New Orleans Review

Volume 35 Number 1

cover art:
Me, by Myself
José María Cundín, 2008
50 X 58 inches, oil on linen

frontispiece:
Angelic Head
José María Cundín, 1984
9 inches high, polychromed polyester

book design:
Christopher Chambers

New Orleans Review, founded in 1968, is published by Loyola University New Orleans. Loyola University is a charter member of the Association of Jesuit University Presses. *New Orleans Review* reads unsolicited submissions of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and translations August 15 through May 15. Subscriptions $15 per year; $35 outside U.S. No portion of *New Orleans Review* may be reproduced without written permission. Send all correspondence to *New Orleans Review,* Box 195, Loyola University, New Orleans, LA 70118. For more information and back issues, visit us at neworleansreview.org. Contents listed in the PMLA Bibliography, the Index of Amercan Periodical Verse, and the American Humanities Index. Printed in the United States. Distributed by Ingram Periodicals. ISSN: 0028-6400

LOYOLA
UNIVERSITY
NEW ORLEANS

CONTENTS

CARL PHILLIPS

In This World to Be Lost

Maybe you've seen how a sea-falcon,
hovering above its own reflection,
will at last strike through it to the silver
life flashing just beneath,
                and thus
survive. How there's a cadence even
to brutality. As it turns out, there were
always choices. Sing, or don't sing.
Ritual, and
        the unraveling of ritual. You
all over again, but bearing the light
for once steadily forward, as if for us both.

CARL PHILLIPS

Fascination

Guttering in its stone urn from a century, by now,
too far away, the candle made of the room
a cavernousness. The shape of the light getting cast
upward, onto the room's ceiling, became a kind
of moon, some
                overlooked, last round of desire—
unclaimed, searching…

*

                There are places, still, that
no moonlight ever quite conquers: a thickness of brush,
the crossed limbs of cathedral pines,
                defend the dark,
inside which—beneath it—the trapped fox has stopped
mutilating its own body to at last get free. Has stopped trying.
Consigns the rust-colored full length of itself to the frosted ground.

MAJOR JACKSON

Headstones

Nightfall arrives through hemlocks, etching
tablets of planted bones. Sometimes I hear
my unnamed dead, falsetto beneath wind,
slow whine in the hearth returned to tell me
of absence and loss. I want you naked in a field.
No one is alone. I resent earth, black spirits arrayed
like a shooting gallery. Let's lie in ground mist
unconvinced of farewells. I want never the end plots
of ministers & film reels, commandments whose doors
angle like fallen shadows. Leave your face.

MAJOR JACKSON

Shortbus

after John Cameron Diaz

But then this business of desirous, dowered flesh,
once again, unbelievably pure, bodies nosing up, seal-like,
then, the long swim through dim, blue corridors,
electronica thumping over bodies like empty drums
where loneliness plays its part: enzyme of nature—
how many iridescent faces floating below like water lilies
have you risen up to meet yours? How many writhing,
night-blooming, dew-washed women? You're prostrate
in the casket of your shadow. The hidden banks
of groans, the splendid whispered sighs beckon.

SHANE MCCRAE

The Boy Calls Twilight

The boy calls twilight *little dark* the night

Big dark and smiles at the moon on the wall the boy

Rocking himself to sleep his head against

The padding on the bars until he falls

Over and sleeps and if he wakes in the night

The boy his head against the padding he

Rocks in the big dark little rocks and soft-

er once and softer twice until he falls

The boy he slumps against the bars of the crib

Falls over falls asleep and wakes in the lit-

tle dark the morning little dark the lit-

tle dark through the window little blue on the crib

And on the moon which does not glow in the light

The little light the moon is for the night

SHANE MCCRAE

The Cardinal Is the Marriage Bird

The cardinal is the marriage bird / And flies a flash of dusk

becomes forgets becomes / Again the body

of the cardinal in the sunlight in the day / Imagine

otherwise the cardinal in the room

The sunlight in the room in the day / The sunlight

on the snow the snow like frosted glass / The cardinal in the snow

as clear as if it were on the inside side of the window

And not in the world the cardinal is

The marriage bird and flies in the sunlight on the snow /

Between the sunlight and the snow

a shadow on the snow but still / The sunlight on the snow

imagine otherwise

The cardinal on the windowsill

And flies

a flash of shadow and the cardinal is the shadow bird /

A flash of wound the wound

bird evergreen to evergreen

Wound leaping evergreen to evergreen / Imagine

welcoming the wound

TESS GALLAGHER

The Man from Kinvara

At the beheading of the statue
the laurel parted from
the garter, and what they did
with King Billy's head I do not know,
for in 1763 the statue stood at
the Boyle bridge, near the Royal Hotel.

But bridges come and go, as this one did
and when rebuilt in 1834, Viscount Lorton
had Billy hefted to the Pleasure Grounds,
complete with picnics and strollers.
But pleasure seekers, as a residue
of the early 1920's 'troubles,'
beheaded the statue among sycamore
and ash—the headless remains later
removed, as an assault on order. Arms
and torso, feet and waistcoat
bludgeoned down. Now the spot

is simply: 'the pedestal where King Billy
stood,' for it is the pedestal-makers
who win the day as that young boy
strikes a pose, then leaps like a jaguar
onto the back of his unsuspecting
friend. Double portrait of heads rolling

through grass, dew cool to their cheeks:
gleeful cries of predator and victor unravel
below the Curlew Mountains,
named for birds we seldom see.

Still, there will always be witnesses; I am waiting
for the man from Kinvara. He is mild
for someone having attended
a beheading. Like me he was a visitor
to the event. But having held onto one's head
while another's falls rearranges
notions of a body. May he let
some detail slip to enlighten me, such as
what they did with a head so dislodged, so
beyond its danger.

The man from Kinvara is taking his time.
I think, like me, he often walks headless under stars,
above the child combatants
rolling across the lawns of the world.
One might yet encounter such a man
with his headless moment, his freedom-glee,
his vacant stare.

Let me up on your back, oh man from Kinvara.
I've a spare head with a girlish sheen
gazing out across Lough Arrow
where daily the swans are shedding a lake
and taking up a sky.

HAINES EASON

Paper Kisses, Paper Moon

For D.A. Powell

A word spoken in due season, how good it is.

Do you remember a clearer water? The palest sea under
bands of horizon. Sound clear as slate in a hall, clear as the moon

we searched for. Through fogbank, was it sun? I remember
the northern route better than the going-out south. I remember

you hoping heavily against the weather, hands between the legs.
The trips themselves sojourn, one into the next.

I have little more than a steady image of your face. Seasons
constructing around you are large cities and steep towns,

perched. Shuttered stucco estates with roads' backs broken
through the distance, and access lost in cypress. The coast's

piano key towns link in singular strength, compose from waters'
mirrors, facing the black west, a pale reverberation off the opposite

dark : neither crescent nor gibbous. The sea heaves. All I remember
are sonatas everyone knows, opaque, denuded in poor recordings.

I remember better southern routes from mountains varied slightly
in snow, which that year clicked like soft stones in your palm.

I prefer ever more a steadfast profile of that place : two coasts,
one south one north, one sun one fog, peaked along an apex—

winter and verging spring, banked in flight transformed
violently front pressing front. I did not know words then for

reverberation of the heart—whatever the sound the insides of a
great instrument makes. I've heard it calculates tides of betrayal

as soon as betrothal. The small boats it seemed, could survive
either. Brought on shore before dark, they filled with frost,

their canvases cracked. A boy broke the lacquered threads, pulling
too hard for excitement, to keep rein of the horizon's glow.

He or the heat—hard to say. One day's winter become another's
trip up or down the coast. The radio which in evening was left on.

HAINES EASON

Marine Layer

FOR D.A. POWELL

Bleating horns for imprisoned tons, dock-bound vessels
scale a calm of buoys. Buoys net the range of passing

freight. He walks the city hills. The city hills lift and fall.
Metallic sounds mourn in the dark, and the boys listen.

In the dark sharp sounds are born. Boys dying, boys fighting.
At market, animals, still-breathing, sold.

He passes cages and he passes blear fishmongers. Flowers,
ghostly when removed from the sea. Brought inland,

his lover is a cargo of blind, dark dreams. But he has come.
The city's bedeviled denizens scurry as in other climes.

His gifted lips mouth various shapes : voyage, return
to me, "keep me for your own." Past midnight he goes down

to the piers. Past midnight and he's still awake. He turns
the lamps on one by one. Night turns down its furnace.

HAINES EASON

By the Mark

FOR D.A. POWELL

As the eyes' truth dies sheathed, closing out histories of their days,
he put aside many homes these months. Autumn tasks tithe away
paths meant for two, lardered off to a time just cooler than spring.
It ran counter to my intention, but the greater the gift, the lesser
indeed matters the fuss of a few seasonal moons. When does it
lie across the open heather and other such, within mysterious airs
of its making? In a time made simple by the details of loss, a man
I'd have been finds himself in houses built against one moment
or another. In its doorways I lose the heartbeat of decisions, rise
lost in its mornings knowing little but that some swallows left
in the night. Little to sing over, little to shout at now, with chores
silenced, weather ever ready to fall. The woods that were a building
of many uses says it alone knows what will make it glad. I believe
its tatters were first saved in the confusion. Last marked were stars.

