manifold fruitions can come forth.

Selvage or Selva Oscura

These lights.

How the hems to any head-scarf were made to reflect the stars. Each and every thread of whatever color or persuasive twist, must be allowed to enter the sacred, the profane grotto. A place that is inclusive of wafts of all types.

The lowly can be brought high, not because of what position thinks itself as high, but because the light and gold alchemical threads which weave the head's adornment mean to display the *emanation of gender*.

Who would be vain enough to own one sex/ gender ID *over* another? It does happen, of course, in contemporary settings which is something that as occurrence, alternates can be made for. Attention paid to the weave which brings animus, brings syzygy upon the scene. Syzygy (the meeting and entwining of inner identities and even the identities worn in a moment, *us to them*) as opposed to a politic or religion of form.

Lost in a wood at the middle of one's age, embrace the myriad as if the myriad were your mother. The largess of weighty, milky stars will always play in melody a gracious host to your most troubled, your darkest renderings.

And when you find yourself *found* in the wood, right on the ohm-ing brink of the fire pine's burning—open all of your niches. The seeds which prior to that transitional brink, were shut tight inside the cones, need the high temperatures in order to release. Opening your niches while release is occurring will enable all that is accrued in you, to change. Morphology and its relation to experimental deifications.

the IT as Sky Burial- or, a Prism Becomes You

We renounce the face of relationship as one face only. No one face has come to us in this life, but many faces do come—to us. We no longer work for a cosmopolitan concept which outwardly manifests only one relation as its global content. We pursue a multi-faced manifold. A space of facets.

To eat and be eaten. In order to have the *eat* and the *to be eaten* able to occur simultaneously (as opposed to one after the other) there is need to guarantee that there are things to offer. Hand extending to awaiting hand with something in it. In order to guarantee that there are things to offer in this type of simultaneity-based context, there must be excess. Therefore, additive aspects must be created.

Our relation to things has been must be overwhelmed by the entrance of a partaking, a meal. Together we have discovered a place that is offered and offers, one to the other, not stopping at appearance. While many states of one to another can and are witnessed, it is the body after death which begins to become apparent. Or, a simile to the body after death. A body which reveals the true face out of the aspect of a lifetime of death-shroud and distorting ego.

The Tibetan highland ritual after death begins with the corpse, which has already retired all that is life. In this regard it has become a site that itself is no longer of the same quality of meaning as it was when it was inhabited as vehicle and drive to carry meaning forth. The mental lips don't retire when the physical lips are ravenously removed by vultures.

From the place of eating and being eaten (as a simultaneity) we can write and speak and talk of sight, of what the eye beholds, no longer within an ocular prison. This being how a prism becomes you.

Salience of a Non-Scene : Manifested Rain : a List From and for the Prism

- Find ways to leave the doors wide open *and* feel safe at the same time
- Obsess about embodying a voice that has space in it for the voice of the other/ others
- Slowly sew yourself a more relevant flag
- Write while naked, sing while naked, perform on stages naked
- Paint with honey
- If having one relationship constitutes the totality of citizenship then renounce your citizenship
- No one face has come to us in this life, but many faces do come—to us
- No longer work for a cosmopolitan concept which manifests only one of us as its global content
- Play *with* your instrument
- Slant does not erase a straight-edged razor but becomes its non-sublated vow to all architectures
- Respect for the intelligence of someone does not then become license *against* that someone
- If communication is what is prized, valued, traded upon, then stop hiding, stop *de-materializing*
- Hair on a hairbrush is gotten from an egg
- When eggs start to grow hair on their exteriors you will know you have begun to succeed
- Suck the crimson petal until your habitus crimps
- Place belief before judgment
- Grace before your pate
- In potent abilities of each other, stay, stay together before during and after all interpretation

indefinite becomings

allegiance

a flight

I wanted to create a psychic halo for the pineal gland, a beloved.

I wanted to increase the pineal gland's intimacies, to give
the pineal gland something to vibrate
in concord with in order to stimulate erotic states that are
relevant

to it

I wanted the pineal gland to be able to experience orgasms.
concerned with the genders
and identities of the sweet gland that is protected
by an animate cave. a cave
is an inverse protraction.

sometimes

I dream sensations that are more real in an ulterior than sensation
ever has been in any here.

this is development as a way to honor extremes
in systems
involves
envisaging one's own collective
corpuscles as primary
offering

at an ephemeral feast

like making images out of tones

like a specific image as an engorged

cosmic genital
eroticizing
an apparition in order to become
form
by way of congenital

ongoing
moment

neurotic hermeneutics

beats
made by bodies in bodiless states

it was never about
my

identity but about what I could be to you
fueling albumin
into
the opaque beak

the future fowl pricks
the you

in an underworld

this that puts indelible aching
in the body

leaking the always inside
tear or

clots are lore are sexual scriptures
densities

defenestrations

being tossed between
fire and snow

they become
tantric through viscous-ness
through applications
within an amass

naming
mounds

in order to find ways to sustain

different violinists
playing the same concerto all at once
with slight unforeseen enactments
of fermata
at varying times in their interpretations

to find
a place you feel
then to plant
seeds there and hope that they will someday
bud

flood
or any other replacement of

floor

beguine to begin
well their
voices
are in their wings

which are primary

to their cosmic selvage
but secondary to their
body
in form
here

a path
of strewn

pages
to follow to
to follow through

there is
a consonant crossing that is
quiet not

percussive

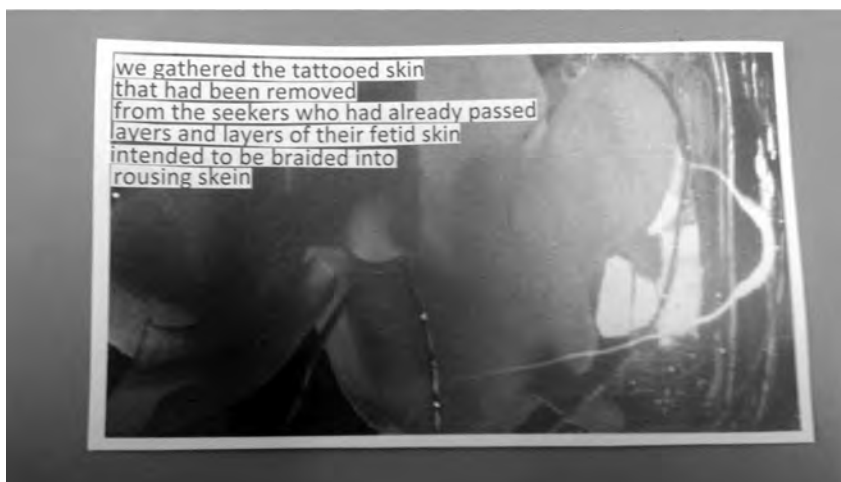
some things need
privacy
in order to evolve

others need
a me bared
is a thing
converting

minstrel

the mineral
minerva
a veil
draped over and grasping

a nacre boat



we gathered the tattooed skin
that had been removed
from the seekers who had already passed
layers and layers of their fetid skin
intended to be braided into
rousing skein

T. THILLEMAN

The temporal void opened for AHNÁHR

living souls

Swallowed whole by the systems of PLNIPLOI

and as PLNIPLOI grows

all's eclipsed by his influence

Dependent upon PLNIPLOI

worshipping

PLNIPLOI'S signal.

History eaten whole

his tiny tail-blade in

space the tongue's syllabus

Homo Sapien's relic sounds

so AHNÁHR protects SHIRU's singing coupling

in a tail-spin

colliding with colloidal spatter

names heart's age

shaking

off wet syllables

to record time's grave

ecstatic fable

A flaming hush

a room

it's the tent she chose to house her

*PLNIPLOI is not a god
And I refuse to be a part of your Godhead!*

SHIRU backs away
Un-touching the Glossary the pages
Before this impersonation ...

Or why the break from the one
hum
this sudden

impetuous

statement?

This is the central sitting of
Julia within the tent.

Rises from the nostrils now
Communal smoke

She held
She holds

Released from an opening mouth
She blows

The world away I
Am in the tent to witness

The signal moment
Storms approach outside the tent

At the flap I've gone to look and yet peering out see a flash of my own
precise image staring back in. The flap returned in a twisting motion
torqued such by the wild winds. The flap made finger-like signalings to
the center of the tent. There, Julia, in a stoney trance, still emitting a
smoke as if from many steppe-inhabitations, times and cycles of time,
generations. The pages of her poems now flung in the dusty, and, as the
flap buttoned shut, they clung to my feet as I read them, reaching for
them:

Dear North Star,

head-flashes

*confusions animated dust now
sprung from your face my hands*

wriggling in depths of you your

voice night's dark also knows

how heat informs my lode

oh a-lighting firm melodies

*all my yearning do, does release me to head-strong
and strung cities in circles of endless tribute,
fire-breathing me, true Queen dear TT*

your co-mystic, j/j



Guy R. Beining: *Last Moon Ends*

JEN KNOX

WE WOULD COME BACK AS RATS

Some mice have oversized ears or smaller frames and are rather adorable; rats are not. One, maybe cute maybe not, decided to burn down our house. Mouse or rat, we know that it chewed its way through an electrical wire that shorted, causing our one-story home to crumble into itself. Flames gobbled up the walls and stomped on the roof. We watched it fall, this house that kept our bodies warm most nights and also kept the secrets that made us cold. Grandma Murphy's musty old house that we'd inherited, that had been appreciating for the last six years and Mother had been planning to sell, was now a singed, ashy, sad pile of memories, and more: it was our windfall. We tried not to smile.

We were taken in for the night by Dr. Mecano, who lived two blocks away and had been a good friend of Grandma's. He explained to the police we'd been speaking to that he was like family. We agreed with limp shrugs because he was old and though we didn't know him well, he was a familiar face. He was drunk and overly apologetic for our bad luck. We huddled in his kitchen, eyeing his Maker's Mark and pretending to be heartbroken. But, we fancied ourselves survivors, not the sort to become attached to things. We believed in moving on and traveling light and adapting. We were looking on the bright side. We held hands and exchanged looks of sadness and exhilaration. Our mother was out of town on business, but she'd often said she hoped the old house would just blow away in a tornado. She joked like this, but in all jokes there is truth—or so we'd read.

Dr. Mecano tried to hit on us, one of us, so we had to leave. We cursed at him. One of us spat, the bubbly saliva landing on the shoulder of his robe. We hoped he would touch it on accident and that he wouldn't enjoy it, that it would make his stomach sink. We had tried to call our mother four times already, but we had to try again. And again. When she finally answered, she was irate. We told her the house burned down and she hung up. Our mother is used to us joking around. We suppose it's our own fault that she didn't believe us.

We had money, but we weren't old enough to stay at a nice hotel. We checked into a cheap one, one that didn't care. The receptionist stared at

us, as people do. We would stay here three days because that is how long our mother would stay gone. They were long, lonely days that were supposed to be spent in the comfort of our own home, but it was also interesting. We had saved our cellphones and the lock box where Mom kept some money because she didn't fully trust banks. We'd bought new clothes that were too flashy for high school, so we didn't go. We stayed at the motel and glared at the mustard-toothed old men that asked if they could accompany us to our room. We threatened one of them, said we'd set his dirty ass on fire if he didn't back up. He wasn't amused but he walked off angry. We'd made an enemy.

Mother came back and threw her hands in the air and ran around in a circle, and we looked at each other and handed her the well-emptied lock box. We told her about how it had started, how the firefighter had told us it was probably the result of a rodent, chewing a wire. She cried for what seemed like weeks. She shed so many tears that, cumulatively, they would have put out that fire. We told her that the insurance would be a good thing, give us a new start.

We'd seen our mother beaten into a corner in that burnt home, three years ago, by our step-father. The man who does not deserve to be named here, whose breath smelled like orange rinds and balloons, was always either incredibly happy or incredibly insane. He had two faces, and one was charming for a time. He was a clown, a party clown. He never hit us while wearing his makeup, but this is when he was most disturbing nonetheless. He paraded around town in white paint and bright colors, painted smile and hearty laughs, in front of smaller children who awed and oohed and cried. We cried when he returned to that house too many nights. Grandma had known him, too, and had approved. She never saw what we did. He left those years ago, but the house had his secrets, more secrets than we knew. We knew.

We wanted them as pets. We asked and, surprisingly, Mother agreed. That weekend, she danced in our new living room to music from the 80s and 90s, embarrassed us. We joined in. We lived and went to school. We watched them run in circles and thanked them, our pet rats. We knew one thing. We were Buddhists and believed in reincarnation—okay, we were not really Buddhists, not yet. We were not dedicated enough to claim a religion. What we knew was if there are reincarnations and we got the opportunity, we would come back as mice. Or better, as rats. We decided. We told our mother this, but we never told her about Dr. Mecano or the motel because we wanted to travel light.

PAUL B. ROTH

QUARTERS

Empty, your room settles under the dust it continues to collect in your absence. Overwhelmed by its aloneness, it accustoms itself to having its frayed rug, wobbly table, backless chair, and restless bed suspended in a floorless darkness. Here nothing escapes its life, only adapts to its own particulars.

Out here your words plunge deeper into this stone well than any bucket's been lowered, but because the thirst they quench is no match for earth's deserts, salt flats, jungles, even its polar ice caps, they're frustrated.

Never knowing such thirst confuses your sleeplessness with survival. How different it would be if those dotted highway lines dividing your heart east from west had not insisted on being raindrops streaking their perforated bodies diagonally across your closed north facing window.

Stones turn over on their own. Untangled from buried cables, poplar roots rupturing asphalt ooze sap where the painful body of your shadow once stood so tall.

PAUL B. ROTH

LOSING SIGHT OF THE LIGHT

Brake lights blinking on and off before disappearing around the corner, settle the house's silence into its rhythmic ticking. Clocks gobble up their energetic time while the darkness soaked up by tiny sponges of light from the digital displays belonging to laptops, touch-keypads, charging batteries, and stove-top timers almost entirely disappears.

Over time, although difficult like Chopin's étude in E-flat minor, pieces of new darkness you gather in one place, become that much harder to sustain in the face of so many quick match strikes, split-second gunflashes, vaporized comet tails or high-beam headlights illuminating your already spider-webbed windshield at the onset of a flashing thunderstorm.

It's not for you to say, but the more light your own darkness absorbs, the smaller its similar inner darkness becomes, the way lightning, after coughing up sparks and smoke, clings its lashing tentacles to every unsuspecting fire it sets.

PAUL B. ROTH

A DAY'S WORK

A hum dies. Silence becomes sound. All you've brought to this unsteady tabletop's become invisible without your touch.

You light a candle in its midst.

Where once copper whirled in its circuitry, light's now steered by impulses similar to the unexpected sound a pen drops from your cramped hand on this same wobbly table in the dark.

Shackles you pull off this table and fasten around your ankles and wrists to keep from falling off the planet, dig into your skin beneath your sleep until dawn bleeds its sky where your blood used to be.

Even what you've written's invisible without your touch.

PAUL B. ROTH

WHERE IT COMES FROM

No matter where you find it, you know your way around this darkness. As a child you believed it occupied space beyond Earth and in your room at bedtime what levitated an elephant just above the sharp end of a vertically held straight pin. You didn't know it existed elsewhere, or could exist anywhere else.

Now, where stars work their way past earth's horizon, you find it. Where light's pulsing bulges a hingeless door or where it glints off propeller blade reflections in opthalmic migraines, you find it. Where the water your kiss lifts from a night lake drips into short-lived ripples, you find it. Where millions of spit and soiled chewing gum marks blacken and splotch city sidewalks, you find it.

Voices that used to instruct you not to touch the moist undersides of spiny leaves, not to caress the relaxed tongues of attack dogs, are now demanding you live the way they live. You know their words carve deep gorges whose darkness you can never fill with your own. All you can do is bring your own life back to life.

PAUL B. ROTH

FOUND BY ONE

Rarely does she wear jewelry save a dazzling solar eclipse ring, a dangling pair of Pleiades earrings, Casseopeia braceletting her well-toned forearm, and the sparkling Himalayas brightening her right eye with their snow capped peaks in spite of bloodying her left with blue fetuses overturned trash cans spill into gutters along Calcutta or Culver City streetcorners.

Your only sight of her is inside yourself.

Unaware is she that you even exist.

The day she does see you, sees your eyes opened wide by lightning stained windows behind which you always waited, she's surprised at having never seen you before. Unable to notice her, only the darkness in which your closed door holds the room can be seen.

When the door she's pushing against bumps into you, her light fills the room's darkness with shadows you'd always thought of as words. You're stunned by how everything you used to let pass without stopping now forms a nest of light above the entrance from which you're unsure about stepping beyond.



Alois Nožička: *V koutku*

KRISTINA EHIN

A PRICELESS NEST

translated from the Estonian by Ilmar Lehtpere

I

A woman was lying in a dark room and felt rather than saw how an old black-barked pear tree was strewing delicately light blossoms outside the window. *As if someone was grating moonlight*, she thought, and a pleasant tremor passed through her breast. Suddenly a nightingale started singing on the pear tree so beautifully that the woman felt how a black, sweet feeling of love awoke again in her heart. Angrily she arrayed herself in the dark. A chain of pale snail shells round her neck. Tangerine-coloured bracelets round her wrists, opaque beads in her ears, and over all this ringing lustre a soft shawl, which helped her move without being heard. Barefoot she stepped onto the lawn and the cold dew somewhat cooled her fiery feelings.

I just simply can't... mumbled the woman. Her breast was throbbing so very hard, the pear tree scattering its fragrance so very madly, the nightingale chirruping far too beautifully. The woman stepped closer, stretched herself out and with her heated hand picked the brown bird off the branch. The woman's touch was so delicate and the nightingale was so deep in the spell of its own song that it didn't notice anything. With the other hand the woman grasped her left breast firmly and opened it like the cover of a secret drawer. Under her breast there was an empty space and this space was framed by strong cage walls. The woman put the nightingale into the cage and closed the breast door. Click. *A couple of hundred silver marks, more or less*, the woman thought and knew that now she could nod off in peace. Her heart was light again and free. The woman slept till dawn brightened, then washed in the amber garden bath, put her hair up adorned with silver flowers, put on her greenish-blue viper-patterned dress, picked up her little black bog-pearl case and stepped through the gate. The sun had already heated up the cobblestones when she got to town. Grey wooden houses lined the streets. A river flowed straight from the sea through the town and into another sea. The river carried foam-white branches and masts broken off ships in a gale; sea badgers and ocean foxes burrowed into the

clay banks and a raft drifted up and down the river drawn by a whale. So it had always been, beginning in the mists of time. And beginning in the mists of time women who didn't want to fall in love yet had come to this town to sell whatever it was that threatened to make them feel.

The woman stepped into the pub. She walked through the room and went behind the bar, opened the door and sat down on the snail sofa in the little room.

Very well, we'll take it, said the Blind Man, who was sitting opposite her in a birch chair, when the woman had taken the nightingale out of the cage in her breast and imprisoned it in a small iron cage on the table between them. The bird chirruped in a voice trembling with pain and its little beak snatched at the rays of sunlight that fell directly on the table from the only window in the room. *It sings well, a good bargain, I found it yesterday evening on a black pear tree*, the woman said with feigned indifference. The Blind Man piled the silver coins directly into the black case and the woman hurried away, not daring to admit to herself how the little bird's song had again filled her heart with mute longing.

From a tradesman she bought small, peculiar, transparent secret eyes and someone's curved ears that had a thin transparent surface like the leaf of a tree. When the woman went to bed that evening, she put the secret eyes in her ears and covered her closed eyes with the thin curved ears. The woman had a man who lay next to her like a hewn log. Like a hewn log this man rolled over onto her every night and the woman dutifully put up with rough touchings that fortunately were too robust to make her feel anything. This time however the man wanted to say something to the woman. His heart was full to the brim with feelings for his own dear wife, and he had been thinking for a long time how he could show her. He correctly sensed that he had still not managed to touch the land behind her eardrums, along which the road to her heart might lead. But the woman saw him through her secret eyes, bought with the money from the sale of the nightingale and now stuffed in her ears, and listened to him with the ears that had once belonged to who knows who and now tightly covered her beautiful eyes. No wonder then that nothing in the woman moved when the man once again rolled onto her like a dense, heavy tree trunk and whispered, breathing heavily in her ear, *I'm so in love with you, oh you're so ferociously beautiful, I'm waiting for you to grow older so I can marvel at you in peace without my eyes starting to hurt*.

The woman didn't hear him; she only saw the man's mouth and teeth with the aid of the secret eyes stuffed into her ears at the same time as her keen

new curved ears picked up a never before heard rustling in the room. With a deep sigh the tree trunk rolled off the woman and fell asleep with his mouth open like a tree hollow. The woman quickly removed her secret eyes and ears, dropped them on the floor next to the bed and listened again. There was no doubt about it — there was a snake in the room. It had slithered in through the window by the light of the moon. Now it undulated across the floor, and with a quick movement snapped up the woman's secret eyes and ears with its forked tongue and swallowed them down. Then it climbed up into the bed, wound its way onto the man's chest and slipped into the hollow of his mouth. *Common marsh adder, doesn't bother me*, the woman thought, and fell asleep.

The next morning her husband was like a new man. His eyes sparkled light green and a strange feeling came over the woman. *Your presence is making me feel strange, go somewhere else*, she said, putting on her normal tone of voice. But the man said nothing and just looked at her with a smile.

The woman went outside and started washing herself. But as soon as she touched the water in the amber bath it started boiling. She scalded her fingers and angrily went back inside. The man looked at her again, pulled the woman towards him and said, *Wonderful*.

What's wonderful? the woman asked, but the man didn't answer. He kissed her fervently and long, like never before. The adder slithered boldly from the man's mouth in between the woman's lips and filled, quivering, her throat and esophagus. The snake looked for a moment into the woman's stomach and backed quickly into the man again. The woman would have clawed the man but the tips of her fingers hurt and so instead she raised them high in the air. She pushed him away from her with her breast, quickly opened the door of her left breast with her teeth and leapt on the man so that he disappeared entirely into the cage of her heart. Click. The door of her breast closed.

