

# BORDERLANDS

TEXAS POETRY REVIEW



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## Editorial Note

*We learned so much, this you know well:  
how, gradually, what could not be taken away  
is taken. Peoples, countrysides.  
And the heart does not die when one thinks it should,  
we smile, there is bread and tea on the table.*

—Czeslaw Milosz

*Philip Pardi  
Amy Schrader  
Fall 2004*



## A Backward Glance: “MS Doings and Undoings” of Walt Whitman

Walt Whitman (1819–1892) needs no introduction to readers of American poetry. His influence, in fact, extends well beyond our borders. Oscar Wilde visited the aging Whitman in Camden, New Jersey; Pablo Neruda translated his work into Spanish; and Iraqi poet Saudi Youssef invokes, “Walt Whitman’s beard filled with butterflies.” Closer to home, Ginsberg famously spotted Walt in a supermarket, and Ezra Pound grudgingly made his peace with him (“Let there be commerce between us”). More recently, poets ranging from Charles Wright (who describes his lines as “the odd marriage of Emily and Walt”) to Yusef Komunyakaa (“The skin’s cage opened but you were locked inside your exotic Ethiopia”) to Mark Doty (“I hope this finds you. I know you’ve been bothered / all century, poets lining up / to claim heritage”) have continued responding to Whitman.

Though Whitman published eight separate editions of *Leaves of Grass* during his lifetime, a number of poems never made it into his ever-expanding book. “In Western Texas” is one such unpublished, undated, and perhaps unfinished fragment. We also publish here an early and discarded draft of part of “Song of Myself.” Both manuscripts are part of the Walt Whitman Collection, archived at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, where they were recently featured as part of “20 x 20: Twenty American Poets of the Twentieth Century,” curated by Kurt Heinzelman.

—Philip Pardi

In Western Texas  
the prairie & oak openings—  
the mesquit bush  
\* pecan tree  
& prickly pear,  
and the spread of the  
land <sup>for stretch</sup> carpeted with  
flowers

## In Western Texas

the prairies & oak openings—  
    mesquit bush  
    & pecan tree  
& prickly pear  
and the <sup>far-stretching</sup> ^ spread of the  
    land carpeted with  
    flowers


## In Western Texas

the prairies & oak openings—  
    mesquit bush  
    pecan tree  
& prickly pear  
and the far-stretching spread of the  
    land carpeted with  
    flowers



## [All Tends to the Soul]

As procreation, so the soul—if procreation  
is impure, all is impure,

As the body, flesh, <sup>graft,</sup> growth, brain,  
prune  
this  
grab so the soul,

All tends to the soul As materials so the soul

As procreation so the soul<sup>^</sup>—if procreation  
is impure, ~~the soul~~ all is impure

~~What materials~~

~~All is tends to the soul, and to that  
which follows what is called  
death~~

As the shadow <sup>concurr with the body</sup> follows the shape  
of the body so the soul  
and has the shape of the body  
and comes not unless of the body  
so the soul concurs with the  
body, and comes not unless of the body,

As materials are, so the soul,

As experiences, ~~thefts~~ childhood,  
maturity, suffering, so the soul,

As craft, lies, ~~thefts~~, f adulteries,  
sarcasm, greed, denial, avarice,  
hatred, gluttony, so the soul,

As the types set up by the

are faithfully returned in by their impression,  
what they are for

~~printer and whatever they mean and  
are, so all you~~ a man's life

and a woman's life is returned in the soul,

before death and interminably  
after death

## [All Tends to the Soul]

All tends to the soul  
As procreation so the soul  
As materials so the soul—  
    if procreation  
    is impure, all is impure

As the shadow concurs with the body  
    and comes not unless of the body  
    so the soul concurs with the  
    body, and comes not unless of the body,  
As materials are, so the soul,  
As experiences, childhood,  
    maturity, suffering, so the soul,  
As craft, lies, thefts, adulteries,  
    sarcasm, greed, denial, avarice,  
    hatred, gluttony, so the soul,  
As the types set up by the  
    printer are faithfully returned by their impression,  
    what they are for  
so a man's life  
    and a woman's life is returned in the soul,  
        before death and interminably  
        after death

## What Everything Could Be

Everything must be better than it really is.  
A young couple carelessly makes love  
on top of their neatly made bed. They find  
one clear moment, and afterward they feel  
like they are the only animals on earth,  
breathing and staring into each other's eyes  
in silence. Long minutes pass before she says,  
*I wonder how long I'll remember this.*  
He has no answer. Forty years later, she is  
dead and the question moot. It must be better.  
The ambivalent loons that disappear beneath  
the still surface of the lake must invent a world  
better than this one in each murky dive,  
must become birdfish waving feathered fins  
and soaring down toward swimming prey.  
Beauty must be a dark world as much as it is  
a bright one. Imagine the lines of people  
that met in bright sunlight on ancient Attic plains.  
Imagine the silence between the lines beforehand  
broken by chattering teeth from each phalanx.  
Melancholy may very well inhabit the temple  
of Delight, the wild West Wind may sound  
the trumpet of a prophecy, and I may be  
an organic harp. Yet I continue to grow old.  
The music of the spheres may be a great symphony  
of unbroken silence: void, more void, a crescendo  
of void. The pinpricks of light against the black sky  
may be the eyes of cold, distant gods. Somewhere  
there must be music. Somewhere the lights must be  
going out. When I was nine, I told my mother  
how I had struck the devil's head while digging  
in our backyard, how I had beaten him back to hell

with the shovel's face. *You did? Well, that's good,*  
she said, smiling. Then she sent me back outside  
to play, to work, to make clouds bloom in the sky,  
to watch the ground for sprouting horns and flame.

## Lesson of the Elements: Fire

When he was a young boy, the pyromaniac  
would light the heads of his plastic army men  
and then become the flame that ate downward,

melting helmet, rifle, canteen, and boots,  
until he was the perfect disc of swirled green  
and black on the driveway pavement.

But tonight he cannot become the flame  
that he starts on the burn ward of the hospital.  
Tonight he can only talk to the flame.

*You could burn it all clean, motherfucker.  
You could make something new out of fresh ash.  
You could be the end and the beginning.*

The pyromaniac's words are ours.  
Our words are *Ilium* and *auto-da-fé*, *napalm* and *Nagasaki*.  
Our voices are like the tongues of flame

atop toy soldiers. We utter words, and they consume us.  
We become the swirls of fiery stars  
that litter the cosmos. We want flames

to rise like the screams of victims or like the body  
of a god ascending into heaven. We say  
*Alpha* and *Omega*, one and another word of the fire.

## Before a Tree, After a Tree

A tree falls in the Florida dark.  
All the people rise & turn their engines  
over. Everyone must go to work.

Where have you got yourself to, Jack?  
I'm sitting in Hartford with a bat  
scared of the door, haunted by telephones.

Listen, why don't you take me fishtailing?  
We'll find some beer & snow & spin around  
the supermarket lots.

Come north, Jack.  
I'll find you a bed & drugs & some  
old computer to beat on.

Come north, Jack.  
Leave your lady her overgrown lawn,  
running thick with rabbits.

Come north, Jack.  
Before a tree falls across a dark road.  
Before you rise, before you work.

## Splinter

The train speeds through a thinning forest.  
Illness threads his intestines.  
The long-suffered chain of sores  
slowly tunneling through what length is left.  
He haunts the glass, looking like the least  
of himself. His bones, reflected sticks.  
His hair, greasy string. Closing his eyes,  
cradling his guitar against the gaunt  
melancholy of his body, he imagines  
that Picasso has made him. He pretends  
that a sweet surrounding blue receives him.  
That all sorrows are received. If not by canvas  
and paint, then by some greater sorrow.  
Opening his eyes to the glass,  
he sees himself, greasy string, loose sticks.  
But he thinks *Maybe these sticks are a forest,*  
*flying past and diminishing. Maybe I am,*  
*or soon will be, this quiet clearing,*  
*this rising, emptied space.*

## Marker

In this train car, a press of bodies in strange embrace and a voice sprung loose from its listener.

People may or may not begin and end with their bodies.  
But questions of why we are here and what after  
are questions for other men. I ask, Where? Is this where?

At the windows, people sit, looking blankly through.  
One man slouches in his seat; his slick hair greases the glass.

We are all marked, by time or want or deed. I am marked  
by vacancy. What cartographer can chart the vast immensity  
between here and here.

Out in the rush-hour traffic of feet and need, there is a fleeting  
sense of moving with or near. A swiftly departing peace.

Some exile has occurred, some mutiny.

## Motel Aubade

The sun invests five empty bottles  
with a hymn. The light has followed you, the light  
loves the burial mound you have become—

Gideon Bible bent on your chest, finger  
up to the knuckle at the place  
where night lost out to the same light

that laces the dream scene on your lids,  
solo finale, red web descending. The light  
over the shoulder of these hills, the light

surrounding your queen-sized bed and peeling  
back the quilted roses. Now the light  
on your face, the rush of water, the quick steel. The light

moving on to a field of Black-Eyed Susans you missed  
when you checked in. The light picking out two men  
shivering at the bus stop, the light loose

on the world. You move to the window,  
the light already losing interest.

## Above 10,000 Feet

small white and pink stars  
    alpine flowers  
and the spiny gray-green  
    leaves of purple thistles  
closely cup the thin

soil, so dry the air  
    yet springs run down  
the lava rock, everywhere  
    melting snow from  
still-virgin patches, stark

above the tree-line, as  
    scar tissue sealing  
old wounds  
    how the body  
responds to shock, the

empty tombs of glaciers  
    that scoured furrows  
down the mountain  
    flank: rough-hewn  
tracks of icy mammoth

## Kingdom Come

The last day comes on a spring afternoon.

It's a small 1940's neighborhood.

Through an overcast sky, the sun's yellow thread makes the frame of pastel community at once dismal and vivid. You observe the day of reckoning as if from a chimney at the edge of town. From the small quilt of oblong houses and grassy lots, people rise.

They are pulled from their tasks and diversions, face-first into the air. A man lifts from his push-mower. A delicate lady flies out through the drapes of her upstairs window. Town square empties as the blue space above topiary trees fills with little human figures. Boys and girls come off their bicycles, fall upward out of a tree house. Automobiles and toys look awkward and forgotten. A woman and child sail over headstones, the first to twist out of the grave. Each body is surrendered prone in the air, a simple smear of color drawn up through a cloud-break where Jesus, arms open, stands revealed in a streaming nimbus.

That was the end of the world, rendered in watercolor and hung above my grandfather's door. A picture done in the minimal stroke and tertiary color of his own world, where he knew he might one day waken to a world of quiet presentiment, a soundless house on a cleared street, finding his wife's glasses and laundry basket dropped in the yard.

Without wonder or dissolution, he would walk out the front door, look upward, and wait.

## Poem Newborn

My word will be *Avis*  
even in sleep  
fierce and yet blank as an  
apple cheek  
and pungent  
I will repeat as you breathe  
and like your name  
*Avis*  
I am a white bird  
bearing a word.

## Dark Messengers

—after “Los Heraldos Negros” by Cesar Vallejo

There are blows in life so hard—I don’t know!  
Blows like God’s hatred; as if the backwash of  
everything suffered  
were sinking a well into our soul.

*I don’t know!*

They are few but they exist—opening ditches  
in the harshest face and hardest back.  
They might be the horses of the barbarous Huns,  
or the dark messengers that death delivers us.

The precipitous falls of the soul’s Christ—some  
adored faith that fate blasphemes,  
those bleeding blows—the crackling  
of some bread burning at the oven’s door.

And man—poor, poor man!  
Turning his eyes, as  
when a slap on the shoulder stops us,  
his eyes crazy,  
and all of his life wells up  
like a puddle of guilt in that gaze.

There are blows in life so hard—I *don’t know!*

## Drought

Imagine a season  
of just having woken,  
staring in irritated dumbness  
at the dragonfly  
who delights in irritating  
the trough of scummed water,  
who leaves us  
diagonally, her legend  
torqued in the gelled air,  
as she escapes  
through heat's essence,  
through the will  
of nothingness imposed  
over all who must stay,  
staring skyward  
through the dying willow,  
bone nets of summer exposed.

## The Traveler Is Remiss in What She Packs and What She Leaves Behind

*They said, while still they might, in mutual words  
“Goodbye, dear love” together, and together  
The hiding bark covered their lips.*

—Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VIII, 717-719

Felix Bannerjee told her over coffee  
The light that falls on the Phrygian hills  
has a separate, unequalled quality  
spills as shiny coins filtered through laurel boughs,  
olive, mulberry, ash and white beech  
as he threaded his dark fingers through her pale  
pressed and rested their web on the formica.

That was January, with its frigid claws  
embedded sharp in those sallow earthen cheeks  
weaving such people together in tangles.

In July, a lone traveler crests the ridge  
no need for map, compass, orientation  
the ruin risen above marshland for miles.  
Underneath the knotted oak and bearing lime  
(her translation read “linden” for “lime”)  
she throws down her pack, draws a Marlboro, breathes.  
Sun leaks wet through spare gaps where the branches meet.

Felix Bannerjee was right, the *lux* is sweet.  
It dissipates the smoke, land, and traveler  
all without root to bear hospitality.

## Nana Bell's Parallax

Go on, sonny, take this to market  
purchase me a new pair of eyes  
the ones I've got aren't cutting it.  
Make them blue this time  
Cerulean ladies see clearly,  
so they say.

The rain appears to fall up  
the morning glories bloom in the gloaming  
and I can't find my man  
though I hear his voice through the walls  
hear him ringing his bell for soup  
and I bring the tureen to find our bed  
not where I expect it.

But for all that, I sense there is still body in this life  
I still taste the blood in my lips  
feel the weather in these bones  
hear the gospel of honeysuckle and pomade  
smell the ozone and asphalt on the other side of afternoon  
showers.

