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Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College Chicago

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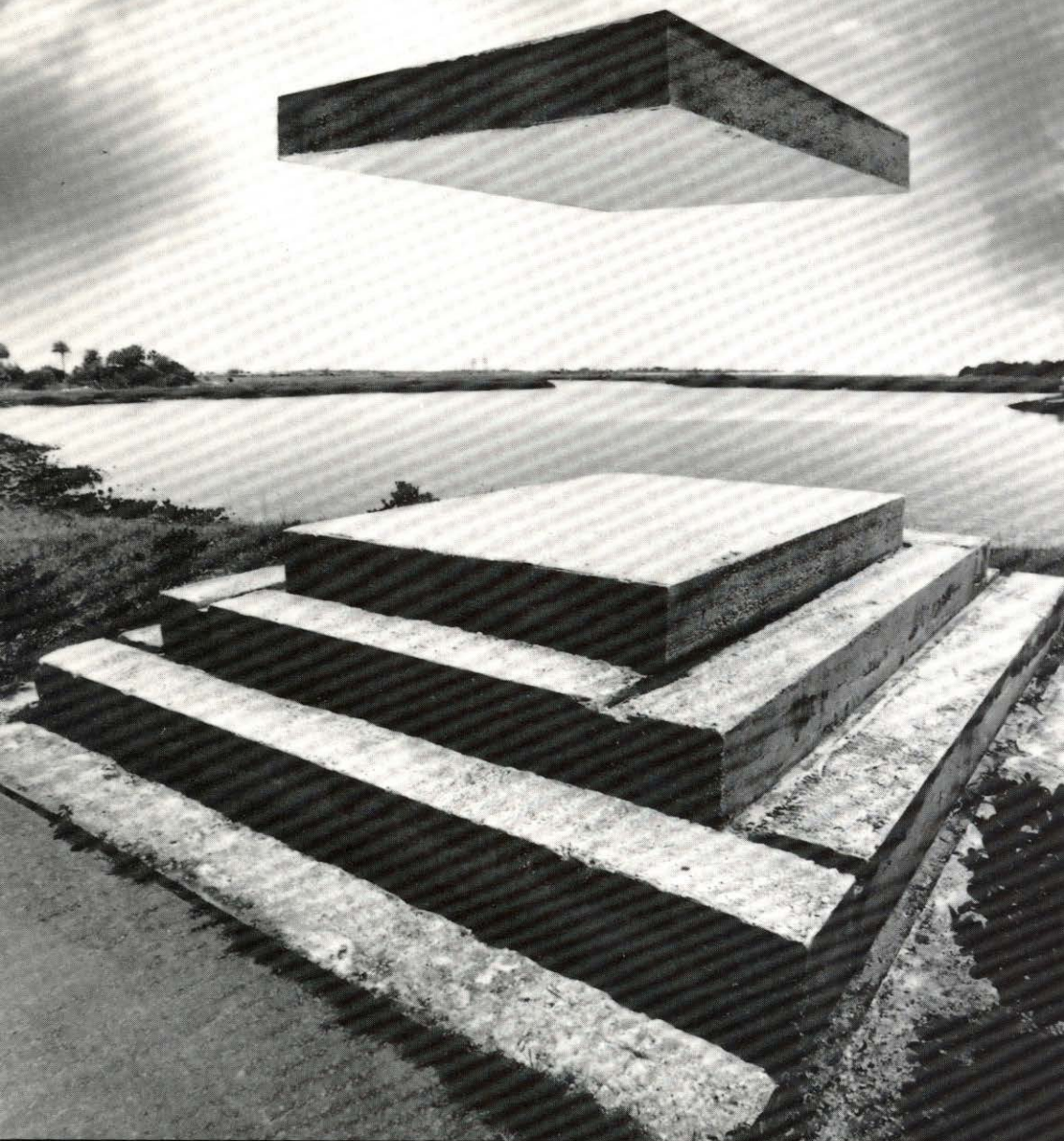
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COLUMBIA POETRY REVIEW

Columbia College/Chicago

Spring 1993

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MAUREEN SEATON

UTOPIA

(after Marianne Moore)

“It is a privilege to see so much confusion.”
I remember my choice at age thirty when he said:
“Everything?” And I threw him out
because I’d chosen a tumult of kids and words,
determined to own it all. Which reminds me
of Moore’s unconventional commission
by the Ford Motor Company to name a successor
to Thunderbird. How she researched and labored
over a lengthy list of zany failures. Her favorite:
“The Utopian Turtletop.” Not such a flop
as the real flop that followed, however. I felt
sorry for the sorry Edsel, the same way
I pitied delinquents of all metals, later
bought my first foreign car at age nineteen
for nineteen hundred dollars because
it could float with the windows up
and it never overheated in summer. When a thief
ripped off hood and tire, sullied her face,
leaving that gaping hole, I sold her—
for by then she’d earned her gender—and turned
toward something large I could never get attached to.
The kids loved our new Ford wagon.
Ugly as it was, it fit fifteen of their noisiest friends
comfortably. After the divorce, I drove us all
to Croton Point Park. I remember
how we rocked the car that day, our jubilation
uncontainable although shocks groaned in celebration.
That was the year someone’s father shot our dog
for disturbing his garbage, the year
I made my choice for the privilege of confusion,
beginning a prose that grew shorter
and sharper until the pieces resembled
hues of a stained glass window. Looking back,
I see my children and my poems rocking unstopably

toward a future that invited chaos
the same way Miss Moore invited the spire
and the storm and the steeple-jack's small sign,
"Danger," into the lazy order of her life.

NASTY GIRLS

That celebrity's son's so hung up
on Zora's refusal to fit in
with the Renaissance, his
neck veins bulge big as snakes—
and I thought this was a celebration,
not a roasting. My head
is deep into trying to comprehend,
but Lori says: "Men ain't shit,"
so I drop the thinking then,
but today I wonder:
Am I nasty? Sonya Rosenberger
pissed off her Bavarian neighbors
when she uncovered Nazis in their clergy—
went from nice to nasty overnight!
And Zora Hurston's reputation as outlaw
followed her to Florida where
they laid her in an unmarked grave
and fed her books to the bonfire. Who
buried her, who burned her words,
who threw dynamite at Rosenberger?
Am I nasty? Here's the folklore
of my people: They love their whiskey.
They count on salvation
at the end of purgatory,
attend Church and buy crullers
and crumb buns on the way home, and fat
newspapers, and Sunday is still
a day of rest, gluttony, and gossip.
I endangered my children once
when I gave up drinking and memory
caused a fury that overflowed.
I endangered them the day
I told them I loved a woman—
"No, honeys, listen to me, I *love* her"—
and their faces crumbled and I prayed
their small hearts would hold.
And when their father took them away
to the blue house and the club
on the Sound and the new baby sisters,
I threw them to the lion

to save myself, but I wonder:
Am I nasty? Is truth
worth such recklessness? Zora,
you're a hundred years old today.
From my room at the top of the city,
I honor you. From my freckles,
and the blush that rises to my roots,
from my woman smell, my pride,
my raised-by-nuns will of iron,
I honor you, nasty girl, nasty
woman, nasty.

HILDA MORLEY

FOR ROBERT DUNCAN 1919-1988

Not looking at me, but always
past me, not wishing
to talk to me, but moving
toward someone else & preferably
a man,
not giving me
any more attention than
your wall-eye would allow,
I was made uneasy,
wondering
which of your thoughts could
make the fog so thick
between us?
But your poems, so many
of them,
broke out of
that mist: huge burning
shafts of light breaking
through clouds,
arrows
of pity, anger soaring
through enormous skies,
a vast embrace
After 30 years
I'm told that you wish to speak to me,
given
your telephone number, to be
used only at certain hours
because
you're ill,
ill but vibrant, open,
laughing, affectionate,
eager
to talk, to know, to hear—so many

years of friendship lost, it seemed then—
(perhaps

not possible before) the hesitations
faded, fears dispelled.

Over & over
meaning to call you from the other edge
of the continent—the clock-time difference
confusing me—I put it off, delayed.

And now the voice I should have
heard again is blotted out,
extinguished,

doused by
the fingers of a cloud heavier
than a man's hand.

I hear of it
on a night in coldest February,
with

no moon in the sky,
only
the hard figures of the stars
brilliant,

their language
thousands of years away
in time,

stronger
than our forever.

