

Fall 1994

## American Goat - 1994

Sean Condon

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# american goat

*Northeastern  
Illinois  
University*

# 6

NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS  
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Northeastern Illinois University  
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## Submission Guidelines

**american goat** gets its name because it hungers for all sorts of literary styles: from traditional forms to experimental, science fiction to children's stories, erotica to romance - we take it all.

We are omnivorous in our quest for original, unpublished poems and short fiction. Submissions must be typed (dot matrix accepted), and margins should be one and one-half inches all the way around. We will accept up to five poems and two stories per contributor.

In each issue we print contributor's notes, so please include a brief statement about you and your writing. Bios will not be considered during the selection process.

We also accept submissions for cover art, black and white photographs or ink drawings, 5x7 or larger.

Send submissions, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope (include enough postage if you want us to return any manuscripts) to:

american goat/Apocalypse  
co Northeastern Illinois University  
5500 N. St. Louis ave  
Chicago, Il 60625

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## american goat 6

NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

## Possibilities

"The artist must prophesy."  
Collingwood

Our poems:  
our battles immortalized  
in paper cities turning yellow with age,  
secrets spilling out from the Low Sierra  
of the soul where a blue bridge leads to Nowhere  
and other unmarked places, where the days  
of sunlight have taken a terrible leave.  
You know how it was with  
Anne & Sylvia on Sorrow Street. I am not  
afraid to raise my hand, this colonial mixture  
of mine is laced with impurity, songs  
of the stale breadlines of Yazoo City and stories  
of old fishermen flowing out to sea . . .  
The radar of my life is not very clear.  
There's a rain of fire over Lake D'Arbonne,  
black clouds over the Bypass Tavern.  
Mistakes have been made, and Jake the Drifter  
is moving back from Georgia, trying to find  
his way home again, trusting in the bottle  
and his fourth wife who'se fixin' to leave him.  
We are all history, we are all witnesses  
to Chapter 7, the last one that  
poetry cannot ever bridge,  
that afterlife of theory  
that is very likely a sequence  
of things, the principles of art forgotten,  
just the use of fiction as a device  
to rearrange the past, to make  
order out of confusion.

So "things" are a jumble of influences.  
Cowboy poetry and Southern stuff

and transcendental white New England "verse"  
written from the accumulated webs  
of shuttered houses: from  
the very start most  
who "write" had  
basic training in Atlantis, hanging on  
to the possibility that a few waterlogged  
philosophers may be right. If they  
go far enough, they soon  
shall see the sea.  
Again.

*Errol Miller*

Angelique

Her black and white face is an  
old german postcard  
of a girl with messy red lips and  
slick grasping thighs  
and CABARET written on her ass  
in purple or sometimes blue

gilded by neon  
her stiletto nipples quiver on mounds  
of blue-veined flesh  
as her hips burst out of  
steaming black latex  
to the whip of her testosterone slave

And she hungers in black and white and red  
and purple or sometimes blue  
sneering a little while speaking in German  
...or en français...de Sade....

*Cait Cerridwen*

The First-Born

There was no way to rehearse  
the pulling of the hearse  
before our home – doors clattered,  
tires tossed debris from the gutter;  
wild geese cried overhead  
their dead—the river hunters cursed  
the wounded their dogs could not find.  
They were a drunken chorus—  
no parting words for a brother.

I walked down and said  
shut up for our funeral!  
until they hung their heads,  
called in the dogs.

We drove to the hills of Kill Devil,  
white surf broke  
against his daughter and his son,  
Sunday bells spoke  
an enthusiastic Mass; I imagined  
the rest of the world rolling over,  
blinking, tooth of sky cracking the window.

One year has sped and he remains dead—  
a desireless prank, an ancestral touch  
numb and dislocated, escutcheon  
of decay. Tea-house Geishas dance  
for him the death of summer; incense  
drifts under temple lanterns  
along the docks of Old Town,  
where we still drift down  
in flood time to buy dog roses.

*Sean Brendan-Brown*



## Chipping Weld

Chipping weld in the segmented fuel tank,  
Having grunted and pulled myself in tight,  
And there contorting with a trouble-light  
Blinking at the junk flecking into my eyes,  
I wasn't ready for the short that untwisted  
That light cord in a stinking melting rush  
And got me back-grunting out of there fast  
To gasp and chew at the real air outside,  
And then make excuses and stall when the boss  
Commanded me in again – stall, that is, until  
Big Dave caught me off-guard oozing out of the hole  
Leading into the series of splash tanks  
And I was cured and just shoved in and got to work  
Chipping weld again; and there in that trap I  
Thought that if I seized they'd have to cut  
Me out with a torch, and how much I'd be like  
The countless salmon that would be pressed  
Into the hell-holds of this troller if we  
Ever got it finished and it didn't sink when we  
Ran it down on greasy timbers into the Fraser,  
And in the holds those fish would suck air  
For hours and die about as slow as any dying  
Animal can stand; and how if the cutting torch  
Cut through the wall of the tank into my ribs,  
How that might be noisy but they'd hear my  
Screams at least and I wouldn't die there  
Like a six-gill shark freshly tugged aboard,  
And promptly having its spinal cord cut  
So it won't struggle and then its tail cut  
Off so that its heart can pump itself dry  
And the meat won't be spoiled by that nasty  
Ammonia which appears in an unbled shark  
And ruins its value.

*Vic Cavalli*

## Neo-expressionist Galactic Bop Jive

Driving to the film alone  
euphoria of loneliness  
that life alone is to be  
afloat again like a beluga  
laughing over nothing  
or a brusque harmony of  
crickets and cicadas  
crawling toward eternal  
transient transcendence  
hysterical miscalculated  
bop voices in the wrong  
diary of summers torn-up  
open-soul surgery ecstasy  
both ways up and down  
place of dreams or fingers  
on reciprocal screen  
where words spill detours  
internalized – divested  
tumescence essence of applause.

*Joan Payne Kincaid*

Bilingual Pyramid  
(for Lithuania)

Born of blood which was hers and her mothers  
Into a land not hers, nor her fathers  
The immigrants daughter is given  
A glass pyramid.  
Deities speak to her in two languages: "My darling  
Dear, there is a space in between two languages

Which transcends the moment of translation,  
a vision not quite seen,  
a syllabel called Oneness  
An undefined sense, a third language.  
The corners in between are traps,  
one day they'll melt..."

Eventually she is holding a perfect glass ball  
She is given  
To joy at such perfection.  
But then

It explodes into an unbearable wound:  
The genocide of a nation.  
She is weaving a cloth to use as a bandage  
In a geometric language of ancestors  
And still, there are corners of the pattern which trap  
her.

A soundless language: she weaves a plain white  
cloth, a gauze

she is weaving a veil  
                  a curtain  
                  a transparency

Which heals the wound  
Blends all corners  
And breathes distinctly in the music of the sixth  
sense.

*Daiva Karuza*

For Our Seventeenth Anniversary

Last week, we saw a movie,  
the heroine gorgeous  
with her first love.  
But the actress  
who played her mother  
set my heart thumping  
like a jew's-harp in a jig,  
her face wearing twenty  
more years of pain  
and the grace to go on.

When I looked at you  
as we held hands  
under the still-lit marquee  
of that midnight magic  
of the movies—  
married seventeen years,  
gray beginning  
to take your head,  
as baldness  
has rooted in mine—

I saw her beauty,  
but in a real woman  
who has lost and won  
her share of battles  
against the years,  
and who was going home  
gladly with me  
for the rest of the movie  
of our lucky lives.

*Robert Cooperman*

## A Long White Beach

Let us consider, for once, our inventory  
of obscure betrayals. All the while  
we were imagining soft landings  
the night sky, the moon a pearl  
among diamonds, the empty sleeves  
of the sea. Later, we abandoned  
each other to ambivalence and shade, breathing  
shallow afternoons and closing the books  
we had leafed through as a hedge  
against boredom. What of it?  
Our desire braced itself  
against the imperturbable splendor  
of traffic and cloud-wrack and blue  
smoke in the hills. When we amassed these  
claims, these assessments, we were conscious  
of countervails and extreme options.  
Seed time we called it. A random  
set like stones in the dry river bed.  
It was enough to dream with half closed eyes.  
It was enough to speak in a tablature  
conditioned by shops and equations.

In the deepening twilight of another summer  
pods ripen and fall. We gather our  
towels and cups, our headbands, our unread mail  
and that is all we have time for  
under the cliffs with their fossil records  
lying carelessly open  
and rough as braille in the decaying light.

*George Amabile*

## When Our Bodies Turn from Innocence to Love

It is only late October, but the beach  
already wears the sparse attitude of winter.  
The water fountains are dry, a picket fence  
sprawls to guard the sand from waves,  
and far away, a lone boat bends to the wind.  
Just one last sail it seems to pray.

Letters and more letters result in nothing.  
The white scourge of time and snow  
are necessary. As dry leaves scratch  
their way to dust, I feel the clean, cold  
breath of the wide open sky approach.  
I'm not one to turn over easily.

Who knows the word to open water?  
It's liquid gates always pour close.  
What is the word for standing here,  
after all this time, and letting go?  
So I say something like "Yes,"  
and a sea of bright saws bites the sky.

*Robert Klein Engler*

## Ode to Buzzy Santos

I never really met Buzzy Santos.  
I think (occasionally) he was our fiction:  
A shadow around the corner; tires squealing out  
Of the half-lit White Hen at Dixon & Olympus.

He drove by wearing cut-offs on every Honda;  
Could buy cases of liquor in any Walgreens;  
Ran our neighborhood from the borders of our need  
For something to keep us from sleeping early (and  
forever); haunted us with a life we could watch  
From open garage doors after ten o'clock in August.

Other nights, we'd sneak out to Memorial Park  
With three or four beers stolen from McGuire's garage,  
Sit at the bottom of twirling slides. Lightning bugs,  
Airplane lights, and the flare (we knew) of cigarettes—  
His girlfriend's, his own, and somebody's joints—answered  
our warm beer musings from the stubble fields where Buzzy stood.

Bitten by suburban nights, mosquitoes (mostly),  
and some weird insatiable foraging instinct  
To explore further and deeper into the known—  
Sidewalks, cul-de-sacs, and new playground equipment—  
Like rodent raccoons knocking over the garbage  
Cans of some parents' wish of "what a home should be."

I never really met Buzzy Santos.  
But tonight, I know I see him standing  
Reflected in the dark window of one  
Of those metal—grated store fronts on State—  
stereos and portable phones turning  
Slow circles, on their stands, next to fake furs,  
Fake gold, fake foreign stuff from Toledo, OH.

Buzzy's standing out there tonight with one  
Hand in somebody else's back pocket,  
The other clutching a brick of cordite  
Shaped like my small hand ready to blow the  
"Oriental Electronic Outlet"  
To its place among the half-thoughts of my adolescent drives home.

*David Gardiner*

## Entropy

You've clasped to me with blunt feet  
and your pink cushion legs.  
Nothing to say,  
Your only leverage the final right  
of Yes or No.

Yeah,  
You're willing to poke at anything.  
Prod it.  
Taste it.  
Immerse yourself in it.

We had lust and obsession.  
And we were together,  
Washing up  
Around the barren edges,  
Making them liquid and free.

Do you want to do something tonight?  
"sure."  
What do you want to do tonight?  
"i don't know."  
We could go to a movie.  
"i don't really want to see a movie."  
Well, what do you want to do?  
"i don't know. how about if you come over?"

Still you clasp and wait and stare.  
Wait for things to get good.  
Wait for me to blow it.  
Wait for apathy to sink in.

So I leave you for the legged bronzed beauty  
With the quick mind and diligence,  
The one with the stark  
Fibrous body  
That feels like hugging wood.

*James Barnett*

## Driving Doris Cardi Away

Blazing sunlight caves in the car door,  
explodes both curbside windows. Mother Cardi  
pounds my old Chevy's roof  
with both fists. I'm jittery,  
but grind and shift gears  
as fast as Doris makes me  
dizzy in bed  
when she boxes my ears  
with cold bare feet  
if I handle her like junk  
after rolling home late,  
tongue-tied and stale. Hiding

swollen eyes and a curse  
behind clenched fists, Doris can't see  
Mother Cardi trip and tear  
the blue housedress; can't see her  
kneel on DeCalb Avenue,  
cross herself twice,  
three times; beg Jesus  
my stiff mechanic's back will break  
under heavy, clumsy desire.