It's just the vision that gets me, boy,  
the vision gets me every time.

## The Surgery

Today her father shampoos her hair, gently, a blue basin on his  
knees  
and her head in his hands. Her arms lie stiff in their deliberate  
T, never  
leaving horizontal with the stitches. Tubes drain blood from left  
and right

dorsal side, and occasionally pus seeps down. Slowly she is  
falling  
asleep, Mother having brought a clean towel, the fire still riding  
on top  
her ribs. Bearable, she thinks, bearable. There is less inside her  
body.

It was simple: a map on each breast by black marker, skin,  
scalpel, gauze.  
More gauze. There was *reduction*, yes: the gene, cheated. Even  
now, she  
feels as though something has been returned to her. Her father's  
fingers move

easily round the bulb of her head. Here, since she is good and  
flat  
on her back for ten to fourteen days, she recalls separately the  
boys in junior high,  
goes through them each with the eidetic flourish of a  
calligraphy pen, settles

on Stace McBremen, loops falling from his stupid name, his  
seamless  
name, his face she remembers with the scar above the lip from  
football, tawny

hair, how he said to her in Home Ec, against the marmoreal  
cupboards, measuring

spoons lightly in her hand, *You know, you could be a porn star  
with those.*

There wasn't space to pull away, to pull back the puffs of baking  
soda falling  
to the floor. She rolls, almost to a dream, through the girls in  
junior high,

tying a burgundy ribbon to the ponytail of appositioned Megan,  
Eun Jin,

Kirstie, how they eyed her risen skin, told the others what older  
sisters

had said in excellent secrecy, *Any more than a handful and a guy's  
just*

*being greedy.* Not enough, they whispered in corners, the word  
*whore* flitting

against orange lockers. Today, her father squeezes the last of the  
suds from

the ends of her hair. Her eyes are closed, so she does not see the  
bubbles spill

into the basin, prettily desist, how her father's hands contract  
and expand

in the water. Small bowls reposition. He is giving her the slosh  
and turn,

ripple of the pool that washed her. It will soothe. She hears it,  
even under

the lamella of stillness. She will forgive him bodies, this girl  
dozing, her blood

slipping down. She'll think of his hands in her hair a year later  
when he is gone

from them. When he bundles up the pregnant woman, headed  
for Des Moines.

## Invocation

Not for your own sake  
but the body  
a pulse, a lung

I hold you in  
one breath

See            touch  
the bruise  
the skin  
proof

we live

## Meditation

For that which is generative  
You be the iron        I the ore

You the blue flame  
tapering blue night

Stasis  
Silver coin with no currency

Render that silver spark  
Kinetic

Make me rise out of body  
without indifference    hungry

## Same Animal

In the desert with Kate  
we felt our evolution,  
felt our bodies  
still-being-blown, sifting.

We'd hold our  
hands up at the end  
of days and say *see*,  
*still here*, proof

we still had to hold  
onto each other.

After the coyote called  
from the rock next to the rock  
we were trying to fall  
asleep next to,

after the coyote sloped  
down the rock face  
and stalked past our camp, after  
we'd watched him,

I touched my ears  
and said *see*, *still here*, proof  
that we still needed to listen  
for what was wild,

and she shook her head,

and she opened the tent  
and crawled, fingers curling to  
the pebble, glancing back to see  
if I was the same animal.

## Bird Story

She says this one's butterfly bush.

*Is it?*

Yeah, trim it back and flowers all season.

Neglect is the best care for cosmos.

Do you prefer the brown bread?

Then you're sure to have a boy,

an eyelash in the finger bowl

a fingernail split on the keyboard

and typed under quick as a wink a row of B's

Bishop Kennedy and milk gems!

I'd been on it a couple weeks and I had this dream,

this bird that was always so mean I had this dream

she was my friend now. And I woke up so happy,

I thought, today's the day! So I went down

put my hand in the cage. And she bit me so hard!

She had my pinkie and I was screaming,

it started bleeding and when she did let go I just cried

for two hours, I cried. That bird had hurt my feelings!

And that's when I knew it was time to get off.

## Ode to the Mouth

Like a piñata, your mouth bursts into laughter.

Like a house, it grows still.

Your mouth of reeds bending across lake water.

Your mouth of psalms, not hurting anyone.  
Dusk rouged, jukebox'd and Byzantine.

Your mouth of sitars, rooftops and swings,  
wing-tipped windows, blue bicycles

and boys running through fields with flashlights.

The architecture of your mouth, an avalanche  
brimming with flowers.

Your sun-smelled mouth.

Hummingbird,  
healing the color of who's suffered.

Like something forgotten  
staining my body.

Your mango'd mouth,  
the Pharaohs knew.

## Falling into Briars

In hell it is difficult to tell other people  
from other people, or to tell anyone  
your secrets. Just as it is hard to tell  
where smoke begins to mix with breathing

during a foggy afternoon in North Beach.  
I got so excited during all this looking down  
at pinball machines, paintings, and maps—  
I caught my eyes pop, as we watched

for the table with outstretched hands,  
and fell hard for the floor. I have a confession.  
I'm a teabag Catholic, and I was praying for us  
to break the high score, or at least a glass,

just so we could do something together  
before we left neon red in our rearview.

## Listening to Bach

—for Jack Everton

In the unaccompanied partita, nothing is random when your ear  
tunes to  
it. You see no chance in the cigar smoke forking air where  
pizzicato  
densities compress the molecules smoke eases through assuming  
all the

postures of creation. Nothing is random. Not opening the door  
to listen  
under stars when suddenly the strains of a mole cricket pitch in  
under  
ground. He delights his mate to distraction. His pattern is to  
know

something is sure to drop in from the assumed sky. Like  
listening to  
Bach and seeing the candle flick to the music, it has something  
to do  
with air displacement. You can relax now. You were never in  
control.

## The Candidate

—after Norman Rockwell

Lately, his life is divided into trains,  
which is where he sits now,  
decompressing from the speech,  
remembering that sprung moment  
when the audience  
applauded, the one he likes to call  
money in the bloodstream, that brief  
expansion—footstep in  
the puddled nucleus—when all his pores  
released their confetti: in that moment,  
how many selves  
were distributed, haphazard, like campaign  
buttons on the street? Years ago, his first wife  
complained, *you don't  
embrace people, you stack them like sandbags  
against your loneliness.* And it was true.  
When he met another woman,  
some of him remained alone,  
and he began to believe that once  
the self is broken,  
it continues to divide, like a dab  
of mercury, which may explain  
the way he copies himself  
in leaves, that absurd, homesick feeling  
he's developed towards his own body,  
the feeling,  
when he's looking in the mirror,

that he's looking at the stars, or how later,  
in the sleeper, disguised  
in the tidal brilliance of the television,  
as he watches, with the sound turned down,  
himself give the speech,  
all pixel and glow, like a man  
reduced to his chemistry, he feels  
even then  
the audiences' gaze upon him, like ropes  
tied to a blow-up float in a parade,  
as if he were a Trojan  
horse, or a Chinese Dragon  
with a dozen men inside. Once,  
watching cartoons  
with his son, he saw a cat,  
frozen, step from a walk-in freezer,  
then shatter  
into a hundred shards of ice which,  
when they melted, refigured the cat's  
image into a puddle  
on the floor. I'll represent the people  
with a single mind, he said tonight,  
though he couldn't help  
but think of his son upon his lap  
that morning, like a cup poured  
from the pitcher  
of himself, and how he yelped  
when the terrorizing mouse  
stepped forth, hoisting,  
was it a paintbrush? No, a mop.

## Acoma, NM

I wanted to go to Acoma, but the pueblo was way up in the sky. I wanted to climb the cliff road, but the people said stay away. I did not deserve the silence of great heights. I wanted to be a tourist, but my feet said I was born in the desert. I wanted to go to Acoma, but the painting in the postcard held me back, the marked path of invasion erased long ago. I wanted to go up there, but stayed away for years, my brown skin refusing to turn darker in the desert sun, my rough Spanish changing gradually to a miserable croaking, the sound of someone destroyed by not being able to climb the ancient roads and alight to the level of the burning star left flaming there by Coronado and his men five hundred years ago, fourteen of the conquistadors thrown off the cliffs when they reached the top, the people waving their arms at the falling bodies, watching the rocks take apart the first animals who tried to sing the same songs the people knew by heart.

“Acoma, NM” appeared in *Borderlands* Number 22 with a typographical error, for which we apologize. We reprint the corrected version here.

## Nude on a Carousel Horse

Which drive comes first?  
the urge to divest oneself  
or the longing to leave  
trodden soil behind?

A circular argument.

You might as well put on  
green pajamas  
and lie masquerading  
as a field of corn.

Yellow kernels. A carousel-  
horse begs no grain  
from a feedbag  
to sweep a lady off her feet

if she stretches her fingers

toward that golden ring  
for the one last ride:  
seat on a fleshless horse  
that just keeps running.

## Vespers

—for V.

Five-thirty and the crickets  
are already out—November  
twilight crowds in through

the winnowed elms. My old  
Chow's claws click on slick  
hardwood, signal the growling

appetite, constant as her yelp,  
undiminished by the years  
of splintered tooth and bone.

She guzzles at the water-bowl,  
each unlikely lick spattering  
the bleached skirting boards.

Outside, night is filling the sky.  
The generator's mosquito-hum  
briefly quietens a red birdsong.

I look up the meaning of *vespers*,  
find "Four psalms, a capitulum,  
a response, a hymn, a versicle,

a canticle from the Gospel, litany  
(*Kyrie eleison*, *Christe eleison*), Pater  
with the ordinary finale, *oratio*,

or prayer, and dismissal." She  
will go south soon, escape  
the confines of this fading

daylight, to another latitude,  
on a chart known only to her,  
red, quiet and roofless.

## Hope

Sounds make a song,  
there is no one to sing.  
It does not matter where you belong  
as long as your lungs  
are filled with free air.  
All you know is that you've been born  
alive, you are airborne  
and bear vestiges of your early life  
with grace: umbilical hernia,  
nearsightedness, two traceable scars  
on the scapulas  
left from the wings.

## Songs from Far Away

When I arrived after so many years,  
I was afraid he would be angry or disappointed,

Find me at fault, but he said, *You're here!*  
With more joy than I have ever heard

In my life. It was as if the force field that separates  
The living from the dead, lifted long enough

For me to hear his voice, so that I could know  
He loved me & knew me, his mother. I've never

Heard the dead before or since. But I wonder  
If they are always talking behind the glass,

Full of joy for us, if they are in the trees, swinging,  
Smiling, saying live, live, live, & on this side

We hear birds,  
Songs from far away.

## Talking to Animals

Before the sun went down, a turtle lifted his body,  
almost standing, to show me the thick black Maori

markings drawn on him, underneath. Then he lowered  
his shield over his head, & sunk down in the lake grass,

disguised. A Hummer went by, like a tank, the driver  
talking on the phone, a warlord on a walkie-talkie.

A trio of ducks: black, mallard, white/brown tried to cross  
the road, & I said, no, there is nothing there for you;

they quacked, but went back down the hill. Further on,  
a river of tiny ducks tried to cross the road, heading

toward the wheel of an oncoming car, but they swerved  
together, an S, a ribbon, like riders on a roller coaster,

just missing disaster, running fast as water to the lakeside.  
Safe. When a dog tried to cross traffic, cars coming both ways,

a woman pulled into the emergency lane, opened her  
passenger door, & the dog walked right in.

Another woman walking fast on the sidewalk, talked  
on her phone, ignoring me, & I looked down, saw a baby

mouse curled up, night eyes passing me, & stepped  
over his gray body folded in a prayer.

## Waiting Out the Hailstorm Beneath the Underpass

About the time it changed from marble to golf ball size the people began to trip their flashers and pull over.

They packed in bumper to bumper in the shadow of concrete piers and, big eyed, opened their doors. They could hear it thudding down. They could see it splashing into deep puddles. What a crowd.

A newly wed couple who had yet to change from tux and gown into their bridal suite clothes. A cowboy with a tobacco tin jammed in back pocket. A family whose little girl was crying and the boy had a heart-shaped birthmark on his cheek. Joined by a gold sedan that rolled up slowly, tossing spray like a dog shaking itself. The rear window was jagged edge. The hood looked like craters of the moon. A man sprang out and studied with the others what fell from black boiling sky. He was good looking, tall, with a tense oxford shirt and slacks, perhaps a quota-busting salesman or a Congressman who had been out chatting with rural constituents. He sighed and ran his hands through thick hair like he was plowing up a field. He brought the hands down and slipped off a wedding band. He looked at it, spun it mildly in one palm, then put it into the slacks pocket.

“I was on my way to Albuquerque,” he said

beneath the echoing shelter as if that explained  
it all to everyone—the weather, the reality of him.  
He got back into the golden car and drove  
away and someone said, “I think it’s starting  
to slack off.” They looked discreetly  
the other way as the bride and groom kissed,  
celebrating the coming of blue sky, the sun  
burning up all those puddles, the piles of hard  
white ice turned to slush then completely gone.

## Ode to a Toaster

It is not true  
Edison  
invented you before  
the light bulb,  
though who knows?—  
thermodiffusion,  
as from a switched coil,  
is less complex  
than incandescence  
if less  
ancient than fire.  
You were my first  
gift to myself,  
costing not less  
than twice  
what you now do,  
and yet  
I have lived  
without  
your apple-cheeked kind  
going on  
thirty years.  
Now  
my father is dead  
I will say he never  
knowingly  
told a lie  
though he spoke sometimes  
of Edison as his  
contemporary,  
promoting  
for thirty years

the Power & Light's  
electrification  
of rural America  
and from time  
to time  
of you  
as the world's first  
small appliance.  
He kept  
after my mother  
died  
their old GE  
four-slicer,  
a fire hazard  
with its worn cloth  
cord taped  
all the way down  
to its antique  
unsealed plug  
but which still turned  
each slice  
a just brown  
right to the end  
when I gave it to Goodwill  
along with his  
Reddy  
Kill-O-Watt  
tie clasp  
and matching cuff links,  
things which had come to seem  
too odd  
to go on finding  
places for,  
as is the way, perhaps,  
with radiance  
and the things it raises  
to the power of air  
or light.

