

# CutBank

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Summer 1995

## CutBank 44

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# CUTBANK 44



Summer 1995



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## CutBank

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### **On the cover:**

Maura Byrne, *Another Dream*, 1993.

Linocut, 12" x 14"

# CUTBANK 44

Summer 1995

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Michael Palmer

**Anode (20 XII 94)**

By that fractured lion in the park  
was it, our latent memories recombined  
so that even the smallest of them—

the one of musk, the one  
of a quartzite pebble on a gravestone—  
were irretrievably lost.

As sounds in the mouth get lost.  
As a traveller—a visitor—may grow silent  
in the spaces of a house.

Sun-flares drape the page now  
with the purest of lies  
in place of desired rains.

Yet it has begun to rain  
after all. Is that what you said?  
Begun to rain after all?

Michael Palmer

**SB**

So a seed or syllable pitched into the well  
disturbs the cloud-form, tears

the image from the bone. And so our weathers  
ink themselves together,

dorsal crests and billows missewn  
for a cloak. And you say,

Gaze of a breeze, empty sleeve.  
You say, It has begun, has started

to begin, a little like mist.  
And Mr. Dust (Street of Bees) insists

that there were hours, apples and stones,  
terms of a circle marking what?

And coins grown dark, dogs  
and cats against the factory walls,

tiny islands of gelatin light,  
a dim go and all gone,

our thens to void the sunken head,  
hands and the voiceless rest,

equal plod equal ground,  
measured step by step.

David Gilbert

## Girl with Large Foot Jumping Rope

My kid makes a controlled slide downstairs and stops in between me and the TV. He's a funny kid. People say he looks a lot like Becky—the slim nose, the oval mouth, the curly blond hair while my hair is straight and black like a well-groomed Indian—but every time I look at him I see my eyes and I see my chin and I know that this is my boy. “Hey, Sport,” I say. I call him Sport, I don't know why, I just do. I like the way it sounds. “What's up, Sport?” It makes me *feel* like a father.

He doesn't say a word, simply stands there, Pledge-of-Allegiance straight. He's seven years old and short for his age—I guess it's a real issue at school, you know, with all the teasing, all the stupid names—and he does this crazy thing with his lips when he's upset, kind of curls them like a disgusted Frenchman. He's doing that now. “Everything all right, Sport?” I say.

He nods, but it's unconvincing.

Then I glance down and notice his feet, his socks really, those white athletic socks that kids wear all the time. Tube socks, we used to call them. Well, these socks are soaking wet, and so are the cuffs of his pants. It looks as if he's been dancing in some fountain in Paris, like in the movies.

“What's up, Josh?” I say, dropping Sport and putting a little sternness in my voice, the you-can-tell-me sort of voice, a cop's voice, the good cop. Becky is the bad cop.

It comes out in one burst, and since he's an emotional boy, he starts to cry, and I can't understand a word the poor guy says, but whatever it is, it breaks my heart. I lean down and take him in my arms and rub the back of his neck and whisper, "It's all right, it's all right," in his ear even though I have no idea what he's done. But he's a good kid. His feet leave wet marks on my lap, and he curls in under my armpit. And Jesus, I almost get weepy.

"I'm sorry, Dad," Josh says after he's mostly controlled himself. He wipes at his eyes and nose with the sleeve of his shirt. But when he breathes, his body shudders. "I just, it just happened," he says.

I brush aside some loose hair and touch his cheek. "Tell me what happened, Sport."

"The toilet's all clogged up." And then he has another fit, this time smaller and probably crafted for my benefit.

"Is that all?" I say. "Is that the whole problem?" And I give him a big, carefree smile. I show him the gap in my front teeth, the gap I can shoot a spray of water through. His face relaxes a bit. He's an oversensitive kid—Becky and I know that—and we try to pass on to him a sense of fun, a *joie de vivre*. If something breaks, it's broken, no big deal. If a friend calls you a name or throws dirt at you, shake it off. For a month we played that stupid song *Don't Worry, Be Happy*, hoping its groove would sink in. But it's not really working, and anything can set him off. I once had to save Josh from a moth because it was fluttering too close to his face; sure, it was a big hairy moth, but he was sobbing like it was the end of the world. It just shatters me. The boy's seven years old, he should be surrounded by cars and stuffed animals and all those stupid toys those perfect kids advertise on TV. He

shouldn't be depressed yet.

"Well, Sport," I say, and I talk like we're going on an adventure, "why don't we just go up there and figure this thing out. Okay?"

"Okay," he says.

I lift him up and then set him on the ground. There are wet blotches all over my pants. "Hey Sport," I say, pointing to my groin. "Looks like your Dad peed in his pants." He gawks at me oddly, like he doesn't know it's a joke, and then I start to laugh so he'll get to laughing, and finally he does, and it's a great laugh, it's my laugh, opened mouth and joyous—a man's laugh, my father's laugh—and we laugh some more when Josh's socks flap around like soggy clown shoes. Yep, my eyes, my chin, and my laugh; the rest is all Becky.

I was supposed to take Josh to school, actually just walk with him to the bus stop, but I decided that it'd be much more important for him to spend the day with his Dad. I had plans. The zoo was on my list, so was a movie and some ice cream, and then we were going to come home and make dinner for Becky—turkey and sweet potatoes with marshmallows on top. It was going to be a good day. But I got tired, I got tired getting out of bed, I was so tired I couldn't take a shower and I love taking showers in the morning. Becky says it's a stage. I don't know what that means but I'm taking vacation days from work because I know if I go there I'll do something stupid like toss a computer through a window or fling sharpened pencils at my secretary; I'd probably call Joe Lester a fucking fat-ass drunk and he'd pull that gun he keeps in his bottom drawer. In the end, no doubt about it, I'd get fired. So now I sit at home in my suit because it makes

the boredom seem more productive. "Just wallow," Becky told me before she went to work, "like a duck, quack, quack."

Josh and I walk upstairs. I can see little footprints blurred on the rug. They're smaller than my hand. I point to them and say, "You'd make a lousy criminal."

Josh is quiet, solemn even. As we get closer to the hall bathroom, he begins to move slower, lingering before each step.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury," I say, "the defendant's footprints lead straight to the bathroom." I tousle Josh's hair and then reach down and pull his hand out of his pocket so I can hold it in mine. "It's no big deal, Sport," I say.

He looks up at me. We're in front of the bathroom door. It's closed. Taped to the door is one of his colorful drawings of a military airdrop. Stick figure paratroopers hang in a flak-filled sky. They're huge, much bigger than the plane they've jumped from, and this lack of perspective seems to have cost them their lives. Death comes with a red crayon.

"I'm not going to be mad," I say to Josh, "and I love you." I grab for the doorknob, and I must admit this feeling of suspense settles in my gut. Turds, I'm thinking, are there going to be turds? I imagine them floating near the lip of the toilet bowl, my son's turds, and I even have an awful image of a few that have slipped over the side like barrels over Niagara Falls. And this strange thought comes to me: I haven't seen my son's shit in a long time. When he was a baby, then a toddler, Becky and I seemed to be always dealing with it, the diapers, the potty training; but now that he's a middle-aged boy, shit, like so many other things, has snuck into his private world.



“Dad?”

“Yeah?”

Josh makes a gesture with his head, a small tilt, I’ve seen Becky do the same thing a thousand times, and I realize that I’m just standing there.

“Right,” I say.

I open the door. We both pause in the doorway as if we’re waiting out an earthquake. There is water on the floor, about a half-inch, and it smells dank, like mop water. I look over to the toilet—the red shag seat cover is closed—and I see no traces of shit on the linoleum. To lighten things up, to take the worry out of Josh’s face, I stride in and do my best version of Gene Kelly. I belt out “I’m singing in the rain, just singing in the rain, what a glorious feeling, I’m happy again,” and dance around the bathroom making delightful splashes with my shoes. But Josh seems even more troubled, his wonderful chin lowered so that a crescent of soft flesh appears. “C’mon,” I say, and I make a face. I go over to the toilet, lift the seat and peer down inside. There are no wads of toilet paper, no floating turds; the water is clear and only slightly higher than average.

“This is nothing, Sport,” I say. Josh steps into the bathroom. His socks are now gray. “Were you going number two?” I ask.

“Uh...no,” he says.

“Well, what happened?”

Josh is not a good liar; he’s like Becky that way. You can see it in their eyes—too many scenarios whirl around their heads. For them, lying is like trying to pick a good peach. “Nothing,” Josh says.

“Then how’d it clog?”

“I’m sorry,” he says.

“No, don’t worry about it. I’m just curious.”

“I don’t know.”

“Well,” I say. And we both stand there. I feel like we’re flushing his soon-to-be-dead goldfish down the toilet, saying a few words before Raphael and Leonardo swirl away to the great beyond. “Well,” I say again, and I reach over and push down the metal handle.

Josh looks up at me.

“It’s a test,” I explain.

The water rises with incredible speed. I think of those sub movies when a depth charge hits its mark and men rush for the closing hatch. Josh steps back as the water swells over the side—it’s almost lovely—and spreads across the floor. A stray Q-tip floats by. Flotsam or jetsam? I never can remember which is which.

“Oh,” Josh says.

“I guess it’s still clogged.”

He nods.

“Well, Sport,” I say, “why don’t you hustle downstairs and get us a mop.” Josh turns and scoots down the hall. Fresh footprints appear on the rug. I survey the scene then reach over and grab the plunger from the corner. There is something satisfying about a plunger, something constant—that after all these years of evolution, of technology, the plunger has stayed the same, has retained its simple design of slim wooden rod pushed into rubber suction cup. You buy one plunger and it will last you your entire life; it will, in fact, outlast you. Those are things you don’t think about in a hardware store.

I slowly lower the plunger into the top-full toilet, but no matter how slow I go, the displaced water overflows and makes more of a mess on the bathroom floor. I position the plunger over the suck hole—I don’t know what you call it but it looks like a heel stamped

into the porcelain—and I start to pump in a poking motion, the kind of motion you use to bring a lame fire back to life. The water churns. It sounds like someone is running through mud. I give it about six good thrusts, stop for a second, then give it four more thrusts. There is no release of whatever it is that's caught down there. "Jesus," I say. And then I do something really stupid, I flush the toilet again. The water rises. I slam shut the toilet seat and sit on the shag cozy.

While I'm waiting for Josh, I notice a bulge underneath the drenched bath mat. I lift up a corner and find this book that my brother Bruce gave me for my birthday. It's a bizarre book filled with medical photographs from late in the last century. When I got it in the mail Becky shook her head and said, "Typical." Bruce lives in Virginia, and during the summer weekends he re-enacts Civil War battles. He really looks the part, long beard, bad teeth, and he has the rebel yell down pat. "It's our history," he always tells me, and every Saturday he gets killed in the first wave of the first battle of Bull Run. Poor Josh is very scared of him—I don't blame him—and I tell him that if his grandfather were alive today, he'd be just like Uncle Bruce. So I start to leaf through this book. The pages are wet and some of them tear, but the pictures are still incredible. Civil war veterans, young guys, barely in their twenties, coldly display their amputations, their stumps, and the awful infections that sometimes resulted. Their eyes are so proud, unflinching; I can almost hear them say, *Look at this shit*. And then there are other horrendous photographs of tumors run amok, of dermatolysis, of elephantiasis, of people savaged by their own bodies. Some of it is hard to take, and sitting

there I can't believe my Josh looks at this stuff. I come across one picture that's earmarked. It's titled *Girl With Large Foot Jumping Rope*, and it's a picture of precisely that. This bonneted girl, a very normal looking kid, wears a lovely dress which has an intricate collar and a pinned rose. She could be going to church. In her raised hands she holds a jump rope. But something is very wrong with her foot, her left foot; it's huge, about six times the size of her other foot. A special boot—it looks like a prizewinning eggplant—has been crafted by some miracle cobbler. And she stands there, ready to jump rope even though you know there's no way she's going to be able to do it with that foot of hers, and her face, a sweet face with close-cropped bangs, looks at you with slightly arched eyebrows. It's sad, but it's beyond sad; it's so sad it seems to slip into the hopeful.

“You tired, Dad?”

I lift my head and look over and see Josh. He stands there holding the mop tight across his chest like it's an old rifle.

“Tired?”

“Yeah.”

“No.” I get up and put the book back down on the toilet seat. Water has seeped through my shoes and my socks are now wet. I want to ask Josh about the book, but I don't. “No,” I tell him, “I'm fine.”

Then Josh breaks down again—it's like his face is made of clay, the way it can crease and sag and fall apart—and while he sobs he tries to talk. It sounds Arabic. “It's all right, Josh.” I take him in my arms; we must look pinned together by that mop.

I make out a word. “Leaking,” he says.

“What?”

“It's leaking downstairs.”

I take the mop, lean it against the wall, and carry Josh downstairs. "What was it you flushed down the toilet?" I ask him.

"Nothing," and then he adds, "I swear, Daddy."

We walk into the living room and Josh points towards the back wall. There is a dark stain on the carpet. I look up and see a slight seam that the water works along. It drips about every fifteen seconds. "Oops," I say. The two of us stand below it. With Josh in my arms, I feel like I'm showing him the moon for the first time. Josh reaches up and touches the ceiling. Water slides down his finger. "We're making a mess," I say. Josh presses his palm against the ceiling. "That's dirty water," I tell him, and we go into the kitchen and grab a bucket from the closet.