*Michael Carrino*

### Progress Report on Dr. Jekyl

Last seen in Riverside Park  
escorting a woman down leafy paths,  
a scarab-head cane held under his arm,  
an elk-tooth charm on his dangling watch chain  
and wearing soft gloves and a silk scarf –  
the two of them laughing like young lovers.  
But she, her eyes glistening like fragments of  
autumn,  
last seen staring up from the river,  
her hair like memories of sunlight  
drifting like seaweed over her face.

Once he was almost captured  
but turned into someone else and escaped.  
The empty noose swung from its branch.  
Silhouettes of a mob trudged back to their homes.

He is certain to strike again –  
perhaps meet some other girl in the park  
and lead her down the leafy path  
or up to his rooms above the tavern.  
We know his habits –  
when he arrives at his office  
when he leaves  
when he sings in his choir,  
his tongue raised to heaven.  
We will soon apprehend him in the act.  
There are cameras in his apartment ceiling,  
microphones implanted in his walls.

We have a man in the lobby of his building  
watching through fronds of the potted palm.  
Another strolls down the somber street  
where the ghost of the murdered girl still lingers.  
See that sparrow on the window ledge?

There are hidden wires leading to it,  
a surveillance camera in its head.  
See those women out in the rain  
walking their aging dogs?  
One of them works for us.

I want to be there when he's caught,  
see if there's panic in his eyes  
or if they merely grow vague and cloud over,  
expressionless as hooked fish,  
see if he's like those large dry insects  
that live in dark places  
and disintegrate when they die.

I want to learn why young women  
follow him down the leafy paths  
or up to his rooms above the tavern,  
their eyes like glistening fragments of autumn,  
their hair like memories of sunlight.

*John Dickson*

## Abstracts and Brief Chronicles

*Jeffrey McKinnon*

Aside from the unnatural heat, even for July, the morning began much as every other morning had during my six month tenure. I staggered out of my room to find Phillip seated on the weight bench in his jockey shorts, phone to his ear, speaking French, presumably to his mother.

"Oui mama. Non mama. Oui mama."

I grunted my greeting and we rolled our eyes at each other. After making my way outside for a pee and feeling the first full thrust of the day's heat, I decided on cold coffee, leftover spaghetti and cigarettes for breakfast. It was Sunday, the day of unreasonable, giddy optimism, the day before our dark day, Monday. The fact that our show was *Hamlet* did nothing to deter my sleep-addled good cheer, or what, compared to most mornings would pass as good cheer. Mondays were the day to get out of town, or into town as the case may be. It meant sleeping late, a swim in the river and perhaps a drive into Madison

for a day of tavern-hopping and a movie. The only thing that stood between us and a day and a half of hedonistic glee was our marathon presentation featuring Shakespeare's navel gazing Danish prince.

In order to arrive at the theater on time to do my rather extensive opening makeup and smoke the requisite number of cigarettes while gabbing with my fellow cast members, I needed to leave the house three hours before showtime. This meant it was still morning and the heat was deceptively tolerable. Had I known temperatures would hit 110° I might have left my trusty bike home and driven in with my roomies.

Home was a peeling, bat infested A-frame, provided by the company, whose razing had been postponed by our arrival. Joining forces with Phillip and Neil, two ex-mates from grad school, and screwing our collective courage to the sticking place, we moved in. Water splashing and mops flailing, we exorcised the grime and gunk, called the local cable affiliate, and pronounced our belfry home. It might have suited us perfectly but for the fact that we were twelve miles from the theater in a stagnant backwater called Lone Rock, population 521. There was indeed a lone rock, a mile out of town, next to the highway and alongside a billboard proclaiming:

"Welcome to Lone Rock. We're the coldest in the nation with the warmest heart."

Painted on the sign below the lettering was a polar bear gazing at an icicle encrusted thermometer. We argued over this sign all summer, whether it made sense or not. I don't recall ever reaching a consensus.

Living in Lone Rock and our location in it – on the edge of town between the Civil War cemetery and an

abandoned apple orchard – did have its advantages: It was quiet, away from the claustrophobia of the theater company, and the nearest buildings were the laundromat, the grocery store, and the post office. We attracted some attention from the locals, but most were outwardly cordial and pleased, if not amazed that the “Barrow’s place” was now occupied by those nice young actors with the theater. After all, we were polite, clean, reasonably quiet, and the local beer sales were off the chart.

Of course there were some problems, not the least of which was the aforementioned challenge of traversing the twelve miles daily into work without a car. Neil, Phillip, and I all owned bicycles, but by July I was the last to be regularly biking the hilly, winding river road to the theater. As a child I was what you could have described as pudgy, and the occasional offhanded remarks concerning my less than heroic physique wounded me to the everlasting quick. I eventually grew out of the baby fat but have forever been staving off calories I was sure were lurking in my genes by punishing my cardiovascular system on a regular basis. I accepted with masochistic resignation the opportunity to combine my daily commute with my daily aerobic torture. My roommates proved to be better adjusted and adopted a more sedentary attitude. Occasionally I could persuade Neil to join me, but usually only when the car ride Phillip had secured had no room for him.

Being three bachelors holding a short lease in the dilapidated house, we were unconcerned with the general niceties of decor and all but the most basic housekeeping. Dishes were washed as needed, we semi-regularly mopped up the water seeping from under the refrigerator, and empty beer cans were only thrown away when not being used as ashtrays. I don’t recall ever cleaning the bathroom, and have no recollection of my roommates doing it either.

There was a general reluctance to spend any time there beyond what it took to maintain personal hygiene. The toilet was avoided whenever possible due to our having discovered a live toad living in it the day we moved in. No matter how often we flushed, it always reappeared, preferring no doubt the slick, open porcelain to the dark, confining sewer pipe. Naturally we feared, and who wouldn’t, what else might swim up to greet us. We never told our visitors, at least not until they had safely relieved themselves. We treated our commode with the indifference that one would treat a long neglected fish pond, and the weeds behind our house grew lush and green.

The only furniture in the house was that which we had brought with us. It was comfortable but uniformly threadbare, in short, the sort of furniture one finds in almost any college living quarters. The centerpiece of this was the Edith Skinner Memorial Sofa, named after the famed speech coach and elocutionist who, as rumor had it, had died on it. It had bounced around several students’ living quarters until we hauled it out from Milwaukee to its final resting place in Lone Rock. It became popular with Phillip and I, both over six feet tall, as a tall person could comfortably recline without compromising his posture. We also became convinced that our consonants became crisper and our vowels cleaner the more time we spent on it. We also brought a large square armchair whose arms were more comfortable than its seat. Rounding out the ensemble was a weight bench complete with barbells perched on its prongs. This served as our gymnasium, phone center, TV tray, hat rack, and extra sofa in the event of a large social gathering. In the morning it was command central, as it was from here Phillip usually sat, phone glued to his ear, seeking out the day’s ride from whichever good Samaritan in the company would swing by out of their way



to pick him up. But no beggar, I, even on this morning when I dripped sweat before getting out of bed. My dedication to the manual mode of transportation was viewed with bemusement, but with car rides thin, the attitude was every man for himself, and nobody tried very hard to dissuade me.

It was the summer of my twenty-eighth year, and I had been employed by a regional theater in southwest Wisconsin who specialized in performing the works of William Shakespeare. They prided themselves on performing these works uncut. So fanatical was their devotion, and as if to demonstrate the purity of their commitment, they insisted the actors, directors and staff work from oversized and cumbersome xeroxes of the Second Folio – the correct folio – archaic alphabet and all. This spartan approach drove many of us to distraction, and within a few days there were more than a few easy-to-read Folger editions smuggled into rehearsal. We preferred the Folger to the far superior Arden edition with its pages of notes, folio comparisons, philologic background, and editors quibbling over the implications of punctuation inconsistencies (“We fail?” vs. “We fail.”) simply because it was easier to conceal. To be found out would mean disgrace and public humiliation on the scale of Chuck Connors being drummed out of the corps at the beginning of the TV series Branded wherein his lance is broken in front of an assembly of his former comrades. I imagined being marched on-stage before the assembled company while my dog-eared, highlighted, and heavily notated Folger was torn into shreds by Maria Pastorelli, one of the co-artistic directors. Aside from casting herself, some unnamed company members felt undeservedly, into most of the plum female roles that and every summer during her

reign, Maria was also the most vocal proponent of performing the plays as written.

The other co-head, and the heart and soul of the acting company, was a 5'2" Hawaiian of Korean extract named Daniel Kim Ho. Danny was a master of disguise and could create the illusion of being any shape, size, sex, or ethnic origin. Though no less zealous in his approach to preserving the words of The Bard than his partner and long-time friend Maria, Danny was a marvel to behold on-stage, and the most challenging actor I've ever worked with. For though his commitment to the words was consistent with the stated policy, he had no qualms about where on-stage those words could be spoken. There were several performances when I found myself delivering lines to where Danny had stood the previous evening, but where now stood empty space and an intimate view of the intent faces of the audience, some of whom had their noses buried in their Complete Works of Shakespeare, reading along. The real challenge lay not in not looking like an imbecile as you nonchalantly seek out the elusive Mr. Ho, usually stationed upstage so you'd have to turn your back on the audience in order to address him. However flustered one became, one must never remark on this tendency toward creative mobility to him, or ask that the blocking not be changed without first consulting his fellow actors. One recognized instantly by the scowling visage, the blazing black eyes, and the tightly coiled physique that here was a serious actor, and serious actors were best not trifled with, particularly if they were also your boss.

One of Danny's greatest triumphs was his performance as Hamlet, having performed the role in half a dozen productions around the country. The year I was hired the theater had planned a gala “farewell” production. Danny was then forty-five years old, and though a master

of makeup was beginning to find it a real stretch to portray a Scandinavian prince in his early twenties, but he wanted one more crack at it before hanging it up for good. It was for this production primarily that I was brought in, fresh from graduate school, to play four different roles. Why hire lots of actors when you can hire a few acting-school graduates eager to prove their mettle by playing multiple roles, sometimes in the same scene?

We performed in an outdoor amphitheater carved out of a hillside adjacent to the Wisconsin River. Wildlife often became integrated into our performances. Early in the summer the fireflies made it appear that the surrounding trees were lit by Christmas lights. Owls hunted squirrels and rabbits, and the screeching and screaming of predator and victim occasionally punctuated our lines. A squirrel took refuge on-stage one night only to find itself in the drawing room of a Restoration Comedy. It quickly bolted into the woods, preferring the life and death chase to the barbs of Lady Sneerwell.

Being adjacent to a river we battled mosquitoes on an epic scale. They in turn attracted a species normally feared and shunned, but one we soon learned was an ally – bats. When the lights came up at dusk, the mosquitoes came in force, attracted by the spectacular illumination of so many theater lights, followed by a feeding frenzy of our winged and sightless allies. They circled the pools of light seemingly in formation, taking turns dive-bombing the aerial sea of insects like the Japanese bombing Pearl Harbor. It was an awesome spectacle, particularly if one developed a distant affection for these furry pilots of the night, as I did. Like them or not, we all learned to live with them. They were everywhere – nesting in the rafters of the plywood barn that served as our dressing room, circling in the cramped and usually crowded upstage pit from where

many entrances and exits were made, and joining on-stage, at times with a flourish that would have made Olivier envious. Hamlet's father's ghost made his entrance from a mid stage trap usually preceded by several bats and a sulfurous puff of smoke. The timing of the bats was so perfect that I'm certain some of our audience believed we kept a few on hand in cages for just the right effect. The actor playing the ghost, Kevin Howard, feared and detested them as he was forced to share their cramped quarters under the stage before his big entrance. "They're fucking rats with wings," he'd snarl whenever anyone spoke up in their defense. He told me later that he would chain-smoke in the trap in the belief that the fumes would repel them. This may explain their fleeing out the trap door at the first opportunity.

By mid-July we had performed Hamlet a dozen times or so in rotating repertory with Twelfth Night, The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Comedy of Errors, Chekov's Ivanov, and Sheridan's The School for Scandal. Hamlet was by far the most grueling and taxing on our collective endurance. After performing the play uncut one quickly understands why the play is usually pared down. It's not that there is much fat to trim, though many would argue this point, but that it is so long. Our average running time was four and a half hours, and depending on the extent of Danny's disappearing act could easily stretch to five, and sometimes did. If one is to run a four and a half hour show and still get the actors to taverns before last call, a sensible consideration for all theater management, the show must begin by seven o'clock at the latest. This would not be a problem on this day as the show was a two o'clock matinee. We had problems of a different order.