## Escape Route

To cut off one escape route  
the Christian king could take,  
the Circassian pasha commanded  
his castle, boasting at that time  
the only chained library east  
of Rome, to float out lengths  
of chain-link mail across  
the Bosphorus, for the books had  
told him of tensile strength.  
The king's ships didn't make it.  
He lost his head. The castle  
remains, a tourist trap, its  
library still in place, minus  
a few books, yes, but also  
a few chains. *Root*, by the way,  
is how I pronounce r-o-u-  
t-e, not *rout* as they do  
where I grew up in the  
greater Middle West  
where every road seems  
on its way to or from  
a battle like Marathon's  
although you can't know  
any of this reading this  
silently as you are if you  
are reading this in a book  
(or on a screen even,  
scrolled down so many  
times the title's lost  
in any case and, with it,  
what I'm getting at).  
This time the route did

became a rout but not  
for the books. So, listen.  
How many times do things  
work out like this for books?

## #51

so far, so spring  
of mediterranean light

sprang it's leak  
into my outsides again

happenstance of rain abates  
define a man's world  
again into my look-see  
of so-called experience

in a word can a word  
about the sky wheel bats  
into the half life  
i reel beneath the palms

standing just outside my heart

## #62

i wake in dead night  
from the other side of the city

a muezzin's whisper in my ear  
i try to hold his note

drowned now by wave  
now lonely hydraulic  
of my clock strikes me  
manmade as his word

now by hiss of passing car  
suddenly the thunder  
with its ever presence  
anchors him to the world

so does this

## Photographer's Statement

In this series of photographs for *Borderlands*, which I am calling "Photographs Illuminating the Song of the Soul" as a reference to Walt Whitman in this issue, I strive to illuminate the spirit of the musician through the art of photography. More than a passion, I dedicate much of my time and energy documenting the musicians around the U.S. and Central America. The images seek to remind us of the power of music in each of our lives and, ultimately, the impact music bestows on the world.

The long list of musicians in my collection continues to expand. Please contact me for a personal viewing ([www.brendaladdphoto.com](http://www.brendaladdphoto.com)).

Many thanks, many blessings,

— Brenda Ladd



*Brunious Brother, 2000*

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*Abbey Lincoln, 2002*

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*Marva Wright, 2001*

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*Little Richard, 2001*

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*Danilo Perez, 2002*

---



*Celia Cruz, 2001*

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*Betty Carter, 1998*

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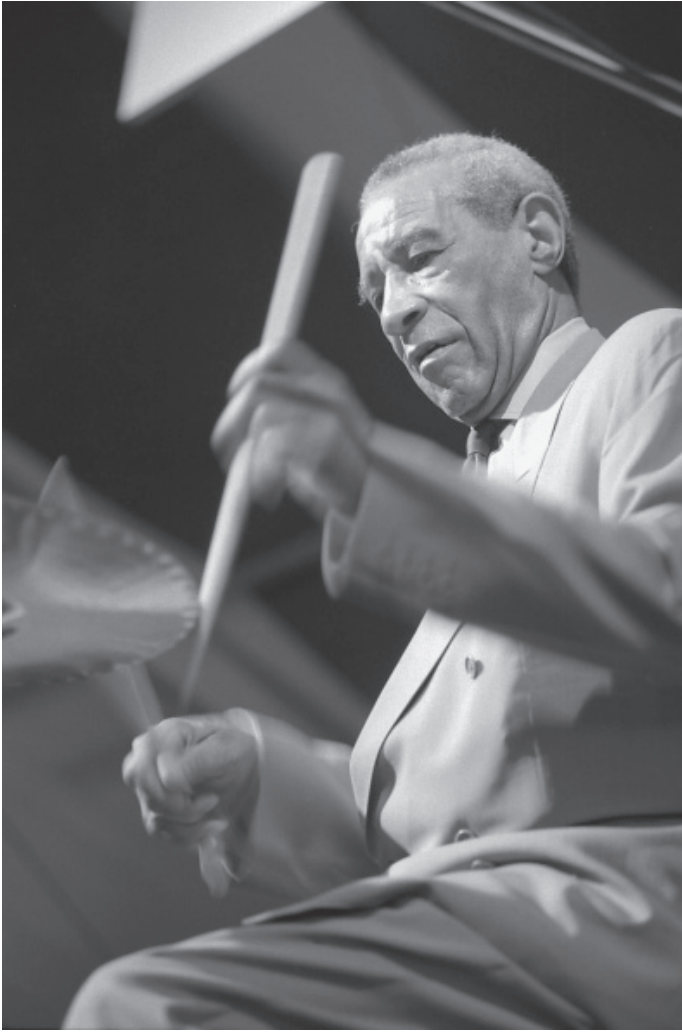
*Boozoo Chavis, 1999*

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*Angélique Kidjo, 1999*

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*Max Roach, 2001*

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B. B. King, 2001

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*Michael Ray, 1999*

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*Sharon Martin, 1999*

---



*Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown, 1999*

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*Sting, 2000*

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*Jimmy Scott, 2001*

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## Agon

New data indicates there is much  
new data, as in, winds strike north  
and south: *ice, ice, ice, ice*, inlets  
unknown to the hot equator. Antarctica:  
study indicates ice thwarts light  
thwarts greenness of sea. Algae  
unable to flower, birds abandoning  
nests to forage for debris. Berg of  
potential. Island of nothingness  
a stay against the living's frenetic  
symptoms. Calved, the ocean's  
quietest predator snakes the black  
channels driving back darkness,  
wounding what it was made from.  
Report predicts climax canceling  
food webs, strata, ships like after-  
thoughts, canyons littered with ice-  
bitten heirlooms slinked through  
by fish sensing their inertia. No flood-  
tide, earth-wall, whale crew to divide  
the white wake. Claims article,  
*Here, it is always winter*: unresting

winter of glacier, winter of cliff,  
endless season of obstructed  
torrent. Adds further, *iceberg*

*endeavors to drop off*—sheets of ice  
borne out toward tundra—*succeeds*

*in increasing size*. Bay-locked  
stasis worn but self-repairing.  
The berg, a mantle of rock and water;

water and rock a continuum building  
and tearing the age it can't unfix.

## Song for the Catatonic

*(He spent two years carving his self-portrait before doctors released him.)*

Because the tree became him—  
fallen among the upright. Because the apple wood  
split in two. Because its rawness drew him,

in un-reason we saw reason.  
Because the knotted waist twisted like intestines,  
tangled blight dividing trunk and branches

like the illness that addled  
his mind. Through cinnamon and rot he hacked—  
shaving the wood, slashing the chest (like his)

cratered with tuberculosis.  
His making marked progress. It pleased us,  
this rigidity, this transformation, the pair of arms

fixed in the perfect expression  
of self-restraint, incapable of causing harm:  
Tear the mouthless face! Tear the incapable-of-

breathing-seeing-saying-face!  
He whittled because we watched; became the tree  
when we didn't. He coaxed music from branches—

the long-held notes and sudden  
staccato rising and falling like the unsteady  
score of thought. We found it beautiful,

because he carved from sickness  
a body to house his mind. He worked  
till there was nothing. Nothing.

## this good petal stepping

through 2:30 thick walking into dim  
and she peel steps like petals

rain falls cool on umbered trees  
and moon slivers still low the clouds

her eyes asleep find restless turning in his crib  
and coo to soothe to reassure and reassert her now presence

the books say argue describe articulate prescriptions clinical  
mothering  
and warm armed she raises restless into her arms wearing his  
2:30 blues

is that thunder? is that a metal? is that a rumbling concrete  
wetness?  
and moon slivers still low the clouds

restless teary soft to salt fat cheeks sweet  
and chortle voice trembles less to her coo warming

this good out of covers moving naked to announce warm her  
now presence  
and through 2:30 thick walking into dim into soothe to reassure  
restless

this good sleeping broken to fall warm cooing to soothe  
and wear restless up out of his turning up out of his crib

this good petal stepping  
and chortle voice trembles less to her coo warming

good mother arms wear restless sleeping restful  
to low the moon sliver back above the clouds

## About Glass and Pleasure

This is all fiction. Most of this is a fiction. There were no women playing bunko and the children were all at home asleep. The men played poker and the women played bunko. It was just like the evening news, except without the confidence and with a lot more diapers. Both groups relied on textbooks to explain the games they were trying to play while eating salted Spanish peanuts (from Georgia), and sipping alcoholic beverages responsibly. There was an expectation of orderliness. Nobody wanted to appear uptight. One fellow wore a dark smoking jacket and jokingly put pomade into his hair. In the middle of the house at a table listening to meticulously planned music. He changed the music often. They talked about their women and children in between hands. Some of the men had no children. They all chewed on cigars and posed for a digital photo in the middle of a hand. A few objected to the suspension of betting for such a self-glorifying group activity, but high bet was stuck at half dollar so nobody objected while they all leaned in to squeeze their faces in the frame of the photo. Most people don't really have much to say about the books they read or the movies they see or the paintings they look at. One guy says he wants to quit his job as a freelance marketing consultant to become a banker when he turns forty. One guy remarked on the chair that was in the shape of a very large hand. There is a forty-foot waterfall that runs down one side of the domed house structure and dumps into a swimming pool underneath the house that the master bedroom looks out on through floor to ceiling glass window panes. At night there are blue and green lights that are turned on to make the waterfall mysteriously visible and the glass window panes that look out on the pool from one end of the house also look out on the side of the hill the house is built into and this always reminds me of the life-like diorama room at the museum of natural history in Los Angeles that I went to as a small boy. I can

almost see the feelings of happy confusion I had then watching hairy mannequins stalk a stuffed mammoth. I would like to come back to this house someday when the owners are not around and take a nap on the mountain side of the glass.

## Music for Piano, Four Hands

I stood in the kitchen, water, water  
everywhere, cupboard door fallen,  
plates broken, we cried,  
          sugar   spilt   oil    spilt.

Music was there,           tremendous,  
beautiful                 oh blonde fury,  
it's about *that* day,       *that* one,  
          bear witness.

One night Rayleen got drunk, fell asleep  
with her glasses on                 fell  
asleep in her car,                 fell asleep,  
          no, no,                 through the windshield.

Rayleen, who left a box of oranges on my porch,  
Rayleen, who braided my hair, Rayleen,  
who wrapped my wrists, Rayleen,  
          who held me when I seized on the flightline.

I read it in a magazine when I was twelve—  
a girl buried alive, straw in her mouth to breathe.  
I haven't felt right since, haven't felt what rang  
          out, what rang out *that night*.

We wasted so much time. You pruned  
the pear trees, set the sprinklers, lit  
the smudge pots as the boy stepped  
          down   stepped   down



## Idiot Savant Caught by Surprise in a Lonely Time

I hope I hope I have not lost hope  
watch wait woodpecker wood  
thrush up the telephone pole  
in the garden on hands and knees  
await the evangelical fire  
meaty thumb olive oil anointed  
spirit-filled mud mulch  
like a mink collar circles  
the Rembrandt tulips.

You perch in the Russian olive tree wave brown branch  
speckled wing lovely wing your mouth stuffed with berries  
pout of ripe snowberries folded and folded in your secret  
pouch a flag a rhizome in your mouth dangles its thick  
red root we are rendered for a moment breathless we  
are rendered without speech we are rendered.

I believe everything sleep with pictures  
of saints under my pillow I *Hail Mary*  
I *Our Father* thicket compost prune  
dig water measure slick segmented  
worm handsome bee hosannas  
leafscud eggshell leftover  
breakfast my kitchen's  
salty crimes I carry the seeds  
to you in my hand I carry  
them in spite of beak in spite of bite  
and sting in spite of winter and wife.

This is how you sing warble peck caw this is how you  
wake to find me your voice your spine against my  
spine that travels a V in the southern sky this is how  
you sing this is how you drop the berry into my mouth  
this is what you promise this is what you carry and I  
could no more hold you than I could hold the sea  
when it enters my back door I could no more contain  
you than I could contain the sudden dazzling lilt.

## Maybe Go to the Sea

It is an unremarkable time, day by the sea,  
but for the novelty of his standing

feet from the fenders and the hood.  
These are the things that shine in the sun by the sea.

And the lone tick, tick engine radiating upon the gravel of the  
turnabout.  
There is nothing else, nothing but his hands in his pockets.

There are waves and there are cars  
and each, in their rolling near, lose themselves

to the great and beautiful currency of sound. There are gulls.  
There are no gulls, it seems to him,

but perhaps in the pearly margins of his view.  
From the great currency, in currency still,

another car pulls in and settles  
behind him. Inside, incidentally, is his mother

and, though unaware, he thinks of her then,  
that, *in one or another of our dreams we must have kissed.*

She scans the things outside her windshield, squints,  
lowers her window to her lips to say,

*and less than that*, an impulse itself lost to the great currency of  
sound.  
Then window toggle, toggle up.

He thinks nothing else this day by the sea  
but often remembers a news report from their

far away home country, famous  
in his mind for its coastal plains of gray house-dust.

The village poor, it seemed, had migrated to live with the wicked  
against the coastal hills, to build dust pan shanties,

to steal electricity, to forget their jungle osprey,  
to create themselves in the image of the street,

to accept, overhead, the city osprey, and police themselves,  
as with the punitive burial of the gasping thief

whose hand they left to stiffen above the dust. And there was  
nothing  
for miles through the news camera, but the thief's wife standing

somehow above the hand and among her neighbors  
and the reporter asking her to tell us what she feels.