ASTRID DUFFY

The Dirt Market

One day, I found a tooth in the ground where the Mao statues should have been. On another, I dug up a heart, carved roughly from wood and engraved with two names, where I was sure I had buried a dozen small stone Buddhas. But the strangest thing I found buried in my plot of land was a man's body, his sunglasses still on.

I was expecting to find an order of twenty cherry wood chess sets that had spent a month underground. I was expecting the warm scent of soil and of sweet damp wood maturing. Maturing, not rotting, thanks to the speckled white birches that almost shade the back end of my field and which drink the extra water from the ground. I was expecting a little more resistance when my shovel hit something; the proud press of wood, shoving back up at me, not the sigh and squeeze of something with a lot more give. It is only because I was afraid of the shovel's quick tip scratching the surfaces of the chess sets, thinking that perhaps the wood had taken water and weakened more than usual, that the body wasn't cut straight in half.

I climbed down into the hole, and removed the last few fistfuls of dirt with my hands. That's when I noticed the smell. Not the rainy smell of wet wood at all, but something much sharper, a splinter of rot and decay that stuck and stunk between my eyes and down my throat. My first thought was that it was sweat, my sweat, the smell of too many hard mornings' work without washing, but as I scooped another inch of soil from the floor of the hole, I realized that something was rotting and it wasn't me. Beneath the dirt, I found fabric. Beneath the fabric, I found flesh.

I managed to pull myself out of the hole before I vomited. The smell of him clung to me, and when I wiped my mouth, I smelled him on my hand and retched again. I left the droplets to sting my chin while I wondered what to do with the body. It would be easy enough to rebury him, I thought. The soil piled next to the hole just needed a firm nudge from my shovel to fall back into place. But the chess sets. They were due in Beijing in two weeks, which wasn't nearly enough time to get more made, buried and cleaned. If I failed to deliver them, I'd have to face my brother's smug anger, and know that I was sinking even lower on our family success scale. To prevent that, I was willing to brave the stink again. All I had to do, I figured, was pull the body out of the hole, remove the chess sets, and then roll him back in. I swept the hard tip of the shovel across the floor of the hole, scraping back the soil, and there he was, looking up from the mud through dirty sunglasses.

He was dressed simply. A once white button-down shirt. Brown trousers that stopped an inch or so short of his ankles, hiked high on his waist with a rough belt. He had no shoes on but that was quite normal. Who wastes shoes on the dead? And then large, square-framed sunglasses. As if his undertaker had been worried that the sunlight in the next world would be blinding.

I took off my cotton shirt and knotted the arms tightly behind my head: a makeshift mask for my mouth and nose. I would have to lift him out, I knew, but first, as I worked up the strength, I got down into the hole and went through his pockets. In his trousers, I found ten squares of colored silk and a flimsy box made from the thinnest wood. When I slid open its lid, a cricket jumped out. Obviously, the body had not been buried long. In his shirt pocket was a thin piece of curling paper, folded in half, which I finally made out to say 'Bruce Lee.' And underneath, in small, fragile writing, was his Chinese name. Li Xiao Lung, Little Dragon. It didn't occur to me to question why a man would carry his own name in his pocket, in two languages no less. All I remember thinking was that his name might

as well have been written in coins, for I was sure that it would finally make my fortune.

My fortune has been slow in coming. There are those who might think I am no more than a dog, hiding my possessions in the dirt. But I'm not; burying things is my job. I'm an ager. Someone who ages things. Someone who digs large holes and puts in all the newly made china, statues and coins that arrive shining with youth on the backs of trucks. Someone who, later in the year, digs it all up again and sends it off to be sold, all dirty and earthy and smelling of the Chinese countryside; a wet, warm scent like red clay.

Tourists don't buy shiny souvenirs. They don't want New China: downtown Beijing, fiberglass and concrete. They want *hutongs* and temples. Tradition, a break from all things American, all things mass-produced, shiny and sterile. They want dirt. While the Chinese are holding umbrellas and scrubbing skin with whitening creams, the Western world is rolling in the mud and stripping for the sun. It's the same with what they buy. So, unless that painted vase has a good month of dirt on it, no sale. If that tea pot is spotless, you'll be taking it home again.

Knowing this is what made my brother his fortune. He's in charge of it all: the production, the aging and the selling. He comes out to the countryside every few months to check that I am following his directions. For the most part, though, he takes the money and smokes. He knows a carefully planned number of English words; not so much English that he loses his charm. He has watched other sellers. Those who speak no English often miss out on a sale. Those who speak good English find it hard to convince customers their products are old. My brother learned just three phrases and some numbers.

"Old," he can say, and, insulted, "Not new!" when the tourists disagree.

"Good price," he promises.

I know these phrases, too, but keep quiet when I visit the market. He is an expert salesman and I know not to interrupt. I've sat with him at the stall a few times after riding into Beijing with the new products, and seen that he is never desperate. He knows that tourists want what they can't afford. They walk away to see if my brother will run after them, but he never takes the bait. He shrugs, and rolls his eyes, and lights another cigarette. It works, too; five minutes later they all come back to pay his price, and he nods, takes the money, and goes on smoking. He never calls them 'good friends', he never asks them to come back next time. Price is not the only thing that separates the real antiques from the fake. My brother's indifference makes all the difference.

I have similar indifference; there is no attachment to the things I bury. Yet I haven't seen the same rewards as my brother. He spends his days comfortably shaded from the sun, a cigarette always lit between his fingers. He has enough spare cash to gamble it away to jade sellers and antique furniture dealers across a mahjong table. I still spend most days up to my neck in dirt, and though I'm not a smoker or a gambler, I envy his days in the shade.

That day, with an already aged body to tend to, my regular aging had to be put on hold. As it was my hole, he couldn't really object to relocation. He made no immediate complaints, at any rate. So out he came.

I knelt in the hole, hoisted him over my right shoulder, and pushed my back against the wall of soil as I struggled to my feet. Bruce was not a large man. But I was not large, either. My arms were thick enough around from lifting Buddhas to and from the cart, but on a small man, arms can only get so thick, and I was panting hard under the damp shirt across my face. My breath, restricted, came out in little snorts. I managed to lift him high enough that his head cleared the hole. Then, I slid him forward until his neck,

his shoulders, and his belly lay on the churned surface of my field. Heaving myself up after him, I pulled him clear of the hole, and turned him over. His sunglasses fell off and I saw his face properly. He was darkly tanned with thick lines across his brow, as if it had been violently ploughed. His eyes were deep set and squinty. His feet had dragged on the side of the hole, taking the wet soil with them, so he now had on a pair of Earth's own shoes, lined with the softest brown suede.

I tried his sunglasses on. They fit me well, so I kept them on, glad that they sufficiently shaded his face that I couldn't clearly see his eyes, which were no doubt asking me what I'd do with him next. Asking why I'd disturbed him, why I hadn't left him asleep, decomposing underground. If there is a body buried in your field, it's not really there if no one digs it up. But I dug and there he was. I avoided looking at him. I was afraid he'd see my plan, see that he was my ticket to success, and spoil it somehow. So instead, I looked around, at the mountains, at the hole, at the stretch of broken green connecting it all, and thought about what I would tell my brother.

My brother is a genius. He can make money from anything, even from things that are damaged and most people would throw away. I once watched him sell a statue of Chairman Mao for eight hundred kuai. Not a life-size statue, but a statue that would reach half way to your knee. A thin foreign man had picked up the figurine and remarked to his wife that he had never seen one quite like it before. He might have been a collector.

"I'll give you four hundred," he smiled.

"Eight hundred fifty," my brother said with his eyes closed.

"No way! Six hundred is our final price."

My brother shook his head. The couple shrugged and walked away.

Ten minutes later they were back. Slightly sheepish, like hungry

children who turned their noses up at dinner but, finding no other options, slink back to the table.

"Eight hundred?" the man pleaded.

My brother nodded. He reached behind him for a sheet of newspaper to wrap the statue. He took the crisp pink notes and put them in his fat black wallet. All the while smoking. That statue had been a reject from the factory, a sample for mixing paint: instead of the usual vibrant reds and greens, the miniature Chairman wore a pastel jacket and hat. It had cost five kuai to make and sold for eight hundred.

Maybe, I thought, he would know how to make money out of Bruce. Perhaps he would know a place that would embalm the body. We could get him a glass coffin and my brother could put him on show in the Dirt Market, or in Tiananmen Square, next to the real Chairman Mao. And maybe, if he did, there'd be something in it for me. A larger cut of the profits, perhaps. Or my own truck, so I wouldn't need to hitch rides every time I go into the city.

I loaded Bruce Lee onto the back of the donkey-cart, covered him with a sack and drove back to the village. If any villagers saw him there might be questions asked. They might confiscate him. He might be stripped and examined by strangers. He might be left out for the dogs, and since he came out of my hole, so to speak, I felt a little responsible for him.

Once home, I threw Bruce's sack-covered body across my bed. It made me glad that I had no wife. No doubt, she would have strangled me for the muddy toe-prints across the floor, and for the sweet meaty smell that now filled the house. I can't say the smell didn't bother me; I still gagged when I got close enough to lift him, but I tried to convince myself, from a distance, that there was merely a basket of rank, overripe plums nearby. I even picked and sliced one of the sour red-skinned plums from my neighbor's tree and dabbed the purple flesh above my top lip, which helped a little.