FOR GIACOMETTI

(his work as seen in the Matter photographs)

That head,
 mountain, or
long bone of a man,
 bone of
a man thinking,
 thinking
against endlessness
 & rearing up,
 thrusting
itself against the limitless outside,
 not only
outside but against himself, to hold,
 hold together
what stands on the whirling
wheel, the revolving disc,
 the globe of
our standing place,
 where we
can stand,
 where we impinge on
the air pressing into
ourselves, what we are,
 what is
our selfness & most solid,
most fragile of all possibles,
 most
unvanishing,
 poised forever,
 held up by
the threat of being,
 the burdening,
that there is no other way to
reach it,
 only
insistence: and to see it
so
 as if the mountains
the trees were there only for

that,
to hold up, as these heads,
these bodies, that look of
what the waves & winds have
beaten, have stretched,
pushed together,
held up, made *above*,
or lifted
out of frightenedness,
out of a
pain of insisting,
made to face out of
the most inward looking into
what digs the eyelids
open,
what leans weighted
as a lodestone
in desperation
& no time impending.
Each footfall a doom made possible,
self staring into
itself,
the eye more filled than
any mirror,
bones folded back into
the body-trunk, the tree,
weight of gravity
on the rib-cage,
the thought of
what is there
(the grounded
breast).

AMY GERSTLER

PSYCHO TOWN

How is this village different from all others?
Simmered in the broth of unsalted gossip,
it's a well-guarded enclave where we pass
our enforced winter rest. We recover our
submerged selves here. One soul-chomping
goblin after another is hauled up from
our depths, blinking and sputtering
like litters of siblings nearly drowned
at a picnic—their bloated faces so scary
father's hair went entirely white six minutes
after a glimpse, whilst our dear mother
has lisped ever since. Later, the evacuation
of the ballet school put an end to our formal
education. Everyone walks the streets affected
by slight curses: toothache, seeing double,
drymouth, or they're wrongly convinced
they've got syphilis. After a few days here,
some visitors sense their presence of mind
leaking from their right ear. Others find
they leave a small pink stain wherever they sit.
You've been chanting uncharacteristic wishes
in your sleep. I lived in this region all
my formative years. If you truly wish my hand
in marriage (*here he fell to his knees
in anguish as she lowered her voice to utter
her demands*), you will have to submit
to the ritual pinpricking, and let the wedding
take place in that sooty church with the artichoke-
shaped spires you can just make out jutting up from
the besmirched, yet somehow cloudless horizon.

A MEASURED JOY

Brilliant as fish scales,
brisk as a goat's beard:
you're a flagrant earthly
glory. Mysterious as opium
milked from the bases
of flaming immodest blossoms,
whose business it is to bite
the will in two while
kissing the eyelids.
Heady as a sentence nine
miles long. Peculiarly
circuitous as the flight
path of the question mark
butterfly. Solemn as fourteen
brown glass vials of antique
pain reliever—still potent
though no one believes it.
Patient as the self-repair
practiced by myriad cloud
forms. Wild and surprising
as a scourge made of lettuce
leaves. Powerful as those
tattered books buried under
ancient temple floors,
dictated by female oracles
prophesying beautiful,
endless, elaborate disasters.
As full of epiphanies
as a thoughtful drinker.
Hilarious as a hall of feathers.
Because you roam the earth,
my having been given
a face to peer out of—
the means to witness your
trajectory—seems, if not
an outright blessing,
at least a stroke of such
astonishing luck, it reduces
me to this gibberish:
like the wearing of a hat

made from a dried bee
hive, like the fourteen course
burnt feasts of the invisible,
like the woman who carried
her lover's spare glass eye
in her breast pocket at all times . . .
Do I need to say how drastic,
elastic and frightening love
in its lunatic ceaselessness is?

MAXINE CHERNOFF

A SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION

In gardens filled
with blue, contagious
light, you read
for meaning.
You weren't looking
for escape
but the beginning
of sorrow, some love
to skew the results.
The landscape held you
indifferently, and
soon you learned
that lives fall
in the plural.
Once love struck,
you bracketed the loss.
In a small Dutch painting,
artist unknown,
a brown shadow wavered
in the corner like its own
transfiguration.
This omen made you
freer with language.
Forward my mail,
you said, and smiled
in your sleep.
You found yourself
reciting the obliterated
version of the story
just as reporters arrived
demanding truth.
During winter,
the shankbone of
the year, you inclined
toward hope and tumbled
forward. Finding yourself

in the halls of knowledge,
sweaty from the journey,
you uncorked
the critical moment,
and grasped the face
of the one you loved.

LANDSCAPE WITHOUT RIVER

I am a museum.
I am unbecoming.
I am the shepherd
strayed from the flock.
I am the sky
clean as trucks,
clean as a knife.
I am waxen, messy, nostalgic
for an ideal past.
I've stayed away
for hours and don't know
the fire from the heat.
I am an august presence
in the hall of breath.
I augur success to July.
I am a sinister force
in the diary
of a snail.
Illuminated in moonlight,
I am more detached
than a shred of evidence.
I am your reward for
tracking winter
to its source.

PHOTO IN *LIFE*

In France
a thin woman
walks down
a brick alley,
her legs
outlined under
a long
swaying skirt.
The basket
she carries
is full
of fruit.
As light rolls
ahead of her,
Gordon McCrae
crows
O-KLA-HO-MA,
and Rod Steiger
plays
the American
heavy, dying
with mumbled
grief
in his mouth.
I sit
on the black
and white kitchen
linoleum
before
memory comes
to colorize.
It is 1955,
and everyone
is happy.

RON SILLIMAN

FROM *NON*

for Jackson Mac Low

Just when you thought it was safe to read: Return to Planet of the Paragraphs. When this you see, justify right for me. Hills of the piedmont act as a track . . . along which the first long finger of oncoming fog is dragged. On the freeway cars cluster, herd instinct. The old man and the bicycle. Sun stuck in a web of cloud. Balconies unused in winter, swimming pool empty in the rain. Fractal tempo: cars rush past. Knowing just how long the “wait” light will blink before it turns to red. Mannish white-haired woman echoes husband. Wide arc of bus as it turns. Categorize joggers by how they hold or wave their hands. Hard of darkness. Hanging from the ceiling of the Eye-talian restaurant was a huge plastic octopus. Theme park from hell. Where freckles join to form that small beautiful continent on the small of your back. Blue bursts of veins in the skin of the thigh. Walkers in the night take fright. Open, the briefcase in his lap forms a desk (train’s roar echoes in the tunnel): he’s using a calculator to balance his checkbook. Belt that missed one of the trousers’ loops. Each sentence, dahling, is mahvelous. It’s Monday and we’re rushing to work—it’s almost euphoric. Albino biker gal? Nah, that’s just bleached out. Woman like that in spiked heels (briefcase is a Coach bag) running full tilt up the escalator to catch her train, trying to keep the *Wall Street Journal* from flying out of the crook of her arm. Each one bleach one. Nothing will tell you faster nor more accurately about the sexual allocation of labor in the field of architecture than women’s restrooms in public buildings. Am I my brother’s beeper? Yellow-billed blackbird that I cannot find in the field guide. I turn over in bed and sense my sinuses drift and gradually resettle. Crisp lines of ironing shape the old man’s blue jeans. The ice plant in bloom, red, yellow. Hegemony begins at home. Ragged looking plant, the artichoke. Hang gliders over the coast drift past the firing ranges at Ford Ord, almost motionless over the dunes (sand blows across the highway). Without a blink, the clerk pulls out a pair of scissors from under the counter and cuts the woman’s credit card in two. Like a vomiter with the dry heaves. Suburban commercial street still empty at nine on a weekday morning. Wheels out of alignment. Abort, ignore, retry? Holding the pen virtually perpendicular to the page, thumb and fingers pinched near the point. Anklets over her stocking before she puts on her tennies. Readable? A cluttered desk is the spatial representation of over-commitment. Porch appears to have a roof, which in fact it does not. Old globe. Waiting for the others to choose their fortune cookies, so that I know that the one which remains

contains my "fate." Bush hints at Deukmejian, all-Gemini ticket. Running up the steps, I blossom into a full sweat. Tables turned atop one another, café closed, man stands stationary alongside his mop. Anger augurs altered ego. Duck into the dime store to buy an umbrella.

words warm

or warn

where meaning wanes

crouch to carve

ink into pages

moan as bus

pulls free of station

Dan Rather

gives me a kiss

JOHN YAU

FIFTH DIPTYCH

I

The two cities
we plan to visit

are crossed
by the same river twice

or is it a city
made up of parts

which do not meet
on the map

spawned by
its shadows

a circle
a child

traces in the sand
fire from

a misremembered stance

II

Clouds milk
brown grass

growing between
aluminum tracks

First wish
their mouths

will be seen
as targets

One might want
to size up

in the park
Second wish

It does not matter
if we slip on

the same language
the one whose words

never mirror
their opposites

SEVENTH POSTCARD FROM GOTTFRIED BENN

Cold festers
on a map

I stole my
bicycle back

from a man
others left

for dead
I am a fossil insert

a spotted plod
taking something

a honk or spark
and the copies of them

I once made
for others

fixed
inside

their animal shirts
and iron tresses

TOM MANDEL

PIZMON—A SYRIAN SONG

Come on ba-by, and rescue me!

