

Spring 4-1-2007

Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College Chicago

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COLUMBIA

PO
ET
RY

REVIEW



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no. 20

COLUMBIA PO
ET
RY
REVIEW

Spring 2007

COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO

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Our reading period extends from August 1 to November 30. Please send up to 5 pages of poetry during our reading period to the above address. We do not accept e-mail submissions. We respond by February. Please supply a SASE for reply only. Submissions will not be returned.

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*In memory of Byron,
who never missed a meeting*



CONTENTS

JEAN VALENTINE

- Photographs at her Wake 1
- The Poet..... 2

LISA FISHMAN

- from* On the Sea 3

JOE ELDRIDGE

- A Giant Proposal..... 6

BRENDA SHAUGHNESSY

- A Brown Age 7
- Moth Death on the Windowsill..... 9
- A Poet's Poem..... 11
- Glass Family..... 12

ALBERTO RÍOS

- The Leukemia Girls 13

SHIN YU PAI

- lucky strike 15

BRANDI HOMAN

- Typography: The Letter A..... 16
- A History 17
- Looking for Desnos 19

JAMES SHEA

- This Is Not What I Came Here For..... 21

CHET GRESHAM

- The Trouble With Documentaries 22

DENISE DUHAMEL

- from* Help (In 47 Languages)
- Menahan 24
- Naadamaagen 25
- Namola 26

KRISTY BOWEN

- the ten-in-one 27

CHRIS GREEN

- Letter to cin salach..... 28

MIKE WHITE

- Cinéma Vérité 30

D.A. POWELL & HAINES EASON

- Jump Cut..... 31
- Day for Night..... 33

HAINES EASON	
Dear Dad,.....	34
BJ SOLOY	
My Co-Pilot is a Welsh Pixiehorse	37
JULIE ROUSE	
The Play House	38
BRIGITTE BYRD	
(perhaps the reason was really that).....	39
DEAN YOUNG	
Arsonist at Rest	40
Half Story Half-life	41
Washing in Cold Water	42
ANGIE ESTES	
Last Words.....	43
SUSAN KUREK	
Truth #60.....	44
JASON TANDON	
I Don't Speak Donkey	45
LANDIS EVERSON	
High Heels, Low Spirits	46
Troy Poem.....	47
MÓNICA DE LA TORRE	
<i>from</i> One Hour Photo	
Fuck the Stars and Other Heavenly Bodies	48
Exercise Your Monotony.....	49
SEAN FLYNN	
Techno-Cento	51
MARK NEELY	
Four Blues	52
AMANDA M. JOHNSON	
I Remember (Being Sick and Injured)	54
FRANK GIAMPIETRO	
Me Spy With My Little Eye	58
Please,.....	59
RACHEL FINKELSTEIN	
Swiss Lint	60
JORDAN DAVIS	
West To East (Ten Ten Wins).....	61
The Sense Of An Ending	63
REBECCA LOUDON	
Eating the tender thing that will not fill	65

ANIS SHIVANI

What the Iranian Woman Wants to Say to Her American
Counterpart 66

K.E. DUFFIN

Mountaineer 67

RICHARD MEIER

Rainbow Report 68
Diurnal Round 69

TERESA K. MILLER

After Aftermath 70

HANNA ANDREWS

Dear you, all the coins have gone soft, 71

JOAN LARKIN

Last Seen 72
Phoning My Brother 73
Houston to Tucson 74

MIKE HAUSER

Triple Envelopment Strata 75

KAIA SAND

from family album of earthen estrangement
actual pedigree charting soap & milk 86
“did you read” 88
Brief Memoir 90

MICHAEL ROBBINS

On this date in history 91

DANIELLE AQUILINE

Cakes 92
Traveling Games 93

PATRICK WOODCOCK

The Saddest Ink 94

MICAH PERRY

Boot-Strap Blues 95

ARIELLE GREENBERG

Dissociative Fugue 96
Your Bad Feelings 97

STEVEN TEREFF

salt machine. 98
in costume. 99

ALISON PICK

The Maps of the Labrador Arrive 100

SARAH MANGUSO	
<i>from Hard to Admit and Harder to Escape</i>	
9.....	101
15.....	102
78.....	103
90.....	104
MATHIAS SVALINA	
Creation Myth.....	105
ANDREW KOSZEWSKI	
Once More, With Temper	106
BECCA KLAVER	
Stare Too Hard and the Bad Feelings Creep Back	107
DANIELA OLSZEWSKA	
Introducing: Jane Doe	108
The Spine Grower	109
RAY DIPALMA	
Vladette, Vlädchen, Vladella.....	110
C.H. EDING	
Parable.....	111
Off to College	112
document, personal poem: 10-27-04	113
Bells for a Black Mountain Poet.....	114
JEFF SCHIFF	
Feeding Depression.....	115
KRISTEN ORSER	
Another Reason for Gratuitous Worry	116
PETER JAY SHIPPY	
<i>from Freaks & Graces</i>	
<i>Temps Mort</i>	117
Air Conditioner	118
The Voice in the Next Room.....	119
BRUCE COVEY	
Clytemnestra.....	120
MONICA GERSTEMEIER	
Excuse Me.....	121
CHRISTOPHER DAVIS	
Our Works.....	122
NICOLE WILSON	
My Aunt Shows Me How To Abide Cancer	123
KATE BRADY	
Comfort	124

RICK BAROT	
Compass	125
Tacoma.....	127
RYAN COLLINS	
Etiquette.....	129
AARON PATRICK FLANAGAN	
Metacenter	130
JEANNINE HALL GAILEY	
The Fox-Wife Describes Their Courtship	132
RYNN WILLIAMS	
Insomnia.....	133
JESSE STEPHEN CROUSE	
Swelling Like Airplane	134
BARBARA PEREZ	
Holes Hold Together, a tautology	136
SIÂN KILLINGSWORTH	
Jungian Parlor Game after Egg Drop Soup	137
THOM WILLIAMS	
Nine of Swords.....	138
SUSEN JAMES	
47 attempts to channel Hannah Weiner	139
MARTHA SILANO	
Report from Connecticut on the Letter M, the AB Pattern, the Counting by 2s, 3s, and 4s.....	140
ANDY TREBING	
12/9/1980	142
Suicide Notes	143
CRYSTAL WILLIAMS	
Polliwog	144
Cosmology	145
JENNIFER WATMAN	
“i really don’t mind! sleeping next to death”.....	147
DOBBY GIBSON	
Civics Lesson	148
TONY TRIGILIO	
I Led Three Lives	149
What I Missed	151
MARGARET BRADY	
Praying Mantis.....	154

ED ROBERSON	
Workshop, but with Nolan in Japan.....	155
Staying In Touch	156
Of Relative Time.....	160
KAREN AN-HWEI LEE	
In Parenthesis, Rutilance	161
JESSICA BOZEK	
Notes for Another Geometry Transport.....	163
JEFFREY MCDANIEL	
Whitman on the F.....	164
Odysseus on the G.....	166
GRAHAM FOUST	
Language Poem	167
Airport	168
CATE MARVIN	
Pretty Speech (The Occasion of your Death)	169
Colder, Bitterer.....	170
You Cut Open.....	171
KATE DOUGHERTY	
Sara without an H.....	172
LISA JARNOT	
Bar Course Excise Insensible.....	173
Wax and be a gemingfeld and feed the well-greened earth.....	174
Sinning Skel Misclape	175
DAVID TRINIDAD	
Classic Layer Cakes	176
CONTRIBUTORS	189

COLUMBIA PO
ET
RY
REVIEW

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Photographs at her Wake

Two curved tortoise-shell combs
in her hair
no more breathing in & out

Outside in childhood
a glint of water
green in the limestone

Inside in marriage
she & John in their lighted room
comb into comb

Can you feel
a hair under a page of the telephone book?
under two pages? under three?

The Poet

for Jerry Stern

Hunger of the tongue
of the belly the throat even
the mike creaked
—was it hungry too? Was the lamp
wild to shine?

The little sounds, &
lights, & everything, alive, & veering, *fun!*
the way you tossed your head, like Johnny Cash—

from On the Sea

I.

A pencil can be sharpened down infinitely—
having learned this, a person says

Or we, or we
might know better than to choose the number seven

Placed here, in the contents of your mind
a wooden spool exclusively
for making ribbon. It's childish

and intricate, the nets lain down,
the strewn road.

The pages waved, made wavy from the damp
imaginary Have you been

writing of peas have you added
on the wheel? Friends become
loved become lit become surfacing

guitars, even Ann
home from the wars.

Little funnel blue path
through the clouds
is just a description for the ones I love.
Infinity of pattern on the stones

are circles, lines, the future, past, secret
present on the shore.

Funnel blue path through the clouds
that curve around another cloud is just what happens,
loves, seen.

A man who shook the olives to the center of the net
left his glove
and then it shows up in the photo
and a dream includes a face, with no connection
to what came before.

Sometimes the name is wrong,
the wrong beloved

way to read. Bedecked with stars
the night flies out.

Particular numbers
of letters get written in colors.

Sheets will be hung on the twine.

Soul, betwinned, extending [,]
of each given thing.

II.

The boy did tell where the stars fell,
pero, Cassandro, he was not believed.

The horizon makes itself a path
when the trees that frame your view of it
outline a funneling down to the sea.

Having failed at journeying once again,
the donkey hauls sandbags to the ristorante.

I am not learning Italian to read Dante
I am not reading anyone
except to speak of the missing—

Ballot box,
Ballet Pox, “keep it simple stupid”
makes a nice war.

Once in the shadow of a great mistake,
the plots all tangle into failure
except “the bright obvious stands motionless in cold”
from which there was no spinning off into an own.

A sea is a glass
mare, la mer, sea. A central note
is C, a song sheet shown under glass.
The waves break over and break
off: the note (the sea) comes apart.

A Giant Proposal

I could've saved Rock Hudson. I know it.
If I'd only hitchhiked to Hollywood
at nineteen—muscle-ripe, limber, and good
at sexing daddies so hard they forget
being a queer is wrong—I could've stoked
Rock's furnace, shoveled out all the clinkers,
kept his coals smoldering with the flicker
of immortality that youth provokes.
I could've been his rising *raison d'être*,
the gold Speedo-clad boy circling his pool
tossing out day-old tricks and cockeyed fools
who strip to play bedroom Russian roulette
just like I've robotically done these past
twenty oddball years since Rock, then you, passed.

A Brown Age

Summer took every one of my
dresses while I was having
them perfumed,

summer wore them every day
so I was naked and living in a cave
where frugivores

snuffled in the melonflesh.
I wrote you a letter in dirty ink.
Asking you here.

Why not? Trees move
at least as much as we do,
if only their heads and arms.

I didn't write that.
I scratched it
on a rock and skipped the rock.

Brownie, the pink oranges are hanging
just behind your head.
It's the life you can't see.

If I turned your head, you'd still
only see the turning.
Not fruit. Not me.

But legs moved to prove you came
at all. At last, we were sleeping
and fucking and it was Fall.

Now in the dark brown dark,
it's cold and white.
Your eyes are largely

plural like fish
sleepfloating in their zones,
no souls, but thirsty.

On the mouth of the cave,
there is an icicle that had no way
here in summer.

Now it melts down
and refreezes into the shape
of a wishbone or two wet

legs to escape on. I will break
them both and put it all in a cup.
I'll wish for water,

that is, waste a wish on what
will already come.
Please don't leave.

Please drink it. I'm waiting
for noon to become midnight
and for you to drink it.

Moth Death on the Windowsill

1. *Moth's Last Words to You*

Being sexy is so important to humans, it's repulsive
but what's not to love? The way you pay in warm
soft cash, erasing cigarettes so coolly. Plus you're so big.

I warned you people, never sleep with the one you love.
Sleep with the others. Make 'em want you,
and you'll love 'em soon enough. Just use the body.

And as for women, for those who love women,
please remember you can always get back inside.
You really can, pressing the emptiness on your hands

and knees. Involve her when your best ideas come,
i.e., Wallace Stevens was addicted to candy, a great
idea for a movie to make together: women love this.

2. *My Last Words to You*

Let's get a little digital camera and one of those film
making programs and finally do this thing.
Let's become an art team and make a family of films.

We're a messy couple, admit it, and what we put
onscreen could delight us, re-light us with proof
of us, memory-proof! Forget Stevens, here's the subject:

The moth died in a mini-second falling the half-inch
between the window and the screen. If such a little
makes a difference then a little is a lot.

Unless a dying is not. The moth is nothing,
but a whole death? More than we've managed
to accomplish at this window. We waited

for our software to be delivered,
we barely watched. We missed it, missed
the window. Missed our shot.

A Poet's Poem

If it takes me all day,
I will get the word "freshened" out of this poem.

I put it in the first line, then moved it to the second
and now it won't come out.

It's stuck. I'm so frustrated,
so I went out to my little porch all covered in snow

and watched the icicles drip, as I smoked
a cigarette.

Finally I reached up and broke a big, clear spike
off the roof with my bare hand.

And used it to write a word in the snow.
I wrote the word "snow."

I can't stand myself.

Glass Family

“She’s half-Japanese and she’s crazy!”
is what Kenny would say, given half
a chance and that half-truths help him

put 2 and 2 together. His use of the word
“crazy” implies that my being half-Japanese
is a distinct form of craziness, seemingly

unrelated. His relation to this bifurcation
is affectionate but mysterious as he is
my brother on both my mother

and my father’s side. My mother would say
“Kenny is Jewish as well as gay” and that
this makes him both “sad” and “happy.”

My father would beam at his son,
the writer, at breakfast: “He’s black
and white and read all over!”

And: “I’m glad I got the two
of you. I don’t think either one of you
alone’d be enough.”

The Leukemia Girls

1.

Sisters, daughters of the youngest
 Daughter of my neighbor—it's confusing,

The girl at the end of the street in the old neighborhood,
 My neighbor who was a friend, a friend of many years,

And whose mother was a friend of my father's
 Since high school—it is exhausting to explain people,

Having to work so hard to invent them for someone else.
 We do it anyway, and take a great deal of time trying.

These people, the people whose stories we tell
 Each other, they're all like places on a map, the real directions

Told to us by someone else, by hard work and concentration,
 That person pointing a finger and nodding a head at critical turns

You must be sure to make by particular trees—*don't miss that turn*—
 The directions exhausting, finally, both to give and to get.

So it will do only to say that my friend's daughter
 And her other daughter as well, both got leukemia.

2.

Nobody knows why. There are answers, of course,
 But the answers aren't answers. They are not answers

The way we think answers should be—*yes ma'am*,
No sir, well behaved and nice to be around.

Science may be our best way of understanding the world,
But it may not be our best way of living in it.

The answer is, nobody knows.
All that's left is to tell this story, to point at it,

Two girls, two daughters, two sisters:
To tell this story and to take the trouble it requires

To invent these two girls—again, and again, for the world—
And to say as directions, *I wouldn't go there*

Stranger, not if I could help it.
But what to do? Even that caution is exhausting,

Knowing what I know about that house,
Knowing what I know about what I don't know.

lucky strike

candlepin

pork

bowl

snooker wagers

on the pocket

eye-hand coordination

cuestick

eight

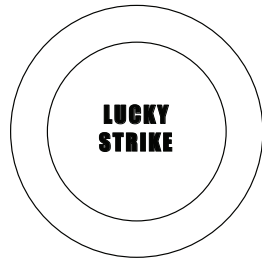
- ball crack

hot oracle

boner in

the corner

snatch



Typography: The Letter A

Britannic Bold—Dear Angler Fish, Dear Hook and Reel. Dear Carousel’s Golden Ring, how we want past our reach. *Century Schoolbook*—Dear Eager Puppy. Dear Everyone Knows

Who’s Best. Dear Flag, we all need approval. *Vivaldi*—Dear Coxcomb, Dear Roadrunner. Dear Strut. A brag’s a brag, with your head full of purple flounces, ruby rings. *Viner*

Hand ITC—Dear Drooping Petals, Dear Broken Fortune Cookie. Our fortune reads: “Chin up, Pup, one day the sky will be clear.” *Mistral*—Dear Squeak. Dear Jet. Dear Stealth. Who sneaks

through radar can only lie for so long. *ZapfChancery*—Dear Road End. Dear Swan Song.

A History

When Tanya Anderson spent the night and told me, half asleep, to use my finger and pretend like it was a boy, I did.

★

Watching a movie with my mom, Dolly Parton says “sax.” I asked Mom what it meant and she checked out a series of books from the library. I knew what sex was. Just not “sax.”

★

I don’t remember my first kiss.

★

I do remember Tony Kilbow, though, feeling me up for the first time in Jackson Park after crawling through a pipe to an empty storm drain. We couldn’t look at each other, looked instead at the Quiet Riot lyrics the high school kids painted on the wall, stared at that rectangle of light like a mail slot to the street. Listened to the cars.

★

I’d get up early to go running, sometimes sneaking through the patio door and crawling into my boyfriend’s bed in the basement, five feet from his snoring brother. Everything still. Hot after crunching through snow in blue lycra. The red roar in my head.

★

We had sex on the laundry room floor, thin carpet over cement.

★

In college, I’d get drunk and sleep with friends I already cared about as friends but then I’d cry. And sometimes they weren’t good friends.

★

My roommate, passing me in the kitchen said casually, “I masturbate.” I said, “Me too,” although I didn’t think I was doing it right. She had shiny hair and straight teeth.

★

I had sex with the love of my life three times a day, almost flunked out of school. We went out to eat a lot.

★

Depression hit. What to do when you can’t enjoy yourself? We didn’t touch. Or talk.

★

Years passed.

★

Finally I realized he masturbated in the shower, no signs around the house. I had assumed because I wasn't, he wasn't either.

★

I'd turn away and cry.

★

Age 25? 26? It became cool to have sex-toy parties, like Tupperware, but this was too late.

★

Almost as late as my mother on the stairs, talking about sex for the first time since Dolly. I was seventeen.

★

Twenty-nine. The first by my hand alone. Twenty. Fucking. Nine.

★

For chrissake.

★

I guess I should be thankful I know even now.

Looking for Desnos

Friday night on State
and Randolph, the only good
bookstore two trains away,

I'm looking for Desnos.
He isn't here of course,
on this day of scotch

neat and penny loafers,
but I'm bored and keep looking—
Dickey, Dickinson, Dryden

too done and Eady too genius—
I fall on Flynn, Nick Flynn,
whose name is catch-22 quicksilver

on the tongue, fricative
like the spark wheel's
spin that makes butane

breathe—
Steve Young and Sam
Spade, Nick Flynn.

This man, a gun, and I'm under
his blue and white cover,
inside that true crime.

I've got diastemata—
teeth rearrange
in my mouth for this,

bite through his garden
of chill and splinter.
His words in storage—

closer to brick, grout.
The darker you become,
the lighter you may be—

Angelization through ink
on paper, tool on tool.
Come bum a cigarette, Nick,

*I need your warehouse
of black rubber.* He shakes
his head, smiles at me

for luck. Nimbused,
his pretty, empty hands.