I readied myself for a trip to Beijing, filling a flask of tea and cleaning the specks of dirt from my finger nails. My brother had commented on my nails the last time I saw him and I didn't want anything to distract him this time. I also washed myself with an old bar of soap, and was about to dry my hands on my dirty trousers when I remembered the silk in Bruce's pocket. I removed it, counting out ten squares, each roughly the size of my palm. I chose a cherry red piece and dried my hands. It was a luxurious feeling; until then, my skin had only felt the raspy drag of rough cotton. I thanked Bruce with a pat of his shoulder and tucked him back into his sack.

We set off for the city just before nightfall, in the bed of a truck whose owner held his nose and asked no questions once I paid him two hundred kuai. It was a lot, but I figured I'd make it back in no time, selling tickets to see Bruce. We rode with two village men who had gotten construction jobs in Beijing for the next three months. The younger of the two had been waved off by a pack of children, all so eager to be in position to touch his hands one last time that it was impossible to count them. His wife, as round and rosy as her husband, had slipped a small parcel into his hand as he kissed her fingers goodbye. It wasn't until the moon was high and bright that he carefully slid the wrapping off, and divided the pale almond cake between the three living members of our party.

The trip took all night, and I watched as gray shadows darkened to smoky black and then slowly lightened up again. There is not one moment when you enter Beijing. It is a slow conversion. More and more traffic. Then, the sky clouds over until there is no more blue, just dust. The buildings grow into towers, and become both dirtier and newer. Anything built in the last six months is freshly painted, either a dull slate or a surprising shade of pastel paint that will soon fade with smog. The walls of the older buildings peel as if plagued by a skin disease they couldn't help but scratch.

I arrived on the back of that blue truck, watching the clouds blast

in, as the other men slept. Watching people in the backs of other trucks, sleeping, smoking, staring out at the world with blank eyes. I sat as straight as I could, imitating Bruce, lying still and covered at my feet.

At sunrise, the truck pulled through the gray gates at the back of the Dirt Market. When my brother had first set up his stall here, it had been known as the Ghost Market because to get the really good buys, you had to be there at the eerie dawn of four or five in the morning. Footsteps echoed towards you on the cobblestones, I remember, long before you could make out the figure approaching, shrouded in the humid morning mist.

Even ten years and a good deal of publicity later, only stall holders and dedicated shoppers were around when I arrived. Very few Westerners. The tourist shoppers arrived at ten, I remembered, and when they did it would not go unnoticed. Eyes would snap open, fakes would come out, prices would go up. It took seconds for the outer rows of sellers to spot foreigners and relay it inwards with cries of *"Waiguoren!"*

My brother's stall was in near the middle of the Dirt Market, out behind the tented courtyard. I arrived at the back and made my way through past the stone carvings and statues. Buddhas ranged from egg-sized heads to a ten-foot peaceful monster. They had stone lions and stone dragons. Stone warriors, stone horses, stone drums and lanterns, all laid out in rows as if they were guests at a stone wedding.

In the centre of his stall, on a stone throne that he would never sell, sat my brother. A blue blanket lay before him. His eyes were closed but not in sleep. He sat straight and thoughtful, his head tilted to show the sharp jaw line. His hands lay clasped in his lap, cracked and wise and nothing like mine.

When we were younger, running around in open-bottomed trousers together, my father took us to meet his aunt. She lived a whole day's ride from where we lived. My father, my brother and I sat silently on the wooden plank that was the cart, all in a row. We formed a steep slope, my father towering above me, my brother a foot shorter. The only sound for sixteen hours came from the donkey's nostrils.

My father's aunt had a reputation for being able to contact the dead. She charged people money, and in return, gave them a long list of ways in which they were failing to meet their ancestor's expectations. Though I'm loyal and respectful to my ancestors, I'm not sure I believe that my aunt was speaking their wishes. Back then, of course, I did, and so when my father asked what should become of my brother and me, if we would head for the city to study, or become farmers, I listened intently. And as we stood before her, her eyes slicing back and forth between us, she told us.

"The older boy is not to be trusted with money. He has damp hands. Money will curl when he touches it, trying to get out of his hand. It will be all too easy for him to spend. Look at the younger boy's hands." She paused, holding out my brother's hands, palms up. I tried to wipe my palms on my shorts without anyone noticing.

"These are cracked and split already. He is only five! Already there are nooks to hide the money in, caves to store up for rainy days. He will always have wealth. A great business man, a great husband. A strong chin that will lead him well."

My father almost smiled. Instead, he nodded and slapped my brother's shoulders.

"Check mine again," I asked, holding out my hands.

My father's aunt grimaced. My father slapped me across the head.

"This one will have dirty hands for the rest of his life," my father's aunt spat, fixing her two bulbous eyes on me. "He will dig

in the ground, play in the damp dirt. His hands are trying to wash themselves of this already."

I greeted my brother, avoiding a handshake. He regarded me sharply, assessing my value as if I were a piece of pottery, and asked my purpose in Beijing. My delivery had not been expected for two weeks. I described Bruce, and watched my brother try to keep his eyes from widening.

"Bruce Lee?" he asked. "From the movies?"

I led him to the blue truck, and un-sacked Bruce. A cloud of cabbage-like odor rose as I pulled back the fabric, so thick you could almost see the smell. My brother stifled a gag. I offered him a tissue but he shrugged it away. He tilted Bruce's chin towards him with the tip of his finger.

"How do you know it's him?"

I reached into Bruce's pocket and showed my brother the piece of paper. He read it, dropped it back onto Bruce, and nodded. We carried him to the stall. My brother held him behind the knees, I held his shoulders. Even though this meant my brother lead the way through the market, so Bruce was carried correctly, feet first, I felt pleasantly superior to have hold of the upper body while my brother had the lower.

"So?" I asked as we laid him down behind my brother's throne. "A great discovery, yes? Something for the history books!"

My brother did not answer. He stood for a second, thinking, and then disappeared into the market. He was gone for almost an hour. I watched the stall, taking up his position on the throne, leaning back in it and feeling the cold stone against my tired back. I sold a small statue—Mao in his lime-green suit—for seventy kuai. My brother could have gotten more, but I knew seventy kuai was still a good profit.

When he returned, my brother had a large book tucked under his arm. The Dirt Market sold everything. He flipped through the

pages. Glossy kung fu stars flew past my nose. He stopped at a picture of Bruce Lee and laid the book across my knees.

"Looks like you've been dragging that corpse around for nothing," my brother said, pointing. The Bruce in the photo had a rounder nose, a smaller face. The Bruce behind the throne, half-in and half-out of a dirty sack, had thinner, meaner eyes. Deceitful eyes, I saw then. How could I have been so stupid?

"What if we pretended it was him?" I asked. Sitting on the throne, I could see the top of my brother's head and it made me feel clever.

"We could charge the foreigners to take photos with him," I said, gripping the stone arms of the throne. "They'd love it. He could make us rich!"

My brother closed his eyes and shook his head.

"Get out of my seat," he said. The idea of riches didn't excite him like it did me.

"He could make us famous," I tried. "The world-famous Huang brothers who dug up Bruce Lee. That's what people would call us."

"Didn't you look at the photo? That stinking old man wouldn't fool anyone." He sighed and handed me the book of photos. A gift, I suppose. "Now get him out of here before he scares away my customers."

As I pulled the sack from behind the throne, I imagined my brother watching me and so I tried to act as if it wasn't heavy at all, squaring my shoulders, locking my jaw. It was heavy, though. My arms and chest began to burn almost immediately. I thought about turning back to wave, but decided not to.

I dragged the sack until I was sure my brother could no longer see us. There didn't seem to be any point in taking the corpse home with me, and I wondered where in the city I could dump him quickly and easily. Wherever I took him, I would have to pull him there myself, I knew, so I thought about just leaving him where I'd dropped him: against the outer wall of what smelled like the men's

toilets. But I couldn't do it. Though he had failed to bring me the fortune I'd hoped for, I was afraid that if I put him anywhere other than back in the hole I'd pulled him from, I would be made to pay for my disrespect somehow. Bad luck would find me: my donkey would die, my house would burn down, or my feet would fall off.

So I found a truck heading back in the direction of my village with room for both the body and I. Again, it took money to cover the question of smell. I was glad not to have to describe the contents of the sack, as I couldn't say it was Bruce Lee anymore. I could only call him Corpse or Body or Stinking Old Man. I felt he had done me some injustice by not being Bruce Lee and, for the whole journey home, I punished him—not enough to warrant bad luck, but enough to make me feel better. I let his head bump against the bed of the truck instead of cushioning it with layers of the sack, and whenever he rolled in my direction, I pushed him away.

The sun was setting before I was dropped at the fork that divided my destination from my driver's. By the time I hauled the sack the extra half-mile to my village, all of my anger had faded into exhaustion. He lay behind my house that night, and I buried him the next morning, back in the same hole he came from, his sunglasses back on and straightened, and I even found a new cricket to put in his wooden box. I didn't want there to be any doubt that I was concerned about his well-being: on top of the mounded dirt, I placed a small marble Buddha with almond shaped eyes.