He wished that day things were better and wanted to tell  
his mother of the categorical human sadness he felt,

wanted the private sadnesses each kept to merge there,  
onto the dust from which came the ad hoc streets

and the desire to build.

He wanted to lift the particular edges of their wishes to that  
dusty light

and witness the glint together, and wonder,  
and be so joined as he felt himself to be

with the wife slightly standing and with, regrettably,  
the reporter who carried the paved world on his shoulders.

And yet, there is nothing of this by the sea  
though his mother's love had, whatever else, been constant

such that the fact of her passing one day would hardly rip  
a place for itself in the arched, blue dome of backdrop

this love had made of her  
above the sea and the cars.

Hearing now his engine quiet, he turns in time  
to see his mother's car pull away and follow its own business

which suggests to him, rightly, that none of this is his problem  
but only his donning of the complex

and ambivalent natures  
of his new nation and its age.

## Riverside Property

The traffic light turns and I walk. Somewhere  
a circuit is thrown, a humming  
down the inlaid ropes, the wound  
cable-ways under us.  
Bus schedules are written.  
Zoning is written.  
Water treaties are written.  
It is five twenty-three in the morning.  
The next light turns and I stay.  
Elsewhere an elevator is releasing, yes,  
somebody's new sweetheart. The sidewalk  
comes in six colors, street cleaners  
are in their last sleep. Their tankers wait  
to make a rain of lumen on the streets.  
Weather is written.  
From an alarm radio  
the national weather service is speaking.  
It says: serving Central Texas  
it is cloudy, the temperature  
is sixty-six degrees,  
and the pressure is thirty point one  
eight inches and dropping.  
A new light turns—a kind of blueness  
seeping among the high stands of yard grass.  
I step past the cedars in the sidewalk  
and under them a kind of blueness.  
It's now so very, very early,  
in the moment a run-away spaniel will decide to go home.  
City property leases are written.  
In the station houses  
fire men are handing their shiny boots  
to the next fire men.

Shift schedules are written. On Sunday  
an upper ridge of high pressure will turn  
into Central Texas then move east  
across the Mississippi River valley.  
The light turns a thin green, pale light  
the color of cold ocean water where seals swim  
and I keep walking because she has died,  
yet, I've learned nothing,  
but I will praise the economic miracle.  
Public assistance budgets are written.  
The strategies of retirement fund managers are written.  
In the old folk's homes women like her  
are still pulling turds from their patients' hands  
at seven dollars to every hour and somehow  
mail carriers are sorting our envelopes  
with few thoughts of thievery.  
The city works, madá, and I will try  
to lie less and these days I'll praise  
the public works that make me feel  
I've been fore-thought. The wind  
is coming out of the southeast at fourteen  
miles per hour  
and I'm walking at the loose hems of the city  
where the river turns down its face  
and then down again.  
I've a doppelganger  
for you—Pelusa,  
or wisp of lint I met in the free Chile.  
A woman your age who,  
in her exile, learned German and Swedish  
and led the reading of poems across the Nordic snow.  
She did this while escaping Pinochet and Nixon, and behind  
them,  
growth and the economic miracle that turns  
my traffic lights now behind me  
and maintains each cedar that drops its pollens  
above the waiting sedan fleets and truck fleets.

I nominate Pelusa because she made love  
with a proud and beautiful gay man on a small island  
of the Río Mapocho that would shortly carry  
archbishop Juan Alsian's body,  
munitions ridden, on the eighteenth of September 1973.  
I second and third Pelusa's nomination  
because she and her man made love in the previous night's  
costumes,  
because about themselves and in the world  
they changed nothing and made nothing.  
Borges says all the books in the library  
are contemporaneous. Then, are all the bodies on the river  
and all the souls that leave them by way of fun  
and bullets? And where have I left you? If I invoke  
Pelusa for you, will you both leave me  
and be on your way?  
This is the hazardous weather outlook, day one:  
no hazardous weather is expected.  
I know you loved your stern father.  
I know you loved motorcycles and bicycles.  
I know that for the sake of your own ride around the block  
you talked a boy out of his pants  
and left him hiding in your skirt behind a pear tree.  
I've been telling that one a lot,  
proud of your forgetting, thinking  
it's like Pelusa and her man forgetting,  
for the sake of what moved them,  
their sexualities and what might flow  
down the river any day now.  
But it's probably me. Madá, my mother,  
my river buffalo, my ruined  
black wig I wear and wear and wear,  
my first NO,  
my prime YES, my archive,  
I'd like to be remembered,  
but just now, I'd like to not remember.  
When you died I slept in your bed.

I dreamt I was dying right there,  
on your comfortable pillow,  
my legs between the slips of cotton.  
I noticed the pillow and the sheets,  
I noticed it was me, I noticed  
that I was noticing and I began to move  
on a dim anger, like an iceberg suddenly breaking  
into green water. I didn't know  
even in death  
I'd be left to form an opinion.  
The traffic lights are turning  
for those of us in the city.  
I should only say, You're gone and we are fewer.  
I know you smoked Pall Malls.  
I know you loved to swim.

## The Vow

—after Jack Gilbert

Justin, it should have been your trumpet that lasted.  
Should have been the diamond stylus and the 78s.  
But it was not. They were the music  
not the journey. It could have been your Army enlistment  
but that was time beginning and time ending.  
Jen and Keiden lasted. It was your newness,  
newness each time they slept and each time they woke.  
It was the good poverty of serious love.  
It was those nights playing Parker's "Donna Lee" that lasted.  
Your promise to play it faster than Clifford Brown did  
the night before he died. Not that you've stopped  
playing, but how those winter nights  
you did play. The same tune for hours into a sofa cushion.  
On your knees and bent over it like a ritual  
to bring back the dead. January rain against the rooftop.  
Cheeks the size of coffins. Some nights we'd watch  
the Southern Pacific pass and flatten our pennies.  
The boxcars mostly empty and open. Moved so fast  
you could see ghosts of the planing mill on the other side.  
The debts from three states did not last. But whispering  
"Saint James Infirmary" until Keiden fell asleep lasted.  
How Jen moved from room to room rises in you still.  
The brass bell of the Willamette River singing  
through the valley. It is not about the music.  
Music and the rain tap against the window  
but only for a while. Before Clifford Brown stepped  
from that Philadelphia bandstand into 1956 forever

he said “I really must go now, it’s so hot.”  
Those nights you made a vow to the beautiful.  
How you practiced. How you praised. How you burned.

## Treatise on Nostalgia

Whatever turns my head on  
and revs it up tonight won't rest;  
old lovers as fodder for fantasies  
on insomniac nights, a shard  
of something sharp and dirty lodged  
in my foot, deeper than skin.

Tonight it's drinking cold gin in bed,  
smoking with Nils while it rained,  
going out together later to watch  
the worms scrawl the question marks  
of their bodies all over the sidewalk.

Nostalgia is just selective memory:  
a teenage girl's night on the boardwalk,  
stolen beach party kiss in the dark  
without the bad breath, without the contagious  
cold sore, without someone else's  
illegible phone number penned on his chest  
in eye-liner above the five hairs  
surrounding his left nipple.

*What's Happening to Me?*—  
the title of the book my mother  
handed over without a word  
to explain adolescent changes;  
a step-by-step guide to hormones,  
body hair, anatomical sketches  
of boys becoming men, was liberating,  
was too late, confirmed what I already knew:

we all grew slowly ugly, the way Stefan,  
the ancient bartender at The Holiday  
Lounge on St. Mark's Place always  
got drunker as the night progressed,  
claimed to have known Auden. By nine,  
he was singing in Russian, lecturing us  
on love's uselessness. Just twenty-one,  
what did we know then of people  
that were broken? The worst story we heard

was from our college physics professor,  
whose wartime job was testing blast force  
on windows—the impact portion  
of the Manhattan Project, though at the time  
he didn't know it. Imagine him surrounded  
by empty panes, diamonds of shattered glass,  
diligently making precise measurements,  
oblivious to their uses.

## Prayer for the Neighborhood

Four generations live in the neighboring house;  
I can see the picture on their TV dancing  
from my kitchen window—we're that close.  
Most days I watch them overflow out the door  
to sit in a running car with deflated tires  
and talk on the cordless phone, fight in private  
with a boyfriend, pass a careful blunt around.  
This block is lined with defunct Chryslers,  
Caddies and Fords resting on metal rims—  
the big American parlors of Nalle Street.  
No family Bible, no couch, no coffee table;  
just a bench seat, sometimes heat, and a stereo,  
windows sealed shut and clouded with smoke.

The helicopter from the hospital down the hill  
kicks up dust and dead leaves as it lands,  
drowns out heavy doors of those cars slamming,  
the blaring rap from the halfway house radios  
one street over on Dice. Halfway from what?  
Broken things? Promises. Windows (since boarded up).  
Men with child support to pay, deadbeat dads  
halfway to back-on-their-feet, hang out  
on the porch trying to freestyle louder  
than the helicopter. And their kids  
who think pillow forts are safe inside,  
who hide when they come to visit,  
whose exhausted mothers yell *Clean up  
the goddamn cushions. Say hello  
to your father.* Pillow forts  
complicate the furniture, complicate  
everything. Wing And A Prayer

on a throw pillow. One Day At A Time  
on a throw pillow.

I wonder if all the neighbors dream  
of singing like last-chance contestants  
on *American Idol*, really belting it out  
beautiful, the way you can in the shower  
when nobody's home, like Aretha or Usher  
or some super-top-dog amateur R&B star  
from *Showtime at the Apollo*, whose picture  
flickers across our sets silently, open-mouthed,  
voice replaced with crickets in summer  
drumming their legs together, and in winter,  
with the train's whistle out and out. Bless this  
dusk punctured with thumping bass, two women  
laughing wildly in that living-room car,  
the neighbors watching *Charmed*, fucked-up father  
raising his arms toward his kid for a hug, helicopter  
settling down in the emergency bay, gurney rushing out  
to greet it.

## Near Uvalde, Texas

Cattle stand at the side  
of the road and stare at me,

clumps of cacti and short  
tough trees.

Oil derricks bend over  
as I pass (the idea of it)

orange dust  
and a song about loneliness.

Nothing to be inspired by but road,  
and this promise: keep going.

At the rest spot two kids set up shop  
in a Cadillac—steam from a steel

bucket in the front seat, the human smell  
of tomatoes. *¿Quieres tamales?*

they ask, tuned-in  
to my hunger.

I tell them no, an ice-cream truck  
passes—

the air is both flat and prickly.

## Tenth Circle

—for T. D.

1.

Your riding boots were soft and scuffed  
like silver spoons or schoolgirl's socks  
pouring all the way up  
to your knees, they cost too much  
Eclipsed sun: your undershirt  
And I, sitting across from you knew  
you'd stolen my boyfriend for a week  
But we didn't mention it  
we were nineteen  
and oh-so-full of melodrama

2.

I cannot see how decades later  
You've been sick for years, almost died a few times  
and my family has forgotten me

3.

At nineteen we lingered laying  
our heads  
on Moroccan stones, orange and blue  
of a café table, our espresso cups  
sticky as newborns' fingers  
and you told me

your mother once pushed you down the stairs  
She said you fell and after that  
you were your own private avalanche

4.

As if you chose a somersault of self-mutilation  
over love.  
I'd like to know about baby formulas:  
Hold me, rock me, bring me home.  
Is there some fatal math, where a mother's wish  
to kill her child  
really works? Years later it solves  
down into zero  
or solitary one?

5.

We drink what's offered.  
But children like us,  
We are wishbones. Break us and find luck,  
We always do.  
War made Akhmatova a poet  
Dante came to her  
Asking after her muse.

6.

Paradiso, my friend, paradise

## Corazon

night sinks within  
the nightingales  
glass lamps smolder

shrink and expand  
resonant like  
a cello's voice

dances the  
rampant  
gallop of fury

low circular  
passages  
to the underworld

capillary roots  
tangle the vision  
sunday school

cherubs whisper  
*Jesus can you  
hear me*

my high-cheeked  
gypsy sweeps the  
puddled image

arouses the wind  
drives night downhill  
carving triggers for the sun

## Artist's Lantern

—for the *Konstantinows*

Tall pole  
swings the

prismed mind

earth torched  
crucible of madness

igniting thought  
limned perceptions

a pen a brush  
working the ineffable

chaos forcing order  
upon that chaos

twin journeys of solitude  
tension transition

drawn onto the field  
color tongue

conjurer and settler of nights  
the sacred thread courage

bewitches the ruptured world  
releases its fugue of light

## Dog City

Only once, lost on our way to Jack-in-the-Box,  
did we find the unfinished office tower,  
a rumor on campus like the lab monkeys on LSD.  
But it was true: a wolfhound paced under construction lights,  
having painted nose streaks on the lobby glass  
& littering the cement floor with dozens of dried turds.  
Spotting us, it trotted over with yellow eyes  
& yellow teeth, its tongue hanging tired green.  
When we tapped the glass, it snarled & punched  
the window so hard with its snout the thick pane shuddered.

Yet someone had slipped inside & spray painted  
red letters by the elevators: "Dog City."  
We wondered if the rest of the rumor was true:  
there was a skateboard kid who'd tamed this dog,  
purred its name, slipped it bones, trained its paw to shake.  
But he'd gone too far, double-crossed the basement dealers.  
Now he rode his skateboard with an empty sleeve  
rolled to an elbow stump. For the rest of the semester,  
we could swear we'd just seen him across the campus plaza.

## Hypermnestra

Spying through stained-glass windows  
to the garden of clipped branches below,  
I recall my wedding night, the bloodbath  
nursed in secret from seed to the pact  
my sisters kept and I broke: to at last  
shoot our husbands with ten pistols we passed  
to each other like young ideas wrapped in cloth.  
Our final plan had each man bleed to death,  
but in the fifth hour, I, the last wife,  
ducked out. Rather than squeeze away his life,  
I slept—deaf and curled—under 450  
thread-count sheets, his breath on my neck. Only  
forty-nine died. Lynceus lived.