—Aretha Franklin

My enemy renders me inconsolable,
Rules, encamped upon my shoulders
While you hide, and I

Cannot abscond. Forgive my misdeeds
And complaints—rebuild the awesome
Supreme temple, for millennia only

A plan. Time, hidden, sure,
The jewellike possession of our
Children, lives among your stars.

Your patience is the voice
Of rescue, answering with mercy
Harmonies that banish the beast.

You sing in the city.
You shout in its houses.
Your mercy rides our banners.

Your bride has a voice
Whose bridegroom is my voice.
O ruler, rebuild the city

Of precious inheritance and love,
Our hearts' urgent meeting place,
And gift of your return.

Rock, God, King, Living One
Accept, love, shine like light
Of rising day, like a

House on its construction site
Build your sanctuary of trust
In my heart. Your light

On my face and hands
Indicates the limits of space
You span. Foundation, Dwelling Place

Let the arrowhead of my
Soul's intention pierce the membrane
Of Your mercy. Engine of

Emanation, these words I spread
Before You. Let them flow
And endure: accept my song.

CLAUDIA KEELAN

TRACTATUS FRANÇAISE

If I forgave myself
(the rain glossing arrival
to the showers)
Would the milestone again show the distance?
All travesties relatively the same,
in the conventional syntax for prayer,
desire vs. duty, she subtracted from he,
God re: Us. (Oh reveal it now.)
A child's shrapnel wounds
(on tv in Amsterdam)
a doctor's ministering I would
(because it's his *job*, the sobbing cameraman)
never have witnessed in my country,
(that you *must not* look away)
her cries so near animal it must be the end
(from the unnamed place)
the father crossing her final feet, small crusader
(preparing the distance from here to

2

There). To family resemblance, to "the place
where appreciation is possible
and connected to other members."
Who share the same place? I wanted to say
it was the blank milestone I loved,
those erased gravestones the Resistance
wrote, and the villages, too, Montpeyroux,
St. Jean de Fos, as indistinguishable as the distance
not revealed between them. But it's in *believing*
we share the same place I stumble, Wittgenstein,
the shaved head
of a French girl, in 19—, whitened now,
somewhere near here,
her tenure to public suffering
filling in the numbers that are not the truth

Alone, but companion to travel,
the *answer* revealing their distance
but not their single importance, each digit
heading the pages
of the history which even now
is writing you.

The gesture of the unknown
father arming his dead child for war, versus
the old philosopher dying foresworn,
counting together on his fingers
the words to assemble us.

CHALKTRACE

You have no choice but to be one
or the other here: gunshot, blossom,
India, freeway, the fixed autumn,
a child's eventual hair. History
of your cellwork shared
in the sculptor you heard the story of,
religion his metier and hugely,
the giant cross he'd just finished
in the foundry falling, cutting off the leg
of first his apprentice, and later,
years later, many crosses and abstract
stigmata in red years later,
the body of the same apprentice's son
flattened under—what? A red cross?
Oxidized, perfected stigmata,
a century's work but hugely
and finally, under the metal signature,
the body of?

 Batting the limited fly
of the 20th century, I speak to you now not as I would
but further away, therefore, more.

WANDA COLEMAN

IMITATION OF DEATH

here sit i at the womb of my desire here
sit i my fingers slowly sweep across
chiseled indentations

spell my name

black head of stone rising from a bed of dreams

pronounce my name

no wind and no sun. fingers rivering eyes
devoid of fears. here sit i

oooh the trouble seen

grave task of staying still. waiting for an
imagined past to reveal some secret. or
important breath-making formula

uncover my name

loam soaking in skeleton. mold foxing in
the world. time silencing rancor
hands scraping the entombing dark

leave no name

only

the hollow husk of a former dweller
underground filled with inquisitive plaster
at the site of excavation. hauled skyward

to be resentenced

MOON LAYING ON HER SIDE

value is as value does

i can't get good service or is it just me?
i use my real name
but the best i can do is imagine small's paradise
who do i thank for being so skunked
so razzed so out of sync

excuse me for the eyes in the back of my head

sad

of thee of thee of thee singing
i am bold patriot. i embrace the nation/notion
that condemns me. i've never confessed
to anything that wasn't public policy. all i
ever wanted was enuff green to cover the black

i cook all day i cook all night
i conjure conjure till the roux is right

(he says i have a high mind
and a whore's hips)

i prepare the oven
for a meal of bones
for a plate of the lover
who leaves me alone

when social dally becomes habit—arf arf
rewriting the turf as i rave thru it

stripped naked

my truth hangs by its nappy mane
strung up in the candy shop window
its hands crossed over its pubis, sprays

the third element of creation

RICHARD JONES

THE TEMPLE

I'm building the temple
stone by stone,
raising statues of women,
raising statues of men.
I've constructed an altar
of oyster shells and olive branches.
Any peasant can make an offering—
rusty nails, bent and broken,
old keys that open nothing and go nowhere,
dead flowers, spent candles, poems.
My temple has no walls, no doors,
sunlight flows between the columns.
All are welcome
to slip in and admire the moon,
or leave, if it's late and they must,
slipping out across the meadow,
the hillside white with dew,
the city burning below,
knowing there is a god,
never looking back.

CATHEDRAL

Someone set songbirds free
to live in the old cathedral,
bringing them from the street market
to the church as a kind of joke.
Now there are doves and finches
nesting in the crooks of the highest arches
or roosting on the impossibly high
sills of stained glass windows,
looking down into the valley of the altar
as if from cliffs.

Twice a day, you'll hear them singing:
at dawn
when the blue light
of angels' wings
and the yellow light of halos
flood into their nests to wake them;
and during mass
when the organ fills
the valley below with thunder.
These birds love thunder,
never having seen a drop of rain.
They love it when the people below stand up
and sing. They fly
in mad little loops
from window to window,
from the tops of arches
down toward the candles and tombs,
making the sign of the cross.

If you look up during mass
to the world's light falling
through the arms of saints,
you can see the birds flying
through blue beams of light,
baptizing themselves with incense
as if it were simple wood smoke
rising from a cabin chimney
in a remote and savage forest.

EILEEN MYLES

AUTHENTICITY

There's pivotal moments
in bouncing time.
My friend goes racing
across the green
bright red car, takes
a corner and behind
the right hand of
this green tree looms
a water tower—the only
religion a small town
knows. I don't
have your ball
I'm sorry to
say. In light
rain a white haired
woman steps off
a bus, it's raining
harder & I almost
can't write, the
dog's brown butt
bouncing through
tear drops. Why
the rain?
'Cause the 19th century's
gone. I saw
the empty train
tracks at Barrytown
the prettiest little
station you ever
did see. All
across Canada
more of the
same and
under the convenient
roof in a
playground we

rest & more
of the same the
roar of the
rain is a blast
from the past. Goodbye
19th century—trash
barrels in Barrytown
filled to the gills,
Germany trying to
transport its
shit to France
& vice versa. You
wept about this
playground one
night, the end
of your childhood
& I didn't need
to cry about any
thing at all
because I
have nature.
You tried to
show me something
beautiful you did
& nature sounds
like a bowling
alley right
now. What
is coming down
the lane for
us. A spotted
deer, peanut
butter colored
crossed our
path, it passed
& I felt like
my life had
been folded
in half.
I'm free now.
I've killed
a deer,

had deer
dreams, raced
to the ocean
holding its
horns, &
now I have
spared the
creature. You
brought me
this. Your desire
for a squirrel
is stronger
than the
part that
wants to
stay dry.
We're driving
through colleges
now; that
fails to move
me in the
manner that
playgrounds do.
You can buy
a piece of
the nineteenth
century if you're
really rich.
God, they
would turn
around & buy
something for
everyone,
those robber
barons, but
I would
settle for
a cigarette.
I go to
Bark &
I major
in ball. So
many things

were sort of
purplish red, those
flowers

wavering
in front of
a corrugated
wall, it
made them
speak to
me as many
& single. I
was moved &
we were driving
through the
20th century
then.

So many birds
forced from
the top of
a dark
green tree,
paint-by-numbers
very very dark,
it was a
high-pressure
situation. Starling,
how contrived
of them to
name the
girl that
way like
a bird that
fascinated
my dog. It's
an incredible
industry of
colors. This little
town gives
you space to
own them
all. Owning

in the sense
of the 21st
century. Not
putting a gate
around all
this space or
driving through
but having a
vision that's
real & fake,
soft footsteps,
semi-metallic
rain, millions
& millions
of singers,
when one
leaf falls
you need
not hope
for another
one.