This Is Not What I Came Here For

Yesterday and today have me in common.
This could be April in which the rain
breaks up the air that surrounds us.
What are you reading now? The funeral
was postponed and I called everyone.
The people here are really watching television.
When I smell you I cannot smell anything.
Would this CD change me? Or a cup of tea?
I do not know what you are doing.
That was me five years ago and who was he?
I am a lost storm. I am an asian lamp?
That sandal seems to fit you perfectly.
Were you listening and thinking about me
this whole time? The more breakfasts
I make, the more I expect it from myself.

The Trouble With Documentaries

After the wolves had died from eating the poisoned buffalo they were then skinned and allowed to lie where they were, and the ravens in eating their stomachs and intestines would also eat the partially digested baits. This would kill them, and the prairie about the carcasses would soon be dotted with the glossy, shining bodies of the defunct ravens, with an occasional Bald Eagle among them.

—James R. Mead 1859

The moon is unhinged
from the earth,
a faint pinprick now.

As a boy I slipped
into the tomb of James Mead, just the thin
slat of midday Kansas
to help me. Saw the flickering projection
on the stone walls, the long back of Kansas,
its culmination! Oh the awards, the prestige,
that unturned prairie,
what a film! Remembering, I piece the land back together, making

myself the moon, that omniscient eye. My verdicts
as swift and harsh as strychnine
slipped into thick campfire coffee or blood
smeared from crotch to forehead and Mead staked
like the hulking bodies of buffalo to prairie

(it took 20 miles at full tilt to slow them)

the ravens would know him, laid bare.

Cut to next scene.

Ravens, stark
against blue, black paper cutouts, *The Birds*, the frenzy,
the unnerving flight.

It is all going wrong,

becoming some True Hollywood Story. You grew old
on Mead Street. The pillars on your porch still stand, the brick streets
last to go. This is the first scene, the smoothed brick bulldozed, then
the camera pans across undisturbed prairie and you
just beyond the rise are waiting. I am directing
this body, and its hunger
is yours and who is to refuse?

This great desert, a landlocked sea,
the distance between us
and the moon,
we both wait, listening
but the network has spliced in a new ending

and the soundtrack builds— *dah dum*

dah dum

the sound quickens

dah dum, dah dum, da dum da dum

and from some unfathomable expanse

a fin surfaces

hints at length, and weight, and suddenness.

And still

the music is rising,

those three-thousand teeth holding

but before there is time to turn, to see,
the surface smooths over again.

from Help (In 47 Languages)

It is rumored that when the famous linguist William Jacobsen was struck by a car, he shouted, "Help!" in 47 languages.

Menahan

When she was hit by the car, she was still too young to cross busy streets by herself. Her father waited for her in front of the tenement after school to **help** her, waving her on only when it was safe. She could see the cars but wasn't good at judging distance or speed, yet this one time she thought, "My father is wrong. I can make it." She darted into traffic and though the car tried to swerve, it crashed into her. The boy was a teenager. She was six. The nurse at the hospital gave her a grape popsicle when the tests were all done. The teenager was scared, he thought it was his fault. He bought her a bracelet made of navy blue metal flowers. She felt very adult when she wore it. The kids at school all signed the cast on her arm. The day it came off, her father bought her a red drum set with gold cymbals.

Naadamaagen

We knew it was going to be bad and it was a holiday weekend, so we called the Red Cross to say, “What can we do?” We planned to load up the car with bottled water and power bars that we could buy in bulk from BJ’s before heading towards Louisiana. “Oh no,” said a woman on the other end of the line. “You’ll be in the way. Please send a check instead.” Then a CNN reporter’s voice cracking as she told of bloated bodies floating by. Inflatable mattresses and garbage cans, makeshift floats. Rats and alligators. The Superdome. Sean Penn in his boat, Geraldo to the rescue, frat boys with a canoe strapped to their SUV. We sat **helpless**, ashamed, watching residents who’d axed through attics, climbed onto tops of houses, **that one word** painted, Sharpied, crayoned, penned on rooftops over and over again.

Namola

We work at the food bank one weekend a month. My husband and I are retired and want to **help**. You'd be amazed how many people show up for cans of corn and yams, whatever we have. The bakery donates loaves of bread and muffins. The kids are the sweetest—my husband saves the cookies under the counter just for them. Kids have the biggest eyes. Ever notice that? I love kids' eyes, before their heads grow and catch up. But sometimes the women seem slutty, I just have to say it. I never would have worn those kinds of skimpy shirts when I was raising my kids. There's a mother and son who live in a car. I just can't imagine how they do it. It's the son who breaks my heart—his crooked bangs. My husband always saves him any cookies or cereal with a logo of Spiderman, the kid's favorite.

the ten-in-one

In the green dark of the mermaid
tank we float, tight fistled,

listless. Addicted to the slow
laudanum of lazy hours, one girl

sliding over the next like
plates of glass. Two hours

in the cage, two on the ballyhoo.
One in the box removing

our heads like dresses.
Removing our dresses like heads.

All of us haunted by train wrecks,
by open space. Each of us soft

in the hip, limbered into
the tiniest space while rats

rummage the trunks, scatter
sequins and dime store jewels.

All our costumes ill fitting,
meant for another, smaller girl.

Letter to cin salach

Dear cin,

I'm writing to say hello. We are new friends. Which means I know you and I don't. So, I will be the protagonist of this letter, you will be the ghost.

New friend, you "have land" in Wisconsin! I promise to teach you how to fly fish. I'll tell you this: casting is a beautiful dance, and there's nothing as luxurious as standing in a stream, but you need to accept that fish are not abstract. Catching a fish is like looking into the face of every mistake you've ever made—the eyes, innocent golden disks, look and look. And yet to cradle the fish in its slick gasping skin, free the hook and slip the body back into velvet. . . . Life must be lived to be understood.

An odd moment: a squirrel fat as a small raccoon is scratching at my screen. He refuses to face the music. Winter is dawning on us. Ice weights the trees, each branch like white coral. My roof, who knows the ordinary boringness of a house, is silent while snow humps up in the road.

Recently, I found a list of goals in an old notebook:

1. *Learn the mandolin*
- 2.
- 3.

I keep my invisible mandolin under wraps—the future gleams, and my dread of 2 and 3. I think of this thing about happiness, and our promise to emptiness. Each morning I wake, say *I'm sorry* out loud, to myself. In emergencies, I quote my favorite poetry—a poem Lexa wrote at eleven years old:

*No it isn't no it's not
Yes it is it's getting quite hot.
Summer is out Summer is in.
Summer is here so let's go swim.*

I once heard you read at the Green Mill, something about the inevitability of men and road construction in spring. Actually, you don't read, you sing. Teach me! I'll wait for you with my loving mandolin—we'll sing something something something about my mother's mismatched and its residue.

I once asked you if it was true, “Girls levitate each other at slumber parties?” You rose to a witchy laugh and looked at me. You said it’s easy—mothers, girlfriends, wives and daughters all know. Why aren’t scientists studying this and winning awards? No magic but science is how I see things, yet with two fingers you’ve raised whole girls in pajamas and white socks . . . *light as a feather stiff as a board*. Boys don’t float, we play tackle basketball and swear and weigh ourselves down in forts.

cin, I should have written more about children. We will both be living the truth of babies soon. I don’t know what to say. From here, below zero, I can only quote William Matthews, “Our children are the only message we can leave them.”

Keep well,
Chris

Cinéma Vérité

The rain is reserved
for love in the movies.

Yesterday I met
two famous practitioners

under one umbrella, running
through neon puddles

past the director's cut,
a yellow cab door opening.

Jump Cut

I.

Pirated still of a gangplank—who would get away.
I know—you've brought me joy, boy.

Watching the winged watermarks—
your place of *ourselves* : swish. Saving

suds in a burnt-out smelter pot. I wish you the clean white
visitation of angels. I wish you copper-bottomed boats,

autumnal blistering—where our battened vessel : without :
aspen groves combing the new seas of scorched mountains,
faux islands seen rising.

Slag pit, sluice—the sloughed skin of our difficult two months
sedimenting the bathtub : this a new town
a new body of water to fathom—my craggy island

II.

Byssal swaying—
a subaqueous discourse of *there* and *there*,
and—*watch, we'll when*. A back upon a stomach, hands tracing

where the skull would laugh. Sweated and wept hardwater
trace of strychnine, trace of lead, quicksilver—
your mouth the very inlet I sought after

O slow—
the ground is jaded, but the horses here no longer
rust. As the will
to wipe away filings

from the riddlebox—mile-long tailings knotted, scabrous,
hooking across the excavated earth,
your delicious bottom, your muscular pits.
Flock of geese, your clean white teeth

were ocean. Runnels from the rise of bodies, washed.
Unmasted, adrift—pitch of
the sprawled ground. Far back : call of water,
gravitation of moon.
Obsidian monody of depths, waves a distant sound.

1 October, 2006

Day for Night

Supple flowers [surprise!] surround
 Your summer face, a lake a convoluted shore
 Counting each morning, each chore—
 the tilting dozes, mountains, dawn's squared-edged light
 amidst these indifferent musings, you drift, a boat unmoored in your psyche

Sickle whirling—the mind's black calendars, rolling back : this supple cheap
 hotel

A subtle reference to oystershells—well, not so subtle. We skin to skin arrived
 as the shedding serpent—our crimson candlelight; or, dusty Venetian blinds,
 limp?

Arrived, yes, broken and huddled against the wind. Moments later, worn out
 adrift on the bay,

 thickets of waves : we bore the lantern over the night's
 wet sweater : all you offered

Sorry I wanted to remove that wet sweater, both in life and later—here
 in tortured convolutions of the mind, its hubbub

The contingent drinks, your slippery hair
 and our long day's journey lists at the dock's neon
 sign announcing “hot pastrami cocktails and girls girls
 girls”

trailed by what night was supposed to be—an amen of loose steps
 in the high lake town

crash of cymbals and the goat bleat of a muted horn, the mystery of orifices
 clumsily entered in the awkward lovemaking drink brings

 awkward my arms : clumsy the trees, the moon's surgery
 or was it the curving docklights—calling from the
 neon : the world.

1 October, 2006

Dear Dad,

picked up for Oregon without notice
 and having only seen this road's no-man's-land
 under a previous moon, I expected mountains
 but that was before, maybe before the sonic tear

of glaciers, far upland I tried to explain to myself
 but this morning, the dust-devils—
 one so small, lost on the unfurling
 land, almost in reach exhaling mere inches away :

a lonely nun, dancing
 into the horned shadows of a brighter and brighter hedgerow
 another woke, climbed slowly past machines' plantings,
 went bent and praying beyond cool alfalfa,
 up the bare brown where one frayed
 cloud, falling like a steel raptor

 on a numbered rural road,
 distant, revved
 a Thunderbird—tilling the gears
 a young man, a mule perhaps,

trucking methamphetamine on a quiet Tuesday
 afternoon slipping up the dust over the road's gray spine
 like shadowy river water voices calling in the throaty
 spin of wheels across the land
 another brown spiral wandered
 into its wake, its threaded identity sublimed

 so, I've got to ask, do you see danger
 in that faint storm (infirm mountain range?)
 to the east? you think a woman rests her head
 on that young driver's lap?

and, what is all this wind when
there are no trees, when the only birds are killers,
only fitfully, from a skeletal rage, touching ground
and then : a flurry, some rend and silent
like these amorphous columns : a screech
and a thin cry of ever-open eyes?

bet that girl sucks her gums
bet she's a red-eyed diner waitress of the purple sunrise
bet he rattles the gear shift too close to her face,
and lies to himself about a hayblown, shake house, away and dell
somewhere coldbeer in the safe and porch wide open

but there were lots of other open places . . .
was it the sun or some slim motor
that unwound shadows from satellite dishes, sprouting up after Spokane—
a whole wavy field of them—and what were they
beaming? we're moving now at a higher and higher speed
into tonight—the driver, she wants to “get home”
Dad, always, something insisting : that patchwork

of those other places : light glints
off ravenous metal eagles
nailed to a truck's mud flaps five stern men
shake their heads : a truckload of potatoes running
like pet-store mice across the dim highway

behind us, in a small town's doldrums, rises
a fluorescent decision against grain silos,
and slowly, down theirs comes ribs, gears
by summer's rediron train tracks
the remaining half,
what's revealed, pink boards curling slow in the heat

from somewhere the sound of rats, the scurry
of light over the clean, the grain-dusted boards

another passenger, up front, his sleeping head slipping,
falling like woodsmoke towards the driver's lap
night drags farmers towards home,
drags shopworn clouds from homes' chimneys
where the clouds or mountains : still another
burnt column stands up
growing thicker and longer,
its brown arms, shining hips expanding
into the press of night.

My Co-Pilot is a Welsh Pixiehorse

This way is well-maintained
but unbeautiful. A church

off the side of the highway.
The sun's loping, rolling slowly

over. The way back will be re-cast.

Through a bridge weathered green,
patina'd almost into a statue

of bridges, I see the Missouri,
receding, the sky without luster.

I love you, you fuckers! Also,
some flower

I must have fancied "pretty"
& so bagged in my satchel keeps turning

up, dried more sophisticated
a pretty (damned

near lovely),
between pages. An unpinned wing.

We're going to leave this city someday.

Sticky web of light along the tracks.
Dead Petal.

Yellow as vice-lacquered tooth
or basement page.

The Play House

I.

Because blood is thicker
you're still pointing to your bony chest
that cherry bomb, your striking hand

flicks a lighter. If I flinch I'll miss it
the gutted house in the floodplain
backyard where you broke a hundred plates

beer cans strewn in a garden of rust.
My sister and I fled to the crotch of the elm to watch
a cicada shed her corset

weren't we your squirrels? Got in everywhere
round brown eyes on you. That's what you get naming me
for an old girlfriend. Dad's women make good ghosts.

II.

In our game we are twins. We are of a mind
playing mothers and fathers together.

If any object is cradled: a shield or a child.
We feed our dolls milkweed. We build our babies houses.

We rub our skin with crushed bodies of fireflies
and become luminescent in the shadow of the elm.

Oh my sister when you become yourself again I will be Dad's little boy.

You are propped in the grass with your t-shirt pulled over your eyes.
I poke a dead opossum with a sharpened stick

and my sister's face is a field of white, whimpering.
I peel back the pouch of skin to find a wet, pink thumb, dead too.

(perhaps the reason was really that)

The following morning she had grown. There was futility in the narrative and her voice broke. It was a challenge. Like the continuity of a fallen history like her eyes locked into his like his body locked into hers like the fear of. *Elle est dehors, la Vie, avec ses balançoires, ses alcools et ses monstres.* It was not a theatrical gesture this leaping out a window it was poetic industrialism it was gauche surrealism it was referential anguish it was just uninspired. She hung over the clashing format of a limb-crushing performance and his early desire clutched to paradoxical pleasures. *Where are the resurrected compositions of.* Plexiglas trays bakelite phones chrome clocks lacquered plastic chairs. The question was not his vigilant vintage '60s. The question was not her emotional modernity. The question was not the crumbling of. If he had a taste for well-timed visualizations was she bound to a pulsing Parisian background. He sensed her resistance to shambling close-ups and there was absence in their ballad.

Arsonist at Rest

It feels good biting down on your heart
but I wish I could have stopped you
from that tattoo. I like your empty tissue box
stuffed with plastic bags: very tidy.
I like how you hardly rust at all
like aluminum and glimpsing you naked
in the window when I do not know your name
and am the insane lonely night milkman.
Maybe I wasn't breast-fed enough.
I'm sure you're gone 90%
when I torch your garage in a friendly way.
I collect strays.
We're not people to take fondue lightly.
I wish I had grown up believing in a goddess
with many arms instead of a newspaper photo.
Get close enough, it's all grey dots.
Everything else is unbridled vulgar passion.
When a human is judged, he says
"I think you're overlooking something"
but he will be talking into a giant hole
like the heat duct that swallowed our marbles.
Maybe it won't be that big a deal.
Maybe it'll be like when you're awfully tired
and finally get to stretch out.
At the heart of the universe: a seahorse
and inside the seahorse, nothing but flames.

Half Story Half-life

Alas, we'll never know how it turns out,
if that boy chewing his sock will ever
be diagnosed and welcomed back or the monster
understood at last and killed. We had to turn
the tv off and try to get some sleep, slippery
goddess who never comes when called and then
won't go away. Hard to know what to sacrifice,
what obeisance make. Torch some fever few?
Dance until the brain floats to the deep end
of the stew or sit at glacial remove
scoring a tablet with po-mo insect song?
Fellow initiates, brother bozo, sister scar,
let us share the paint strips of our hearts,
leadbelly blues, inverness greys, scab red.
Not that I expect to understand you better
than you do me or less, your addled broken
bike bell, my hostage knock. It's just
that we're together not much longer
and what a relief. Look who's here with us,
Captain Mike and his topical bilge,
the commando, the shampoo salesman,
the reluctant soprano who refuses to sing
unless we plead, cajole, insist, promise
to make fools of ourselves too, forget
ourselves as others are obliged to do
so the world may be restored a portion
of its emptiness and peace.

Washing in Cold Water

I don't think I'm close enough
to start giving everything away yet.
Maybe I'll spend one more day in the madhouse
reading them Hopkins and Breton for corroboration.
Until you come back inside with a bunch of loonies,
each of them carrying a leaf,
I don't think you're ready
and I'm not ready.
Achilles was ready.
Wordsworth was ready but when he asked directions,
a man pointed behind him at the mist
and said he's already crossed the peak.
It's probably not the peak or the valley
where you put down your day pack
and order the thick local beer.
It's probably not some sort of sexual mania
brought on by ogling the floorshow.
Or dissections.
Glaciers drug most of the landscape here
then the wind wore faces in it.
On the plains, who kills who
is impossible to keep straight
then Achilles's son marries Helen's daughter
and a flock of lambs covers the hills
and a sapling's roots slowly crush
the skeleton of a cat buried under it.
The parents can't decide when to tell their child
she was found in a dumpster so never do.
Of course that's not the end of it.
Her whole life, teachers praise her
but something in the mirror drifts.
The wondrous is the truth because it's simpler.
My mother tried to be nice to me
but she had to lock me in my room.
That's not an excuse.
I heard doves.

Last Words

Let us cross over
 the river and sit in the shade
 of the trees. *Pardonnez-moi, Monsieur,*
 wait 'til I have finished
 my problem. It's been a long time
 since I've had champagne. Too late
 for fruit, too soon for
 flowers: hold the cross
 high so I may see it through
 the flames. Get my swan costume
 ready. I am about to—or I am
 going to—die: either expression
 is used. Who is it? Ah, Luisa, you
 always arrive just as I am
 leaving. Sweet Rosabel, I leave you
 the truth: if you can read this,
 you've come too close. L.
 is doing the rhododendrons,
 the boat is going down, and I'm going
 into the bathroom to read. More
 light. Am I dying
 or is this my birthday? I should have
 drunk more champagne. Either
 that wallpaper goes or
 I go. What is the answer?
 Very well, then, what
 is the question? Oh why
 does it take so long
 to come?