I've brought you a log the size of a man, inside of which there is an adder, inside of which in turn there is... the woman said breathlessly, for this time she had come to town running. Quickly-quickly she wanted to sell what filled her heart and made it so heavy. She hadn't managed to open the door of her breast yet when the Blind Man answered, *This deal is no deal. I'm not buying this*. The woman was dismayed and took her leave. Her hands were throbbing with pain and she pressed them to her breast. *Adder, fie*, she whispered, and smiled unwillingly.

II

Come on, explain! The woman was breathing heavily, and nearly screamed at the man. She had opened the door of her breast and the man had climbed out onto the fluffy bedspread, which was covered with a greyish evening light. *Wait, just let me orient myself,* the man answered. He rose from the bed and stretched. He clicked his teeth together once, stepped out across the veranda into the yard, smelled the pear tree blossoms, smelled them again, ran around the house a few times, stepped onto the steps, thought again and ran off across the meadow, yellow with cowslips, into the forest.

There's a forest path knotted with tree roots that way full of hollows. Maybe he's taking his adder back, the woman thought. She lay down on the bedspread and was just beginning to feel like herself again when the man returned. *And? Did you get rid of that creature?* the woman asked, astir with expectation.

What creature? The woman didn't know what to answer. She got angry again, tied the man up and hoisted him up by the feet to hang from the ceiling.

Open your mouth, she commanded. The man thought he might as well just for the fun of it, and spread his jaws out wide. The woman had poured good whole milk into a bowl and put it invitingly on the floor. But the adder didn't appear. She drank the milk herself, untied the man, went outside and sighed heavily.

Maybe she'd got the feeling wrong? Maybe the snake was still inside her? Maybe it hadn't gone back into the man? It just could be... Her heart skipped a few beats; she filled her lungs with the velvet evening air and didn't notice how a swarm of nightingales had gathered on the black pear tree, all of them chirruping clearly and mercilessly about the beauty, the pain and the loss of freedom that grips lovers.

The adder stayed on to live in the woman and the man, filling them with secrets the cage in the woman's heart was incapable of holding and no milk was sweet enough to tempt out. It came and went as it pleased, it wandered unperturbed out of one and into the other. The woman didn't know how to explain the feelings that surged within her, but it seemed easier to make them her own than to struggle against them. She hoped and feared, loved and suffered until she seemed to turn into a log herself — a strong, knobbly sculpture of love, a priceless nest. The best one the adder had ever known.

ANTHONY SEIDMAN

POETRY FROM BEHIND THE FENCE: BORDER REFLECTIONS AND POETRY FROM TIJUANA, MEXICALI AND CIUDAD JUÁREZ

I

Limousine-Express...nothing could be further from the truth, yet that was the name of the bus company that left me at a dusty station in downtown El Paso: 12 hours of a diesel engine growling through a desert of dilapidated motels, gas stations and forlorn burger chains reminiscent of the photos of Ed Ruscha. While waiting for friend and wonderful editor, Bernardo Juárezgui, of *Bagatela Press* to pick me up, I crossed the street: there stood a red brick tenement with a grimy plaque commemorating the life and literature of Mariano Azuela. It was in that building he penned his classic novel about the Mexican Revolution, *Los de abajo*, while seeking refuge on the American side of the *Río Bravo*. And now bullets were flying once again in Juárez, a bloody fiesta of bullets, decapitations, torture and extortion. Azuela would not be surprised. In the courtyard of the building, the sheets and undershirts drying on laundry-wires rustled like flags of surrender. History, he might have added, abounds in repetitions with minor variations.

The apparent purpose of my visit at the start of this September, was to participate in a festival entitled *Literatura en el Bravo*, taking place in Ciudad Juárez. A deeper motive was to revisit that city where I had lived for three years, where my son was born, where I cemented friendships with writers who continue to amaze me with the taut, raw quality of their poetry. Their names, Martín Camps, Gaspar Orozco, Édgar Rincón Luna, and others, continue to shift things in the world of Mexican letters where a poetry that reads like diluted translations from Mallarmé is churned out from the nation's Death-Star of *kulchur*: Mexico City. An appropriate act of defiance, I suppose: to write a new, more sinewy poetry in the face of thugs, both in

uniform and without, who kidnap or murder in the name of drug money or to maintain the government's tenuous grip on a semblance of order.

Like any naïve North-American, I only had shards of the truth of what was going on in Juárez. Before Bernardo arrived at the bus station in order to cross me over into Mexico, I was still expecting to see the ruinous red-light district a few blocks from where I rented a two room house with a view of the concrete banks of the border and, farther off, the glistening bank towers in El Paso. During my absence from Juárez, I had continued to write at times about the city that seared itself into my psyche when I was in my early twenties. My scribbles emphasized the neon and smoke, the hard azure of the desert sky, the crackle and hiss from 24 hour taco stands, the suffocating heat, the smooth marble floors and cool atriums where the rich dined or danced, as well as the boulevards, bleak and endless, populated by industrial parks and American fast-food chains. If the child is the father of the man, as Wordsworth wrote, then the present is the stern father of impressions drugged in the narcotic haze of memory.

A decade ago, I started translating poets from Juárez. It sprung from a desire to learn more about the friends I had made. It was also a way to remember the scalding beauty and chaos of the city. For anyone hailing from colonial gems like Oaxaca or Guanajuato, Juárez was a snake-pit, a concrete wasteland, a hive where thieves, hustlers and drug dealers paraded. It was Bernardo who, on a bacchanalian foray to Chihuahua City in 1996, instructed me to say we had traveled from El Paso, rather than Juárez. *They'll regard us with less suspicion and hostility*, he assured me. It's no wonder that the only song celebrating Juárez as "number one" was composed by a grotesquely affected, yet brilliant performer. The city's quirks and energy are commensurate with such an oddity from the pop world. The poetry from Juárez, though, has always been abrasive, and it cuts like a jagged blade. It's an adage that the poem is more intelligent than the poet; the poem is also prescient of things to come. Perhaps for that reason, the Latin word for poet is *vates*, or "prophet." Prior to the explosion of the drug war, an ever-mounting death toll, and the razing of the city's historic downtown, Gaspar Orozco was already writing such lines as:

*If she approaches you
showing her filthy teeth
if the city approaches you
with her one eye
(that bitch has always been one eye'd)
kick her right in the liver
fire your images pointblank at her
so that your name doesn't appear
on today's list of the dead*

Other poets, such as Rincón Luna, spoke of the verb as a wall that protects as much as it isolates the poet. In his great poem “El Cerco,” or “The Enclosure,” Rincón Luna asserts: *when the night offered herself to you / you understood how / poetry was building us an enclosure / between the dust and the city*. An agonizing tone dominates much of Rincón Luna’s poetry, especially in his newest collection *Puño de Whiskey*, or *Fistful of Whiskey*, published by *Ediciones sin nombre*. It is the poetry of witness, of a voice of outrage. The dead, the mutilated, children orphaned or killed appear like shades gathering and approaching some intrepid intruder into the frigid, stubble fields beyond Acheron. They approach us, their faces red from being murdered, or stained by the blood of their loved ones. How can this continue? How can I continue waiting for peace, for a chance to sleep in peace, Edgar seems to be saying, while around him and every other Juarense, there encircles nothing but *immense holes in the pages and in what is said / days drawn by the absence in which we sleep / writing / waiting*.

The festival was to be a bright respite from this darkness. Being the first writer to arrive, I had an entire day to myself. I decided to walk from the hotel to the area of downtown close to where I used to live. The hotel where guests of the *Instituto de Cultura Chihuahuense* were offered lodging is a lavish one replete with garden gazebos, a pool, and a sumptuous buffet safe from the hungry gazes of the poor living in cinder blocks. Those *colonias* hunkered in the dusty hills with names like the *colonia Bella Vista*, the *Alta Vista* and *Anapra* have always been areas considered off-limits to those living in the rest of the city. For several years, I lived in the notorious *Bella Vista*. My house, close to the intersection of *Acacias* and *Cobre*, was a few blocks from the *Mariscal*...a narrow, ramshackle street that snaked its way from the international bridge to the public market a mile away. That street and its environs were teeming with brothels; cantinas; sidewalk stalls steaming with the odors of tripe and hog-maw tacos peppering the hot nights; liquor stores; cheap hotels that offered rooms for a few hours, as well as for the night. It was a district that employed thousands. The mortal core of this border town.

What I found out, though, on that first morning back in Juárez was that the city had razed the entire strip. Not even rubble remained. Was this a futile attempt on the part of the local politicians to clean up the image of Juárez? Most likely so, yet it clearly only added to the city’s unemployment, and it hardly made the downtown area any safer. Instead of the throng of American and Mexican soldiers on leave, tourists, locals and hustlers, a lugubrious silence reigned, even though it was an azure noon and a dusty breeze dried the sweat that had gathered on my brow. All around me stretched out empty lots of parched earth. The occasional shards of broken tile floors glistened. In a vacant lot where a strip-club and brothel called

Faustino's once stood, a concrete staircase circled up from the ground to an absent landing. I tried to imagine what these streets would now be like at midnight. I also realized that apart from a pedestrian far off in the distance, and one car rattling over a pothole, I was completely alone.

And for the first time, *I felt unsafe in Juárez.*

I place some emphasis on that phrase for the following reason: even though in the 90's I was a white American—a *güero*, or a straight-out *gabacho* to many—I walked at all hours of the night. Poet Martín Camps and I would meet with other friends at a bar on the *Mariscal* called *El Bombin* and spend hours talking while adrift in an atmosphere glistening with the silver teeth of barmaids, the clinking of bottles, and platters of free *carne asada* as a *botana*. Often, at two or three in the morning, we would make our way to his parents' house...they had practically adopted me, and after stumbling from downtown to their home close to the *Pronaf* district, Martín and I would sit at the kitchen table, serving ourselves leftovers of refried beans and *rajas con queso*. This trek was made dozens of times, yet my daily trek from Juárez to the University in El Paso, and back from El Paso into the *Bella Vista*, very often late at night, was made hundreds of times. Nothing ever happened to me. Perhaps that was mere luck. But as Lou Reed asserts in "Sweet Jane"... *Those were different times*. The international border was more fluid, the Mexican government had yet to declare war on the *narcos* under dubious motives, and the citizens of the United States were concerned about the stain on a blue dress.

With regards to the festival, I have the following to say: Its organization was excellent. The generosity and care of those assisting in the success of the festival was wonderful. The council for fine arts had a retinue of local citizens whose friendliness and eagerness to help was sincere. They greeted every request with a smile, despite all the excrement they had to swallow for the past few years in Juárez. The wine flowed, life was feast, as if we lived in some once-upon-a-time. We had yet to find Beauty bitter, and the poets hailing from Uruguay, France, Panama and elsewhere presented their works in universities, high schools, cultural centers and bookstores. Newspaper cameras flashed, writers were interviewed for radio broadcast, and I had the opportunity to present my work in the new *Centro Cultural Paso del Norte*...a structure of vast, high windows, murals, soft light cascading and marble floors mirroring metallic beams that reminded me of the Frank Gehry concert hall in downtown Los Angeles. And it was inside that building that I heard someone shout my name from the second floor.

I looked up and immediately recognized a friend by the name of J (for his own safety, I won't provide his true name, as reprisals continue to be inflicted upon Juárez citizens for speaking out against corruption). It had been years since I had last seen him, and he jogged down the stairs to greet me with a hand slap and a hug. He was dressed in a uniform consisting of

blue overalls, and I learned that he was working at the ticket booth for the theater. After joking with me that he was going to set a disco ball above me and flash strobe lights while I intoned my poems, I asked him to tell me how he was doing. His answer was when I truly grasped that we, the writers invited, had been sheltered and protected by the representatives of the cultural institution. With misgivings, I had noticed the armed troops and federal police on every corner; having lived in Juárez, I already knew that a man bearing arms is always a dangerous man, even if he is in uniform. The citizens in Juárez knew to trust no one. But I had no idea how bad things could be.

J began to recount a nightmare that had occurred to him and his wife, and one which was all too familiar to many Juarenses. One night, a block from his house, some *federales* pulled him over. His car had American plates, and they assured him that they only wanted to verify that he possessed the pink slip for the car. When J explained that he had the paper work back home, the agents told him to leave the car and return with the documents. By the time he came back, accompanied by his wife to serve as a witness, the agents had their weapons drawn, and several wrestled him against the car and cuffed him. They had planted cocaine under the driver's seat, and J was now officially a *narco*. He was arrested. His car, confiscated. For several days, he was imprisoned, while his wife and family tried their best to contact him, contact the authorities, find a way to get him out. As always in Mexico, what was expected on their part was a sizeable *mordida*, the slang term for a bribe, yet literally meaning a "bite." When the *federales* finally contacted J's wife, they set the price at 10,000 American dollars for J's release, as well as for the return of their car. A week passed by. Everyone tried to gather enough money; in this case, the *federales* settled for 4,000 dollars...J was released... yet the car is now the property of an agent who must have a fetish for the used, American cars that Juarenses often purchase in El Paso...one of the few advantages from living on the border.

How does one continue? One can't continue, yet one does. For us foreigners—visiting writers nonetheless—we had the luxury of being driven in a fleet of large vans. At check-points, soldiers or *federales* armed with machine guns, stopped our vans, peeked inside, yet waved us on. Even though we moved fluidly from celebration to celebration, and slept every night in immaculate white sheets, our bellies full, our lips red with mirth and wine, the writers in the van would tense up at every check point. The driver would always flash a beguiling smile back at us, assuring us with that very *norteño* understatement: *No pasa nada*. After one such encounter with a platoon of troops, one of the poetesses in the van asserted that although she was scared, we were here to show our support for Juárez, and start the healing process with poetry. I kept my mouth shut, yet the comment smacked, at the very least, of the sentimental, if not of the

outrageously callous. If any poetry is to do such a miracle, it had better be written by the poets of Juárez, and it will be a poetry that will make *Howl* seem like a flamboyant fizzle. I understood at that moment, and I still believe, that we were merely tourists, and that we had, at best, contributed a small heap of stones to the rebuilding of the city. To assume anything more would be patronizing, and it would also imply a lack of faith in this city that has grown hard in the heat, and has survived wars, a revolution, mass murder, exploitation at the hand of international corporations....

Juárez is not a little soft city, as Martín Camps wrote. What it is, he best sums up with the following lines: *Ciudad Juárez is a canine city / it barks deep from within memory / with a regiment of fangs protruding from its muzzle. / Some say this city's violent / yet they know nothing of how they pull the trigger / or stab with an ice-pick.* At times, the desert is beautiful, despite all the murder it conceals. Sometimes one is lucky enough to behold a crimson sunset, yet *in the rearview mirror of a sedan rusting in a forgotten junkyard.*

Would you be willing to peer into that looking glass?

Addendum

Recently, I have participated in several readings and festivals in Tijuana. The visits to Tijuana were due largely to Martín Camps, who insisted that Tijuana—stirring back to life after a season of violence as gruesome as that which has been plaguing Juárez—was a place where wonderful poetry was being written. And true, the literature, music and theater of Tijuana has blossomed for several decades because the city was always considered to be beyond the edge of the Republic, and in the neglected purlieus of the country's history. That is, it was safe from the federal government's fine arts councils and scholarships; the culture and literature was, and has been, autochthonic, whereas Juárez has always carried the weight of the Mexican revolution, sparkling with the gunfire of Pancho Villa, the brief residency of president Benito Juárez, and an existence dating to the 1600's as an important crossing, or "pass," across the *rio bravo*.

In Tijuana, it has been an honor and pleasure to meet and work with such poets as Roberto Castillo Udiarte and Alfonso García Cortez. Moreover, it is with pleasure that I include translations of several poems by Tijuana poets superbly rendered by poet, translator and cultural promoter David Shook. (Shook also has a mustache which makes one familiar with Mexican poetry think of Salvador Díaz Mirón.)

All of the poets in the following selection are widely published, and some have already appeared in translated format in journals and anthologies in the States and elsewhere. The curious reader, in this era of light-speed info, can find detailed biographical information and publications with little

effort. Upon first completing a selection of translations by poets from Ciudad Juárez, I couldn't resist the temptation to include poets from Mexicali and Tijuana in order to give a clear sense of the vitality of the poetry written from several major cities on the border between Mexico and the United States.

All poems from pages 186-226 have been translated from the Spanish by Anthony Seidman, except where noted.

ROBERTO CASTILLO

UDIARTE (TECATE, 1951)

ZONA NORTE**

A world where everyone was an accomplice and where the most minor act, the most insignificant and smallest of their movements and actions, was undertaken in order to cloak the true and fearful condition of each one of them.

—José Revueltas

*

What you have never
wanted to say
is scribbled
on public bathroom walls.

*

Stinking of piss
and litter
the urban nomad
sings from his corner, there,
where his dreams of being an emperor
take on flesh tonight
and the stray dogs
admire the sparkle
of his glass crown.

*

The ancient man
drags his feet
across dirt and glass shards.

He's forgotten his name,
age, family...
the only thing he has left:
pride in being alive
and a small bottle of liquor.

*

These very hands you see
making this tequila bottle
seem so tiny
defended me from Death itself
one moonless night.

However,
these enormous hands
were in 33 fights
and lost every one.

*

Each weekend
she changes her name, her corner.
Since the age of fifteen
she has grown old
and you don't recognize her now on the street;
she's that woman in the blue dress
whom, one winter night,
you forgot to pay.

*

Between beers
the woman dances;
the men sweat and pant
their rancid breath.

(The *norteño* ballad
drags itself under the tables
and scatters through the curtain
which struggles to be a door.)

A midget, holding a great grudge,
approaches the woman,
shatters a bottle against her.

*

To ask for another beer,
or listen to the blind man playing the piano,
as well as his fifty-something singer
belting out a nameless bolero.

The map of their lives,
umbrage of sobbing and glass shards,
clouds braided to the legs of a piano with
yellow and black keys
out of tune,
while on the dance floor
an elderly couple dances and
relives something I can't see.

*

As always,
when the last bottle falls
so too
will all of the masks.

***Zona norte: the red-light district in Tijuana*

ROBERTO CASTILLO UDIARTE

LIZARD TAIL BLUES

*Its red-hot frenzy
of an infinite spiral
dies, is reborn,—
lizard tail blues—
from the jukebox for us
(into the infernal interior
which chews it, returns it)
from one anguish to another anguish*
—Francisco Morales

Reptiliary

1

No use
trying to ignore
the lizard;
sooner or later it'll
arrive without even
knocking the door.

2

With barely a sound,
dragging itself and
crawling up
the steps:
subterranean sadness.

3

With azure skin,
greenish black tail,
it slowly
approaches,
sits up on two hind
paws and peers
into my eyes;
it recognizes me,
I recognize myself:
lizard tail blues.

4

For several days
my heart has shared
much in common with
a barbershop,
the shuttered drugstore,
and empty parking lot.

*

Dirty plates,
yellow napkins,
cigarettes, mother-of-pearl ashtrays,
a once-bitten fruit,
the mouse caught in a trap,
echo of laughter in the corner,
and the slight warmth of chairs:
daily ruins.

*

This morning
upon opening the door to Tuesday,
a yellow dog in winter
suffering his death throes.
His eyes
 gaze at something I can't comprehend,
something
 that has to do with December

and not the tepidness of my coffee.
I am his last vision:
and before him, I kneel.

*

Mornings,
cold coffee, socks
missing pairs,
pants filthy
with grease and mud;
mornings with a dark wallet.

Nights
warm beer,
cigarette butts, closed shops
and the book I can't find;
nights
in which anger
silently
sits on my table
and awaits dawn.

*

There are days
in which a rage
viciously tears at
my armpits,
and crushes my stomach.
Days
in which the routine
plays itself out
while my comb
triumphantly
accumulates more of my hair.

*

Cars honking,
the water shut off,
delays with the paychecks,
search warrants,

imprisonment and
sentimental shooting spree,
freedom on parole,
and the death of friends
are some of the things
I loathe:
they're
that cotton stuffing
coming out from the seams
of a ragdoll
some call reality.

JOSÉ JAVIER VILLARREAL (TIJUANA, 1959)

TIJUANA

for Roberto Castillo Udiarte

This city wounds like a fishbone stuck in our throats,
like the man passing by, fear written all over his face.
She wounds us like love and its armies,
like angels hopelessly forsaken.
She's the woman who strips us naked by the sea,
the rain of March, the two storms of Summer,
the blow forcing our eyes open, and the kiss sealing our lips.
She's infamy and resentment's monument,
the dog that spooked us when walking back home from school,
the one we sometimes discern in the stare of the man beside us.
This city is built upon the sweat and dreams of our parents,
upon a girl's raped body and the hand always poised for murder.
She grows like hate, like dust and rage,
like a wrathful sea that slips through your fingers.
She's the woman who passed by without noticing you,
who doesn't remember you,
the woman you always dissimulate,
yet to whom you address your verses.

MIGUEL ANGEL CHAVEZ LEON

(CIUDAD JUÁREZ, 1962)

FROM SAXOPHONE POEMS

Saxophone and Ruined Fridays

Today the saxophones let loose,
rhythms swaying to a *son*,
trains abandoned in rust,
telegrams dissolving in air,
eroticism drawn with innocence,
songs that kept on playing in some car,
and bread shared
by the clocks of dawn.

Saxophones inhabit
ruined Fridays.

Saxophonic Mythology I

When you see my last minute
speed across the eternal highways,
a saxophone melody will be there
with its brush-like eyes,
in full control of the miles ahead.
And there will be no signals for a time to cry,
nor arrows pointing to the destination.

From the night
there emerge liquid tigers
 seeking moist dreams.
They have been sent
 in order to shred the words uttered in bed.
With deep bites they will hunt down the love stories
 that have survived.
They will not leave any passion unscathed,
they will rob
 libidos,
 sheets,
 caresses,
 kisses,
 milk,
 wine,
 flowers,
 letters,
 memory itself.
Not a trace of dreams,
 semen
 nor tears will be left,
and all the sexual fluid of females
will be dried
by the wild
breath of the water tigers
sent to banish
the sole sacred
thing on earth:
 the saxophones dancing in your skin.

Sax 5

Night is a curse
inherited from that age
when man chopped down
the first tree
and saxophones didn't exist.

Sax 6

When it rains
one listens to the deathly dankness,
drops that shatter the stillness
of the departed.
Then they awaken
and commence weeping.
The only thing the deceased
can listen to
comes from the rain
and lost saxophones.