I once caught him eyeing me while  
I chopped piles of tomatoes and basil  
and watched him shake as he permitted  
a moment of wonder and dread.

He doesn't know for certain  
I will not change my mind.

He must know that I am resigned  
to this servant-filled world. Besides, when I  
remember the bangs on mom's  
front door during Sunday brunch, and the fumes  
in Claire's eyes as the police officer  
pushed her into his screaming squad car,  
and when I remember Julie's hurled insults  
like *sell out, chicken shit, and it's your fault*  
as the bailiff removed her from the court,  
I know I am no longer part of their chosen punishment:  
water jars and sieves.

I look through this screened door and tell myself  
that a castle is worth separation  
from my lost sisters, one kind of prison  
for another, and justice made my screen  
with a much finer mesh.

Lynceus rises, moves a bluebell  
from one bed to another, and I tell  
myself that my children's children will grow  
to decapitate their foes and it will make life  
worth this sacrifice.

Now, in this empty prison house where vines  
climb year after year over endless brick,  
I am left with the loud memory of silence  
where the ring of a gunshot should be.

## The Dictionary of Need

### **Blackwater:**

A urine stream of lymph and dead blood cells,  
forecasting upcoming fatality.

**Usage:** *At first no one knew to fear Blackwater,  
but now having buried many who'd been fine  
at breakfast, I can find no peace.*

### **Cluster-Heat:**

Infants become the very embers of fever.

Black clouds form each afternoon;  
lightning ignites the highlands.

Static snaps the nursery  
as nineteen red-faced babies  
kick and whimper.

### **Mortal Shame:**

Your dispensary cabinets rattle like gourds.

Patients, accustomed to your clattering lack,  
agree to leave unhealed.

***Pharaonic Misfortune:***

Everything in Job, and most of Exodus.

For when all things fall to mold,  
and mildew informs every wrinkle.

For when you find yourselves just grease  
and bone,

In need, not Eden. Ashamed,  
but still unwise, still naked.

## In Pecos

### 1. Earrings

Clean light picks out each cactus spine.  
Mama snatches earrings from the truck dashboard  
so she'll look dressed up as we reach the door  
of the only Mexican restaurant.  
By some magic, she does; greets the cook,  
the lady with toothpicks who takes the cash.

### 2. A Life

Billy Bass holds hard the Christians  
who looked down on him for selling liquor,  
bought their whiskey out of town. Those people  
have watched too much wrinkled tin and sun.  
From her childhood, Carolyn remembered best  
a tarantula on the road, moving fast.

### 3. Wind

At the State Farm Insurance building, hedges  
are shaped for an eighteenth-century garden.  
Wild plains circle this outpost.  
Wind whips bushes, the canvas awning  
of an abandoned Dairy Queen. Sky  
is so big it goes back to the last ice age.

4. Outlook

Mountains can rescue, more so than religion.  
Rock can be draped in colors so hazy  
you might have imagined their existence.  
To be sure, you look sharply southward.  
One day the mountains are clear stone blue.  
You keep that prospect for life, as proof.

## Water Mirage Near Saragosa\*

Whatever lives on a shimmering thread,  
coming, going like a dragonfly  
on the road before us, flashing lake-silver,  
leaps like an animal's freedom,  
the twitch of an eyelid, pulsing arch of rainbow  
from irrigation lines poised like insects wingspread  
across the horizon.

That vision in slow time becomes a towering  
wagon-load of lumber, or a family with watchful eyes  
escaping through dust to California.  
When they stare from the rusty window,  
they're like us, warm-blooded,  
with stubborn faith in the bright apparition  
above hot asphalt, wide water and mountains.

\*The town of Saragosa, Texas, was demolished by tornado in 1987.

## Autobiography of a Body

—for J. K.

Presence masters, in-steals, then heels with a leash called  
    *Inconsolable*;  
unmoved, it cleaves a harrow turning, churning fallow fields  
    down.  
I rise. And drown  
in hanging tight bright bags of cherry-red mourning, an  
    intimate drip dripping into mazes  
in vein while lashes  
dwindle; hair spindles, twists into dark cross-hatched mats that  
clog the drain for days.  
Best be quick, chart fields of forget-me-not skin nick, nicked  
    with thick-lipped  
unsheathing breast-pocket carvings made  
to spell, sur-vi-val. And forget the familiar lines of my woman's  
    form; time;  
and time before  
I am shorn and shorn and shorn and shorn and shorn. Then  
gone drug-numb in hazes  
that blanket the reef. I strain. It retreats. But sand-ebbs, tide-  
    turns, and anguish  
re-learns to draw its sharp knives.  
So—day by day—an early winter comes this way. Shadows stay,  
    dandle and draw night  
near. It's a hard rain;  
gulls cry hyena-harsh in prayer. There's an earnest scent of ice  
    on the air.

## Pigskin

Fumble, and it's half-wit  
barn-hands trying to tackle  
the pig—it slips out from the  
belly, can't be handled  
without finesse. The baby

glossed and not breathing until ankled  
upside down and slapped on the ass. A sour-milk  
stink like outdated candy  
from the chocolate store I worked  
at that went to fatten hogs

in Illinois. They'd shove IV's full  
of corn syrup, Coke—glucose high and I swear  
that's what got those athletes fainting  
on the field. As 4-H Club kids they bred  
their stock for the State Fair. The girl

across the street produced a two-  
hundred pound sow and later one  
of her own. At school, the fetus arrived  
in a formaldehyde-filled plastic  
bag. We were to dissect—first the piglet's

underside through the intestines. Nervous  
system by the end of the week, we slit  
along the spine, the skull. Some joker  
sliced from ear to ear, peeled the face  
off, pressed it mask-like against his. Porker,

swine—the thing can scream and will  
when its legs are tied. At the Fair, it's wrestle

a pig and take it home. Rain, and the turf  
becomes slop. There goes Chester,  
Buttercup, weaned from a bottle.

[untitled]

like ants on  
a discarded fruit

sons, daughters,  
mothers, fathers  
friends

bones  
packed in pits

*for thirty years  
we picnicked here*

## Jean Toomer Down South

—for M. S. S., and his own peregrinations

Pine needles on the ground bent beneath his shoes, as he walked into woods with their rumors of Juju men; the cane-juice made him dizzy. Sharecroppers from their cabins discerned his color from the chalk and brittle songs of the white folk, yet they saw his plum neck-ties and heard the punctuated beat of the city in his speech. Jean had passed for white in New York: skin the color of bleached-dry corn husk, and hair combed straight. Each evening, the sawmill would close, and the sweetness of lumber saturated the coolness. Then the young women would sit on their porches awaiting their lovers; women, dusky and humming, with rounded thighs and breasts full of nightwebbed rivers. They were like afternoons that push away the sun. The men drank, and by coal heaters, grandfathers narrated the Diaspora of time, bumper crops, girls who ripened too quickly, and the knife-fights. Once, while sitting on the steps of his lodging, Jean heard a man singing far off:

*There's a basement with a window where the light's all brown;  
there's a basement with a window where the light's all brown,—  
sometimes I sit there all night when I feel like I'm gonna drown.*

The new journals from New York became wind in fields of tin-cans and rats rattling bones. Where the nymphs had abandoned London, where Helen was a ghost on the pavements of Manhattan, Jean felt the flowers in his blood blossom, and heard the spirituals, tasted the wet air at dawn, and the region was like a brown nipple at the mouth of that poet.

*There's a basement light with a window . . .  
cause a man can't never drown . . .*

And one twilight, while walking back from the woods, he saw men huddled round a bonfire by the sawmill. Fermented cane in a bottle, faces all his color, yet lit up by red firelight. They noticed him and invited him to a drink: the city boy who spent his time writing. Yet there was never a poem he wrote about that hour, while he spat and gossiped work and women with names like Karintha. For a while, he belonged; and like his companions, he would swig at the bottle, shake his head then guffaw, tasting the smoke in the liquor, and all the while savoring it.

## Compression

Lisbon in the 1920's: the baroque façades of buildings dating from the blood and silver of colonial expansion have become heavy, on the point of imploding. During a drizzle, Pessoa eats his plate of liver and rice at a tavern and writes on loose pages from an open file. The omnibus makes its rattle, yet the beaches of Estoril with their cafes serving platters of sardines, bottles of tart red wine, are the smoke and flash of summer: a season that always seems distant, even at the start of May. Better to stay in and write, after unbuttoning one's collar and putting away the blotter and ledger.

Outside, the sun burning off the haze colored like boiled mutton; Pessoa looks up from his page and notices that his plate has been taken away, yet his white napkin remains crumpled by the wine glass. Through the window, an old woman in a black shawl sweeping the sidewalk; it looks as if she could shrivel any instant into that skein of moth-eaten cloth. Her husband owns the tailor shop occupying part of the ground-floor of the building erected during the glitter of the Empire; a miracle that the structure survived the great earthquake. Like a palimpsest, the tailor's sign is discolored by the stains of what was another sign advertising a tavern where sailors drank after returning from the tropics, their teeth black, and their faces red. Debris, withered flowers; Pessoa feels that malaise whenever he ponders time and human institutions. He thinks: Should a waiter place a glass of milk beside me, it would curdle instantly.

And at that stained wood table, he jots down an entry for his *Book of Disquiet*; an observation on his atheism of nationality and social egoism. It is the briefest yet, and by legerdemain of the right simile, he is able to sum up his works, his childhood, paving stones and spectacles in three lines. Had it survived, and had he time to reread it, he might have stopped writing, knowing that he had written the key, the true word.

His waiter is polite to the point of being meek. Pessoa, though, is oblivious to him, as he starts a new poem on a clean sheet of paper; beside his glass, crumpled paper, a sheet with a crossed-out line, and another page with that entry. . . . True, it briefly shimmered, made his skin tingle, yet has now been forgotten until he finishes a few strophes. The waiter clears his throat, picks up the napkin, inquires if he can take the goblet, and clear the trash; Pessoa waves his hand impatiently. And an hour later, the sky outside the window reddened with dusk, the street completely dry, and the tailor shop locked, Pessoa puts away some pages, without noticing what was thrown away, and would be tossed that night into the blue-hot flames of the incinerator.

The haiku suggests that seventeen syllables are enough to transfix a season, cherry blossoms, the ochre of a fountain apprehended through dark water, and all that is transient with a few images, yet each effort, as Issa penned, is a writing in dew in order to describe a world of dew. Without any success, I have sought what might compress the immutable and the quotidian in a single dactyl or juxtaposition, yet all of my poems are botched.

Somewhere, on a neighboring block perhaps, a poet has been writing, documenting the jacarandas and wasps, sunlight on stucco, and the empty parking lots of my city. He is carving an image of my loneliness, and with each poem he attempts to incarnate that truth by way of one poem or word. One night, he dreams of speaking to a man dressed as a clerk, with a pointed chin, thin mustache, and round spectacles. He doesn't remember a word, but awakens the next morning intent on writing, on resuming the cycle, the reams upon reams of lost or burning paper, those revelatory words that have gone, like a puddle drying, and leaving no stain.

## On Blaney Road

Séamus  
Was the boy in school  
Who taunts me still,  
Down all these years  
From primary to now.

He had sisters  
With wild and rusted brillo hair.  
My daydreams sidled past  
Their illusive hovel  
On the Blaney road.

Séamus,  
With your scrawny legs in worsted shorts,  
Your scraggy woolen tank top,  
Your scratchy flying fists—  
I hated you in that hopeless,  
Helpless six-year-old way.

## Contrescarpe

Paul Muldoon wrote glibly that he gave up the Shannon for the  
Shenandoah

“Holler on me, girl”

A magnificent wood turtle, *Clemmys insculpta*, moves fast into  
the bog off the weed-grown track way out behind an  
abandoned farmhouse

Moths: ignorant apamea, doubtful agroperina, dock rustic,  
brown angle shades, turbulent phosphila, cloaked marvel,  
common hyppa, gray half-spot, goat fallow, white-dotted  
groundling, American bird's wing

Wisteria hangs over the yellow cut-stone walls in summer  
Jerusalem

On narrow Yoel Salomon Street

Silica dust high-desert eucalyptus car exhaust soot and diesel  
smell

Jerusalemites, unusually clean and composed, sophisticated and  
intensely aware

Inside and outside the Damascus Gate

The highway bypasses out to the Jericho road and the West  
Bank settlement compounds

The ancient olive hills are carved with wide, raw cutbank  
sweeping roads

In the mood of the approaches to the huge new galvanized  
prisons on California's north coast and in the Far West's  
outland deserts

Israel out there on the edge to the east of the Mediterranean's west

Part of a world of unearthly flash vivid blue

California buckwheat, Wright buckwheat, chaparral  
honeysuckle, basketbush, California rose, creeping sage,  
poison oak

Woolly yarrow, western ragweed, crimson columbine, Indian  
milkweed, golden stars, Oercutt brodiaea, globe lilly,  
splendid mariposa lily, bird's nest thistle, coyote gourd,  
jimsonweed, California fuscia

"All I wanted was a man / With a single heart, / And we would  
stay together / As our hair turned white. . . . / The integrity  
of a loyal man / Is beyond the value of money"

Abruzzo, Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Emilia-Romagna,  
Friuli-Venezia-Giulia, Lazio, Liguria, Lombardia, Marche,  
Molise, Piemonte, Puglia, Sardegna, Sicilia, Toscana,  
Trentino Alto Adige, Umbria, Valle d'Aosta, Veneto

Hamburg was starkly polarized in the early nineties by gracious-  
livers versus orthodox Greens, recapitulating the pre-  
unification problem of the BRD versus the DDR

Somewhat in the way that Zulu-versus-ANC became a doomful  
parody of the old Afrikaner versus the English