The heat first became a problem for me as I wheeled my bike into the parking lot and came to a stop. My head

instantly began to throb, felt hot and on the verge of exploding. The salty crust on my body felt like a suit of armor. Our normally lively Sunday afternoon crowd was subdued. Families huddled in the shade, not moving, save the occasional beverage lifted to a tilted back head. There were the usual groups: middle-aged professional couples from Madison; young travelers from Chicago, weary and gritty from the drive up and the poor camping facilities; and off on the fringes one found the rural tourists we dubbed the "locals", no matter their origin. They were people from all over – Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, and decidedly unurban. They were a vocal lot. They laughed at everything having to do with the show or not. They laughed at the familiar lines remembered from a high school English class, at makeup, at each other, and generally came to the theater with the intention of thoroughly enjoying themselves, and evidently did judging from the size of the subscription base. The older audience members tended to be "the readers", those reading along in their complete works. They were very attentive but almost non-responsive save when someone would paraphrase, omit, or generally bungle a line (this never happened to me), whereupon dozens of heads would rise in unison, peering through bifocals at the actors on-stage, trying to identify the culprit. Their diligence kept us honest. The locals could also be identified by the greasy brown take-out bags from Bob's Riverview Restaurant in Spring Green, the closest town to the theater. We knew these bags and their accompanying smell well, having spent more than a decent amount of time within Bob's air-conditioned walls, grazing at the salad bar ("All you can eat! Salad and fried bread! \$2.50!!"). Bob's had a daily special, "The Riverview Special" which we dubbed "The Roadkill Special". We religiously avoided it in the belief that we'd seen it baking

on the road outside Spring Green on our daily rides in.

As I passed through the picnic area to trudge the final 100 yards uphill to the theater a few indifferent heads turned to appraise me. My backpack, windblown hair and obvious need for a shower and a good night's sleep identified me as an employee of the theater. Curiosity sated, the same heads turned listlessly away. I glanced at my watch: Twelve o'clock, two hours before curtain, meaning I had an hour to smoke, drink something, anything (probably someone's soda from the company fridge adorned with a hand written admonition to the "soda thief"), and kibitz with the cast and crew until the dreaded makeup call. I noticed I was the first to arrive, which was unusual. Normally a small group of die-hards were here, warming up, being massaged by Roshawn, another of my former schoolmates, sleeping on the picnic tables so graciously provided us by management, or scurrying to and fro with towels over hair and makeup in some exaggerated state, for we were nothing s a company f not cosmetically adventurous. I dropped my pack off at my makeup station, involuntarily scanning the ceiling for bats, and came back outside to smoke, attract attention, and catch my breath from the climb.

The dreaded hill provided a wonderful topic of constant and very spirited bellyaching, most of it by Peter Romanov, our majestic and elegant elder statesman, who as far as I know didn't walk up the hill all summer. A special shuttle was provided or he, Joe Purcell, our other senior citizen, and infirm members of the public. Peter's complaints were theoretical, for not only was he unwilling to climb the hill, had he shown any willingness to do so, he would have been prevented en masse out of fear of losing him to a cardiopulmonary eruption. Peter smoked like a Downer Avenue bus, Phillip Morris Reserves, the kind of

cigarette you could only buy in a tobacco shop. he kept them well hidden and let it be known by his regal glare that there would be no bumming at his expense. Peter would reluctantly surrender a smoke to the occasional ignorant, boorish leech, but nobody ever asked him twice. He seemed the archetypal nicotine casualty, sputtering and wheezing like a squeeze box, until he limped on-stage where all dissipations magically vanished. Once in the lights he could roar through twenty lines of difficult verse in a ringing baritone without seeming to breathe at all.

As I inhaled deeply on my first post-ride smoke, it again occurred to me how hot my head was. Feeling suddenly dizzy, I wondered if I was going to have a heart attack. I quickly resolved to quit smoking at some date in the near future, probably after the season ended and I could go through the heebie-jeebies in private. While a working actor I preferred to remain a smoker. Cigarettes are the social glue for actors. Bumming, stealing, borrowing, or short-stopping a smoke in progress are bonding mechanisms and a time-honored tradition. Far be it from me to buck tradition and perhaps threaten or offend the other smokers in the company.

The first arrivals, near the end of my second cigarette, were the shuttle persons accompanied by an unusually large and unusually jolly group of actors well known for their ability to walk up the hill. Included in this group were Phillip and Neil, who carried a Bob's coffee-to-go cup and was badly in need of a hairbrush and a swifter delivery system for his caffeine. Following behind were Danny and Maria, laughing, amazingly enough, and toting two large boxes containing, as it turned out, Gatorade and potato chips. Were it possible to reel while reclining on a picnic table I surely would have done so, for this bit of care and consideration was unprecedented from a management

that expected us to do without hot water at the theater, and thought nothing of housing us twelve miles from our place of work with no clear way to arrive there.

As Phillip strode by on his way to the barn I asked, "What's up?"

He waved a hand in the air as if to brush away gnats, shook his head and said, "I don't know. Maria bought us all milk and cookies." Phillip had difficulty concealing his Gallic contempt towards those he feels have slighted him. Of all of us, our living arrangement irked him the most, and somehow he held Maria personally responsible. As he continued on, Neil lopped himself down at the table.

"What's in the boxes?" I asked

"Dunno," he said, choking on, then coughing and clearing his way through phlegm. "Gatorade. Have you got a smoke?"

Maria interrupted our ritual by banging a tin cup on the Port-O-Potty door, trying to get everyone's attention.

"Occupied," came a muffled male voice from within.

She started to say something, looked back at the door as if to reply, then started: "Listen up please. It's going to be very hot today, too hot maybe to do the show, but we've got a sellout, so . . ."

Danny, who had been squatting at her feet, hands folded and covering his mouth as if contemplating the fates of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern stood and said, "We will do minimal costumes today with all makeup optional. The chances for having heat stroke are very good, so we've brought Gatorade and potato chips. Keep yourselves hydrated, keep drinking fluids even when you don't want to. Soldiers, no chain mail today -"

A hosanna burst forth from a half dozen of us. Costumes for the Danish army included heavy woolen

sweaters spray-painted silver to look metallic, thick plastic breastplates, and heavy woolen leggings also sprayed silver. Over all this was a multiple cloak/cape rigging that could have pulled a schooner through a calm sea. All it did for us was make us sweat, and the sweat made our makeup run and our beards and mustaches hang tenuously from a few strands of glue. When prosthetic hair is in danger of falling, the actor's mind goes on red alert, his performance being shifted to automatic pilot while he devises ways to save face. Every actor who has ever worn a beard has exercised the thoughtful hand to mouth gesture ("Hmm, very interesting Torvald.") which provides the opportunity for a quick push or check of the facial hair ("Glue holding, humidity down, all is well."). The thought of not having to worry about makeup maintenance was psychologically liberating and produced an uncharacteristic, pre-Hamlet good cheer amongst those of us hanging about outside the barn.

After a quick huddle with the other Danes, we decided on boots, chestplates, and our lightest capes, along, of course with our ever present running shorts that it seemed we lived in that summer. Neil's suggestion of sunglasses was voted down, but just barely. The audience was forewarned to expect a stripped down version, literally, of the play. Refunds were offered for the pure of heart, but I don't remember hearing that anyone left. In fact, the announcement galvanized our audience, allowing them to bestow their benevolence and willingly suspended disbelief above and beyond the call of duty.

The first of my roles was at the outset of the show as the officer Marcellus who, along with fellow officers Bernardo, played by Phillip, and Francisco, played by a dry-witted, dobro-playing, fly fishing fanatic named Ted Bentley, are the first to spy Hamlet's ghost, roaming the

castle walls on a frosty winter night. Trying to convince the audience that it's freezing cold while people are dropping from heat stroke is no easy task, and lines such as Francisco's, "It is bitter cold and I am sick at heart." drew more than a few guffaws. By the time of my own, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," the general merriment was potentially at its highest. We realized early on in the run that unless we managed to stamp out the early laughs we had a four and a half hour dog on our hands. A wager was introduced wherein key lines were to be delivered without the audience laughing in recognition, or the deliverer of the line bought beer that night for the other actors on-stage. If a successful reading of the line was executed sans laughter, he drank at his fellow actors' expense. I'm proud to say that my adjustment in nuance on "Something is rotten . . .," was responsible for the bet being called off, but not before I spent several evenings drinking free.

Fortunately by now it was no longer in effect. The audience tittered as we made our entrance, not knowing that we had cracked ourselves up waiting for our entrance during the spooky pre-show music. It was difficult to make eye-contact for fear of breaking, particularly with Phillip, with whom I shared a telepathic appreciation of irony in any form. By the time of Bentley's "... bitter cold..." line, we had ceased trying to conceal our amusement at trying to feign freezing cold while dashing about in shorts. Bentley took the line out with the deadpan delivery of a comedian. The audience roared their approval, and I believe it was the only time all season, perhaps in the long checkered history of the play, that the first scene was applauded at its conclusion.

Later Philip and I accompany Horatio to Hamlet's chamber to inform the prince that his dead father is making a nuisance of himself. Danny opted for full makeup,

including several latex alterations to his facial features. Extreme conditions such as these could bring out the machismo in many actors. Later in the season, near the end in fact, temperatures dipped to near freezing. Actors were adding layers to keep warm. On a dare I made my entrance in School for Scandal's tavern scene in a light linen shirt unbuttoned to just above my navel, this on a night when most people wore gloves until just before their entrance. Our breath was clearly visible, and a few snowflakes actually fluttered down. I paid dearly for my folly, as not only was I uncomfortably cold, but all of Charles Surface's drinking companions in the scene made a point of touching their genuine pewter steins, now frosted, to my exposed nipples. It became a not so subtle game of tag between the assembled actors and myself. I believe I drank free on this occasion also, but not triumphantly.

Danny was perhaps feeling the same humility, as his makeup was now flowing freely, and his false nose was curling up at the edges. He looked as if someone had stuck a wedge of cheese on his face. Phillip saw it too, informing me with the gentle pressure on my elbow with his. Fortunately we were to kneel reverently with heads down while Horatio does much of the talking, thereby enabling us to collect ourselves before having to look Danny in the eye. We made it safely offstage, barely stifling our snorts.

It was time for costume change number two: the strolling players who provides Hamlet with the vehicle to trap his treacherous uncle, Claudius. Our costumes were simple monastic robes of light muslin. We slipped into these, armed ourselves with Gatorade, chips, and cigarettes, and sat at the tables enjoying our first significant break.

"Fuckin' wacky out there," said Neil, between handfuls of potato chips.

"I wish it were always this much fun – were you going to die when you saw Randy?"

"As if the makeup helps anything today –"

A clearing throat signaled that Danny was on his way back to touch up his face, as was his wont whenever opportunity arose. It was well known you weren't to diss the Bard within earshot of the powers that be, though this increased the temptation to do so when they were just out of earshot, a kind of aural mumblety-peg. We made a practice of maligning the more famous passages while awaiting the next entrance ("About my brains. Hmm . . ." for example was chock full of possibilities), but Danny could create a wave of silence in a raucous room simply by striding through on his way somewhere. Today he was mumbling, shaking his head, and one by one peeling off various facial appendages. He looked up to see us trying to appear that we weren't watching him. He laughed and shook his head.

"Hot out there. I'm having trouble seeing, I guess we'll have a Korean Hamlet today."

Sotto voice, Phillip muttered, "As if they couldn't tell."

"Wehrcome to Hamrhett," Neil added.

It was time to station ourselves in the upstage pit and wait for our entrance, en masse, into Elsinore.