Sax 7

Used to conceal sadness,
awaken interred demons,
bury the dead,
amuse emperors and frigid queens,
keep time for the destructive marching of armies,
praise hero outlaws,
narrate the horrors of war,
humiliate the vanquished,
recall lovesickness and misfortune,
music
should return to inventing,
regress to its origin
of drunken saxophones.

Dreams

I have dreamt

the saxophone from which originated rain,
felt-covered tables for a game of pool,
yellow umbrellas dancing
in the patios of unhappy men.

I have dreams in which numbers
become dust nourishing ants.

I dream

silk trains

which refuse to set off,
flower rivers that are born
for those who cry during war.

I have dreamt

blood flooding

the windows of my enemies,
horses swollen with floods
that cross a forest of guitars
where there nests
my goddesses of clay,
made in the image and likeness
of my desires.

And I dreamt of Laura Delia,

the scent under her skirt,
the breathing of her skin
in those instants when
she is completely naked.

ALFONSO GARCIA CORTEZ

(TIJUANA, 1963)

THE CITY SMELLS OF YOU

The city smells of you, of your body
and the fleeting moistness you leave in my hands.

Let's say your odor accompanies my footsteps;
let's say it guides them.
Let's say that enmeshed among so many odors
the city retains, I distinguish yours.

And I trail your odor until I discover you
in dark corners
where death lurks, spying on us, and neighbors
watch us from afar.

The city smells of you, of your body.
There's a kiss of blood on every corner.

ALFONSO GARCIA CORTEZ

MOON LOOMING

Moon looming above the Tijuana night,
rotund, fat and brazen.

Conceited city:
if you watch the moon as she lowers down, seeking my block;
if she curls,—
ever so deftly,—
under the eaves of my house;
if she descends to the shore
if she gets into my bed or puts her foot in the water
city, don't worry, and
don't you shine your lights on her,
don't you deprive me of this blade cutting the night in two,
that rotund, fat and brazen, perhaps-to-bleed
moon looming above Tijuana.

ALFONSO GARCIA CORTEZ

PILGRAMAGE

I walk out to the street.

I search.

I look for myself in the gaze of strangers.

I play at recognizing myself in the perpetual wandering about
of their steps.

Within the sweat and dust with which they adorn

their wilted garments

I pursue myself.

Word by word I go behind myself.

Behind myself I go.

For a long time I have followed myself.

In order to recover myself, I invent new names,
deep transmutations,
paradoxes.

Perhaps,

and only perhaps,

I might not encounter myself.

Perhaps

this wandering and astonished vertex

might crawl about the city

in deep distress.

Just this shadow and myself.

Perhaps the insistent music from a radio

and the drawn-out siren from a police car

howling.

KARINA V. BALDERRÁBANO

(MEXICALI, 1969)

AUGUST IN TIJUANA

Beneath this intolerable heat
urban thoughts
travel slowly, impertinently
with the intention of being tossed
onto the empty asphalt

I open the door
yellow eyes confront me
black fur, streaked with gray
threaten to caress my feet
and I look away
yet it scolds me with its yowling
and I look at it again
hoping that it may say something
nothing to do with me

The neighbors sleep noisily
or make love in silence
my rest is
claustrophobic and scarce
sweat meanders through the paths
in the creases of my asphyxiated chest
thunder rattles my soul
I savor the rain that distracts me
and finds me brimming over with hope

and fleeting.

GASPAR OROZCO

(CHIHUAHUA, 1971)

FROM ABRIR FUEGO

If it approaches you
showing its filthy teeth
swallowing a swarm of glass down its gullet
if the city approaches you
with its eye,
(that bitch has always been one eye'd),
injecting the same old blood
kick it right in the liver
fire your images pointblank into it
and let it go streak the river with its blood
let it get lost with the shadow shattered between its paws
let it leave you alone
so at least you can check
if on that occasion,
(and only on that occasion),
your name doesn't appear
on today's list of the dead

*

I live on a street with a name
that is entirely foreign to me
I live in a neighborhood with a name
that strikes me as hostile
I live in a city with a name that's
resolutely imposter
resolutely enemy

the names here have declared war against me
letter by letter
 blow by blow
and I have no other option
but to start the destruction of this city
return to the ancient word
that I hear resounding
like the dazzle of a distant battle
blow by blow
 letter by letter

JORGE ORTEGA

(MEXICALI, 1974)

FLOWERY WAR*

Summer approaches:

I await you
in the warmth that inseminates the air
boiling atop the sacrificial flames
of one who slips a sun beneath his tongue.
Your name migrates, reaching my ears
like the rustle from immense trees stirred
by the evening breeze;
although the foliage proclaims you, no one
comprehends this lingua franca for the chosen...
yet my mind understands. In a few hours,
we will meet on some corner
of the citadel walls that intuit
the sum total of places you procure.
One need not agree on details;
to leave suffices, as to put key in ignition...
threads of premonition must guide
you blindly through nocturnal fjords
until lips may light upon a place
whose vestige I am at this very moment,
before something may come, ignite, and consume us.

* allusion to Aztec ceremonial wars enacted in order to capture sacrificial victims.

JORGE ORTEGA

MAGISTER OF SIGNS

*In vain I stay awake decoding
the world's alphabet.*

— Eugenio Montejo

The sky is a vast syllabary,
a great chalkboard of compact water
where aero-planes and birds inscribe
the fleeting sentence of their flight.
The clouds amalgamate a dialect
from errant vocables that the breeze
stirs or dissipates each evening,
like a finger turning the page of a journal.
We attend class by looking above;
something fugitive hides an example
of liberty or an invitation to a voyage
dictated by the wind's shell.
Night leaves rubble in the heavens,
sublime boulders and vaporous masses
that offer the reading of its body
in exchange for tribute: keeping vigil.

MARTÍN CAMPS

(CIUDAD JUÁREZ, 1974)

SMALL APPENDIX TO A GRAND, TIMELY POEM BY NESTOR PERLONGHER

*There are more dead people than living. And their numbers
are increasing. The living are getting rarer.*

— EUGENE IONESCO, *Rhinoceros*

In sewers, among rats,
in the cellars of the wealthy, an Explorer and a Suburban
parked in front of each mansion with paunch-shaped domes,
there are zombies.
Beneath the ties of bankers who splash on *Obsession for Men* cologne,
inside safes, next to heaps and heaps of dollars,
in the drawers where they hide pearls, deeds for houses,
gold ingots, diamond rings they loosened from
the fingers of their mothers,
there are zombies.
In trunks, in glove compartments, in tires, in the cracks
of cars, in the rear-view mirror, in the side-view mirror that reads:
Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear,
on hoods, alternators, in the air-conditioning, the radio and bumper,
there are zombies.
In leaves, among the roots, on the grass you cannot cross,
among red and yellow flowers, among cacti and thorns,
prickly pears that rot because no one eats them, among bushes,
cascades of black plastic bags,
there are zombies.
In those who say:

How about if I grease your palm?

One more for the road!

How do I get a backstage pass?...

there are zombies.

In empty notebooks belonging to high school students,
in battered briefcases of teachers,
in pockets of white collar workers
in bulky wallets with wads of cash,
there are zombies.

In movie theatres, bars, self-service stores,
in gyms, among chaste young women,
in churches with papal relics fragrant with holy oil
like the sizzle from a pan before frying fish,
there are zombies.

In the closets that...in the trunks for...

in the bicycles where...

there are zombies.

In the calm face of the generous, or the sourpuss face
of peddlers, among the thrift-shop clothes dealers,
the scrap-iron salesmen,
among janitors, recyclers, philosophers a priori,
there are zombies.

Across the hills where the sun sets, in the main canal
where the moon is reflected, among the fine desert sand,
in plastic bags, bottles of milk, chocolate-bar wrappers,
paper cups from *McDonalds*, dirty napkins,
Happy Meals, brown bags, cardboard, chewing gum,
phlegm, feces and urine,
there are zombies.

In the mopped corridors of public servants,
in the immaculate vestries of priests,
in the plush velvet booths of pimps,
at clandestine tables for cardsharps,
there are...yes, you guessed it...
zombies.

In phalanges, carpus, metacarpus,
biceps, clavicle, brain, neurons, red zone,
in the encephalogram, in the order of the central nervous system,
synapsis, neurons, in the finger pressing
with the same force as one presses a piano key,
or squeezes, the bullet flies, the bullet strikes its target,
there are zombies.

In the one selling the gunpowder, the one making the weapon,

the one welding, the one manufacturing hatreds, the one splitting
the atom, the one who presses “enter” so that the bombs fall,
there are zombies.

In distilleries, lap dances, monasteries,
prisons, seminaries and universities,
there are zombies.

In the rails beneath rocking trains,
in deep oil wells,
in underpasses, and creaking steps,
in asphalt potholes, in speed-bumps,
in avenues and stop signs, crosswalks,
Yield signs,
there are zombies.

In flashy rims, in drive-thru cafes,
in the calm cup of tea on an ebony table
where the powerful eat, in garbage cans,
in barrels, in blankets, in plastic bags,
there are zombies.

On the sill, in the gurgling river, in the dry square-shaped river,
in the computer missing keys, in newspaper stands,
in the voice of town criers, in the blackest clouds,
there are zombies.

In poetry contests, in rigged juries,
under the Oscar statuette, in the tuxedo of the Nobel Prize winner,
behind the bottle of *Bonafont* water, behind tables
with black tablecloths
where celebrity poets preside in eminence,
although they’re clean-shaven, they, too, are zombies.

In time wasted, in the people who wait for the train,
the one who awaits a truck full of hope,
in the first class section of a 747,
in cruise ship cabins with a view,
in limousines, big-rigs, motorcycles,
tanks, imported vans,
there are zombies.

In the postmodern poems abounding with white space,
those tidy deserts that the trees protest,
(heck, if they can’t fill the page, do their line-breaks
really need so much air?),
in colophons, in the *Nihil obstat*, in a book with a print-run
in the thousands,
in the ISBN, in taxes, in the bookstore, in boxes,
in the books that are not read,

there are zombies.

In the markets, on Wednesdays of fruits and vegetables,
among apples, pears, limes that seem ripe,
in the bloated, reduced-price oranges, on the line to weigh,
in the lactose aisle,
in the price of tortillas, the meat you can't even consider,
there are zombies.

In envelopes, postmarks, stamps,
keys, clean tables and dirty ones,
capped pipes, the wastepipe, the main canal,
The Channel of Miramontes, the Rio Bravo, the Rio Grande,
there are zombies.

Full of hope, in love, holding hands in plazas, in the embraces
of lovers in the back of bars, on dance floors, behind smiles,
(false traces of happiness),
between the legs of the girl with black, almost-fully-revealing stockings,
behind the black Ray-Bans of an adolescent,
between the delicate knees of a traveler,
in the bathroom where a beggar injects heroin into her arm,
in the dry leaf that falls on an autumn night
in a young man who doesn't know how to spell his name,
in a picture of light as burning water,
there are zombies.

In the streets of Juárez,
on Monterrey Hill,
the mouth of the river,
in the channels of Chihuahua,
in the clear waters of Cancun,
in Cenotes, in clouds, in fog, ships
and pyramids,
there are zombies.

But if Perlongher already said it, and better,
(*And just who the heck is he?*, 'cause
the name sounds Argentine, so says the cynic),
why beat a dead horse?

Let him look elsewhere,
because here, we swear, we perjure ourselves on this,
in this region, this zone, between these pages,
at this point of the century and at sea level,
that, here in this country, there are no
zombies, and the fact is that here,
we are very far,
nope,

not here,
officially, we roundly deny it
up to the final consequences
and results of a joint commission,
of an upstanding prosecutor's office,
it's the honest truth, really,
here
there are
no
zombies.
And if there were, we don't even see them.
Well, Abracadabra!
Open cadavers, open zombies.
You will see.
Every summer.
Surprise!
So many many
zombies.

ÉDGAR RINCÓN LUNA

(CIUDAD JUÁREZ, 1974)

THE ENCLOSURE

At a certain moment
after having left home
you thought that you had forgotten something
an object
something uncertain
and that it was necessary to turn back

Once in particular
while in the middle of childish games and joy
a word took you by surprise
and you turned your gaze elsewhere in search of it

Then with undeniable fear
a voice surprised you while you spoke
another voice
simply another

And when the vast and
traversable night offered herself to you
you became aware how
between the dust and the city
for us
poetry was building an enclosure

ÉDGAR RINCÓN LUNA

DEFINITION OF WAITING

I write about days
I write on its leopard haunches
accidents that don't take place
names of objects like
eyes of blind women gazing at the afternoon
nights that trace the empty ring in our souls
bland days
ash between fingers
as fragile as
the glass-pane of a voice
holes
immense holes in the pages and in what is said:
days drawn by the absence in which we sleep
writing

waiting

ÉDGAR RINCÓN LUNA

IT'S NIGHT AND THERE ARE NO REPTILES

There are things that amaze you
such as the absolute innocence with which a boy
shoots his best friend

the same street with its prowling cops and its strays
and music in the background

and so when a friend slowly falls
biting the dust
mom interrupts the denouement
supper's ready
and the boy becomes aware of his hunger
leaves the battle scene empty
supper can't wait
(death might)

there is something on the edge left from that cry
on nights that grow long
perhaps the simple absence of reptiles
or maybe remaining in that strange emptiness we are
almost
always

CÉSAR SILVA MÁRQUEZ

(CIUDAD JUAREZ, 1974)

THE ANGUISH OF WHAT'S BORN

in a cheap bar i watch a movie about convicts
and the screen is like a sun though it's 10 o'clock
at nite
a squandering of light, a stunning dove
like the woman tending the bar
whiskey embraces the scene and in the movie
everything smells like new
no one eats or drinks because everything is
circumstantial
because nobody will die during dinner
and nobody will escape when the convicts are drinking
everyone's like a centipede squeezing at danger,
the sumptuous rib that god immediately cloisters in
a bubbling spring
and which in the evening nourishes birds in the patio
and nourishes the danger of a razor's edge into the
astute brow
everyday they remember
those who once again will be important
they speak about the anguish of what's born
and guess that everything's alright
in the movie you can inexplicably hear an orchestra
you hear the ill-fated funereal dilate at the foot of
the screen
but here on the outside Sinatra sings just for us
12 years have passed on T.V. and the actors are old
the same thing happened here
my woman grew out her hair, and the drapes are
drab
fate is a lifeless body
and my cup drags in the years
i drink

CÉSAR SILVA MÁRQUEZ

FIRE

phosphor of the world,
necklace of words:

the fingers loosen,
the fingers write;

they dictate what I think,

they forge what I dictate.

WEREWOLF

i'm a grappling iron
i'm the miracle in which fear crosses itself
the wound sniffing its own blood and devouring itself
i'm a thread that catches on fire vertically

open up the door

ANTONIO FLORES SCHROEDER

(CHIHUAHUA, 1975)

THESE DAYS OF OURS

They killed the woman on the 13th
the last neighborhood dealer
a lean
 and porous ghost
from a thousand nights
now godforsaken
 (and without any good weed to sell).

Same thing happened to Doña María
wailing beside Pancho
when the extortionists came
to collect at their pharmacy every Friday.

Martín, the cop and owner of ten cars and
a mansion in the ruinous Hidalgo neighborhood
went mad one night
upon discovering his headless son.

My neighbor's nieces
never reached the movie theater,—
the reminder from a silencer
reached them at a traffic light.

Martina's boy will not be able to walk:
a stray bullet lodged into his spine,
nor will the son of Mario, my friend who's
still scrambling from the gunshots inside the mall.

And I
among the prodigious dead and calamities
can no longer be the same as I was yesterday;
I am now a bodiless borderland
stumbling over each pothole in the street and
and hopelessly dancing the *Noa-Noa**.

*Song which also shares the name of a song and the Juárez night club where Mexican Pop singer Juan Gabriel first became popular.

ANTONIO FLORES SCHROEDER

CROWS

For each bullet's thunder
there's an irrevocable mourning in my city
a ripping of asphyxiated moons
a silence that migrates to the public parks
and inhabits the nights belonging to children
Because of that
and only because of that
a knot of nails
ties up my throat while
from your windowpane
I inhale the smoke of my absence

DESERT CITY

There
amid the stench of gunpowder
and blood posing as a symbol
for a river-less city
a Phoenix appears
on the verge of flitting
among the machinegun tears
and sighs of lead

LAURA JÁUREGUI MARUETA

(TIJUANA, 1976)

I WANT TO EMBRACE THEM

There are four of us
seated
strangers
filling just one taxi's seat.
We travel without speaking to each other.

I consider them my sisters.
I want to embrace them.

All of us are aware
of what is savored on this seat:
four peaceful breaths
four damp gazes
four living women
chained
together through
our pierced ears.

Out of the corner of my eye
only the phosphorescence of the others' pupils
which make faces
and blink
bounces off our cheeks
in this quiet hall.
Once out of the taxi
we will never know who each other are.
Our teeth will not be known.
Never again will another seat
unite so much universe.

LAURA JÁUREGUI MARUETA

PRIMIPARA

I had never been with four men at once, I think while I am naked, my legs open with them surrounding me. What's happening to me hurts and I scream. I like it. I see and feel many hands over me. The only thing I do is scream, and open my legs, and before long I smile. My body sweats in this lit-up room. I breathe faster and faster. My husband isn't here, just me and these four men. My pain and gasping end when, finally, from between my legs they pull out the baby's head.

(Both poems translated from the Spanish by David Shook.)

LAURA JÁUREGUI MARUETA

I

In this city of immigrants
there's no such thing as local time.
Whenever I ask for the time
they give me one from another city.
No one's from around here.
Clocks belonging to the inhabitants
reveal the current hour in their native cities.
I, who live without a watch,
have no authority over time,

for time no longer belongs to us.

II

Couples saunter by,
on the corner,
of the 3rd Street night.
Children await them and then
stalk them down in order to
sell a flower.

(Translated from the Spanish by Anthony Seidman.)

YOHANNA JARAMILLO

(TIJUANA, 1979)

FROM DIARIOS DEL ESTE

5.

Te ves feliz y me gusta que seas feliz.
LOS PRISIONEROS

Inside my brain you're saved
nameless,
white gown in my dreams
always from corner to corner.

The h-less I hides beneath the earth,
beneath speech.

Not to change the gesture,
to achieve un-altering ordinariness,
to defend the inexistence of pain
and to imagine being subtle between your bones.

And like this... (they will say this summer 2011).

6.

I count the dust to know my age
on this dead planet
the Earth is the aged vehicle of our dead,
we are the cemetery of the Universe
the old friend that regenerates with his cry.

9.

Inn-filtrated

Their names drift away from their faces like clouds,
behind the rocks, rivers of dead, before the dead
our eyes and body speechless.

10.

Death is not who I'm waiting for
I am waiting, anxiously, to see that last vision
the one the infirmed hallucinate,
the one where they call out to their dead father.

I need to encapsulate time,
detain death until I encounter life,
it was sad to see my son born
and inform him: you're going to die.

12.

We have returned to the rocks,
to include ourselves in the body's future; to dust.

A sun dial in the middle of *Ojo de Agua*
to dance its time with old Tijuana.

Yesterday Sunday the *pulque*, the lamb, the *aguamiel*, the prickly pears.
Today Monday, red, the blood, the dead dogs,
their bellies filled with scavenging rats.
Tomorrow, of squirrels, of bobcats, of coyotes,
without mountains, without olive trees and Saints hung from a Beretta.

(Translated from the Spanish by David Shook)

JOSÉ RICO

(CIUDAD JUÁREZ, 1987)

P O R T

Today, on the patio of the San Juan Fort,
the coast's curve
is a line across the palm,
the wild crests of a distant wave
embrace and gnaw each other
like two sea beasts:
ash scatters from the waning sun.
And after so much distance, Luis Alberto,
and the desertion of your home,
you've come back to this country: everything
the water in the cliffs attempts
to substitute, all that was lost
among the north's carnivorous sands,
appears and settles in
to every swivel of the ocean,
and you come back
to see if life can be repaired
with jaranas, and with the breeze that licks our hair,
today, on the patio of the San Juan Fort.

The tidal water with the jostling seagulls
reminds me how the place where we were born
assigned us scorpions in one hand
and in the other, youth and time.
I think of how we touched the map,
expecting that the jolt of seaweed and
the baths of liquor would
unlock themselves to us.
Our skin abraded in the arid heat,
brimming with boredom and delays,
we said we'd travel south,
and suddenly the sand,
begrudging life, awoke,
and tore at spines and skulls, and rats emerged

out of the drainage.
And I remember, Luis Alberto, how
I couldn't bear the fear,
I left my family severed,
I severed the embraces,
I severed even the goodbyes.
I saw the automotive graveyards,
the wastelands, the fog across Durango,
Bajío, Zacatecas,
nocturnal Cuautitlán, the red
centipede
of the beltway.
Autistic, stuttering, I
turned circles in the south.
I searched for clarity, but still
the faces lodged themselves into the tar,
the trees were mannequins,
the shrapnel sounded anywhere I went,
the dunes and friezes, anywhere I went;
sand trickled from my hair.
And even from afar
I followed you.
And many times I called you
to ask about the world.

You rode your Vespa,
evading timetables of death.
The hot air scoured, the snow came down, you gathered
torture testimonies.
Tarantulas and gorgons
swallowed up the suburbs,
nothing restrained you, snow fell,
you wrote it down; the ban of pain
was lifted in your words.
There were rifles and dust storms
and one night they surrounded you,
they put you on your knees, facing away,
you realized you would die.

Far off, on a street of facades as elegant
as any tyrant, protected by
the flowers' purple shadow,
I heard the tangling of your fingers at your neck,
the clenching of your teeth, the code words
at your back. The wall gazed down at you,

a ski mask uttered numbers
with a sphinx's darkness,
and as you saw your final sight, what you were sure would be
your final sight, and as you breathed your final breath,
something rooted in
your forehead, something crossed the border with you,
wondering why they'd let you go,
and why this serpent of a country so
devoured itself.

You watched, from Texas,
the night in flames,
aswarm with lust and hatred.
Not even for the holes
they didn't open in your face
could you be thankful.
And from the switchblade's other side,
ashen with barriers and smog,
I injured others to compose myself
and I could not be happy.
The desert stretched between us
was the end.