Truth #60

He spilled open: the butcher cut, the stringy in his throat, the
“I love you,” the salt ancient, the scar sowing itself some other name, the
madder and yolk valentines, the ready fist, the faint jester and spray paint
clown, the violin game, the flood cake, the eyes falsetto blue, the playing
dead and mocking boy.

I Don't Speak Donkey

Recently I admitted to my friend Bill
That I can't emote.
"No problem," he assured me,
"Just write your feelings in this leather-bound diary
I lifted from a gift shop in London."
Will this help you understand me? I asked.
"Yes," he said.
"I will break into your house,
Find the diary stashed in your underwear drawer,
And I will pry its tiny lock.
I'll know that you like the way the rain puddles on the roof of your garage,
That you named the finch bobbing in the water, Thampy,
And that you still dream about all of your best friends
From the different stages of your life
Living on the same street, barbequing every weekend,
Feasting on your tamarind lamb kabobs
While listening to *Tired of Bile*,
The punk band you played bass for in college,
And watching photo-worthy sunsets
Over a block that has no beginning or end,
Which is strange
Because you always wanted to live alone
On a dead-end trail in the mountains."

High Heels, Low Spirits

Who has time to split apart our poem?
It's been like tomorrow all day.
It's Paradise here, and yet it's hideous.
That dragging sound is my soul uplifting.

The dog in the manger has had two
heart attacks, the half-baked kind
and the chewed-leather kind. Which is real
which sublime? Movies just show us

our fingernails scraping for pleasure, our
toes tucked hard at stars. Talking backward,
slurping the same shop widows, same top models.
The poetry of it isn't poetry, it's cine-jealousy.

Troy Poem

This collection of cities
one atop another
feels like breakfast food
mud-wrapped in cardboard boxes.

The holiness of old thoughts
never existed
until we dug down and found it
in dead people's dishes.

Traces of doubt arose everywhere
among the silverware, raising a cloud
of dust devils
to obscure the focus of our confusion.

The trumpets blew out
grain like a razz-ma-tazz
flopping it in the chariot paths
between doors.

That said, our questions made the gods, agriculture, battles
made the stacked boxes collapse
layered in responsibility.

We died also rattled by earthquakes
our loins heavy with wheat
that in this dream of things
got boxed to eat with gods.

from One Hour Photo

7/26/04

The more precisely the position is determined, the less precisely the momentum is known.

Fuck the Stars and Other Heavenly Bodies

One wasn't enough. Two dead birds appeared in unexpected places.
One in the alley where we thought an orange cat had been trapped.

We had tried to rescue it, but by the time we were ready it had fled.
For over a month, somebody's scent has remained in the hand-me-down

chair in my office. For you, I'm keeping track of things like these.
You said there's no limit to learning, except the one I won't bring up now.

You don't leave the message I'm dying to talk to you to one who's lost
a loved one. Forgive the selfishness of this guilt. I'm keeping track of slips

like these. The champagne tasted sweet, yet we weren't celebrating.
But the guy at the table next to ours thought so; he barged in

and toasted to life. Why not "barge out." Once one's in, exiting is
to be expected. More slips to come. And inept efforts to contain them.

Some say a potent photo is one untarnished by the doom that later met
the portrayed. All photographs capture an absence, hasten hindsight.

*Illegible: a doctor's prescription should be. Likewise one's signature—
it shows one is swamped with correspondence.*

7/24/06

Life at the colony.

Exercise Your Monotony

Who wouldn't agree: nothing is more comforting than being liked by others, even if you haven't made up your mind as to whether or not you like them yourself.

Thanks to search engines it's become easier to "weed out the chaff," so to speak. But, oh, what to do when there is none? (This is, after all, as idyllic an environment as an environment can be.)

At night, when nobody's looking, the residents Google each other. Test their intuitions about how their peers fare in the so-called outside world.

Reciprocity is perhaps all that's required to get along; from there cordiality follows unless conversation veers toward aesthetic or political matters.

Soon it becomes clear that the groups can be divided in two: the time-travelers and the materialists.

Materialism: Utter the word with horror, stressing each syllable.

The quaintness of the backdrop tends to attract the time-travelers more than the others, whose responses can be equal in jerkiness.

Metaphysics: Laugh it to scorn: proof of your superior intellect.

But the travelers are prone to wanting to go back, revisit a past experience and deliver it with grace.

Imagination: When lacking in oneself, attack it in others.

What does the audience want? Major distortion here, since people's creations get mixed in with their personalities and the intolerable in one's discipline is acceptable in all others.

There will always be a gazer or two, taking it all in and realizing the obvious: what we all have in common is want.

In the end, the nearsighted will deal with bedroom affairs and the farsighted with mass transit systems.

Techno-Cento

i need to rework junkie and tweak poet
 i cut myself on a comb this morning
 i wonder what the psychic would have to say about this?

whine uhhhh i am fearful
 i want a room with a view
 or a sky woth no cloud
 or anything really that is nice to look at
 want to eat and eat and eat

(isn't he the cutest?:)
 except when he isn't?
 that is going to rock the hizzzouse

mine went weird too but it did not say corrupt code
 well who knows what time anything is

yeah i hear yuo
 yucky yucky
 yucky
 i am thinking that maybe i don't ever want to be married
 then you do not have to worry about any of this stuff
 you can just let go and let god
 or let go and let ? gary
 or don't ever let go, go crazy and go crazy
 or become a machine
 an rboot instead of an rbot
 a way to make sure there is no mire

is hawaii or alaska in the contential united states?

Four Blues

You play against a sickness past your cure.

—Robert Lowell

The trouble is I bore Picassos silly. At a painter's party the guests all look painted themselves—their faces great roaring abstract oceans, or delicate nudes with lines like police chalk, or grim still-lives, all shadow and suggestion. I huddle in a corner, so obviously written, holding my martini like a restless bird. *Honey*, said my vicious friend Virginia, *no one's got time to curl up for days and read you.*

They are notes in a song that goes all night although I sleep, like the harmonica player in a basement bar, his skin buzzing from the drug, who fills his belly with rags while the bartender puts chairs up on tables and calls himself a cab over a long warm whiskey. The player has a baby girl, and he does her morning voice. Then her cry when she sees his fallen face in a crack of light.

Months of winter windows bring the walking blues. To leave and leave again like my daughter going through and through the alphabet. She's all beginnings now, and if I'm lucky I've got a couple middles left. Go to Leningrad to thaw. To Maine where my parents honeymooned. Nairobi for Buddha's lesson. Oriole St. where kids sing baseballs through air. To Portugal.

In a plain sits a blue scale I stand on in the morning. It says how old I am, and what a punk, as the lights blink *ordinary, ordinary, only worse*. Next to me violets on the wallpaper pucker—I'll tear them out this summer or the next. Without the scale I'd liftoff like a heron over water. But it glowers at my iron wings. Even so, after a night of gin and reckoning, I often trip a few notes up the clouds.

I Remember (Being Sick and Injured)

I remember how much I hated taking pills and how much I loved taking cough syrup.

I remember Snoopy Band-Aids with a tiny pillow of gauze underneath, after getting a shot.

I remember taking Dimetapp when I wasn't really sick because I loved the flavor.

I remember flat 7-Up for stomach aches.

I remember plastic hot water bottles and electric heating pads.

I remember the new improved waiting room of the children's hospital and all the toys it had, but by then I was too old to play with most of them.

I remember having to leave sleepovers at Heather & Stacy's house because I always got sick there.

I remember getting chicken pox in second grade, it was over spring break and I didn't get to miss any school.

I remember faking being sick off and on for a couple months in high school just to stay home and play *The Adventures of Link*. And how bored I was when I had to start going back to school.

I remember going down the rocket slide at Union Park and sliding into someone else's vomit then vomiting myself.

I remember breaking my ankle and being dropped off at the hospital entrance while my mom parked the car. I had to hop in alone.

I remember while I was on crutches getting to pick two friends to bring my lunch to me every day and us getting to stay in the classroom without adults during recess.

I remember the tickle of the saw getting my cast taken off.

I remember the first time walking without my cast and how round the ground felt under my right foot.

I remember Flintstones Vitamins.

I remember running for the Campho-Phenique after getting stung by wasps.

I remember my parents kept medicine in the highest cupboard in the kitchen.

I remember being at the eye doctor's office for my fourth black eye (softball) and the nurse telling us I was there exactly one year before for the same thing (baseball).

I remember my mom's aloe vera plant and breaking off tips for burns and cuts.

I remember hating Vicks VapoRub because of the way it stuck to my flannel pajama shirt.

I remember the white sheet and green blanketed cots of the nurse's office.

I remember trying to achieve the delicate balance of holding a mercury thermometer in my mouth—firm enough so they wouldn't slip out and not too hard without biting down, because I was afraid of breaking them.

I remember sitting on a work table of the florist supply warehouse after diving for a football on the asphalt parking lot while my mom dabbed my face with wet paper towels to clean it, murmuring "didn't hurt."

I remember not being able to read mercury thermometers.

I remember my mom always made me get out of bed when I stayed home from school because she thought if I was up and around I would feel better.

I remember my eyes being glued shut from pink eye and waking up in the middle of the night, unable to open them. I would run blind down the hall to my parents' room so my mom could put a warm wet wash cloth on them to get them open.

I remember standing on a swivel chair to clean the windows of the flower coolers and two seconds later being on the floor with my back bleeding.

I remember only letting my father get my splinters out because he was so gentle about it.

I remember getting the 24-hour flu, and going to bed at 8pm and not waking up until 4pm the next day.

I remember being carried through three wings of my high school on a gurney after falling down a flight of stairs.

I remember how rich everything tasted when I woke up from back surgery, apple juice and saltines.

I remember how good it was to eat pizza instead, even though I couldn't keep it down.

I remember the smell of hospitals; sterile with a faint tinge of urine.

I remember Halls cough drops in the long square package and how the dimple in the center of the lozenge would suction to my tongue.

I remember seeing my brother's shoe coming right for my face just after my first black eye had healed, leading to the second.

I remember cold sweats.

I remember how scared I was waiting to see the doctor about the lump on my breast, and how comforting it was to have my mother with me.

I remember spraining my ankle when my babysitter made me do an obstacle course in our backyard. As she carried me into the house a bird pooped on her arm and I felt avenged.

Me Spy With My Little Eye

Me and my paper plate of fried chicken.

Me the hero! un-jamming the big grey copier.

Me, the escalator? Me take the steps.

Me, and no more fifty gallon fish tank.

Me in my new hundred dollar shoes.

and me if me don't cut my hair just so my head looks huge.

Me, my head is huge.

Me, my Dad's ancient, oily face,

me like to kiss it.

Me fold clothes but no no no me don't put them away.

Me paying too much for the teeny tiny house.

Me asking for help,

cuz me can't get no cheap flight to Malta,

Me all stuck in sassafras.

But not so with you right?

You're smart

and soooo cool but I fucking spy you.

Please,

Josephine Rooney, come back to Oswego.
This underwater scene has me bamboozled.

The rock of happiness has fallen

on my collar bone. I miss your “achoo!”

Sogni d'oro my darling *sogni d'oro*,

for you I would staple my hair.

Swiss Lint

What happened next was predictable.
White noise and the spelling of her braided hair.

I knew how to sit, still in brittle honey.
Stacking myself above campfires,
as if holding back pits that bloom in my mouth.

All of the Lincoln Logs have hardened into their frames,
they feed the white avenue of their needle driver,
her lock into 1968 all over again.

I am sick of your good-witch heart,
sick of smelling the kill, of wanting green.

I cannot hear the school.
The children have rusted into the magnetics of the yard,
their spider arms are right-angled and daddy-long.
They do not lie.

I am waiting for your two-step
to draw from beneath your pleated coat.
To fill and taper out again,
into a lesser rain.

West To East (Ten Ten Wins)

It's 6:33 of a Monday giving me 22 minutes
 For May, its head in the Edison
 Its feet in a dish of salt

I scare up an early shift of pigeons
 Checking out Katie Hinneran's ass
 In Noises Off; a penny looks
 Down in honor of Matthew Broderick
 And Gene Wilder before him

It's quiet and cold and raincoats
 Are keeping the diamond district
 Warm among the thousand empty necklines
 The honeycomb boxes sheets
 And trash bags, where's
 Everybody off to, Proskauer Rose?

The brass polish smell makes me hungry
 And the scratches in the painted window
 This liturgical season makes me want to
 Trade in the star I follow
 For a little burning tongue on the head

Hugs in the Bear Stearns lobby
 And down Vanderbilt, the fifty storey
 Building where the insurance company
 Outsourced my physical

You've heard of writer's lotto:
 Scratch a poet find a trust fund

I'm no doctor, university don or otherwise so
 For now I herd text where actuaries graze

O so what, what if
I take my equity and stake it
On a used wagon and Spanish class

Will that be my precocious midlife
Leather jacket or a delayed bout
Ten rounds with angst, the angel
Of redress for ragged margins
And warm vents for sleep
Even with a baby pinky red moon
In my peripheral vision I can see
A cell phone of mine say 6:55

The thief of my pink sheets deterred
By plastic twine, it's up to the 30th floor
To Dug's eleven new messages, to find
Out from the I Ching whether this
Martingale will pay. You never know.
And now I look into my morning, to see
What it will make of me.

The Sense Of An Ending

All the different colors
 Want to break things,
 Wearing tooled holsters
 And hammered copper
 Panavision dueling pistols,

Lincoln Center. Not my stop and
 Not yours either. A woman down the car
 Puts silver snakes in her ears
 And plugs a cord into a cigarette lighter.

Once you start worrying
 Whether what you say makes sense
 You're done for, says the penguin.
 A good heart,
 Practices vedantic astrology,
 Goes out long and comes back
 With a dignity you don't expect
 Because she's short,
 Has a thing for men's clothes.

Now we're talking
 Says the English language.
 He climbs the dresser and puts
 His hand in the creamer tipping it
 Spilling pumpkin seeds across
 The laundry, his laundry,
 In the corner by my closet.

Harbor! Train! Turtle!
Harbor! Harbor! Harbor! driving through trees.
Eagle, pointing to a feather stuck to the window.
 That's not even a seagull.
Seagull. Cycle. Seagull motorcycle.

Under the piano, flicking the amplifier on and off.
He gets up and runs out of the room: *Gouda!*
Where did you come from? *I come from Nap.*

Moon, in the elevator. *Moon apple banana*
On phone. *Bye bye* when I come home.

Eating the tender thing that will not fill

1.

There is a bruise on your jaw, a stone
or a broken tooth, teeth little Gullivers
in a row, a trip on a sidecar gone loose
from its mate and dropped
back into the quarry.

2.

Odd punishments afoot.
For instance, the time you ate
your brother after cooking him
in a port reduction and *fatfatfat*
no take-backs.

4.

Mars hangs above you like a meat chime.

5.

At the last minute, twine knotted around your feet,
horse, raccoon, cat, dog, rabbit, lamb, pig, bear,
you can hardly sleep from all the racket in your bed
and spring, yes, the spring market is near.

What the Iranian Woman Wants to Say to Her American Counterpart

We are invited to prematurely unveiled tickertape parades,
shrunk to the skeletal remains of mere boys.
We foresee trench warfare at the outer limits of the kitchen in sight of the
Alborz Mountains,
the Madison Avenue draftsman's cluttered board,
the remains of unprogrammable Silicon Valley code.
Pails of garbage cause a ceaseless heartpounding among the neighborhood's
pygmy jazzmen,
hounded cats wallow in stasis, and a smell, as of old people perpetually
on the brink of resurrection, wafts up in the waning
afternoons. It's the Texas sun, my neighbors
excuse themselves (for their grotesqueries). Dasht-e-Kevir.
Or victory marches gone sour. We are at
loggerheads over misplaced pairs of scissors,
when it's not about elusive car keys or door keys.
The luxury bathroom floor, green marble, annoys
with its coolness. There should be reparations
for the mere act of sneezing and then not blessing.
We can crawl inside the spacey confines of grandfather clocks,
and not necessarily as children. Sylvia Plath's Daddy
and the Ayatollah Khomeini have a lifelong conversation
wherein one man accuses the womenfolk of the other
for the bestial economy. The readings
constrict Ginsberg and Shariati to petty vocals.
Full-throated pain. Shrill and sure.
Pills and potions. Primetime selling,
and the shopping basket in our hands
chalices of dried up shame. A perpetual state of
pregnancy. And the men clapping quietly in their laps.

Mountaineer

With the alabaster torso of a prizefighter
KO'd in the ring, or a would-be swimmer through gravel
whose butterfly stroke struck the pseudo-water
of talus rubble and was instantly stilled,
stripped to the waist of your flimsy rags,
your tanned hands flung out like a shaman's,
you seem more like a sailor drowned on the crags
of a drained sea than a nubile faun
who pranced for a painter. Oblivious to your bashed-in head
whose reddish death hair grew for several days,
your twig-snapped leg, "Get up," the sky said
decade after decade. Everything about you decays
except your body. Friends grew old and died.
Embryos of embryos found you on the mountainside.

Rainbow Report

Dreamed (The roughness and insubstantiality of surfaces, the weave of a pillow, explained to naked friend!!!, other friend eating chocolate chip cookies, plus baby), Woke early (6:15), Talked with friend, Hugged, Discussed scheduled time of swim, Read schedule (He was wrong!!!, Read all the times and things on the schedule, Pool 6:35-7:05, Breakfast (grape-nuts, soymilk, coffee), Read paper!!!, Named states he'd lived in and read news items (The founder and chairman of a Wisconsin investment company / Lake Placid—a new documentary chronicled / More than half of the top administrator's at Harvard University left since Lawrence Summers), Outside, 9:45-12:35, Got out and Read Plasticville, "Something's Got To Give" and 1/2 "Ancient History," Good Friend / Took off clothes and lay in Bed with Friend, Listened to Friend / Repeated Names / Acted out what happened, Told friend dream!!!, Outside 3:00-4:55, Lots of songs, Bobbed head to songs / between songs names songs, Got out and read book again, Dinner-time, Showered, Changed Shirt, Untucked sheets from bed, Lots of math concepts (near / far).

Diurnal Round

You are writing beautiful poems and I am
squeezing ginger tea from its bag
with the string and my fingers as you
taught and watching a short freight pass
interloper on the commuter tracks
like the theory of projection on the surface
of the clouds if D. and the 19th century I would have
to describe why I didn't go back to bed
via the colors orange and violet adhering
and seeming to approach a collaboration
with the imagination as this poem approaches you
gray sky that followed and the middle finger
signature of the flashing mast
of the John Hancock tower going nowhere
unless we of the crowd on the sidewalk suddenly
stop spinning so it may seem to orbit
as a wave in the sea, toppling the spot
we watched it, stone in hand?