A couple of days after the burial, I rode out to the area with new statues to age. In front of the small Buddha sat a small boy. Both cross legged, both gray in the dawn light. The boy sprang to his feet when he heard my donkey, ready to bolt.

"Wait!" I called to him. "Did you know Bruce Lee?" The name came out before I could catch my mistake.

The boy hesitated. I drew closer. He wore brown shorts and no shirt. His eyes were narrow and shadowed.

"I don't know Bruce Lee, but I do like him. My father promised to buy me a poster when he went to the city. I wrote the name down for him so he'd remember." He pointed to the soil, the grave. "But he never made it that far."

"Your father," I repeated, following the boy's finger to the freshly turned dirt before us. "I never knew him. What did he do?"

The boy stared at my feet. I sat and then he sat, and once sitting, he told me about his father, a silk salesman from a few villages over. His father hadn't made the silk himself; that took place in the sunnier villages south of Beijing. Their family did not even own any silk beyond the ten sample swatches they showed to potential customers. All his father had to his name were those swatches, a gnarled brown book in which to record orders and a son to succeed him.

"It was me that buried him here," the small boy said. "We were hoping to sell some silk in these villages. My father was on his way to Beijing, and he let me come the first bit of the way with him, to learn a little about selling. But then he died. He just fell down. He'd been walking for too long, I guess."

"So you've come back to pay your respects?" I asked.

"No," the boy said. "I'm here to dig him up."

"Dig him up?"

"For the silk," the boy said. "I buried him with it still in his pocket."

"I can help you there," I said. The silk was still on my kitchen table at home.

We rode back to my house together on the donkey cart. The sun fell behind the mountains which had been the backdrop for my life, the mountains that I had seen every morning through cracks in the newspapers taped to my windows. While we rode, I told the boy about the trip to Beijing with his father. About the crowds and stalls and colors of the Dirt Market. He smiled and thanked me, happy that his father had reached the city. I didn't tell him that his father had been tucked inside a sack for most of the trip.

We reached my house and I gave the boy his silk. The cherry colored piece had curled at the corners from when I had dried my hands on it. He stacked the swatches carefully, running his thumb over the surface of each square, and then slotted his inheritance into a pocket. I gave him the book my brother had given me, Bruce Lee buried in the shiny pages. It was just as good as a poster, the boy said. He started out for home straight away, saying his mother would be waiting for him, that if he left right then he'd be home by dark. After he left, I noticed a swatch of silk on the floor beneath the table. I picked it up: the reddest silk I had ever seen. I planted it the following day, in the dry soil out by the grave, and I hope that the man who wasn't Bruce Lee will see it, from wherever he is now, and look upon me favorably.

TERRANCE HAYES

I Am a Bird Now

When Antony a man like Nina
With a shook note corned in his quiver

Dolls a wig of light the way a wounded
Head is dolled and the song slung

From his grimace is no longer part
Of the body but shares some of its

History you know how I feel / the raw
Drawl drawn from the bottom of the throat

The hunger broken by what can and cannot
Heal in the much too dark to see

After the vase is asleep with the taste
Of the bit flower its moodiness and lust

You know how I feel / submerged
In a clouded jar altered and alert

The mind lightheaded and hawked
Rundown and cloaked in awkwardness

You know what I sorrow when I lay
On your back Beloved and our lovemaking

With your back to me is a form
Of departure / you know how I feel

Terrestrial as a marriage like a wing
When it is no longer part of the body

Slung from a horn carved of metal
Slickened to shine a phrase winding coil

and the winded valves the song which aches
As it opens and aches as it shutters down

Birds flying high / You know how I feel
Sun in the sky / You know how I feel

Reeds drifting on by / You know how I feel
It's a new dawn / It's a new day

It's a new life / For me
And I'm feeling good…

SHERMAN ALEXIE

Ode to Ann & Nancy Wilson

Damn, that's a woman playing electric guitar
And that's her sister singing lead.
Their name is Heart
And, man, they want to go crazy,
Crazy, crazy on you. Feel how hard
A woman can get. And it's good—it's great.
So, listen, kid, you might get kissed—
You might get laid—
But it's all about her wish list,
Not yours, so you'll have to sit back and wait

And wait and wait for her to make her choice.
If you're lucky, she'll take you home
For serious joys,
Or maybe you'll spend the night alone,
Haunted by that guitar and by that voice.
These sisters tumble walls and shatter glass,
So, boy, put on your best dance shoes
And shake your ass.
This isn't the time for the blues.
You need to jump into your car and drive fast

Through the dark streets of Emerald City.
This is where these sisters were born
Of lightning, thunder, and rainstorms.
Come on! Come on! Come on! Are you pretty
Enough? Do you think that you're strong enough?
Tell me. Are you the kind of man
Who can earn—who can withstand—
These rock-n-roll matriarchs' trust and love?
Can you be their groupie? Their road crew Buddha?
I don't think you have the magic.
I don't think you know the tragic.
You will never be their blue-eyed barracuda.

SHERMAN ALEXIE

Interrogation

Q: Did that horse catch fire in the lake?
A: Define fire.

Q: Did that horse or lake catch fire?
A: Define horse.

Q: Did that horse and lake catch fire simultaneously?
A: Define lake.

Q: Did that fire or lake catch the horse?
A: Define catch.

Q: Did that burned horse really rise from the dead?
A: Define burned.

Q: Did the dead rise from inside that burned horse?
A: Define inside.

Q: Did that horse burn or raise the dead?
A: Define dead.

Q: Did the dead rise and catch fire?
A: Define rise.

Q: Did the lake rise when flooded by the dead?
A: Define flooded.

Q: Did the flood invent the horse?
A: No, the horse invented fire and rose from the lake.

MIRANDA FIELD

For the Horses Who Fell through the Ice

Two green bottles in a heap of brown bottles: someone drank
here before me. So quiet in the woods I hear my own ghost ask
for things: another child, no children, spring sun to soothe us,
zipper this jacket. By the season abandoned at the edge of the
Hudson. Frost glitters in the loam of the mushroom farm that fills
the ice-house footprint where an ice empire expired. Steam from
speechlessness escapes.

MIRANDA FIELD

Persistence of Vision

I had a dream almost exactly like a Muybridge sequence and you weren't in it.
Our marriage's mise en scene like single lives in black and white flickers.
We named our children Occident Airborne,
now everything's earthbound.
We might sit down and eat what might be food or might be poison.
Pierced by toy bows and arrows, see us fall/
reverse-fall, drain/re-fill, strobe: ghost/opaque/ghost/opaque…
On the bridge, my heart suggested you "go kiss the fishes"
then rowed out looking for you among the uncombed rushes.
Having second thoughts, I cut the plethora to stubble.
I bound the rushes into rope.
Maybe we'll never find each other again in all this mess.
Many pierced by toy bows and arrows
still glide like racehorses, all hooves off the earth.

JENNIFER MALESICH

Desire, the Accident

The dying horse was a palomino.

What I drop in the dream
does not burn the motel down.
Trying on lipstick and perfume,
the blonde wig I could never pull off.
I wake up with empty hands
and search the sheets for the cigarette
I crave. Panic at a ghost of smoke.
Bridwell sleeping next to me
on the bloody bedspread.

Rattlesnakes hung on the barbwire fence.

JENNIFER MALESICH

Wise as Serpents, Harmless as Doves

Pentacostal tent revival, Arkansas

Bridwell takes up serpents.
And may they not be snakes at all,

but the rattles of them, their charms.
Like birds in the last frame—

maybe not birds at all, just shadows
of birds, holy ghosts.

He talks out of both sides of his mouth
like any serpent.

He's his own arson, flaming
the fire of his fire

in this tent-city house of God.
What will collapse will collapse complete.

The kingdom come
is what Bridwell's done.

ELIZABETH LANGEMAK

The Doubt of St. Sema

When I paused on your shores I thought
I was standing, but I was just floating
upright: on the beach of a sea, on a barrier
spit of rock and coral, cockled land and breezes

wrinkled through with elsewhere scents,
the uprush a coax to my toes. When I drowned,
I drowned without looking, I closed my eyes
and uncharted myself, traded my breath

for the ocean of it all. The water was full
of you, not made of you, but you were there
around me: cusp I stepped over, littoral pull,
picnic on the shore above. My wits slipped

their case, broke to the surface unfirm
as the sky. Skin sloughed down
to grist, bones took their cues
from opposite corners and life moved

elsewhere, no scaffold to hold it together.
Now when I lie, I lie like the dead, sideways,
leftover words escaping the breach of my mouth
and down through the opposite ocean of air

to their ears. A boil. Abyssal, midnight,
twilight, a tide pulled in or out. Even
the imagination of everything is not enough
to see me now. Have them look past their relics,

prayers. Try a finger in a bowl of water.

CASEY KAIT

Your Brief But Excellent Visit

Dear V,

We were all thrilled by your brief but excellent visit. We were all thrilled, but no one was as thrilled as I was, for I had been thinking on your visit for some time, wondering how—however brief it would be—how would it be? Would you be how I thought you might be, or would you be different? Well, in truth, when you arrived, you were different and the same, and I cannot say how or why or in what way exactly, except that you were exactly how I thought you would be and exactly another way, a different way. A way that I had not anticipated but also a way that did not surprise me. It is you, after all.