But you came back.
You came to show me your afflictions,
your narcotics, your tattoos.
The pair we are no longer,
the pair that would ascend,
already drunk, to find their faces in the tide,
they bid farewell to us.
Today
San Juan de Ulúa
looks like the needle of a scale
that points toward dusk.
I look at you, Luis Alberto,
and know that it's in vain
for death to stamp upon our faces.
The breakers snap their necks against the quay.
The ocean singing with its mournful voice
somehow reminds me of my baptism.

(Translated from the Spanish by Robin Myers)



Alois Nožička: *Den Druhý*

SKIDROW PENTHOUSE 227



Guy R. Beining: *A Head With No Relief*

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE 134

the remark from
a high step
felt like slate
falling thru ones head

the electrical works
passed under
the jesus crossing,
under the scope
of insect seekers.
the speckled hand
was not so grand
& floated away.

there on the
cemetery steps one remembers
the infirmary stairs &
waiting for the skid
to take one down.

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE 135

raking over the
cremation sight, a
dog appeared & began
to sniff for bones.

between eaves, sparkling
notes trailed twilight.
a blossom thought
a question, a
bloom anticipated it.

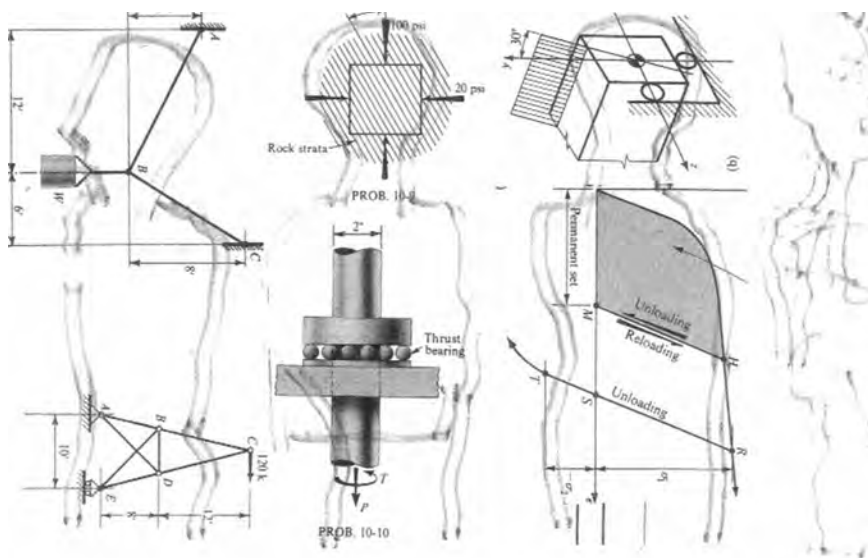
the worker took
his pocketwatch
& a screwdriver
plus one part
of the program.

in an itch
to wear everything
the last song
took all her apparel.

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE 138

once she had
undone the trap
the artist fled.
she was free
to glow in
powdered space
& would
no longer face
billowing lines
& shaded lies,
but a coral snake
slidered in & began
to unwind its wand
& she watched
in dismay as his
coldness took command.



EQUAL ENDS TO



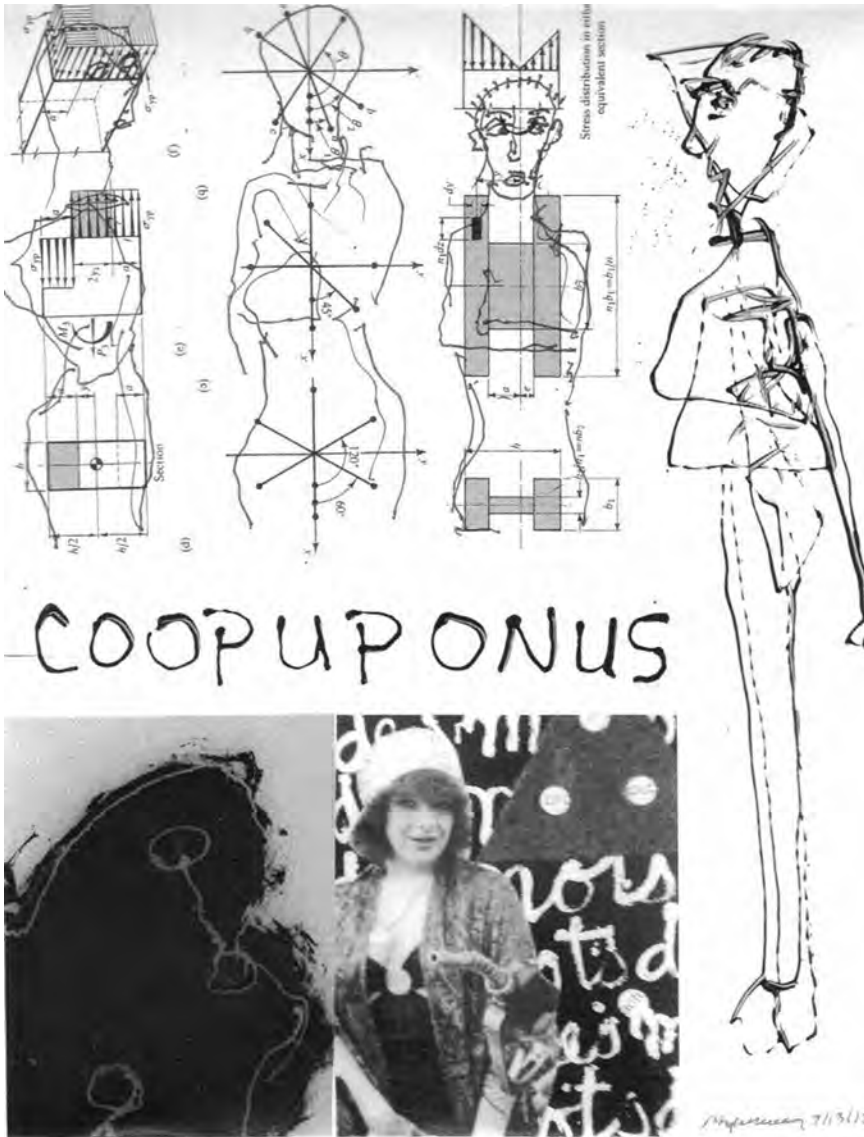
BORDER & PUZZLE

Guy R. Beining: *Equal Ends*

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE 141

exploding packets
& sacks were
carted from
the war front.
one remaining package
was thin as skin,
in the fifth
chamber of night
where it bellowed
from vibrating ribs.



Guy R. Beining: *Coopuponus*

GUY R. BEINING

FELT TONGUE 143

test the nerve
of her back
pushing past
shadows that
had been
their bed,
their terrain,
in the small
squabble of a
charred frame.



Lawrence Applebaum

JIM CORY

WHAT IF I'M NOT READY FOR ORGANIZED "EXERCISE"?

When people move, they carry their weight around.
Do you have fainting spells or extreme dizziness?
Five more pounds? "I look better now than
butter or cheese sauces." The easy way

to spot them [sitting or lying] is to take the stairs.
PLUS! "I tried asparagus and broccoli." TEAR
-OUT MEAL PLANNER. Coat a large nonstick skillet
with clutter. Your Leader will help you. In a large bowl, beat

Your Leader. WHY DOES THE skillet let
uncooked egg move? Tilt skillet. Bonus! 4 large egg whites! Minced worry,
high-fat subscriber. 1 medium
leek, plus sidetracked brownie
yields goddess. HELP! I'M

RUNNING OUT OF cook
ing spray. This book

discusses the most common situations that
avoid feelings of pudding. Using a spatula

you can swap
Leader for extra food. Deduct salad Your

greens. Transfer
deprivation. "When I went
on a vacation

to Aruba," right away that croissant.

HOW DOES THE candy bar
splatter future
guesswork? "There's no way

I'm giving it up." Add a pinch of buttocks. "600 pounds of"

minced garlic cloves

HELPS YOU STAY

ripe. Focus on favorite indulgences. Bonus! ½ tsp sea salt. As

with all food, use a push lawnmower

instead of the mall

entrance:

- Park on the stairs
- Release escalator
- Pace while whisking
- Get in the toys
- Take a few stoplights to the shop and back
- Bring the laundry as a getaway

HOW HAS ACTIVITY CHANGED a restaurant menu?

Tear it out & take it with you.

Fat & carbs

help you see at a glance that fruit

"was nudging me toward"

leftovers, five days a week. "Halloween

treats don't get

any cuter." Ingredients include :

- sister's wedding, unsweetened
- 28 oz. canned tomato slices
- leafy tools
- fat-free Zumba journey
- STIR FRY high blood pressure
- glass ham
- "I hate this."

Mix thoroughly. Preheat

doggie bags. Fit Thanksgiving into a favorite pair

of jeans. Evoke

cheekbones. "My sister-in-law never fails"

to indulge

what might go wrong. Bonus! When I get the urge to

put my hand on

hot aroma, feel

pork chops and add ginger.

BIRD•B•GONE

Barn Swallows are valuable neighbors.

They release extensive knowledge of the bird control industry and processes.

The male makes a nest of non-toxic mist, fog or scent, which the female lines with feathers.

There are many factors to consider when trying to deter or remove birds, such as 50 feet per box.

Loud rusty squawk

Starlings can offer advice on proper use and installation of products and help you find an installer during construction.

Installers have stout, longish bills and webbed feet.

They feed in shallow water, pastures and arable land.

About 40 of them today dive bombed our friendly dog after he saw an injured bird and went to look at it.

That's when the birds start to defecate over the side of the nest.

Loud rusty squawk

Bird droppings can carry up to 60 known mollusks and insects

Transmittable diseases are highly vocal, and have exhibited tool use behavior.

Product Features:

- Creates straw
- Will hiss when in danger
- 80 years of hands
- Suitable for blocking people from landing
- Electric jolt to bake off bacteria

Bird*B*Gone is proud to offer turkeys, especially males, who come up to the building and “peck” at the glass, sometimes until they have bloodied their beaks.

The beak is long, and pointed.

Our Bird Control Engineers continue to follow their parents about, begging for food and sometimes it’s quite startling.

Our Bird Control Engineers make a kur kur kur or gur gur gur sound.

They hunt airborne insects.

Both males and females sing.

TOM WEIGEL

A WINGED CHAIR

Hopeless chic change your colors
 wear anything but black
climate change is local
it's not chic to freeze in May
 live & learn
 PEREZ PRADO FOREVER
WHEN YOU HUM YOU PRODUCE SOMETHING
SO I listen in scrambled cellular realm
 to pass the donuts
 & step away
as the plot thickens
more castaways than Charles Dickens
it is the nature of a vise
 to be about me
think as late as today
 the river erasing the loitering cloud

6.19.12



the ticket
does not agree
with the stance.



Guy R. Beining: *Fitted*

TOM WEIGEL

SKULLS ROWING

In New England Halloween
is the longest season of all

so we search again 2:30 p.m.
for cat with fiddle

nose to the loadstone
one the builders threw away

No Pandora here
we are tired of location

what is easy because of you
is you in a round-about way

prototypical literacy
is on the horizon

no applause please we're skittish
note the Prince of Fizzle differs

though we hear the maker of marrow
& mirth is near by a length

TOM WEIGEL

RAMBLE

plot thinner paint thicker
a way to specify
what is missing never sleeps
but thanks heaps
for go between
for tip toeing
through path of scarlet tanagers
to boulders brooding
in Neolithic sleep
angry spook laden
megalith fertility markers
to lose the trail of mysteries
& pick it up again
emerging to light on the path
once more above the swamp

9.16.12

ANDREW KAUFMAN

SOUNDING THE NAMES

Since the language has no word list,
the village no school or history
of strangers, since the river
is the only real way there, the half-visible

sandy track beside it
in the dry season the only alternate...
Since the translated, phonetic
phrases I'd gotten were the wrong dialect,

when I arrived they sounded out the names
for what they could point to:
goats and chickens wandering around,
a bucket of dying fish, the pirogue

they caught them from. The word
in the desert for *water*
was *manna*, though I could not point
to *desert* since it was everywhere.

Sun and *moon*,
and the dry cow dung
gathered each morning
for cooking fuel were easy.

So were *hand*, *teeth*, *lips*,
tongue, and when Pama got to *breast*
she pushed aside her gown,
pinched her nipple, and waited

for me to repeat. *Chie*.
Chie—making my “*Ch*”
more guttural. *Chie*, *Chie*
to fix my inflection.

When I pointed to the palm tree
high above the mud huts,
I do not know if the word
they gave me was for *tree*, the clutch

of coconuts in its high groin,
or *green*, or *wind*, *wind*
ripping through fronds,
or *wind-blown sand*.

A boy pulled his pants down,
pointed to his penis,
and said the word slowly,
making sure I wrote it—

Cock? Dick? Penis?
Did they tell me *floor*
or *hard mud? Sky* or *blue?*
Money was clear or was it

Give me money—
when the hand waving Hello
deftly flipped to a jaunty
right angle with my chin.

Pama taught me
three types of bowls,
two types of fish traps,
the word for grinding millet

with pestle and mortar, words
for *bracelet* and *ring*.
Fuck was clear enough—
two fingers shoved

into the tight circle
of forefinger and thumb.
Her pantomime was clear
as a paragraph—pointing from her to me,

hands slowly swelling
her dress into a pregnant oval
at her stomach.
A long, rising vowel—

not a word
or else pure onomatopoeia—
a beatific smile
showing the missing

and discolored teeth, a hand
gesturing somewhere
beyond the river and desert,
the smile held so long

it froze from summer dream
to a half-toothless woman's
hopeless plea.
Two small boys took turns

mimicking seductive dances
until she shooed them off
with quick, low guttural syllables.
I had no way to ask the words

for *Why?* and *How?*
or to say, *I am leaving soon*,
so she wouldn't spend
half the day fixing my dinner—none

for *happy* or *sad*, *yesterday*
or *tomorrow*, none for the sea
between *talk* and *fuck*,
nor the desert between *gone* and *here*.



David Chorlton: *Night Arrest*

NAVA RENEK

ALL HALLOW'S EVE 1965

Mr. James probably thought I was just another nosey white social worker doing her good deed by working part-time in the projects. He didn't realize that I actually lived there and knew about the Swastika that had been painted on Mr. Kramer's door, or that my daughter played with the same kids he was now accusing of committing that heinous act. I'm sure he didn't know how much time I'd spent watching him and his friends, wondering how long it'd be before one of them showed up at the clinic.

"Halloween ain't nothin no more. I mean them kids running 'round the building don't got nothing to be 'fraid of: no Klu Klux Klan, no bounty hunters, no lynchings. Hell, you can't even get evicted from these apartments without a government lawsuit being filed against you, and if you say the right things in court, it could take years. Now, even us Negroes got rights."

I looked at him squarely, trying not to respond to his cynical remark, worried he might misinterpret my concern—maybe think I was laughing at him, so I just nodded, hoping to convey some sympathy.

"Well, tell that to the authorities. I never wanted to be living in these houses, each one of 'em a penitentiary climbing straight to the sky. Fourteen story cell blocks—that's what I call 'em—and we the prisoners inside. The government's kept their plan a secret. Most people don't know nothing about it. They acting like we's free to go about our business, but you know what? They've got us by the balls. We're stuck here like we on Rikers and ain't no one gonna get his day in court. Now Uncle Sam wants to pay for our food and clothing. Welfare. Gotta line up for Food Stamps 'cause they think we ain't got the ability to get food any other way. Sign up for poverty right here on the dotted line."

It's not like I hadn't heard this argument before: welfare was weakening poor people's drive to do for themselves; but the economic system was stacked against us. Impoverished people (no matter what color) needed a break. Subsidized housing helped a lot of us get back on our feet. Mr. James might not have known how many people like my husband and I were

out fighting for basic civil rights. The country was in the midst of a social revolution, but I didn't think he wanted me to explain that to him.

"You know why they keep us fed? Cause they think we ain't good enough to work at no high paying job. It's best to herd us into these projects, give us free monies, let us have our babies. Then, when we go looking for employment and don't find nothing, we can't complain 'cause we got food on the table and a roof over our heads."

"Are you working now?"

Mr. James looked down and shook his head. "Oh, I tried looking. The last time wasn't so long ago neither. A few weeks, maybe. Someone give me a tip, so I went down to one of 'em warehouses in midtown advertising for a delivery boy. Now I ain't no boy, but I can walk these streets as good as any man. I know Manhattan from the Bronx to the Battery, so when I saw the boss in his long black coat, skull cap, and side curls, looking at me like I was Beelzebub, saying there weren't no jobs and I'd just spent my last fifteen cent to get down there for nothing, I wanted to wring his hairy neck. Them Jews got nerve. We been living in the United States longer than 'em. Just 'cause my granddaddy came in chains at the bottom of a boat, he act like he the king of the world. How come? I'll tell you why: It's the goddamn glory of the color of his skin. If you're white, you're all right. If you're black, stand back cause you ain't gonna get shit in this town."

Sometimes, I hate my profession. Having to sit down with so many different kinds of people and open up my heart and mind to their ways of thinking is difficult because I know if one person is expressing certain thoughts, there are a hundred others who are feeling the same way. I can practically taste the bitter ignorance of their words, as if what they said had just come from my own lips. With every client I see, I try to develop a strategy, like sometimes, when you read a book, you know the ending before you're well into the pages, yet you read the whole darn thing anyway just to see how the details play out. Listening to my clients is like reading a book. Once someone seats himself in the chair next to my desk, I almost always know how our conversation is going to proceed. If they're high-strung, I keep my voice low, soothing them like background music. If they're depressed or introverted, I bump up my wattage, hoping they'll gain something from my energy. My strategy with Mr. James was to let him talk, like we'd learned in school, and maybe as he told his story, I'd be able to understand how best to help him.

"Mr. James, why don't you tell me what happened on Halloween?"

He nodded, agreeing to my little plan. "I didn't like being lied to. When that boss said there weren't no jobs, I thought he was telling me I wasn't good enough to drag my ass around Manhattan loaded down with other people's crap, so after I left his warehouse, I ducked into Maggie Wee

across the street and got the bartender to pour me a shot of Wild Turkey. From the tavern window, I could watch that Jew order his men around, loading flatbeds and pushing hand trucks. I coulda done that job with my eyes closed, but I didn't see one Negro working for him. Not-a-one! He had Spics, Chinks, Diegos, and Micks, but not a single black man. That was when I knew I never had a chance at that job, and every time another person who wasn't colored and didn't look like me went into that warehouse, I knocked back another shot, until them fairy lights dangling from the ceiling started to blur and I knew it was time to get home. That's when I remembered it was Halloween."

Counseling takes concentration. Usually, if I'm in the right frame of mind, it's easy to listen to other people's troubles and think rationally about how to bring them around to their own resolutions. But sometimes, when the world a client describes intersects with my own, my attention snaps and I have to rein in my thoughts in order to listen more objectively. The moment Mr. James mentioned Halloween, I felt sick. It was the first Halloween I'd let my daughter, Shelby, go Trick or Treating alone. She was only eight—too old to have her mom tagging along, but too young to understand how frightened I was of letting her go into those stairwells and hallways all by herself. I've learned to take my chances, though, and have faith that this crazy, mixed up, complicated world is still filled with more good than bad.

"What was it like," I asked Mr. James.

"I'll be truthful, Doc. By the time I got back to the projects, I'd picked up a pint of Jim Beam, and as I passed those boys in the stairwell, I couldn't help wanting to scare them a little—just put them on edge the same way I was feeling. So when one of them looked at me sort of frightened like, I whispered into his ear: 'Everyone knows the boogeyman lives on the fourteenth floor, but he also lives in 5B with Mr. Kramer.'

"You shoulda seen that boy's eyes grow wide, as if I'd just told 'em where to find a million bucks. Then the other one, I know as J.J., started blabbing and didn't stop: 'I ain't going on Kramer's floor. Last year, all he gave out was apples. I hear he's got an apartment filled with old newspapers and doesn't do nothing all day. My mama told me...'

"'Once, I seen him on the stairs just standing there with his crater face and yellow cane,' the one called Darryl continued. 'He told us we was making so much noise, we'd wake up the dead.'

"'Well, he should know about dead, cause my momma says she knows for a fact that he was married once and one day his wife just died. It took him two weeks before he called the ambulance.'

"'She didn't die. She walked out the door and caught that amnesia thing and wandered around the city all day. She didn't know who she was or where she belonged.'

“‘I heard he lived with his mother but she was too old and sick to go out. All she did was stink up the apartment.’

“‘He kept her in and beat her with his cane.’

“‘He didn’t beat her, but remember that nasty dog he used to have? He beat that thing to death and then threw it down the incinerator.’

“‘It wasn’t no dog he threw down the incinerator. It was Miss Brown’s baby.’

“‘Eeewwwhh,’ the three boys groaned at once.

“‘If we go back to Kramer’s, he’ll probably chase us down the stairs. He might even try to capture us,’ J.J. warned.

“‘Maybe he’ll try to push us into the incinerator?’ Dillon guessed.

“‘I don’t know about you guys, but I ain’t going up there tonight. My momma says she don’t want me going out of this building ‘cause of the fights we got into last year. She says she don’t know why we can’t just stay in one building. Fourteen stories, twelve apartments on each floor, we don’t need no more candy than that.’

“‘How’d she know it was us who got into those fights?’

“‘Cause we the only boys hanging around the lobby.’

“‘Did you tell her it was a lie?’

“‘Yeah, but she whopped me until I told her the truth. Listen, this year, we gotta bring paint because I’m gonna get Mr. Simmons’ door good. Every time he sees me playing on the lawn, he goes and tells my momma. I gotta teach him to mind his own business.’

“Footsteps pounded down the stairs from somewhere above us, and the boys dashed out into the corridor. I guess I musta been thinking I was some kinda ghost they couldn’t see ‘cause I kept following right behind.

“Once they got out into the hallway, Darrell motioned for the others to get closer for last minute instructions. “First, we meet downstairs to do some trick or treating. Then, we go over to Building Five and do some damage. Afterwards, we come back to see what Kramer’s hiding.’