Act II, scene two, though crucial to the play in that in it Hamlet hatches the plot wherein he will trick Claudius into revealing his role in the murder of Hamlet senior, is often the scene most brutally dismembered. It contains Shakespeare's take on Greek tragedy in the form of a monologue delivered by the "1 Player". Often referred to as "the speech of death" due to its length and potential incomprehensibility, we called it "Peter's aria". Peter gave this speech one of the most thrilling readings I've ever

witnessed on-stage, and it was my privilege as one of the “players” visiting Elsinore, to watch him wring heartbreak and pathos out of materials usually left behind in early rehearsals. From a raised platform, lit from behind and below, white hair glowing and eyes glittering, he cast a magnificent and mesmerizing presence in front of the silhouettes of the pine trees, and more than once brought his fellow cast members on-stage to tears. This was all the more remarkable as just moments before we had all waited together in the upstage pit, smoking, grumbling, and resisting the impulse to try to physically dodge the bats that circled constantly above eye-level. We had no illusions about being “the players”, knew what our function was – to give Hamlet the idea of the play-within-the-play which would mimic the murder of his father, and knew further that Danny was stealing focus by any means possible throughout the scene. After all, this was his prerogative – he was playing Hamlet. It was an easy few minutes for the rest of the players, my roommates included. All we had to do was smile a lot and watch and listen to Peter.

One advantage to the pit on hot days was that it was cool and shady. We lounged that day on crates, benches, stairs, and whatever props were not in use, stripped down to our lightest generic muslin gowns and, at least in my case, our BVDs. Joe Purcell, our Polonius, chomped noisily on peanut M&Ms, mouthing the lines being spoken on-stage and occasionally cackling softly. Bill was something of a curiosity in the company, and we treated him with the courtesy one might show the pet poodle of an acquaintance. With flowing white hair and Shavian beard, wiry build and spritely temperament, he could have passed for Ben Gunn. His claw-like hand grabbed mine with surprising strength, and he tried to stuff some M&Ms in my hand. I pulled my hand involuntarily away and made a

silent gesture meant to convey a polite decline. Phillip watched with an expression of vague disgust.

“No? The doctor says I shouldn’t eat them, but what does he know?” he cackled, turned facing the steps leading up to the stage and cocked an ear, listening for his cue.

Phillip sidled up beside me and whispered, “It’s amazing what he eats with no teeth.”

It wasn’t true that Joe had no teeth. One was clearly visible on his upper gum, though with its nicotine color and partially exposed root looked like it would soon be going the way of the others. I nodded my agreement, half listening to the cat and mouse game on-stage between Hamlet, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. Neil sat at the edge of the shade next to Peter, blowing smoke rings.

“What a goddamned freak show. It’s too fucking hot to be doing a show, they’re going to fucking kill us,” wheezed Peter from within the cloud of smoke engulfing the slumped-over upper half of his body. Neil grunted his assent then leaned forward to accept the nearly empty yellow bag from Joe who was ready to proceed on-stage. We all got to our feet, listened for our cue and ascended into the arena. After Hamlet’s greeting and lots of nodding, smiling and shuffling on our parts, we seated ourselves stage center and turned upstage to watch Peter trill his aria.

At the first instant of pain I thought I had sat on an exposed nailhead, but within a split second a much sharper and hotter pain shot from my butt into my lower back, the hot stabbing sensation throbbing like some internal bass drum. Trying to resist the impulse to leap to my feet, which would have made me the unwilling focus of the audience, I shifted to my other buttock. It was then that I felt the movement and realized with a panic that I had seated myself on, but not disabled one of the many

varied flying, stinging insects that menaced us all summer. My guess, which proved to be correct, was a wasp. I reached down and grabbed a handful of gown in the general vicinity of the pain, hoping to put the creature and myself out of our miseries. By now Peter was well into the retelling of the battle 'twixt Priam and Pyrrus, and I was feeling oddly cool, damp, and removed from the action. Neil was looking over, trying to catch my eye, then guided my attention down to my hand, which was grasped in an unobtrusive way onto my right buttock. I gave it an extra squeeze to hopefully kill the winged beast within, started to explain, caught myself just in time, grew dizzy and suddenly afraid I wouldn't be able to get to my feet. The next thing I knew for sure was that everyone else was on their feet, with Hamlet saying, while looking down at me with a faint scowl, "Do you hear? Let them be well used."

I recognized this in a detached sort of way as our exit cue and suddenly found myself rising to my feet with the help of two of my fellow players. I was led offstage right, not our usual exit but the quickest. I found myself suddenly surrounded by actors and Angie Jones, Jonesy, our young assistant stage manager and the object of many male fantasies that monastic summer.

"Did he faint?"

"I thought he passed out"

"Are you OK? What's wrong?"

"He looks green"

I felt as if I were in slow motion in a fast-forward dream. Licking my suddenly dry lips and mouth I ventured to speak:

"I was stung by something. On my ass. Sat on it."

This must be it," Jonesy announced, proudly dangling a bent and apparently dead wasp by the wing.

"Don't expect me to suck out the poison."

"Angie will, right Jonesy?"

"Oh shut up."

"I hear mud works, let's rub mud on it."

"Not in my contract."

The cacophony of distant voices decided I was to be led to the side of the barn where there was a water outlet, and that I was to smear mud on the area in question. I don't recall actually doing this, but I do recall feeling sleepy and uncertain of my remaining duties for the show. Phillip walked me through my remaining scenes, one as a Danish officer, and one as a Norwegian officer in the army of Fortinbras, in which I delivered, by unconscious rote, a reply to a query from Hamlet which sounded to my ears like pure gobbledygook. Fortunately I was able to identify my cue by the pause that ensued after his line. The remainder of the performance was lost to me, though I was able to make the curtain call after being roused from an unexpected snooze backstage by Kevin Howard, who had changed from the gravedigger back into his Hamlet's ghost costume for the bow.

Afterwards in the barn there was the usual Sunday-after-matinee celebratory atmosphere. I was regaining my senses, though was having trouble sitting comfortably on my throbbing and swollen bum. Jonesy presented me with a trophy for bravery consisting of a 4" X 4" square of plywood with the deceased but now notorious wasp mounted with straight pins, wings embossed with glitter and the tip of the abdomen painted red. It was later hung backstage as the centerpiece of a shrine and became known as the Pain-In-The-Ass Award. For all I know it hangs there to this day. Anyway, I like to think it does.

At the top of the amphitheater facing the path down the hill to the parking lot was a snack shack we called the cantina. It was here that those willing to go out after



the show gathered to have a post show beer and discuss plans. There being no makeup to remove, most of us made it up there before the audience was dispersed. Normally I enjoy the looks of recognition that dawn on faces I've just performed in front of for four plus hours, but not this night. The prospect of deciding on a plan of action – whether or not to have a beer; whether or not to stop off at The Shed, the company watering hole in Spring Green; whether I was up to the forty-five minute bike ride home – was difficult enough, but the prospect of standing in line for a beer was too much. I took a quick detour around the cantina and headed down the hill.

“Jeffrey, wait.” It was Phillip.

“Going to The Shed?” I asked, more out of ritual than curiosity.

“How are you getting home? Do you need a ride? I think there's room in Mark's car.”

Talking Jeff into accepting a ride home was another ritual that had developed over the course of the season, but it usually took place at closing time, three miles closer to my destination, several pitchers of beer the worse for wear. Graciously refusing these rides had become increasingly difficult. I actually enjoyed riding home in the dark. There was almost always a moon to light the way, and deprived of full visibility, the air smelled sweeter, and my thoughts were more vivid, especially with a buzz on. The only sounds were the rhythmic squeak and clacking of my aged Raleigh three-speed, and me talking to myself, re-living conversations real and imagined. Some good samaritans were becoming more insistent, perhaps from the notion that I was merely being polite. Phillip knew better.

“I'm going to ride. I could use it.”

“Mind if I come along?”

“What about your bike?” I asked, knowing full well

it had been locked up at the bottom of the hill for over a week. “Aren't you going out, the night is young, it's –”

“Not tonight. We've got some wine at home, yes?” We had. We started down the hill.

“Golf tomorrow gentlemen, seven A.M.” It was Peter, dressed, brushed and dapper. He always walked down the path, and always invited anyone he encountered to join him on the links. I always declined.

“No thanks, Peter. See you Tuesday.”

We clanked and squeaked our way through the rapidly falling darkness, the warm fragrant air cooling our bodies. I was only occasionally aware of the pain in my butt, and the rhythm of pedaling made me slightly dreamy, sober as I was. Conversation wasn't necessary. Phillip, ten or fifteen yards ahead of me, suddenly pointed to our right, north, and slowed to a stop. I pulled up behind him.

“What is it?” The northern horizon was lit by a green haze which seemed to be swirling and shifting. We stood, straddling our bikes for a few moments, saying nothing. The haze pulsed, rose up in points, grew fainter, then more vivid. It was now fully dark around us.

“It's the Northern Lights,” he finally said. I had never seen them, and could think of nothing to add. “When I see something like this Jeffrey, it makes me realize how little acting means to me.” Again I could think of nothing to add.

We stood watching in silence for five, maybe ten minutes, hypnotized by the unexpected light show. I tried to make myself take a mental photograph, not of what I was seeing, but of the moment, of this time. Sadness crept over me, like a tingling up my spine. I knew the moment would soon be gone, but I held on. The more I held, the faster it slipped, until, still clutching with my mind, it was gone.

The still pulsating green was there, but my place in it had been usurped by my allegiance to the restless march of time. It was time to go.

The summer of my twenty-eighth year ended like that moment, before I had left it. In a way, it ended with that moment. The season still had a couple months to run, but in my mind, it was time to move on.

I was not re-hired for the following season, nor were any of my Milwaukee comrades. Danny and Maria resigned after the following season, and the ensuing years wiped out any human trace of the season of my employment. Peter Romanov dropped dead of a massive coronary while golfing, a few weeks after the season's end. Joe Purcell took advantage of his insurance policy provided by the theater and was fitted with a complete set of false teeth. The last I heard he had cut his hair, shaved and was working a lot in New York City. Neil moved to the Southeast, working as a "sword banger" in a year-round theme park. We talked on the phone a couple of times before I lost track of him completely. Phillip died of lung infection two years later after a long and secret battle with AIDS. I am still moving on.

## Patmos

"I John, your brother, ... was on the island called Patmos  
on account of the word of God...."  
— Revelations 1:9

Small holy island. The tongue of the Aegean worked into the island's crotch & coves (it seemed, from above, the next day) it's dark & we don't sense this. Slow glide. We hit the dock with a grunt. Boats. Missed boats drifting out to dots. Mist the sun whips up, washed out. Small holy island, more a fort where monks pray. Black hats, stern beards, a saint's skull in a silver case. 7 saints. Candle smoke. Two towns on either end of the monk's road we walked down drunk, not yet talking. Harbor bars. This road around unzips. Doorframes lucky for the crosses carved on top. No one dances. All the hills are dips & rolls. Flowerstems the wind sends trembling. Unzips to the heart. Ice plant. Thorn plant like molecules. Later we make love —not here— & at the house you bare your breasts just to tan. Perfect spine. This road around unzips to the heart. To the heart. I saw a farmer, without machines, gather, cut & stack the knee-deep crop of barley. Certainly not the apocalypse this place is famous for.

Roger W. Hecht

Occipital Recovery  
(To My Daughter)

What do we know of our cerebellum?  
A lot, but not much  
the neurosurgeons say.

A walk in pitch black those brain  
cells are pretty smart, not allowing  
the nervous system to know  
the pain going on in that body.

A coma they call it.  
Expect the worst, accept anything else  
as a gift from God.

Little eyes peek out and understand  
what they see, but won't remember -  
cause that would be too painful.

Out of the coma the brain cells emerge  
bringing all the pain and hurt;  
rebel, it's the only way to cry out.

It could take months... no thanks,  
push harder; damaged body and mind  
working together. Weeks - no days.  
Months - no weeks. To hell  
with their expectations.

Doctors - the hands of God.  
Respiratory and Physical Therapists -  
the fingers of God, all working  
from the outside, while the soul  
pushes from the inside... heal, heal.

Why the miraculous recovery  
when none was expected at start?  
Why did it happen at all if this  
recovery is indeed a miracle?

We're not using enough of these brain  
cells yet to know. It could be to  
unite those hearts in prayer  
or maybe just to let one little sheep know  
she is still with the flock.

*Robert A. Nilles*

## The Hurricane-Party

They applaud the approaching storm  
with flutes of Brut  
in the Pirate Sloop Saloon  
cheering *brutal champagne*  
*for a brutal spectacle!*  
as lightning pricks around the masts  
of shrimp-boats coming home.

I drink a toast of the cheap wine,  
recover my coat and keys,  
walk down to my car.  
I won't be here when the winds hit  
I've told my friends a casino  
should take your money  
not your life; this night would have  
excited me ten years ago, perhaps.