Before you came we were all wondering what you would say on the topics on which we had previously heard you speak, and the topics we had all previously discussed—sometimes quite briefly, and other times for quite a while. You give us much to think about!

We, of course, discussed the way that you thought things should be and the way you thought they should not be. I do not have to tell you, but I will, that we have debated these things. You have given us quite a lot to talk about but also quite a lot to argue about, too, for none can agree on the things which you have spoken about. Some are saying that you say one thing, others saying that you say another.

This is not such a problem except for in the case of Clive, who is quite focused on the way things should *not* be and is often making

a great trouble for me and a great anger between us sometimes. For why, exactly, I cannot say, but I can say, however, that I do not believe this is what you are saying. It is a problem, for we have gone back and forth many, many times, and with the instruction and support of the others, we still do not come to an answer.

Old Dalinda sides with me, and I am trusting her more because she is old and because she has a great peace in her heart. I think you will remember Old Dalinda, no? She is very old and wore a blue dress on your last visit and has seen you many times, even if you two have not spoken. Certainly you must remember her. She is believing that sometimes Clive likes to make a big anger between us for no reason. Only I believe there is a reason, and the reason is that there is not so much to do here except wait on your visit, and then enjoy your visit, and then talk about when you might return. We talk on these things very much.

What a surprise it was when you did not talk on the topic of the way things should be and not be, but only on topics which we had never before heard you speak! What a surprise indeed, and a happy surprise. For I have previously enjoyed hearing your thoughts on the ways in which things should be and the ways in which they should not, but it was with a flourish of excitement that I heard you speak about not the way things should or should not be, but the ways in which they are, and we are. All of us. I believe Clive cannot make a big anger between us for this one.

For what are we if not the way we are, or, at least that is what I believe you to be saying. It is the thing I most took away from it all; however, there was much to think about and "wade through," as I have heard you say many times. I am wading through very seriously these things you said and considering them very carefully. For what are we if not considerate creatures? A brief thought for you.

I wanted to say now, although I said it before in perhaps not such a way as I am saying it now, that however brief your visit was, it was

excellent. Most of all for me, who had waited so long for you to return and had been perhaps more excited than the rest of us. Because why? I believe you know why, but I will say it again in a way you perhaps cannot avoid. Because I had been waiting so long for your visit and had thought on you many times between when you were first here and when you came back, and, of course, when you were not here at all.

I have just now thought on the time when you were here last—however brief—and thought many, many times on the time when you would return again and how I would be and how you would be. As I said, you were exactly as I had thought you would be and altogether different, too.

I wonder if you have thought on me between the time you were here last and then the last time you were here again also. Did you think on how I would be? And, I wonder, was I the same or altogether different? I believe I was different. It is a good thing.

I have found many changes in me since the first time you were here and the last time. I have found changes since the last time, too, but those you will not be able to guess until you come again, hopefully for another excellent visit, but perhaps one that is not so brief. For me it is not just the visit, but the thinking on the visit before and after, and also during, that makes such a visit—however brief—one that is, somehow, not so brief.

Can you imagine if there was a time when you might visit and it would not be so brief? I think about this visit also. Not just how it might be for me and for you, too, but how it would be for everyone here who would like so much for you to visit and never leave. Many people feel this, but perhaps none so much as me, as I have already explained.

I want so much to know about the new things that you are thinking, and to hear you say them would be a great adventure. It is cold now, though maybe not so cold as where you are. I think the cold is

good for thinking, and I am thinking about the way things are, and also how they could be different, and the great changes a person can make if a person does not have a fear of changes. I am not such a person, but am making changes anyway, as you will see how I am different when you return. So many changes that perhaps you will not even recognize me or know me as the person that you know. But then maybe you will. It is me, after all.

I feel it will be springtime and warm again when you return, and little Gerta will perhaps not be so little as you remember, but a real little girl who will be walking and talking as she is not yet, but will be as you will see. She wants very much for you to return and says so, not with words but with the way she looks at me, so I know she is thinking, *I wish V would return*. You may laugh and perhaps you are thinking, *You cannot know what she is thinking for she is only a little baby*. But I can tell what she is thinking by only looking in her eyes. You are the one who said her eyes are the exact color of the ocean in the village where you were born, a village that no longer exists. You said they were the same as my eyes, and you said some other very beautiful things, which I will not say here but which I think you will remember. Do you remember? I have said too much already, no?

Before we come to the end here, I must tell you Mother (Mada I call her since I was a little baby) says you must come before she dies. I know, not even you can know when she will die, and that is a great question for us. Every day she is asking when she will die, and every day we are saying no one can know, not even V. And so she is saying, *Please come soon because there will be a great disappointment if I die before V comes back*. And she is always calling to me, *P, I am dying, I am dying*. We are believing all of the time that Mada is not dying yet because she is waiting for you to return. Please do not believe that if you return she will be dying for real this time, and so please do not use this reason to stay away. For who can say if she is dying or waiting to die or only waiting? And please do not think that I want her

to die because I want another excellent visit. Such a visit would not be excellent for me even though Mada is old and we all must be dying sometime.

Well, I have said all that I had hoped to say and perhaps some things that I had hoped not to say, but as I have already said them I will not take them back. These are things I might like to hear if I were you, and I hope that you enjoyed hearing them. And if you have not enjoyed them please do not say so to me because I would have a great sadness if you did. I could not bear it.

V, believe me when I say we all—all of us, but most of all me—look on your next visit with a great excitement and anticipation! Please let us know when you will return, and if you do not know, at least let us know *when* you will know. It keeps us near to you to know, and to know you.

Thinking on all of your visits past and future,

P

POETRY FEATURE

Oni Buchanan

ONI BUCHANAN

No Blue Morpho

I wanted
the Blue Morpho
to anoint me
with his fragility
I was in his presence
in the tent
of butterflies
He did not land
on me though I stood
very still for a long
time very still
with my arm
extended like a thin
and resilient branch
buoyant curious respectful
a pliant limb I thought
venturing humbly
into the scented air
of blossoms and delicate
curling offshoots
a graceful arc of tender
branch but He did not
land on me I tried
to look succulent I
imagined myself

exuding fragrance
and the lobes of my ears
as ripened taut with
the redolent essence
of honeysuckle
but no Blue Morpho
came to alight upon
my shoulder and unfurl
His slender tongue
toward the delicate
curve the rosy curve
no Blue Morpho
alighted upon me
that day beneath
the butterfly canopy
where the air was
mixed part saturated
warmth fertile humidity
part the cries of a caged
canary part the effervescent
sound of evaporating
mist from the cascades
of a manmade waterfall
I stood very still hoping
to be mistaken
for something more
beautiful more luxuriant
luminous tropical a fragrant
possibility but no
Blue Morpho anointed me
with His delicate foot
no Blue Morpho landed

momentarily on my
outstretched arm to
breathe His shimmery
wings and launch
again no Blue
Morpho drew a curve
in air that rested
on my shoulder for
a solitary point
instead in my
perfect concentrated
stillness I heard
for the first
time the microtones
of wing scales drifting
softly and invisibly
through the heated air
the wing scales
microscopic motes of
color of fashioned dust
descending through the
perfumed air
as various butterflies
brushed imperceptibly by
the scales like
tiny silver bells
accidentally sounding
as they fell the
air itself brushed
their sound I
overheard that nearly
imperceptible symphonic

grid that map of tones
within the satiated air
that net of sounds
that caught me in its
webbing that fell
from wingtips delicacies
dropped by the
Blue Morpho as He
flew on in unerring
loops His joy
beamed elsewhere
nonintersecting beacon

ONI BUCHANAN

The Worms

The worms were tapping on my forehead.
They tapped with the blunt ends of their mouths.
They were testing the sturdiness of the ground.
They were testing the quality of the sediment.

Two worms crawled down my face to line
the lower edges of my cheek bones.
They drew a string they held between them.
A third worm plucked the string.
They were testing the pitch and tuning
of the gauntness of my face, of the tautness
of my skin across its scaffolding.
They were warming up the chorus and the soloists.

One worm shimmied under the string.
One worm hung its trousers on the string.
One worm balanced on the string holding a parasol.
One worm used the string to shoot an arrow up into the sky.

Shoot at the sun, shoot at the sun,
one worm bellowed into its megaphone.
One worm belted field positions.
One worm preached a sermon.
One worm placed a catalog order, artisanal handiworks.
One worm struck a hard rubber mallet on its metallophone.

Some worms listening to the sermon lay writhing on their sides.
Some shrieked like terrible children.
Some worms listening to the sermon lay draped limp over the dirt pews.
A worm listening to the metallophone tried to wedge his way
under the instrument, for an "intimate experience of the music."
A worm in the dirt manse embroidered crosses on a worm stole.

I was lying on my back in the fluorescent
nurse's room, a curtain drawn around my cot.
A worm-voice over the high school loudspeaker
interrupted the broadcast of my favorite
patriotic anthem. A crackle in its voice
made me long for dry cereal with profound
emptiness and irrational desire. The worm-voice said,
"Will Oni Buchanan please come
to the main office." "Oni Buchanan."
"Come to the main office." Go
to the main office, the school nurse
said to me.