Josh sits on the sink and watches me mop up the bathroom floor. His head rests against the medicine cabinet mirror; it makes him look like a Siamese twin. That'd be a tough way to go through life, especially if you had to share a skull. But today they can separate you; they can fix you, but I wonder if you'd look at your brother or your sister and try to see where you once fit—kneecap to kneecap, spine to spine—if to you your body was nothing but a piece of a puzzle.

I have to wring out the mop with my hands. "Ugh," I say. When I turn around to soak up some more water, the yellow handle knocks over some shampoo. "I'm a spaz," I say.

"A spaz?" Josh has his toothbrush in his mouth even though he's not brushing his teeth.

"Someone who's uncoordinated, clumsy."

"Oh."

I finish mopping the floor, then I clean the

bath tub by running the shower for a bit. “Now the toilet,” I say. I turn to Josh. “What’s in here?”

“Nothing.”

“Really?”

“Yes.”

“You sure?”

“Uh-huh.”

I let him get away with lying. I guess it doesn’t matter. He seems to be calm at this moment and I don’t want to spoil it; I don’t want to spoil anything. I pick him up—he splits from the mirror—and I tell him to go downstairs and watch TV. “The afternoon is the good time, Sport,” I tell him, “when all the best shows are on.”

I pick up the book from the toilet and rest it in the curve of the sink, then I grab the plunger and lift up the seat cover. I’m determined to clear whatever’s down there.

I hear that sound again, the sound of the person running through mud. He’s running faster now because something is chasing him, and it scares the shit out of him. The person glances back. He can’t see a thing, but he knows it’s close behind. The man loses one shoe, then another, then he trips and falls but quickly gets back up. The mud starts to dry and cake on his skin. It’s slowing him down.

I begin to sweat all over—I’m in pitiful shape—and my shirt sticks to my back. So much water everywhere. But my adrenaline is really moving. I look over toward the doorway and see Becky. She’s holding Josh’s hand. They both watch me, and I smile. I must look crazy, the way I’m trying to churn this water into something, anything, but I don’t stop.

Jenny Flynn

## Echolalia

*Embryo, cheerio, so-and-so, Aunt Grace says, snapping her teeth into place. She pats my cheek. With age her Irish hair has pinked, fading like an old velvet seat. Do what you have to. I'll love you just the same.*

Grace raised me in this windy house, so many pale-petaled fruit trees on the meadowed hill in springtime we seem to live caught on a floe of snow the sun slowly withers.

That night in December he waited in blue shadows beside the café where I serve plates of yolky farm eggs. Beneath rain-soaked hair his face looked harder after two years, a dark carapace of labor and leaving.

Empty seed heads rattled by the river bank as we matted down a bed of grasses with our palms. I always did follow his voice, harsh and commanding as a raven's caw, *Miranda, Miranda, Miranda—*

After, I walked him back to the idling bus. He scraped the stubble of his cheek across mine, climbed on, and  
faced me  
through glass, rain smearing his mouth to a soft  
bruise—

*Did you know your name means wonder?*

*Wonder, thunder, blunder,* Aunt Grace has become quite a rhymer, her connection to life worn to that inexact echo. They say I take after her—I inherited the precise thing that shapes her mouth.

When her husband died (a ruddy man who whistled with his fingers), my aunt began to hear voices at the  
axes  
of seasons. Buds and dying leaves say *Grace* and she answers, *Mace, waste, lace, I still remember*

*your mother's face when she came home fat with you!* She imitates, leaning back, rounding her belly—a well of bones—with a balled sweater. *Daddy waiting for her, hunched into his hat.*

At night wind creeps through everything I've filled the  
walls  
with. I shouldn't say *creep*, like an animal: it's a liquid sound,  
a gushing. Most springs, the river jumps sandbags,  
flooding  
cold stubble with rain. *Rain, pain, insane*—how does that go?

Walking to the breakfast shift, I can feel the other heartbeat doubled with mine as I touch slivers on the  
pines.  
Frost can cut a little before it melts (Grace told me that, long ago)  
but then a cold gush usually dulls the wound.



Carmen Hoover

## Living with the Elk

I forget, and the waitress at the Silver Dollar Bar doesn't remind me: *don't drink the water in Butte.*

I order a tall glass with ice and lemon and take it with me. Across the street, I break windows out of the old whorehouse.

I'm not interested in whores. I like noises—especially the sound that follows a really good noise. A car covered with mirror-squares pulls up. The driver warns me that the corner I'm standing on is not safe.

I lean my 2x4 against a parking meter.

I start taking pictures and walking in circles.

Someone who looks like me is trying on a \$10 fur coat at Saint Vincent du Paul's.

She rinses with diet Coke after she brushes her teeth.

She walks to the end of a long tunnel with tiny lightbulbs and stands at the edge of the mining pit.

She pushes a button that says *information.*

The recorded voice explains things, including the happiness of tourists.

She pushes the button again.

I am busy. Nobody can talk to me.

I walk toward the bar. The pigeon resting in the doorway died while I was gone.

The band is too loud.

I meet a nice man

with fingers in his ears. He's nudging

the pigeon with the toe of his boot.  
We take turns dancing on the narrow sidewalk.  
We stand by the window, press  
one finger each along the crack in the glass.  
We hold hands and listen for the sirens.

We are hungry. We sit behind  
a paper curtain in an orange booth  
and talk about the night I slept on a waterbed.  
We eat fried rice and hamburgers.  
The waitress hasn't come back with the money,  
so we stay.  
I want him to come to my room and teach me how  
to fold paper airplanes but he seems to think I already know.  
I'm afraid to ask.  
The Continental Divide is out there, but I've lost interest.

T. Crunk

## Blues for Home

All that remains  
is this wooden chair  
sitting in the shade of an elm

blood of the earth  
lipping from root to root  
below me

a few bricks  
scattered among the thistle.

All that remains  
is to rub my hands across them  
patiently—

the erasure of my fingerprints  
is all that remains now  
for my perfection.

Susan Yuzna

## Sleepless Everywhere

Who are those clouds flying by, the doves,  
the doves at their windows?  
Ezekiel said (something like that).

And Crazy Horse supposedly said  
it's a good day to die, or someone did.  
He went for days without sleep, without food,

to enter his vision. A horseman came,  
rode on. Soldiers fell out of the sky  
for another. They kept falling,

the horses, the soldiers,  
though the window stayed open  
and stepping through it was confusing

said the brother who betrayed him,  
as Judas would agree. There was a man  
worked for God and the Borgia devil

by turns, Leonardo da Vinci, sleeping  
fifteen minutes every four hours,  
rising to attach paper wings

to small, green lizards. Nowhere  
in his voluminous notebooks  
is there any mention of human affection.

How can you not love the man?  
Salvador Dali napped sitting upright,  
a spoon balanced on his palm.

The noise of its dropping woke him.  
None of it works for me.  
An ordinary sort of insomniac,

I watch out the window.  
Who are those stars twirling by  
in their white, white dresses?

Weren't we pretty then?  
Except for the Smith girl.  
An angel, my father said she looked like,

laid out in her white dress and veil.  
O Mary, Mary, quite contrary,  
if you came back

in your white dress with wings,  
would I stop being afraid at night?  
If you came to the swings of St. Theodore's

black-topped playground  
after First Communion class we could tell  
secrets again (*I like your panties*)

as the wind passes, cool  
and pleasing, between our thighs.  
And to show how I love you,

I would pump harder  
over the hills of air, I would hang

upside down in the posture of St. Peter

on his cross, my feet pointed  
to heaven: a slow crucifixion  
the most glorious.

O Ezekiel, strangled by your wheel,  
and Grandpa, drunk on 7 Crown,  
these fierce old men,

I don't want them.  
Give me a hand, a soft one,  
to place on the forehead of fever.

A man like a mother.  
Let the dove go.  
Let the angel fall silent.

Surrounding Leonardo's  
effeminate St. John the Baptist  
is a darkness you've never seen,

out of which the boy-prophet  
smiles. The final gesture,  
his signature,

a finger pointing up and away  
from the slight self.  
His cross, a slender thing.

Sonja Kindley

## This Body, Long Distance

Although I am twenty-five, hardly the nasty girl I was at eighteen, my body is dewy-slim and bashful, and I walk with the consciousness of muscle and bone and patella-clicks, like a nubile ballerina in clashing yellow stockings performing for her family. This is why the video Dino is making of me right now in this haunted warehouse will turn out like kiddy-porn. I have never overwhelmed a man with my womanliness, only aroused the pervert in him.

I have a garbage bag over my upper body, with a hole for breathing. Dino thought it would be interesting if I flailed around on the futon as if I were exorcising a devil, the mud-green plastic crinkling, reflecting.

“What about ripping the plastic with your fingernails,” Dino suggests. He is strong, that Dino. His directions and mastery of the camera make me think of sex. When I do the things he tells me to do I feel myself swelling inside like those red gut-balloons Eskimo kids make from caribou—playful like that; nevertheless, obscene.

He doesn't want crotch. If I could see I would find a prude-Dino, avoiding my bush, zooming down to my shrimp-curl toes and the hieroglyph tattooed on my ankle when the thrashing yanks the bag above my belly button.

“I don't want this to be nasty,” he explained

beforehand, "though knowing you, there will no doubt be an element of kink."

Dino: a boyfriend, never a lover. Two blind smooches, fifteen years old, memorized my love poem and jumped on his skateboard. He was almost my prom date.

He is growing a Rasputin-black goatee and a senior art student's contrived bravado, though I believe in his vision, the way he stares at people beyond the appropriate time, transfixed like a kid, like a hungry dog.

The political part of the video is when I push lipstick and compacts and tampax and earrings out of the hole as if excreting symbols of socialized femininity. Then I tear at this industrial cocoon until my arms burst out, my breasts like alien eyes.

"How 'bout my head?" I ask.

"Yeah, your head. But keep your eyes closed then slowly open them, like a kitten birth."

And so I claw through, glad that I am snookered, bold in this sense, feline-furious, because this could be the silliest thing ever or the coolest. You have to trust. When my head pops out we are both jarred. The lights are hot, I am sticky, and the appearance of my human face, doused with the shock of exposure, seems more absurd than the bag antics. I wonder who's going to see this video, then how come Dino and I never really talked about the afterwards, how come I'm so naked, so childishly bare, and he still shuts the door tightly when he pees.

There is a wind outside, there is a tin can wind chime. We are in the bad part of town. Whenever I walk to Dino's I listen closely to my footsteps—do they make clicks and clops, feminine noises, or do they pound like adrenaline, a pissed speed?



“Kat,” he says, “you were perfect. I can't wait to add the music. Want a gardenburger or something?”

We eat on his hard futon and it's okay if the pickle juice dribbles on the bedspread. He shakes his size twelve Converse foot as he thinks.

“I was tempted to exploit you,” he says, smiling. “But you are so sweet-looking, I don't know, I didn't want to be some wanker wanking around. I could make a hot erotic video but I'd rather do something cerebral. You looked good, violent and delicate.”

“You looked good too,” I say, then roll away from him.

If you look me in the eye you will see that something is askew: one eyeball wanders distractedly like a dreamer while the other stares hard, making up for its twin's nomadic lapses. I am told the effect is sexy and confusing. It is as if I am not completely there.

There are other tricks my body plays. It starts at my sacrum and ripples up, my spine like a corkscrew, throwing my torso this way and that: left ribcage jutting, right shoulder lower. Scoliosis. It curls on the tongue, it is like some code sent in waves when I was forming: as in the game Telephone, the message was misheard, altered, each translation playing off the last, an earnest gibberish.

My body, an experiment in communication.

“Look at me,” my mother says.

And I do. The woman whose breasts I sucked, now white-haired, wistful, wearing an acrylic vest over a sweater. My mother's eyes have never been icy,

always warm like toasted almonds. She is symmetrical.

“I think I'm drying up.”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

“There's nothing to do in this house.”

It is a house on top of a hill. The mailbox is a quarter-mile walk. There is a cornfield, high Douglas Firs, a rarely used Jacuzzi. There should be more pets than Andrew, the turtle dove. It is not the house I grew up in, it is far more luxurious than that little shack that tilted and made doors swing open, water slide westward.

“It would be nice to have a grandchild,” she says, as if it were the first time she's wanted this; we know better.

“It would be nice to be married first,” I answer.

I am her last one, I wish I could help, I am often torn between wanting to live with her forever in this country castle and fleeing, breaking the bond which makes me call her twice weekly, compare myself to her, wear her hand-me-downs (though I would not wear the red acrylic vest).

She has a tired look but she is still so sensual: round, seesawing hips, muscle on her thighs; a way of moving casually, as if movement were only transportation, not a sly language.

“I had a dream last night that I had a baby,” I say, joining her at the window, our sunset ritual.

“I had black-and-white photos of me nursing it, my breasts were huge and tan, I looked so grown-up and beautiful, I thought. And you and Dad were proud of me, even though I didn't have a husband. But I couldn't decide on a name. I couldn't even remember my favorite girl-names, it was a question of symbolism and sound, deciding my girl's future. I kept landing on names I never really liked—Marla, Bianca. The dream

became annoying and all my happiness got overshadowed by my search for the perfect name.”

“I named you after myself,” my mother says. “And now you are Kat and I am still Elizabeth.”