After Aftermath

I.

Ooze out, acid-blood-bile away and the sharp
pieces naced, the shell clichés itself empty, grays
the air inhabiting where the water ran.

The valves that pumped, that filtered,
dried by the out, bifurcated, bound.

The binary falselys, on/off, in/out, down/down.

II.

You are impenetrating, pregnating, a rhombus
with legs.

No, I have not mentally asked him to let
me go, or physically or in mitral Morse code.

There is a reason haibun masters could write about flowers
after rain, and we

III.

A boon

At least the gift of a subject, a still lifeless package to unwrap

Dear you, all the coins have gone soft,

the way you like them. A mint track-flattened blank, oblong, insignificant, faces blurred down to varied ores.

Still swamp hot in pants pockets, weighing you down on long guilt walks to this or that train home, but

they mean nothing in the fountain; nobody hopes on sad scrapmetal. But Dear you, you're not superstitious,

never considered heads or tails, never reveled in shiny-new, nor glued pennies with your birthday year to the mirror.

Dear you, it takes mettle to undo a curse—all this change cast away, spending hours branding copper with teeth marks.

Last Seen

On empty pavement
under infected elms

by houses lined up silent
windows admitting nothing

no spendthrift peonies
no dropped dolls

to worry the guiltless
borders of short grass

that time I came walking
and froze to see you walking

through dead quiet
and freezing light

my body marked for cutting
and yours just beginning

you rebuking and I
shrinking into the harsh story

which for all I know
still serves you

wherever you moved and married
and had your reasons

and after what we did
undid my body's reason

I was scraped to a small word
as they took saws to the trees

Phoning My Brother

This Sunday devotion—
a service I'm rendering?
But I need his voice
to see him: stooped,
standing on ripped linoleum,
adding to a pan of leftovers
while the cats twist
through towers of cans on the table.

He shuts off the rice—always a talker,
any question will start the mudslide
of facts and opinions. This time
the true key of a Chopin prelude
some idiot transposed and what
the gifted doctor who was also a tuba player
said of the piece Donald wrote for him:
trickier than colon surgery . . .

how he's kept the oil bill down,
and now that the ground's thawing,
the date of Ann's interment is set.
No need for you to come this far.
I see him standing by her raw grave
as the priest intones the short service.
I don't want to bother anyone—
says this without weeping—
to the sister waiting to hang up.

Houston To Tucson

So heaven is fire, too:
these lakes of flame—gilt-edged—
and below, a cerulean stream
draws us, steady over alps
of whipped curds. How
can she read her magazine, or he
fill his crossword, ball pen
stalled in the pinpoint gleam—
am I the only child
cheek pressed to pane
as hell's pilot
ferries us through heaven?

Triple Envelopment Strata

later your children will become important

Do you believe modernism is dead

later your children will become transparent

in good with parental meteorology

ultra personal coagulations

this chili is fuckin' up my steez

I went to McDonalds

and I had a coffee

and I came back

it is cold there is dead light in the air

living or dead we have to know what it is

it is cold there is living light in the air

It made me feel like *I* was somebody else

can this be evasive do you think

Date Movie is dumb don't go watch it

I went to Hardees

and I had a coffee

and I came back

I see robots everywhere

where the sprockets bend and air shoots

walk over the touch of enemies

the touch of enemies is on you

AAAAHHH!

I can't feel my leg AAAAHHH!

remember from that movie

do you believe modernism is dead

bro-down

take funk music for example

do you look cold there

I got an ad tells me that

I just shrunk there

coke can pleasant

coke can pederast

say something about the universe

say it at Dustin's party

I wasn't there

solutions go to infinity

I had a Burger King coupon book

I threw it all away

solutions go to infirmary

please lose the dots

box thru swinging door

install a slight fissure

cranberry juice spill in aisle 6

cut gum on sports card gum

fake rose with glitter in a glass

fake hair on man or woman's garment

fake magazine with fake subscription card

hands get dirty

hand sanitizer goes into skin

Doug Fritz wants his holds

'double envelopment strategy'

about to drop trou

back in America no potato chips

The Weight by The Band

always granola always what works

oh the karaoke you'll karaoke

Jack and water

straight over rapids

I get heart trouble

I get funk foot

which is so weird

I plotz then dash out

do a couple things on there

don't call here

I'm all alone up there

we all do our own thing

in the reign and expensive shift

the copier sound's annex

do art and social work

be consistent about punctuation

keep up on what to appear to oppose

APPROPRIATE APPROPRIATE APPROPRIATE

in the copier sound's annex

of truth and guilt

what reasons for health

in this scud missile laboratory

the scud stud slaves away

to be boisterous about one's confusion

to just hang out talk the talk

me and the boys

water-based poetics

poem like a champagne pyramid

at a famous poet's wedding

do it on the net then in hard copy

something like orange folder

modern dance presentation

in Haystack Hunter's poem

many birders end up

a good distance from the birds

to relax press 9

to exchange press 4

to suppress press Digimon

quote the love poems

the ones that make you think

things that make you go mmmmm

scan for m&ms

quietly

we are expanding our forms

such as that glistens

such as that shards

such as that sushi

B P Nichol looked like Mr. Perfect

I do inventory

these things occur to me

a chair by an open window

sandwich & corporate soda

trains blowing up

preservative blues

mess with you

gonna like it so much

violence on cue

violence in que

violence is cute

violence is a click

violence is a clique

violence is our schtick

mess up the air for birds

throw cups on shore

they throw our cups on shore

needless horny

stumped for an answer

puzzled by words

don't it stretch

or

don't you watch either way

t shirts in the moonlight

talk show infiltrates

study of our karma

do you believe modernism is dead

I believe Lawrence Welk is dead

long live Lawrence Welk

fear what happens

or could

the motor boat kind

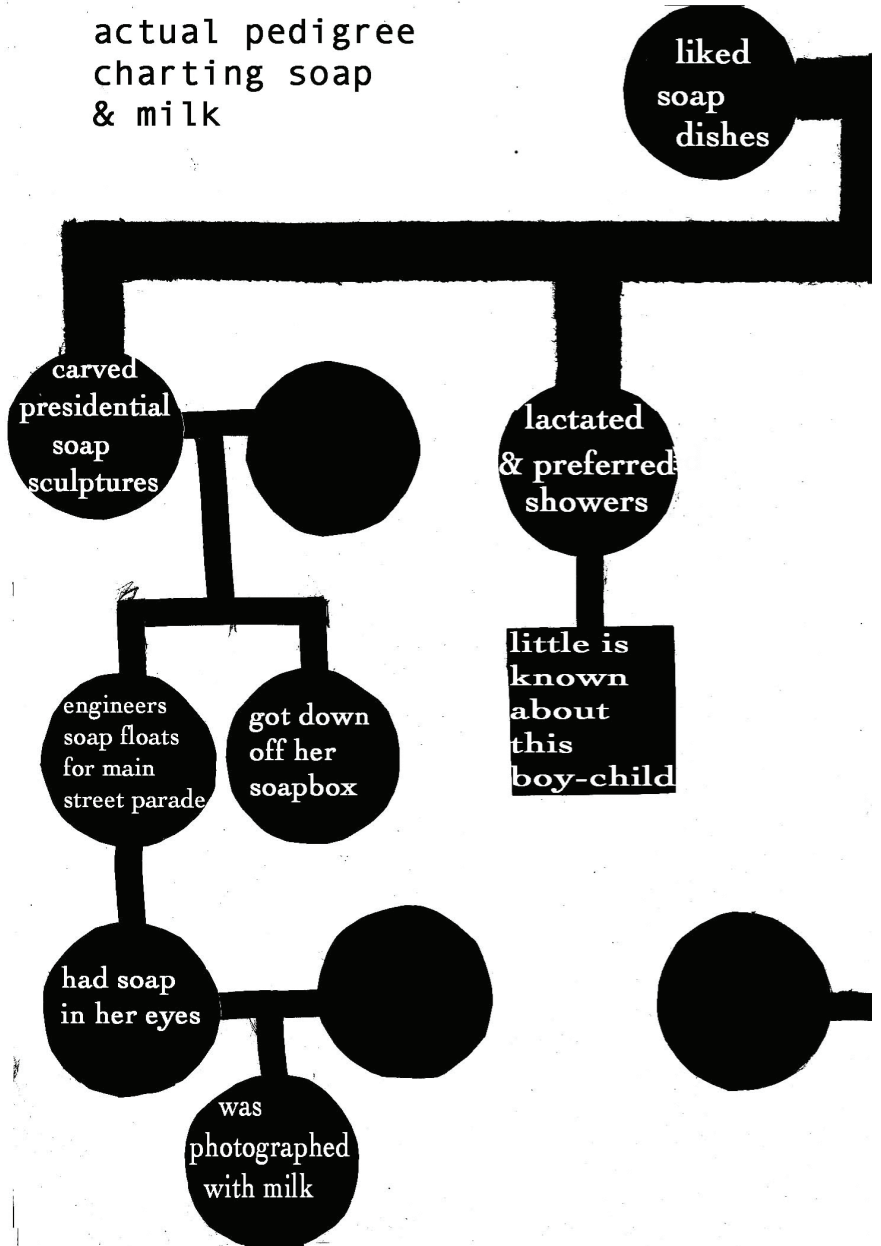
long distance athlete

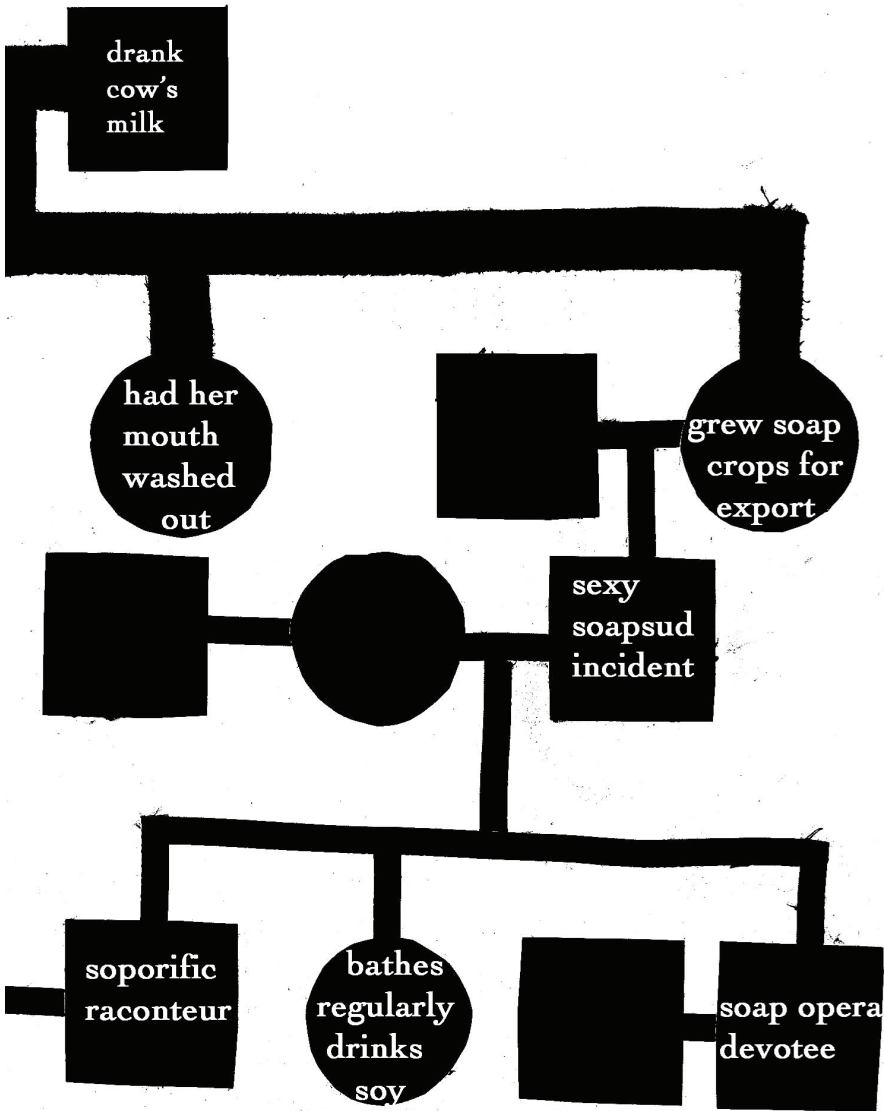
Playboy op eds

by Norman Mailer

from family album of earthen
estrangement

actual pedigree
charting soap
& milk





“did you read”

did you read
that William
& Harry those
young and
current princes
 attended a
 ‘colonizers
 and natives’
party? ‘and several of the
250 present
had blackened
their faces
minstrel-style’

Daily Mail
London
January 17,
2005

I was
really looking
forward to
Martha
Stewart speaking out
for the poor
after her
imprisonment

maybe I
haven’t
followed her
story closely
enough

and now a
mother is not
eating because
she knows
she's part of the problem per usual

a war and its
killing

many people including her
son

this season
I can't walk
well but I will
be able to
again

some injuries
are nearly
'reversible.'
but surgeries

still the planks
hold me up
and I am
grateful that

I do not sink
into the earth
the core

can't be
rescinded.
Carrie Buck,
Minnie Lee
if I slip into your
story I don't
belong there

Brief Memoir

I remember often that I am not a man. I'm distracted by a lethal summer continuing a lethal year. Life comma life comma civil war comma and the justice has gone pheasant hunting again. My left hand is more serviceable than my right. Some legislators passed a bill of whimsy once when I was twenty-two my window was a door burglarized to bequeath poetry solar paneled. 'Democracy' spreading an itch profitable for tonic hawkers, weddings brilliant in their photographed laughter. At times wrists grow rashes. Lateness shares its people, its wide tattle-tale doors. Since you are reading I'll take this opportunity to mention that the Caracas mayor compared the cost of one week's upkeep of golf turf to feeding twenty families. Listen to the little radios plugged full of people. Little radios on lean curbs, leaning lyrically.

On this date in history

I am tempted to move to the rust belt!
Little chuckwagon the dog chases
through every last room . . .

The mind is a terrible thing.
It is a tendril, a lathe. Laying the ocean
across the ocean floor, rescuing the *Hindenburg* baby.
This is pulsar CP 1919!
This is a Fourier analysis of its consecutive light spasms.
Soon the first American lawn in orbit
will be visible from the reactor's core.

A balloon over Baptistown detects particles
from a forest fire in Alaska.
A special sparrow falls in Providence, Rhode Island,
where I'm calling from. I think it's 10:30.

I'll give you the benefit of the dubbed.
I see the western escrow-light falling into
the proper tuples of our modest lane.
On and on. Sex with sailors was in demand
among the Hawaiian women. That sort of thing.

Cakes

for Albert Colleto

there are two metal steps into any pastry truck. first my father, then deedee snuck into the little debbie cave when they were boys. fingers licked sticky and damp dug deep into boxes of suzy-qs, ding-dongs, and other fudgy things. instead of church or god they would sneak with heavy pockets into the alley and eat what was taken and not melted.

seven years later deedee's hill was hit hard in vietnam and no one in his company made it out alive. my father showed me a poem deedee had written in his last choke.

i don't really remember it.
i thought the poem was ugly.

Traveling Games

things like this always happen upstate,
 first west point, then dime store baguettes
 and blocks of cheese. we spent all night

in the van crossing out words in dickinson
 poems. you would ask me for an adjective
 and i would tell you no one here loves

masochism or hand massages, and still
 i want you deep enough to fumble parts
 of speech. adjective: crumbled; verb:

deconstruct. *proud of my crumbled heart*
since thou didst deconstruct it. meaning:
 how long can it take to wade through

poughkeepsie? meaning: how much
 longer will i wait until you take me home?

The Saddest Ink

in memory of Sergei Yesenin

I don't know what was used to leach the bloody ink
how flesh made word or the amount needed to write
eight lines of vermillioned verse but I do know an old
Russian woman whose museum has abandoned it to dust.

Moscow 1998, Russia

Boot-Strap Blues

The elk were communists then,
the hummingbirds suckled swift poison, and the bitter
clouds wouldn't listen to reason, but back then I had
been slipping on a lot of loose moss in the river,
hitting my head.

At Patty's Palace, it was a bulkhead with
standard-issue burnt beans where the elderly drank
from stool-sit positions, lined up like so many defenders
of the crown.

In other parking lots the Paint Valley Bearcats circled
the wagons and used the pickup of their trucks mostly
for empty cans of Natural Ice, cuz hey man,
it's easy on the wallet.

I sat in my bedroom and knew
that it was mine if I could take it,
only I should stop eating so much candy.
I finally leaned up and surgically removed the screen
from the window.

I thought I could land on
tips of the dandelions

When I fell, I sprained or broke
my hand on the latch of
the well that collected moss, and
little water, and the dog sidled up,

licked my hand,
and mocked me with "veni, vidi, vici."

Dissociative Fugue

O to suddenly pack a valise full of snowflakes
& head off to the holiday, heady old place
mildewing tenderly like the edges of lips pulled apart
for the rip of a kiss. To be bad! To be a person
& not this gratis weight of balled rubber bands
& the silver charms at the edges of a heavy life.
The drawer slides open. A damp wool sweater stuffed
behind it. The drawer slides & your mother,
a fetus, is stuffed behind it & now you fight.
To be orphaned!, o how grand. I'll start again:
o to suddenly fold your career & goals into
silky square knots, fill the miniature bottles with
lotions, fill the miniature bottles with whisky,
fill the tiny life with something molten like snow
& start again. You are on a big island
setting up the new life on a kitchen counter.
Here, you are postmaster, huntress, cartographer.
You kiss a woozy somebody & tap them
into marriage. You go about in this uniform for weeks
until it is greened at the edges & moist & you need
a new one. You slide open the drawer of the highboy
& there's your old mother, still yours,
so the weather begins to fuzz at the edges & you
are knocked back, the smallest nesting doll in the set,
& start again: o to ferociously assemble the people
you love into each other, into slip-covered albums,
o to arrange your medicines by the days of the week
with little snap-close, hard-edged compartments,
o to love this arrangement of chemicals in the
hot white glitter of your holiday body, o . . .

Your Bad Feelings

I don't want to spend Seven Minutes in Heaven with your Bad Feelings.
I don't want to tongue-kiss your laundry day,
your extracurricular, your dystopia—
my searching blindly tongue will only make your dystopia think I want it
more.

I am done dating your free-floating anxiety.
I want to break up with it in a Japanese garden on a prettier day than you can
imagine:

stinging cold, ballasts of rain, oh so pretty.

I want to come home raw and rosy and single.

I want to feel incandescent and compact, a balsa boat on a little pond.

Here's what I think: I think, I never have to marry you.

I don't even have to fake land on you in Spin the Bottle anymore,
land on you again and again like I used to do,
some blind loyalty lodged like an x-ray card between my tongue and cheek,
bit down upon hard.