ONI BUCHANAN

See

Six or seven yards behind you in the city smog
a man carrying a dog like a toddler
(its front paws around his neck)
calls your name, or what could only

be your name, he's looking straight
at you as you stare absently
at something else across this noisy street.
The dog looks into the face of the man

and then looks where the man's eyes
are looking—straight at you—though you
have not yet realized you're part
of this scene though there's

your body standing quiet
on the public sidewalk. The dog
is so sincere. The man is walking
toward you. He's carrying

the little brown dog
with the tight matted curls. He calls
your name again. Theresa, I know
what's about to happen—you're about

to recognize his voice,
you're about to pull his voice like
a lavender ribbon from the gray blur
of other noises in the air, and then

the syllables will focus, your name
will cohere out of the ether and
be yours like the worn cloth carnation
pinned to your slightly crumpled

coat lapel. You'll turn around, toward
his voice, toward your name. The dog
will look at you, earnest and slightly
worried, eager to please. You already

know these lives. You're about to
hear, you're about to turn, you hear, you
turn, now what do you
see that I can't see

from right here on the sidewalk, me,
invisible as the parked cars, the row
of metal mailboxes, this single gum-stuck
lamppost? What do you see?

ONI BUCHANAN

The Silent Horse

The silent horse is euthanized, was
euthanized. Its silent picture is here now
as a silent ambassador of the horse.

Silent doctors tried all their
silent remedies to save it
but the silence spread,

a liquid through the veins,
and gathered in the infected
hoof and gathered all the

used silences, dirty
silences, to return
silence to the silenced heart.

And those of us left
in the silent present watch
the minutes silently recede, ebb

away in hours in days in years
accumulating silently like snow.
Those of us left

hold up a silent magnifying glass
to the minutes to see inside
their silence. Each minute

holds a silent space like
rods and cones, a silent vision
of what could fill it, what

silent projection could enter
upside-down, silent wires crossed,
could leave again, silent and upright—

ONI BUCHANAN

Then From Our Green Branch

then the "safety net" they held

under a branch

then they hit the branch

with a stick

and all of us who weren't holding

tight right at that

second, or if we

forgot, or if

we lifted a foot to say, or if we lifted

a foot to launch, or go, or

if dozing, if we'd been

looking upward through leaves

at a shifting

polygon of sky, or if from the beating we

lost our sense

or if we got

dizzy couldn't hold if

confused if the quaking

scared some youngers if our

balance skewed

or the ground below loomed

in seasick waves, then from our

green branch

we were shaken, dis-

lodged, we

fell from our green world into something

colder—

ONI BUCHANAN

Must a Violence

Must a violence be administered
Must a violence be enacted upon
Must a violence be had to oneself
Must a violence be endured
Must an unanticipated violence
Must a violence beyond one's control
Must a modicum of violence
Must a dosage or capsule-full of violence
Must an irregularly-dispensed occasional
vaccination of violence
Must a violence be inflicted upon
Must a violence first be undergone

Unless a machine is built
Unless a machine can anticipate
Unless a machine's precision
Unless the exactitude of a machine can be employed
Unless the clean functionality of a machine
Unless the useful reliability of a machine
Unless a machine's metallic composition
Unless a machine's efficiency and preoccupation
Unless the spinning cogs of a well-oiled machine
Unless the gears and circuitry of a handsome machine
Unless a machine whose constant vibrating hum
Unless a machine in synchronization

Unless a threshing machine be devised
Unless a winnowing machine
Unless a machine is invented by inventors
Unless a machine can first predict
Unless a machine can graph and then extrapolate

How many hits does it take
How many hits to disassemble
How many hits to scatter the ingredients in a useful circumference
How many hits to de-contextualize
How many hits to see the material
on its own terms
How many hits to purify the elements
How many hits to distill the proper essence
How many hits to extract the volatile components
How many hits not to ask what your country
can do for you
How many hits to scramble the wiring
How many hits to jar the assumptions just enough
How many hits to isolate the isotopes
How many hits to hammer at white heat
How many hits to break the bonds and re-forge
the remnant molecules
How many hits to loosen like a tooth
that offers a newer tooth beneath
How many hits to solve a logic puzzle
by ejection button
How many hits to tear the canvas and break the glass
How many hits to lay it all out
How many hits are just enough hits
How many hits are not one too many hits
How many hits are the perfect number of hits

How many hits are a grand slam of hits
How many hits are the exact duress of hits
How many hits to achieve a boiling point of matter
How many hits to execute with great precision
How many hits to reach a certain brink

What is the certainty of the brink
What is the indisputable most defining
characteristic of the brink
What is the unmistakable distinguishing feature
of the brink
What is the "je ne sais quoi" of the brink
What is the elusive, unplaceable perfume
worn discreetly by the brink
What is the quality of air surrounding the brink
What is the punctured skin or surface area of the brink
What is the ragged groundwork, the contour of the brink
What is the fluctuating elevation of the brink
What is the mercurial temperature by day
and by night of the brink
What is the precise longitude and latitude of the brink
What are the geological constituents of the brink
What is the constitutional makeup of the brink
Is there a flag staked at the brink
Is there my country's flag staked at the brink
Is my family's crest staked at the brink
Is my clan's necessary plaid staked at the brink
Is there a base camp at the brink
Is there a campfire at the brink
Is there room for footwork at the brink
Is there a showcase at the brink
Is there a rationing of provisions at the brink

Are the comestibles divided fairly at the brink
Will the pork be salted at the brink
Is the brink made of salt
Is the brink made of ice
Is the brink made of stone
Is the brink made of red clay
Is the brink made of dust
Is the brink made of petrified wood
Is the brink made of flower stems
Is the brink made of animal pelts
Is the brink made of egg shells
Is the brink made of fruit rinds
Is the brink made of rats' nests
Is the brink made of calcite
Is the brink made of teeth
Is the brink made of feathers
Is the brink made of marble
Is the brink made of straw
Is the brink made of chaff

GLEN POURCIAU

Other

I was with my wife at a bar, corner booth, drinks in front of us. A woman carrying a drink approached the booth, familiarity in the way she held the cocktail glass. She wanted to know if she could join us. We hesitated. We're talking, my wife said, we need to discuss some things. We're in the middle of a private conversation, I told her. Not being rude, just explaining. She walked away without answering, and we looked at each other and shrugged. We kept talking, but maybe five minutes later my wife got so mad that she stood and said she was going to the restroom. What she really wanted, I imagined, was to get away from me before she made a spectacle of us, before she tried to strangle me without any opportunity to dispose of my body. When she came back several minutes later she told me what happened. The woman who'd approached us was in the restroom, standing at a sink wiping away tears and smeared makeup with a tissue. She told my wife that she was lonely and had no one to talk to, and it had taken all of her courage to walk up to our booth. She thought we looked like people she could start a conversation with, though she admitted she had no idea what she would have said. My wife apologized to the woman but told her that we already had another woman with us, someone only my wife and I could know was there. My wife invited the woman to come and sit with us but warned her that it was a bad time and that I might be in for a rough night. The woman said she didn't think she should intrude, and my wife left the woman and came back to the booth. You told her all that? I asked. She was devastated, my wife said, and she

needed to know why we turned her away. Then the woman came up to the booth, holding her somewhat depleted drink, and sat down on my wife's side of the curved seat. I changed my mind, she told her, which was when I decided it was time she heard something from me. We went to a movie before coming to the bar, I told the woman, a movie about an unhappy marriage, among other things. We argued about the movie over our drinks, my wife saying that she found the husband in the movie annoying while I said I found the wife annoying. My wife thought the husband's attitude and behavior were thoroughly revolting, and I thought the wife did everything she could think of to provoke him. But underneath it all what we were really talking about, I explained, was what we almost always end up talking about, the so-called other woman, not a woman I am having or have had an affair with, as my wife led you to believe, but my first wife, who died young. I miss my first wife terribly and I don't know how to hide it. I never wanted to admit it, but she, I said, pointing at my wife, kept taunting me and finally I came out with it. As I suspected, she didn't want to hear that I still loved my first wife, and she became furious and has never stopped being furious at me for making what I have come to think of as a confession. My wife interrupted. I cannot be your first wife, she said. I don't expect you to be her, I answered, but on the other hand being with you, as you know, reminds me of how much I loved her. The second other woman at the booth then told me that she understood how I felt. I was in love with a woman who also died young, in a car crash, she said to us, and I have never been the same since that day and have never met anyone else I've loved. She was in a miserable marriage, the lonely woman went on, no children, and our affair was a secret, no one but the two of us ever knew about it. Was her husband driving? my wife asked, licking an eye tooth. She was alone in the car, the woman replied. May I ask your first wife's name? she asked me, and I said her name. I'm sorry for you, the woman said, and your

pain brings back mine. Are there any other women in the room who'd like to sit with us? my wife asked. The lonely woman rose and came to my side of the booth and scooted next to me. She put her arms around me and hugged me, and I hugged her, our hands moving over our backs and shoulders and the backs of our heads. The lonely woman whispered in my ear the name of the woman she'd loved. My second wife asked if she should leave the room or join us. We ignored her.