Frederik Kuhlau, d. Copenhagen, 1832, introduced Beethoven  
to the Danes, was flautist in the Queen's court orchestra,  
wrote brilliant chamber works for flute, pianoforte and  
strings, and the music for an old Danish chestnut, *Elverhøj*

Below the high Swiss peaks, Wildstruel 3243m, Rinderhorn  
3454m, Balmhorn 3709m, Doldenhorn 3643m, Blümlisalp  
3664m, Breithorn 3782m, Grosshorn 3762m, Jungfrau  
4158m, Mönch 4099m, Eiger 3970m, Fiescherhorn 4049m,  
Finsteraarhorn 4274m, Schreckhorn 4078m, Wetterhorn  
3701m

“Travel is the saddest of the pleasures”

Hundreds of Irish bicycle deaths a year, drunk riders heading  
home from a pub in the dark and rainy fog run down by the  
cars of other drunks driving home

Common mergansers feeding in the rain, over a dozen in close.  
The females are catching small perch and tossing them to  
turn them headfirst to swallow extremely rapidly

Almost all the mergansers of a float dive simultaneously.  
Perhaps they are all seeing fish at the same instant

## Self-Portrait as a Multitiered Marketing Plan

—Immortality is preferable in this life

### I. Talking Points

It's about compression. It's about love conquering most but not all. It's about misery loving company throughout much of our shared history and above all else it's time laid out like picked-over hors d'oeuvres—the tired fruit, the sweaty cheese, a lone fly catching a buzz off the empties, stray feathers off a white ostrich boa—“what was her name? she came with him? was she a she? a he? a shim?” and other questions gather, publicists to these small rooms, pitching, flakking that it's all about me staked out in semiformal tensions, death, not dying, life as it resumes—

### II. Mission Statement

Any discussion of my death presumes I lived once and was happy doing so. It's hard to tell. It was ages ago. Briefly I dwell on it in volumes I and II of *Period Costumes*, a work attributed to me although

I don't remember writing it but oh  
do I remember wiping down the heirlooms  
of one unwished-for past (the photographs,  
the ticket stubs, the hatreds, the fey laughs)  
and finally getting it—that as a man  
expired I was to record with some feeling  
what he knew of life when he began  
to forget who he was (and/or die trying).

### III. Case Study

There once was a man who forgot that dying  
was a choice, who eventually forgot  
to die altogether. His children thought  
him spiteful or, *peut-être*, lazy, citing  
myth, biology, habit, good taste, voicing  
grave concern about his stamina. “Not  
that we don't love you,” said that hateful snot,  
his daughter, “not that we don't care” a mincing  
son halfheartedly allowed while his friends,  
such as they were, found themselves at loose ends  
dying one after the other without  
even a word from him. Not *god*, *goodbye*  
nor any coveted or talked-about  
invectives hurled at loved ones, ocean, sky.

### IV. Declarations

Of course the weather is a metaphor  
for weather in that *deluge*, *blanket*, *breath*  
*of*, *raging*, *higher*, *dog days*, *wetter*, *four*  
*breathe life* (itself a metaphor for death  
by freak desire) into that old campaign  
to bracket our now and thus return to it—  
making journey out of destination Pain—

making one-time-chance-encounter pure habit  
which makes for harder breaking than both heart  
and wild horse. At seven I asked my Father  
for a horse. "I'll buy you pictures" (art  
will save us) "of a horse." And what odd bother,  
this having been saved, like time, like string,  
like money for a rainy day. *Ka-ching*—

## V. Attachments

—for Charles Christian de Vezin Olivier

Faith? Forgiveness? Money. For it is never  
the most important thing but always  
the second most important thing. Always  
it is a giver and the gift that never  
gives so much as trades, negotiates, never  
blinking, neither fraught nor flurried, always  
cool, erect, in spats and cutaway, always  
urging our complete surrender and never  
had we given it a second thought  
until that day when money sealed its border,  
broke off talks, expelled our last ambassador  
or next-to-last. We cried, cried wolf, half-fought,  
let slip our lapdogs of war, then stood  
our gift horse way up Vine, past Hollywood—

## VI. Risk Transfer

A Hollywood ending is that which should  
not happen happening to those whom often  
don't deserve whatever the glad or good-  
enough tidings offered in the proven  
three-act formula. Fine. But then what  
of Hollywood beginnings? Stretched and gouached

like pearly-pastel abstracts with the not-  
so-far-fetched theory going Fortune sloshed  
her roadie on us just the other day  
as evidenced by [your example here]  
authenticating life—a prized Monet  
at auction: gavel, gasp, a muffled cheer  
among The Great whose goods get tagged and crated,  
ever to be loved, lived-through, duplicated—

## VII. For Further Information

We want to be loved for what we've created—  
not for whom nor what we are, not for how  
important or precious or devastated  
we, at our core, might be, although now-  
a-days speculation on this core  
would have us all made real by perfect hurt—  
our dear gaping uncovered in the desert  
outside Taos where the sky and mud floor  
of our world give unexpected way  
in a thousand-foot drop of sheared basalt  
broken like a bottomless argument  
into layer, fragment, contour, and fault,  
into what we did that molten day  
our great rift opened and begat no moment.

## Chipped Bowl

A woman carries a basket into a field.  
She represents someone's eternity  
in blue-and-white china. It's fall there  
and two geese travel toward a pond.

She does not know her destination  
has become an abyss into your day—  
American headlines on the newspaper,  
a cat lazing in a rectangle of sun by the stove.

The story of where she would arrive broken away,  
its lip weathered brown. She will not go to a hut  
with a thatched roof, or to a willow to idyll  
beneath its drowsy branches.

She will always be on the verge of her life  
with her carved bone buttons, her bonnet  
whose silk ties reach into a breeze.  
She will never know if there is burlap or velvet.

You have grown accustomed to the shattered image  
of her tranquil ascent into your day, and the falseness  
of her story, no matter how you end it.  
You eat of this longing.

## A Response to What I Do Not Know

She is willing to be blamed, and wait out the dignity the earth  
restores  
when a fern sword springs between her ribs, pushes its way  
through the mossy depths

as her last gesture. (This, the richest soil!) In the outer  
circumstance:  
a flowered dress, white sandals, a cotton hair tie, and a neat  
brown ponytail.

She does not have to make excuses—all her failings to produce  
pleasure  
and exactness. Her body has magic left.

It is not a cruelty the way she is taken from herself: the root  
system forming,  
the mosses growing fine denominations by covering over  
abstract breakings

and decay. Her neck bent so she is always looking past a fallen  
birch trunk  
toward a duck pond. The birds have been singing to her all  
these months,

high whistle songs and twitters right into her ear, so she might  
rise glorious  
from all that sleep and exclaim, “where are you my love?”  
Forgiveness

is what she does best now that there is no retort. Now her eyes  
look  
through themselves and settle on the back of her skull for that  
deep vision.

Her landscape overwhelmed with clues of unrest, tangible  
enough to fill the palms,  
to fill the eyes with infinite tribulation. It is herself, unsettled  
and chilly to approach,

blackened bones and yellow tendons pulled taut, keeping her  
together.  
The woods hum around her, ghost woods.

## After the Rain

—for Janine, *para siempre mi amor*

That night in Albuquerque,  
after the rain,  
the dried red chile  
we left lying  
on the woven white blanket  
in the center  
of the old-town plaza  
began to swell.

Its shriveled skin  
grew taut  
in the moon's moist embrace  
and it glowed  
as if filled with a light  
of its own.

Come morning it had burst,  
its stretched  
flesh spreading out  
and curling  
downward,

gently,  
like the wings  
of a butterfly  
on the verge  
of flight.

## At the Nucla Prairie Dog Shootout

*“Kill ’em all, little and small . . . nits make lice.”*

—Colonel John Chivington (Sand Creek,  
Colorado—November 1864)

The hairy men  
in their leather gun gloves

and Winchester caps  
advance with practiced precision.

Efficiently they calculate  
distance. They breathe, squeeze.

From too many rifle barrels,  
the smell of spent gunpowder

floats across flood flats and foothills  
filled with bodies and wet red grass.

## Cooling, Near the Center

After the divorce, her refrigerator became her favorite place to shelve. Capers, olives, long after they had been opened. Chocolates, too, waited next to onions. Spinach aging in a twisted bag.

Beveled bottles, heart-strung names, Alessi, Hill Country, Simmery Smooth Caramel. She had started this cooler new. Slowly, it began to fill. Asparagus, pine nuts, edible flowers.

At night, she went searching. Something sweet. Substantial. Grape tomatoes would soften and pile in season. Golden soup, in cold, and rosemary loaf, would turn, gel, cake—

Losing composition. *I will never find Holy in here*, she thought. Solids. Powders. Flesh. Ingredients survive only so long. How in a stove, they come together.

## Vermeer's *Girl Asleep*

So that's one way to end it, one way to get out of the whole mess. Simple enough.

He must have imagined an abandoned voyage, cameo glass and paperweights, Eros sleeping, breath quivering in dreamwork, a breaking glass at noon.

He probably lifted the tapestry by accident, pushed it across the table as he told her that it wasn't going to work out for them. *She was beautiful*, yes, but there are lanes that fail the feet, half vases and long stretches of dark, loose coils and linen sheets, a stream yet to be found.

She told herself, *not for a second had she felt bad*—she had set out the fruit, let him in, held out her hand, offered him some wine. He had come to tell her something, and he did. When he left he pushed back the chair and then the lifting of the tapestry as she heard the breaking porcelain, the dark door closing upon the day.

She didn't stand up. *Nothing said, nothing more to say*. Just before she fell asleep, she thought of failed cargo jettisoned long ago from ships lost at sea—small skies and pale clouds breaking into sight beneath a blue sky, the cherished desire of holding him in a kind of glass.

*Now across our sleep, in dreams so hesitatingly  
drawn as if across a vase of peonies  
and chrysanthemums  
we watch each other and share  
in the vacancy of voyages:*

A tablecloth stirring though open windows, winter gloom and  
glassware, the pale blossom of certain doors, a white light falling  
across a dark cutting board.

## Diego Rivera's *Desnudo con Alcatraces*

In Diego Rivera's *Desnudo con Alcatraces* a woman is turned away from us, her hair is tightly worn before the opening of a basketful of flowers. Her outstretched arms mediate the distance; her spine and even her hair help to divide it all. Why are there so many hearts here? She is speaking, humming perhaps, between a few words and phrases, *alcatraces, alcatraces, alcatraces*, her voice falling into the flower's whitest district, in praise of white in praise of brown, in praise of weathers of a world brought to life and into time.

In Diego Rivera's *Desnudo con Alcatraces*,  
a woman is about to lift flowers  
in her arms, the body, a felt texture,  
a lavish simplicity like a coming clean,  
a lost stare found in ours, as we  
become her staring at the held flowers,  
in the found stillness, in the coming clean.

If I had painted her, I would have her rise and walk barefoot,  
the thin warmth of earth cooling beneath the words, *alcatraces, alcatraces, alcatraces* between her breath and she would turn,  
dissolve, and reassess herself and hear herself call out, *Where am I now?* What could bring you back to this?

A naked body's sense of belonging to a place,  
flesh and petals, skin and nakedness—  
entranced, transformed, the resurrection of labor,  
the stigmata of duty,  
of obedience, and of pain, repainted.

She would stand, if I had painted her, and walk through a crowded marketplace, down a country road, her body shrouded in white vacant air,

the light would turn brown, that country road would become a path leading back to the marketplace, and she would sit back down, her outstretched arms bringing back the limit, a figure sitting before white flowers staring at the deep white and yellow beauty of her place—white flowers in her brown gaze, lit once of dreams, in the holding or, in the making, as words or paint, or love, would finally have it.

## The Curtains Are Another Kind of Husband

Drawn in the daytime, they are grand,  
gruff and complete with cuffs. Another kind of

eight-in-all, they are near, but not enough.  
The curtains are cryptic and unwilling to billow

when the windows are closed.  
They whisper, they whistle, they call me

glaucoma. Clearly they can't speak, clearly  
they can't see me, but they do drape

like the arms of an angel-ape  
down the sides of each see-through torso.

The curtains make flirting make sense and  
make fun. The last one teases me.

My grooms disagree with me and I am both  
embarrassed and proud. I am embarrassed

to be so proud, but I am also proud  
of this embarrassment. They say

they give me a place, but they take my place.  
They take my time and they give way.

## Hard Feelings

*“They searched the cellar Fruitlessly”*  
—Edward Gorey

We have gone to bed like dark socks  
and we have woken stiffly  
like in-laws, like three English uncles  
bunking in the basement of a house  
that’s been on the market for months now.  
I act like my bathrobe is a regular sweater  
while these three stand around in suits, looking  
aimlessly about the basement,  
faking their search for who  
knows what in which language: three men  
turned whither, turned west and one  
watching another face first into the dark drain  
of an even darker door.  
I might say that I am  
in the basement, based on this basementy feeling.  
Every morning, I drink  
one cup of coffee while the same young couple  
checks the kitchen for corners.  
My men are pretending intently, without  
any extra bending,  
hoping for some nook or cranny to plumb, some  
crook or nanny dumb enough to tell them what.  
It is not sound, but all speech that has gone out of me.

## Airborne

This morning I woke to helicopters and church bells. From my window I watched the heavy blue police birds circle over and back, over and back against the gray sky which moved in unobtrusive opposition—whatever happens below, what blood-handed humans hide, it's a matter of inconsequence to the large, cloaked order of clouds untouchably processing—while inside our building Deacon Holness emerged from the apartment next to mine in his suit and tie, thick eyeglasses tinted against the light of evil, padded shoulders lifting across our street toward the church, as if belief could make a man a cloud.

## Empathy

1.

All day I have been walking  
down to the shadows of the wood-bank  
to spy the fox that twice  
bloomed from that dark greenness.

Patiently, he watched me through the sweetspire,  
his eyes, luminous as mica, forcing  
their light against the bruising dusk. This time, the beautiful fire  
of his face darkened to a plum mask.