My mouth was always too small for all that.

My mouth never had room for all your spit-back sugar.

So I'm taking the Truth instead of the Dare:

I'm done, and for all its lack of hard kisses the day has a fresher skin across its
mouth.

salt machine.

I envy the grace of the wheel
with a barnacled back. fish bones
fill my lungs. my bladder houses a sea urchin. all my angles
caught on coral. behind the waves your hands splash.
there's more to oceans than poseidon's bullying.

in costume.

the snow harvesters maintain their grace in spring. icy water pours from their navels. their silhouette's process into snakehead. into air. the imperfection of white. flaw's jubilant blue. sweepers usher in sunrise. and what to do with the mouth? a finger enters or a tongue. eyes unlock. there you are lounging against the retina. applaud.

The Maps of the Labrador Arrive

The first expedition: 1903.

Leonidas Hubbard, George Ellison, Dillon Wallace
set out for the Naskapi hunting grounds,
hoping to find the caribou herd,
enough meat for the winter.

Thousands of miles of uncharted forest,
black-flies swarming their mouths and eyes,
trap-like tangle of willow and alder
reaching and pulling them down.

Must not all things at the last be swallowed up in death?

My paddle, my single canoe.

from Hard to Admit and Harder
to Escape

9

My friend and I are asked to dock the rowboat immediately and speak to the director of the camp.

The tall man stands in front of us and asks me first whether I use that language at home. I don't know the right answer, so I say "sometimes," I am twelve, my small heart is pounding. My friend's turn, she says "No, never, not ever." Then the man turns to me again as if I have been lying.

15

The first night I walk into the woods with my small light and terrible fear. The second night I walk again with terrible fear, and on the third night, the same. I ask the others if they feel this fear, and they say they did once but that it passed. That they learned to use a small light and then no light. Now they ride bicycles into the forest. Now they lie down in the meadow and close their eyes. On the fifth night I bring three lights into the woods yet walk in fear. On the sixth night I try one small light again. It is getting easier. I feel different all day, don't care where I put my books down. My back has ached all week but I no longer worry. On the seventh night I walk into the woods and turn off my small light. Now I am like the others. On the eighth night we fly into the dark on foot and on our bicycles, walking and riding in every direction from the stone library at the center of the grounds. Now I am like them. I close my eyes and walk into the woods, turn off my small light. I no longer recognize myself. Now I am really afraid.

78

I feel uneasy around a certain acquaintance and decide to solve the problem by spending more time with him. It doesn't help. I initiate a lunch date, then a dinner date. We meet for drinks a few times, but even being drunk doesn't seem to put either of us at ease. By now it is obvious we have a real problem on our hands. We begin sleeping together, but even that doesn't feel right. We move in together. We edit each other's work. Nothing. I like the apartment but as soon as he walks in the door I stop singing or doing whatever I am doing and return to the discomfort that is by now familiar.

90

I watch a horror film in which zombies overrun the earth. After watching the film, which seems so realistic, I realize my unreadiness to face cannibal zombies. Soon I begin running long distances, lifting weights, and training my mind to calm me in times of great stress. I work harder at my job, clear my apartment of clutter, and organize my finances. My friends praise my newfound strength and health.

Creation Myth

Before there were people
there were ghosts.
They walked around
holding radios & eyedroppers,
looking quizzically at each other,
trying to understand
what the street signs said.

Something was ringing
& it wouldn't stop.
The ghosts gathered
around the ringing,
shuffling back & forth
on feathery feet,
ghost-heads lolling
on shadowy necks.

There was a voice
& all the ghosts started:
No one can feed the baby.
No one can feed the baby.

Once More, With Temper

In the end God does not care
how old you were when you were born,
or if you've beheld the sound of a unicorn's horn
smashing against a glacier. It does not matter
if you've kept up the perpetual caramel gargle of faith,
or if there was a guy from the future on the jury.
It does not matter if yesterday you realized
that you've disappointed everyone you've ever known
and that you are very, very proud of yourself.
Postcards from the mountaintops, virgins from the valleys.
The discoveries that kittens evolve to be cuter and that Man,
figuratively, there are millions of us! Figuratively, man. Millions!
103 seasons spent trying to screw in a light bulb. You can feel anything
as deeply as you want to. It is impossible to name a prayer.

Stare Too Hard and the Bad Feelings Creep Back

When I finally arrived at the town of my heart
 the anticipation had already wrecked me,
 warped my steel. I'm sure I'd've been an okay
 denizen if the whole goal of my prancing hadn't
 been the possibility of discovery, the chance
 the scouts would sling their crossfires on me
 like on a pouty skinny thing at the mall.

As it was, I built things wrong, I loved things
 wrong. So I left hopping skipping and jumping
 across the border, left to sit in the hut of the blind
 with a blindfold on, *ohhhming* and offering up smoke.

When I came back I was so sorry for the bloody
 smudges I'd left on all the buildings. I knew they'd
 been erected for Olympians and had once kept me
 swaddled, though I'll admit I took pleasure in saying
 suffocated. Nothing in nature wants to go home.
 All these animals just dig holes. Everything at the limits
 of every town is a symbol for the bayonets lined fencelike
 around my heart. I've lost that lovin' feeling, or an engine,
 or a swamp. It's that readable. It's just a picture book.

Introducing: Jane Doe

I was born in a concrete patch.

I was born with a complex system
of bicycle parts breathing me in
and then out and then in again.

I am the thing with the shiny yellow
saxophone voice. I am the girl
who cubed pomegranate juice;
the girl with a J-shaped pseudonym.

I drink from a zodiac-lidded jug.
My pockets full of special bugs,
my female-shaped hand bones
clutching a note written in red-
orange crayon: *Do you like me?*
Circle: YES NO

The Spine Grower

I cut out the space between the anus and the vagina.
I soaked it in gin for six to eight weeks.
I bought a plot of land under that wireless horizon.
I dug a hole, China-style.
I invoked the Taurus, the Virgo, and the Capricorn.
I added a great lake's worth of water.
I stuffed Jolly Rogers with straw and strung them along the perimeter.
I converted carbon into pesticides.
I dressed the children in reaper robes.
I sold tickets to the flowering, porno-style.
I switched the camera to the Yes setting.

Vladette, Vlädchen, Vladella

The phrase “très curieuse typographie”
 caught my eye—that and the goat in the corner
 —the corner made by the edge of the book
 and the splayed scissors under the letter opener

No one has been here in more than a week
 apart from the goat and the assessor of clocks
 9 h du matin jeudi 17 et 10 h du matin vendredi 18 juin
 the words did not come close but were useful nonetheless

Vladette, Vlädchen, and Vladella have been proposed
 from within a small and very private circle of friends
 I have brought them into my house in order
 that they might test the meaning of their grins

These are the rewards of cursory harassment
 and the cahoots of false modesty and the warble of specific intent
 On a day like this with the food chewed the drinks poured and the fan going,
 perhaps, like me or the goat among the mushrooms, you have some other ideas

A remarkable sneeze that passes for an optimistic apology has its place
 “I tell you I’m in earnest and sneezing like that proves I’m telling the truth”
 Occluded emotions are all that the rebuke will allow
 falling on the violets and coming up smelling like roses

Too bad for you too bad for me too bad for the goat
 Step this way—the portrait has been finished more or less
 but as you can see it hasn’t been framed
 This, as a matter of fact, could take some time

Parable

Bring me your dreams, she said coyly
Nothing bad will happen, and for six years
I brought them and she ate them and became the size of a mountain.
From the bulbous base of the mountain out from under her ragged skirt
occasionally a scrap flutters,
paper, or effluvium, excretion.
Grabbing for it I cause her to shift all her weight.
This results in a tedious readjustment.

Off to College

To college I took an orange nylon nightgown sent by my aunt
or it may have been polyester.
Her name was Mildred.

We started college in August and ended in June.
My father drove.
I asked my mother, Margaret, how to wash my clothes.

I didn't know yet how to wash my clothes
or really how to look well in them either.
Leave that to the Shirleys and the Joans.

document, personal poem:
10-27-04

today I didn't get mad at my husband
Friday I got mad at him for leaving the bag of charcoal
by the door and not sweeping up the ashes blown into the corner of the porch
Saturday I got furious because he didn't complete the travel arrangements and
I gladly would have
Sunday I got mad because the weedy beachfront we had cleared for planting
in the spring looks like a mud field now
today I didn't get mad

Bells for a Black Mountain Poet

Some poets I knew of got together to eulogize a poet who'd died, more famous than any of them.

I went alone. Somehow my name was on a list and I was notified. It was a casual place.

The man next to me drank a coffee, a wine, and a water, sort of simultaneously; I sensed his nervous presence

on my left. One of the eulogizers had been my teacher (she didn't recognize me); she spoke of the dead poet's tenure

high up in the mountains decades back. Another remembered him as her teacher in upstate New York. He'd certainly made his mark.

"There is no country," he'd said. "Speech is an assertion of one . . ., by one . . ."

talks, even if finally to no one, talks and talks.

Feeding Depression

So long
to the holy-holy-let-yourself

off-the-hook days
early dinners begun

with Petit Syrah and minor confession
Hope is charming

yet each day without grace
compounds

Horseradish and grated ginger
rust on the counter

Rice browns in the salt bowl

Goodbye to brooking all despair
Goodbye to swift catharsis

I am squinting
I am fast lowering the blinds

and kindling the lights
Take soup with me

red beans and coriander
flatbreads

Come come
I will allow nothing but blood

to seep from this orange

Another Reason for Gratuitous Worry

It's getting harder to remember all my words. The three of them: *skin*, *could*, and *love* want my complete attention.

There's a child in the next room, in my bedroom, and he's been hungry for a week. His skin is snow. I'd bake him something, but he'd melt. I would love to put him back together.

For a good rhyme I have to clean the dishes, or take the dog for a walk.

Words debase me at the grocery store:
Would you like paper or plastic? Skin.

I can't say what I mean to say.

When you asked me to marry you I said, *I could*.
We haven't spoken since.
But when the elevator man asked me *what floor* I told him I loved him.

We ride the elevator day and night;
we talk about when we were children—before we had words—and
the ways people waited for/wanted us to make sense.

When we leave the elevator we'll both lose our voices in the windstorm outside.
But we don't know this yet.

from Freaks & Graces*Temps Mort*

Since her death I only sleep in hotels. One friend says: yes, I see, to evade her ghost. Hotels are interstitial states. Spiritus lenis. She can't scare you, there. One friend says: hotels are monasteries of memory. Sleep on the engram mattress, suckle at the mini-bar, flat-screen, spill from the complimentary unguentaria and meditate, reflect, poolside. Savor voids. One friend says: no, now you must do your own laundry, if you know what I mean. You do know what I mean? Come home! Learn to free yourself from the guilt of living or you will forever be tagging your door: do not disturb. One friend asks: That's sad? Where are you? I'll visit? What's the food like?

PETER JAY SHIPPY

Air Conditioner

The Old Port Regency, Portland, Maine

The bee in my room won't quit until the window
Coins honey. Until night
Struts its sharp rib.

The Voice in the Next Room

The Argyle Hotel, Malibu, California

In movies about boy detectives
The mouth of the goblet is placed against
The wall, the ear
Attaches to the glass stem, the ear
Fingers the killer
 in the next room
 confessing his crime
 to the girl detective
 blindfolded
 tied to the chair.

I surf every channel. I comb each wall.

Clytemnestra

When the signal's given, her torrid affair
In white, the colorlessness beneath the maze
On mountains the next would light & so on
The rise of the bubbles to the rim of the flute
So vehemently electric, stone proceeding
In strings popping, notes carried off the margins
& easy challenges for chalk, animation, a singer
Reckless at the tips of the rope, the fiberoptics
Helped elect #61 when suitable to text, author
& wish that type might be more than a dance
On tiles, coasters, cups, & mugs—Play with me
Or its picture, lit from arrears & glittering fragility
A 14-inch minotaur stuffed, magical, stadium
90-something to vibrate, a muddled machine
On the floor placing pieces of red all around
& animating theatrical apparel, the location of
Our adding machine's dollhouse evening, 2 spiders'
Interlocking messages, engraving audible salt:
A nymph defending herself against elegy

Excuse Me

I don't mean to impose
but I'm the ocean.
Part your legs & let me through.
Wave length temperament—
I'll never stop.
Make oranges before settling down.
Sifting sand with plastic shovels,
it will never hold.
Clog holes,
Line skin with sand
paper.
No thorns among us will prick the fragile.

Our Works

1. *Labor*

Our bald bookworms, as if dabbing pates with polish,
spray paint green dusty patches between grass blades,

restoring bangs unto a bust of Atlas carved out of a
radish, then replanted in the planet, by our radicals,

grateful for a way to make a living, bowing
in tuxedos before Veggie King the evening

of its grand opening, offering
any seeds, seduced, craving

nutrients, our degrading
leaf-gold paper crowns.

2. *Opera*

Our voice adjunct, a frustrated failure,
a falsetto countertenor, tests warm fall

break air, lays by the pool, reads up
on some potential master who shut

up, concentrated, got better, resented teaching, woke
up upon Olympus middle-aged, scared, lonely, brain

damaged by lack of heavy breath: he held his pet's sexy
painting, *Heaven*, an oval of sky blue, baby blue, tight,

icy winds, twisting it about him, singing,
wild, high, quite like our diva diving in.

My Aunt Shows Me How To Abide Cancer

One tender cell splits to fire, one dies. The crimson
day pulverizes as seeds are forgotten in the damp muck.
At sunrise, unravel the spine from its coiled mess to welcome
a harvest. So many soiled crows pecking marrow in the woodsmoke.
Time, a bounty with clipped wings. She prunes her hillside of snapdragons.

Comfort

Hands in a white basin
beneath a cold, silver faucet
always remind me of home.
My neighbors have a sink like this in their basement.
We use it to clean the brains and trim
the hog maws on butchering night.
The basin is not so white then.
We also use ice cream buckets with flimsy handles
full of water and parts of a pig.
I always thought it was weird that we cleaned these buckets
and then used them to freeze homemade applesauce,
to scrub the horses' fungus with Betadine.
Once a year the horses get this fungus called scratches.
We have to remove the fresh scabs, disinfect, and apply cream.
It is hard to dry a horse's coat,
so the cream runs down the leg and over the hoof
the same way the blood runs off the pig
when my dad shoots it between the eyes and slits its throat.
It is my job to hold the hose,
and when they pass me the steaming stomach,
I turn it inside out and rinse its insides
without thinking.

Compass

If I knew exactly where you were
I wouldn't have to think
of the animals you loved

to kill, the ducks and deer and fish
of a wilderness childhood

appearing in my head, the trophies
of a lament.

This much is certain:
it is colder up there,
in the approximate thousand miles
of the landscape where you live.

There will be snow through
summer, and as much light as
there had been
prolonged darkness.

The story of thrashing
your drunk father in the kitchen.
The story of the dogs
frozen outside in a heap.

The village, its people,
each person the walking wound
of a place that has no use for them.

I have a tenderness
that is foolish. I want you here,

the aurora of hair on your chest,
your salt and iron
mouth. Every new poppy

in the yard swoons for this, for
what I want, though I know
I am crazy to think they know anything.

Let's agree at least on the remarkable

differences: your thin
creatures waking from their sleep
into another spring,

my green weeds igniting, and the bee,
the small arrival of it,

leaving its hurt on my cheek.

Tacoma

1.

There is a woman of two minds
 delivering the newspapers
 of our town: arsenic in the rain,
 arsenic in the ground,

weather the size of a continent
 coming down from Canada.

One mind keeps a rubber-band
 tightness over the world
 at hand, the other listens to speech

coming from the kettles
 and door-knobs, the pure products
 of America, their words

scurrying, things bothered by light.

2.

The rain is ridiculous, ridiculous.

When it is here I sleep.
 When it is over I sleep.

Every number of every telephone
 number I've ever had
 swirls black lottery numbers
 in my head. Every address:

Agua Dulce Street, Neil Road,
 North Lucas, Lagunitas Avenue.

It is about time you arrived, you.
There is only this simple news:

If love cannot keep the boy,
love will not keep the sonnet.

3.

There is a ferry to the penitentiary
island. The water of the sound
is cloudy and silver. The paper mills

are gone. In the glass museum
there are waves permanently held,

in violent accounting of what's actual.
The first thing I saw here
were the crows, but I took them

as good. There is a magnolia tree
on one side of the house, a fir

tree on the other. Everyone gardens.
Fighter jets roar low to land nearby:

the intricate, precise animals.

Etiquette

It was an easy disappearing act.

I learned well little boys are better
seen than heard.

Then the mean surgery.

Dirty hair & impatience.
None of the preparations stuck.

After toeing around, a second
lesson began.

I broke, found my center, learned to move.

My immune system toughened up.
Now, I work the long division.

It takes the stomach of a thief.

Metacenter

i.

when you say *home* have you too much tensor around your glottis,
and there is always how we're being moved around

leaf tremolo *wind* straining stipule
faint rattling crescendo over nanoinches of forest wall

becomes crowd for

larghetto unto the same quivering sluice

as a standing test speak the words *timbur!!* and *tenor*

ii. *coherer*

our you is not you, but

what have we to converse about, speak at each other about
and handprints and footprints unto

ripa loam like *yes we was here*, and look

this blood surfacing perse beneath our soles

sound points of touched heard

there and there and there

iii. marconi

for those stepping into per os tributaries:
stay the same within whatever aposis you imagine, and don't fake any ether either,
because your memories will sound like *beinsure deerasure benoitome*
your mind launched on sick apogees vomiting
brain moving inside your skull like a canoe on whitecapping lake
oops man overboard! be careful not to sink beyond a depth
ears split like old beat worn drum skins, and there's no rebounding from this per se

iv. point of intersection, or ear drum

before men come and before men go there was something rumored as *forever*
which made fossils possible, and gave deep loam pressure and purpose
before men came and before they got gone their skin belonged like hung papyruses
which was a space for infixing, new passels of bone orientations
before men damned streams (before *sluice*) bared themselves
what lived in the mud drank amongst patters in puddles

The Fox-Wife Describes Their Courtship

I had given up the world, given my body to death or any possible rebirth. When he found me at the shrine of Inari, I became something else. But when the smoke rose, it was still me, terrified, turning and turning from the heat. How could he quiet this new body, its voices and tears? When we're alone, I forget my other life sometimes, forget my sharp teeth and tail. I become the thing beneath his hands, softer.

We all wear our voices out calling for each other, and when does that song end? He loved the falling cherry blossoms, the crumpling peonies, the dying willow. He always sought to put things back together. I tear things apart. The instruments of bone and blood are the same; the intents are different. I look down and see my paw on his hand. He sees the half-moons of nails, the pink skin. He sees the hope in changing seasons, and I only see the leaves departed, the savage inky trails of the moon in the grass.

I know before he does
how he will leave me,
a little temple of spine and fur.