In the bar of my Biloxi motel  
fisherman have come for the drink  
specials and talk of the gamblers  
awaiting a hurricane inside  
flimsy glass turrets.  
*I have friends there*, I should say—  
silly, rich and boisterous  
as they are, they don't  
deserve to drown like rats.  
I say nothing. My friends are fools;  
I won't confide in working men  
men who panhandle the sea.

Sean Brendan-Brown

## Grampa Bill

Grampa Bill, all whiskers, tobacco and beer,  
Face reddened through reading meters for the Public  
Service,  
Pacing tall in his gray uniform,  
Chart in hand, backyard to backyard,  
Used to kneel over our beds at night,  
Whispering gruff tales of Weenie Paul  
The white boy who befriended the Indian boy,  
And Rin-Tin-Tin, and he taught us the Our Father,  
Even though he was a Mason, and we, Catholics.

Gramma would nag him, "Aw, Bill, put your teeth in . . .,"  
"That man's disgustin'," or she'd worried that he'd been  
Drinking Jax beer at Herstel's with his cronies,  
Then driving the old Pontiac  
into the canal off some bayou road.

Grampa Bill would visit us up North sometimes,  
And watch TV with Daddy,  
The two eating limburger cheese and laughing —  
And Grampa still wittering stories of  
"The bad man Frank and the good man Bill."

As his eyesight went,  
He listened to the radio all night long,  
Talk shows and Billy Graham, "a good man,"  
But still letting us pick out names of the horses he played,  
Circling them in the morning paper with a blunt pencil  
After chanting them aloud in ceremonious rhythm:  
"Copper Penny, Paddy's Prize, Manowar . . ."

Maybe it was those days in the sun,  
Or perhaps the chew-tobacco he stored in his cheek  
That started the cancer.  
he died in the hospital, all tubes and machines,

Eaten up from the inside, mom said,  
And I, away at college, busy with exams,  
Never knew exactly what moment, what thought,  
What cell-gone-wild  
Was his last.

Some nights now,  
Especially the hot, humid, palm-treed New Orleans kind,  
His whiskers scratch my cheek,  
His chew-tobacco, started from spit and a crinkled package,  
Sniffs from the palm of his hand back to me,  
His voice rumbles my ear soft with another childhood tale  
As I lay me down to a middle-aged, Chicago suburban  
sleep.

*Donna Pucciani*

## Bungee Jumping

It's still dark.  
Almost ready: ankles  
tethered, equipment checked.  
The steel snap-hook  
clutches the steel rail of the bridge,  
fear clogs the throat like phlegm;  
that's the right way to start.  
It's real. You know  
the beginning and  
where you hope to end.  
But the fall is what it's all about.  
Lying on the sunrise wind,  
plummeting toward dark shards of water,  
is pure rush,  
good if you know you're going to rise inhaling  
air you've just exhaled.  
The tension and the tug of cord  
reaching its limits,  
hurling you back, is good, too.  
That's when you know it's right,  
or how to make it right, hoping  
words will come.  
Ready now. It's still dark.  
Wait for the first show  
of light. Then jump.

*Richard Calisch*

## Nighthawks

Catering  
to the long hours settling in,  
ghosts of last night and ghostly dreams  
of things to come and things bent  
out of shape, poetry  
of another time, another place, obtrusive grey  
gulls of morning and arthritic customers demanding  
another cup of coffee, a family tree shrouded in  
darkness somewhere Down South, urban sensibilities,  
of ol' "Kiss My — If You Don't Like It" syndrome,  
lingering perfume from the thorax of sea-green molls  
who have outgrown their usefulness, by now.

Cooler weather, no one heard  
the whispers of last night, without eyes and ears, then,  
just torsos colliding in moonlight, question marks of sorts,  
sprouting wings, in the beginning, flapping around  
delirious,  
and after only one good dance there was a flowering  
of activity, and bones melted down  
and hooves clattered  
and the sea closed in, in a special language,  
flowing, and the greedy Northern stars were merciless  
and simply closed up shop, and the sexy murmurs turned  
to second-hand talk, and a radio was still playing  
and the music swam around for a while like in  
Anne Sexton's poem, and the moon went into  
menopause and a woman pouted her  
nude lips and a man imagined  
big boats on a small lake and both of them  
knew the work of the night was finished, straining  
to rearrange the alignment of the planets and forget  
about the latest news, the grey facade  
of morning masquerade.

*Errol Miller*

## The Fence

And as we moved into the mountain curve  
Our headlights failed, all was black,  
The brake pedal was hit so hard it was bent,  
And we flew off the edge —  
Between the swamp and power pole  
Smashing down and penetrating a barbed wire fence,  
That like a violin bridge  
Held firm as we thrust under its strings scratching.  
The sounds were numerous.  
Besides Rosalita's head hitting the glove-box  
Like a pitched hard-ball,  
I commented, once we'd stopped rolling:  
We're dead. We're all dead.  
But we were fine.  
We tried to flag help on the highway  
But everyone was too busy or afraid  
To help a man and boy.  
Then the ranch owners rode up on their rounds.  
In the night light they looked at our freshly painted  
Green 54 Ford pick-up, all scratched and clawed  
To the silver undermetal,  
And those scratches looked like  
The veins of an animal.

*Vic Cavalli*

She Said She Was Happy Married To  
The President

The body swims discarded affairs  
discovers naked dreams are mist  
remember when you fingered my  
boundaries, limits, swaying hair  
in milk-white manipulations?  
Exposure becomes a stolen entity  
intimacy is a decision  
entry and thrusts of Anglo-Saxon code words.

Jellyfish never quite joke or shock  
away neanderthal desperation;  
observe the quivering naked snare  
returning to some primordial sea  
a raucous rip tide passion  
clinging to spheres and external pudenda  
patting tapping need to exchange lives.

Relationship gender genital maps  
gentle as a pond of leeches  
risks, boredom for which someone will drown  
in useless senseless violent exposure  
mysteries among algae  
refracted swirls of brief absurd trust  
innocent as a wave waiting to break  
Baroque control doesn't exist in aqua  
never equal moaning envelopment  
filmy underwater ballet from birth  
swimming blind as whipping sperm  
primordial pleasure obsessions  
robotic chance meetings  
with harpy mermaids performing fellatio.

*Joan Payne Kincaid*

Pochelbel on a Lonely Winter Evening

soft strings glide through  
chill white flakes  
floating to the earth  
in december's dark air

candle burns dim  
as strains of the kanon  
wash over flickering flames  
dripping wax weaving  
stories in the night

tales of times vanished  
never again to appear  
as a people, a city  
a ghetto  
no more holy nights  
thick with family and song  
bread, wine, and lights

wax trails are the tears  
of dead loves  
ashes and sackcloth  
just as  
violins are the  
tools of the heart's  
mourning

the rialto

have you  
heard the  
news?

a userer was sharpening  
his blade

with ducats stolen

from the purse  
of a good  
christian

ducats and daughter  
both are  
vanished

*Micheal Paulson*

## Haste To Demephtis

I filmed the three whales caught in the ice  
in Alaska.

I quizzed one  
when the camera wasn't rolling,  
when the other newsmen were asleep,  
in the heat of the night.

I tried to speak to the other two,  
but they were trying to survive.  
Since I couldn't dive to the ocean floor,  
I pleaded with the whale's barnacled back  
to search the underwater tundra.

He died, but the other two escaped.  
Soviet tanker plowed through the ice,  
and others praised perestroika,  
crying joyously.

When I was seven years old,  
I buried my watch, a gift from  
my grandfather, in the public sandbox  
at the park I could see from my window.  
I observed dogs covering their bones,  
and wanted to understand why they did it.  
I wanted to dig up the brown leather strap each  
day,  
check the time,  
and return it to its grave.

That first night, I couldn't wait any longer,  
and I crawled out of the apartment  
to the sandbox.

The tossed dirt remained from my excavation,  
but when the sun came,

I still hadn't found the watch.  
There was a vacant crevice in the sand  
where the watch had been.

The plates of the Earth had shifted,



and swallowed my bone.  
Eskimos chattered to me,  
offered me a home for life,  
my own private igloo,  
and I thanked them with sign language nos,  
and went to Toronto,  
where I read there exist really fast cars.  
I purchased one.  
The man promised me that it would travel  
the continents in forty years,  
and added that it could go  
zero to sixty in six seconds  
and that it had a full tank of gas.  
It did have a full tank,  
but it couldn't accelerate like he promised.

I asked my mother to help me look,  
and we went to work with a spade.  
An old dark man,  
whose wrinkles crumpled his face,  
offered me a shovel which I could barely lift.  
My mother took the shovel,  
I took the spade.  
All we found was twenty-six cents,  
the Driver's License of an elderly neighbor who died,  
and the muffled clink when our blades met  
underground.  
The old man left without his shovel.

There were not enough roads in Canada,  
so I purchased a helicopter,  
and a pilot to fly it  
while I looked out the window.  
I saw the Alaskan Pipeline,  
and dreamed out of exhaustion  
that it was what I wanted,  
but even the pilot knew it wasn't  
and so did the blades carving arctic air.

My uncle suggested that we put up flyers  
for the lost watch,

or tell the police it was stolen  
to collect the insurance.  
I called newspapers and left ads,  
and still could not find it,  
and decided that it did not  
want to come back.  
I might not want to come back  
if I was all safe and warm and sandy,  
and I watched dogs losing their bones  
in the sandbox, too.

When I went to the state of Washington,  
I went to a basketball game.  
I saw the urge in men's faces,  
the eyes that ravaged wooden floors  
and hands that strangled orange rubber.  
I watched the man next to me spill his caramel corn,  
and blame his son,  
and I saw Seattle was not where it  
took cover,  
the intangible object of my quest.  
I didn't even bother to check the streets of Spokane,  
or the frost at Mt. Rainier  
because of their proximity.

I skipped school to look.  
Classmates, who used to gather around  
the skinny men rolling dice,  
helped me dig.  
But I preferred to look myself,  
in the sanctity of my sandbox,  
sometimes pulling the crevice apart with my bare  
hands.  
I could see something through there,  
not the watch,  
something huge and flat that I couldn't quite reach.  
I would have asked one of the older kids,  
or my mother,  
or the skinny men with twisted arms,  
but they would rather dig.  
My teacher said the watch probably decomposed.  
I slept in the sandbox.

A librarian in Florida asked if she could help me.  
I said, "yes."  
I said, "for what single reason do North and South America exist?"  
She told me to check the card catalogue under F.  
I didn't see what I was looking for right away,  
but discovered Ferlinghetti,  
Faulkner, Franz Kafka.  
I found Fame and Fortune but they whispered lies,  
and lured with siren songs.  
My concrete scrutiny  
was suddenly worthless.  
It occurred to me to return the car,  
but that would take too long,  
and I had books to search through.  
My fugitive was the written word!

After my mother tucked me in one night,  
under the sand,  
I took a stick and poked it down  
into the gap.  
I didn't see anything move,  
so I went to sleep  
and dreamt of yellow lines  
and swordfish calendars.

Years were spent reading,  
watching each sentence, letter, and ink atom  
with jolly intensity.  
I knew I was on the right track,  
I was sure of it,  
and this satisfied me.  
But all I found,  
though Shakespeare was clever  
and Burroughs was funny,  
were other searchers.  
Most of them dead.

I watched classmates, older kids,  
burn centipedes with magnifying glasses.

On the brightest, hottest day of my life,  
I scooped sand out of the way  
and aimed a point of heat through the crevice  
underneath the sandbox.  
I watched the insects squirm and hurry  
and decided that whatever was below  
would hide from my magnifying glass ray  
by emerging.  
It didn't come out, but I smelled burnt tar  
and saw a point of asphalt.  
I didn't go back to the sandbox,  
but started checking newly constructed  
highways  
and looked out the window when I rode.

On the TV set,  
they interviewed an Indian child,  
and asked him what they thought of war.  
He said, "it sucks."  
Without turning off the TV,  
I rove to Wilmington, Delaware,  
where the boy lived. He would know the  
answer,  
children know when a storm is coming.  
They can still see  
ghosts.  
On the highway, I whistled  
and listened for secret messages in my tune.  
When I came wildly knocking on the door,  
the boy's mother would not let me in.  
There must have been something wrong with  
how I looked at her,  
like I wanted to eat her son.  
"Is your son home? I need to speak to him."  
"No, no, sir. Please go away."  
Curtains opened in a bedroom  
and the boy's frightened face flashed.  
I bowled past the mother and when I was  
arrived,  
finally, in his room, the boy was on the phone.  
"I called the police," he said. "You better go."  
"Go where?" I yelled, shaking him. "Go where?"