LYDIA TOMKIW

WHAT I LIKE DOING BEST

Busting slob, swaying gush,
Nabbing drool, boodling;
Flinging woo, pitching woo,
Spooning, smooching, swooning,
 Under the moonlight, under a flash light, under a sun lamp,
 Under a table, understated, underscored, underrated,
 Understand I won't remove my underclothes,
 Under the influence, under a shower, underwater with an underclassman
Watching the submarine races.
Lapping faces; playing kissy-face,
Playing smacky-lips, playing tonsil hockey;
Locking lips, ripping lips, cleaning teeth, tongue wrestling;
Perching, petting, bussing, smacking, slurping, parking,
 In a convertible, in a big rig, in a castle, in a dumpster,
 In a bathroom, in a river, in front of Rover, in front of mother,
 In a field of clover, in a dungeon, in a prison;
 In a hospital bed, in June, in November, in a tizzy, I remember getting dizzy
 While listening to, like, Thin Lizzy in the background, like, Bolero or
 Elvis Costello; like, Howling Wolf howling, like, Yoko Ono yowling,
 While I was:
Dealing drool, swapping spit, switching lip,
Whipping pout, trading mouth,
Smashing face, bouncing lick;
 Gently, elegantly, tenderly, subtly,
 Friendly, coolly, demurely, alluringly,
 Or give it to me surly, burly, late at night or early,
 I want to get
Loved-up, cuddled-up, eaten-up, swallowed-up, only-from-the-waist-up;
Lip tango, lip scalp, lip loot;
Smooch, suck face,
Make out, neck, kiss,
Salute someone with
The throwing of my lips.

BARRY SILESKY

SKETCH TOWARD LANDSCAPE

That country gathered along the shore,
so many shades of skin, shapes of eyes
the artist collects for his studio draws us

out: "Throw it to me! Git
over here!" Or is it the black mesh drawn over
her skin tracing the dark

nipple, inviting a hand? Then she
passes and a door shuts.
The room is quiet.

Bathed in the milky light, the canvas stretched
in the corner so far from the afternoon
revives the itch that makes it.

Whose hand? When she caught
my eye, then slipped into the long summer
sprawled on a bed, the view

became the only souvenir
of the visit: let's have another
drink, breathe the thick musk, nothing

to wake for. . . . Such excitement
when she moved in, streets piling
their racket through the windows,

but by fall the complaints
won't stop. We browse the album
again: history arranged to forget

it was never my room. Her breast
becomes the smashed thumb, rain
flooding the basement.

Outside's orange, yellow, green
splashed on sky, so delicious
if they ever really

existed, if we could find them, explain
her smile, the afternoon the weather
changed and she left to repair the frame, mix

the new colors the days
require. So blue now, humidity cleaned
out, a thin wisp of cloud highlights

the garden, perfect for the picnic.
The children are sure to love it,
if we can just save them from

the bully, the new disease, her
skin. Those rusted mountains don't
fit at all. We can't escape them.

PHILIP KLUKOFF

SOUTHEAST CHICAGO: DECEMBER 8

When I awake
I listen to my blood
as I do to you
and to Saint Saens,
and to the African proverb
about the village and the child.
I dream the Chinese warriors on my wall
and the woman who prays to birds.
I touch the brick my hand removed
from Warsaw.

The warring body
feels you
in purple and magenta zones,
in miles of North Dakota wire.

I have ridden through such desolation
and return,

invite myself to read Marquez,
feel magically alone
with you, who know my passion,
find it in the early morning frost,
and watch it vanish long before
the poem for which you ask.

CONNIE DEANOVICH

OAF

he eats hillbilly tiger
and washes his red hair
with gasoline
he has promised to make a movie
to drive an Electra 225 onto a stage
and spit on it
to make a movie of this
to call it *Combat*

he has a taste for bone
and washes his grandmother
with rubbing alcohol
he has promised to take her to a movie
in her old Electra
promised her she could spit out the window

he drinks red oil
and fantasizes washing a mountaineer
with snowmelt
he was promised a movie of this
by a liar friend
he'd now like to spit on

he chews an orange blueprint of Tony Curtis
just exactly like a spy without a hat
or Nazi beer to wash it down with
he has promised to keep the secret
so he only spits out the nonessentials
the shoes
the tip of the nose

he drinks from the pink water's edge and
as he promised himself
he laps it up like a tiger crouched at a watering hole
during an electric storm

when lightning spits blue strikes across the sky
really
the sky is gray as a limb

what he doesn't know about sky, in general

buckets
London
choreographing a face
amusing a born realist
stomaching an aspirin
the presence of Albuquerque
sex laws
jail agenda
harpoons, in dreams
limp heavyweights
stone dead snakes and
basements

could fill the Sacred Leg
and its nonelectrified cathedral

he eats crackers
on the steps of the cathedral
and fingerbowls in holy water
its water dusty with promise
and he moves toward more of it
like an Electra 225 crushing a patch of jasmine
the flower of promise
the transport of joy

SANDRA STEINGRABER

DISPATCH

Angel, take a message
to my beloved, though
who she is I don't know
or where.

Angel, ecstatic agent, deliver
this film, these drawings
of the cords and tunnels
of my heart.

Hold her, enemy angel,
in your radiant gaze.
Hold her in your black
and tarry wings.

DEVON BROCK

THE YELLOW BUCKET

The ape of reason
wakes
inside
the primate house,

the pulp
of the weather
rolled
tightly
with
its
dextrous
tongue,
plugging
the
appropriate
canker,

grooming
its
habit
with
the
stiff
bristle
of
the
keeper's
broom,

the
hiss
&
spatter
of
hoses;

of
Sundays
&
driveways
&
ration;

of
palsied
tomato,
strapped
to
splinters
of
unfinished
staves;
and
the
stiff
utility
of
hoses,
the
recalcitrance
of
lawns.

The
cries
beyond
walls
&
walls
of
other
Euclidian
habitats:

Rhesus,
Howler,
Macaque.

The
blood-
stained
glove
&
the
short
yellow
bucket
&
the
ping
of
rough-
hewn
meat
slapping
against
concrete.

The
envy
of
Baboon
Island.

The
low
leafless
canopy,
dim,
of
the
Marmoset.

The
always-
sucking
of
rubber
boots.

HOW ONE INVENTS NIGHTTIME

shade like a bad tooth, the
gaping plaything of tongues,

laps at the dry spots
'til wet, wider.

Night: an act of obstruction:

hand as duck;
fist as dog.
Earth as paring down.

light, mass
angle of incidence.

time as measure of distortion,
posts, pillars, poles,
long scabs of wire:

wire.

NO TONGUES IN THE HURRICANE

I keep :

Willow switches,
Knotted bits of string
& fear,

Sharper corners
Of gumwrapper chain &
The long stuff of regret,

Coiled,

On the middle shelf,
In the third cabinet,
Left of the fridge,

Between matched
& unmatched
Glassware

(like
Thermos bottles
put there at purchase

by my mother,
with foresight
& yard-sale dollar tags;

or
the brass & polish
of the unsinged lantern,

decorous,
obscene
in the living room,

by the t.v.,
above the unbattered drum),
&

Words rotten with implication,
Tongues &
All of memory's stoneware.

MARY JO BANG

BACK FROM BEDLAM

You've come riding back from Bedlam on a half-starved horse,
bragging about how you abandoned the nurse
you fell in love with,
leaving her only a slip of crumpled white paper
on which you wrote your name
and listed your dashed hopes:

a second coming,
Freud for a father,
that your mother was a mute.

I thought you would return less tarnished;
while you were away,
I had pictured you among plump matrons who
served you and other small boys at long wooden tables;
I had you eating rice pudding with fresh raspberry sauce.
Instead, there are worn spots in the tweed of your jacket—
the kind that come
from resting your elbows too long on a hard surface—
and needle marks in unseen places.

I kiss the pale half-moons beneath your eyes.
You show me the stones in your pockets;
each is small and flat and smooth;
each engraved, like a holy scarab, with its own talismanic sign.
A well-meaning someone (you refuse to name names)
promised these would safeguard your speech
and simplify your thoughts.

You say your words are spun from spider's silk,
that they gleam iridescent in the sunlight
and change meaning as they move from purple to pink.
I want to believe you.
I'll be back, you shout, as soon as I know where I'm going.
Then you ride off again,
leaving me to finger the gluey, thin threads of a spider's web
and pocket the folded notes I find hidden there.

NIGHT SONG

(for my son, Michael)

Night sings to me through my wrists,
whistles down dark carpal tunnels,
notes floating high and wide
like jets above ice-white clouds.