“I remember other Halloweens around here when I still had my baby girl with me, before she and her momma moved down south,” Mr. James continued. “Laurel would dress up like a fairy princess or ballerina—nothing scary or mean—and her mother would take her out into the hall, never letting go of her hand, and they’d join up with the rest of the kids who’d started knocking on doors. At the end of the evening, when Laurel got back home, her pillowcase would be full of Mounds and Milky Way bars, M&Ms and Good-n-Plenty boxes which she’d pour out onto the carpet and count one by one, putting ‘em in little piles like lollipops here, chocolate bars there. She wanted everything to be organized, as if she could control the world.

“Well, them three little boys reminded me of Laurel. She’d be older now: maybe fifteen, probably too old for Halloween, but they had her spirit. It was the memory of losing my sweet child that took me outside

that new boy Dillon's door, where I held my ear to the cold metal, listening to how his momma was talking to him. She only been living in the projects a few months, but it ain't no secret what she thinks of the rest of us.

"Isn't it a little too cold to be playing outside?" I heard her ask.

"Her boy answered truthfully, telling her they weren't outside but had been in the stairwell.

"You know I don't like you playing there disturbing other people."

"Tonight, I'm gonna be a ghost. If I cut holes in a sheet, no one will know who I am."

"Then I heard that stuck up bitch cluck her tongue 'cause it wasn't where her son played that bothered her; it was who he played with. Ever since she moved in, she hasn't let us forget that she wasn't born here and will be leaving soon. I guess I gotta give her credit for dreaming.

"I don't want you getting into trouble," she warned him. "There are too many people using Halloween as an excuse to be hateful to each other while they can hide their faces."

"We ain't doing nothing wrong."

"That left a silence, and I knew his mom didn't like that all of a sudden her boy was speaking like some ignorant nigger.

"We're *not* going to do *anything* wrong," Dillon corrected, without her saying a word.

Maybe at this point I should've removed myself from the case because Mr. James was talking about the kids and families in my own building, people whose problems I could only guess at. Even though we all lived right on top of each other, we've all learned the etiquette of close proximity: when to avoid eye contact, how to pretend we don't hear what's going on on the other side of the walls, under what circumstances to ignore anonymous shouts and cries. Behind each door is another story, another world with its own dreams and disappointments.

"Did you follow the children any more that night?" I asked him.

Mr. James nodded. "J.J. and Darrell were waiting for Dillon downstairs in the lobby. I tagged along as they walked toward Building Five and took the elevator to the fourteenth floor, probably wanting to start Trick or Treating at the top and work their way down.

"Cardboard cutouts of orange pumpkins, hook-nosed witches, and snickering goblins hung off the doors, while crowds of children gathered around waiting for each apartment to open up. It was something else to watch them kids. I don't remember ever being their age. It's like all at once I sprung from my momma's womb some sorry ass nigger sitting on one of them benches outside."

"There are programs you could get into if you wanted to straighten out."

Mr. James looked at me as if I hadn't understood a word. "I didn't come here to be taken off the sauce, Doc."

"I'm sorry," I apologized, hoping he'd carry on with his story.

"By the ninth floor, I could tell them boys' pillowcases was getting heavy. I'd watched as the neighbors deposited lollipops, cookies, chocolate kisses, and candy bars into their sacks, wasting their valuable money on meaningless junk. Have you seen this place around the holidays? It's as if these people don't even know they's poor."

I couldn't help remembering how each Christmas when the decorations went up along Broadway and the Salvation Army Santas appeared on every corner, my husband Len would pace around the apartment, carrying on about how the Catholic church was hoodwinking their parishioners.

"I snuck back to Building Six like I was on some special mission on *Mannix* or *To Catch A Thief*. The stairwell is disgusting almost all the time, but that night, it was nearly pitch black too, with candy wrappers littering the floor and the stink of urination in every corner. The tiny square windows on each landing were coated over in thick paint so no one could see in or out. Up on the fifth floor, I watched Darrell open the door.

"All the lights is out. Someone must've smashed the bulbs."

"I think I hear someone behind us." Dillon straightened up.

"Shh. Why you acting like my sister? If someone's here, we'll find 'em."

"Who's going first," J.J. asked, edging Dillon toward Kramer's apartment, then reaching over the boy's shoulder and knocking on the door.

"He's coming," Darryl shouted, jumping away.

"That's when Kramer appeared leaning against his yellow cane, his facing looking skeletal, the outlines of his cheek bones covered with gray stubble. The old man didn't see me, but he stared at the boys and blinked once, then twice, as though he was trying to push bad thoughts to the back of his head. Soon, his eyes grew big with recognition, and the boys inched forward, holding out their pillowcases. 'Trick or treat,' they sang.

"At first the old man looked at the white sheets that covered their child bodies and gazed down to their bags topped off with candy. Then a glimmer seemed to pass cross his eyes as he nodded, motioning for them to wait, and shuffled back into his apartment. When he returned, he was holding a glass bowl filled with apples and carefully doled out one to each boy, as if his fingers were jaws of a mechanical crane releasing great boulders into a candy pit. By then, the boys must've forgotten about trying to do him any harm, but when he reached out a boney claw to pat one of their heads, they all screamed, as though the old man's fingers shot rays of fire. 'Run,' Darrell yelled, as they scrambled down the hall.

"I followed them into the stairwell where they gathered in the dark.

"Did you see that," Darrell whispered. "Nothing in the apartment but an old TV."

“And these apples. They could be poisoned. We’d better not eat ‘em.”

“Maybe all he’s got are these apples. We could’ve taken his last one.”

“Or they could have razor blades in them.”

“If my momma finds out, she’s gonna kill me. Why doesn’t he give out candy like everyone else?”

“Maybe he’s a foreigner and doesn’t know about Halloween,” Dillon guessed. “I’m gonna go back up and give his apple back to him. If we don’t, he might starve.”

“That was when I knew what I had to do. Maybe them Nazis had it right. I wasn’t gonna let no grumpy old man scare them boys and ruin their Halloween, so I hurried back to my apartment, picked up an old can of spray paint, and hurried back to Kramer’s door.

By then, it was obvious that Mr. James hadn’t come to the clinic to find a solution to his chronic unemployment, or alcohol abuse, or to remedy the fact that his family was in disarray. He wanted absolution and was just going to continue making discriminatory remarks, so I asked him just why he’d come in to the clinic that day.

“That’s what I’m trying to tell you, Doc.”

“As long as the story’s going to end somewhere. Frankly, I think you should watch what you say. You might offend someone.”

“Have I offended you,” he demanded, his pupils moving to the corners of his eyes so that more white than iris was visible.

“No,” I lied, trying to recall who was on duty at the front desk and looking at the clock, wishing it was 3:00 p.m., time to pick Shelby up from school.

“On the fifth floor, I opened the stairwell door and crouched low, shaking the can of paint, getting it all riled up for my masterpiece cuz Kramer’s door was gonna be my canvas. The can emitted a long hissing sound, accompanied by black spray, as a sweet candylike smell filled the air. Then I heard that boy, Dillon, creep closer to me. He must’ve come back to return his apple, but I didn’t pay him no mind. When my work was done, I turned to Dillon and flashed my best grin. ‘That’s Kramer’s door,’ I told him. ‘I just put a sign there to show him we know where he lives.’

“The boy didn’t move. He just stared at the rich black lines that glistened like whip marks across the door. I hardly noticed the yellow light become brighter as Kramer opened up and sniffed the air. The old man looked different. He’d changed into a brown terry cloth robe like he was about ready for bed and followed the trail of dripping paint from the linoleum floor to the Swastika on his door. Then a wild look came into his eyes and his mouth turned into a hollow circle, his eyeballs bulging as he glared at the lines.

“I don’t think Dillon heard me creep away, but I left him watching as the old man’s posture stiffened and he raised his cane high over his head,

the cuff of his bathrobe cresting just above the tiny numbers tattooed against his wrist. Then he hurled himself at Dillon, screaming in a language neither one of us could understand.

“For a moment, Dillon just stood there until his legs loosened up and he started running down the hall, screaming that Kramer did want to kill him. Kramer hated little boys. Kramer stuffed kids down the incinerator. Kramer kept children prisoner in his back room and made them eat cat food.

“I watched from the stairwell door as the old man got winded and leaned against the wall to catch his breath looking as though he was about to throw up, probably wishing he was back in Poland or Russia or wherever the hell he came from, somewhere where there were other people like him who would help, because the residents on his own floor had all opened their doors to see what the commotion was about and then quickly closed them again.

“That’s when, I tell you, all the alcohol burning in my system musta flushed my head clear, ‘cause all of a sudden, the old man looked so frightened and weak I guess I kinda felt sorry for him.

“I found them boys downstairs where Dillon was telling the others what’d happened. ‘I think he wanted to grab me and beat me with his cane.’

“‘He probably wanted to capture you and hold you prisoner, then sell you for loads of money.’

“‘What about Mr. James?’ Dillon asked. ‘What was he doing? I thought Halloween was for kids?’

“‘He probably knows what happens to Kramer each Halloween. He’s seen Kramer turn into a werewolf.’

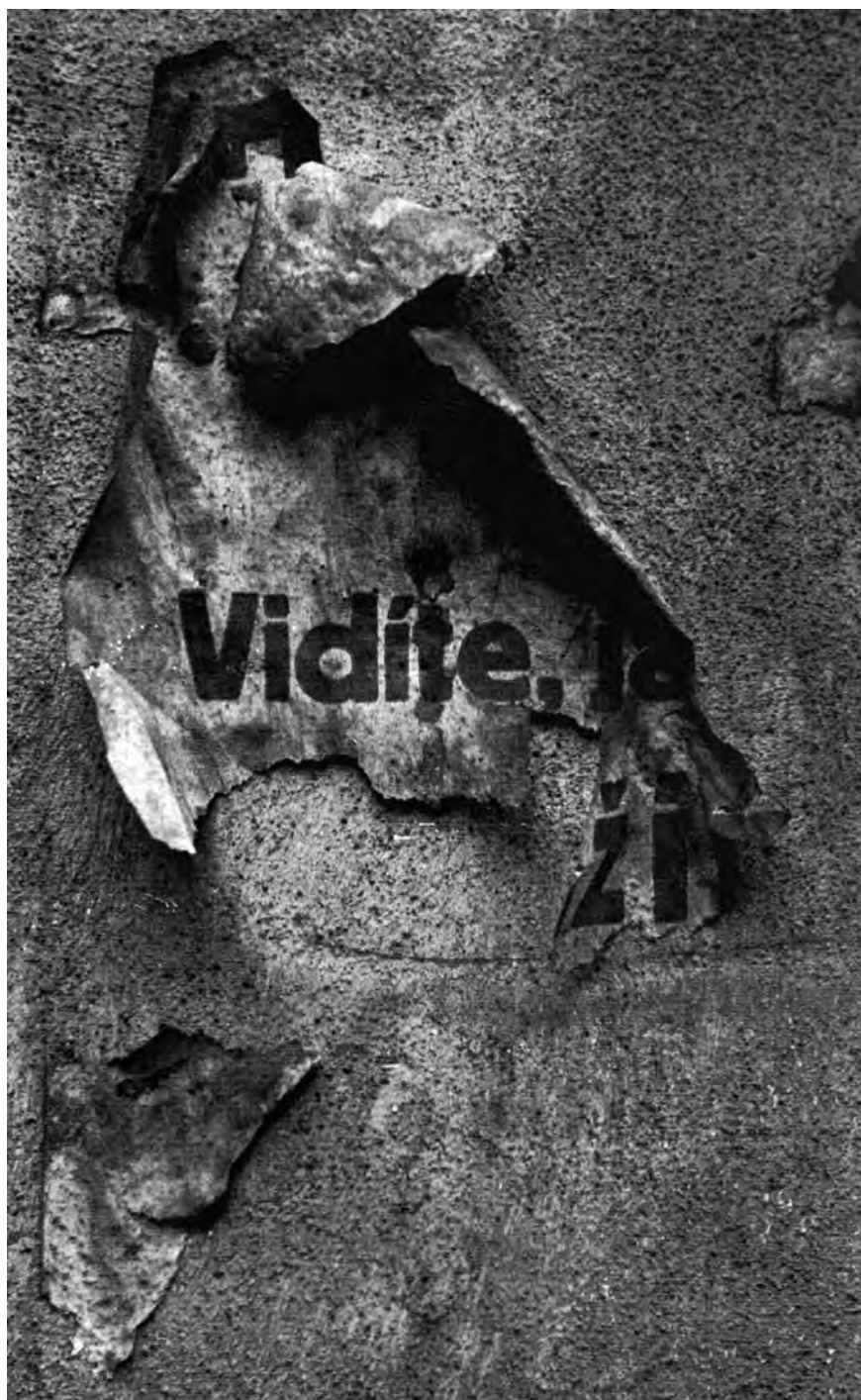
“‘Yeah. Every Halloween, Kramer gets this feeling, like he’s some kind of animal and he has to taste blood—boy’s blood!’

“‘Maybe he sleeps upside down like a bat.’

“‘Or grows wings and flies around when the moon is full.’

“‘His teeth turn into fangs and he likes to bite into children’s necks.’

“Well, I sat down in the stairwell and let their talk wash over me, wishing I had another bottle of something. Lord, it seems like all I got filling my head are bad thoughts, and I want to remember a day when I looked out onto the world and saw light, you know, the sun rising over Building One, licking the pink bricks, and me going into Laurel’s bedroom, catching the dust mites dancing in the air.”



Alois Nožička: *Jak žít*

RYAN RAGAN

WE, QUALIFIED

I made amends with walking rain on Sunday
night. I closed the shades, changed into my pajamas,
read for a while

and fell asleep holding the book split like a rib cage
so that over my own, words were for a short while
in a dark crevice between up-rise and forgetting.
Would you believe me if I said I dreamt again

of you and I as the children we never were?
We happened in a house to be ancient blue bottles
hearing together our moms and dads,

watching the wall-clock go from noon to friendship
in kite time. We knew we were dreaming,
so we turned from bottles to frogs,
frogs to leftovers, leftovers to children again.

My dad was your dad, my mom your mom, your river
my river. You said my name but it was your name but mine
just the same. It was Monday before leaving the house,

she came a shot after 4 a.m. Your hair went from green dreads
to normal blond, long as water draping over my highway.
Of course we were whole again; distance will do that.
Morning in our house is a deckhand swallowing the shipyard.

RYAN RAGAN

GIVEN LIGHT IS WONT TO TRAVEL

Even the servant has a desire to belong,
his wooden hand exploring an empty pocket
like a tomb,

holding in the other a twisted length of rope and burlap sack,
the sour apple scream of the chicken coop turning
as a watch in the breeze. The boy

and his father tending to the benefit of their brood,
while three towns over the sun's orange must
be as eloquent as a back tattoo.

The boy imagines himself instead there
guiding a primrose stranger's street walk toward a pot-belly kid,
the playground whiner, covering face as the other jelly kids point

jelly fingers into his ribs. He knows the separation of duty from
task, hand to club, so that approaching the old bore raccoon—
a left arm buried to the shoulder in a steel trap,

he knows by the way the animal's lips slide back
that no one is to stare at their shadowed figure in a window.



David Chorlton: *Windy Day*

DAVID CHORLTON

ON FALLEN LEAVES

The book is always open
where the beetle moves from page
to cracking page
along the canyon's history
recorded in leaves
whose leather and parchment tones
are layered on the ground.

He is black light in a library
dedicated to storms,
a rustle in the silent reading room
where clouds alone
have permission to speak,
a single tooth that eats
its way through time,

and nobody can tell how much
of it remains. But he takes
each chapter as it comes,
as evolution gave him patience
where others practice politics.



David Chorlton: *Couple at the Bus Stop*

DAVID CHORLTON

HOW TO AVOID TALKING ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

When the wicked witch who makes the seas boil
comes ashore, cover her up
with a blanket and hurry away
to where press photographers can't see her.

When bears come down from the mountains
to find all the rivers gone,
offer them the rust
that runs out of our faucets.

When a bird out of its range
lands on the windowsill
with an olive branch in its beak,
refuse to surrender.

When you think you hear rain but it's locusts
swarming, take cover in the basement
and choose between playing cards
or rolling dice.

When the horse arrives with blood on its saddle,
don't ask where it's from
but feed it and say how much
you like that shade of red.

DAVID CHORLTON

FREEFALL

Between the desert and infinity
the sky shifts from blue to black
while a weightless glow
rises from red earth and thorns
through air becoming purer
until it thins beyond breath's altitude.
Mountains fall away, rivers tremble,
grasslands are burn marks made by light.

It's so cold, the seasons
don't come this high, and the planet
swings from the stillness here
with its gentle weight in balance.
Already, the air is too weak
for living in, and helium
climbs above time.

With a continent spreading below,
and dark without end above,
the journey continues its vertical course
to where it comes into view
that we're living in a layer
the thickness of a leaf
in space beyond measuring.

This is where the check list begins: remember
oceans with salt on their tongues,
forests with wings
negotiating narrow space,
plains billowing when a cloud
casts a shadow over them,
and canyons where a voice

is never released from its echo.
Now the door opens. Remember
the lizard with lightning
for a spine, the fox
who burns in the snow, and the whale
upon whom all waters
eventually wash. Twenty four miles above
the Mescalero Escarpment, the next step

leaves no footprint. The Earth rushes
at the speed of life, into the unfiltered glare
of the sun.



Guy R. Beining: *A Statue Dreams of Itself*

GERMAN FUNG

THE DROWSY PUMAS

Here come the raccoons and the grasshoppers
And the neighbor's fox terrier
With their headsets and live rat ringtones!

Gossip mills cradled in the ears of every animal!
Nautilus shell phone booths!
Radio towers out of the cricketlands!

Nations, ecosystems metastasizing in Walmart resin—
The woods are louder than jackhammers!
Salamanders ordering kimonos from the rock wall lithoplex—

Cormorants dialing faultlines under the Atlantic—
Minnows in Lake Huron trading fish stories
With minnows in Nazareth, PA—

What oboes and sabbath bells and Kenyan
Lizard hosannas! You can't understand a word!
But it's beautiful as goshawks and fog crows

Crying across an Appalachian tarn!
Beautiful as the cell phone college posess
Crowding the crosswalk like drowsy pumas!

And the campus bus dragging its tail
Of black smoke—Galloping past every stop!
Honking at pigeon militias who crash into the tall parts

Of cities, giant marble clouds bleeding
and bleeding and bleeding their one soda can of rain—
Mid-range left ringing in the mourning doves—

The city emptied to just a limo's length—
One keystroke! One keystroke! One keystroke!
It is not a vanishing, but the beginning

Of a cyber species who wake in each other's cardiac emptiness—
The sprawl of midnight during the sunlight's racket—
The intelligent darkness, like a commercial lioness,

Roars through the syrupy crowds until it reaches the polar cry
Of a high-rise glacier melting to twenty dollars and then the silverfish
hoarding, in its headphone apartment, its password, its password, its
password—

GIL FAGIANI

LOWER CONSCIOUSNESS

At twenty-three, I tripped on LSD
to enter a dream state.

At sixty-seven, I'm in a dream state
and trip on the sidewalk,

falling hands first
into fog feces.

WANTED

Men of extraordinary strength and stamina
are being sought to clear away animal corpses
from the grounds of a nuclear power plant.
A high school diploma and fluency in English
—or in any language—are strictly prohibited.

ALAN BRITT

DOOMSDAY: 12/21/12

Bleached blonde, black eyebrows —

In case of fire break glass —

Emergency flashers —

Recessed lights inside skull —

Bullfrog cello with sore throat —

Knocks at the door —

Paper gown removed, vitals checked —

Verbs & adverbs braided like scorpions —

Cellphone in wheelchair —

Lies about love↔angry love —

Christmas tree with red gauze, golden cones
& white blinking lights, hisses like a possum
in darkest corner of coffin —

Small white dog with pink skin, cataract
about to bloom —

Detroit gangs fake each other's deaths —

Greektown serves shell casings
& steamed mussels for lunch —

Clouds of magnesium —

Helium kisses —

Sunglasses the size of sunflowers —

Roman numeral X on wall clock leaps
to its death —

Raining mercury in Estonia —

Raining ashes in Cincinnati —

Raining bicycles in Berlin —

Raining gramophones in Bangladesh —

Raining mustaches in Pittsburgh —

Raining reindeer in Iraq —

Plastic roses at Italian bistros die
of liver cancer —

Snow plow scrapes electrons into wall of cocaine
in suburban mall parking lot —

Drones in your shower, drones in your
underwear, drones in your anus —

Just saying —

ALAN BRITT

THE PAINTED TRIBE

Gods are inherited like ancestors,
you know.

You have to be old enough
to remember them;
otherwise, visit your local library.

It's not that complicated.

Gods are serious pets.

Many gods resemble the unfortunate pit bull,
angelic by nature
but otherwise trained to devour everything in sight.

It's the gift of gods
to loiter the streets of Brooklyn, Fresno, San Antonio
and well below the Bible Belt,
exhaling lonely husbands and wives
from the corner of Canal Street
and alleys intersecting smoke.

In the midst of another hurricane
named after daughter or son
we board windows
and fail to recognize
shadowy ancestors poised
to snatch us from our mythological disaster.

So, after many lifetimes the painted tribe
swallows Blake's *Songs of Experience* whole,
and now they want to save us from ourselves?

The question remains: how can we forgive vindictive gods
when the ones who invented vindictive gods
are the ones who attacked us in the first place,
felling us like giraffes with their poison-tipped spears of faith,
the very same tribe that roams our unconscious today?

ALAN BRITT

MICRO-UNIVERSES AND DUCKS

The feral abuse from humans
to other life forms, including humans,
is mind boggling.

Force-feeding ducks, causing them
to vomit algorithms
through corroded cages
designed to fatten them
for frosted-globe-white-napkin-restaurants
promising heretofore non-consummated
moments of doubt only to become
non-consecrated moments in history—
(What's the difference?).

What a waste of ducks.

We should be ducks,
each of us, you & I need to know
what it's like to slurp Dupont mush
for the greasy pleasure
of humans regardless of your
(if you're a duck) regardless
of your disgusting life.

After all, we're humans.