Turning, I felt myself open like a premature ghost  
to the world of leaves.

Miles off, an owl called  
in a tree now wholly dark.

2.

And always, always, the night forms in me  
a picture  
of his face that is now veiled  
in the blackberries far from  
the farmers' baying dogs.

3.

At my listless feet, this earth may once again  
sluice and loosen the dead roots  
with streams of joy.

**Khaled Mattawa, *Zodiac of Echoes*** (Keene, New York: Ausable Press, 2004), 144 pp., \$14, and **Saadi Youssef, *Without an Alphabet, Without a Face: Selected Poems of Saadi Youssef***, translated from the Arabic by Khaled Mattawa (Saint Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2003), 186 pp., \$16. Reviewed by Marcela Sulak.

*Exile,  
your ninety-nine names  
trill the tip of my tongue.*

*Isn't it time to sing what I've gathered  
into blessing—  
indigenous, though scant? . . .*

*I am certain that what I carry of you  
is more wonderful  
than I can know.*

*It's what makes me unknowable  
when I look airline hostesses,  
shop clerks, or janitors in the eye.*

—Khaled Mattawa, “Vicinity”

Living and being at home in exile is the central concern of Khaled Mattawa's second collection of poetry, *Zodiac of Echoes*, and his translation of the Iraqi Saadi Youssef's selected poems, 1955–1997, *Without an Alphabet, Without a Face*, for which Mattawa won the 2004 Penn Award for Translation. What does it take for a native of Benghazi, Libya, to be at home in a Western country such as the United States? For Mattawa, the answer is: a commitment to contemporary Arabic poetry (as evidenced by the two earlier volumes Mattawa translated), an open dialogue with other Arabic writers at home and in exile, and a political, aesthetic, and human engagement with the world

around him. Mattawa came to the United States as a teenager; he has lived in Louisiana, Tennessee, and California. Most recently, he has taught creative writing at the University of Texas, and now he lives in Ann Arbor, where he teaches at the University of Michigan.

Mattawa's second collection of poetry, *Zodiac of Echoes*, is his gorgeously lyrical, powerfully written effort to take stock of his American place and citizenship, to gather the places and names of exile into an indigenous blessing. The collection is firmly rooted in American soil, and it celebrates the sublime as well as the ridiculous, the horrifying as well as the comforting aspects of the United States, Mattawa's adopted home. But we are never allowed to forget that the United States is only one small part of Mattawa's enormous world. Thus, *Zodiac of Echoes* transports us all over the globe, on foot, by donkey, cars, and taxis, and via satellite television. It brings all the places the narrator has lived and experienced into dialogue with the secluded interiors of America, allowing different points of communion and exile to comment upon one another.

In the subtle interweaving of lines from the Quran into the industrial landscape of Tennessee ("Vicinity"), and in the playful commentary of the narrator's niece on the philosophy of Simone Weil—"I shall put on flesh," she declares, / the refrigerator handle in her grasp" ("Genealogy of Fire")—Mattawa criticizes the isolation of American society, driven by greed and capitalism. In such poems as "Tuned," in which the secular and the sacred are blended in the communal celebrations of Ramadan, Mattawa illustrates how North American-style economics has left its mark on Arab culture. Always, though, the purpose of each poem is to create an object of beauty, a means of multiplying the consciousness, or a medium of communication.

The same concerns that drive Mattawa's poetry—community, communication, and a commitment to human dignity in the face of dehumanizing political regimes, movements, and economic systems—resonate, as well, throughout Mattawa's translation of the poetry of Saadi Youssef. Youssef gave Mattawa complete autonomy in the selection and

arrangement of the poems, so that the collection, the first of Youssef's ever translated into English, reflects an ongoing dialogue between the two poets. In compiling and translating the work, Mattawa selected a cross section of poems from 1955–1997, arranging them by place, rather than by year of composition, to highlight the prominence of place and the devastating effects of exile in Youssef's poetry.

"Poetry can only be an exploration of ideology, not a means of expressing belief in it," says Mattawa of Youssef's Marxist orientation. The Iraqi poet's ideology became an unwelcome passport into a dozen different countries in the West and Middle East after Saddam Hussein's regime forced the poet to leave Iraq in 1979. In poems such as "The Ends of the African North," we witness the way the deserted homeland becomes "pollen" that is carried "from exile to exile." Here, the pollen both fertilizes the place of exile with memory and impoverishes it by draining it of its reality:

Morocco was spinning  
like a record playing in the dark and you clung  
to each minute. Morocco was spinning  
and you clung to it.  
You clung to its five-angled disc.  
We were chained to its scents and the soft sands  
of its beaches, weighed with white wine  
until the sand slumbered,  
until the wine reddened, and the picture blurred  
and our lives were divided by the Bureaus of Aliens and  
Immigration.  
Three months, and three, and three, and three more.

In the same poem, the condition of exile erases the identity, not of the place, but of the refugee:

In the neighborhoods of Tunis and their winter cafés  
at the gates of Africa's spread thighs  
I saw a girl weep  
without an alphabet, without a face.  
Snow was falling and the girl wept under it.

If the profoundly political dimensions of Youssef's poetry escape the uninitiated reader on first encounter, it is because of the sheer sensuality of Youssef's language. Youssef believes "the social and political concept ought to remain latent in the text, absorbed by the artist's blood. They should not float on the surface, so as not to distract the structure of the artistic work."

For the reader accustomed to a more direct, less sentimental approach, the celebration of sensuality in poems depicting desperate poverty, loneliness, prison, or torture chambers may seem strange or jarring at first:

". . . Ah Oujda, Oujda, the Skhairat Road  
was blocked by the Royal Guards. I brought it [a myrtle  
flower]  
from there and hid it under my skin, the shoes  
of the Royal Guards were heavy with nails."  
He pointed to his chest quickly, then  
closed his eyes.

Youssef, like Mattawa, has learned to seek out the beautiful and life-sustaining elements of a painful existence, revealing a sophisticated, subtle understanding of life in exile, torn between nostalgia for what is left behind and a realistic hope for the future. The subtle orientation calls for extreme self-awareness, and it most often presents itself in understatement, allowing the reader to enter into the poem with intelligence and sympathy.

Youssef's complexity is such that he is often able to praise and condemn objectively, with equal measure, as in the poem "America, America," written in response to the hardships U.S.-led sanctions imposed on the Iraqi people. Notable is the fact that Youssef's political message is never subservient to his poetic craft. Even in America, the ostensible source of Iraq's distress, the speaker recognizes formal and substantive beauty. Thus, the poem incorporates the American blues form and references Walt Whitman and other cultural icons, such as Marilyn Monroe's giggle. Yet a country so rich and good, he implies, should be more generous with its gifts and less malevolent with its curses:

Take what you do not have  
and give us what we have.  
Take the stripes of your flag  
and give us the stars.  
Take the Afghani mujahideen beard  
and give us Walt Whitman's beard filled with butterflies.  
Take Saddam Hussein  
and give us Abraham Lincoln  
or give us no one.

Youssef's lyricism makes his poetry seem so eminently accessible that it is easy to underestimate the skill Youssef employs in situating the lyrical "I" in communal and political contexts, or the significance of his refusal to resolve the troubling questions and situations his poetry often evokes. At the same time, one may feel disoriented by the fact Youssef presumes the reader's familiarity with the geography and personalities of the depicted regions. Readers unfamiliar with Arabic literature may feel ill equipped to appreciate the significance of Youssef's poetry, much less his contribution to Arabic literature. Fortunately, Mattawa, a native speaker of Arabic, provides an intelligent introduction, touching on Youssef's major themes and techniques and contextualizing them in the recent history of Arabic poetry and politics. With these aids, the reader can more readily recognize the personal and geographical names recurring throughout the selection, allowing the names to become real figures, not simply symbols and images.

Now Saddam Hussein's regime has been overthrown, and exiles and expatriates must decide whether to return to Iraq or to continue living the lives they have made for themselves elsewhere. Youssef, one of the most important poets in the Arab world today, author of forty volumes of poetry and several more of prose, remains in London. Like Mattawa, he seeks to build a community and make a home in exile.

## Contributors

**Dan Albergotti** lives in Greensboro, North Carolina. His poems have appeared in *Ascent*, *The Laurel Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Natural Bridge*, *New Orleans Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, and other journals. He has received scholarships from the Sewanee and Bread Loaf writers' conferences, as well as a fellowship from the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. A graduate of the M.F.A. program at UNC Greensboro and former poetry editor of *The Greensboro Review*, he currently teaches in the English department of Elon University.

**Samuel Amadon** was born in Hartford, Connecticut. He enjoys quitting jobs and changing addresses. He is a student in the Columbia University M.F.A. program, and his work has appeared in the anthology, *Don't Abuse the Muse*, from Middlefingher Press.

**M. K. Babcock** lives in Pennsylvania. Her poems have appeared in *Bird Dog Magazine*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Tampa Review*, and *So to Speak*.

**Jeffrey Bahr** lives in Colorado and has work published or forthcoming in *Black Warrior Review*, *Chelsea*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Indiana Review*, *The Journal*, *Prairie Schooner*, and *Quarterly West*.

**Sharon Balentine** has lived in Spain since 1995 after many years in Austin, Texas. She has published poetry in various journals, including *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *Stone Drum*, *Skylark*, *West Wind Review*, and *Wild Plum*. She has also published fiction in the *Tulane Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *Rosebud*, and *StoryQuarterly*, among others.

**David Bart** is assistant editor of *Illya's Honey*, the literary quarterly of The Dallas Poets Community. The DPC holds monthly readings at Half Price Books, holds three writing workshops per month, and sponsors an annual poetry contest. This is his second publication in *Borderlands*.

**Celia Bland** recently published *Soft Box* (CavanKerry Press), a collection of poems. She teaches at Bard College in New York state.

**Paula Bohince** received an M.F.A. from New York University's graduate creative-writing program and recently completed a residency at the MacDowell Colony. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and others. She lives and teaches in New York City.

**Trina Burke** is a freelance writer/editor living in Seattle whose work is scheduled to appear in upcoming issues of *Words and Pictures* and *The Burnside Review*. She will be attending Western Washington University's graduate program in English Studies in the fall.

**Susanna Childress** has published in *The Mississippi Review*, *Bellingham Review*, *Runes*, *Fourteen Hills*, *The Florida Review*, and is forthcoming in *Crab Orchard Review* and the anthology *And Know This Place: Poems of Indiana*. She is a Ph.D. student at Florida State University.

**Alison Cimino** was born and raised in Smithtown, New York. Upon graduating from Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, she worked for Random House Inc. for a brief time and then moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, to teach eighth-grade English. In 2004 she completed her M.F.A. from Texas State University, San Marcos. Alison currently lives and works in Boulder, Colorado.

**Weston Cutter** is a writer living in Minneapolis.

**Allison deFreese** has worked as both journalist and English teacher in Mexico, Bolivia, Southeast Asia, and India. A former James A. Michener Fellow at The University of Texas at Austin, her poetry has appeared in *The Indiana Review*, *South Coast Poetry Review*, *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *The Louisville Review*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, *Southwestern American Literature*, *The Bolivian Times*, and *Puerto del Sol*. She currently lives in Tokyo.

**Sean Thomas Dougherty** is the author of six full-length books, including *Nightshift Belonging to Lorca* (2004 Mammoth Books). Recent awards include a 2004 PA Council for the Arts Fellowship in Literature, and a 2003 Penn State Junior Faculty Research Fellowship. He is the assistant director for the B.F.A. Program in Creative Writing at Penn State Erie.

**Kurt Cole Eidsvig** is a poet and artist who lives and works in South Boston, Massachusetts. He is a recent recipient of a Massachusetts Cultural Council grant, and his work has appeared in magazines such as *Hanging Loose*, *Main Street Rag*, and *The South Boston Literary Gazette*. He still believes in poetry, and the Red Sox, and is a member of the Thrown Free school of poetry. His work can also be seen at [www.KurtColeEidsvig.com](http://www.KurtColeEidsvig.com).

**Michel Englebert** is a Belgian-American poet who has lived and worked in Europe, the U.S., Japan, Malaysia, and now South Korea. His poems have appeared in many publications, including the *Sewanee Review* and *American Poetry Review*. He is currently at work on an epic poem and a novel set in Brazil.

**Steve Gehrke's** second book, *The Pyramids of Malpighi*, won *The Philip Levine Prize for Poetry* and was published by Anhinga Press in 2004. Individual poems have received *The Gulf Coast Poetry Prize*, *The Milton Dorfman Prize*, and *The Marlboro Review Prize for Poetry*. Other recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming at *The Southern Review*, *Mid-American Review*, *Slate*, *The Sun*,

*Washington Square*, *Indiana Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and *Poetry Daily*. He is poetry editor at *The Missouri Review*.

**Ray Gonzalez** is the author of seven books of poetry, including the recent *The Hawk Temple at Tierra Grande* (BOA Editions, 2003 Minnesota Book Award for Poetry, National Book Critics Circle Award Citation). He is a professor of English at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis.

**Taylor Graham** is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in the Sierra Nevada. In addition to *Borderlands*, her poems have appeared in *Grand Street*, *The Iowa Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, and elsewhere, and she's included in the new anthology, *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Santa Clara University, 2004).