Face down, my breath meets yours
somewhere between Chicago and Los Angeles,
perhaps in the painted desert or the petrified forest
where trees with rock cores rest briefly

before becoming what's next.
Night sings to me from my fragile pelvic bones,
fibrous bands holding hollowness in place;
a faint rustle rises.

Last night you telephoned,
said you were a white line on a looking glass mirror,
a pale iridescent pearl, oyster-bred,
circling ever farther away from any

seeable center.
Night sings, crossing barriers,
lines dividing what this is
from what it is not.

You are what you have always been,
both a scalpel blade no wider than a glaze of frost on a window,
and a curved needle drawing a length of suture
through two edges of a new wound,

entering one side, exiting another,
while a single line from that night song
moves mutely through me:
subcutaneum, pericranium, blood and bone.

LOOK AGAIN

I'm on the ferry between Dover and Calais,
sitting in a plush gray recliner
in the middle of a group of retarded adolescents,
toddlers in time-inflated bodies.
One girl keeps saying, *Look in my mouth. I just went to the dentist.*
She opens wide and the boy next to her looks deep inside,
searching for something.
Look again, she says insistently,
never closing completely, *Ook in ma mout, ook in ma mout.*
My husband, next to me, is reading a paperback thriller
with a rifle scope on the cover;
I'm watching the gray waves outside the window, three seats over,
wash the side rails into the ocean.
We don't speak; what is there to say?
That evening, we eat duck and white beans in a café in Cambrai
while *Blueberry Hill* plays softly on the radio,
then we silently go to sleep in separate beds
like the Ozzie and Harriets who bore us.

In Strasbourg, I climb the stairs of the astrological clock,
failing to heed the warning that anyone with heart trouble
should not attempt this alone.
At the top, I lean out a window and cover my ears
against the clamor of bells in the Cathedral.
My husband is in our hotel room;
he imagines he is the leader of an international spy ring:
he has drawn the rich brocade curtains against an assassin's bullet
and sits in the shadows, with a good view of the door.
I count the tiles in the street,
buy a Swedish camera in a secondhand store
and photograph graffiti—
a stencil of Mickey Mouse with a gun to his temple.
I look up and, there—in an open window—is the omen I am looking for:
a dress listing on a hanger, waiting to be worn.

For weeks, we trace a silent line across a map
that grows more fragile with each folding and unfolding.
It's hot; the interiors of the stone churches are dank.
We drink wine like it's bottled water;

the reds leave pale lavender traces on our lips.
The ocean is calm the day we return to England;
we go out on deck;
my husband wants a souvenir snapshot
to show his friends back at Interpol.
He makes a perfect pirouette for the camera,
and somebody captures the back of his head.

CAROLYN KOO

THE MUTE PLANT

A seasonal distraction
from the cold,
you eat the leaves
of the mute plant,
sit next to it
humming the inanimate
air of your lightest room,
listening.
The water by turns
travels and arrives.
The vein of yellow stem,
the root, drying slow as wood.

Your fingers
tipped in the edge
of dirt,
branches black outside,
all other senses
represented in a
momentary sway
toward patience.
The throat waits
for a voice, asleep
in the unnatural
dark.

Days later,
sound returns slow,
hands and eyes
limp in sympathy.
Child noises,
a simple No,

and the plainer
words of want.
The foreign tone of rage
and apology,
the lowest notes
of abandon.

OCTOBER EFFIGY

You bring a child's
paper stiffened shirt,
traces of white doll hair.

Joining it for lunch
on the porch, and peeling
frosted leaves from its legs,

Speak dreamily of 4 A.M. fires
to mysterious music designed
to imply hysteria, romance or poverty.

From under the rattling awning,
watch a din of rain, the dim movements
of folding umbrellas.

The plain au pair, the groomed parents
stroll past in jealous balance
while you falter and cough.

As a hole in your throat hits the air,
name the things you want.
The pull of dull cannibal bruises along an arm,

someplace to stare, and the sound of reading aloud.
A murky current of breath and shape
asleep under a heap of clean red clothes.

CYNTHIA CAPPELLO

CELEBRANT

I've learned
how not to be sacrificed.
That gold-plumbed virgins
sink fast
beneath the lip
of the volcano lake,
no crop god ever satisfied;
that the torn cage forfeit
of human heart
to stone knife and sun
appeases no one.

Still
I refuse to stumble
the barefoot desert
with only body parts and
common household objects
to comfort
the rimless day.

I know a place
of cool root and moss,
where the essence of my children
beads my skin.
I will live there.
I will build no altars.

THOUGHTS ON A LINE BY MARK STRAND

I'd like to say
it's the absence of field,
but it sinks
into the careful skew
of my father's
burnt cork lines,
the way my mother
tips a plate

a carpal tendency
toward water-spotted silk
and silkworm-eaten leaves,
a drift of dirt and emeralds,
still life with lodestone.

I'm the rough hands
of polite company,
a woman
in pearls and galoshes
who sings
in public restrooms,
"to click
into place is to die."

This is why
I appear pink in a black room
and, most especially,
the reverse,
how I know
which teeth to bargain
for your stories
of nights in Fargo,

the reason
I pray like a Darwinian
and dance in the spit
of the sieve.

HOUSES

I

These houses fall between
the greedy fingers of my child,
a gable, a chimney,
this rot on the root cellar door,
soft spot of responsibility,

the weight of blue
in a room once ivyed
and windowed over the barn,

the beds in polished alcoves
quick with cubbyholes
bristling with lace.

I gnaw my grandfather's elbow,
plague his patterns
room to room.

He knows already
the spruce grown through
the abandoned farmhouse,
broken floor,
blue missives sent through
every window,
the loosening roof.

I sleep in his shadow,
watch the orchard,
inspect the doorframes for arrows.

II

There have been stages:
a certain steel-strung chemistry,
the penny end of clockworn afternoons,
torn ticket smiles,
a bruised compliance
as peroxide whitens the wound.

In the days of Dalmation linoleum
her house was still sometimes
unshuttered, and I carried
into her dustmote parlor
a trumpet of honeysuckle
crushed against the tongue.

Eddy was a waiter in New York,
before the soaps,
the big-screen scenes with Bob,
before the kids learned how
to sound the credits,
clip addresses
and rented celebrations
from the drawers of maiden aunts.

III

Last night a house in Germany,
the soldiers knock.
The wooden trunk in the basement
grows too slowly,
car keys pebble into dust.
I tell the officer:
I'm just an American.
I want to go home.

IV

Future is a "f" word:
fantail, fireplace—
the mind wrapped in silk
and hung near the ceiling.

Word becomes symbol,
a shortness of breath,
the spiral collapsing
plank and plank,
a striving toward
the straighter line.

In the blue-bordered room
I fatten daily,
bowels tumbling
with the weight of light,

the distance to a window
dropping from lips
rounder than any wedding ring.

I'm ready.

ANGELA GOODRICH

FRAGMENTS

La mujera los brazos agua
Tengo un blanco gato
Tienes tu tambre
Escuela o Inglesia o
Explosion through Guadalajara
On TV sirens and the dark-haired
Men running to old ambulances
Someone dumped into the sewer
Energy explosion
I am pouring my tea
On the table knowing only
Streets have swallowed
City life into rubble
Death woman search pebbles
For children bodies mothers strangers
And I am too far away to
Know anything about them
Except the jumbled language
A missionary taught us in fourth grade
Me llamo Angela
I can name myself
Puerto dinero muy simpatico
And know nothing beyond
El muchaco la tia
Que esta los anos
The surreality of streets and bones broken

WANTING NEW WINDOWS

I'm having motorcycle urges to Paris
I'm having hair urges to blond
Weakness is photographing the same city
Looking at plastic chair-desks too long
Searching for chalk in too many schools
I've made love in every room of every apartment
Traced the black lines in my oak floors
You shake your keys twice before
Opening the door that catches
The rug where I place my shoes
I've been watching the water pretending it's
Summer in a scorching shower
The driftwood dries on the coffee table
And flakes as your legs hurt
In a world working at speeds of city
In the consistency of summer's southern fans
The thin cracking ice sidewalks are
Palaces of bright girls near the
Overfeeling of me lying face down on
Howard Street asleep
The trade of time waiting knowing
There's a leaving I can trace the
Burn of bare shoulders hot sun
Holding you speeding to the
Loud dirt and heavy wines of Italy

HOLLOW

Sleeping in the breath of busy days
You have no idea I haunt the bed awake
It's been years here
Since my robe fell slightly open
That summer when the willow trees
Were lightning cages
Until your disappearance into a postcard
From other continents and
I slept on beaches in a roaring summer
City wanting to wake near your breath

This night seems expansive
Not another six hours short
I leave you still naked
To watch waves and count rooms
Fearing emptiness
Because the light and heat are not mine
Not yours either
In these days here
We have habits of hands across necks
Couches and books
I shouldn't be so slowly into sleep
But you have left me before
In the charred morning of trees

WILLIAM PAUL HICKEY

DISTANCE IN THE GREEN STAGE OF RECOVERY

He sits behind the wire blind
Collecting stillness
Gathering dust

Making fiddle strings snap
In an accidental manner
He washes the earth

The psalmist dines
Upon sea insects
Bad conductors
For a rusting hinge
His mouth has ceased to move

His children string his memory now
Lying still among the rushes
In the city of trees

This passionate ogre
Has an affinity for
Accidental color
A black eye
In the green stage
Of recovery

Dreaming a box of swallows
He paints their spectral chiming
Beneath a dark and whirling
Ceiling of rain

Unbottled sadness
A long walk home

DISCORD

The tangling discord,
black box and shifting
weight. Enormous and
angular.