Katherine Elizabeth: As a little girl I never wore skirts or dresses because I didn't want the boys to see my panties when I climbed the monkey bars. That was the only reason. I never explained it. When my mother took me to Sears I just requested Toughskins in girly colors, acting disinterested in the Holly Hobby dresses that came with matching bonnets. As I grew into slim jeans with sequins on the pockets, my blonde hair always tangled, my name, Katherine Elizabeth, still seemed top-heavy, an enormous pink velvet bow on a tiny head.

I became Kat at sixteen, when my sister moved to New York, my best friend lied to me, and Mickey T. got me so excited on a cemetery lawn, midsummer, I thought: there is no turning back, I am sold.

Dino was editing the video when Sandra, a colleague, snuck a peek and launched into criticism. He's telling me this as we sit in the courtyard outside the school, sipping charred coffee. Rust-colored leaves stick to our butts; the sunny, northwestern chill of autumn.

Dino says: “She walks in and goes, ‘Whoa, porno!’, watches the last part, and says, ‘Dino, this is mono-conceptual.’ So I said, ‘Okay, tell me the concept.’ And she goes, ‘It's eager propaganda for a man testing out his feminist wings, it's a little young, and who is that girl, she looks like a twelve-year-old.’ We actually had a good talk, it didn't bother me. But in case you're wondering, you turned out bitchin', and I

owe you.”

“Nah, just give me the master when you're through.”

He pauses uncertainly.

“Do you mean that? You don't trust me? You think I'd mass-market this ten-minute exercise, to hell with our friendship?”

“No, goofy. I'd just feel safer if I knew where it was at all times.”

“I guess that's fair,” he says. “People can be so evil.”

He pulls out a pack of cigarettes from his motorcycle jacket and sticks one in his mouth like a lollipop. I am aghast.

“Hey! Since when are you a smoker!”

He narrows his eyes, pushes his black shaggy hair off his handsome Navajo brow, and says, “Since I started filming naked nymphets writhing around in plastic bags.”

“But Dino,” I whine.

“But what? Aw, it's just an experiment. As you will note, these are generic Lights, not exactly high-powered tar sticks. I won't do it around you if you don't want me to.”

“I'm sorry. It's just so unlike you, Mr. Broccoli.”

“Yeah, Mr. whole wheat mac-and-cheese with turkey franks. I only go so far.”

“I thinks it's all those art students you're hanging out with. They all smoke probably.”

“Keep this up and I'm going to start teasing you about looking like a secretary.”

“Dino, I hate you.”

“I hate you, too. Are you as turned on as I am?”

“More.”

We look at each other with theatrical lust, about to draw together for a smearing, ridiculous, sitcom kiss, then something makes us freeze. We stand up, brush the leaves off our pant seats, and giggle nervously.

“Just remember: I've seen you in a compromising position,” he warns, grinning. “No other tight-assed bucking bronco has that claim to fame.”

The part about looking like a secretary has a ring of truth. I wear blazers and gold earrings and tortoise shell glasses for typing. But it is all a disguise, my joke on the corporate wasteland. I have no threshold for sleaze, I am constantly churning out superior little fantasies involving my co-workers in the Marketing Department. I have also been known to push the dress code to the point of getting my palm rapped by Human Resources. It's all such a travesty.

Like the other day I was watching a seduction at the water cooler, Brian preening, wanting to pry the pants off Becky in a tasteful, new age way. He kept saying, "truthfully" and "to be honest..." He had a low, handsome-man chuckle which implied that he never wore the same jeans twice and had the drycleaners do his laundry, including socks. She was pert and sassy—shampoo adjectives; she was acutely aware of the value of her wildly assertive ass and therefore insisted on carping on bad client transactions, making the water cooler banter appear legitimate.

I thought to myself, Young love, young love, and this vision surfaced: me, opening my legs, Brian lapping quietly underneath my desk.

My mother's sadness ebbs and flows. I believe

she needs a new pet, though that is my girl side speaking. The other side believes that menstrual cramps are desperate wails, that the uterus cries Fill me; then the blood oozes out, defeated. Women act perplexed that they are moody during ovulation, but to me it makes sense: the body craves something that the mind rejects again and again. And now that my mother's womb is at peace, her mind misses the dilemma.

My mother is sad. She bakes honey-sweetened cornmeal-oat rolls, strolls around the neighborhood daily, reads her art history books and Annie Dillard, but still she is sad. She begins to reveal disturbing details about my family that I'd never heard before during our weekend walks: Grampa didn't just die, he committed suicide. My aunt has always been a pothead, all throughout her successful career as a psychotherapist. My sister, Nina, had an abortion in New York, that's why she was so weepy on the phone that winter.

These secrets unveiled make me lose my footing, make me think I was so clueless, will always be clueless; maybe it's these crooked eyes of mine, one perceiving, the other dreaming.

She speaks of spanking Nina when she was young, regretting it. "She was such a stubborn child and I didn't know what else to do," my mother explains, as if I were the one to forgive her. "Always screaming and crying—you go crazy."

And again, I think of Telephone, the sound of a slap, the sting, the realization, Mother hit me, traveling long-distance, hot, indignant, twisting shape over years, coming out funny, like this: I let myself be hit.

Now Dino has finished the video and talks about

it paternally, using child-rearing phrases, describing me as "the figure," which I find oddly flattering. I heard him say to Ellis, our gullible friend, "See how the figure goes from severe to sensuous in this scene—it took a long time to coax that effect in the editing room." His class is impressed—all except Sandra. A week later he hands me the master as if it were a bouquet of flowers.

I end up in bed with him. We are like brother and sister, cozied up in funky blankets with the remote control and popcorn.

"Did I tell you you're pretty? Did I ever tell you I want to marry your legs?" He asks, tucking a pillow behind my head. "Kat, I'm such a pervert," he adds, happily.

We are like brother and sister, but I feel a heat between our flopped bodies, I want to move into it; the wind chimes are singing from the fire escape, dented and hollow.

"So you claim," I say. "Turn it on."

"Okay, but just remember this: in the words of Billy Joel, 'We didn't start the fire, it was always burnin' since the world was turnin' ...'"

"God, that was dumb. I love it. Okay, Dino, I'm ready. Showtime."

"I think there's one more thing you should know."

"Yeah?"

"Well, it's kind of hard for me to say.... It's not going to sound right, I shouldn't even bother, but...what am I, sixteen? In a nutshell: when I was filming you I felt this exciting tension, this sexiness after all the video mechanics were taken care of—you really turned me on, the way you would look at me when we were working out poses, and your little body.... I pretended like it was all in the name of art, but sometimes I just wanted to

throw the camera aside.... And then I felt so deranged, agh—I didn't like the thought of getting off on plastic and headless torsos, so I tried to objectify and pretend it wasn't really you, just limbs and skin and whatnot, to be true to the concept.”

He's running his fingers through his hair, eyes black and gleaming, trying to dodge my gaze. I remember the first time I saw him with his shirt off, on the soccer field, tenth grade, how surprised I was by his chiseled ribs and smooth muscle, dark hair, dark nipples. The girls were tickled by him, sweet Dino. I was the lucky one, I got two kisses; then he got scared and thought he should do more kissing, grazing, running around to see who loved him best. And then Mickey T. said, Aw, you don't need that Flintstone, and we danced to Prince's "Little Red Corvette," our legs cross-hatched, his advanced cock hot, pressing a Morse code against my hip, and I thought, Look, there's a body that will enter my body; this is the way things go. Dino never asked me what happened between me and Mickey T. I assumed he didn't care.

Now Dino is looking at me thoughtfully, as a twenty-five-old man, cat-scratched, through it all. I think of things I could say, jokes we have resorted to, but I stutter before my mouth moves; I am pounding inside.

He shifts his weight and turns on the video.

There is a woman's back. I recognize the curves, the geography. There is a woman's hand brushing down her pubic fluff. There is my tattoo. There is my mouth, opening and closing like an angelfish. Things are separate, puzzle pieces. I am blinking in the light, lying on my back; I smile for some reason. I look as though I am in love. There is no plastic bag, no thrashing.



“And then,” Dino says, “I started to miss Kat.”

When Dino's hand wraps around mine I am a thousand women at once clamoring to be heard, noisy, insistent, bumping down vertebrae. The naked body on TV, my mother in the country, Nina in New York, Katherine Elizabeth losing it, gaining it, ribcage rotating to the left when I love, to the right when I hate, and all these bones in this body trying to make sense, trying to follow the pitch.

Ed Skoog

## Variation on the Idea of Crowds

I go into crowds, hoping for riot,  
and I know a crowd is an amalgam  
of the general crush, like prison

or an epic. I go into a crowd's  
ontogeny, mark the move to grown  
from embryo, moving face to face.

Going into crowds, I hope a tyro  
will tutor me in what is still young,  
show me new divisions among the turks

preening, subscribers to an abstract cool.  
In the crowd my eyes dart from dirt to rain,  
picking out which brawlers would start a fight,

guessing who in the crowd presides,  
lead starling in a scarf of starlings  
wrapped around a river,

asteroidal revolutionaries,  
flying tories; or which gang plans to start  
fires under the dinner tables;

which clique's old age will mostly be spent  
dusting silver nitrate under roses.  
There are groups in the crowd covered in sores.

In crowds are islands that seem oases.  
I go into crowds to learn how to move  
many as one, the latest pattern

of bones going into the body,  
occipital tori, the many tendons of the wrist,  
inside the gala of ribs the salsa of organs

red and moving like featured performers,  
riotous heart and lungs someone's mama  
felt longing under a taut belly,

or saw through the gamma broadcast  
clipped to the doctor's light, curled baby  
bones, fetal catafalque, each facet and cleft

fleshed out by the doctor's pen, actual  
fetal development unimportant:  
there is the one projected skeleton

featuring us, in the medical room,  
doctor rushing toward other patients,  
each of us trying to remain parental

to this white sketch against a black faucet,  
a claue to fawn it into morning.  
And at the base of the X-

rayed neck a solarium  
glows warm, the neckbones concatenating  
towards the face even now woven

around a sucked thumb that must taste  
like sourballs, the kid's wince transfers

to the transparency so terribly.

There must be something valuable in thumbs.  
They are crowded into so many mouths,  
cedilla for the chin, ladled by a fist.

Patricia Goedicke

## Ideas

The thin bars of the traps we let down  
to catch gossiping lobsters, mere  
table talk or the deep, ongoing  
history of the sea's long standing  
affair with earth and where we stand on it  
and how, all the clever cat's cradles  
we weave for ourselves shudder  
at every passing fin. Each explanation  
we invent shines fitfully  
but proudly  
against the reefs it grows from

and wants to make love to,  
illuminate even those dark  
seething carpets of other, wilder  
hungrier scholars that seem almost  
to swallow us. In rippling schools. Masses  
of small bottom fish, corpuscles  
like fire leaping across chasms  
or slower, oozing into thick  
crusted layers. The seep of cells  
worm-like, secretly dividing  
and then multiplying into live  
clumped coral. Buzzing. With eager  
electric hooks, pronged feet, tiny  
red starfish hanging all over

the fringed eyehole we peer through, what  
ceaseless activity! Would they tear us  
apart?

No. They are too blind—  
too random for that. But both kinds  
of colonists urgently need  
each other, every answer  
comes caked with the prickly  
slime of barnacles, the  
cages we think we've erected  
against sharks and other predators are frail  
ghost crabs, their near see-through  
slats sway in the hissing crackle  
of the cold soup that created them.

Mike Craig

## At the Aquarium

QUEENSLAND LUNGFISH—ARRIVED AT THE  
COODER AQUARIUM IN 1933; THE OLDEST  
AND LARGEST KNOWN LUNGFISH IN CAPTIV-  
ITY. PLEASE DO NOT TAP ON GLASS.

Another plaque talks about the other fish  
in with him: tiny thumb-sized orange and yellow Sizzlefish  
and a pair of roundish, slender fish  
like blue raviolis flitting in and out of the rocks.  
But we don't notice them, seeing only the lungfish,  
his heavy eyes, the occasional bubbles lifting away  
from his mossy nostrils.

Today there is only one witness to the proceeding.  
She has lowered a long-stemmed white rose  
down into the tank. The lungfish has made his way over  
and, positioning his tremulous lips  
beneath the undulating petals, speaks thus:

"My name is Richard.  
I was born in 1921 just outside Cleveland, Ohio  
in a lake called Erie.  
My fellow fishes are of the Dipnoi Order  
(or Dipneusti) having lungs as well as gills  
and capable of constructing for themselves  
mucus-lined mudsleaves  
in which to withstand extended droughts."

(He pauses for a moment.)

“Feedbag is one of my favorite words.”

(Brief pause.)

“Do you believe in Justice?

Or are you like me, seeing life as a series  
of insults and letdowns?

These are troubled times, people.

I was one of a dozen lungfish pulled from their mudsleaves.

I had seen platters of stuffed mushroom caps

and chicken wellington...once I watched a woman soak her  
finger

in a jar of capers. There were cider stands  
along the country roads and little Jerry Khan  
took fresh eggs around in his bike basket.

This was all before I arrived at the aquarium.

It used to be you had the Good and the Evil.

People had convictions.

The Usage Panel was in the process of ruling

out their beliefs about empiricism, nobody knowing where  
they were headed, and so naturally

we see a trend toward cultism and fantasy.”

(Bubbles.)

“Within the Dipnoi Order

the hagfish is admired feverishly by the youth  
for its jawless, sucking mouth

and rasping teeth with which they bore into  
and feed on other fish.