Insomnia

I try tearing paper into tiny, perfect squares—
they cut my fingers. Warm milk, perhaps,
stirred counter-clockwise in a cast iron pan—
but even then there's burning at the edges,
angry foam-hiss. I've been told
to put trumpet flowers under my pillow,
I do: stamen up, the old crone said.
But the pollen stains, and there are bees,
I swear, in those long yellow chambers, echoing,
the way the house does, mocking, with its longevity—
each rib creaking and bending where I'm likely to break—

I try floating out along the long O of *lone*,
to where it flattens to *loss*, and just stay there
disconnecting the dots of my night sky
as one would take apart a house made of sticks,
carefully, last addition to first,
like sheep leaping backward into their pens.

Swelling Like Airplane

It's barely raining outside sometime in September
Earlier today I walked to the store
There, I bought too much

The same plane just flew by twice
and I realized on my walk back home from the store
that something might be wrong with my hands

I don't like doctors, they know too much
or I'd go to see one about my hands

They are fine except for the swelling
If swelling were normal I wouldn't have a problem

but it is not, so I am luckless and plum in the face
There's that plane again

You know it's an airplane commercial when there are wings in it

or *Rhapsody In Blue* is playing
Those notes are obvious. Let me rephrase, the song is beautiful
and it is obvious when it is playing, let me rephrase, you know it's an airplane

when it has wings, and *Rhapsody In Blue*
that beautiful song, it's obvious, is playing
I know it when it is playing, those notes
are playing like wings, are playing
like the wings of a commercial about airplanes
I love that song like wings on an airplane

an airplane an airplane
Commercials are airplanes like wings are wings

My hands swell because of temperature differences
what could a doctor tell me
what could a doctor know too much about that I don't already know some about

An airplane inside my hands listening to their hearts beat
An airplane inside my hands listening to an airplane

My hands eventually become less like swollen hands
and more like the hands of an airplane

Holes Hold Together, a tautology

The children tied their clotheslines from house to house
but the game cut the throat of a neighborhood man
If a net is a series of holes held together by string
thread irony through the a posteriori

::

Fall back on the rule of disjunctive syllogism
You found the smuggled war photographs of your grandfather
only when dementia had forgotten your name
Inference loss

::

Today, a patient drove her Plymouth into an oncoming car
argued that an epileptic movement is always meaningless
that the injured driver is the injured synapse
Free will does not presuppose meaning

::

Quantify God through absence
the probability of heaven on the head of a coin
We cannot know whether Pascal won
only that He too accomplished nothing

Jungian Parlor Game after Egg Drop Soup

A bantam hen
struts around melting

ice cubes and a fight

of self-analysis that should not
be repeated. This part:

axis tipped, reverberating grief.
Standing graveside,

cuticles picked to blood;

empty fortune
cookie; lines on a hand

tracing a juggernaut.

Cusp of earth, rest,
decay, recomposition.

Spot fire flashbulb lights
a white witch (me, Halloween)

but still calculating water and fingertip

sensations. Three words
and a few timid stars

hazard an enterprise

for salvaging habits
of affection. You say: *I'm*

coming over. Ideally,
we can see in

through the dark.

Nine of Swords

Blood color sky scared the hippies
Who wanted some anesthetized turquoise
To sedate the climb to midnight

The swan rolled down from the big north
It was half the crazy hemisphere
Over the church steeple

The dead people were a little restless
Coming before dawn
As they are wont to do

Kryptonite lasagna was being served
To the leftists and the rightists
None was left or right

My rocket launcher felt heavy.
For once, it weighed the same as
the death it carried

moving across the radar
a flock of deadly geese
threw shadows

four in the morning
is hard to swallow
one slice at a time

47 attempts to channel Hannah Weiner

In imaginary countries named for perfumes a blue serendipity of night nouns
 the arms of a lost woman circle a clockface after 2100 telling time by sundial
 nearly impossible the woman eyeshadowed with dandelion floss stirs clouds
 with long handled human hair brushes one hiss of braid or eyebrows plucked
 raw how many geomedical considerations until gravity fails she wonders
 playing the stars a rosary of hail marys etc & so on unanchored syntax with
 a transitive vertigo windrose & bloomed beside the woman *I know nothing
 of saints or their unfettered speech* she says I remind her of someone some-
 where a *headcase* she implies drawing airy circles with her right forefinger in
 her indexy way igniting nerves *hold the moon beneath your tongue for its faint
 weiner schnitzel boiled potatoes & gravy lots of gravy always gravy* faith madness &
 spontaneous human combustion all utilize heat helpful in study of internal
 noise all about her the nape of a treeish suburb there's smog over the hedges
 a somber strumming reserved for nicotine Vicodan or a hot bath served with
 emergency music the day I spoke in similes until my mouth resembled an
 open grave coffined & tied with a black lace ribbon I was too disturbed for
 sleep swallowing the dictionary a page at a time with a glass of cold moon-
 light brewed tea I asked her for help me words don't appear in air unless I
 close my eyes & where is Silent Teacher is she/he with you there is there a
 contact mantra number I can borrow language for occasions I do not under-
 estimate the flower of narHANNAAhrative getting in the last word edgewise

Report from Connecticut on the Letter M, the AB Pattern, the Counting by 2s, 3s, and 4s

It's the first week of kindergarten.

Draw a picture of the moon

his homework calendar states,
but tonight the moon

is nowhere to be found, buried
beneath clouds. Besides,

we're on the other side of the country,
having flown to a wedding

where nothing begins with M
except money and mojito,

mergers and martinis, a set
of M&M golf club gloves.

We are, however, making note
of all AB patterns, including

one chocolate chip, one cashew
(repeat, repeat), including

his little sister's mind-numbing repetitions:
ladeeladeeladeeladee, pluuuu. So we are, sorta,

doing homework, sorta making sense
of the patterns of triangles on the back

of our seats (light blue, blue, light blue, blue),
of the cat, dog, cat, dog ad for a bank

as we're waiting to board. But the planes
lining up for take-off are neither moon

nor discernible pattern. What do we do with those?
When we get home I promise I'll make him count

by 2s and 3s and even 4s, have him paste,
to a giant piece of paper,

cutouts of mittens and mice, of meercats and men,
but right now I'm helping him fasten his seatbelt

while holding my baby in my lap, right now I can't think
about patterns or numbers or even about the moon,

how certainly it will outlast us.

12/9/1980

We are conducting an experiment regarding the suspension threshold of milk for Nestlé Quik powder, both of us scooping mound after mound from the maw of the tin box. If you dip the spoon just right, the milk coats the sweet brown powder then peels away with satisfying slowness. Our influence on the world is limited to these glasses of confection. You wear something pink and Chewbacca's on my shirt. Soon we will leave for school.

First we will discover your mother sobbing in front of the t.v. Dazed and swollen, she begins to tell us what crazy is. I wonder if you—a year older—understand any of it as my blue Keds sink into the grey shag. Every grownup I see today looks stunned, just like her. There is more quiet time in school but a radio plays The Beatles in the portable during recess. There is no dodgeball since it rains all day. Or now it seems that it rained all day.

Suicide Notes

I gouge the orange rind
with my thumbnail, slice toward
the top. It rips too easily:

out in the sun too long,
overstimulated. It gives
too easily: my thumb plunges

to the center. A moment
passes before it becomes
unpleasant. I think of

your last few seconds,
I think about everybody's.

Polliwog

No one should be this beautiful, you think.
 She's fucking it up for the rest of us.
 You'd forgotten how men's heads
 can purl in unison, eyes quickening,
 feet suddenly sucked to the impossible floor
 & how women's hands don't bother to their hair
 but stay clasped, lips agape, eyes hesitating
 then casting fearfully aside.
 There is that kind of beauty
 & you swim midst it today,
 watch it glean & glide, over fries & beer,
 remember God is real
 & having fun with the lot of us.
 We talk, she & I, about love, passion,
 a man who is good but perhaps not good enough. For her,
 always another. She has thought it out:
What would love be without passion?
 she sighs. Between us grow such different questions.
Where is love? I ask & do not know
 but imagine it in the deeps—below the water's raging,
 where it is calm, patient. Under this
 she seems so translucent, so shimmering at the top,
 deep as a tadpole. Nature, I think, requires it to be thus—
 beauty so shallow a mystery; beautiful, perhaps our most ugly
 in deep reflection.

Cosmology

& long after it had been done, the light & sky, the water
bridging the bodies, the long repeated & entwined histories,
their correspondent travesties,

we were left with one named boy bopping his peahead
down the street, his gruff yellowing dog, a suspicious series of familiar
inhabitants lining the blocks of our boy's house. To the west

The Old Guys, to the east, The Wives' Tales, directly north,
the Heart clan, all warring & jiving amongst themselves, in need
to be supreme, understood, the light. This locus, nadir & pinnacle

on Chicago's southernmost chin, these four small blocks, the greystones
piled high & tight, the black wrought iron sentinels lined up in a horizon
of black atop black, combined create so much confusion

& beauty the trees waver & sway, hold their palms to foreheads as if to faint.
Who can make anything of it? Surely not the many voices rumbling low & faint,
echoing along Cottage Grove, along MLK, Ellis, St. Lawrence, all.

The birds too echo, warn & call along their perches. It is madness,
here. I tell you, there is madness. Do you see the girls at the corner cackling,
cackling? They screech & yell because who cares to hear the Old Guys

mutter, the Wives' Tales' high moral ground? Who cares to listen to the Heart's
envious moans. No. They cackle & screech & gossip about boys & boots,
suck on Now-and-Laters, drink juicy-juicy, & paint their nails.

So, though things are blooming again & brave people are returning
to this once deserted corner of the earth, what of us once lost has not yet,
might never, return. & among it all the beasts of our burdens, sliding

along the blocks, have learned & so disguised & disguising, hint to Ollie.
Oh, & if he listened what would they say these Greek gods of old,
renamed Demetria & Darnell in their golden shiny party boots, these morals

with their night candles & capes creeping on the block in the middle night, on the down low, these concepts desperately digging deeper as if miners hunting for ore; what are they saying to him? & if he listened would they sound like, thump-thump,

thump-thump? & of what would he be reminded? Here in this: the aggregate of our lives, the proof, & Ollie, bopping, lost/found, under the street's harsh lights, moving awkwardly through the world as if without a body, bumping into things

unreal & real, unable to decipher, unable to discern, his body a vessel/non-vessel, our Ollie—bright eyed, narrow necked, too thickly skinned boy from the South Side.

“i really don’t mind! sleeping
next to death”

i really don’t mind! sleeping next to death

what! such a patient visitor!

all jade, no hate, my hair all roughed

i barely see his face! i care to not care

so long as i’m beside

and not upon! my feet which still

n’er touch what stamped

his lead boot, oily fat hand

a stolen piece—

man past! All this i dream

smirky purple feline for’er & sweetly

until I wake and On the pillow a Mint

fresh day’s face of riches!

Civics Lesson

New to town, we didn't know how to speak the municipal language. But they kept us fed for as long as we could convincingly feign comprehension. We did this by smiling.

By day, some drove with their headlights on, the front license plates of the older cars perfectly askew. By night, they returned home, carefully hanging their clothes from wire sculptures bent to resemble shoulders. This went on for weeks.

The leaves changed color. Our camouflage proved useless. Eventually it got very cold.

When we slit the belly of a local snowman, we discovered a spine comprised entirely of the trickle of his own undoing. Their gods were gutless.

Everything was ceremony. Rubbish spilled from the park's central barrel. We watched them place crumpled bags and paper cups next to it, as if mere proximity were discarded enough.

But no one ever sat down in that park.

It was as if they couldn't stop moving.

I Led Three Lives

I Led Three Lives for the FBI was Lee Harvey Oswald's favorite television program as a child. Oswald remains a mystery, despite attempts to reduce him to the Crazy Marxist or the James Bond CIA spy.

I felt that I led two very separate lives. As a young child, I felt the immigrant part of my family was unacknowledged, and therefore somehow negated, by my American environment, and vice versa.

"I Loved Two Wives Equally (what a mess)" (Genesis 29: 26-30).

I led the way up stairs.

I led the way to the door of Eugenie's room.

How I led my child to Christ.

I led four cows to eat grass along farm dikes. I was pulled to the ground many times by the cows.

I led us to the forest center where there are picnic tables in a covered area.

I led us another fifty yards or so along the riverbank.

I led us down a path and out of view.

I led six of the 25 laps, and I probably could have led a lot more than that, but I was trying to size everybody up that I was dealing with up there.

The boy who watched *I Led Three Lives for the FBI* joined the Marines, served as a radar operator at an air base in Japan that housed U-2 spy planes, learned Russian quickly and defected to the Soviet Union, came back to the U.S. with a Russian wife to work at menial jobs, occasionally passing out pro-Castro leaflets while also being seen in the company of serious anti-Communist zealots.

I led an interesting pendulum to a thin crack pitch to the base of what we called the S-cracks.

Jim led up the long sinuous thin crack to a bivy in a grotto.

I led elite teams of security field personnel in Annapolis for an organization which performed attack and penetration testing with the military and federal agencies.

I Led Three Lives for the FBI planted the seed for Oswald's defection to the Soviet Union in 1959, some researchers believe, and inspired the subsequent work he allegedly did for Naval Intelligence and the FBI until John F. Kennedy's assassination.

I Led Two Lives, the British title for Ed Wood's *Glen or Glenda*—other alternate titles, *I Changed My Sex* and *He and She*—actually was shown in my high-school sex-ed class. Way ahead of its time.

I led four laps right there towards the end and had a really good shot at winning.

I led affinity groups at the protests against the WTO in Nice, France, and the G8 in Genoa, Italy, in 2001, where I was clubbed to the ground and wounded by police.

I led two discussions of the flawed media coverage of the West Virginia miners story.

How I led Catholics out of the Church.

What I Missed

The Le Bon Temps Roule Bar and Sandwich Shop—one of Oswald’s hangouts, two blocks from Magazine Street—looted after Katrina.

Someone stole a plaque at the bar that said, *Lee Harvey Oswald drank beer here*. But assassination researchers can’t agree if Oswald even liked beer.

Shelly and I planned a New Orleans trip this summer to visit Oswald’s old haunts.

The intersection of Camp and Lafayette, where his one-man Fair Play for Cuba Committee shared a building with ex-FBI agent and CIA operative (and Cuban gun smuggler) Guy Banister, who ran a detective agency there.

Reilly Coffee Company, where Oswald kept the machines greased.

The Magazine Street apartment he shared with Marina, where he read science fiction novels the summer of ’63 in the front screened porch, tacked a map of the world to the wall, and planned to hijack a plane to Cuba. He asked Marina to hide the gun under her pregnant belly.

A few mouse clicks from buying the plane tickets for the last weekend in August. Would’ve been the weekend Katrina made landfall.

The last minute, we used the money for a car repair.

My letter to Rick, who asked what I was writing about: *I know a bar near Boston City Hall where Pope John Paul II’s photo sits next to JFK’s above the taps. Hierarchies and mystic wood, I’m serious, the tall pine forest of the mind. One slant of sunlight reaching down to take you away from the terrifying chaos of a jar someone left behind in Tennessee.*

We visited Rick in New York on the 30th anniversary of the assassination. I recall it as “the 30th anniversary weekend,” but I imagine him saying: “I remember Tony and Shelly took the bus from Boston the year I moved to NY with Missy, and at a bar that weekend, whatever, he kept talking about the JFK assassination.”

The three of us with Alex, a bar in Sheridan Square. We made fun of Arlen Specter. It kills me I don't remember the jokes now, but I do know this was the same year a punk band called Single Bullet Theory came out of D.C.

Someone played "Don't Fear the Reaper" on the jukebox.

Rick and I tried to remember what Richard Hugo said about poems and birds. Alex put his finger in the air to stop me because he thinks I talk too much.

Hugo's monster was desolate and kind, Rick said.

Poems are birds we loved who moved on and remain.

Clinton was on TV saying he's "convinced" Oswald was the lone gunslinger in Dealey Plaza. Then a cut to Connie Chung.

Twenty seconds CBS video of tourists taking photographs of a granite plaque, where Oswald is called the "alleged" shooter for the official historical record, and 10 seconds of the museum Dallas built out of the sixth floor of the old Book Depository.

One of the exhibits, the actual window from which the gunman fired.

I called Rick last summer on my cell phone and left a message, "I'm on the Grassy Knoll as I speak—I saw the sniper's nest this morning—the window trim was pink."

I left out the oil-stained creaky wood floors, dank schoolbook boxes, warehouse humidity, burly ghosts, and armpit sweat.

Tall, skinny man, sober in bleach-blue suit and tie, like a civil engineer just out of college, leaned toward the sixth-floor window where shots were fired, scratching his chin. Connie Chung voiceover: "The famous sixth-floor window."

The window. He chose *not* to take the easy shot as the limo crawled down Houston. He pulled the trigger with his vision obscured by a live-oak tree.

Yoko installs a wooden cross in a gallery.

In front of the cross, a bucket of nails. Next to the nails, a hammer.

Praying Mantis

Our fathom, who art in heavy cream,
Hallowed be thy nanny goat.
Thy king salmon come,
Thy williwaw be done
On earthquake as it is in hectare.
Give us this daystar our daily break,
And forgive us our tribadism,
As we fork those who triage against us.
And lead us not into tenancy,
But deliver us from ewe.
For thine is the kingpin
And the pragmatist
And the glottis,
Forlorn and eversible,
Amentia.

Workshop, but with Nolan in Japan

The apparition of those faces in a crowd . . .

riding the bullet train
the view passes by so fast
it is either a blur they say

or –like night lightning
strokes the raindrops to a stop
in midair

in that flash moment–
maybe from the train you can glimpse
one of those famous blossoms

waiting there stopped still
in midair holding its wave to you
in place. write us

and tell us if
this is so.

Staying In Touch

Summer boats migrating south down the lake
to dry-dock sky reflects in the puddle
More thirsty geese stage for flight in the park

Geese boats rowing a sky blue wind reflect
in the lake surface wavy lined entry
autumn trees turn the page of their color

you can't tell
if they are sails in the distance
or whitecaps they may
be breaths of the voice

of water disappearing
into the cold other life as
fog saying goodbye
or kissing the air being

welcomed
fine white linen
paper pages of
smokeless burning

fog off letter of the sun

think of all the money I must have spent
gardening but then also have to think
of when I couldn't garden it gotten too much
for me and gone wild.

the smell of the garden outside in the house
suddenly in the night when I walk naked
without lights it dresses me with my body
the sense of smell now in one of the pockets

as/& a weapon I carry at the sounds
that wake me: a disturbing behavior.
but no more than filling a craving for roses
then to let them die unplanted unsatisfied

in everything's craving to stay alive.
in the rough neighborhood where I lived.

his head was hammering around
the house thinking about it
an echo that is a buzz
the jar of objects too close

or the windows moving
he tries to fix things
he can't the echo is his
not letting go

outside things
are shaking not in rhythm
with the wind something else
the sky cannot change

the subject

Coin peeks through two opening slots awake;
the blue ticket printed in clouds pops up.
Change ringing inside, a singing bird.