The fish in his head
An eyesore, a badge,
Reeling clocklike,
the hands

Snipping away. This
time, fascination and
metronome. Scaled for
some others of

Lesser enormity. Charming
monster, who whistles his
hushed tunefuls of military
tone and bearing.

Carpet farming; fanning out.
Digesting infertility,
it spaces and
spans.

The mottled hum dislodges,
suggesting subversion, a sick
lip-smacked goodness.
Increasing

the heart rate,
staining shoes,
folding
image.

DEVICE TO DRIVE OFF BOREDOM

She's crossing the long planks of my floor with a smile, and I finger the photo of a cat named motorhead (He incessantly purrs). Outside it's all morning and rain, cutting lesions into glass. The rain is familiar, making the front hall dream. It worries like thread, discovers this soup of a city running in thin lines, then underneath. In the dumpster behind the Melrose is a cradle full of rotting restaurant trash, and there's rats, pigeons and crazies routing around happily in it. At least one of these characters has blue eyes, I'd be willing to bet on it. Sometimes we sit naked. And peering over the tangle of the two of us, we vanish; our contours becoming landscapes. Our hands and arms like caravans of soldiers, bridge the silent borders. One time in a youth hostel in Germany, the old putz frau put my name on the chore roster and I didn't understand WE separate and dead soldiers fill the trenches between us. An arbitrary word, right here would be perfect. Good. He traces your smile, with

soft and seismic hands.
You shiver so geiger-counter
sharp. The apostle's utensil.
A whirring, cheerful dirge.

MICHELLE HERRON

FINGERS

i with desire cannot hide
i place then tuck the yellow tears
under your bottomless sky
i find a way to sleep with one eye open
to watch me watch me

along the way
i have forgotten the smell of apples
the way teeth feel when biting into the apple
the taste of blood and the feel of accidental
cigar burns on skin

i have misplaced love letters found
in these poems the mirror that follows
these sheets where blood's stained limp-
ness remains and pimp-like pillows create
rustic elbows
and i no longer need to finger me for you

ORANGE ORIEGA

Nobody's going to know about the poems she never wrote.
One day when clouds boom tarantulas in the skies amass
the things of earning a living
boasting and jumping outside the rhythmic pulses
of scientific data sheets
culmination of strychnine poverty and unwillingness
of yesterday's nightmares. These pictures take fingers
and lift the handle on the doorknob and watch the candles
burn out one by one and fall dangerously into the acidic past.
He opened up the jar with brown muscles flexed,
and out poured the universe. Pushing down like fried rice,
and why do they have to be that way?
Hold a child in one hand, the arch over a cloud.
I told you I was a vegetable! Get out of the snow and row faster.
Wait now.

Nobody's going to know about this.
Life sings orange substances and spines hang bone by bone
on a wall mat. Oriega, Oriega. He ate trickle-down Martians
with butter. How everything just mashed together. And whose voice
is this, anyway? She says, Let's not get into psychological hypothesisii.
My cousins got back from Miami. They left us the baby of Cuba. Left
to be the baby of the world. So welcome the best in life. I see
your drum. It's getting louder. Let's not forget the prostitutes on 63rd.
They have their own own. Sure, everybody's shankin' their ass.
Spotlightin' misery. I listen to our drums, they comfort me. Frolickin'
tongues whispering, our souls encased in strange orange light. Relax.
Good horizontal lines, black-blue sky.
She sees everything orange going on around her.

JOSEPH MELODY

IF I HAD A BOOK

If I had a book there would be no letters,
In its title
Only a photograph.
Photography is my second favorite art,
Though I have little knowledge
Of mechanical things.
I would have to reconstitute my essence
From the bottom building up,
Stacked and interlocked
With spaces in between to represent
Thought,
Elliptic fantasies of the brainstem
That have been dismissed,
Building roads,
To be the guy who stands beside
The giant orange marvels
Holding a shovel.
It is then that I would walk
The route of the Danakil plain
Wearing sunglasses
And tanning oil,
Or you might find me
In the upstairs bedroom
Of my Aunt Diane's house,
Laughing like a priest
At the red glow in the closet
And the steady scratching sound
That gets louder the sleepier I become.
I would no longer be perplexed
By little unexplained oddities
Like natural lemon flavor,
Battle simulation,
Squirrels at the zoo,
A warm front cold front,
Overlap resulting in speckled shingles
Spread across the flatlands,

Or everybody driving with their windows up
At summer's sweetest moment.
To dwell on some yet unheard-of faculty
Is to initiate its coming to pass.
This I overheard from a woman
Whose husband left for Yugoslavia
To fight for his homeland.
The years of nothing
Were the years of messages,
Voices scattered and received
Through the lungwater of a fetus.
I learned to write poetry
By driving a stolen car.
You become aware of your surroundings.
You notice that the second lane from the right
Draws the least attention.
You hide between trucks on the highway
And avoid being boxed in at stoplights.
You watch the people in the cars
Around you making eye contact
Under the guise of fearlessness.
You are conscious of every spot
You touch.

THE MATCH

I visualize black bombers
Meeting The Don behind translucent wine
As my fingers flex
To ignite the two-headed
Match from Mexico
Manufactured in a floorless factory
That could have been a library
If reading were more like smoking.
The mistake of an unoblivious housewife
Tired from her double shift;
The defiling of a tree
Imported from further down
In the diminishing jungle
Where oversized crickets leap
Above the smoldering brush
To whisper inquisitions.
My response was that I cannot know,
That I am a man driven by three forces—
The will to navigate,
The need to communicate,
And indulgence.
This match, sent to me here
In my room in the basement,
Made me wonder if life were not
A random prank,
Mystical in its randomness,
Like a condom stretched about
The mouthpiece of a pay phone
When calling for cocaine
At dusk,
Or calling your mother.
I will shave my head on Sunday.

BRYAN TSIKOURIS

ELECTRIC STORM OVER CLEVELAND

A wooden cross on a simple stage
and Mary Beth suddenly understands.
Then she drives in a rusty car
through split oceans
and charcoal faces transposed
on the tissue paper sky.
She is eleven miles past birth
and a thousand flowers buried in love.
She is young and pretty
and knows those two simple words
are seashells of responsibility.
She is a landmark between Cleveland
and the dipping terrain of Kentucky hills,
a smooth desert of beauty
with cactus rose bloomed in every pore.
As she drives, the windshield tells her things
in twisted pictures and glamorous porcelain
molded into dark robes and curtains.
The lightning pushing through,
rolling balls of black cloud,
pierces amazing windstorms in her mind.
She has found a cousin of freedom
in strawberries centuries old.
She is a newcomer wrapped in bandages
from the weight and texture of her memories,
and what she seeks
of the incandescent spinal columns in the sky
is only a love to believe in.

BARRIE COLE

THOSE BOOKS

It begins with the cave man
putting marks down in Sumeria
baked marks, soon

A book of birds on parchment
A book of kings on parchment

The motion of turning pages can be very
beautiful

She says let me teach you
the anatomy of melancholy
It's a floating world
made from ink, oil, water
Dye your interlacing knots purple

the script
written in three languages
with a chorus of gibberish
It's on clay tablets
hinged together
pounded with a stylus that
gets wider then narrower
the way of openings

Surfaces change
Tools change
This is the book of the dead
This is the book of the animals

illuminated manuscripts soaked
stretched scraped taut and thin

Looking back
you can see

it's an astronomical marvel
You slow yourself down
to get the words right
but the bloody bison
is endlessly misinterpreted

You find water only by
smelling it out
and then you drown yourself
to remind yourself
of your fluid innocence

And during the repeated interrogation scene
mud speeds out of you

You realize that at times
a hollow silence
is the best approach

TODAY

Today we think of hip bones and skirts made from bones. And the tiny loops are questionable. And the way she sits like that it's questionable too. Today we think of supple horses with saddles and silent turtles with saddles. You are lying down with a saddle upon your belly. Today we think the comb collecting is the same as feeling. The liturgy of apologies and the way we are put together, hinged like this. We think of nice exchanges with regular people. The difficulty of saying Thank You, the gaps and smatterings of things you might like to do. A without rising inside you like a barometer at one of those amusement parks. It is what slips in you sideways or at the corners allowing you to hang from the sky by your ankles or do karate underwater or some other near impossible feat like saying what you meant.