And like roosters with our balls shaved off

we move in confusion across the proverbial barnyard,



forgetting about the questions.”

(A long pause.)

“Today I am 74 years old.

As for all the unanswered questions only two remain:

What is probably the fiercest of the Asiatic beasts of prey?  
and

How fast does the wind go?

I am not sorry I came here, these thoughts sifting down  
to me

the way a few leaves fall from a tree in autumn.”

(The lungfish retreats.)

The one witness to this, the waitress  
from a nearby diner on her break,  
puts her fingers to the glass and gargles.

Daniel McCann

## Ecology

I thought I saw them, the sheep, through the trees again.  
I was not myself. We sat on lawnchairs  
And discussed the year of the tiger  
Which had passed. Yesterday I saw my wife  
Cupping her arms around her head. The white jonquils  
Presumably—they were much the same  
As past centuries, yet today, as the clouds  
Crowd in around us

Their pink and cerulean blue ribs  
Breaking and setting, an eternal wasp flies  
Across the newspaper on the wrought-iron table,  
The print still withheld in the black, braided mystery  
Of our ever having been  
The human condition.

The locusts drown our voices  
When there is nothing to say.

The caisson at the edge of the yard,  
Entombed to cattail and marigold  
Hides a case of apricot liqueur.  
Our parrot speaks from the *austere porch*.  
To the north, the dried lakebed with its rings of evaporation  
Increases its panoply of artifacts  
With each gyre until, at last, in the center  
A small pool mirrors our two pale faces.

Tom Spanbauer

## Writing Your Face

*The following essay is taken from the text of a keynote speech delivered by Mr. Spanbauer at the Theoretical Approaches to Marginalized Literatures Conference. The editors wish to thank UM's Professor Veronica Stewart, whose valuable work with the conference made the publication of this essay possible.*

When I was asked to give the keynote speech on marginalized literature, what I thought the guy said was *marginal life* literature.

And what I thought was, how did this guy find out about my life?

Then, when I understood it was *marginalized literature*, and after I said yes, the first thing I had to find out was what marginalized literature was.

The second thing I had to find out, after I found out what marginalized literature was, was why in the hell did they ask me to talk about it?

Just what is a margin?

My top shelf old red dictionary defines margin as the part of the page or the sheet outside the main body of the text.

Defines marginal as that which is written in the margins of a page or sheet, or as occupying the borderland of a relatively stable territorial or cultural area, or as characterized by the incorporation of habits and values of one culture to another and by the

incomplete assimilation of one culture to another.

Located at the fringe of consciousness.

Margin—outside the main body of the text.

Marginal—that which is in the margins.

And then there's Marginalized. The -ized part means to cause to be—or conform to—or resemble.

So what I came to was that marginalized means conforming to what is outside the main body of the text.

I have spent my life trying to be in the main body of the text.

The most important thing in my family was our good name. At nine o'clock Mass on Sunday morning, when we as a family received Communion, the most important thing was our good name, and that as we walked back to our pews, with the Host, with God in our mouths, we could hold our heads high and walk proud.

Our worth was in the eyes of other people.

Us and them.

This one morning, though, there was trouble. My aunt had called my sister a whore, and my mother had found out my aunt had called my sister a whore. My aunt and her family always went to nine o'clock Mass like us. So there was this one morning, the morning my mother knew my aunt had called my sister a whore and that Sunday morning was also the morning that my aunt and my mother were setting up coffee hour in the basement of the church, together. After Communion, after we walked back, heads held high, proud of our good name, and were kneeling in the pew with God—then my mother got up, genuflected, made

the sign of the cross, walked down the aisle and down the steps to the basement. I looked over at my fourteen year-old sister, the whore, and my sister looked back at me.

It wasn't long before all hell broke loose. From below us, the congregation, from below, the Monsignor up on the altar saying Go In Peace God Be With You, from below us, pots and pans were crashing in the basement, screams of bloody murder floating up. How dare you call my daughter a whore! You screwed every man in Blackfoot before you finally found a husband.

I ran down the stairs and on the floor were two bodies, all nylons and high heels and Sunday hats askew, my mother and my aunt screaming and spitting at each other rolling all over the floor.

Marginal Life Literature.

Located at the fringe of consciousness.

The Holy Cross nuns at the St. Joseph's School taught me manners, respect for authority, citizenship, fear of the devil and good spelling. I always got an A in deportment and application. The Baltimore Catechism was my rule book. If I didn't know what to do, I could just go to the rule book—which I memorized—which I incorporated the habits and values of—which I assimilated—so I'd go to the rule book and memorize the rule and repeat the rule, so I would know how to be, how to act, what was right and what was wrong. What I had to do to get into the main body of the text, that is, heaven. What I had to do to stay out of the margins, that is, limbo, purgatory and hell, and since I was baptized in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost I didn't have to worry about the margins of limbo because the rule is, the boundary of limbo is you

don't go there if you're baptized, and I was baptized, but that still left purgatory, and that still left hell.

So it was very important for me to know what I had to do. What I had to know. How I had to act. How I had not to act. To make God receive me into His chosen fold, into the main body of his text, that is, to make God love me. So I wouldn't fall into the margins and go to hell.

What I had to do to make God love me and not go to hell was follow the rules, and the rules were in the Baltimore Catechism. The rules were in the book. The rules were in the main body of the text.

In fact, the rules *were* the main body of the text.

Everything else was marginal, was suspect, was located at the fringe of consciousness, was the weeping and the gnashing of teeth.

I have spent my life finding out what the rules are, so I can follow the rules, so I will be loved.

Picture this: I am standing on Tyhee Road in the morning waiting for the school bus. I have my red binder and my lunch pail with the Lone Ranger and Tonto on it. I am wearing the matching blue denim outfit, coat and pants. My white shirt button collar, polished black wedgies. My hair is parted on the left side like the picture of the boy in the barber shop that says Boy's Regular under it.

*Boy's Regular.*

I am standing up straight, good posture, probably repeating prayers to myself for the poor souls in purgatory.

Up pulls the Tyhee school bus.

Inside the Tyhee school bus are *them*. People not like me. Mormons mostly, and Indians. What my father called Ne'er Do Wells. My father in his Buick driving to church through the land of Ford-driving ne'er

do wells. And these ne'er do wells, these dirt farm Mormon kids, these Indian kids, look out the window at me, the fag in his tidy blue outfit and parted hair and they rub their hands together.

Getting on that shool bus is the story of my life: there I am, located on the fringe of consciousness, walking into the main body of the text.

Spent my life. Student government, King of the Senior Ball, Most Outstanding Personality, Alpha Chi Omega Dream Man, selfless, diligent Peace Corps volunteer, loyal husband, Bachelor of Arts, Master of Fine Arts, caring teacher, successful novelist—when you go to the Portland airport there's a sign right next to the picture of that famous American Rush Limbaugh that says Tom Spanbauer lives here, and that proves it goddamnit—next to Rush Limbaugh proves that I'm in the main body of the text, and here I am today in front of you and I really really hope you guys like this speech and you don't think this keynote speech is too marginal, and you think I'm really smart. And I hope you guys like my outfit and my hair and I hope you guys really like me.

United States of America. In the world, the United States of America is the main body of the text.

America the Great Melting Pot.

America the Great Incorporator of Habits and Values of all its many cultures and peoples. America the Great Cultural Assimilator. The Great Gatherer from the margins of the world into the main body of the text. Bring me your tired, your cold, your hungry.

But not your Haitians.

And don't ask America what happened, what is happening to her Native Americans.

So I have a question. At this convention, if we're talking about who's in the margins, who's not in the main body of the text, then who is it we're *not* talking about here today?

The New York Times Book Review!

The New York Times Best Sellers List

Baltimore Catechism Rule Book.

And all those New Yorkers who call literature from this part of America, *Southern* literature, who call literature from this part of America, *Western* literature, when nobody who is a New Yorker calls literature from New York, *Eastern* literature.

Ask a Native American about marginalization. Marginalization is nothing new to the Native American. The Native Americans, treated by the U.S. Government as a conquered people, were the first of us to be marginalized, first along with the African slaves the Europeans brought over on the slave ships.

The very blood in their veins is considered marginal, the color of their skin, their type of hair, their bodies not the main body of the text—they are them, not us. These Native Americans have had a boundary, a margin drawn around them, actual lines that define their reservations, not keeping us out, but keeping them in.

And the African-American has boundaries too. Just take a look at Portland, Oregon. Portland, Oregon is a segregated city. Physically segregated. The white people live here and here and here and here and the black people live over there in the north. You drive



from one neighborhood to another and you physically experience the color line, the boundary, the margin.

One of the saddest and subtlest points about racism—yes, when we start talking about marginalization we're talking racism and sexism, us and them, the have and the have not, the main body of the text and the margins of the text—one of the saddest things about this thin-lipped white man greed of the eighties, is how it took the money and ran, and left the marginal with nothing where there used to be hardly anything.

Which leaves the marginal with no programs, no boot straps to even pull up, no education and no hope. What that does to the marginal is bake sales for AIDS and billions of dollars for Star Wars. What that does for the marginal—and this is the saddest part—is turn us against ourselves.

How many sad stories do I know of social programs, educational programs gone sour because there is so little money, so little recourse, a pittance of funds for hundreds of programs to fight over. So we are divided. We are conquered. We shall not overcome. We shall backbite, rip off, fuck over, do anything that is necessary to get the funding for our tiny lunch program, for our tiny alcohol treatment program.

One thing that is new, that is different about our long American history of marginalization, is this is the first time in U.S. history when middle class educated white males can be considered marginal.

The gay man.

Outside the main body of the text.

In the borderland.

Located at the fringe of consciousness.

One of them.

The incorporation of habits but incomplete assimilation.

Me.

In the sixties I marched against the war, but I didn't experience war.

In the sixties I marched with black people, marched against oppression, but I was not black.

In the seventies, I marched with Native Americans against oppression, but I was not Native American.

In the seventies I marched with women, marched against sexual oppression, but I was not a woman.

In the eighties, I marched with gay people, marched against oppression. In the eighties, AIDS has, one by one, taken my friends from me, has made my very body the main body of the text.

I have spent my life trying to be in the main body of the text, and now, in the nineties, I'd much rather be watching this on television.

Literature. My old red top shelf dictionary defines literature as writings having excellence of form or expression and expressing ideas of permanent or universal interest.

My question now is if writing must express a universal interest in order to be called literature, then how can literature be literature if it's marginalized literature?

Does gay literature have an excellence of form or expression that expresses ideas of permanent interest only to gay people?

Does women's literature have an excellence of form or expression that expresses ideas of permanent interest only to women?

Does Native American literature have an excellence of form or expression that expresses ideas of permanent interest only to Native Americans?

Where do we stop with this nineteenth-century naming and filing and classifying?

Back there at the beginning of this keynote speech—back there when you guys all still liked me—I defined marginalized as conforming to what is outside the main body of the text.

Now I'm wondering does it ever happen that we marginalizeders could perhaps conform and resemble to such a degree that—and this happens all the time to me when I'm writing—that what is in the margins gets to be so much that the margins overwhelm the main body of the text and what happens then is the margins become the main body of the text and then the main body of the text is no longer the main body of the text and all of a sudden is that which occupies the borderland.

We'll never reach this place unless we marginalizeders all stick together.

Black, Asian, women, gay, Native American, white. And here's the secret to sticking together.

Oh! The Humanity!

The universal.

The human heart.

What's the *same* about us all.

What's beating my heart is beating yours.

Jorge Luis Borges once said that all that writers do is describe their own faces.

When you go to the mirror and look into your

eyes, when you go down into your darkest place and find the dark truth there, and when you bring your dark truth up to the light, and when you speak your dark truth openly and clearly, you do not marginalize people, you do not exclude them, you include them, because what is in my dark heart is also in yours.

According to Emerson, a famous marginalized American, genius is knowing that what is in your own heart is true for all men.

In my heart, there is failure, fault, fear. I write of moments in my life when the bottom fell out. I write about what's wrong with the world, my world. What's wrong with me. The process of my fiction is exploring my darkness. I go into my dark room, go into that dark theater, naked I turn on the computer screen, touch darkness, touch myself. I am committed to finding the truth, but I don't know before I go into the dark, what the truth is. And there's no promise I will find a light at the end of the tunnel; in fact, the light at the end of the tunnel could be a speeding locomotive headed my way.

What if I find something too dark, too scary?  
Monstrous?

I'm sure I will.

Ere I go into the valley.

I will find death.

Death is the source of my story, of your story.

Death is not in the margins. Death is the main body of the text.

In the face of death, we learn what it is that makes us human.

When I go down into my dark theater, I find everyone there. All of you down in there with me. All of you—women and gays and Native Americans and

African-Americans and white male Republicans, Popes and priests and senators from North Carolina and Utah, even Lon Mabon is down in the darkness with me. All of us, oh the humanity, together, no them, just us, all of us, doing the nasty in the dark, entangled, trying to find how our beginnings lead to our middles and how that will lead to our end.

My story is entangled with yours. My fate entangled with yours.

By exploring my darkness I find my humanity.

In that sense, my darkness, my otherness, my marginality is in fact my gift.

How will we see genius, how can we see our humanity, if we have never examined what it is in our hearts? Not our gay heart. Not our woman's heart, not our Native American heart, not our white male Republican heart.