Loose change of faces adds up rush hour.
The platform stacks those profiles into rolls,
rolls the trains cash in for large bills, the city.

No leaves almost ice
for tea the cloud ashen fire:
autumn oversleeps.

Three departure times
pass. Three buses at once come.
Why catch the right one?

In Parenthesis, Rutilance

Beating up the desire, she says

Beating down the sweltering gold pulse

Bludgeoning a live fish, vibrant sacrifice

Vocabulary of bleeding perfumery

Fragrance lingering *yu shiang*

In parenthesis not fish, the other *yu*

You know it is personal discipline

Rutilant inside your invisible ruby

Fish flopping over on a chopping block

Unwed liver in the other room, left dished

You look away from the sacrifice

Or put the desire in a porcelain jar

Odorless, soundless prime

Stored up high on the top shelf

Like a young girl's upturned head

Her mother's kisses transposed in a dream

To mosquitoes kissing the cold surface

Bath water drawn cold, forgotten in the hour

One person, this young girl's irrigated grace

Not the daughter, that is, the childhood rather

All its old weathering points of water and blood

Mingled in one proboscis of love

Your own vocabulary of fragrance

Arched beveled rosewood finished

Notes for Another Geometry Transport

1. Bridges of view. Girded by the accumulation of our unremitting swerves, eyes arc to follow a fault I could melt into.
2. Ice, must and mutating letters—a peristalsis of flash cubes. Lust evades like a common latitude. A list in the margins, running accusatory. To swap is not to understand, is not to know the storms and stories, the trees and tents.
3. Rehearse my floating body. When you come, snow-wet, my anti-bride.

Whitman on the F

Crowded, morning F train from Brooklyn, a woman with mud-colored eyes,
 rises: cuneiform wrinkles appear
 between her brows, as if her brain is squished up against the aquarium glass
 of her forehead. Her lips move,
 a voice so soft, we only catch every third syllable . . . *are . . . hel . . . ho . . .*
lung . . . anks.

The three-hours-of-sleep-in-the-tank me yearns to whisper: *louder*
next time, lady, as she limps past,
 bare-palmed, but I'm too tired to crank open the mouth's finicky drawbridge,
 too wiped to fiddle with
 the combination lock attached to my wallet, so I sift through the mud
 in her eyes, looking for a clue
 of the life she left behind, before she started singing arias on the subway.
 Over her right shoulder,
 I see Walt Whitman wobble to his feet, like an overflowing barrel of flesh
 and beard and smile. "Here,
 darling," he wraps a white-haired paw around the dandelion stem
 of her spine. "Brothers and sisters,"
 he bellows, "our little amaranth here needs some loving of the green
 variety." He stuffs a clump
 of grass into the open mouth of her cup. Soon everyone in the car
 has foliage out. He pulls a red
 wheelbarrow, glistening with raindrops, from under his seat, "Here,"
 he gleams, his teeth huge
 and white, like the tombstones in a futuristic graveyard. The poet
 in me hisses, "Good job, bonehead,
 letting old graybeard beat you to the punch." The large guy wedged beside me
 mutters under the mustard
 canopy of his breath. "Are you ok?" I ask. "I hate when he does this,"
 he says, thumbing at Old Walt, "playing
 the jolly big shot, the Vegetarian Skyscraper, doing belly flops into the spotlight,
 like his words are the organic cement,
 making us all one." "Why should that bother you?" I ask. "Me?" he scoffs,
 "I'm Walter Whitman, the human being.

Can you imagine sharing a soul with that beast?" A smile levitates
between us; we both take a bite. I exit
the train at 42nd, duck into a Grand Central bathroom, try, unsuccessfully,
to wash Walt's burly shadow off my fingertips.

Odysseus on the G

Which one of you garbage-picking motherfuckers is Odysseus?
Which one of you is taking notes, and will rip off your funk like a garment
and rise?
Which one of you is the son of pain?
Which one has Athena standing over your shoulder, holding a cloak of mist,
telling you when to duck from nightsticks?
Which one of you has a wife somewhere wrist-deep in tapestry?
Which one of you answers to the name of Nobody and plunged an olive pole
into the one-eyed beast?
Which one of you is building a Trojan horse in your mind?
Which one of you remembers the smell of split Juniper in the hair of Calypso?
Which one of you stuffs beeswax in your ears as you float past the Siren
so you don't plunge face-first into the quicksand of her song?
I know there's more than you're showing me.
I know that under that catastrophe of whiskers there's a face.
I know that inside those black bags there's a pair of human eyes
ready to roll out like dice.
Come out of that broken down Trojan horse you call a body.
You've cleared the last of Neptune's hurdles.
Just rise up, out of that plastic throne, rip off your funk like a garment, and ascend.

Language Poem

Get on your song
like what happened happened.
Look just past the gamut
not into it.
A bone can poke out
from a body. Stuff
is equal to itself.
Disappointment in
the poem's voicey
noise is too easy.

Airport

Enormity's adorable.

★

Hands down, we're heaven-bound.

I will heavy-pet the ground.

You bring the car around.

Pretty Speech (The Occasion of your Death)

When you died, phones clattered off ears to tiled floors as phones in movies do. Everyone gasped, no one could breathe. There was a scream. I grew ugly from a distance at the clabber of your boots scuffing rock wall. You always knew how to cause a scene. A scream. Forgive me, your error was obscene. You, unlatched over air eight-hundred feet deep. Even my parents paused their DVD. Descent swift, lousy Icarus. Forgive me for being mean. You know how it is. When that old Arctic feeling comes over me, it's extreme. Keeping up appearances makes me pathological. Your death, I've been reading about it. The accounts are practically mythological. I'm more likely to marry a stranger than believe that your cousin, who was on the scene, found, as he claims, your necklace snagged on gray granite and will always wonder if some greater force led him to it. I mean, please. Dead? You're lucky you missed the memorial service. The spiritual director directed us to wave our arms in unison above our heads to guide you toward the heavens, in case you got lost, I guess. I'll admit, I was a little pissed. I asked to read a poem. Pastor Mary Cornfed took the folded page from my hands, unfolded it, glanced, and then deemed it *inappropriate*, as it was *awfully intimate*. (See pages XX - XX.) The faith-healing cunt. I've been in a bad mood ever since.

Colder, Bitterer

My hair turns white overnight. No, my hair is black
and gloves my head, my hair thick, dark as leather,
my hair meaning ever and ever, even after that ever.

My hair is black, take it back. I like the rumor better
that found you in Greenland, allowed us to suspend
your headlong fall in the frail and opaque wilderness

of our minds, still your body mid-air moments before
its smash into all that white, let us leave you broken
at a glacier's base, ice-locked, lips thistled with frost.

My hair was black, they're bringing you back. When
I think you dead, my hands run over the hair that caps
my head. A rumor had you lodged so deep and far out

they said you would never be recovered, your body lost
by a glacier in Greenland. Not so distant, not so far out,
no, just as gone yet nearer still: your body discovered in

Canada. Men and pulleys pull you out the snow to cut
you open. What do they think they'll find? Your bag
of skin, its loose sock of flesh smashed, bone-shards?

They will cut you open. Everyone is crying. Everyone
and their flowers. Though I hate your lover since I was
once your lover, I still cannot stand to watch her crying

in this stadium of grief. Our jealousies empty the heavens.
Her shoulders shake beneath the sun. My hair turned white.
They carry you off the mountain. They are cutting you open.

You Cut Open

When I used to not watch television, knowing it was bad for the mind.
 When I used to listen to the rain, not knowing it was bad for the mind.
 Regarding our mourning: we stood in a stadium. The sky grew harried.
 Wherever it was, your body, our minds crawled it like flies, thinking it.

Wherever it was, our minds were combing your skin, licking scratches.
 Somewhere someone was doing something with your body. Bad minds
 trying to find something bad to find. Death unnatural, your fall suspect.

In the stadium, us each thinking ourselves along your limbs like tongues.
 Back with your body, in some lab far outside our minds, their procedure
 begun, the scalpel's line drawn clean from chest to sternum, the incision

forming a Y. Tugging the flap of skin above your breast back over your
 head, skin I kissed folds over your face, meets your blue lips. They saw
 off the ice-caps of ribs, then lift them off your chest like lids. Skin flaps

are dropped back to your sides so their hands can dig out the heart-block,
 lungs, ropes of intestine, set them all aside to weigh, slice and later view
 through a microscope on slides. They saw your skull a hinge, now cup

to gently lift the brain's delicate jelly, suspend it into a jar's formaldehyde.
 They put back your skull's cap, leaving you witless, and sew your head shut
 with the same thick stitch used to stitch baseballs. Now they drop the lot

of you back into you: heart, intestine, lungs, spleen and liver, all a jumble,
 back into the space where once together they hummed inside a living you.
 Sun knives light out from the heart of cloud. I want to bury my hands in

your guts, breathe in the mineral rust of your blood gone bad and dead,
 rich plush, bury myself beneath your hide, live beneath its ruby slickness,
 to push my own bones into you, knot my fingers in your hair's slack flax.
 Salt in rock. Water in rock. They're done with you. My eyes crack open.

Sara without an H

she developed an affinity for pink
in garment, in ribbon accenting
reddened hair.

the boy who transported her groceries
said she looked nice.

when she wore a red
blazer and lipstick to Christmas
mass and dinner at McCarthy's
the makeup soaked into wrinkles.

in grandpa's dark office
where his face is etched in bronze
we'd hide with her lipsticks.

she had those cases with a small
mirror for application.

I loved perfume bottles then
and still have my three favorite.

Bar Course Excise Insensible

Now rare too small and gradual to see
as course excision visibility
yet robber moon insensible to bar
the filled up cave of moon stars yet and far
avast ye moonstones, Brooklyn is no place
to read of happy flowers in a vase,
an airplane past, a husband's row,
a corn cob cat hair stellar bow,
an ankle diddled into air, an boulder
hillside drinking air, an after though
of tongues and necks, the body parts
that fill with sweat, called up upon
to fight a war, of willow trees,
in air upscored.

Wax and be a gemingfeld and feed the well-greened earth

Waxéd be the gemingfelds
that feed the fresh fit earth
and rocket blue of midnight
sky unleashed unpelt ungirt
and garded by a garden hose
be smelted to the way, of
randed gray-filled pellet moons
of simply summer sway,
go melted all the trees in trees
in sanctity of branch,
in sanctity of tree melt hep
for sea to shining stanch.
in salt sub bot cutaneous,
cutaneous with gore, to
watch the racks of elements
of snow storms filled with whor
o horbe that lies and horbe that
ruts that bleeds out all the sea,
in rocket glare, in underwear
in every crescent V.

Sinning Skel Misclape

O sinning skel misclape thy lock
from frenzied felbred feefs
and longitudes of long tongued fuels
unpebble-dashed deceased.

Unpebble-dashed, unpebble-dashed,
Unpebble-dashed unrose,
up from the theme that random flaps
in news flash rancid hose.

A morning dress of morning field
redrenched upon the sun,
that reads the wobble of the
air, the weary cautious rung.

The red-black innards laid up bare
for all to see and spy
tradition for the form of those
like vicious cheerfulled nighs.

Classic Layer Cakes

*Mother is gone,
only Things remain.*
—Denise Levertov

9773 Comanche Ave. A pale yellow, ranch-style tract house in the suburbs of Los Angeles. White shutters. Decorative cast iron trellis (leaves and acorns), painted white, around the front porch. Dichondra. Gardenias. Ivy in the parkway, beginning to climb a Modesto Ash. Snapdragons in the flowerbeds. Bottlebrush in the backyard.

The phone number, when we moved there in the late fifties, was Dickens (DI) 9-1647. The prefix was later changed to 349.

Osso, Lassen, Winnetka, Plummer: the streets that boxed in our world.

My mother in her frilled apron, dusting and vacuuming; sweeping and mopping; rinsing, scouring, scrubbing. Driving her station wagon to the supermarket. Pushing the cart. Crossing each item off her shopping list. Her large, slightly loopy handwriting slanting towards the right. Perusing *The Brand-Name Calorie Counter* at the check-out stand. Folding her receipt and Green Stamps into her purse. Pulling into the driveway. Unloading the brown grocery bags, setting them on the speckled linoleum in her pink kitchen. Emptying them, folding them, flattening them, stacking them.

What treats she'd take out of those bags: Wheat Thins, Triscuits, Oreos, Nilla Wafers, Bugles, Sno Balls, Twinkies, Cheez-Its, Ritz. Laura Scudder's potato chips came in twin-paks, in big red, yellow, and brown striped bags. After my mother died, at a store near her home, those colors caught my eye. I bought a package, folded and saved it (threw away the chips). The expiration date, stamped on the bag, is June 23, 1996.

the fork marks in her peanut butter cookies

her pink and light green Depression glass
her collection of souvenir spoons
The Ray Conniff Singers
Sing Along with Mitch
the milk glass (hobnail, ruffled) in the Early American hutch
her German cuckoo clock

She sent away to Northern Paper Mills, makers of fine toilet tissue, for a set of American Beauty Portraits: 11 x 14 prints of sweet little girls: one holding daisies, one cuddling a kitten, one bundled up against the snow. Which she framed and hung in the hall. There was also one of an infant peeking out of a pink blanket.

My brother and I are outside, in the front yard, when it begins to rain. Soon it is pouring. I find this exciting, dance around in my soaked clothes and then lose myself in play: floating my Mickey Mouse pirate ship in the rushing river the gutter has become. Pleased with ourselves, we knock on the door—to surprise my mother. But she is furious. She grabs and undresses us, wraps us in towels, and makes us dry off in front of the fireplace.

So much to be afraid of: earthquake, mudslide, wildfire, plane crash, train wreck, car accident, Communism, nuclear war, riots, gas shortage, Skylab, burglar, rapist, kidnapper, mass murderer, botulism, polio, rabies, tetanus, lockjaw, gangrene, infection, germs, sirens, black widow, rattlesnake, calories, high cholesterol, heart attack, cancer.

PTA meetings. Tupperware parties. Den Mother. “Avon calling.”

One year, she threw a surprise birthday party for my father. Invited neighbors and some of his Lockheed colleagues. It never happened again; my father didn't like being surprised. I remember shish kabob skewers on the barbeque on the back patio and a huge brandy snifter filled with cantaloupe, honeydew, and watermelon balls.

I also remember a shower she gave for one of her friends. There were dishes full of mixed nuts and pastel pillow mints, and candied almonds wrapped in tulle and tied with curling ribbon. They played a game where each woman, blindfolded and using a spoon, had to lift as many cotton balls as she could from that same brandy snifter.

My mother lying on the couch in front of the TV, watching the late show, crying. *Since You Went Away*: Claudette Colbert and her daughters (Jennifer Jones and Shirley Temple) holding down the home front. *The Fighting Sullivans*: five brothers, stationed on the same battleship during World War II, perish together. Family tragedy: my mother's nineteen-year-old cousin George also died at Guadalcanal.

Years later she tells me her deepest secret: when they were children, George molested her.

her suffering, her experience, her emotion

After the war ended, her mother, Marguerite, died of leukemia. My mother was fourteen. A family photo taken during Marguerite's illness: my mother's angry expression. "I didn't want that picture taken."

Moments before she died, Marguerite cried out: "George is calling me."

Imitation of Life: the scene where Sarah Jane (Susan Kohner), full of remorse and grief, throws herself on her mother's coffin.

Her migraine headaches. Her weight problem. The mornings she slept late, unable to get out of bed.

In the mid-eighties, my parents were traveling in their motor home. Parked at a campground one night, they became friendly with a couple their age, sat talking over drinks. The woman, when the subject of Rock Hudson, gay men and AIDS came up, said: "What do they expect us to do?" "They expect us to help them," my mother replied.

In the previous passage I initially wrote "mother home" instead of "motor home."

My father once said she loved children and the elderly, but wasn't fond of many people in between.

Her first breakdown: she woke up in the middle of the night, looked out her bedroom window, and saw—hanging in the backyard—a pair of golden drapes.

My mother's burden, all her adult life: my father's anger. His daily outbursts, his constant belittling. It eventually wore her down, defeated her. How many times did I hear her say, in the middle of one of his fits: "Shhh! What will the neighbors think." She once told me he never showed his temper until they were married. After she died, my father said that when they were newlyweds, my mother got so angry she threw a cast iron ashtray at him. It really hurt—he walked around the block in pain. His anecdote made me laugh.

Good for her.

A phone call from my father. "Your mother has cancer." "Where?" "Down there." Ira and I spend Christmas in Paris as planned, but it is cold and rainy, and I am depressed. I lie awake in our hotel room late one night watching a film in which Santa Claus battles the Devil—in Spanish, with French subtitles. Unable to enjoy the surreal juxtapositions, I long to understand what is being said.

How in the midst of her illness, returning from the hospital, she bribed an ambulance driver to stop at McDonald's. How when I was in high school and she'd pick me up at the library on weeknights, we often drove through McDonald's on the way home. "Don't tell your father." How it used to tick me off that she'd pick at my French fries. "Why didn't you get your own?"

When we were sick she'd bring us Campbell's chicken noodle soup, saltines, and ginger ale on a TV tray. A rerun of *I Love Lucy* was also medicinal.

Thinking it the first of many such trips I'd have to take, I flew from New York to Los Angeles. Rented a car and drove to central California, where my parents had retired. She was in an extended care facility in Santa Maria. The first thing she said to me was: "Did you bring me a poem?" Later, waking

and finding me sitting there, she said: “This can’t be fun for you.” “It’s why I came, to see you.” At one point, when I was telling her about my teaching, my writing, she pronounced: “It’s taken you a long time, but you’ve come up in the world.”

How, before she died, decades seemed to drop away. She looked younger, prettier, than she had in years.

her Kleenex tissues
her Aqua Net hairspray
her Jergens Lotion
her Camay soap
her Calgon bath oil beads
her Clairol shampoo
her Avon lipstick samples: tiny white plastic tubes
her jar of Topaze cream (a yellow jewel embedded in its lid)

The morning she died, she called my father from the hospice. Said she’d thought she was going to die the night before. Thought that she was hemorrhaging. And that her mother, Marguerite, was coming for her.

I was eight months sober when she had her first breakdown. My mother was convinced that their house had been bugged, that their neighbor, a redheaded woman, was the leader of a suburban drug ring. There may have been some truth to this. One night when I visited my parents (they were still on Comanche Ave.), the tires on my car were slashed. I went to see my mother when she was in the psych ward at Northridge Hospital. I remember almost nothing—only that we sat together and talked. That Christmas, in the middle of preparing the holiday meal, my mother, fed up with my father’s nagging, asked me to take her “anywhere.” We drove up to Chatsworth Park, sat looking at the lights of the San Fernando Valley. “Do you think someone’s looking out for you?” she asked. “You mean like God or a Higher Power or something?” “Yes.” “Yes,” I said, “I do believe that.”