SHEILA STRABLEY

WHAT COMES AROUND

My whole world
can be described
by two album covers.
Exhibit A: "Joplin in Concert."
Exhibit B: Madonna's first album.
The bracelets are what struck me.
Madonna's black tire rubber,
Janis' more slightly hippy (more severely ignored).

Madonna drinks hundreds.
Janis drinks screwdrivers.
And they've both got their heavy brace-
letted hands up to their cheeks.
Madonna posey, Janis laughing.
Madonna thinking she's got it.
Janis wanting it so badly.
Madonna thinking she's a tough-bitch-
version of Monroe but really she's Janis.

Look at the surface.
Both black and white with just the
slightest touch of red on the lettering
(a tiny splash of blood
like on Janis' satin pants in that famous photo
that graces the cover of Dalton's bio *Piece of My Heart*).

Janis smiles after a few drinks as
Madonna is posing all—pretending all,
her hair teased up strategically
as Janis lets it all
show and flow and GO!

Both of them are trying to get you to buy them,
exposing their wishes, Mad-
onna strangling herself like the repressive 80s,
Janis loosening all she can.

She's not wearing any makeup,
Madonna's wearing too much
or just enough
for this time.

They're both so different and yet . . .
one daring me to be a Madonna wannabe
but I love Janis
and it's all the same
in Black and White and Red
all over like a trite joke.

DECK THE HALLS

puts me in the mind of people in 1922,
except all of the women have
 long sienna hair instead
of Siouxsie Sioux hairdos.
Everyone is screaming like characters
in a Ken Russell film, twirling
 gold garland around
like a morning star
Decking the halls with spangle tangles,
laughing like the grungy-haired
 psychokiller in those
bad 1982 movies.
The first one I ever saw was
 My Bloody Valentine
 in keeping with the holiday spirit
at a February 14th sleepover.
In the outrage all the people in the halls
do not realize that they released
 a grungy-haired psychokiller
who starts running through the
Gruesome gold garland, belting falalalala lalalala
and they all sing along
 ignorant of its purpose
(A summon cry to bring up the demons).
This image amused me in Denny's green
after the annual Christmas Eve party
 where I dressed up as Santa
most of the guys being unfun except for
Uncle Ed who's now too blind to read the gift tags.
50-year-old white cotton mustaches
 falling in your mouth
don't taste as good as Linda's fudge, I know.
Later, having given up religion for Lent that year,
I order grilled cheese
 from the waitress
who is wearing Emeraude
While me and my sister ditch midnight mass.
Paula's throat is sore from mono.
 She tells me
"Yeah, I'll probably go to hell. I don't care."

As I watch a piece of gold garland,
a mangle spangle trapped at Denny's
about to fall onto
a bottle of Heinz.

A STEVENS DREAM

I think, I think in
muddy red today.
He understands
it is this way,

but everything in
Stevens' dream is green;
he understands and knows
I like the way red grows.

He dreams of the pleasures
of merely circulating
in indigo and green,

eating apricot, no,
porpoise ice cream.
He will not see
beyond what he himself
is left to dream.

So let the lamp
affix its beam.
The only emperor
is the green in Stevens' dream.

KEVIN CASSIDY

DUCKBERG

In the latest cartoon of myself I waddle
the lawn with the Weed-Be-Gone bottle
dropping dandelions. I am accurate,
enjoying the etiquette, the precision, of lawn care.
I love how the dandelions droop with that slide-
whistle sound and the miniature little mushroom
clouds that rise as they expire.

Something is bound to happen.
When we drive the same tree keeps going by.
A door that closes six different ways.
Common objects become insanely plastic.
Many household items make good catapults.
Anything put in the oven will burn.
Humans are indicated from the knees down.

The impact of rubber on the concept
of stretching cannot be overstated.
My snagged swimsuit is going to snap
me back and crash me through the slats;
my silhouette as the black hole of passage.
Nothing in the shape of me.
Or the bath house will spring forward,
overtake and slam me down. I'll walk in broken circles,
folded like an accordion, droning discordant.

It is an abstracted life, funny and familiar. I lay
in bed and my eyelids flap open like window shades.
The predictable faucet is willful, it drips insomnia,
but I don't mind. I am fine. Either Huey, Dewey, or Louie
has curled up on my chest and I will let him sleep
as long as he likes. Such tenderness is rare
and I feel like I am floating. I can be his bed or his boat
or whatever he wants. My sailor shirt can be a sail.
We can drift and simplify. We can be as little as the line

that traces our path on a minimal map of the world.
We can sail and sing "Delores." We can dream
of beautiful Daisy, the convex glass in her eyes,
and imagine the whine of the diving bi-plane
growing softer and further away.

TORQUE COUPLETS

Over your shoulder reflecting the sun, that's how to look at glass.
Every mirror is empty from one edge to another.

They asked for passports at every border but we never understood a word.
Every river is its own nation. There are citizens walking the banks.

The sky and the ground are partners,
like crutches hanging in a cave; the healing waters, the colorful statues.

In heaven the angels have wings but there is nowhere they want to fly.
The small planes are tied down with cables made of steel.

The windsock can't catch a breeze. You need steel to turn the dirt.
Without labor anything grows.

The piano is filled with metal string pulled into tune with a wrench.
Family portraits line the soundboard.

The eyes learn to think like a camera.
I've been humming one love song all day.

Part of you will never be what you behold.
No one knows that. Keep it to yourself.

Call everyone by a secret name.
Let everyone in on it.

Something goes wrong on Mt. Rushmore. Not the presidents
but the Beatles. Not snow but smoke and fire.

Certain taxis pick up the lost free of charge.
They can't help if you don't know where to go.

Certain sappy headlines: "TORNADO HITS SCRAPYARD."
No one hurt as hundreds stay home.

Every city is a beautiful place lit this way at sunset.
Tenants keep moving one room to another.

What if it was the spirit that died and the eternal body
was occupied by a series of separate persons?

A light left on in a closet,
Shoes of a previous occupant.

One foot moves, the other doesn't.
A life spent going in circles.

MICHAEL CRONIN

MALAISE AT BREAKFAST

for the Tallis Scholars

I got rejected by
a journal called
“insipid”
and the “New Zoo Review” came
hard on the heels
of that missile

I’d shout Nyah! Nyah!
if only I hadn’t known
it was the last chance
to beat my odds—

the self-fulfilling prophecy
(my self-propelling fallacy),
the art I am not—

the donuts are stale.
Law school is beckoning
like a lumpy stripper
flapping twenties
from a G-string
calling me
“sailor”

so why the hell not?
Maybe I can
move Blind Justice’s
furniture around,
and we’ll
stumble towards that
Condo in the Sky—

YOW! BRING ON THE BIG TEAT!

sailing to the Waldorf Hysteria,
and I've a taste
for the consolation prize
I have eyes for teak
in my fantasy schooner's
Hefneresque cabin,
Oh! the meaningless
body fluids of leisure
sing sweetly of women and wine
and room service margaritas,
the elegy of pastries
topped to bustin'
with the alabaster confection
of remorse

Time is short

Redemption shrinks back
like cashmere in the microwave—
the granite chasm
of cruller-soaked indifference
is slowly filling
with the new plaster ooze
of non-dairy
creamer

MACHINE

Today I got a buffalo nickle out of a vending machine which had changed me, not the meaningful symbolism we seek at church or in cigarette ads, but a small touch of sorcery between Do-ri-tos and the grave will brighten even a winter lead city sky, even a sky like tonight, like saltines in orange sauce, like sloppy Dream-sicles on canvas, like a poke in the eye, a gut-punch gasping, even a buffalo nickel can warm the ears or the webbing of the hands when nothing need explaining but nothing makes sense, and after a while even buffalo nickels will warm to your palm and become you, and that could be a good thing, especially on a November like this.

MATTHEW BAKER

TOASTING WITH TAP WATER

“My love is so strong it moves objects in my house.”

—Billy Bragg

To slow and irreversible developments!
To the progression’s new acne!
To “I guess so.”

Winding a neglected thread around a disintegrating spool,
I hurry and fumble. Pity for lack of use drives my once-safe
engine into the red zone. It is
difficult to swerve and intend.