**Alex Grant** was born in Scotland and now lives in North Carolina. In 2004 he was a finalist for NCSU's statewide poetry contest, a recipient of a John Woods Scholarship from Western Michigan University, and winner of The Pavel Srut Poetry Fellowship in WMU's Prague Summer Program. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Sycamore Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Midwest Quarterly*, and *Phi Kappa Phi Forum*. He divides his time between Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

**Andrey Gritsman** is a poet and essayist. Born and raised in Russia, he currently lives in the New York area. His poems, essays, and translations have appeared in *Richmond Review* (London, U.K.), *Ars-Interpres* (Stokholm-London), *Poetry International*, *Manhattan Review*, *New Orleans Review*, *Poetry New York*, *Berkshire Review*, and many others. His poems are anthologized in *Modern Poetry in Translation* (U.K.), *Crossing Centuries* (*New Generation in Russian Poetry*), and in the forthcoming anthology, *The Breath from the Parted Lips: Voices from the Robert Frost Place*. A collection of poems and essays, *Long Fall*, is forthcoming this summer from Spuyten Duyvil Press in New York. Gritsman received his M.F.A. in Poetry from Vermont College. He runs the

*Intercultural Poetry Series* at the popular literary club, Cornelia Street Café, in New York City.

**Kelle Groom** is the author of two poetry collections, *Underwater City* (University Press of Florida, 2004) and *Luckily* (Anhinga Press, 2006). Her poems have appeared in *Agni*, *Luna*, *The New Yorker*, *Witness*, and other journals. She is the director of grants administration for the Coalition for the Homeless of Central Florida.

**Albert Haley** is the author of *Home Ground: Stories of Two Families and the Land* and the novel *Exotic*. His poems have appeared in *The Cresset*, *Poems & Plays*, *New Texas*, and other journals. A graduate of Yale and a former twenty-five-year resident of Alaska, he is now writer in residence at Abilene Christian University in Abilene, Texas.

**Kurt Heinzelman** is executive curator for academic affairs at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, as well as a professor of English at The University of Texas at Austin and a resident faculty member at the James A. Michener Center for Writers. The poems published in this issue will appear in his forthcoming volume of poetry, *Black Butterflies* (Verser Press).

**Jason Iwen** is one of the founding members of the Emergency Collective, one of CLMP's latest additions. He currently teaches literature, film, and creative writing at the American University of Beirut, in Lebanon, where he lives with his wife and three cats. He ran in the first Beirut International Marathon this year and will soon participate in an upcoming Red Bull relay pentathlon. His poetry has recently appeared, or will soon appear, in journals such as *Clackamas Literary Review*, *Onthebus*, *Fence*, *Third Coast*, *The Marlboro Review*, and *Reed Magazine*.

**Brenda Ladd** is a dynamic force in the world of photography. After earning a B.A. from The University of Texas, she began working as a portrait photographer in Austin. Twenty-plus years

later, her successful studio attests to her dedication. She instructs classes and workshops for U.T. Austin and the Rocky Mountain School of Photography in Montana. Her images have been featured in numerous publications, award-winning CD's, books, promos, and exhibits throughout the U.S., as well as in an interactive CD for the artist Sting. Ladd's honest, critically acclaimed photographic eye illuminates the pivotal moments of life.

**Shara Lessley** holds a Stegner Fellowship in Poetry at Stanford University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Pleiades*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and elsewhere.

**Lowell Lipton** lives in the hill country outside of Austin, Texas, with his wife and two small children. He has taught writing courses for the English department at Wayne State University (Detroit, Michigan) and the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stanford University (Palo Alto, California). Lowell is currently a stay-at-home dad who muddles through the day writing and raising kids—digs up rocks in the backyard, folds laundry, and makes dinner and poems by hand. Both his creative and scholarly efforts often work to explore how people use words to make and make sense of the world.

**Rebecca Loudon** lives and writes in Seattle. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Portland Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Seattle Review*, and *Fine Madness*. Her first full-length collection of poetry, *Tarantella*, is forthcoming from Ravenna Press.

**Farid Matuk** is a poet, essayist, and translator of Peruvian and Syrian descent. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming from *Painted Bride Quarterly* and *Skanky Possum Press*. His essays have appeared most recently in *The Texas Observer*. He is a recent graduate of the Michener Center for Writers.

**Michael McGriff's** poetry has recently appeared in *American Literary Review*, *The Jefferson Monthly*, and *Poet Lore*.

**Erika Meitner** is currently a visiting assistant professor of creative writing at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Her first collection of poems, *Inventory at the All-Night Drugstore*, won the 2002 Anhinga Prize for Poetry and was published in 2003 by Anhinga Press. She holds an M.F.A. from the University of Virginia, where she was a Henry Hoyns fellow, and has received additional fellowships from the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, Sewanee Writers' Conference, the Virginia Center for Creative Arts, and the Blue Mountain Center. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Mid-American Review*, *5 AM*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Slate*, *The Southern Review*, *The Minnesota Review*, and *North American Review*.

**Yvonne C. Murphy** held a Stegner Fellowship in Poetry at Stanford University and received a Ph.D. in creative writing from the University of Houston. Yvonne currently lives in Queens, New York, and teaches cultural studies at Empire State College.

**Jill Neimark's** novel *Bloodsong* (Random House/Plume) was a Book of the Month Club selection and published in the United States as well as England, Australia, Germany, Italy, and Israel. Her journalism has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Discover Magazine*, *The Economist*, and many other venues. She lives in New York City.

**Catherine Neuhardt-Minor's** work has appeared in *Chelsea*, *Peregrine*, *Folio*, *Lullwater Review*, *Chariton Review*, *Bloomsbury Review*, *Mindprints*, *Phi Kappa Phi Forum*, *Poet Lore*, and other literary journals. Catherine's work has won many conference prizes. She teaches art at St. Margaret's School in Tappahannock, Virginia.

**Will Nixon** has published two chapbooks: *When I Had It Made* (Pudding House Publications) and *The Fish Are Laughing* (Pavement Saw Press), which won a national competition. His poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *The Ledge*, *Slipstream*, and other journals. An essay of his published in *North Dakota Quarterly* was listed as a “Notable Essay” in *The Best American Essays of 2003*.

**Katherine D. Perry** is a doctoral candidate at Auburn University. Her research centers on American Women’s Poetry and Women’s Studies, and she teaches poetry writing at Tutwiler Women’s Prison. Her poetry has appeared in *Women’s Studies*, *13th Moon*, and *The Rio Grande Review*.

**Holly Pettit**, born on a SAC Base on the Canadian border, was raised in Alabama, served as a Russian linguist in Europe for the U.S. Army, graduated Harvard Divinity School, and worked for the homeless community in Boston. She now lives in New Hampshire. Admissions Moderator of the online poetry workshop *Zeugma* ([www.zpoems.net](http://www.zpoems.net)), Holly attended the Creative Center of New York’s Program for Art in Hospitals and in 2003 was Visiting Writer to Romania. Her manuscript, *Pacifica*, was a finalist for the Prairie Schooner 2004 Book Prize.

**Del Marie Rogers’** *She’ll Never Want More Than This* (Firewheel Press, 2002) was a finalist for Best Book of Poems, Texas Institute of Letters. *After the Mountain* (MSS) tells of her mother’s life on Mt. Barry Scobee near Ft. Davis and the impact of those years on the family. Davis Mountains poems are also important in *Close to Ground* (Corona, 1990). Her work appears in *The Texas Observer*, *Puerto del Sol*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, and many anthologies—see *Roundup: An Anthology of Texas Poets*, edited by Dave Oliphant, and *Is This Forever, or What?*, edited by Naomi Shihab Nye.

**Laurie Rosenblatt**, M.D., practices in the Department of Psychosocial Oncology and Palliative Care at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute/Brigham & Women’s Hospital and teaches at the Harvard Medical School. In addition to professional

publications, she has published creative nonfiction in *Dotlit: The Online Journal of Creative Writing* and poetry in *Coelacanth*, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, and *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*.

**Emily Rosko** is a Stegner Fellow at Stanford. Her poems appeared recently in *The Denver Quarterly*, *Pleiades*, *Tarpaulin Sky*, and *Octopus*.

**Jared Schickling** describes himself as twenty-five years old. Male. His other publications are *Freefall* magazine (Spring 2005), *Reader's Quarterly* (Fall 2001), and a book that has been reviewed favorably, entitled *Suburban Eggs* (Publish America, 2004). He lives with Mollie, Curt, and four cats in Lockport, New York, where “happened and is happening Gil Transit, which caused and is causing those New 44s.”

**Anthony Seidman** lives in Los Angeles with his family, where he makes his living as a middle-school teacher, and writes. His poetry has appeared in *Parque Nandino* (Mexico), *Hunger*, *The Bloomsbury Review*, among other journals, and he has a new book, *Where Thirsts Intersect*, coming out from The Bitter Oleander Press in 2005.

**Barbara Smith**, born in Dublin in 1967, is a native of Armagh, Northern Ireland, and has an enduring fascination with the realm of words. She has been involved with writing groups and workshops, in small magazine publications, short-story competitions, and, not least, has been writing poetry for the main part of her adult life. Her work has been published in broadsheets, magazines, e-zines and journals, ranging in reach from the Irish broadsheet, *Riposte*, to the Internet. Smith has published two volumes of poetry: *Gnosis* and *Poetic Stage*; the latter has enjoyed moderate success both inside and outside Ireland. Smith regularly enjoys performing public recitals of her work, to great acclaim and even occasional applause. She currently lives in Drogheda in the Boyne Valley, in the Republic of Ireland.

**D. E. Steward's** "Contrescarpe" is an addendum to a sequential project that runs month to month, underway since September 1986. This form is an attempt to note and build on some of the literary reality of the times. More than three years of months from the whole project are serialized and then archived at [www.fencemag.com](http://www.fencemag.com), and 125 months are published in various other literary magazines.

**Marcela Sulak** is a poet, writer, and translator. Her poems are forthcoming, or have most recently appeared, in *Fence*, *The Indiana Review*, *The Notre Dame Review*, *Quarterly West*, *River Styx*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*, among others. Her published translations from the Czech include *May* by Karel Hynek Macha (Twisted Spoon Press, 2005) and *Kytice* by Jaroslav Erben (Twisted Spoon Press, 2006), and from the French, *Bela-Wenda, Poems from Congo-Zaire* (Alaska Press, 1996). Her book reviews appear in the *Austin American-Statesman* and *The Texas Observer*.

**Bradford Gray Telford** was born in El Paso, grew up in Dallas, and was educated at Princeton and Columbia. He is the coauthor of *The Rules for Cats* (Dutton, 1997) and *Mad About Martha* (Andrews and McMeel, 1996), and the coadapter and translator of Aristophanes' *The Birds* (New York Fringe Theatre Festival, 1996). He is a Ph.D. student in literature and creative writing at the University of Houston.

**A. F. Thomas** is the recipient of several major poetry awards, including the Ann Stanford Poetry Prize and the Rella Lossy Poetry Award chapbook. Her poetry has appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Rattle*, *Bellingham Review*, and *Southern Poetry Review*, among other publications. She has an M.F.A. in Poetry Writing from Washington University in St. Louis where she won an Academy of American Poets prize and a postgraduate teaching fellowship.

**Steve Tompkins** is a graduate of the University of Southern Colorado and is an active member of the burgeoning Pueblo, Colorado, poetry scene. He has previously published poems and

prose in *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, *BYZANTIUM*, *Lucid Moon*, and *The Hungry Eye*. He is in the process of completing his first volume of poetry and currently works as director of the English Language Program at a charter school in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

**Natalia Treviño** was born in Mexico City and currently resides in Helotes, Texas, where she is married and the mother of one child. Having traveled extensively to Mexico as a child, she is fascinated by borders, crossings, and biculturalism in her work. Natalia is an assistant professor of English at Northwest Vista College, and she has previously had works published in *Mirrors Beneath the Earth: Short Fiction by Chicano Writers* and the poetry anthology, *Inheritance of Light*, edited by Ray Gonzalez. Recently, her poetry appeared in *Octavo*, *the Poetry Quarterly of the Alsop Review*, and she is the 2004 recipient of the Wendy Barker Creative Writing Award and the Sandra Cisneros Emerging Writer grant.

**Juan Carlos Vargas** holds graduate degrees from Stanford University and Brown University, and an undergraduate degree from U.C.L.A. He teaches American and British literature at the University of Costa Rica and has taught at a variety of American universities, including the University of New Orleans and the University of Rhode Island. A few years back, he was a fellow at the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center in Massachusetts.

**Kary Wayson** is a recipient of the 2003 “Discovery”/The Nation award and a 2001 Artist Trust/Washington State Arts Commission Fellowship. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *The Nation*, *LitRag*, *Cranky*, and *FIELD*, among others. Her chapbook, *Dog & Me*, was published in April 2004 by *LitRag* Press. Kary lives in Seattle, where she teaches poetry through the University of Washington’s Extension Center.

**Walt Whitman** (1819–1892) was born on the West Hills of Long Island and grew up to become one of the great American men of

letters. Between 1848 and 1855 he developed the free-verse style of poetry that resulted in *Leaves Of Grass*, which he self-published in 1855 in a volume consisting of twelve poems and a preface. He sent a copy to Emerson, his poetic effort having been greatly a response to Emerson's call for an original American poet singing in a new voice, and later editions included Emerson's enthusiastic reply. Over the years, Whitman published numerous editions of the book as he continued expanding and refining it. He spent the last years in Camden, New Jersey, where he completed his final volume of poems, *Good-Bye, My Fancy* (1891) and prepared the "deathbed" edition of *Leaves of Grass*. Ever optimistic for humanity and for America, he concluded in his essay "A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Road," written a year before his death, that "the strongest and sweetest songs yet remain to be sung."

**Anne Pierson Wiese** is a winner of the 2004 "Discovery"/*The Nation* poetry prize and received the first-place poetry prize in the 2002 Writers@Work Fellowship Competition. Recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Nation*, *Quarterly West*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Diner*, *The South Carolina Review*, and *Rattapallax*, among others.

**William Wright** was born and raised in Edgefield, South Carolina. Wright has published widely in such journals as *Poet Lore*, *Texas Review*, *storySouth*, *Yemassee*, *Phoebe*, and *Academic Exchange Quarterly*. Wright serves as coeditor of *The Southern Poetry Anthology (South Carolina)* with Stephen Gardner of the University of South Carolina, Aiken.

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