Tell me what's gay, what's straight, what's woman, what's Asian, and I am no longer in a family of human beings.

Isn't marginalization, in a sense, a censorship?

Put me in a box and tape GAY over my box.

Put you in that box over there and tape ASIAN over the box.

Put you over there and tape AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN over the box.

What do we have here?

We have the rule book.

Us and them.

We are divided and conquered.

Back at the St. Joseph's school, my religion taught me that what is in my heart is sinful. My science class taught me that what is in my heart is scientifically

unverifiable. The business class taught me that if it comes from my heart, its only worth is what I can sell it for. My art class taught me that if it comes from my heart, then it probably has already been said, so just try to put a new angle on it.

Everything I've every learned from this Christian Walt Disney Scientific American culture of mine has told me not to listen to my heart. Everything, that is, *except* what I've learned from the marginalized.

Writers write because they weren't invited to the party.

So, let's go back to Tyhee Road and me standing in my blue denim wedgies, my red binder, waiting for the bus.

The Tyhee schoolbus pulls up.

Let's tell the story this way. Let's start with me looking in the window of the bus and instead of Indians and Ford-driving dirt-farming Mormons, let's say something miraculous happens and who I see are scared kids, funny kids, sad kids, kids like me. And then, due to the miraculous, those kids look out and see this funny-looking guy, a scared kid, a funny kid, a sad kid, a kid like them.

Let's say then I get on the bus and we drive to the University of Montana to the Marginalized Literatures convention, and we're all together on the bus, girls and boys and blacks and whites, and Asians and Mormons and Catholics and Jews and Native Americans and gays and Democrats and even one Republican, and we are singing a song. We are not singing We Shall Overcome.

We are singing We Shall Kick Your Ass.

Now what I sound like is an old hippy white guy preaching peace and love.

Listen to me.

Margins are very important. Boundaries are important. Without boundaries, I don't know where I start or stop.

Good fences make good neighbors.

So instead of making our boundaries into things that divide us, that categorize us, let's let our fences make us good neighbors. I can sit my morning coffee on our fence in between us and you can set your chamomile tea or your whiskey or your cigarette or your cowboy hat or your joint or your condoms or your Bible or your nipple ring on the fence too, and we can talk about the fence, the fence itself, or how it's different on this side from that side.

We can talk about words, how each word has a corral around it of meaning and how a word in its corral changes when you put another word in its corral next to it.

We can talk about the spaces in between words, how those blank silences, those little respites, put a margin around a word.

We could talk about how without spaces in between and margins all the way around, how language would dissolve into a plenum, a black hole full of everything.

We have all spent our lives trying to find out what the rule is, so we can follow the rule, or break the rule, so we can be loved.

We have all spent our lives, or part of our lives, in the margin, with our worth only judged in other

people's eyes.

It is not only my pain.

It is not only your pain.

It is the pain of being different, off, peculiar, odd, marginal, the black hole full of nothing, the pain of the mass of men and their quiet desperation.

The pain of the darkness where you don't know the rules.

The pain of the darkness it takes for us to see the light.

Ladies and gentlemen, women and men, black, yellow, brown, red, white, gay, straight.

This funny-looking face is mine. This funny-looking face is yours. Is his. Is hers. This funny-looking face is our face.

Parade your peculiar.

It's what makes us human.



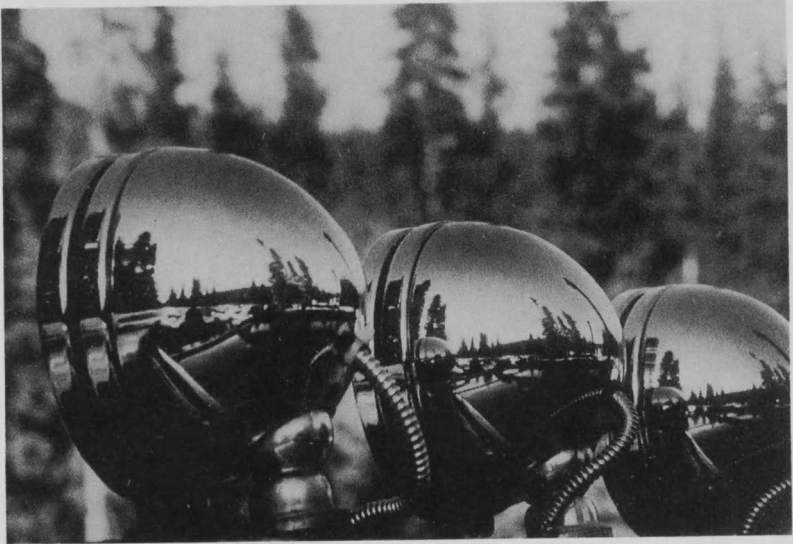
## Contributing Artists

**Maura Byrne** grew up all over Canada. She will receive her MFA in printmaking from the University of Montana in December, 1995.

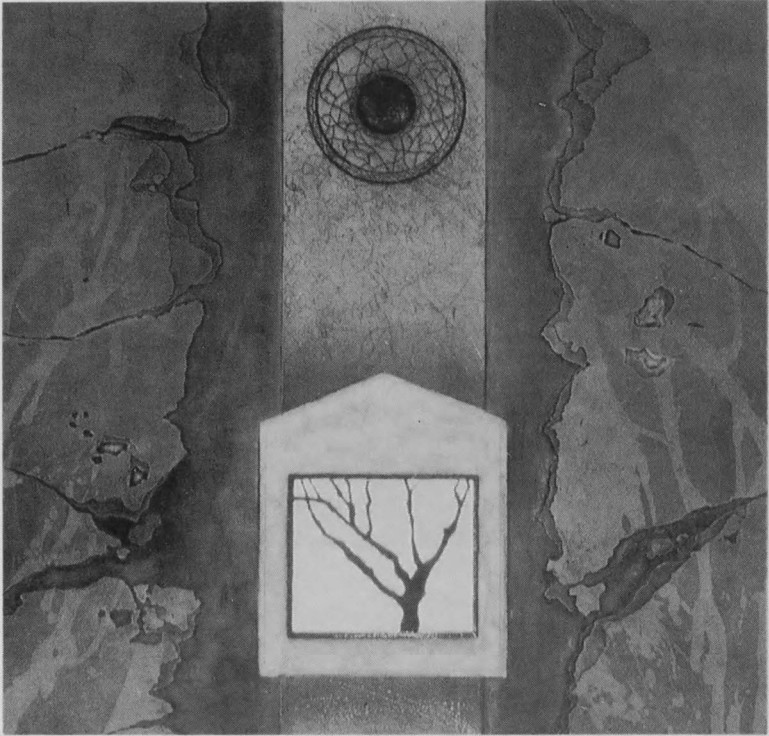
**Brian Hatfield** graduated from the University of Montanain 1995 with a degree in math and environmental biology. He is currently working on a book of photographs.

**Mato A. Higashitani** is currently teaching printmaking at the University of Montana. The two prints shown here are from the series "Silent Dialogue," which is dedicated to the late printmaker and UM art professor Donald Bunse.

**Suzanne Truman** is currently working on her MFA in printmaking and painting at the University of Montana. She works with dream imagery and forgotten memory.



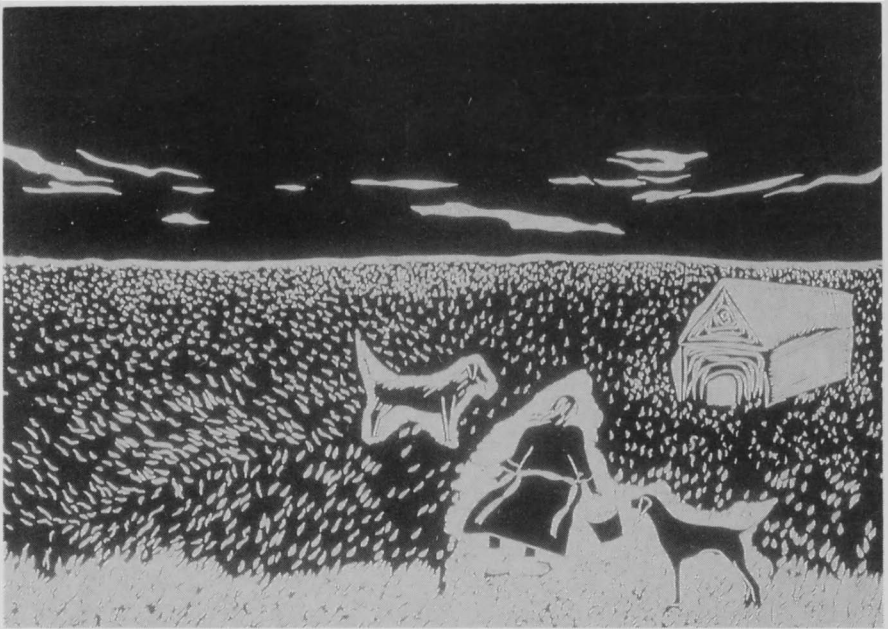
Brian Hatfield  
*Untitled*, 1995  
black and white photograph, 5" x 7"



Mato A. Higashitani  
*The Day When the Shrine Was Built*, 1994  
color etching and engraving, 18" x 18"



Mato A. Higashitani  
*Triumph of the Collagraph*, 1995  
photo etching and collagraph, 18" x 18"



Maura Byrne  
*Feeding the Dogs*, 1993  
linocut, 18" x 24.5"



Maura Byrne  
*Mum and Dad*, 1993  
linocut, 8" x 8"

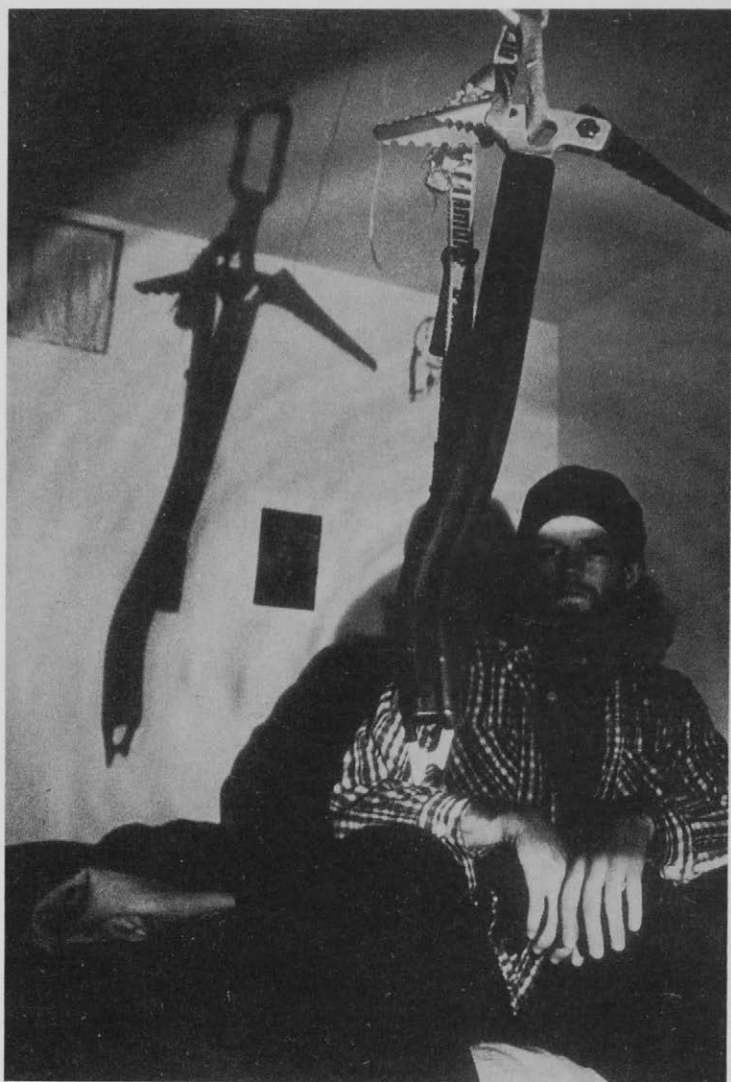


Suzanne Truman  
*Timing Is Everything*, 1994  
oil on masonite, 36" x 54"



Suzanne Truman  
*Oppression*, 1994  
block print, 12" x 14"





Brian Hatfield

*Untitled*, 1995

black and white photograph, 8" x 10"

Russell Edson

## The Dinner Date

An old man, after years of meditation, finally decides to take his ape to dinner.

The ape insists on wearing a diaper. It's more dainty than a tuxedo.

The old man decides to wear a condom. It's more dainty than a monocle, or even a flower in one's lapel.

The ape is on its back diapering itself, hooting, please don't look.

I wouldn't for all the tea in China.

Meanwhile the old man is choosing a condom. The one made of lace seems too old-fashioned. The one made of Swiss cheese is not exactly his style. The colander might work, but it's full of fettuccine without Alfredo.

Meanwhile the ape is all tangled up in an unsupervised diaper with a thousand safety pins.

Meanwhile the restaurant is about to close...

Russell Edson

## The Laws

If the rooster thinks he brings up the sun, and if the cow thinks she sets it with her lowing, what harm?

Of course the cow is somewhat smarter than the rooster, but his convictions are stronger. The cow tends to be intellectually lazy. This makes the rooster appear to be quicker, but it's probably only his nerves.

Roosters are born nervous wrecks. And still, no laws are broken.

Should the rooster and the cow get married it has no legal force in human law. Nor has it sanction in biological law.