To being walloped right in the kisser! (In each sense and a lot.)
To moments when they mean something!
To manipulating dead Flossie’s udder!

My main squeeze, in the necessary sense. The fixture has ceased to produce,
the faucet now flows backwards. The moist pouch has stiffened, and a yellowish
mildew ripens. Nutritious flower, emitting bile from a sly, sore boil.
Fancy feeding off oneself.

Prodding Texan digs for oil in a monster-movie graveyard;
up come the daisies, and the tulips, and the posies,
and a long forgotten member of a long forgotten family who is now dripping
brown fluid from all seven eyes, is obviously possessed by an evil and
violent power, and wants to devour your soul bit by severed bit, emerges
from a hole in the earth whilst making horrible squishy noises. Tired of all
the infernal drilling. Slowly coming your way; you cannot escape because
you forget to run.
Imagined rumblings beneath an impotent geyser.
“She was my only way of getting milk.”

To sad, well-kept gardens!
To well-dressed heroes and heroines!

Your python smile means everything. A well-repaired vessel awaits decoration;
each little pot is Eden to an excited florist. Prepare to declare your vocation.
With giddy devotion I search for more it's not there.
Dejected farmer still expects. Broken spigot incites wavering resolve. "We'll
have to get by without it, even though we can't get by without it." A chain-
smoker ascending lengthy stairs.

To childish oaths of allegiance uttered hastily!
To happy endings when they kiss from here on out!
To making a wish in a regular well! (Or on a satellite.)

Perennial underground fruit: One must squat to gather it. The International
Harvester is busted. Sultry farmer's daughter stoops to nurture unborn
attention; the county fair adjourns to have a looksee. Busy pupils study
complex figures. It is difficult to realize such a swift captivity. An inverted,
seashell-shaped flashing on the inside of my eyelids beckons when I blink.
A cumbersome beacon, like one flap of a hummingbird's wing.

To dissonant upheaval!
To second-row seats at the ball game!
To Wilt the Stilt, Lurch, and Goliath in the first row!

Capturing an entire school of minnows in a Dixie Cup. My exile has been
postponed until I can provide sufficient evidence that I really really really
mean what I'm thinking.

C. J. ZANDER

WHAT SHE BROUGHT

What she brought, without thinking, her veryness
was clear across the room an hour ago. He
saw it even before then, in spite of the many
obstacles between them—flower arrangements, canny
jazz, a dozen idiots, guests, travelers briefly free
of the road, not quite arrived but leaving, less

here than anywhere. And then there is the past.
Something there also. Something here at the bar
between the gin and caution. A misplaced
wine glass. The mirror. A long hallway erased
by drinking and dawdlers. Moving along, stretching far
toward the back of the house. Touching them at last.

It is enough to talk. To sit on stairs
of mahogany and mild relationships not
consciously for gain in a fine anti-dance.
It is enough to rise and walk almost by chance
among a painted gathering of smiling nothings caught
against the evening, to come slowly to where

she is. Resting, bare-armed, in the firelight.
This evening. This faint music. Her head
lifted in recognition, his turned partially way
to see her party coming in, her friends today.
Cars slide outside. She stands. Whatever led
her here, he thinks, turns back now into night.

ANN ENGELSTAD

THINGS TO DO ON A DALLAS, TEXAS, MORNING

It's 6:00 A.M. and I'm waiting for my turn in the shower. Victor and Mary are in there still caressing each other with soap of the same name, oblivious to the fact that time is of essence: narcissism a deaux; and hey, we've gotta leave in 45 minutes! I guess I could jump over the balcony into the Quail Run jacuzzi and take a bath there to save time, but I get the shower in 5 minutes instead, and Victor is shaving in the kitchen when Mary and I come down with the Tooth Ranger kits and we pile into the big yellow van that says Orange Orang-utan Orthodontic Outfitters on the doors, otherwise known as the Tooth Rangers, 10 minutes late, but that's okay cuz Texans are slow as roaches sprayed with Raid anyway, so the patients won't mind.

Dr. Barney Barnhill's office is like a bird house with pigeon-holed rooms, and I'm sitting behind a dental chair long as a house trailer and Judy puts a java cup muddy with Creamora next to the blue germicide behind me. Jimmy's in the chair opening wide and I ask him if he's been eating rocks cuz his braces are busted and send him to Victor in another bird hole 10 feet away. He does the banding, and I'm the wire wizard and I balance the force vectors while Mary is the traffic cop who lines up the patients and we're 50-deep by 10:30.

Barney Barnhill doesn't know beans about Ortho, so he plugs amalgams and says "Hi" to the "kiddos" and blesses a tooth for 10 seconds by touching it as if he did the work—trying to keep it legal—before going back to his crown and bridge around the corner.

We don't care what he does, we get a cut of the take, and I'm in charge so he has nothing to worry about. I know my progress diagnosis I know when to pour it on, cookbook it, prescribe rubberbands only, check for loose bands, slide 'em down the bench, on to the next one and we're outta here.

Bases are still loaded at 11:45, but we crank 'em out and we'll be done by 3:00, you can count on it. We can just make happy hour at Desperados and by 5:00 we're deep into the Nachos Deluxe and on our second frozen Margarita as big as 3 snow cones and don't I love to lick the salt crystals glittering off the edge.

CONRAD WELLS

A HISTORY OF WESTERN EUROPE

He raised his head
A lion on the gate
at Mycenae Basilisks
appearing in groups
of one to ten A Tarkhan
sat alone in the
forecastle They were
given three wishes
Kiss the rod, then
the sword He wrapped
his theme in plastic
and crossed swamps or
mountains A blend of
honey and natural
flavorings All
amulets were recovered
They reconsider
the theocracy

MELISSA MELENDEZ

WRESTLING

wrestling, with pulse
with webs that fit like second skin around my face
my fingernails carving worn paths
tearing away at all of it
past, stupid things
a hundred and one times I should have known better
they crowd my conscious
I can't say how many times I've hit the mat
wrestling with moon dogs howling at blackness
we all call for some surge of grace to fall
I walk around beneath looming arches
holding tension at my shoulders
so tight, I could balance tea cups, and saucers
at each side like a champion
skinny thing, weightless really
with the gaunt morose face of an old woman
walking down Michigan Avenue with cups and saucers
paying for each step with thin bone currency
no, I'm not hungry
I'm in training, pulling each string to its bitter tautness
just before breaking point then,
a breath
we'll save braking for later
I'm suited up and at my best weight
taking life in gutted fistfuls
pulling up way more than I'm sure is there
wrestling, like a toppling brown bear
chestnut shiny, as if the backbone of a fish could cause
such light
I'll take them on with the muscular grace of a forest
creature, in its prime, in its heyday,
in its best time to die

BARBARA SLAGA

HOW TO FALL

Again, start from the left
and bend until light stands
on your feet and offers
to push you further beyond
carpets, floors, and dimensions
that are not the end or
beginning of anything.
I mean to climb a mountain
and let the winds travel
through your knees.
Your feet firmly set on rocks
and your eyes rolling first.

In the museum there are stairs
and only borrowed art.
Photos that cause vertigo.
No railings, no flower pots
to break your inevitable clash
with checkered floors and marble.

I'll begin again
and tell you to light a match
within a cave within a dream.
Borrow the gravity that escapes
with the oxygen that burns,
landing in a tower of
earth and hieroglyphics.

Always announce your arrival
at any meeting place,
becoming more weighted with each word.
Your fingernails that bite themselves.
Your hair heavier than this morning
pulls you back.
You're resting in a chair among strangers.

Your presence is nothing
but gravity and rain.
Solidified until called upon
to empty, more liquid
and signs the language
to forward the mail,
hold the call,
and rise to a tolerable depth.

Hilda Morley ♦ Ron Silliman ♦ Claudia Keelan ♦ Eileen Myles

Amy Gerstler ♦ John Yau ♦ Wanda Coleman ♦ Lydia Tomkiw ♦ Connie Deanovich

Maureen Seaton ♦ Maxine Chernoff ♦ Tom Mandel ♦ Richard Jones

Barry Silesky ♦ Sandra Steingraber ♦ Carolyn Koo ♦ William Paul Hickey

Philip Klukoff ♦ Devon Brock ♦ Cynthia Capello ♦ Michelle Herron

Barrie Cole ♦ Michael Cronin ♦ Ann Engelstad ♦ Barbara Slaga

Bryan Tsikouris ♦ Kevin Cassidy ♦ C.J. Zander ♦ Melissa Melendez ♦ Ellen Rosen

Mathew Baker ♦ Conrad Wells ♦ Dave Mead

Mary Jo Bang ♦ Angela Coodrich ♦ Joseph Melody ♦ Sheila Strabley