& that is all...humans on holidays
including atom bomb days ejecting us
from 1.2 billion dollar football stadiums
into infinite laps filled with great grandchildren
plus two hundred & twenty-eight thousand
of the most beautiful heretofore undiscovered
micro-universes, notwithstanding.

SARAH McELWAIN

MURALIST

The first time I entered New York City it was through its fabulous front door — Grand Central. I was 5. On the 10:15 from New Haven with my father. Later, I entered the city through its respectable side door — in the back seat of our Impala, zooming down the Westside Highway. It was a big decision — what to stare at? The fortress of apartment buildings along Riverside Drive? Or shadowy New Jersey across the dark Hudson?

This time I entered New York City through its back door — Port Authority, arriving in 1977 with a suitcase, a duffel bag and \$400.

I'd expected to stay with Uncle Cameron and Aunt Nell in the room that my cousin Jack had vacated for Bard but Uncle Cameron had Parkinson's and a 24-hour nurse now occupied that room. Aunt Nell put me on the couch. In the morning she handed me The Village VOICE and the telephone.

I took the first place that I saw. The super spoke Spanish and I didn't understand a word but handed over \$100 in exchange for the keys to a month-to-month ground floor apartment on the corner of East 4th and Bowery. It was one long, narrow room with two windows at the end. The previous tenant had left behind a ply-wood loft bed, a drawing table and a radio. It was lit by a string of low-hanging bulbs. To say that it was dark is an understatement. No natural light entered the apartment except for an hour a day when a sliver slipped in between the two buildings. The windows, blackened with grime, faced the backside of the fire station, Engine Company 33 on Great Jones Street.

Aunt Nell sent down a new mattress and two bags of towels and sheets. There was a refrigerator and a hot plate on a folding table, a toilet with a chain behind a curtain, and a cavernous bathtub along one wall beside a sink so small that it looked like a joke sink.

The first thing I learned was that to get a job, you needed a phone. But to get a phone, you needed a job. It was a catch-22 and suddenly I missed Pauline and Glen. I wanted to tell them this story. But I needed a phone to do that, too.

I walked up to AT&T on 14th Street; they agreed to install one for a \$30 cash deposit.

Aunt Nell told me to look for a job as an editorial assistant. I had a year of experience as an art therapist, checkable references and a BFA. I'd gone to a good college, even if it was an art school. I could write and spell. I circled a column of ads in the VOICE, typed cover letters and résumés on my green Smith Corona portable. Then I walked down to the Post Office on Canal Street and waited in a long line to mail them. After that it was hard to return to the dark apartment when the narrow, winding streets of Chinatown were so close.

Chinatown seemed more familiar than other parts of the city. I remembered the paper lanterns and dragons, textiles and food stalls with lacquered, hanging ducks and newspapers printed in unreadable black characters from my childhood visits. Now everything was red and gold. It was the Year of the Snake. A snake in the house was supposed to be a good omen. Your family would never starve if you had a snake in the house.

The next thing I learned was that after you applied for a job you had to stay home to answer the phone. But it was impossible for me to stay inside.

It was 1977, the city was bankrupt, the trash was no longer collected and the streets looked a Salvation Army explosion. But the skyline was beautiful and the facades of the buildings. It was architect Louis Kahn who said: "The sun never knew how beautiful it was until it hit the side of a building." Not just the brick, marble, sandstone and granite, but the geometry of the fire escapes and window gates and all the decorative but functional ironwork.

I began experimenting with the subway. Timid at first, but soon taking the train to the outer boroughs, getting out at end-of-the-line neighborhoods like Riverdale, Inwood, Flushing and Coney Island.

I would have been afraid to walk around Coney Island at night, but during the day I explored freely. The empty rides turned and twisted, flashed lights and blasted music. The bored workers stood around drinking coffee, waiting for the nighttime crowd. Walking around, I fell in love with Carney Art. All the neon signs and hand-painted, freak show billboards, ads for Half Man, Two-in-one Man and Penguin Girl. Dancing hot dogs and the Cyclone's screaming man graphic.

One Friday afternoon I bought a beer in a paper cup. I sat on a bench on the Boardwalk. The wide, sandy beach was mostly empty. Beyond it the ocean dazzled with sunlight. It was hard to remember that New York City had a beach and was on the ocean.

A creep sat down next to me. I didn't even look at him. I jumped up and headed for the subway. He trailed me down the sidewalk. I saw him

on the platform: A dark man of undetermined ethnicity, wearing a yellow-and-turquoise-striped shirt open to the waist. His hair was long and greasy. He might have been drunk. He was carrying a newspaper.

The train finally came. I ran down the platform and got into a car at the far-end. It was empty. When the train pulled out of the station, I took out my book. I'd found "House of Mirth" in the garbage. A minute later the door between the cars opened. He sat down across from me.

In previous circumstances when men had exposed themselves to me — the pervert in the bushes outside of life drawing class, or goofy residents at the state school for the retarded where I'd worked as an art therapist, or the trough-drop of college drunks — I'd laughed. Partly as a defense, but partly because the thing always looked so silly poking out like that.

This time I didn't laugh. My heart was pounding so hard that I could hear it.

When the train finally pulled into the next station, he covered it with the newspaper. The doors opened. I'd intended to run out, but a crowd of people pushed in and it seemed safer to stay in the car with the pervert than to wait for another train on an empty platform.

I got off at Lafayette Street. He got off too. I pushed through the turnstile. He was right behind me. I turned and saw the flash of religious medals against his hairy chest.

"Stop following me!" I yelled.

He looked confused.

"No," I said, blocking the turnstile with my hip. "Go away!"

I looked around. Apparently it was okay to yell in the subway. Nobody took much notice. I refused to move and finally he shuffled off.

I ran up the subway steps and down the Bowery. It was four o'clock and two bums were already passing out in my doorway. I might have stepped on one bum's hand as I hurried with my key in the lock.

"Fuck you!" he said.

I ran down the hall. I unlocked the door to my apartment and locked it behind me. I was home. Safe.

One morning I saw an ad in the VOICE for an artist: "To paint mural in new Soho bar. Interviews Fri noon. 173 Spring St."

This was something I could do. I had my BFA to prove it. And I didn't have to stay home and wait for the phone to ring. I typed a fresh copy of my résumé and bought a steam iron at the bodega on the corner that sold bananas and platform shoes.

On Friday morning I put on my neatly pressed job suit: Navy gabardine with a mid-knee length skirt and a boxy jacket with large, plastic buttons. It was the kind of good girl suit that you wore — if you've grown up in Connecticut — to church, funerals and job interviews.

Soho was hot and hazy with truck exhaust from the loading docks. At 11:45, there were already artists lined up outside the bar.

“Is this the line for the job?” I asked the guy at the end of the line.

He nodded then waved a friend over. I got in line behind them. As more artists emerged from their lofts, the crowd kept getting bigger, but the line never got longer. I remained at the end as they joined their friends. The crowd was mostly men wearing black tee-shirts and paint-spattered jeans, and a few androgynous types in jumpsuits or pants made out of yellow or orange parachute material.

I couldn’t tell if I was invisible or stuck out like a sore thumb.

At 12:15 the owners came out of the bar. Ray wore a black tee-shirt and jeans that looked dry-cleaned, aviator shades and a gold ID bracelet. His partner, Thora, who would later be revealed as Rochelle from Ronkonomah, seemed deeply intimidating, dressed German dominatrix-style in skin-tight black rubber, hair slicked back and platinum. She handed out pink flyers to the crowd.

The mural’s theme was “Famous Artists of Greenwich Village.”

A few artists with gray in their beards said, “Shit,” crumpled up their flyers and walked off. The terms were \$200 for sketches and \$200 upon completion. I heard complaints that this was an insult, a rip-off, but it sounded like good money to me. Sketches were due in a week. It was a competition. I’d won other art contests. Maybe I could win this one, too. I hurried back to East 4th Street, twisting my ankle on the oily cobblestones, wearing my good shoes, black-strapped Capezios with a low Cuban heel.

I moved the drawing table out from under the bed and placed it in front of the windows. Not for more light—there was no light—but for more workspace. I had a hi-intensity lamp and tracing paper. What I needed now was reference material.

Before the Picture Collection of the New York Public Library moved to the Mid-Manhattan branch—and before it went online—it was in the basement of the Donnell Branch on West 53rd St. Across the street was The Museum of Modern Art. I looked at it knowingly, believing that soon my paintings would be hanging on its walls.

“I’m painting a mural,” I told the reference librarian. I hadn’t won the contest yet, but in my mind I was already Diego Rivera. “I need photos of famous artists from the 1950s.”

She handed me a slip of paper with some call numbers and sent me into a room full of file folders. It was a kind of heaven: a huge collection of illustrations and photographs from thousands of sources including ephemera dating back a century, on every subject from airplanes to zebras. I checked out ten (the limit) folders of old *Art in Americas*.

I couldn't sleep that night. My brain was buzzing, over-stimulated by too many images. Whenever I laid down, a parade of prints, watercolors, and daguerreotypes streamed through my head.

I got up and turned the dial of the black plastic Magnavox with the crooked antennae until I found WRVR. I'd never heard soulful jazz radio before. More than the music, I loved the deep, intimate voices of the DJs. I listened to Herschel until midnight; then Barry Vaughn played Miles Davis until dawn. The radio was my new boyfriend.

At 7:00, the firemen began cooking bacon in the stationhouse kitchen. The smell of bacon still has a powerful erotic effect on me.

On Friday morning I returned to Soho wearing jeans, sneakers and a black tee-shirt with my sketch rolled up under my arm. It was almost noon, but this time there were no other artists out front. I looked at my watch. Did I get the time or date wrong? At 12:15, Ray poked his head out and looked around. "You the only one?"

Thora was drinking coffee at the bar. She hadn't drawn her eyebrows on yet and she looked like a frightening egg.

I unrolled my sketch. I'd worked all week, cutting and pasting; scaling and arranging before inking my final on vellum.

I could tell that Ray was really impressed. Thora opened her make-up kit on the bar. "Somebody else might show up," she said.

While we waited Ray finished his coffee and explained his plan to me.

"The bar is no longer just a hide-out," he said, emptying a pack of Sweet-n-lo. "It's a place to be seen."

"It's called urban narcissism," said Thora.

I was sure Thora hadn't made this up. I didn't know what it meant but it sounded smart. "You're creating a scene?" I asked.

"You got it," said Ray, cocking his thumb and forefinger like a gun, shooting it in my direction. It was the first time I'd seen this gesture. I found it both thrilling and repellant.

"What are you naming it?" I asked.

"We're keeping it simple," said Ray. "Ray's Bar or just Ray's."

"No way," insisted Thora, putting down her mascara. She handed me a card: RAY DAR in pink letters.

"Whose Dar?" I asked.

"See. She doesn't get it cause it's stupid," said Ray.

"Ray's Bar," she said. "That's so square. It could be my Dad's bar."

My dad's bar was the university club.

While they argued, I watched the door. At 1 o'clock, when no one else had shown up, I was declared the winner. Ray handed me 10 \$20s. I'd get 10 more when I was finished.

I arrived on Monday morning at 9:00. The Puerto Rican electricians, who were installing the track lights, bought me my first café con leché. Addicts remember their first drink or score. I remember my first café con leché. I entered into what would become a long love affair with strong coffee.

On Friday afternoon, after I'd primed and sanded the wall into a porcelain finish, I drank a beer with the electricians, a tall cold can of Papst, while I watched them shoot dice in the hallway.

I needed a projector. I'd seen Pearl Paint's red-and-white striped awning on Canal Street. For someone who considers Josef Albers Color-Aid exercises to be a religion, Pearl Paint was nirvana. Now that I was a professional artist, I was finally ready to enter the temple. I climbed up the metal loading dock steps and pulled open the heavy wooden door.

Inside, it was even more amazing than I'd imagined: entire walls full of oil paint, arranged across the spectrum. Shelves of primers, oils, linseeds and varnishes that I'd never heard of before. A whole room devoted to paint brushes: single-hairs to big fat sables. I wanted one of everything. And that was just the first floor.

When I left Pearl Paint two hours later, I'd spent \$100 on art supplies, including a Swiss projector with an adjustable precision lens in a threaded barrel and a cooling fan so that it could be used for hours. This was not a projector for amateurs.

Walking home, the city no longer seemed quite so chaotic and random. Now the city had a center. Pearl Paint.

That week I transferred my scaled-up sketch to wall using a hard, no. 1 pencil. On Monday, I began painting the first layer—the *imprimatura*—or where the light would fall, mixing red and yellow ochre, then adding ivory black to create the undertone of the largest, darkest object in the center of the painting—the long, shiny mahogany bar.

On Friday morning, while the electricians installed the ceiling fans, I began laying in the shadow layer, painting all the dark details in burnt umber, except for the textures, so that it could dry over the weekend.

On Monday, I began the dead layer. This is where the artistry lies. The other layers are workmanlike. Any trained artist can do them. It's the dead layer where the talent shows. Using lead white and burnt bone, I painted the penumbra. Sunlight, moonlight, firelight, electric light all have different qualities. This was bar light. I experimented with a cold olive layer, a halftone lower to keep the shadows transparent.

There are happy accidents. The bar was opening on Friday and there was no time to let the penumbra dry. I sealed it too soon, creating a shimmery, boozy effect that was unintended.

“That looks f-ing great!” said the Irish carpenter, who showed up to build the banquette under the painting.

“Where do you want me to sign it?” I asked Ray.

Thora stood in front of it, hand on her hip “How come everybody looks so unhappy? Look at ‘em,” she said, gesturing at Jackson Pollack and Lee Krasner arguing in the background. “People don’t wanna see a bunch of sad sacks in a bar,” she said, pointing at Rothko, Klein and Ernst staring into their drinks. “Who died? Where’s the funeral?”

I looked at Ray, sure he’d think this was ludicrous.

“I think it looks pretty good,” he shrugged.

In the end it didn’t matter that they’d approved my final sketch. Or that Ray liked the mural. Or that Thora was an idiot. What mattered was that Ray had gotten his way with the name and now it was Thora’s turn. If I wanted the rest of the money, I’d have to paint smiles on all the faces.

You can’t just paint a smile on a face. There are muscles of smiling. The curve of the mouth affects the shapes around it, the cheeks and the chin. Not to mention the expression in the eyes.

Spring Street was full of old magazines. I cut out big, red-lipped or pink toothy smiles and randomly pasted them all the faces, turning de Kooning, Gorky, the Soyer Brothers, Isabel Bishop, Ben Shahn, Stuart Davis and Loren McIver into fractured, demented creatures with a layer of cheap, thick polymer. Thora liked it and I got my \$200.

A L I X A D O O M

H E A T L I G H T N I N G

*When your father dies, say the Armenians,
your sun shifts forever.*

And you walk in his light.

(Diana Der-Hovanessian, “Shifting The Sun”)

It comes as a silent storm—a vanishing
and reappearing—flashes of news
of that which returns to us.

We had been sitting in the back porch
telling stories of messages from the dead—
doesn’t that scare you? my daughter asked.
No, I love it, I said—it’s just energy.
This August summer night she has returned
for a visit to my Minnesota home—the lightning
comes in and licks and flickers on all horizons
no matter the directions of our turns.
Our house, the trees, a garage shake and gasp
in a light that throttles and drops them
back into their place in the night.
Light washes across the sky and flaps
like laundry snapping into darkness. Sometimes
a piece breaks loose and humps and rumples
like a dragon; the color of bleached bones,
it bobbles near the horizon. An occasional snake
fizzles and slithers over our heads as dazzling as fireworks.

The yard jumps back and forth with my daughter,
going on and off in the grass, her steps alighting
in grass as if she were walking on water.
Sometimes the news of this life is so much
that it is delivered only in snatches. Tonight
our world serves itself up in glances off rooftops
and stunned stones guarding the garden.

My mother rarely spoke of darkness,
yet I remember her voice, beveled with timbres of dusk
as heat lightning feathered its effects across an evening
when a truck hit our old Chevy on the highway
between slices of midnight black.
Her voice, husky with reverence
for our young lives tumbling out of the back seat,
is now silent as the lightning that drenches
this night and drops among the phlox
stalk still with purple wonder.

I imagine my mother talked to my father
in that same voice the night she told him he would not die,
that he would come home again. He could no longer speak,
shook his head, “No,” and soon was gone. I don’t remember
my father but his love for me must have been great—
his absence was immense as this light
that fractures all horizons.

Like a reverie in fast-forward the heat lightning
exhumes everything, our yard, the road,
the neighbors’ houses. Bolts and sheets
snap and swaddle their dark arrivals. The light
shudders and utters its muffled surprise.

ALIXA DOOM

OUT OF SIBERIA

“Russian biophysicists have managed to resurrect a 30,000-year-old plant after finding fruit tissue that was preserved in Siberian permafrost.”

BBC

After thirty thousand years
125 feet underground in Southeast Siberia
they unearth your burial,
bring your seed to bloom
and name you *Silene Stenophylla*,
you who have emerged
from a time before our language.

Released from darkness
where your tiny heart lay buried
beneath centuries of wars
galloping above you,
your five-petal flower unrolls
astonishing as the dead sea scrolls,
although there is more to tell
of your travel through darkness
than there are words in this whirling world.

Sometimes something
falls to the bottom of a heart
and lies there with the heaviness
of a dark secret, the child
a mother could not keep.
Yet even a slight light
can shift the small heft
of a seed and release
its packet of sorrow.
When my sister's son
returned to her family
forty years later

she sat at the head of the table
and beamed at the shining
of three siblings gathered there.

Silene Stenophylla, little guru,
you knelt into yourself
in your dark hut
for almost an infinity,
sealed in a silence
a Buddhist aspires to.
Everywhere the wide horizon
of the cold kept
and protected you
on your slow journey.

Once you quivered among
Neanderthals and mammoths.
Now you unfurl a pure white swirl
that startles us like a newfound star
from a distant world.

DAVID DOUGERT

BEREAVE

Those vultures would need a God
To lift this King's bones toward
Wounds that will serve as constellation points
The angles a hundred arrows took to avoid a lie
Every breached dissuasion guiding a muscle twitch
So many deaths from closure

SIRE

Worlds opened to us then
He had stopped time as a last resort
The same spear struck the same heart
Again and again our victory song searched
It will take many gods declaring
This Ghost that haunts them false
Star dust on cave walls
The way vengeance informs every myth

SHANNON SALTER

ABOUT A YELLOW BALL

the rubber was from a tree in Sri Lanka
the tree was from a seed
seed slept until soil woke it

the yellow was from the high leaves
from sun falling
against shoulders and backs
of slender green

the yellow contained no phthalates
the yellow was shy but only
upon waking
the yellow
always said
yes

the air was a miracle and a mystery
no one knew how it got inside
the good hot air

the air was captured but it was glad
the air had nowhere else to be

time was secretly drawing the air out
slow and easy
it didn't hurt the rubber or the yellow

someday all the air would be gone
the air would go someplace else
the yellow and the rubber
would go back to sun
and back to seed
time would keep their song



Alois Nožička: *Jako v klicce*

SHANNON SALTER

THE APPLES, THE APPLES

for Zoe

Birds are a force beyond

a leaf weathered thin like an empty sail

what page should we keep it in?
the little wing

half of a heart

keep it in a page with color
the page with balloons
that carry people
into sky

the way is this way

new wing-tips
mystery of trees

the stems and branches of a child's bedside

red and gold skins smooth from the orchards
a garden full of bone-white clouds

Zoe, do you remember the apples?

a quiet in the snow beneath our hands
these roots

a scream we call awake

SHANNON SALTER

ON THE RIM

I saw the sun go down inside
a jar of bees
sap from a redwood

I want the shadow in Minnesota
old as me and you
always the thick aloe moon
listening its way back in

I heard the sun say its name
her eyes big and full
the perfect sound
around

around

today the golden gate
is seventy five
the night is clear enough
for gulls to howl

TONY GLOEGGLER

TO BELIEVE OR NOT TO BELIEVE

On any winter Sunday
I can sit in front of a TV
with my dips and beer
believing the worst team
can beat the best one. Kneel
in a polished pew, watch
a priest raise a thin wafer,
a gold plated chalice high
over his head, believe bread
and wine become flesh, blood.

Days later, I can meet
my brother on the steps
of a hospital in Queens, walk
down empty halls, take
the elevator to the basement,
watch a film about drinking,
driving, recovery and putting
faith in a higher power. Catch
my brother's eye, shake
my head slightly and try
not to laugh while everyone
praises Jesus and God's plan
as John faces jail time.

I want to believe John
when he says he's sorry,
he's worried about our mom,
what our dead father
would have thought.
I'm afraid he's only sorry
he got caught, worried
how he'll get place to place
without a car, not scared
enough to stop drinking, too
old and lonely to change.

At work, I'm in the middle
of an investigation, trying
to find out if two workers
spent last Saturday night
from 8-9:00, after showers
and medication, having sex
in the bedroom where three
of the retarded guys sleep.
Everyone was talking and
I didn't know who or what
to believe, how to tell
the truth from the lies,
even try to guess what's
been completely left out.

Even when me and Suzanne
were completely in love, alone
in the residence, we never
went that far. Maybe a brush
against each other, her hips,
my shoulder, a finger tracing
lips, my hands sliding down
her side, one simple chaste
kiss. Back then I was certain
there was plenty of time,
I believed she'd leave Bill
and we'd end up together.
Now I know how easy
it would have been, how
no one would have known
and I wouldn't spend another
moment trying to imagine
how amazing it would have felt.

Tonight, I want to believe
this beautiful young woman
with the prettiest, darkest eyes
I can ever remember seeing
is looking at me the same way
I am looking at her. Walking
to her favorite nearby restaurant,
sitting at a corner table,
talking about poetry, Bob
and Jakob Dylan, the tattoo

on her back. She listens closely,
leans in to tell a secret or two,
describes the chocolate cake
she wants so badly. The waitress
apologizes, explains they never
have any on Mondays. I'm hoping
we'll sit here again, maybe
next Friday night. She'll reach
across, feed me a forkful
and I'll believe it's the best
cake I've ever tasted. This time,
when we linger at the mouth
of the subway, it will turn into
slow kisses, a bumpy uptown
cab ride, a three day weekend.