So it is generally better for roosters to marry hens, and cows to marry bulls. Though neither has any legal force in human law, the law of nature does not discount it...

Russell Edson

## **The Personal Garment**

Oh, to be sure, the personal garment is usually to be found bunching itself at the human crotch.

Sometimes they cup women's breasts. This without pleasure or displeasure. They make no special note of nipples.

But should the personal garment develop any of the normal feelings it must immediately be removed from its body and given to the dead...

Amber Dorko Stopper

## Marilyn the Mennonite

I have always worried. When I was in second grade and coming off of the school bus, I worried terribly that I had just heard my mother not win something on the radio. It was during a special contest month when the disc jockeys were pulling names out of the phone book, and if you answered them by saying "WGBA's gonna make me rich," you got a lot of money. As I got off the school bus that morning in second grade, I was positive I heard my mother lose.

"Hello?" the voice had said. And that was it. She had lost.

Hearing it from the staticky radio sitting on the school bus dashboard, I was sure it was my mother. I was wailing. I went into the school. I tried to tell them, I heard my mother lose the WGBA contest. She is probably so sad. She must need me. But no one would take me to the office to use the phone.

The flower of my mother's birthmonth was Lily of the Valley, a poisonous flower. Once I had made the connection between this poisonous flower and my mother, I was sure harm would come of it. I would sit at my desk at school and picture my mother sitting on the concrete steps of our house, reading *Woman's Day* and absently reaching into one of our concrete urns full of Lily of the Valley and eating it. You see, even when I was a little kid, I imagined that wherever I was not, the world began spinning out of control. I felt a turning

point on my honeymoon, when I let my new husband drive with a root beer barrel in his mouth. Not once did I picture his impending death; he had a root beer barrel in his mouth, which certainly could have killed him, particularly while driving, but with each second that passed the root beer barrel grew smaller and smaller. I was happy. I had in my pocket what we had been calling The Wad, about one third of our monetary wedding gifts, which over the three days of our honeymoon we spent easily on food, turnpike tolls, and gas. We spent our first night in Lancaster in a bed and breakfast run by a Mennonite couple named Marilyn and Bill. We thought that was very funny. Marilyn the Mennonite. In the bathroom medicine cabinet there was a tube of Chap-Stik so old that it was made of metal. It boasted an active ingredient called Moistu-Tane. Also, it said, try Chap-Ans for Hands.

“I want to go home,” I told my new husband.

I have always wanted to go home. I could easily sign a contract today, if someone would let me, saying I never had to spend a night away from my bed again. I wanted to go home. My husband would not let me. “What would everybody think?” he said. “They just gave us all this money because they knew we were going away!” He took the money out of the pocket of my jeans, which were lying at the foot of the bed. We were wearing the white terry robes provided by Marilyn the Mennonite. We shuffled through fifties and hundreds. Hundred dollar bills have such a congratulatory look, as though there were exclamation points on them. It seemed important to get rid of all of them. “We have to break the hundreds,” I said. “Or in a few days we’ll be wanting to buy beef jerky in a convenience store and have nothing but hundreds to do it with.”

“What are you so worried about?” my husband asked.

The bed we slept in had a headboard shaped from two large kitchen chairs stuck together. We got up the next morning and walked around the yard and house. There were two other people at the breakfast table, a young woman and her mother. They were discussing edible flowers. Crystallized violets, like you would use on a wedding cake. The husband of Marilyn the Mennonite brought us breakfast.

“I couldn’t help overhearing your conversation,” he said.

In a strange little dish was a very, very soft egg lazily in butter and milk. “That’s a coddled egg,” I said. It’s usually only something you read about.

“Yes,” he said. There was also a fruit salad, some very buttery toast, and a big bright flower on each plate.

“Please don’t put your pine cones on the table,” the man said to me. “The sap...”

I took the pine cones I had collected in the yard and moved them away. “What is that flower doing on my plate?” I asked.

“I heard you talking about edible flowers. It’s a nasturtium,” he said, and left the room.

All four of us had a nasturtium on our plates. My husband bit his. “Peppery,” he said.

“Nasturtiums *are* edible,” I said. But I didn’t know what a nasturtium looked like. “I mean, that’s what they make capers out of.” But this didn’t look like a caper.

Everyone ate their flowers. My husband started on his fruit salad. “What’s the green stuff all over this

pineapple?" he yelled to the man in the kitchen.

The man came and stood in the archway, appearing offended. "Mint," he said.

"It's not mint," my husband mumbled to me. "It's not. It's *basil* or something. That guy has no idea." And I looked at the bitten-off stamens on his plate.

I mean, the whole concept of human life is so frail, so utterly frail to begin with. The best you get, timewise, is so little. It was never until I was in love that I realized this. Eighty years at best? And so much of it gone. It sounds silly and maudlin until you actually start to care about it. The time line of your life is set up like a big department store, with advertisements that boast up to 60 percent off, but all around you only see signs for 10 and 20 percent.

I had felt it coming. Before I had done this thing, I had felt so much braver than ever before in my life. I certainly no longer cared whether or not my mother won radio contests and ate poisonous flowers. I had nothing to lose. I was this big gorgeous key lime pie, this succulent tart jewel, that he came along and did with exactly what I was *for*—cut a slice—making me more loved and less whole forever. That's one scary thing.

But there are other terrors in the world that you are helpless to: the *pop* heard just before the gas station where you are filling up explodes; the expanding of the optic nerve when you eat ice cream too fast. When will come the day when you will see him for the last time? my paranoid Choir Invisible asks. He pouts when he leaves for work, and I, chin up, say "Oh, you'll be back before you know it." And then—JINX!—I think, what



if he really *was* back—*before he knew it?* Unconscious. Ambulances, his slack cold face in my hands for the last time?

A root beer barrel in the car driving towards his honeymoon bed was the most freedom he ever got (dear, I am so sorry). And I keep thinking that love's a child, love is this child that says Let me get into your lap and squirm around and bang you on the head with this here toy doctor's kit; love's a child, and death is this two hundred and fifty bar blues song that you keep thinking is going to come to a bridge but never does.

The best part of the honeymoon was when we came back. We dropped off the rental car at the airport and took an airport limo back to the city, sharing it with some Japanese businessmen and two older English women. Our apartment was stacked with boxes we'd forgotten about. Lots of the wrapping paper had doves on it.

"We could just save them all for Christmas," my husband said, tired.

But of course we didn't. The things you *get*. Crystal candleholders with crystal bobeches, things that go in the kitchen, stemware and frames. We looked like grownups. And that night we went out and bought a Christmas tree, because we knew we had been on our honeymoon when everyone else had bought theirs.

And the next morning when I left it was dark and rainy, the dog was whining, we had lights turned on as though it was night, and it smelled like breakfast. The radio was playing swing Christmas music. All the wedding presents were still all over the floor,

unwrapped. And I had to go to work. "Leave it like this," I told him, "so I can pretend that this is where you are."

"But it is where I am."

"But it won't be if you change it."

I left, it was drizzling and dark, the Christmas lights the city pays for were lit, and I was so happy. It was really different. I was thinking about babies, other people's babies, and how most of them are born with those dark blue eyes that their mother will go to all lengths to convince themselves will stay that way. Like it would be a loss if their eyes turned brown or light. Of all the things to bother to hope for someone. If I saw a person with those dark, velvet blue eyes, I might scream. I think: but what do I know? Will I wish this? How do I know I won't wish this?

Charlie R. Braxton

## **Torn between Two Worlds (Jesus at the Crossroads)**

and it came to pass  
that the son of man  
was called down to  
the crossroads  
where the loa of  
the dead and the  
spirit of the undead  
meet in the sweet  
by and by to try  
and test the cool  
of those who dare  
to walk the walk  
of the crossroad way  
and break  
between the beats of  
mortals and gods  
seek/in the holiness  
of wisdom past  
and wisdom present  
embodied in the  
orishas of that  
old time religion

yeah jesus went  
down to the old  
rugged cross-

roads to dance between  
two worlds  
his holy body breaking  
to the beat of a music  
loud enough to shake awake  
the black saints of old  
marching onward  
like majestic warriors  
chanting  
in/to the hot dark delta night  
(loa legba, loa legba, loa legba)  
may the circle be unbroken  
by and by lord  
by and by  
and all the while ehsu watches the waning of the west &  
elegba looks longingly  
to the east  
admonishing jesus  
to seek ye first  
the holy kingdom  
of ashe'  
and all other wisdoms  
will be added on/in/to you  
yo son of man  
the choice is yours  
you can get with this  
or you can get with that

Charlie R. Braxton

## Fly Fly Black Bird

It was me who  
heard the blackbird  
say that  
the word is the way  
the way is the word  
sacred song/sung/some  
chant psalms so calm  
it shakes the faith of  
the fate/full  
whose blood/spill filled  
the pristine streets  
of philistine who dream  
of being philosopher/kings  
of rhythmless swing  
                                please  
don't sing me no mocking bird blues  
don't play me no copycat jazz  
i  
  have  
had  
    e-  
      nuff already.....she/it!

Steve Lattimore

## Dogs

I was sent home early from school for not letting Billy Pushkin drink water after I made him eat one stick of white chalk and one stick of yellow. The principal called my house and my mom's boyfriend said yeah, sure, send him home. I didn't want to go home though because Albert would be lying on the couch wearing baggy shorts and no underwear, drinking apple wine. I thought about going to The Liquor for a Big Hunk, but I'd spent all my money looking at Emily Klein's bare butt before school. So I went instead to see Blair Bodine, who was home sick. I'd tell Blair I started a club, charge him a quarter to join, then take his money to The Liquor and get my Big Hunk. Maybe check out Emily's tits with the change.

Blair answered the door in pajama bottoms and no top. He said his mom wasn't home so I couldn't come in. In his driveway, a red wagon sat with an empty wire cage on top of it. I asked Blair what the cage was for, but he wouldn't say. Then I told him I had an extra full nelson, did he want it? He said that he did.

Blair should have watched more wrestling. I pinned his arms behind him and dropped him to the mat that read *Please Wipe Your Feet* and he admitted he'd been playing dogs with the kid next door. It was a dog cage.

That sounds like fun, I said. Let's play. Blair

said he didn't want to. I'll be a Doberman Pinscher, I said. You're a Poodle. Get in the cage.

Blair got in. I took the padlock that hung loose from the latch and clicked it shut. I'm not a Poodle, though, Blair said. I'm a Collie.

Okay, I said. You're a Collie. Bark.

Blair barked. His nose was running and his back glistened with sweat.

You must be hot, I said. I wheeled Blair in his cage across the lawn to the faucet and squirted him with the hose. He whimpered for a minute, then I turned the nozzle and the spray changed from a chunky mist to a stiff rope.

I'm sick, he screamed. Then, for no reason, he barked again. That was pretty funny, so I stopped squirting him. But then, seeing me laugh, *he* laughed too, and I didn't like that. I turned the nozzle again and drilled him. Forever.

Shut up, I said when he started screaming. Dogs like water. Especially Collies.

But Blair wouldn't shut up. Cry, cry, cry. So I wheeled the wagon out to the sidewalk and charged kids getting out of school a dime each to squirt him. The hose was plenty long, and soon I had nearly a buck, a week's worth of Big Hunks. I turned the hose over to the kids with no money and let them squirt Blair for free. I wasn't a mean kid, not like they said I was.

I was about to turn Blair loose—enough was enough—when a car drove by, then stopped and backed up until it was in front of us. Four high-schoolers got out and one of them took the hose from me. What do you think you're doing, he said. I told him I was letting people squirt my friend for money. He took the hose from me and fiddled with the nozzle. I shrunk back, thinking he was going to squirt me, but then he went

ahead and turned the stream on Blair. I didn't say anything about the dime. When he finished, he crimped the hose and offered it to another guy, a bigger one. The second one, though, said no, he had a better idea. He unzipped his fly.

Blair screamed like a sissy until the pee hit him, then he shut up. He crouched down and pressed both hands over his mouth. The sound the pee made on his back was a sad one, like he was hollow, not a real kid or even a dog, just a bag of garbage left out in the rain.

Hey, I said. Don't do that. He's sick.

When he finished peeing, the big kid zipped up and they all got into the car. I picked up the hose, but the one who'd peed leaned out the window and said, If you wash him off, we're coming back for you. I dropped the hose and the nozzle clicked on the cement. Blair opened his eyes when he heard it, but then he said, It burns, it burns, and pressed his hands to his face.

I looked at the kid who'd peed and said, You owe me fifteen cents, you son of a bitch. I tacked on a nickel for using pee instead of water. The kid didn't pay though, and they drove off laughing.

Blair was crying so hard he couldn't tell me where the key to the lock was. Then a car that looked like his mom's station wagon turned the corner, and I ran. A long way down the street, the car passed me—it was no one I knew. But I was almost to our apartment by then, so I kept going. I was starting to feel sick, too.

When I got home, Albert gave me a note for The Liquor and a stolen traveler's check from the wrinkled paper sack he had that was full of them. I walked to The Liquor and gave the guy the note and the check and he gave me three bottles of Albert's wine. Half way home I remembered about the Big Hunk. I went back



to The Liquor and bought one, careful to use my own money, not Albert's, though I could have, easy.