ADAM DAY

Shomer

Dead, my grandfather
is a polar bear. I am riding
his body downriver
to its end, while he stares up
from the suckhole of one crow-stolen
eye socket. Teeth gone;
fungus in the lungs. The claw-points
of stars rock above.
Once, his coat glowed
against his preacher's black hat
and jacket—laying the host
on women's tongues—
how their breasts ran red
when he pawed. Defrocked, divorced—
he could not keep house.
There is the soft smacking
of river water on either side—
a badger stands gristle-mouthed
with a vole carcass. There is
a bullet of blood running
his nose—the kingfisher
picks the black away
until night arrives and it is
a bright berry petrified
with rot. The coat

is yellowing; raddled
with fleas and blowfly
larvae. Below, bass and sauger
disappear into the net of his fur
pulling the flesh away like bits
of caked mud. I catch them
when I can, open his mouth
and slide the kill home
as if he does not know yet
how to be dead. The last day,
I felt the ribbed roof of his open maw
against the back of my hand
and it bled down his throat
so that he came alive a moment
spluttering—the rattle of phlegm—
then still again. At the gulf
I pierced the soft palate
under the tongue until
it gave and there came a hissing
like wet wood in fire and I ran
a stringer through, pulling him
ashore, boggy corpse, before
I sent him off again, slack,
stubbled chin rocking on his chest—
a distant knot of snow now,
something less than smoke.

* According to Jewish tradition, the body should not be left—until the time of burial, a "shomer," meaning "guard" or "watcher," stays with the deceased through the day and night.

ADAM DAY

The Insomniac

The pig with the black feet is an insomniac.
Long ago kids left a mask in the yard filled
with leaves. Now the insomniac wears it—
leaning his head down, snuffing, it sticks
to his moist snout, and he's Marlon Brando.
We find hidden, delicately stripped orange skins,
candy wrappers, and shredded letters
that name him, Albert. He's like a Russian—
enormous, vulnerable, perhaps tragic—
a lover of darkness—snow-capped trashcans,
coal bins, ships' holds, sinkholes. He wanders
into the nightwoods for days, sending back
sounds like the ripple of radio voices,
until it's not Christmas, just one more day
and he hangs by his slick black feet, unzipped,
the warm wet release lipping his chin.
Never promiscuous in his affections
he understood being human, the chasm
between the classes, but never condescended,
even when he must have known he'd be eaten
on paper plates.

ADAM DAY

Steps

The only person at the twelve-step
meeting, Christ hangs on his cross
in the church basement's smell of cafeteria
trays and play dough, imagining a woman
in a tight cable-knit holds her nipple, just
out of reach of his mouth, imagines a rigging
holding him there, and the feel of rope in his hands
has disappeared and he steps down
to an alley's shot brick floor
and night. And still, no one knows.
And sees men as trees, walking.
Body-bruised and half-naked, asked
by a passerby to help reach a cufflink lost
far under a car, goes off whispering
to the walls, *Disappointment is a lover's word.*

BRIAN MCMILLAN

Driving Through Rock

Smoke over Stump Junction.
Summer fires in the swamps
press fog to the sun, orange spokes
in fir tops. I'm driving through rock and ghosts
pass over me, vapors under the wheels.
Moths dissolve in the high beams
as flakes of snow. God is in
the calmness of the fire through the windshield—
God who once, in fire by night, in smoke
by day, led tribes through sand and walls
of water. Ahead, mist funnels into pillars
over silver ponds rimmed by evergreens.
Passing rusted barns in corrugated fields,
half-dreaming grass blue-gray with dew,
I want to say I'm being led.

JOHN ESTES

St. Francis Reads the Kama Sutra

The dead are not so easily de-educated—
    several ways have been tried
to reform, to shift a habit
into a memory and back again: implants
                and transplants and all artificial
means of arousal fail from these locations.

Sexual relations can be diversified by studying
    the habits of animals, domestic and wild
                and even insects.

It's as though, three-quarters-naked already,
    as if in getting back to nature they—
well, we—believed you when you told us to seek
original mind below, or within,
        or above, as if a lover,
  like all deep bass sounds, weren't non-directional.

JOHN ESTES

Useful Fictions

Things keep their secrets. Heraclitus

A year renews at its turn
the temperature drops throughout the day
we turn on the news
we seek a new that ages well
we find no other need for renewal

Nothing shines from within
no things bleed DayGlo white
despite epiphanies and the dispatches
of revelation
from the trenches of wonder

The only laws or friction evident
(from this position)
are the law of contradiction
that decrees yes this but not that
and the postmark
that ossature of time
and austere guard
regarding us all from within
the confines of business hours
each to each other
a dread fix and a black box

These needful, deadly—
we resolve to change an intersect only
and not some source
not some point or origin
and god forbid a witness—illusions—
the freezing wind that
penetrates this window is one
the threshold of this room is one

STEPHANIE REENTS

The Collected Fish of Holland

After she finished fifth grade, my sister, Sparrow, thought she was pregnant before she got sick and died. It had been a tragic year. My father went across the border in search of funeral photographs, eerie antique pictures of people lying placidly in coffins, and never returned. A neighbor said our dog, Treat, gnawed through the fence and attacked his cat, and the dog catcher came and carted him off. I got a little plastic bullet stuck in my nose from playing with my new gun in bed, and as my mother whisked me by bicycle through the hot, murky night to the hospital, she wailed, "We are ruined, we are ruined." I thought this meant that I was going to die, but in the emergency room a kindly nurse blew up a surgical glove so that it looked like a turkey. I laughed, and the bullet popped out of my nose. We didn't have to pay, and my mother sang songs from the *Wizard of Oz* on the way home and stopped at an all-night convenience store and bought me a slushy, an indulgence in a household where drinking pop was frowned upon. Because we lived with people who weren't our family, there were all kinds of rules: close the bathroom door, unless you're doing simple hygiene; use the cup marked with your name; don't sneak grapes that your parents didn't buy; play quietly before noon.

"Now, brush your teeth vigorously." She walked down the hallway, her tan legs disappearing before the rest of her so that she appeared to be floating up the stairs to the loft where the grownups slept on futons.

"I'm going to have a baby, Star," my sister said when I climbed into her bed.

We were lucky. Because our mother owned the house, we had our own room with our own things. The other children, six in all, shared two bedrooms down the hall, their toys tossed together like salad in wooden boxes. Looking back, I see I was in the process of becoming just like my father: always hoarding things, being greedy to the point of brutality.

"Why," I asked.

"Because I'm becoming a woman." And then she said we couldn't sleep together because she might bleed on me.

"Are you now?"

"No, it won't happen until after the baby comes out. That's when you get hurt."

"How?"

She clicked on the bedside light and took her bowl of antique marbles into her lap, picking them up and dropping them one at a time. This made a clacking sound that I usually found soothing, but not tonight. "This one," she said, eyeing one with primary colors twisted together like a peppermint stick, "is from the World's Fair of 1935."

"How?" I whined.

"How would you like a marble stuck up your nose this time?"

This shut me up.

When she turned off the light, I scooted closer to her, and even though I'd been warned away, she didn't shove me back. She smelled like dust, a familiar scent in Tucson, where everything that wasn't closely tended eventually withered and crumbled into nothing.

The Fish of Holland

Our father was a Dutch man named Huygen; our mother, an American named Flo, who later changed her name to Flora. They met in Greece, where they were both casting about for adventures, before, years later, Mother screamed, "But you have children!" When Huygen told us about his childhood, he often spoke of the fish

he'd collected. As a teenager, he visited every body of water, every stream, river, and lake, in pursuit of the native fish of Holland. After he'd collected all 67, the newspaper ran a story about him, titled "Fish Whisperer" (roughly translated, Father said), and about his accomplishments.

"I dumped dem into buckets with de water. De smaller ones, I put in de plastic bags."

Occasionally his hook dredged up other things, including an old teacup when he was fishing for bottom feeders. He kept the teacup on a high shelf in his room, the first object of what would later become an extensive collection that included fine porcelain, and also first editions, handwoven tapestries, elephant trees, and antique marbles. The fish all went into large tanks in his family's basement.

"What happened to the fish, Daddy?" I asked.

"My parents, dey found dit eccentric. Dey wanted me to develop other hobbies, like cross country skiing and fondue cooking."

"What about the fish?" I whined.

"Never mind de fish," he gruffed. "There is no need to talk of fish in de desert."

The Crayfish of Sabino Canyon

There were fish in the desert, tiny crayfish that lived in pools deep in the canyons. Sometimes, one of the Mothers or Fathers would take our whole gang to Sabino Canyon, parking a quarter mile away to avoid paying the park entrance fees, and then urging us forward, like a flock of bleating lambs, along the hot dusty road. "Make a run for it," they'd order at a clearing in the traffic.

The Mothers and Fathers were friends of Huygen's whom he'd gathered for a communal experience. They included a baker named Helen who had spiky black hair and worked in a hippy café, baking pies with pecans she picked from the orchards along the old highway to Mexico. She brought her puny son, Timmy, with fluorescent

yellow hair, and her muy amigo, Miguel, a guitar player and tamale maker who sold his mostly masa concoctions outside Walgreen's on Friday and Saturday nights. There was Betsey, a Legal Aid lawyer, and her two children, Lulu and Gabe, a bit older than my sister, who were always sitting at the kitchen table, sucking ice and doing math problems. They were not geniuses, our mother said, but they would go far in life, further than we would, because they were pricks and were not afraid of suffering. Doreen and Oscar were artists; they made dioramas that depicted grinning skeletons doing everyday things like driving school buses, sitting on the toilet, picking apples, and going grocery shopping, and on the weekends, they worked for a mortician, picking up dead bodies. Their three children, whose names I no longer recall, threw tantrums whenever they got a body call.