Of course, I remember opening
that hand written letter
from Helen after eight years
of silence, fitting my own
note in an envelope, walking
to the mail box. I flew
to Vermont, talked all night
and day, in and out of bed,
and decided to believe her
when she explained everything
was different and she swore
she'd never hurt me again.
Besides, I was free falling
myself, hurtling toward her
and her son, this beautiful,
fascinating, autistic 5 year old.
Even when it ended harsher
and sadder than the first time,
I wanted to believe that me
and Joshua had connected,
that we meant something
important to each other.

I've done my best to stay part
of Joshua's life: sending gifts,
visiting four, five weekends
a year, blowing up air mattresses,
ceaselessly climbing in and out

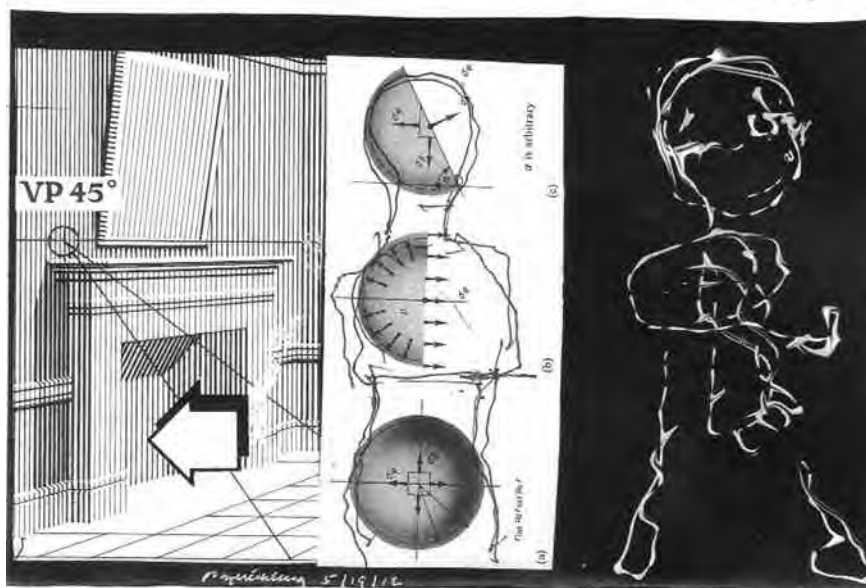
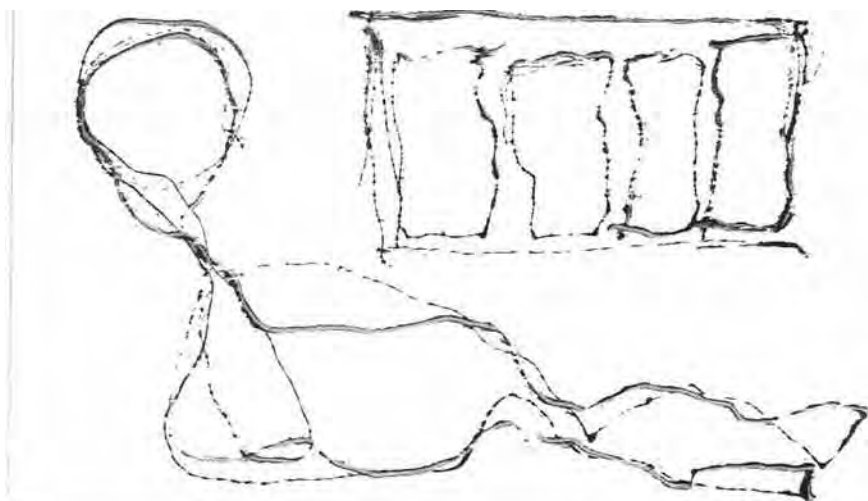
of their blue car, blindly driving
the endless two lane highways
and back roads that make up
the secret maze mapped out
in the deepest parts of Joshua's
ever anxious heart and mind.
Sometimes, we stop to roll
or sled down hills, swing
in hammocks, eat chicken
fingers, bad Vermont pizza,
shoot hoops or ride bikes,
spend days at Great Escape
as Joshua rides every scary ride
in the place twice, never sure
if he ever thinks about me
when I'm back in Brooklyn.

On my last visit, Joshua
sat still, stared at a keyboard
for thirty minutes and typed
out words while a teacher held
his forearm for support, helped
lift his finger after he pecked
each letter. She kept her eye
on the screen too, tightened
or lessened the pressure
on Joshua's arm anytime
he resisted or tried to race
too fast and I wondered
how he could spell words
he needs help to read.

Fifteen, twenty years ago,
Facilitative Communication
was hailed as a miracle
until every objective study
proved it was the helper guiding
the kid's hand subconsciously.
But Helen, Joshua's teachers
and respite workers are excited
about his progress and I'm
hoping what I know is wrong.

When Joshua typed
he wanted to talk to me,
I leaned forward. He wrote
he was excited to see me
and I told him I missed him,
asked what he wanted to do
this weekend. He typed
he's glad I keep coming
so far to see him, sometimes
his autism gets in the way
and he can't always show
me how he feels, but he types
he thinks I am his dad.

I didn't know what to say.
I wanted to believe it really
was Joshua speaking to me,
that this is how he feels.
I took an index card,
printed big capital letters
"I wish I was your father
and don't worry, I'll do
anything I can for you
anyway." I underlined it
with my finger slowly, made
Joshua read it out loud
and hoped he believed me.



Guy R. Beining: *Forming Xitonorus*

ALAN CATLIN

GIACOMETTI BONES

(poems inspired by the art of Guy R. Beining)

1.

Inside the shadows
of an hourglass,
deserts of sand

leak from cracked
seals onto
heat fused plain;

eyes closed,
the condemned grip
knotted circles like

nooses that hang
from nowhere
skies,

read chapters and
verses from blank
day books

2.

Blackened stumps of
winter trees like
metal spikes through

prehistoric hides
of beasts primitive
artists inscribed
on cave walls

with charcoal and
pitched pine, or became
encased

in glacier ice,
eyes frozen open,
now centuries old,
still expecting
to see

3.

Muffled wings
in alabaster rain,

frosted landscape
from which
the heart is leached

all those solitary
nights, flightless
birds assault

4.

Blank forests
where tumescent rocks
grow

tenuous as toad
stools,

pubescent flocks
of fledgling birds

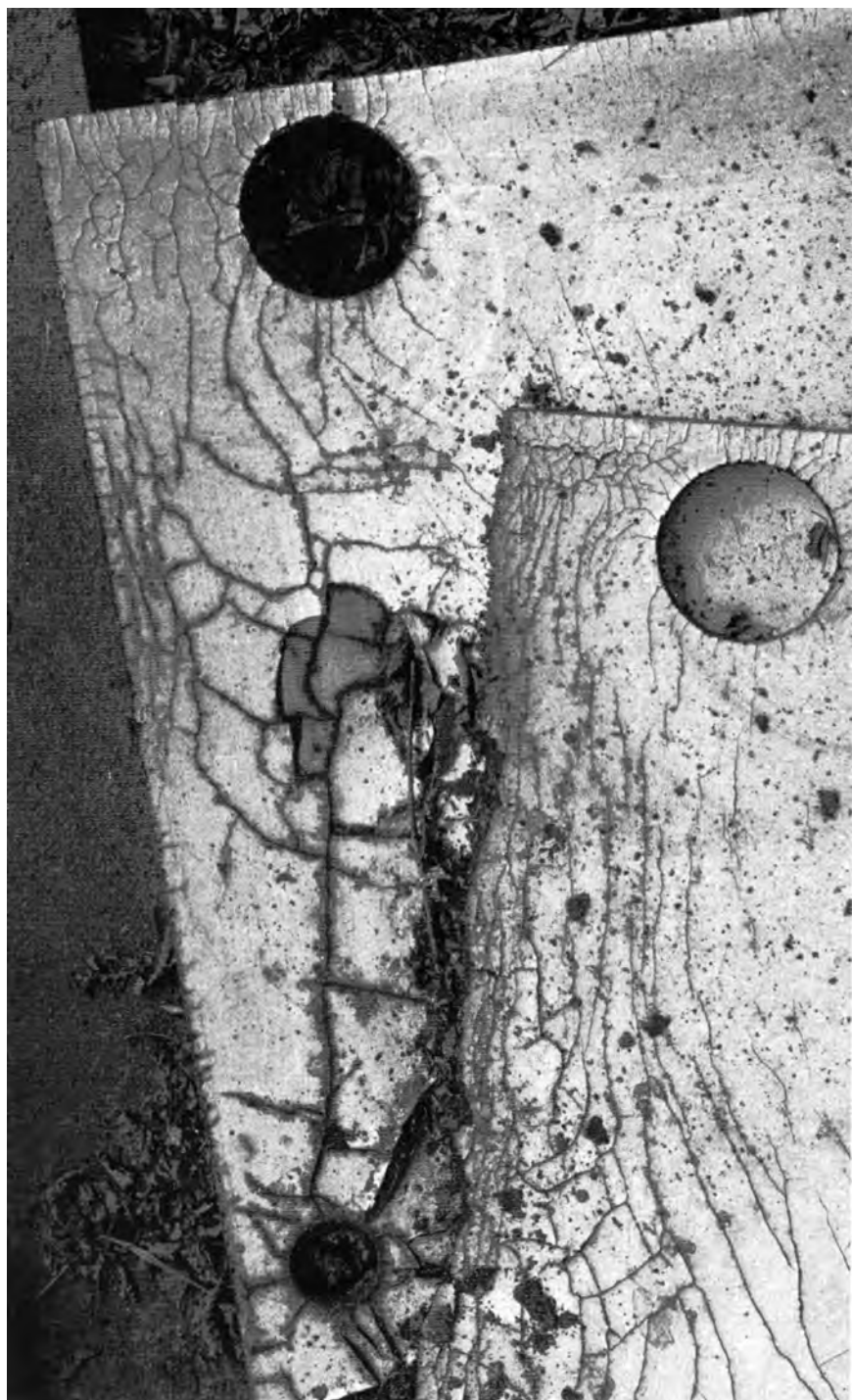
the saline solutions
of accumulated
clouds

5.

Dawn torn feathers
fallen from brittle
limbs lie amid fruit pulp,

battered rinds
from blood orange
trees; citrus oil

sheen on shallow pools
streaks of sun are
extracted from



Alois Nožička: *Planetárium*

ROSALIND PALERMO STEVENSON

THE FOGHORN

1. sound of the foghorn and the ocean
loud, persistent, repeating
2. view of the ocean from the cliff
3. closeup, waves over rocks
4. wind, reeds, water
5. ocean, front to side
6. ocean, front to other side
7. ocean
8. waves to shore

The dream is true. All dreams are true.
(Antonin Artaud)

9. long shot over rocks
first appearance of the younger woman
10. closeup of the waves moving
up on the rocks
the younger woman stumbling on the rocky shore
appears as if blind
11. closeup of the younger woman walking against the bottom of the cliff
wall
12. closeup of the rocks
the rocky shore

*I have a feeling of harshness, of landscapes as if sculpted,
of swaying patches of ground covered over with a sort of cool sand,
and they mean:
regret, disappointment, abandonment, separation,
when will we meet again?*
(Antonin Artaud)

13. closeup of the second woman standing looking
from the top of the cliff
14. medium shot of the second woman on the top of the cliff
and with her a large pack of dogs
15. medium shot of the second woman
surrounded by the dogs
16. repeat shot, angle shift
and distant
17. repeat shot, angle shift
and closer
18. closeup of the second woman looking up
19. medium shot of the second woman
barbed wire in front of the woman

*Nothing so resembles love as the appeal of certain dream landscapes,
the encirclement of certain hills by a clay-like material whose forms
seem molded in our thoughts.*

(Antonin Artaud)

20. circular movement of the camera around the
younger woman and the second woman
at the table
continuous shot
21. a sumptuous feast
22. medium shot of the second woman
she moves the mobile hanging above the table
looks into the camera
23. closeup of the mobile crossing in front of the
second woman's face
24. closeup of the younger woman
she looks frightened
25. closeup of the second woman eating
licking her fingers
26. closeup of the younger woman
in profile
27. closeup of the second woman
drinking
28. closeup of the younger woman
eating
29. closeup of the second woman, under lit and dark

When will we meet again? When will the earthy taste of your lips again touch my anxious spirit? Earth is like some kind of whirlwind of mortal lips. Life scoops up ahead of us the pit of all the caresses that somehow we missed. What can we do with this angel at our side, whose apparition never happened?

(Antonin Artaud)

- 30. medium shot of the younger woman
coming down the staircase
- 31. medium shot of the man
where is he?
- 32. medium shot of the man
his body as if descending onto the camera
down onto the camera
down onto the camera laughing
- 33. medium shot to close up
the younger woman coming down the staircase
the second woman standing behind her
- 34. under lit shot of the man
darkness of the lighting against his
blond hair
and pale skin
- 35. medium shot to closeup of the younger woman
running down the stairs
- 36. closeup to medium shot of the man
down onto the younger woman
- 37. closeup of the younger woman
looking up
- 38. medium shot of the man
pulling at groin
- 39. closeup of the man
looking up

Will all our sensations be forever intellectual, and will all our dreams never succeed in kindling a soul whose feelings will help us die?

(Antonin Artaud)

40. medium shot outdoors
the camera moving down between reeds
leading to the ocean
41. closeup of the man
in the reeds
the suggestion of an embryo
42. tilted closeup of the man
43. closeup of the man
as seen through his hair
which is covering his face
the suggestion of an embryo
44. medium shot of the man
looking
45. series of quick cuts of the man
in the reeds
46. continuing
47. continuing
48. the camera as if
running through the reeds
49. the man as if
an apparition

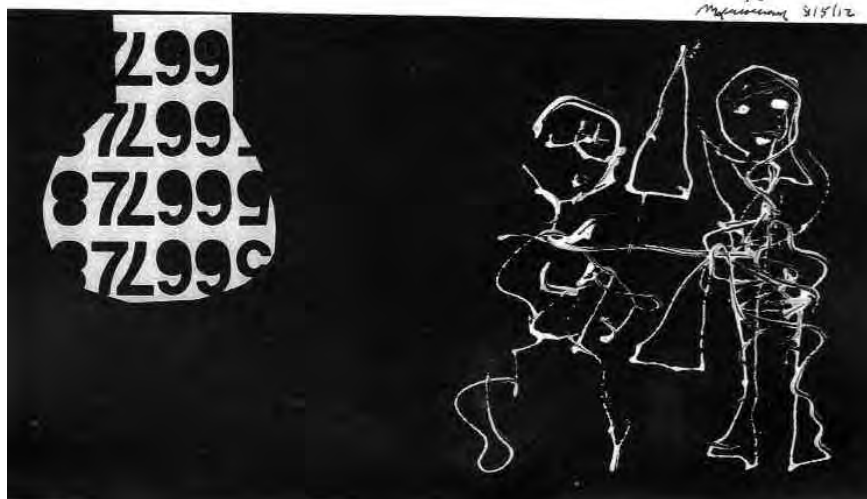
*What is this death we are alone in forever, where love never teaches us
the way?*

(Antonin Artaud)

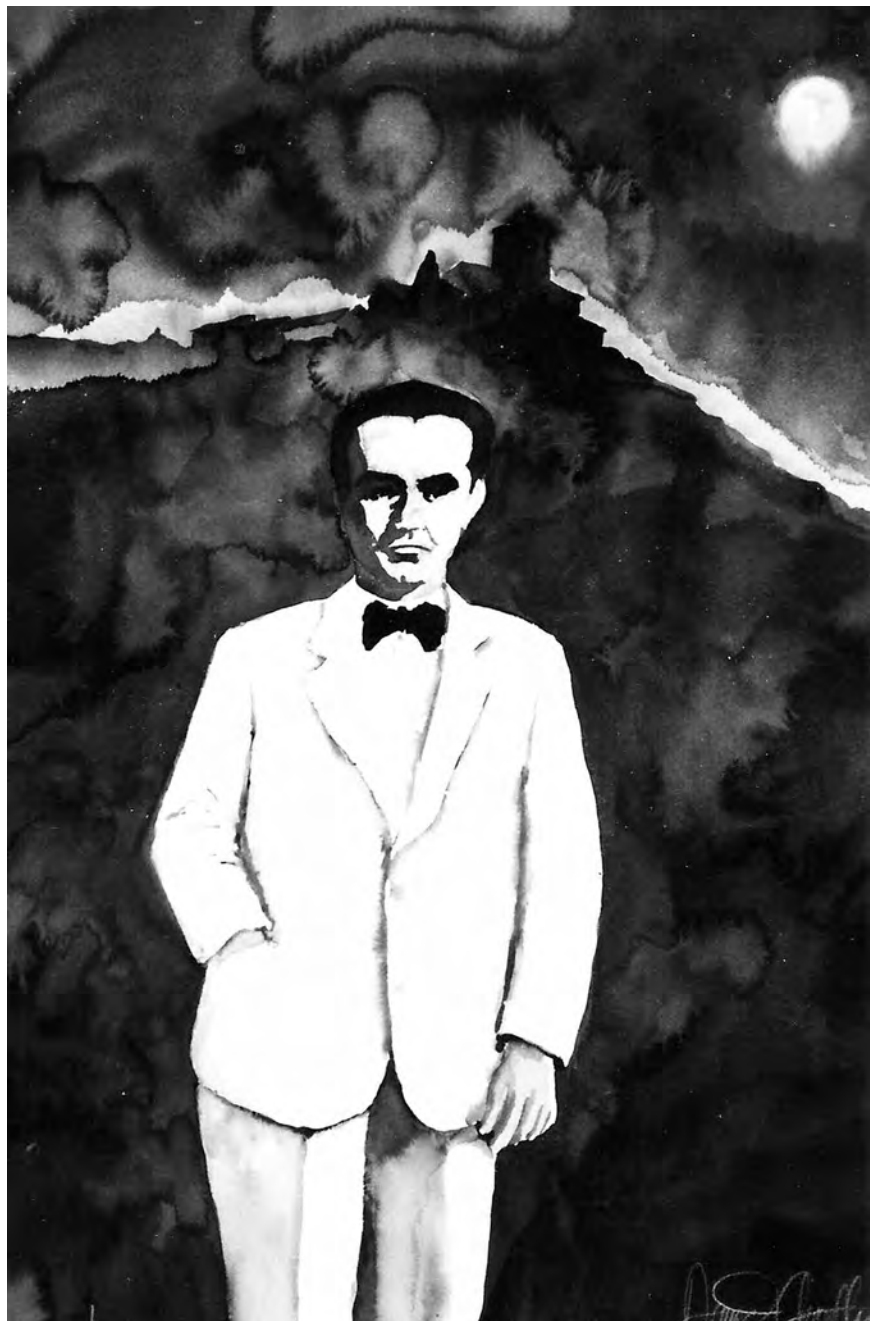
50. the ocean, the shore, under lit,
in closeup
in medium shot to closeup
51. large wooden posts against the shoreline
the remains of a structure
52. wind, reeds, ocean
53. a long panning shot up the face of the cliff
and fade
54. the continuing sound of the foghorn and the ocean
loud, persistent, repeating



The color is numbered



Guy R. Beining: *The Color is Numbered*



David Chorlton: *Lorca*



David Chorlton: *Kafka*

PHILIP DACEY

FREUDIAN DETERGENT

We just id the laundry.
Typo from a letter

The washing machine
is of course in the basement,
at home in the dark.
See the whirl at the round window,
the forces at the foundation

of the house, its upper floors
at the mercy of suds.
To id laundry
is to deepen its colors
and give the whites

the glow of skulls in the moonlight.
To id laundry means
it can never return
to its state of innocence;
the solution that saturates

towels and sheets does not remove
old stains but embeds new ones
invisibly deep in the fibers,
stains that whisper to skin
the truth of its origin.

After idding, laundry is grateful
to be so weighted, so pulled
from underneath, for now it knows
it can never be lifted away
from any line by any wind.

PHILIP DACEY

I SWEAR

For white teeth, tell the truth.
Vietnamese proverb

I brush my truth every day
lest cavities rot it.
Swear on no Bible but
on the whiteness of your teeth.

Know truth as an abrasive
that scours enamel clean,
a wind in the mouth that erodes
yellow from your teeth.

No dentist can whiten
the teeth of a liar. Not eyes
but molars and incisors
are the windows of the soul,

and floss is superfluous
if you're an honest man—
food never sticks
in the teeth of truth.

Dark glasses are advisable
to protect against the glare
when truth smiles.
When you bite an apple

with two rows of shining truth,
the sound is a kind of music,
a crispness admissible
as evidence in court.

PHILIP DACEY

AGAINST THE WORD “SPIRITUAL”

I see it laboring beside the road,
then setting down its burden
of meanings that have accumulated
over time on its back,
a great black bag of them,

each weighted by someone's
hopes and desires.
Like a refugee from a war zone,
the word needs to rest awhile.
It needs a great silence

to form around it,
a silence in which it can
renew itself. Let it sleep,
years even, foetal,
and dream of a new body

whose vowels and consonants
know only buoyancy, no drag,
no hands grasping at it.
But for now, have pity on
this exhausted figure of sound,

which has been driven so far
from its root, from “breath,”
it has almost none left.
There is nothing spiritual
about the word “spiritual.”

PHILIP DACEY

CHUNK

The woman kicks a little chunk of ice
down the sidewalk as she walks.
She has no reason to kick the ice,
and that is why she does it.

She kicks it down the street
in front of her, time and again,
and the ice waits for her to kick it again,
and she does.

Doing so must be for her
a kind of work of art,
a creative act, that motion
of leg and foot and ice,
that skidding of the cold object.
An extravagant gesture.
The spirit on holiday.
Maybe for her it's even a kind
of poetry, or else why would I pay
such attention to her?

It's true, that I kick this icy object
in your direction, for no reason,
and that is why I do it.

Go ahead—
give it a good kick
in return.

GARY LEE JOHNSTON

THE UNDERMINING OF LADY GAGA

My screen name is bored by the trees
and how they make the wind
sound suspicious
and teeming.

It thinks the plastic water
sponsored by the makers of Lady Gaga
seems trite at certain
temperatures, certain sediments
of listening.

My screen name, numb with loneliness,
seeks other screen names
for transcommunication orgies.