My mom was home from her day job and getting ready for her night job when I got back. She said Blair's mom had run screaming toward her car as she drove by his house. She said she'd slammed on the brakes to keep from hitting her. What was wrong with me, my mom wanted to know. Why was I such a terrorist? Wasn't it enough for me to ruin her life? She smacked me on the neck with the cord from her curling iron. How long was I going to be a little bastard, she asked. Why hadn't she kept her goddamn pants on? She wept as she hit me. What was wrong with me, she asked again. With her? Why were we all like this?

I wriggled loose from her, and she threw a tan bottle of make-up that hit me in the lip. Albert grabbed the sack of wine when my blood started dripping into it. First thing he did was fish out my Big Hunk, peel away the black and white wrapper, and take a bite. That's mine, I said.

Albert looked at it real close, said he didn't see my name anywhere. He took another big bite, then ran his tongue down the length of it and threw it to me. I sat on the floor in the corner by the TV and ate it without wiping it off. I stared at Albert and he stared at me. When I put the candy to my lips, the white nougat turned pink. It tastes better like this anyway, I said.

My mother retrieved her bottle of make-up and wiped it clean. She uncapped it and dabbed the liquid cover-up onto both cheeks, watching me as I ate. I saw from the way she looked at me that she was wondering what kind of person I was going to be. Strangely enough, I was thinking about this too. But unlike my mother, who four years later would leave me at Jerry's coffee shop in Hollister, California, hand me twenty

dollars and drive away, I never finished the thought. The image of Blair, pee-soaked and caged, sobbing, reared up before me and pushed everything else away. I saw Blair, and I saw the stream of pee pattering on his back, and I saw that it was mine.

I don't know, maybe the high school kids were real, maybe just a lie I told and told and came to believe. Twenty years later I can't say which. What I do remember, though, is the bitterness of that candy bar, the image of my friend, and the question that I asked myself as my mother stood there rubbing the brown batter into her face, hating me and becoming beautiful: *Why didn't you go back and let him out of that cage, you fool? He would have given anything.*

Patrick McCormick

## Album Scratches #7

I did this. I smelled toast. She read this poem. She said it was about eight thirty a.m. We discussed my pet theory: the fishtank. The phone rang. I sensed a poem. The aboriginal tone of her skin spoke French. I answered. I felt it was necessary. To me there is a word for everything. *Fatuity. Hypnogogic. Alb.* It was the city.

They were moving. We moved quickly. The old house was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white, decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies, set on what had once been our most select street. But garages and cotton gins...the same old story.

It all started when I stopped reading Faulkner. The city limits stopped. We stopped talking about moving. We moved the bed. Behind it we found a poem. I will tell all that it said. Don't move. Outside there's a green sun and a yellow swallowtail fluttering.

Behind us there's a fruit in the big tree over there. Pluck it. She was always so good with her hands, with letters, names, and addresses. She wrote incessantly. I blame myself. The note said: *lettuce, wine, sandwich meat.* I waited at the grocery for hours. She arrived with the wrong message. There never was a tree.

Now I can begin. The ground was flat and warm. I slept easy under thick boughs. Across the tracks, the hills looked like giant panthers. You looked fat. I never said that. The hills looked heavy. The soil roiled black with nitrogen. The shade around us

turned turbid. The air of truth turned around us. I breathe and you exhale. I inhale your breath. We are too close. This economy must change. Picture this: six boys and nine girls. All the girls are smiling. I'm taking their photo. Am I wrong? It's the phone again.

Now no one will believe me. Scattered rocks of crumpled paper litter the linoleum floor while her platinum hair lights up the toaster. Do I know her prescription? Yes. It is inscribed with the words *oeuvre*, *sentient*, and *inertia*, on the wall above our bed.

Gerri Jardine

## The Veteran

You pronounce my name well. Very well.  
A difficult name, I know.  
I'm told it can flop around in the mouth like a raw oyster.

How long till it rains? Till we need not bathe in kerosene?  
When will this basement fill with water,  
this carafe with red wine? Don't ask.  
My mother tells me when she was a child she never once  
thought of the bombs. Stupid woman.  
Here. Drink this.

What I remember:  
polka music at the hospital. Belgium, maybe.  
No. Or Budapest. A nurse who cannot pronounce a name  
on a bracelet. An honest mistake.  
In the surgical theater a doctor who performs with an icepick.  
I am out cold and counting backwards.  
Did I misinterpret a gesture? Did the hands give  
or take away? I miss everything.  
They have pumped my stomach, they say.  
Its contents are on the next gurney. Nurses console it,  
call it my given name.

Since the surgery you need only to plug me in;  
I become a thief, my handiwork graces pawnshop windows.  
Fences know me.  
I become Napoleon learning English, counting heads  
in English. I become Eva Braun cutting paper dolls

in a bunker.

I make amends, shave my head, plot to murder the pope,  
make amends, skin his head.

I am always taking things.

Hand me an extension cord, I change disguises.

I am not you.

In the distance I hear my name mispronounced.

Hear that? They say, "We need the bastard."

I go, though I am fresh out of scrap.

Karen Subach

## Tattoo

—for Primo Levi

There was just the hand, there was my arm.

There was just the small pin, there was my hand, there was my arm.

The pin's blue pinch. The dots processing in  
Some with suitcases, some with shoes.

9 the monocle of the man who dragged the pin.

2 the profile of the monocled man who grinned and hooded  
with pushing the ragged pin to

6 the broken eyeglass of my father, in a bloody blue.

Blue the root of this I chew again.

8 the pair of glasses I pushed through the wire for bread.

There was gunfire, and then none.

Zelda, Josef, Ewa, Isaak, dead, had dug and dug.  
I had to look.

Space between slashed 7 and crooked 4  
traces the head of a shovel.

Flesh layers, then. The soil.

Aqua brightest vein, my ink tastes of trains,  
the tracks siphoned in and up, the back-to-back,

the 9, the 1.

O pulled-open, mouth-shouting, won't-close-O undone,  
blighted part I hate most,

O for Oswiecim, 1943,

O bloating on my white raggy cold old forearm.

You serpent approaching to close on yourself.

You fruit, bitten.



John Yau

## Counterpoint

The upright man marches like a clock  
which is to say he cannot quite return

to the same spot in the grooved sky  
The eyebrow panel is obsolete

The evolution of ants defines one kind of speed  
the revolution in fashion hints at another

Don't slump forward in your rubberized seat  
because you still need to order all twenty-four volumes

Why do you want to be naked  
when all the stars have rescinded their orders

I insist that you put more thought  
into your fortune cookies

Can receiving the consolation prize  
be as gratifying as entering the contest

Please learn to remove all evidence of your stubble  
without inconveniencing others

Arithmetic is a spiral shaped waiting room  
filled with the pronouns of ruined ladders

I wish I could get you to see it my way  
but then I wouldn't be here if you did

Tod Marshall

## Interview with Nance Van Winckel

Tod Marshall: You've written many poems that use voices, that speak through different personas. From where do you think these voices come? Do you receive them? Or perhaps "retrieve" these voices that guide these poems?

Nance Van Winckel: I think about it more as finding an attitude or a certain tonality through which the poem originates—a kind of verbal posturing I hear from the speaker in the poem. And then I just try to hear that more closely. Of course, though I realize any poem's speaker is partly me, what I'm interested in are the parts that aren't as familiar to me, that aren't as recognizable.

I have a theory about where this comes from. I think as we mature we try on various personalities to figure out who we're going to be as adults, what we're going to be like, and in the process of trying on all these new personalities, we are also casting them off just as quickly because maybe they feel uncomfortable on us or maybe we don't know how to express ourselves inside of them. But I think what really happens is that we don't entirely cast them off. Instead, we bury these selves inside us. For instance, when I was growing up, say about twelve years old, I had a tomboy personality, and it manifested itself in a lot of ways. I was sarcastic to adults; I had a real rebellious streak; I played football and hung around with boys more than with girls. But

then somewhere I started to leave that self behind and tried to perceive myself in a more feminine way. But I think I never really left that tomboy self; I think it just went deeper down, and certainly that's a self that comes out from time to time in poems, a sort of sassy talker. Sometimes when I look at her I really do see someone talking with a hand on her hip—a whole attitude and gesture. I see her still as more a boy than a girl. I don't know if that might be the anima/animus, but I suspect there's some connection to that too.

TM Theorists talk about feminine versus masculine discourse. Do you think such theories apply to what you're saying? Are there strictly feminine voices or attitudes that inhabit your work? Or masculine? And do you think you can clearly distinguish between them?

NVW That's one of the things I try to find out in the drafting process. I try to distinguish. I try to see how the consciousness reveals *itself*. Partly that's what a poem is to me, an act of exploring what this consciousness is and where it's coming from and, in a more physical, concrete way, where it's located in time and space. So, yes, it does seem as if it's one or the other, male or female, but it often takes a long time for me to figure out who it is, and then when I do, the poem usually opens up; that's where the narrative begins to open up. Whoever is talking usually has a story to tell.

Czeslaw Milosz has written about this in his collection of essays, *Visions from San Francisco Bay*. He says this in "Essay in Which the Author Confesses That He Is on the Side of Man, for Lack of Anything Better":

*Every man and woman I pass on the street feels*

*trapped by the boundaries of their skin, but, in fact, they are delicate receiving instruments whose spirituality and corporeality vibrate in one specific manner because they have been set at one specific pitch. Each of them bears within himself a multitude of souls and, I maintain, of bodies as well, but only one soul and one body are at their disposal, the others remain unliberated.*

TM Milosz also talks about daimonions dictating his poetry to him; he says that we need to “hope / that good spirits, not evil ones, choose us for their instruments.” What do you do when one of these selves, one of these consciousness that seems to be entering your work seems to be malevolent? Do you try to exorcise such a “daimonion” through the writing?

NVW I can't say that I've felt my way into anything that seemed evil. I certainly have felt my way into consciousnesses that are, well, *not* politically correct. But I'm not sure I think of them as evil. A lot of times, for instance, the women in my poems struggle with being under the power of men, under the spell of men—the new book I'm working on is called “After a Spell.” And certainly what's going on in some of these poems—people having unjust power over other people, putting spells on them—is a harsh reality but politically not a very acceptable note to strike.

TM You're very attracted to the work of Wallace Stevens. Yet out of all the modernist poets—I'm thinking of H.D., Pound, and Eliot especially—Stevens seems the least interested in personas; that is, he seems most interested in exploring his own mind, his own imaginative, epistemological relationship with the

world. Could you talk about your attraction to Stevens' work and perhaps what you've learned from him?

NVW Stevens went on his ear. I think that's first and foremost what I've loved about Stevens. Lately I've been reading Stevens again and looking at how he uses diction, levels of diction. Many of my favorite poems of his have this odd duality of diction. For instance, in "Academic Discourse at Havana" he has this really funky mix of academese and also a wonderful, lush aristocratic diction. Then there's the diction of decadence, of Florida and Cuba, the tropics; I call that Stevens' guilt discourse. I think he had a bit of guilt for being an aristocrat, trafficking in so much money. A lot of that flows out in his poems in a certain tongue in cheek way. I like how he puts these different dictions together, bounces back and forth between them. I'm thinking of these lines:

*The toil*

*Of thought evoked a peace eccentric to  
The eye and tinkling to the ear. Gruff drums  
could beat, yet not alarm the populace.  
The indolent progressions of the swans  
Made earth come right; a peanut parody  
For peanut people.*

There's this kind of nuttiness in this juxtaposition, a kind of almost self-effacement about where he is, how learned he is, and the way his relationship to the poetry world keeps creeping in to this really lush world of the concrete, the physical. The dictions keep crossing over on each other. I think it's this tonal play I'm attracted to; he played tonalities like his own invented notes on a language scale. And the poems are so rich in other sorts

of music as well, wide deep vowels and clackety consonates like castanets.

TM “The Comedian as the Letter C” is probably a prime example of that type of play:

*Nota: man is the intelligence of his soil,  
The sovereign ghost. As such, the Socrates  
Of snails, musician of pears, principium  
And lex.*

The poem is, throughout, such fun; he makes fun of the pedagogue...

NVW Possibly he was a bit chagrined that he was so smart.

TM Rilke is another modernist who is very dear to you. In your recent book, *The Dirt*, one might even call Rilke a sort of guiding angel. What interests you most in his work? Is there a particular period of his work you're most attracted to? Which poems do you return to most often?

NVW Well, of course I love the *Elegies*. I guess those are the ones I read most frequently, but I also like the poems that come just before the *Elegies* or, I suppose, in the middle of the *Elegies*. He'd written a few of them when he'd began suffering from writer's block and he couldn't get any more of the *Elegies* out; he went back to these other poems that are sort of prayer poems. I think that's what appeals to me—the permission he gives himself to offer prayers. He seems to demand of himself that he stay connected to something bigger than he is; to call out toward the spiritual plane, and to

recognize that whatever he does in poetry has to have a foot, even just the a tiny penetration, into that plane. I'm touched by the way he bolstered himself and kept telling himself in various poem-mantras that the spiritual world existed as much as the physical world; his poems were his way of putting feelers out there.

TM In Robert Hass's essay on Rilke that introduced Stephen Mitchell's translations, he talks about Rilke's disdain for this world, the physical realm, and how he attempts to distance himself from it, and you talk about your attraction to his supplication and his attachment to an idealistic realm, yet in your book where we find Rilke as an epigraphical-angel, so many of the poems are so physical, so "of this world." Could you talk about that tension?