The boy could not see ghosts anymore,  
he could not even see me,  
so I left.

Everyone thought I was quiet,  
but I yelled at the streets,  
reserved curses for concrete,  
and traded insults with the curb.  
One day on the way to school,  
I thought I saw the watch rolling  
on the side of the road.  
I squeezed out of the window  
and there it was, beside my hand.  
Then the ambulance came,  
and burlesque men bound me to a board  
and drove me to a hospital  
where I was tied between sheets and yelled at.  
If I was going to find the watch,  
I would find it myself,  
and I would drive the roads on my own.

I flew to Tokyo.  
I learned Japanese;  
tried to find sympathetic foreigners  
who would teach me to squat over toilets  
and sleep on the floor.  
I ate a Big Mac at the airport,  
with six wrappers,  
and returned to America.  
The keelhauling air had gusted across the  
landbridge.

In the next eight years,  
I saw dogs on retractable leashes,  
eating handpainted vittles.  
They never buried bones.  
I got a license,  
drove to college,  
and became a telejournalist.  
I moved to Chicago and checked road signs  
for roads to other roads.

New York had five denizens.  
Manhattan was breeding  
with Dow Jones desperadoes,  
Wall Street bandits studying sidewalks.  
They were looking for clues, too,  
but the secrets they sought  
were of stocks and bonds  
and Boesky temptresses.  
I didn't go aboveground in Brooklyn,  
Queens or the Bronx.  
Instead, I talked to subway nocturnals,  
painted lost ads with spray paint graffiti  
on station floors  
and subterranean benches.  
I saw the black man whose shovel I borrowed.  
He had another one, a jackhammer,  
and was plundering cement.  
He was willing to stop,  
and I bought him a subway token.

I took pictures of streets on rainy days  
and did human interest stories on them.  
I inspected the white dashes when I shifted  
lanes.  
I filled the car with diesel fuel,  
and roared on speedways,  
and bought a racing car and drove  
in the Indianapolis 500 for six laps.

In Mexico City, I mourned the remnants  
of earthquakes,  
and passerby stare at me with flickering  
thoughts.  
I scraped rubble from clogged sewage drains,  
but discovered only filthy water.  
In El Salvador,  
I saw American troops crunching ice in bars,  
and native hostages fighting  
black and white photographs.  
In Brazil, there were studded forests,  
cows with cavities,

mechanical beasts waltzing carefree.  
The roads became unstable,  
but I continued south,  
toward Equator jungles  
and lost gold mines.

I fell in love,  
because someone said there was nothing like it,  
and I was curious.  
She was beautiful,  
and handsome and fair.  
We eloped on a Saturday night.  
After making love in a car,  
I took her out and lay her down on the street.  
I made love to her with my eyes open.  
She told me to close them, she begged  
and pleaded on her knees  
and cursed the day she met me  
and threw her diaphragm into the ditch.  
We got divorced the next morning  
and I closed my eyes then.

Through empty altitudes I ascended,  
rumbling slowly on melting overpasses  
and cavernous tunnels with divisions  
under mountains. The sign said:  
WELCOME TO CHILE in English,  
and I kept going up and kept looking  
down at the cement, into it.

I found God, too,  
during a telecast from Texas,  
surrounded by sweaty, singing aborigines.  
One of them had yellow hair  
and too much makeup.  
When she sang, I finally saw God.  
I laughed at first, like I laughed  
at Jim Jones, and I blasted him and religion,  
and cultural values and morality.  
The whole media climbed on their freaky backs  
and dug their fingers into their eyes.

I let them do the dirty work.

A pinnacle sliced sky above,  
but the roads were rimmed with potholes,  
and they were clogged with gravel.  
I knew I could not find my precious watch  
on these mangled wrappers.  
But the brakes weren't working right,  
so I continued climbing.

Chicago was without snow in the winter  
so when the whales were discovered,  
I took my chance.

After crossing a bridge,  
it collapses behind me.  
Glancing back, checking my blind spot  
to switch lanes, I see the wooden structures fall.  
A sign tells me five miles to  
Demephitis, population one.  
I arrive five minutes later,  
and cruise the megawatt  
ghost town.  
There are chains rattling.  
There is a bell dully sounding.  
I hear cherished words in the night.

In the tangled skein of this city,  
in the limited silk asphalt  
exists the one purpose of the  
Western Hemisphere.  
I ride my smoking spider,  
searching for a clue.  
The rearview mirror is a magnifying glass,  
so I will not miss a fingerprint.  
In China exists the Great Wall.  
In India resides the Taj Mahal.  
All of Asia is one polished answer.  
But the frozen whales are no solution,  
not the pizza delivery man who opened his door into  
traffic,  
it is not even found in Air Force One,

or Los Angeles, California,  
or the state of Wyoming,  
or Idaho,  
or in the vacancy of six hotel rooms  
in Dallas.

I attach giant spotlights to the roof of my car.  
They have similar kinds of airports,  
or at the Grand Opening of furniture stores.  
They are heavy,  
the roof sags and crumples,  
and necessary.

For forty days and forty nights,  
I struggle against the urban backdrop,  
driving toward blind shadows.  
Then the headlights and floodlights  
extinguish simultaneously,  
and I can see ghosts.  
They are everywhere,  
illuminating the darkness.  
One pedals to my window  
and smiles in my ear.

Whistling passwords,  
I return over the newly constructed bridge,  
on highways and turnpikes and asphalt radii.  
There is little traffic.  
At the sandbox, I finger the brown leather  
watch  
with the smooth fingers of the next morning.

Because the ghost told me,  
he said "wait until morning. Sleep sound and  
vibrant and without hesitation. You can return  
to the sandbox when you have completed  
everything there is to accomplish. The sandbox  
will not disappear. I will wait here for you."

*David Rothbart*

## Drumming Journey With Frances

*Daiva Karuze*

A lady with long wavy black hair is drumming rhythmically on a drum she made herself. In a circle people are lying on the floor or sitting with their eyes closed. "We are going on a drumming journey," Frances tells us.

At first I'm disappointed because I don't see the images I've become used to seeing in trance. I'm watching the dark. The dark starts to form blue and green tunnels and caves. Men with antlers on their head are leaning over the entrances. I must pass them to get through. Inside the tunnels and caves I see teeth lined up like soldiers, like mountains, large, like crystals. Two men dressed in beige leather, with antlers on their heads are dancing in a yellow tunnel of light. More of the men appear, dressed identically. They line up in two rows. They are holding a large piece of leather between them, flat, like a sheet that they are shaking. The two rows of antler men move toward each other and then away, from each other; the leather sheet

between them becomes taut and then relaxes. It looks like they are holding a trampoline and someone is jumping on it. Then they start throwing my fathers watch, which my Uncle Gytis gave him, up and down on the taut leather. The watch turns into a diamond ring. Feathers hang down off the edges of the trampoline. I ask one of the men for a gift and he gives me a brilliant red stone. I wonder if it's a garnet, my birth stone, but it seems more fiery than a garnet. It is glowing and smooth. I ask him what he wants in return and he tells me to teach a writing workshop.

In the distance I see a wooden wolf figure. I go to it and enter its mouth. The drummer is making scratching sounds. I think of mosquitoes and bees. The poor dead bees that are dying at my house. A hive of bees decided to try and spend the winter between the rafters of the house, I've been coming home to dead bees and one has stung my black cat. I am inside the wooden wolf figure. The drumming is getting faster and faster. I feel safe inside the wolf, but I need to get out. Suddenly I bust out, by pushing out of both sides at once, as though I were busting out of a glass. The wolf should shatter, and I see some blood, but he is intact, with beautiful shiny black fur. He is no longer wood, but truly wolf like. He is completely intact, no signs at all that I have just busted out from inside of him. I struggle and tangle with him. I try to pull away from him, but he won't let me. It becomes quite erotic. I am loving and blending with the wolf. I want to stay in this place, in this moment forever. The drumming gets louder still and the wolf becomes frightened. He becomes a cowering wolf puppy at the drummers feet. I watch, as the drumming stops and the beautiful sleek wolf puppy, puts his head on the lap of the huge woman Goddess with long wavy black hair and she pets the back of his head gently.

The journey ends. "Does anyone want to share?" Frances asks. I do and she responds, "Siberian Shamans wore antlers on their heads. They let you in didn't they?"

## At The Carnival Of Future Days

The oracle has closed.  
The sign upon her doorpost reads,  
"...due to death in the family...,"  
the letters are faded and obscure.  
The soothsayer's tent is tatters  
flapping in the frigid wind,  
and the booth where crystal balls were read  
has disappeared,  
leaving not a shard of glass behind  
upon the sand.  
Wind swirls where once the tarot cards  
flashed in the gypsy's palm.  
Darkness rises from the sea,  
but no torches have been kindled;  
and I have walked out to this strip of beach  
to look beyond what was and is,  
only to stare into the silent  
onyx masonry of night.

*Richard Calisch*

## The Sun Shower

"... Miracles occur  
If you care to call those spasmodic  
*Tricks of radiance miracles.*"

—Sylvia Plath

Down the street  
a sunday of empty parks.

I watch myself  
slide by  
mirrors and shop windows.

Clouds assemble, grey  
stones in a wall. All morning  
the light has been thickening  
toward rain. Now  
the river's blown  
ripple-patterns  
grow suddenly still  
and it begins: drowsy  
as hemlock, a chill  
drizzle that packs me in-  
to a doorway's upright box.

Spidery limbs crawl  
over the blank numbered faces  
of clocks behind my face  
which hangs, a ghost  
about to evaporate  
in the glass  
between this universe  
of concealed springs and gears  
clicking or whirring with insect  
speech, and a town wiped out by rain.

Inklings breathe  
at the back of my mind  
like the unshelled bodies of snails  
and there's a shift  
from the mouselight of self-hypnosis  
to lightning that triggers  
long spattering bursts  
of relief. The overcast  
breaks up like an ice field in April  
and wherever sunlight lights the bouncing rain  
on the sleek tar, on the rinsed  
roofs and hoods and bumpers of cars  
even on flat water  
it surprises thousands  
of horned creatures the colour of glass  
whose looked-through lives become visible  
only when they have something to dance about.

George Amabile

Schola Cantorum

What does a man make in twenty-five years—  
a house, a child, a book – gray hair,  
sore joints, bruised bones, singing;  
what more, what less, what can a man make?

I rode the train today, to a store closed  
when I got there, I rode the train and looked out  
the rain diamonded windows at the long rows  
of alleys, and the long rows of pointed attics.

I regret we could not make a compromise.  
Every six months I would sleep with him, she  
could have the rest, but the damp order of the world  
tells me love does not settle things so easily.

It would not be love if it did – ask that man reading  
his paper fold by fold, or the woman with the bag  
between her legs, ask the boy with the backward  
baseball cap, they will tell you their lives rail

the thin line of dreams, why shouldn't yours, why  
not twenty-five years of making do, why not—  
even yesterday, down at the beach, when the young  
man took off his shirt and his girlfriend kissed

his stomach as they sat on the hard stairs,  
and you watched, knowing it was a time of fire  
passing, only to remember how his hand  
was fire passing on my leg, and the words

stuck on my lips, a mouth full of diamonds,  
yet not one sound came out – what did words buy,  
not light, not time, not air, fire, water;  
maybe hozana of ashes, maybe bones, maybe ice.

Build me this house then, a house of ash, a house  
of ice, a dome where singing ges back and forth.  
Listen, echoes of a resurrection reverberate,  
and I return with the story I know by heart.

*Robert Klein Engler*

All That's Accumulated

Stalking the wild bumble-bee  
south of the Mason-Dixon line,  
I sense a sense of place  
while harvest waits.  
Soon it will be nude November  
with falling leaves, the sound of the ax  
echoing in the woods, a conscious purpose,  
perhaps, near the end of the line.

For I have tilled a hillside of rock  
for over fifty years, never striking gold, like  
I went over to Yazoo City to rest and only  
bought a man a beer: he later robbed  
a store to get another beer, the Old South,  
the New South, the measureless wealth  
of this world and others.