It wants to overthrow the Gaga Party.
The Gaga America.
The Gaga Earth.

My screen name wants to follow
her fleshland of stunted choreographies.
Gaga eating herself as far as
the nothingness can hear.

My g-mail name is bored by the real-time
death threats of the Gaga cults.

My verizon.net name is bored by impoverished
romance edited that day
to video dance gore.

My name in ancient Fortran is bored
by the constant feed of digital sex vegetation.

The comment screen I've tilled swarms
with animals wronged
somewhere out in the parking lots,
the flattened hills
of fluorescent content.

No place for them to hide but their own
scattered bodies.

My screen name is weary with Gagas
who cannot find water,
land, or sky.

"Eat your sugared Gagas," a mother
scolds her online child.

My screen name, poisoned
by its own plasma, sells vulnerable relief maps.

It is angry for every reason and none.

My real name, too, is bored
by the Gagas, pelicans now, who cry
from a place that cannot be killed.

Gaga, which means, "to forget."

Gaga, which means, "blood pageantries."

Gaga, which means, "flesh of the attacked silences."

And then her unrecorded name, which contains machines
repeating the populations of other machines.

Her name's first empire continues
beyond case-sensitive editing rooms
and there the meat sculptures hold each other
in damp algorithms of pain.

One study says, “The subject hurts most when her songs creep close together.”

Another says, “Her music relies on cellular manipulation and stick figure mythology.”

I say the blood, as always, is a myth.

Gaga, which means, “play with me.”

Gaga, which means, “to be held, until complete, in wet, anonymous piles.”

I can see, beneath her twitching mascara, where the monsters have laid their eggs.

Gaga, which means, “forgiven by the face and its uncounted monsters.”

Gaga after Gaga after Gaga.

LAWRENCE APPLEBAUM

WATCH THE CLOSING DOORS

Brooklyn is an anemone face down in the water
the world trampling over it
again and again
Orange seats hold two heavy women
and some angry men
their plum backsides cradled until Atlantic Avenue
where they will make the change
the same change as yesterday
Electricity is killing us and pulling us forward at the same time
After school children dot the platforms
“Lupe Loves Trip,” sprayed on
the walls of Beverly Road
The stations fade away fast as we pass
Water towers high on their Bunsen burner pedestals
Soon we are inside
tunnels lit by light blue graffiti drizzling down
Cortelyou is draped in red ivy like a Victorian woman
dying in a velvet dress who
we cannot stop for
We pass green and burgundy houses
Backyards face us naked filled with broken furniture
and lost childhoods
Avenue H is level
with the street like beach and ocean till
Avenue J has dipped Brooklyn down again
into an oval shaped cup
an outdoor gymnasium where children’s feet get wet in the rain
I am in your flattened world of grey sky
and nothingness
only the tracks are full sparks now
soon I will see your empty face
The yellow circle surrounding the Q will
hang like the rising sun above our heads
and you and I will be
held and held.



Alois Nožička: *Volný Pád*

STEPHANIE DICKINSON

A BOUT DE SOUFFLE

AN INTERVIEW WITH JEAN SEBERG

Part 1

You've been considered the Midwest's Muse, so tell us about the town where you're from.

Don't think you can escape Marshalltown was the unsaid caution. When you swim in the forbidden sandpits the hydra growth invades and later the town watches my white foot ease into hundreds of mouths. Marshalltown had the landlocked foursquare light of smoldering hymnals. It shone from the red maples and elms, the green dripping emeralds from branches. I left the town trees. I eloped from tractor chug and roads of nowhere to go. Everything was thirst. Everyone knows your nightgown's color when you arrive in the funeral parlor.

You want Marshalltown. I buried my daughter there. Go find the graves of my parents and brother, and you'll see she's with them. Nina. I flew her from Paris in a glass coffin. Trinket-thing. Mourning doves nest and ditch lilies spring from her. Orange petals that shiver from human touch.

Night swims.

The waning town drowns.

I've drunk myself sober on darkness.

Each year on the anniversary of my baby's stillbirth I attempt suicide. Have I any flesh left? Seven months pregnant I swallowed barbiturates thinking we'd both die, but then I survived.

Will you elaborate about your first screen test and the legendary Otto Preminger?

What's to say about auditioning for the role of a saint? You want to inhabit Joan of Arc, but there are thousands of you(s) breathing the same lines. Can you be the daughter of salmon-colored booths and milk shakes and be the girl who God told to lead armies? The she who wore soldier pants laced together by dozens of knots, who feared rape more than flames at the stake?

Preminger could see I'd come swaddled by the sleep-asphyxiated trees and yellowed fields. And I could not look at him. None of the girls could. 18,000 auditioned for Preminger's *Saint Joan*. I was the one chosen. He could see me burning more than the others—a Swedish daughter of Iowa, two generations removed from fjords. Transplanted to black dirt country that belonged to the Mesquaki, who'd been corralled tired and forsaken to powwows. Drums chanted on broken legs. Magic gone can't be danced back. I borrowed their power.

He told me I was short. What made me think I could act? White armor and gold fleurs-de-lis? He handed me a cross and bound me to the stake. Mechanical error caused the gas tanks to explode. Nothingness. Stars hissing and whirling through space. My blue demons attacking. *Not her face I hear them cry.*

You've been termed a naïf, that is a cross between the naïve and the waif, with a self-destructive bent. Could you talk about that?

Because the heroes of movies I watched in the Orpheus smoked cigarettes I started to burn my fingers, striking matches with my thumbnail. I watched myself inhale. Brando muttered and talked from the side of his face like a saint. Dean leather jacketed himself and shrugged. From him I learned the shoulder-scrunch.

Maybe I was the first actress who returned the hard stare of the camera. I was known for the blank look. The empty actress. Magnificent neck. Masochistic. Listen. A Midwestern girl is a good girl. She does what she's told. Am I the drum majorette who played Sabrina in a high school production or the bitch who bankrolled the Black Panthers? Am I even a biological being? I learned four languages and I wasn't smart or witty. I married three times. My second husband, only a year younger than my father, was all bottle rockets and jigger chasers, black widows and exploding flame balls. He directed me in the worst film ever made. *Birds Come to Peru to Die*. I fuck a bordello madam and her clients before meeting a young artist. Later I drown myself. Real life intruded. I was belting down pills, tumbling over the falls into the white water. I learned the meaning of the word venal. Insouciant. I darted before the camera like a minnow. Thin and stilted, said the critics. Like the Viking girl tied to the ship's prow by hanks of her hair, only I was rosebuds stitched to black bras. A gamine. My acting style derided.

It seems you've ever been a stranger to Iowa but sprang up from the streets of Paris.

Paris has a willowness where old and new glide effortlessly through. Paris is the photograph you're in that forgets you, that adds you before subtracting. There are fields too in France, the weeping of vineyards. After ten films I wanted to be a passive cow staring into the green distance, content. But my husbands executed peace.

Paris taught me how to act. Acting is a congealed grease. The bacon and blood you paint yourself with, but then you get it licked off before the mirror. I fled the sin-scoured earth to eat the dirty plankton at the bottom of the Eurotrash soul. There was a red barn in my lower lip and my mother's buffet weighing down my eyelid. I pretended to be demure. Acting is the cloudy glass of the stopper ball and what perfume is left—all brown musk dried to a fragrant scab must be picked and made to bleed. Again, then again.

Why did you always marry in Paris?

I craved becoming midnight or dawn. I wanted to rise like smoke from a burning cause. I would be pure banner. But it was a misogynist flag my husbands thrust into my hand. I tried to fit in, to become the sleek club girl standing half naked on the cobblestone street. To reek of the undersea of Sartre and Flaubert, of Duras and Collette. Everywhere the damselfish swam, their long-finned legs in lemon-colored dresses and filmy neon-blue stripes. The fish girls didn't see me, and then they did. Even with my nostrils full of cigarette smoke I smelled them sniff me and their noses curled. Iowa. Stink of a clodhopper.

16 Arrondissement. An old Chinese woman kept muttering, "Best food in changbai zhen yan. Deer antler. Bear. Snow toad. Eat me. Rare. I am best food." I married an old man, then a young one; both wanted to chew me like I was the edible world. In the end I took Marshalltown back. Creaking hardwood floors cracked their reins and stretched me length-to-length. The galloping yank of bit between my teeth.

Sundays, the rock of ages. I listened to the July peonies boiling scent through the screen, fanning myself as gospel clacked.

Part 11

You've been trying to unbury the Midwest inside yourself, so describe some of the drama of the dullest place on Earth. What sparked the fanciful in you, the fever to act?

I had a terrible hunger for the theatrical. Sundays we'd eat at my great-aunt's. My uncle sat in long-sleeved shirts three layers deep, hunched on the Queen Anne's chair. He'd tell you naked women were climbing his red oak tree, the same ones who slept in the chicken coop eating his eggs. My siblings crouched at his feet, laughing. I'd tell them to stop, they'd hurt our great-aunt. How could I stop myself wanting to hear more? I believed in the gold-skinned women with azure lips and feathered hair, the pale-skinned women with doe eyes, Victorian lace at their neck and ankles and nothing else. I too saw them half hidden in the straw. Pointing their toes on the roosts like a ballet of droppings. Cavorting, eating his brain. They stroked the chickens purring in their laps. I would think of his visions when I played Lilith. In a childhood offering movie magazines and Sunday dinner as the week's highlights, I sought out the trinket house that offered allegory through glaucoma-whitened eyes. Later I too would witness naked women climbing fire escapes or clutching the wheel of my weaving Renault, having swallowed my gin and seconals. A trance is not quite dementia. But a death before death that uproots the who and what in you.

What is it about your uncle that feeds your dramatic interest? Tell us about your decision to stare into the camera and cross that fourth wall as the voiceover speaks your thoughts.

He taught me to break the rule of gaze. It's not the window behind him you crave or the fence twined through with raspberries and wild grape so close to the gravel road, but all the green cloaked under a shawl of dust. Dust is the doily. There to disguise the wildness. The old uncle laid it bare. He worked as a tinner at the original meat packing plant before it became Marshalltown's Swift Meats. Hacksaw and scraper were the music of his world. Six-inch blade, the soloist. A hypochondriac, great-uncle fashioned metal into cans ever certain that his cold would bloom into pneumonia, the lush pain likely appendicitis striding up and down his side. "Don't kill a sow in heat," he said. "The flesh goes rank, then her taste is one of spunk." My mother inhaled her substitute school teacher breath. I didn't yet know that word. Sebergs are a haunted line. Ten thousand tin crypts for animals whose spirits have vanished. It's all the death in us. To stare into the camera had been a no-no. His expression never changed. His

pallor stayed the same. Looking at the window, his vein-knotted hands, or my great-aunt, but the words he spoke were camera angles. Close-ups and panning shots. He'd shout out, "Where's my girl wife?" He'd rhyme. *Cloud, cleave, knead*. Nightly he'd watch my great-aunt's hair loosened by brush tumble to her buttocks. *Pelvis, girdle*. What did he call the bent gentleness that dressed, fed, and washed him? Nothing. Sometimes a grunt. The beauties in his coop cracking eggs and supping the yolk embryos molested his head. "Scald the carcass to loosen scurf, and then add a pinch of hardwood ash," he'd laugh, stroking his chin as if a tusk's growth bristled there.

You spoke of your great-uncle's visions in relation to your roles. Talk about Lilith, considered one of your best performances.

Who hasn't read Isaiah? *She shall become an abode for jackals and a haunt for ostriches. The Lilith. Wildcats shall meet with desert beasts, satyrs shall call to one another; there shall the lilith repose.* Original sexual predator and strangler of sleeping men. Bird talons for feet and a scorpion between her legs, the demi-goddess of storm, she who suckles dogs and pigs at her milkless breasts. Hollywood's no Babylonian Talmud. They keep my midwestern twang and dress me in prim cotton. Disguise my boy-hair with a blond wig, then order me to hunt the fragile lightning bugs, or better still, lower a bucket into the unmapped self. Then dredge-dredge the silt for watersnakes that plunder the bank's fat raspberries, and wait for the camera to attack. I sense my great-uncle's vision of tree-climbing soul nakedness.

You were quoted as saying, "I'm lost to Debbie Reynolds roles and I'll never give Liz Taylor a run for her money," so where do you think Jean Seberg as Lilith fits in?

Myth. Not fable or legend, in *Lilith* I fit into an interstice of the sacred/demonic. I'm to become a temptress, a schizophrenic housed in a wooded sanitarium let loose midday to wander. Every afternoon I'm laughing, but I crave myself most and slip between the shagbark hickories where sun's a soft blade over the red maples and lamb's ear grasses. There are peaches swaying in the breeze. I call the black flies to bite and sup. My arm's a feast among the dust. I wade into the lake slashed by sun and shadow, lift my skirt above my knees and bend to kiss my reflection. I'm the girl next door with a viper's twist. Watch a smile try to hide itself on my mouth when a bespectacled fellow patient (Peter Fonda) attempts to drown himself to prove his love. If I were queen I would serve only apricots and dates toothpicked through by thorns. I would seduce the breathing

peonies, entice the long grass and draw summer lightning and thunderclap. Not just the caregiver attendant, (Warren Beatty) so young you wouldn't recognize his innocence raised from its grave. I take him in my arms. Desolation is where we rent our bed. Between my breasts there's floating broken ice and estuaries of frigid water. On my near perfect face my lips are quivering wings of arctic swans. Isaiah 34:14 *"and the shrichowle shall rest there, and shall finde for her selfe a quiet dwelling."*

You've been compared to silent movie star Louise Brooks in the intelligence you bring to your roles. Can you discuss?

Her gun-shy, almond eyes avoided the camera. She was hauteur's daughter. I was guileless. She was fashion. A divinity of furs and sashes, the soul revealed as a Cloche hat. A kiss of blood-dark lipstick. My face artless, hers all elaboration. But at bottom we shared a problem. We think too much. A rumor gets around about you and you're finished. Difficult. Tubular skirts and dropped waistlines, they hosed her out of Hollywood once they realized she had a brain. Washing up in Deutschland, the flowering Weimer cinema (pre-Hitler) filmed *Pandora's Box* which showed the world her ivory flesh in ostrich feathers and bare back split by a single jeweled string. Likewise, Hollywood had no use for me, and then France adopted Jean Seberg. I learned their language. New Wave. Improvisation. I was fresh as heat lightning. They say I'm intelligent. How can they know? The roles they offered me femme fatale of a butterfly hatching hut, seductress of a bat cave, and Mayan Colonnade. I was nineteen when world fame swept my feet out from under me. Preminger became the sun and God above. Damnation in its way. My mouth found secreting the dew of a water lily, dried. I wear a dirt-sweetened negligee. Great books Louise credits for keeping her alive until age 78, when the whole silent era dimmed behind her. I swam toward the camera. She never acknowledged its presence.

You revolutionized modern film. What qualities did you embody?

Acting explores the mysterious warming oven of character. The crone knows how to make a meal on a cookstove. The kept woman, the lover of older men understands how meat burns, the temperature's never the same. I'm green wood, wet wood, kindling. Everything I touch I'm warned away from. Every stick burns in its own flame. All thorn and stinger, crones grasp how to cook with fire. They've lived fire. They've seen too much. Field work, corn picking sun a fire in their eyes, their hands on fire, burn and blister, cramping fire in their bellies, blood dripping from the rag folded between their legs. I knew fire too. Bad reviews when they keep coming.

They pan you, put you in stocks, they bleed you and stop to wring you
between the waves of heat. Joan d'Arc knows less of char and flame than
they and me.



David Chorlton: *Crossing*

FRANKENSTORM MOOD
SPOTTING

1.

In the tenement village
the wind is monitored
by a door when it closes

and the rain stays inside
the soreness of the stairwells

and children throw unopened
cans at the silhouettes
of purple basil
and television cactus
stranded
in the curtains that thrive here.

Every day I see the same
homeless man sleeping

inside his pitbull. They do not

move. There is no smell,
no punishing sorrow.

I kick a leaking brain
down the sidewalk—
I checked, and it is not
a bag of beer dampened

and crumpled with worry.

I'm just looking
for the stupors I lost.

It is not possible to leave
by car or train or bus or thought
this town inside
the illness of a woman I knew
during the days

of her long hair
and red-freckled smile.

At night the wind
comes from a flashlight
and I can hear the distant sirens
arousing another high-tide
neighborhood.

The candle I lit reminds me
how sad the air smells
when the innards of the refrigerator
go quiet.

The police whisper at my door.

Or maybe it's just the paint flaking.

The coffee tonight tastes
like a cell phone as its voices
run dry.

It is not possible to leave this moment
the dollar dead in my pocket
promised

would never arrive.

2.

We eat the howls
of fire engines for dinner.
Slivers of ambulance bread.
Flashlight milk.

I counted three lit candles
behind the blank screens
across the still-shallow street.

“Someday the lights will be
shut off for good,” I tell you.

“Someday the food will be
shut off for good,” you say.

I wonder who’s fondling
a book this late in the prowling wind.

At the first candle
maybe one lone person is making
another person with a voice
not yet vandalized by its dark cities.

We hear the clock retracing
all its minutes one by one.

“This is how it really is,” you say.

The phone that was supposed to save us
lies dead in its drawer,

but our socks, at least, keep
our feet close and our cat chases
the monsters away from the walls
when they flood

and our windows when they darken
with nearby towers of nothing.

3.

The cars have fled
the blackout quarantine of East Third Street.

By late afternoon
it’s dark as the scattered basements
of a smashed flashlight.

No people, just air displacements
chewing the sides of scaffolding.

During the dead light days,
the computers, ruined with voids
between world systems,
mean nothing.

The surge protectors mean nothing.

The freezer means nothing.

The lamp, blind as boiling water, means nothing.

We can smell
the garbage sacks left outside
and suffering like lapses
in civilization.

Weeks go by without sun,
just clouds powered by muted torches,
and the cries of bird-like non-beings.

My woman walks fifty blocks
north to her job
where the lights aren't sick.

She can't call anybody
on her hand clotted with boroughs
of wind that drowned
and boroughs of wind that did not drown.

She returns home in days, not hours.

The one room muffles its worried mice
with peanut butter and jelly,
canned tuna,
dry milk, protein bars,
disaster food.

What others call sleep
I call pacing the mattress's one repeating mile.

And outside, even the traffic signals
look like they've lost
their galaxies,

their gods that can't be seen or felt
between the unmanned
tenements,

the hurried, shawl-frail steps
my woman planted

and the tired beds of her body
approaching

with unreliable readings of where we live.



MY LAST CENTURY
JOANNA SIT

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PUBLISHERS WEEKLY



RIVERING
DEAN KOSTOS

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RICHARD HOWARD

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THE TASTE OF FOG

DAVID CHORLTON



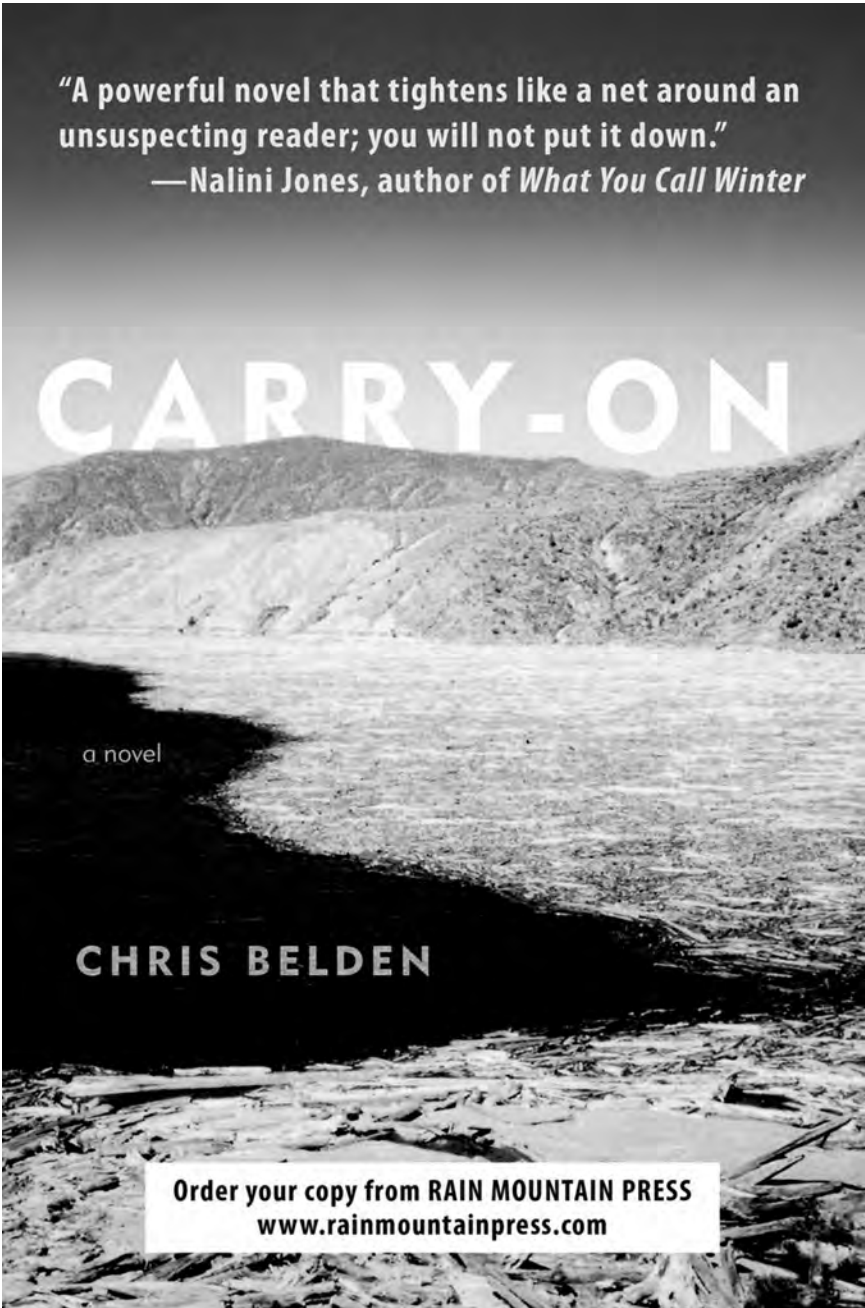
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