NW Your question takes me back to Rilke's "Spanish Trilogy." I think what we see there was how he believed we get to the spiritual through the physical. That poem talks about looking at a landscape, at sheep "penned in the fold at night / enduring the great dark absence of the world." For me a poem has to come *through* the physical; the things have to somehow be pulled inside—the landscape, as well as the people. I think very much it's got to have the physical presence of the the people, the folk. That's one of the good things to look at in this particular Rilke poem: "old men left alone at the asylum / who cough in bed, importantly, from children / drunk with sleep upon the breasts of strangers." They're just ordinary people, and you have to surround them with...I don't know what to call it...your humanity perhaps, and take them through you, and that's how you arrive at the spiritual, by always internalizing what's around in the physical



world.

TM And somehow that internalizing elevates things toward the ideal, the beautiful?

NVW Well, I guess that's where I don't feel very Rilkean as a writer myself; I don't feel it has to be beautiful. But maybe that depends on how you define beauty. I simply have to feel that the poem finally belongs outside me, is shared, that the story that's told, the landscape it's from and the consciousness we've entered, are shared.

TM One thing that Milosz talks about that is in a similar vein—one thing that saved him when he was experiencing a crisis—was thinking and meditating on a scene he had witnessed in the post-war years of a peasant family sharing tea in a train station amidst an incredible chaos of relocation, sharing a fundamental human gesture that he saw as more “real” than anything else that was going on around them. Is this more in the direction of what you're implying?

NVW Exactly, yes. I think what you've described Milosz talking about is supremely beautiful, people trying to maintain, amidst their poverty and desperate circumstances, some element that, for them, contains what is beautiful in life. This makes me think of Elizabeth Bishop and a poem of hers that I love, “Filling Station,” where she buzzes by in her rich-person car for a fill-up, and she, in typical Bishop fashion, just describes the filth of this gas station. But then, as she's looking at it, she starts to notice all these little elements that the people who work there have gathered to try to give their lives beauty. Small things.

They've put a crocheted doily under a half-dead begonia. Probably we would think this is tacky, but these people live in an ugly place full of oil and grease and the smell of gasoline and this is what they've done to bring beauty into their lives; it's a little thing but it means so much and is so striking in that poem.

TM An empathy that embraces more than just the stereotypes, that is actively interested in all the little ins and outs of other individuals.

NVW The ability to project into an otherness is what we need to do more of as a people. It's an act of the imagination, and lately I've been worried that it's exactly the sort of imaginative acumen the Newt Gingriches of the world are trying to shut down. They try to reduce everyone to clones of their own values and social mythology. People who cannot imagine other people's lives in specific detail, but only in generalities and types, tend to huddle together in fear of a type, say of illegal immigrants. They're only viewed in the most general way, as a cliché. I think when people reduce their world to clichés in this way, and this seems so much the mindset of many of our newly elected officials, such clichés foster hysteria. It's the easiest kind of comfort to drift toward the mob mentality, where everybody is right and good except those who don't think exactly like you. Our whole culture was built on the values of multiplicity and diversity. We can't suddenly decide that's *not* what we're about, can we?

TM Earlier you talked about "attitudes" or "consciousnesses" that you pursue or follow in the writing of the poem as, at a certain point, turning into

narrative. Do you see your work as primarily narrative or lyrical or meditative lyrical? Or do any of these descriptive titles work?

NVW I keep trying to cut away from my poems as much of the narrative understructure as I can and still have the poems stand—that is, trying to have them rely more on voice, a certain credibility of the mind I’m striving for and that the reader is, I hope, residing in as I am. But I can’t ever seem to get away from narrative entirely; sometimes a poem becomes most completely narrative when I realize that it is the story that is at the crux of why these people “are talking to me” in the first place. Sometimes it’s something other than story, say a contradiction that’s buried in stuff that’s emotional or psychological, and “how they got there” is not as important as looking at the different sides of their lives that are pulling at them. I think my work is probably always going to be both. I’ve written some short, more lyrical poems, but I don’t think I’m ever going to stop writing poems with at least some elements of narrative.

TM You spoke of, perhaps, trying to clip some of the narrative understructure out and, simultaneously, you’ve been writing a great deal of fiction. In *Limited Lifetime Warranty* you’ve written a series of interconnected stories. When you wrote that book did you have any models in mind? Anderson? Joyce? Dos Passos?

NVW Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio* is a book that I’ve discussed with classes many times. I think I’ve been very influenced by what he did structurally in *Winesburg*, but also by his idea of the “grotesque”—those people in his book who believe one

thing above all others and block out all else, all other possibilities from their lives, because of that.

TM Do you work on the two genres separately? Do you have a “fiction mode” where you just work on your stories for a few weeks and then come back to the poems? Or do you just tinker with both simultaneously?

NVW I’m still figuring this out. It feels very schizophrenic to me right now. I wake up and I don’t know which I’m going to be until I get to my writing desk after my coffee and cereal, and then somehow I know. I’m not sure what it is; perhaps it has something to do with what goes on overnight in the subconscious, applying my subconscious to the task of working out during sleep those writing tasks that need to be solved. Some mornings I wake up and I have a whole scene of dialogue in my head—there’s this big discussion going on!—and I just go in and write it all down. Other days it’s a line or phrase of a poem. I wish I had a system; it’s very muddled right now.

TM I heard Rick Bass say once that reading poetry is good for a short story writer because it’s like lifting weights. I like to flip the simile and say that writing fiction is good for a poet because it’s like loosening up and going out for a nice, easy jog. Do you feel a different attachment to the language when you’re writing in one genre versus the other?

NVW Definitely in poetry I feel language is what I’m hearing and attending to most. Other things, like structure and attention to image, often seem to be on automatic pilot in poems. But I’m such a newcomer to

fiction that I have to focus a lot of energy still on that thing they call “plot.” It’s a challenge for me to find the right structures and chronological movement to contain the details that have drawn me into a story in the first place. Working on stories has probably been a good outlet for my narrative impulses, so that I don’t believe I still push on the narrative structures in my poems, at least not as much as I used to. And that feels fairly liberating: not to have to undergird so much narrative on a poem that feels mostly to belong to voice and consciousness.

TM You’ve told me that you’re writing a novel now. Looking at *Limited Lifetime Warranty*, how do you exactly distinguish between a large collection of interconnected stories and a novel?

NVW I think that in a novel, collectively the chapters have to work to answer a question or a set of questions. There are ongoing problems to be addressed. And in a collection of interconnected stories the overall questions and the ways they’re worked through get to be more like variations on a theme. Also, it’s wonderful to be able to introduce characters in, say, story number three and have them reappear in story number seven, and nobody seems to mind that they were absent through stories four, five, and six. Basically what you’re doing in interconnected stories is creating this world, this landscape for the stories, that serves as a kind of backdrop, and you get to step in and out of it. You can be dreamy in one story and straight-forward in another. The backdrop is the same, so there’s a sense of cohesion.

TM With your recent interest in fiction, do you find

yourself reading more contemporary fiction than poetry? Or is your reading time taken up by research?

NVW All of the above. I write book reviews of poetry still, so I continue to read several new books of poetry every week. I'm always involved in a novel or book of short stories for "pleasure." And then I do enjoy research for, usually, the fiction I'm working on, as opposed to the poetry. I read a lot of science, for instance, some information on woolly mammoth fossils for the novel I'm working on, and also some rather nutty stuff on psychic detectives for a short story.

TM Also as an editor and a teacher, you read a great deal of contemporary work. How do you think your position as editor of *Willow Springs* has affected your own writing?

NVW I like something I heard Donald Hall say once, or maybe I read it somewhere, that he has different rooms in his house where he works on his prose or on his poetry. The work I do as editor helps keep fresh in my mind, but in a fairly unobtrusive way, what's important in both genres. I guess I'd define it most generally as that feeling that comes off the page that the poem or the story took the writer by the shoulders and shook him or her. There's a sense that the work made clear its demands, through a passionate outpouring that pervades the language, on the writer. The feeling that a literary work grew beyond what its author knew, *consciously* knew, that it brought pain or joy, and always surprise, that *some* sort of intense emotion propelled the work—that's what elevates a piece of writing past the ordinary, past the 95% of manuscripts I read every week, many of which are well-crafted, but

lack that rush, that sweep of passion.

TM Several contemporary poets have argued that the art of poetry needs to be repopularized, that, in the formulation of Joseph Brodsky, it needs to get on the check-out shelf at supermarkets. How do you understand poetry's role in culture?

NVW I think poetry is, right now, at odds with culture. I think that, as you mentioned, a lot of people have been talking about this so what I'm suggesting isn't new, but it's what Walt Whitman was getting at, what he was saying when he described himself as

*Walt Whitman, a kosmos, of Manhattan the son,  
Turbulent, fleshy, sensual, eating, drinking, and  
breeding,  
No sentimentalist, no stander above men and  
women or apart from them,  
No more modest than immodest.*

And see, there's that passion, that grand stance of the work being bigger than the man. He's its mouthpiece. I feel that many poets today feel that they're apart from "ordinary folk," and in turn, many so-called ordinary folk feel that we as poets don't have anything to say to them. Sadly, we all deserve the divorce that we've gotten from each other. We're all responsible for it; I think poetry does have a lot to say to ordinary folks, but one needs to say those things in a language that is both comprehensible and endearing to them. For most people I know, there's precious little time for anything else in their lives that takes concentration and emotional and mental energy but work and family, and I suspect that's why the arts in general and poetry in particular

are neglected—because poetry does take a lot of energy.

TM Do you think in your future writing you'll turn even more toward prose or do you think you'll continue in this schizophrenic state?

NVW I'm not sure, but I remember something my friend Lisel Mueller told me several years ago: she thought that perhaps what literary culture was evolving towards is one genre, something that would be a kind of cross between poetry and fiction, fictional prose. That's interesting to me; I'm very interested in the prose poem. I don't write them but I like to read them. I'm interested too in seeing the connections between the two genres, the places where they intersect. And although I suspect fiction is taking over more and more control of the mainstream literary marketplace, it's come to seem an act of faith to write poems. It's probably an act of faith to read them too. For those who can make a space in their lives for this sort of thing, they're meditation tools. They're a way of asserting some quietude and contemplation into the chaos. Certainly there's no drought of good poems to steer one this way, and I'm sure I'll never lose my own faith in them.



## Contributors

**Charlie R. Braxton** is a poet, playwright, essayist, and freelance journalist. His work has appeared in *Black American Literature Forum*, *Crossroads*, *Eyeball*, *The Minnesota Review*, *Image*, *Sepia Poetry Journal*, and *Vibe* magazine. Braxton's first volume of poetry, *Ascension From the Ashes*, was published in 1990 by Blackwood Press. Currently he is working on a book about Hip Hop culture to be published in 1996.

**Mike Craig** is from Ohio. His was a Scottish dish consisting of the minced heart, lungs, and liver of a sheep or goat mixed with suet, onions, oatmeal, and seasonings, for which he won seventh place.

**T. Crunk** is originally from western Kentucky. His first collection of poetry, *Living in the Resurrection*, is the 1994 selection in the Yale Younger Poets Series.

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**Tod Marshall** is currently finishing a PhD in literature at the University of Kansas. He has recent work in the *Georgia Review*, *Poetry East*, and *Boulevard*. He is married, and has two energetic sons.

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**Michael Palmer**’s most recent collection is *At Passages* (New Directions, 1995). With o-blek editions, he has just published his translation of Emmanuel Hocquard’s *Theory of Tables*. His translations from the poetry of Alexei Parshchikov appear in *Blue Vitriol* (Avec Books, 1994). His work is featured, along with an interview, in *Exact Change Yearbook #1* (1995), from Exact Change Press.

**Ed Skoog** grew up in Topeka, Kansas. His manuscript, *Tool Kit*, won the 1995 Merriam-Frontier Award from the University of Montana.

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**Amber Dorko Stopper** lives in Philadelphia and has published stories in *Long Shot*, *Northwest Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *American Writing*. She was a Fellow of the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts in 1992-93 and is currently working on a short story collection.

**Karen Subach's** work has appeared in *APR*, *Cimarron Review*, *Kalliope*, *Phoebe*, and other journals.

**John Yau** is a poet, fiction writer, critic, and curator. Recent publications include a book of poems, *Edificio Sayonara* (Black Sparrow, 1992); short stories, *Hawaiian Cowboys* (Black Sparrow, 1995); and criticism, *In the Realm of Appearances: the Art of Andy Warhol* (Ecco Press, 1993). He spent the spring semester teaching at UC Berkeley, and has for the last couple of years divided his time between Berkeley and New York City.

**Susan Yuzna** is a graduate of the University of Montana MFA program, where she was the Richard Hugo Memorial Poetry Scholar, 1993-94. She is currently a Bush Writing Fellow and has published poems recently in *The Antioch Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *The Laurel Review*.

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The editors are pleased to present the 1994-5  
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for her poem, "Dominique"  
published in *CutBank 42*

Judge: James Tate

The 1994-5  
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**Jiri Kajanë**

for his story, "This Past Tuesday"  
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*Fourth Annual*

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*April 5-7, 1996*

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- The New Historicism: Reinscribing, Ghettoizing, or Opening up the Canon?
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**Send 300 word abstracts or alternative panel proposals by December 15, 1995 to:**

Marginalized Literatures Conference  
English Dept., University of Montana  
Missoula, MT 59812  
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## **Epigraph**

This evening I accidentally smelled a baseball.



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