And I said to myself  
I must abort this downward glide,  
I must flower out of one of New England's  
prim white houses and hitchhike to Cinderella's  
midnight ball, find a woman to subdue me.  
But it wasn't in the cards that day, like God  
was demanding a cherished offering  
of human souls tramping on to higher ground,  
the Blue and the Grey of those times,  
like Paris in the Twenties.

But there are soldiers on both sides,  
warming their hands by blazing campfires,  
the smoke billowing up to Heaven,  
you ramble around  
in the shade for awhile, you wait  
for twilight and firefly-lamp,  
you wait for orders to come down...



The thing about summer is that soon  
it is over, most of the season used up  
browsing in bookstores, fighting mosquitos,  
fighting invaders, dressing and undressing  
wounds.  
Hey, the Yanks are coming, the Art-Police,  
the insensitive clocks of autumn  
losing time, vivid and imaginative  
bentwood fiction stories of last night when  
the Hired Hand was drunk in an enormous room  
over at the Forest Club, learning another  
lesson, leaving about twelve.

*Errol Miller*

### Ahmad Jamal: All the Things You Are

House lights dim, and the bass player  
Hangs over his instrument like a lover.  
The stage is a study in black, white and brown.  
A short, well-tuned man walks to the piano,  
His dimples a small miracle  
Above white well-trimmed whiskers,  
The whites of his eyes glowing in the footlights  
Whiter than the white of drums and drummer.

He sits, tension in back from spine to white  
collar  
Curving to brown neck above the dark jacket,  
Sheen of black heel tapping on the stage floor  
Under a starless mushroom-cap ceiling.  
Syncopation giggles out of the shoulders  
Imprisoned in their grey suit, sending  
Sound swinging from jungle trees  
Like Tarzan on LSD.

Webbed music spins from brown arachnid hands  
Strong fingers and a hardened palm  
Strike chords like Rachmaninoff.  
No substitute for strong fingers,  
My teacher used to say.

Swallowed by the ebony grand,  
Thrown back like Jonah again and again,  
He flings sound in great waves  
Through the teeth of the beast  
With the Steinway tattoo.

Sound to the core of sound,  
The single tone is the ground of being.  
Like an architect he shapes  
Not just notes but spaces in between,

The echo in the hills, and  
Berries dropped in a tin bucket.  
And after, Debussy-bluesy chords  
Loll between scales that rip like zippers.

Slow smiler, tune tapper,  
Vine rider, whale survivor,  
Chord weaver, pearl gatherer—  
“All the things you are, are mine.”  
And at the end of each piece  
A single note in the treble, up high,  
And a small brown “Yeah,”  
Invite the tumult of applause.

*Donna Pucciani*

## A Repair

He hoists my clutch-slipping crate,  
Pulls its tranny, plate and disc,  
Zaps off its four wheels,  
Pops its pan plug and lets the oil fall;  
And while that sky-blue pearly chariot  
Is with four metal fingers delicately  
upheld by its rust blasted  
underbelly frame  
and floats there alien in air with a  
thin trickle of black blood trickling  
bleeds helpless and is dead,  
The mechanic comes in  
and says  
it's getting old.

*Vic Cavalli*

Loser's Dressing Room

The blood of God  
knows how many  
broken contenders  
pocks this floor  
like black nailholes  
Clotted towels  
lie crimson in  
sweet smelling  
clouds of piss  
roiling from the defeated  
porcelain of the stool  
in this corner  
    just lay there  
    kid until the Doc . . .  
    where's the Doc  
Jesus hand's  
broken  
mouth  
spills hot salty wine  
tasting of loss  
in the sibilant criss-cross of  
men  
spitting  
cigar poisoned  
gobs  
into the warm  
stink of tape and leather  
    easy kid clean ya up  
    doc'll be here  
    in a minute  
    you'll be ok  
    you'll be back  
    you'll be champ  
    where the hell's the Doc

Styptic stings down  
destroyed face  
driving nails into cuts  
nose mouth  
ripping the punchnumbered  
body on the table  
in this crypt-shadowed cubicle  
    Ok, kid, OK  
    Sweet Jesus  
    where the hell's the  
    Doc?

*Richard Calisch*

## Rainy Days, Rainy Nights

*Laura Allyson Hickey*

During all of dinner the singing went on upstairs and nobody said a word.

"Please pass the potatoes," said my father, Arthur Henry, over a shrill, opera-like voice singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." It was your typical dinnertime scenario at the Henry house. Seated around our dining room table was my mother Fran, my sister Janice, my father, and I. It being the typical scenario, Janice goes on about her social life, Arthur sits like a stoic, and Fran listens attentively to Janice.

The singing star is my Aunt Melba. She is my mom's sister who lives in our guest room. Every night at six o'clock sharp she breaks out into song. Usually she sings "Here Comes The Bride," but tonight, since it is raining, she is singing "Row, Row, Row Your Boat." She moved in with us about two years ago when her fiancée suddenly died from a heart attack. She's a little loopy, "disturbed" as Fran

calls her, and she's been serenading us since she came. Everyone has gotten used to it since it does not appear that Melba is leaving anytime soon.

It wasn't so easy at first though. Everyone adjusted in their own way. My dad never had been a stoic before. Arthur himself used to be quite the singer. Every Saturday night the radio used to fill the house with "Saturday Night with Sinatra." Only we used to call it "Saturday Night with Arthur" because half the time you couldn't even hear poor Frank. He used to dance around in this horrible baby blue terrycloth robe, and tell us we wouldn't know good music if it bit us on the butt. That all changed when Melba came. He got rid of the radio and the robe. I guess he had gotten a taste of his own medicine from Melba.

Janice used to be more fun too. She used to love playing Chinese Checkers with me, but ever since Melba and I have started having Chinese Checker tournaments every Wednesday at four, she claims that the game is only for babies and old ladies that have nothing better to do. Mom said she's jealous because Melba and I get along so well. I think Janice is still mad about the time her friend Karen was over.

Janice and Karen were studying in Janice's room when Melba walked in completely naked. She stood there talking about the "dreadful heat," like her being naked was no big deal. Janice didn't know what to do. Karen made an excuse to leave, and then Janice wound up crying for the rest of the night.

The next day, Karen told everybody at school about Melba, and most of Janice's friends stopped coming around. Now she mainly concentrates on the men in her life. I thought her friends were snobs anyway, but now Janice is very careful not to have anyone over past 5:45 p.m., fifteen minutes before Melba's designated signing

time. When she does have visitors she never brings them upstairs. This is because Melba has not moved a foot to come downstairs in two years.

Other than Janice and my father, the rest of us remain the same. My mom is still very quiet, and says that we all have to make sacrifices for Melba because she is family. I don't mind at all because Melba is my best friend. She listens to me, and best of all she makes me laugh.

After Janice finishes her current story about some boy who she is convinced is in love with her, my mom leans over and says,

"Lily, will you please prepare Melba her plate now?" Preparing plates for Melba is my job. After piling a rather dry pork chop, some string beans, and a heap of mashed potatoes on a plate, I excuse myself and begin to climb the stairs to Melba's secluded room at the end of the hall. By now the singing has stopped.

It seems that every time I enter Melba's room I see something I have never seen before. Her room is covered with souvenirs. When she was in her early twenties she was a go-go dancer in Paris. She's got garter belts on her bed posts, and postcards of Paris border the top of her wall in a circle around the room. Above her bed is a black and white picture of her favorite author, Jack Kerouac.

The rest of her room consists of pictures from the job she held from her thirties on. She was a waitress at Ruby's Diner in a small town in South Carolina. She said that she wanted a totally different lifestyle than Paris. Her favorite pictures are enlarged. There are pictures of Melba with big burly-looking truck drivers, her favorite customers, and even pictures of her behind the grill.

Then there is our favorite picture. You see, Melba's fiancée Ted worked at the barber shop next to the diner. That's how they met. This picture is of Ted chasing Melba

around the barber shop with a pair of clippers. Melba's mouth is wide open as if she was letting out a shrill scream, and Ted's eyes look determined to catch his prey.

I open her door because Melba does not notice if you knock anyway. She is seated in her antique rocking chair by the window in a bright yellow rain coat and matching rain hat. She also has on bright red rubber boots. I know the exact story I will hear tonight as I wait for her to clean her plate.

"Pork chops tonight, Melba," I say cheerfully as I place the plate on her tray table in front of her. She nods vaguely at me as her muddy brown eyes remain glazed and fixed on the rain outside.

"The rain that fell from a dismal sky seemed so appropriate when I walked out of that funeral home." She turned abruptly towards her plate and started making horrible screeching noises with her utensils as she tried to cut her pork chop. I plopped down on her bed and listened attentively.

"Each raindrop seemed to pierce my skin like a dart that had found its target." Her tiny lips that looked like someone had just made a thin line on her face with a red crayon, pursed as she examined the rest of the food on her plate and continued.

"I didn't care about being soaked, so I took my time walking back to my car. Perfect pictures of past rainy days flashed through my mind like photographs with each step. Like the time Ted and I went to wash our hair in the rain only to have it stop as soon as we lathered up."

I giggled somewhat like I usually do at this point in the story. Her eyes turned serious though, and her voice turned icy as she said,

"But today was different. The rain was lonelier, colder, and would never be something to look back upon

and laugh at." Just as she said that I noticed the name "Ted" written in big block letters in the mist on her window. The letters were starting to run.

"I like the rain," I offered in an effort to lighten the mood.

"I would like to learn how to like it again." She paused for a minute, cracked one of her famous half smiles, and said, "Come out in the rain with me, Lily. Help me learn how to like it again, or at least not to despise it quite so much." She had a desperate look in her eye that I had never seen before. I nodded, not knowing exactly what I could do, but more than willing to try something.

Melba started laughing and shaking her feet madly in an effort to get her boots off. They hit the wall like red blobs of jello.

"Grab those and let's go!" she exclaimed while making a frantic motion for me to grab her boots and put them on. I had never seen Melba so excited as she quietly crept out of the room towards the back stairwell.

The reason I say I had never seen her so excited was because she had a huge grin on her face the whole time, and every time my boots squeaked her body would shake a bit with suppressed laughter. I reassured myself that loopy was definitely the best description of her. There was always a sense of adventure to Melba that had drawn me to her. Now I was getting to experience it.

We crept down the stairwell making sure that there was nobody in the kitchen. We quietly opened the kitchen door and retreated out into the rain.

I heard a large splash and felt mud fly all over my face. I looked over at Melba. She was knee deep in a puddle, and giggling like a three year old. Before I knew it, I was in the puddle too. Splashing around, getting dirty, and loving every minute of it.

After that we made mud balls and tried to hit different targets with them. I felt bad when I accidentally hit a birdhouse with one. I was Melba's favorite target.

Sneaking back inside was no big deal. The dinner cleanup was done, and everyone was inside watching television, assuming I was still upstairs with Melba. We left some mud behind, but it didn't seem to matter. I followed Melba upstairs, beginning to look forward to changing my clothes.

"Lily," said Melba, turning around when I reached my bedroom door, "see you tomorrow at four for Chinese Checkers."

"Of course," I said.

The next day at four Melba was not there. There was a note on her door that simply said, "Gone to Paris. Thanks, Melba." Nobody could believe it, except for me.

I hear from her every now and then. Last week she sent me a new pair of boots and a postcard.

## Possession

He wasn't a famous victim,  
no movie-star, writer, or artist,  
not even forced to sing like a crow.  
Just a doctoral candidate  
in times that chewed up Americans  
for signing a petition,  
shaking the wrong hand in a photo.

His dissertation rejected,  
he drove a cab with my father.  
The two talked, my mother frantic  
when Dad walked home at dawn,  
high from Dostoevsky, Marx, Homer.  
"You've got two small sons!"  
she raged, afraid.

When McCarthy finally crashed  
like a heart-shot dragon,  
the two cheered the hearings  
as if the World Series.  
"You'll get your doctorate now,"  
my father clapped his back  
to encourage a clean-up batter.  
Leo shrugged, mumbled about "Time."

When Leo disappeared,  
"Back to Moscow," another hack joked,  
my father decked him,  
knuckles smarting, heart hurting  
that Leo hadn't trusted him  
or that McCarthy's bony fingers  
had snatched his friend  
from the Tail Gunner's  
still dirty grave.