I spent the morning with her, helping her divide up her jewelry. I took a break for lunch, drove up the coast to a doll store I’d found in the Yellow

Pages. I remember having a funny feeling as I drove back. When I walked in the house, the phone was ringing. It was my father: "Get here quick!" The wildest ride of my life: doing 90 on 101, in my mother's Taurus, thinking "Wait!" The dreamlike sensation of watching myself from outside myself: This wasn't really happening. I pulled into the parking lot. As I walked towards the hospice, I saw a woman (a nurse?) out of the corner of my eye, pointing and gesturing that I should run. So I ran. My sister pulled me into the room.

What I said to my mother as she was dying:

"Thank you for being my mother. I love you."

"You're onto the next step of the journey. God be with you."

"You've done a good job, Mom. You can let go now."

I saw the nurse look at her watch, heard her say "time of death." Then I crumpled beside the bed, sobbing.

My father said he cried once, while she was dying. "That's the only time I'm going to cry." I remembered my mother telling me that she'd tried to get him, after he'd retired, to go with her to a therapist. He'd refused, saying he was too set in his ways, wasn't about to change now.

I remember thinking: Now I know what a dead person looks like.

Later I'm told that after she hemorrhaged she yelled: "Oh God, take me now!"

The house my parents retired to was also pale yellow. When my father and I went to Costco to buy food for the reception after the funeral, he insisted that the cake be pale yellow, like her houses.

My father says it was all the sodas, all the Cokes, that killed her.

I remember the two framed ballerinas in her lavender bedroom. I remember the soft light and silence when, alone in the house, I'd intrude on my parents' privacy: explore their walk-in closet, riffle through drawers. Her dresses and ruffled slips, her clip-on costume earrings. On the dresser: ceramic figurines:

Pinky and Blue Boy, the Virgin Mary. In a bedside drawer: her rosary and prayer book, and a bundle of her and my father's love letters (tied with a white ribbon).

A day or two after the funeral, before I went back to New York, my sister pulled me aside and handed me my parents' love letters. "You should keep these," she whispered, "Dad will just throw them out." I did keep them for a while, but couldn't bring myself to read them. When I sold my papers to Fales Library at NYU, I included the letters, still tied in ribbon. I remember the air of mystery, of secrecy these letters had when I was a child; that they still have.

My mother in the rear view mirror, waving and undoubtedly crying, at visit's end, as I drive away.

A month after my mother's death, I have a phone session with Helen. She tells me my mother was ready to go, that her mother, Marguerite, and a friend were there to greet her. She says that my mother isn't coming back right away, that she is undergoing a process of "soul healing." She can do this in the Ethers; she doesn't have to be here on Earth. Helen hears healing sounds. Musical healing. Healing at the deepest level of being. My mother will begin, when she's ready, a whole new cycle, one of pleasure, peacefulness, and beauty. She also says that my mother and Marguerite are together, and that they're aware of the conversation Helen and I are having.

Most reincarnational philosophies teach that a long period of celestial rest usually intervenes between incarnations—a time for assimilating the harvest of life's experiences. Then, refreshed and invigorated, the individual returns, not in sadness and despair but, as childhood attests, in eager joyousness to undertake a new adventure in learning and growing.

What I had them put in her coffin: a lucky penny and two fortunes: "You will be singled out for promotion" and "There is a prospect of a thrilling time ahead for you."

Helen said the woman I saw out of the corner of my eye, who encouraged me to run, was my mother. She wanted to make sure I'd be there at the end.

Time of death: 6:05 p.m., Wednesday, May 8, 1996. Insult to injury: that she should die right before Mother's Day. My father, as we made the funeral arrangements, said: "I guess it won't be much of a Christmas this year."

One of the ironies of her death: that I should develop a closer relationship with my father. How he asked me to be his executor: of the four children, he said, I am the one who can communicate. He's been supportive of my poetry, and I see that he is proud of what I've accomplished, though when I was younger it seemed he did all he could to thwart my efforts to be a writer.

In the weeks before Christmas, my mother hides presents around the house: under beds, in cupboards and closets. I am given to snooping; she tells me not to poke around. I find a gift for my brother—the *Combat!* board game—in the hamper in my father's bathroom. Unable to contain myself, I let her know I'm in on the secret. Instead of welcoming me as her conspirator, she slaps me across the face.

Things she put in our Christmas stockings: candy canes, oranges, batteries, maple leaf candies, yo-yos, pennies, socks.

How she always wanted Christmas to be perfect; how it was always spoiled by my father's tirades. Decorating the tree: boxes of ornaments, strands of colored lights, on the living room floor. Christmas morning: ribbon and wrapping paper everywhere. He resented the mess.

her special holiday china: Franciscan Desert Rose

One year, instead of tinsel, she covered the tree with angel hair. I remember her saying to be careful, when I tried to help, because it could cut your fingers, get in your eyes. The fact that something so pretty could also be dangerous could not have been lost on me.

I wish I could do this memory better.

Using sponges, dipped in colored Glass Wax, to stencil the windows with snowflakes, reindeer, candles, wreaths. Watching her arrange her cookies—drizzled, sprinkled, powdered, frosted—on the three-tiered serving tray. Gazing at the Sears Christmas catalog, pretending *not* to look at the pages of girls' toys: Barbie and her friends; metal two-story dollhouses; child-size cardboard kitchens and supermarkets; play food; Suzy Homemaker vacuum cleaner and ironing board; cake mix sets with electric ovens.

Come into Miss Cookie's Kitchen. I purchased, on eBay, this 1962 Colorforms set. My sisters must have had it, because I distinctly remember how you could open Miss Cookie's refrigerator, oven, and cupboards and press her yellow teapot, her green cake, and her pink milk bottle inside. Taped to the upper right-hand corner of the box is the original gift tag—a smiling Santa face. Printed across his white beard is the name Patti.

Christmas, 1963: my sisters receive Deluxe Reading's Barbie-scale Dream Kitchen. Even while opening my own presents, I can't keep my eyes off of it. "Santa" had opened the box and set up those colorful plastic appliances: pink sink and brown dishwasher (both with running water), yellow oven (with rotating turkey and glowing red burners), turquoise refrigerator (with swing-out shelves). Countless accessories: dishes, silverware, utensils, food. Three decades later, it will take me a number of pre-eBay years to piece together a complete set, mostly by scouring doll shows. Precious: the plastic cakes (with hairline cracks), the ice cube and egg trays, the tiny boxes of sugar, crackers, and lemon cookies.

August, 2005: I visit my friend Bec in Largo, Florida. My first night there we sit up late, talking, admiring her Barbie collection. From a closet she produces a Deluxe Reading Kitchen, never played with, in its original box. It's a hard feeling to describe: confronting what I desired and couldn't have, in such pristine condition—brand new, as if it had been transported via a time machine. Thrilling, and yet sad. After looking at it, I say: "My mother couldn't have known how important this stuff was to me." Bec agrees. I feel

my mother's presence in the room. The next morning, Bec says: "I felt that your mother was with us last night." "I did too," I tell her.

A turning point in my collecting: when I realized I had bought myself every Barbie item my mother had bought my sisters.

Ira, Dianne, and I wander around the Chelsea flea market. I spot an old Sears catalog and start flipping through it. Ira comes over to look at it with me. The dealer, a woman in her thirties, says we can buy, but not look at it. "How can I tell if I want to buy it unless I look at it?" The woman reaches for the catalog and slides it away from us. "Cunt," I say. I look back as we make our way through the market, can see how agitated she is. We have to pass her table on the way out. She charges up to me and says: "What would your mother say?" Ira and Dianne are afraid I'll lose it, since my mother has just died. But I don't respond. "She's right," I say to them. And feel the reprimand has come straight from my mother.

After she died, I bought, at an antique mall, a stack of magazines from the early sixties. *Better Homes and Gardens*. *Family Circle*. *McCall's*. Late at night I'd look through them—at pictures of housewives in kitchens and dining rooms; at ads for laundry detergent and floor wax; at recipes for Rice Krispie treats and pumpkin pie—and cry.

My mother in her apron, baking. My mother combining, mixing, blending, and stirring. My mother flattening the dough on the breadboard with her rolling pin. My mother squeezing the handle of her flour sifter. My mother kneading, blanching, creaming, and whipping. My mother pouring tomato aspic into a Jell-O mold. My mother measuring, folding, removing, and filling. My mother greasing the cookie sheet. My mother placing paper cupcake liners in her muffin pan. My mother beating, sprinkling, crimping, and tinting. My mother cutting the dough into strips for a lattice crust. My mother consulting her *Betty Crocker Cookbook*. My mother using a spatula to evenly spread frosting to the edge of the first layer. My mother frosting the sides. My mother applying more frosting with free, easy strokes. My mother spreading frosting on top, making swirls with the back of a spoon.

Angel Food. Pineapple Upside-Down. Lemon Chiffon. German Chocolate. Red Velvet. Classic White.

Licking the last streaks of batter from the bowl, or one of the beaters when she finished whipping the cream. After making a pie, she'd transform remnants of dough into "Rolly Pollys": strips sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar, then rolled and baked. Through the glass oven door, I'd watch them puff up and turn brown.

gardenias from the front yard floating in a shallow bowl on the kitchen table

A photograph taken the day I graduated from Nobel Junior High. Northridge, California. June, 1968. I stand, stiffly, in front of the entrance on Tampa Ave., in suit and tie, squinting at the camera (my father), trying to smile. My mother stands a few feet to the right, facing me. She wears a sleeveless floral print dress. Her hair has been done. In her left hand she holds the commencement program and her purse. Her right hand is raised to her throat, in proud excitement. She is smiling broadly.

Last time I visited my father, there wasn't a trace of my mother in the house. He'd gotten rid of everything. Given most of her belongings to my sisters. Saved a few things for me, in a small box on the top shelf of a closet in a guest room. The Tiffany china (tulips) I'd sent her from New York several Christmases, a couple pieces of her cut glass.

I miss my mother.

Searching eBay for *The Sound of Hollywood*: The Medallion Strings performing themes from *The Apartment*, *The Sundowners*, *A Summer Place*, *Spellbound*, *The Alamo*, *Never on Sunday*, *Midnight Lace*. Staring at the photo of the blue-on-blue album cover and deciding not to bid. Enough to simply remember lying in front of the hi-fi in the living room, while she cleans or cooks in the kitchen, listening to those dramatic tunes.

CONTRIBUTORS



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RAY DIPALMA'S recent books include *Quatre Poèmes* (translated by Vincent Dussol), Éditions Comp 'Act, 2006, and *Caper* (translated by Gian Maria Annovi) ML & NLF, 2006. Among his earlier collections are *Numbers and Tempers*, *Le Tombeau de Reverdy*, *Provocations*, *Hôtel des Ruines*, *Gnossiennes*, and *Letters*. He lives in New York City and teaches at the School of Visual Arts.

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TERESA K. MILLER received her MFA from Mills College, won the 2006 Mary Merritt Henry Prize, and currently teaches English at Columbia College Chicago. Her poems have appeared in print and online journals, including *ZYZZYVA*, *MiPOesias*, *27 rue de fleurs*, and *Shampoo*. She would like to thank and remember her father, Marvin Gene Miller, who was killed by a street racing seventeen-year-old on March 17, 2006.

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JAMES SHEA's poems have appeared in numerous journals including *American Letters & Commentary*, *Crowd*, *Gulf Coast*, and *jubilat*. He lives in Chicago.

PETER JAY SHIPPY is the author of *Thieves' Latin* (University of Iowa Press) and *Alphaville* (BlazeVOX Books). In 2007, Rose Metal Press will publish his book-length poem, *How to Build the Ghost in Your Attic*. He teaches at Emerson College in Boston.

ANIS SHIVANI's poem is from his collection, *Treasonous Times*, available to interested publishers. Other poems appear in *The Threepenny Review*, *Salamander*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *Meanjin*, *Notre Dame Review*, *The Iowa Review*, and elsewhere.

MARTHA SILANO lives in Seattle, where she teaches at Bellevue Community College. Her books are *Blue Positive* (2006) and *What the Truth Tastes Like* (1999).

BJ SOLOY graduated from Columbia College Chicago in December, though a financial hold on his account leaves the receipt of his diploma an open-ended source of intrigue. He thinks that Chicago has some nice poets, but few nice smells, and is anxious to move somewhere small where he can sing loudly and out of tune.

MATHIAS SVALINA lives in Lincoln, Nebraska, where he co-curates "The Clean Part Reading Series" and co-edits *Octopus Magazine and Books*. His poems have been recently published or are forthcoming in *Fence*, *Typo*, *Action*

Yes, *Denver Quarterly* and other journals. His first chapbook, *Why I Am White*, is forthcoming from Kitchen Press.

JASON TANDON's poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Poet Lore*, *Euphony*, *Regarding Arts & Letters*, *Del Sol Review*, *Good Foot*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Pavement Saw*, and elsewhere. He teaches at the University of New Hampshire and is an intern poetry editor at the *Paris Review*.

STEVEN TEREFF received his MFA in poetry from Columbia College Chicago. His poetry and co-translations of Novica Tadić have appeared in *Black Clock*, *Apocryphal Text*, and *New American Writing*. He currently teaches at Columbia College Chicago and Truman College.

ANDY TREBING works in Chicago, where he lives with a woman, a cat, and a dog called Chickenwing. He speaks fluent Tennessee.

TONY TRIGILIO is the author of the poetry collection, *The Lama's English Lessons* (Three Candles Press). His poems have appeared recently in *Big Bridge*, *Black Clock*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Diagram*, and *La Petite Zine*. He teaches at Columbia College Chicago, where he also serves as Director of Creative Writing—Poetry and co-edits the journal *Court Green*.

DAVID TRINIDAD's last two books, *Plasticville* and *Phoebe 2002: An Essay in Verse*, were published by Turtle Point Press. With Denise Duhamel and Maureen Seaton, he edited *Saints of Hysteria: A Half-Century of Collaborative American Poetry* (Soft Skull Press, 2007). Trinidad teaches poetry at Columbia College Chicago, where he co-edits the journal *Court Green*. His next book of poetry, *The Late Show*, is forthcoming from Turtle Point in 2007.

JEAN VALENTINE's most recent book is her collected poems, *Door in the Mountain*, published by Wesleyan University Press in 2004. She lives in New York City.

JENNIFER WATMAN's stature is: islanded in a room volleying wave-producing mechanisms & ink-linking/leaking tools. Has tickled, touched: *CPR #19 & #20*; forthcoming *Another Chicago Magazine #48*, *Wet: A Journal of Proper Bathing &* in *MiPOesias*, edited by David Trinidad. So likes: boots, honey, people, pizza, and cosmology.

MIKE WHITE has recent or forthcoming poems in journals including *The Threepenny Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *Poetry*, *Verse*, *Pleiades*, *River Styx*, and *Court Green*. Originally from Montreal, he now lives in Salt Lake City. He is co-editor of *Quarterly West*.

CRYSTAL WILLIAMS is the author of two collections of poetry, *Kin* and *Lunatic*. Her work is forthcoming and/or appears in the following journals: *The American Poetry Review*, *Luna*, *5AM*, and *Spoon River Review*, among others. She has taught at Columbia College Chicago, Stonecoast Low Residency MFA Program, and is on faculty at Reed College. She has just completed a third collection.

RYNN WILLIAMS is the author of *Adonis Garage* (University of Nebraska Press), which received the 2004 Prairie Schooner Book Award for Poetry. She won a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship in 2001, and her poems have appeared in *The Nation*, *FIELD*, and *The Massachusetts Review*, among other magazines. Williams is a creative writing tutor in the McGhee Division of New York University.

THOM WILLIAMS is a poet, teacher, and musician. He has published hundreds of poems and has won awards and commendations on five continents. His haiku have been celebrated for a decade in Japan where they've adorned millions of Itoen Green Tea cans.

NICOLE WILSON lives in Chicago where she is a candidate in the MFA Poetry Program at Columbia College Chicago.

PATRICK WOODCOCK is the author of six books of poetry and his seventh, *Forgive the Host, Then Bury Him* is due for publication in Belgrade. After years of travel in Iceland, Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East, he now lives and has decided to expire in Colombia.

DEAN YOUNG's most recent book is *embryo*.



COVER ART:
SELF-PORTRAIT AS TENDER
MERCENARY, JULIE HEFFERNAN,
2006, OIL ON CANVAS, 91" X 68"

DAVID TRINIDAD
LISA JARNOT
KATE DOUGHERTY
GATE MARVIN
GRAHAM FOUST
JEFFREY McDANIEL
JESSICA BOZEK
KAREN AN-HWEI LEE
ED ROBERSON
MARGARET BRADY
TONY TRIGILIO
DOBBY GIBSON
JENNIFER WATMAN
CRYSTAL WILLIAMS
ANDY TREBING
MARTHA SILANO
SUSEN JAMES

THOM WILLIAMS
SIÂN KILLINGSWORTH
BARBARA PEREZ
JESSE STEPHEN GROUSE
RYNN WILLIAMS
JEANNINE HALL GAILEY
AARON PATRICK FLANAGAN
RYAN COLLINS
RICK BAROT
KATE BRADY
NICOLE WILSON
CHRISTOPHER DAVIS
MONICA GERSTEMEIER
BRUCE GOVEY
PETER JAY SHIPPY
KRISTEN ORSER
JEFF SCHIFF
C.H. EDING
RAY DiPALMA
DANIELA OLSZEWSKA
BEGGA KLAVER
ANDREW KOSZEWSKI
MATHIAS SVALINA
SARAH MANGUSO
ALISON PICK
STEVEN TEREFF
ARIELLE GREENBERG
MIGAH PERRY
PATRICK WOODCOCK
DANIELLE AQUILINE
MICHAEL ROBBINS
KAIA SAND
MIKE HAUSER
JOAN LARKIN
HANNA ANDREWS

TERESA K. MILLER
RICHARD MEIER
K.E. DUFFIN
ANIS SHIVANI
REBECCA LOUDON
JORDAN DAVIS
RACHEL FINKELSTEIN
FRANK GIAMPETRO
AMANDA M. JOHNSON
MARK NEELY
SEAN FLYNN
MÓNICA DE LA TORRE
LANDIS EVERSON
JASON TANDON
SUSAN KUREK
ANGIE ESTES
DEAN YOUNG
BRIGITTE BYRD
JULIE ROUSE
BJ SOLOY
HAINES EASON
D.A. POWELL & HAINES EASON
MIKE WHITE
CHRIS GREEN
KRISTY BOWEN
DENISE DUHAMMEL
CHET GRESHAM
JAMES SHEA
BRANDI HOMAN
SHIN YU PAI
ALBERTO RÍOS
BRENDA SHAUGHNESSY
JOE ELDRIDGE
LISA FISHMAN
JEAN VALENTINE

no. 20

REVIEW

POETRY

COLUMBIA