*Robert Cooperman*

## The Lover

most people capture the blush of Spring  
in calendars and collectors' plates...  
with picnic summers, cinnamon falls,  
and winters warmed by holiday lights.

Their memories are photos of comfort.

i worship the breath of dying lilacs,  
swollen strawberries bleeding sun,  
burnt fields under steel clouds,  
the pale rose dawn of February...

the heavy green sky before lightning,  
January frozen mute and blue,  
chimney smoke in fragrant rain,  
white butterflies by the roadside.

I worship moments too ripe or nearly dead

when people grab for pictures of memories,  
cling to music and maudlin wine...  
shout out poetry in desperation,  
turn on the lights and make love.

*Cait Cerridwen*

The Meteora: Northern Greece  
for D.

In the twelfth century  
in Thessalonika  
after practising death in a dream  
monks ascended  
the huge stone pillars  
carved by an extinct river  
and walled themselves in.

Plague fires  
burned in the body  
dumps. The only smoke  
that reached them smelled of wax.

But that's over. Today  
the one they've left as a guide  
with egg in his beard  
and a rash under the hair  
on his neck tells you, "No  
the female animals go . . ."  
into his ark of masculine darkness.

Inside, under smoke-blackened roof-beams  
by faltering altar light  
bits of broken tile compose  
the stylized, gilt-haloed faces  
of Saints. Drained  
by history's meaningless pain  
they look up to heaven and weep.

As we leave through the cramped vestry  
I notice how the skewed windowpane  
frames your thoughtful figure, warped  
by glass, leaning  
against a waist high wall  
the wind in your hair, listening  
to the distant music of goat bells  
and the sound of water running under the ice.

George Amabile

Last Name

As if it were a cooing stone,  
I kept the name you gave me.  
As if it propped me upright  
until I stood  
comforted by letters.

Banished with my cigarette  
to an unlit deck  
in the hissing rain,  
once, after dinner with friends  
& too many glasses of Beaujolais,  
I whispered  
*Your wife, yours yours*  
so that three thousand miles away  
your eyes would widen,  
you'd look about.  
Smell of woodsmoke  
& me crouched on slick wood  
furious  
that I remained stupid as a gosling  
imprinted with the monotony  
of your name & sad.

When you came back  
from the other side of the continent  
I always knew.  
I clung to the ocean  
as if the Pacific were a bed I hung  
onto the edge of.  
Monstrous salmon finned silver through sleep &  
you  
loomed close, closer, filled the whole dream  
until you were within  
arms' reach  
& I'd wake cold, wet with sweat,



regret  
for the hug  
that never came.  
For which I am grateful;  
then I could at least simulate  
dignity.

I look at the name now  
& its letters are voiceless, without power,  
a shaman's pouch behind  
museum glass.  
A fist-sized black rock, a sand dollar  
shaped like a cross  
love letters I save  
for a granddaughter still unborn.  
Nothing special about this stone,  
no cadence of spirit whistles,  
no fossil runes  
just hard minerals  
for building.

*Zoë Landale*

## Unphone Call

The Bell Corporation  
spends millions making  
dialing easy.  
But my brain,  
not knowing what  
blinding call-forwarding words  
to say into your call-waiting  
ear when I hear the soft click  
of you raising your sweet  
princess phone,  
fills my head with the acrid stench  
of burned-out circuits  
and keeps me, trembling,  
from even picking up the phone  
every time I don't call you.

*Richard Calisch*

## A Thousand And One Nights

Col. Terence Hazelton, retired. At least his eyes are.  
And his nose and heavy jowls, as though his picture  
taken back in military school has been the victim  
of some vandalous graffiti freak.  
Lives by day in the cloister of his room  
wrapped with shields and spears and twisted knives  
and snapshots of animals and long-departed friends  
hanging from the walls to nourish him.

But night is when he breathes,  
beginning with his evening walk under the dying sky,  
the martins still soaring through the red of it.  
And as he walks, imagines he's on battlefields  
of smouldering shell-pocked earth, trees stripped bare  
and occasional rigor-mortised men and horses.  
Walks like a march – the jutting jaw, the riding crop,  
defiantly kicking each skull in his path  
and scornful of any soldier who allows himself  
to be mulched in the mud.

Of course there are those inarticulate nights  
of webbed wings against the moon  
when his landlady of vanilla skin  
is a magnet that draws him clumping through the halls.  
She of the tea leaf readings and imperfect dentures  
and coat with its fur half worn away  
waits in her room for the rattle and clank of him,  
smiling at how he'll toss his trousers on the chair,  
place his boots convenient to leap into  
and see that his pistol is never out of reach.  
And how he'll sleep until the fog of morning,  
this great connoisseur of old legs  
and the degree of sag in various woman features.

And nights at the bar of the Hamilton Hotel

where the pillow-bosomed ladies beyond their prime  
smile auras of blue smoke between their teeth  
and stretch out their fleshy arms to greet him.  
He relives his battles as they sit there,  
waving his invisible sword to massacre the air  
as he recounts in intricate detail wild episodes  
that rouse their fading memories of living.

But sooner or later tears from his boozy eyes  
accentuate the ruins of his face –  
conduct unworthy of army officers, retired.  
Finally he drifts outside again, isolated as the moon.  
Metallic leaves clatter the trees above him  
and waddling raccoons mimic his weaving course  
as he wanders back to his wooden halls again  
to bang and plead at fair landlady's door,  
though on nights like this it never opens.

*John Dickson*

Finale

It was the sudden cancellation  
of following through  
to some resolution  
not left here waiting  
with the ferryboat gone  
and maidens trying to  
capture a look before  
binding stage fright  
exposed numb weakness  
wandering toward the  
flown neighbor's lonely  
gothic emptiness  
over the back fence  
someone who loved words  
is gone for sale.

*Joan Payne Kincaid*

What Remains

Now, the history of days  
has been carried away.  
What remains is a mood, a long tone,  
the empty wash of wipers  
in a smooth rain.

I'm back in San Antonio,  
looking at the places where we met.  
I walk along the river that flows  
beneath the city like some ancient Roman district  
and I remember a brick,  
a curved shadow from a bridge overhead.  
I remember the mixed scent of you and this cloudy river  
filled with mud and refuse,  
the sweet air of popcorn and peanuts and cotton candy,  
the heavy faces of dark-skinned vendors  
hawking their wares.  
One looks at me, waits for me to go past,  
and then begins his cry again.

I'm lost. A policeman directs me back the way I came.  
Here's the tree planted in 1811.  
You touched the bark lightly, afraid you'd hurt it.  
Here's the broken step where you almost fell  
in the water. I remember, you cried out.  
I caught you.

Once we drove six hours,  
south from Dallas, to the ocean.  
We named great birds out loud.  
We thought of sixty-three,  
but I can only remember four:  
Sandpiper, crane,  
pelican,  
condor.

*David Rothbart*

Places

For Bill Hennessey, 1947-1994

Sometimes in the throat,  
Sometimes behind the eyes,  
Or in the tight muscle under the ribs,  
The core of grief lodges.

Is it possible to speak to a man's soul  
By sitting behind his classroom desk,  
Or wandering the football field  
Where he coached,  
Or imagining him at the xerox machine,  
Or the mailroom,  
Where, just last week,  
We'd paused a moment to talk shop,  
And cancer

Is this possible,  
In all those places where he sat or stood,  
The halls he walked with long strides  
In the realm of fluorescent lights,  
Or the inside places of us  
Where knots of tears  
Now gather at inconvenient times –

Will some alien God  
On some deep imagined planet,  
Some darkened star,  
Turn in space to point the way,  
Guide us to the unknown sphere  
Where we can speak,  
Finally,  
The words we really meant to say  
At the mailbox and be heard

For, Bill,  
We hardly knew you.

*Donna Pucciani*

They Are, They Always Have Been

Poets are mythological creatures  
training themselves to reimagine history,  
the medium through which reality  
reshapes itself. The Empire  
is always available for consultation, defining  
"culture," defining "progress," defining "loss."  
So goes the crowd to execution, the meeting  
to which there is no end, and the poem  
will not fail them now, for works  
of art shall never die, as  
old as craftsmanship the rhetoric of  
the craftsman lies sleeping in the framework  
of imagination, soon another generation  
will discover plain carpentry  
and delight in the mirror of the past.  
Words shall not lie idle in the One Mind  
who planted them in Earth, of course  
there is struggle and those who take  
The Name in vain, but there  
is a River, there is a heritage  
through the misty lookingglass of time  
and transformation where spiritual forebears  
parked their dusty vehicles, where  
they passed the last of the wine  
around before they verified  
the clarity of their purpose: this  
is classical music, my child, listen  
to the rain beating on tin roofs  
and dogs barking  
and the song of the flute.  
Soon another artist shall stuff  
the green of the valley  
into an anonymous battered suitcase,  
soon a nightingale shall arrive  
from Memphis with more  
passionate poetry.

*Errol Miller*

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## Contributor's Notes

**James Barnett** - Is a former Chicago Public School teacher, editorial assistant, and punk rock musician. He currently makes his living selling meat over the phone.

**Richard Calish** - Was a high school English teacher for thirty years. He is the editor of *Tag Lines*, and *Those Who Can, Teach*, in-house arts magazines of the high school district where he is now Coordinator of Programs for Talented and Gifted students. His poetry has appeared in *Blue Unicorn*, *Stray Bullets*, *North American Poetry Review* and *Whetstone*. He also has two books: *Somehow These Things Are All Connected*, and *I've Been Away So Many Lives*.

**Michael Carrino** - Has an MFA in Writing from Norwich University, has been published in *Hudson Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Poet & Critic*, *Poetry East* and others. Has a book out *Some Rescues*.

**Cait Cerridwen** - Is a happy, eccentric Northeastern graduate who is pretending to be normal in order to land a job as a language arts teacher. She will celebrate her first real paycheck by buying leather underwear.

**John Dickson** - Published in *American Scholar*, *Poetry*, *Hammers* and *Willow Review*. He also has two books of poetry *Waving at Trains* and *Victoria Hotel*.

**Robert Klein Engler** - Lives in Chicago. His poems and stories appear in *Borderlands*, *Chronicles*, *Hyphen*, *The James Wright Review* and *Kansas Quarterly*. He is author of two books of poetry, *Adagio* and *Situations of the Heart* (Alphabeta Press).

**David Gardiner** - Is working on his doctorate at Loyola University, and studied creative writing at University College-Galway in Ireland.

**Roger W. Hecht** - Has an MFA in poetry from the University of Arizona, and has been published in *Bakunin*, *Camelia*, *ONTHEBUS*, *Puetro del Sol*, and other magazines. He is currently working on his Ph.D. in Literature at Syracuse University.

**Laura Allyson Hickey** - The one thing I can say has been a constant in my life is the need to write. I owe a lot of spiritual contentment to those who have recognized that need, and are always trying to help me develop it in every aspect, be it college tuition, kicks in the ass, encouraging words, pots of coffee, or letting me see sides of their personalities that will stay with me always.

**Daiva Valeria Karuza** - Is a student at Northeastern Illinois University currently pursuing a Masters in Community and Family Counseling. Daiva also has a Bachelors in Art from NEIU. Her poetry has been published in various publications in English and Lithuanian. She currently sells insurance for a living and is looking forward to a career in the mental health field.

**Joan Payne Kincaid** - An eclectic writer and former opera singer, whose topics include everything from world situations to a typical day in her life as a wife, mother, pacifist and activist for animal and human rights.

**Zoe Landale** - Is working on an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia, and has published her third book of poems, *Burning Stone* (Ronsdale Press).

**Errol Miller** - Has works published in: *Rhino*, *Wisdom*, *Tomorrow*, *Oyez Review*, *Fuel* and *Caliban*.

**Robert A. Nilles** - Fifty-three year old BOG student at NEIU, with an emphasis on Literature, who has been a banker for thirty-four years. He is presently working on a novel and a short book of poems.

**Michael Paulson** - A recent graduate of Brown University, who works in Providence as a free-lance writer. He enjoys Star Trek, soccer, and the spectacular autumn foliage of New England.

**Donna Pucciani** - Has taught English, music, humanities, and women's studies in various secondary schools and colleges in the East and Midwest. Has had poems published in: *Prairie Light Review*, *The Paper Bag*, *West of Boston*, *South Ash Press* and *Karamu*.

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