At Sabino Canyon, there was a fake trolley that wheezed up the road, and we always pleaded for a ride, usually unsuccessfully, but on this particular day, Helen was at the helm, and she wasn't fond of walking. "Sure, I've got tip money."

At stop four, we hopped off the trolley, our brown bag lunches melting in our sweaty palms, the white towels borrowed from the YMCA trailing behind us like capes.

"Watch that you don't get too sunburned," Helen yawned as we splashed around in the knee-deep tepid pool in the rocks.

One of the Doreen-and-Oscar kids was afraid of the tiny crayfish that lived in the bottom of the puddle, and we terrorized him by pretending that they were river lobsters that were going to bite off his toes.

"They're not lobster, you know," Lulu announced. "Lobster are cold water fish."

"They live in salt water," Gabe added, "like the Atlantic Ocean."

I watched my sister, her T-shirt clinging to her rotund stomach, as she scooped up a handful of water and poured it over her head.

"We know." Sparrow smacked the water for emphasis. "Our father collected all the fish in Holland."

"Most likely these are crayfish," Lulu continued, ignoring my sister.

"Crayfish are warm water dwellers," Gabe added. His white underwear hung off his narrow hips.

"Your dad told my dad that he was running away," Timmy said to no one in particular. The Doreen-and-Oscar kids huddled together.

"Miguel's not your real dad," a Doreen-and-Oscar kid said. "He's Mexican, and you're blonde."

"I didn't mean your dad," Timmy said. "I meant theirs." He looked at my sister and me.

I wanted to defend our family honor, but I couldn't say that our dad would pummel Miguel because Huygen was a pacifist. As usual, Helen was oblivious, busy picking pecan meat from their shells with metal claws. "Our dad's smarter," I tried, but Sparrow interrupted me with a dramatic sigh: "This isn't good for baby." She patted her stomach. The other children giggled nervously, dragging their fingertips across the water.

"You're not old enough," Lulu said.

"But what about the girl in the National Enquirer," asked a Doreen-and-Oscar. "She was only eight."

"That's right, I'm nine," my sister continued, looking distractedly towards the cliffs.

"I don't understand," Timmy said.

"Look at her stomach," one of the Doreen-and-Oscars said. "It's huge."

"It's a girl," my sister announced.

"Scientifically speaking," Gabe piped up, "there are some things we would need to know. Like an equation. We need to plug in the knowns to solve it."

"Did you do it?" asked the oldest Doreen-and-Oscar.

"Do what?" my sister said.

The two younger D&Os started to cry.

"Yes," I said, "she did it with bullets."

"Kids," Helen yelled, "you're getting sunburned. Better come eat your lunches."

Lulu slid a blue scuba mask down her forehead, pinched her nose, and plunged underwater. When she surfaced, she was cradling a tiny crayfish in her palm. "Who wants to eat this? It's a delicacy with garlic and butter."

"I hate butter," Timmy said. "It's slimy."

"Put him back, Lulu," Gabe said. "You're giving him a shock to his system for no good reason."

"I went to the shrine," my sister said, "and lit a candle. That's how I did it."

Our neighborhood shrine, a brick fireplace without a chimney, was filled with candles, plastic flowers, and tiny silver Milagros. There was a rumor that kittens and puppies were sacrificed there, but I only ever saw the fat Mexican ladies who gave me charred tortillas whispering prayers in front of the flickering candles.

"You're not supposed to," I said. The Mothers and Fathers forbade us from going. It was sacred, they said, but they were mostly afraid we'd steal Milagros and curse ourselves.

Gabe grabbed his sister's forearm, twisting it to flip the crayfish from her hand.

"And presto," my sister said, whipping her hands through the water, splashing the D&O kids. "I got a girl."

"Fish breathe C02," Gabe said through gritted teeth. "And crayfish are a type of fish. Therefore, he's suffocating."

"You're going to squish him," someone screamed as we all watched Lulu's hand close into a tight fist.

Sparrow stepped forward. "Let's see what we've got here." She peeled back Lulu's fingers. The crayfish was mangled. One of the

pinchers, the only part of the tiny body that was recognizable because it looked like a kitchen mitt, was ripped off, and there were green streaks across Lulu's palm. "Step back," Sparrow ordered. "I need some light."

"You're horrible, Lulu," Gabe said, dragging his finger under his nose. "You need timeout from the human race."

"Kids," Helen chirped from the shore, "if you're going to stay out in the sun you need to come eat your lunches and get some energy."

"Just as I thought," Sparrow said, drawing so close the tip of her nose practically touched the dead crayfish, "those little black spots are crayfish rot."

"Where?" Lulu choked, bending down, bumping heads with my sister. "I don't see them."

"It was going to die anyway." Sparrow sprinkled water on Lulu's hand. "Forgive us our sins against each other and fish. Let us all live forever in eternity. Amen."

"A men," the D&O kids piped up, which disintegrated into an argument about whether it was ah-men or a-men. Lulu dug up a handful of sand, as though to fling it at us, but then she scrubbed her palms until patches of pink skin appeared. It was noon. The sun beat down like a hammer, the tomatoes on our cheese sandwiches had liquefied, and by the time we finally left Sabino, Timmy's shoulders were so burned they would later blister. Sparrow sat by herself in the trolley, pressing one hand into her stomach and using the other to wave each time we passed a Saguaro, their arms drooping from the months without rain. "Goodbye, cactus," she whispered as though she already had learned you couldn't count on keeping anything. "Goodbye, canyon."

ART FEATURE

José María Cundín

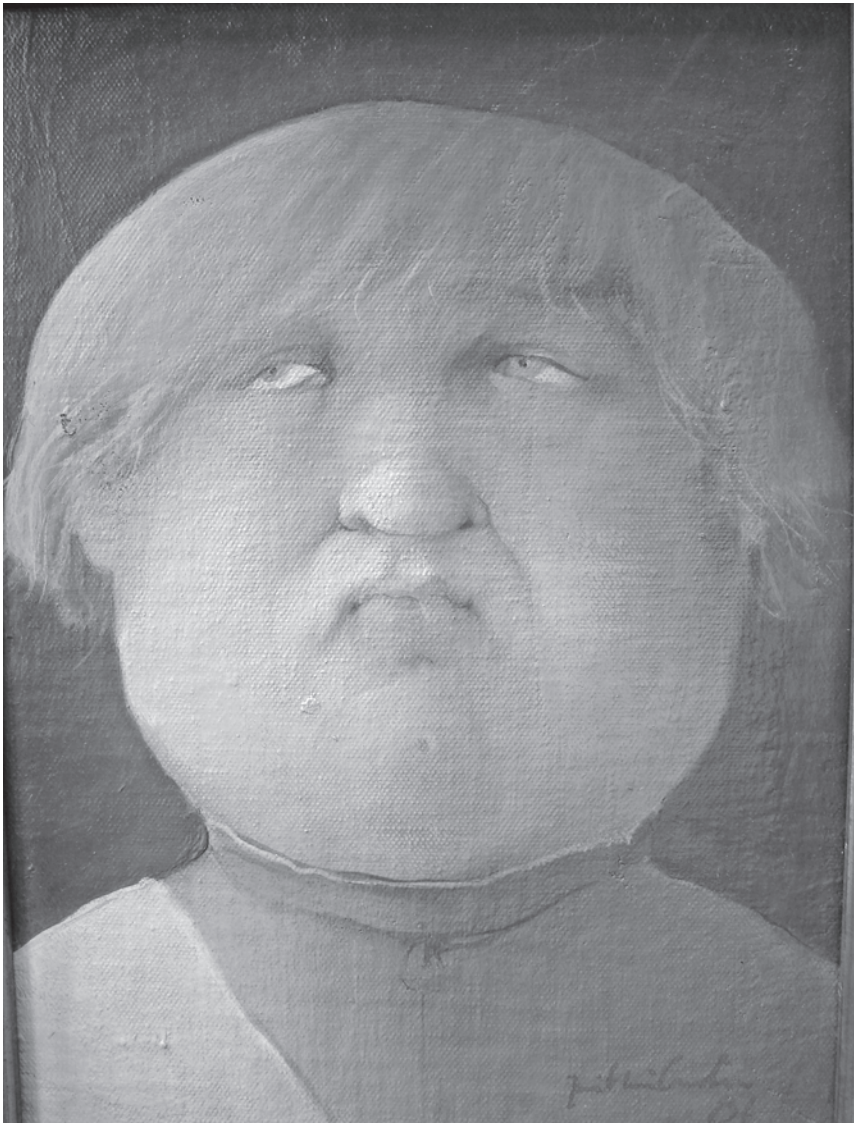
Predestination (with Suggestion for Spiritual Escape)
17 x 11 x 9 inches, mixed media, 2006

Huevonada (Summer Cloud)

20 inches high, polychromed wood, 2006

La Niña de Nava de la Asunción

36 x 44 inches, oil on linen, 1990



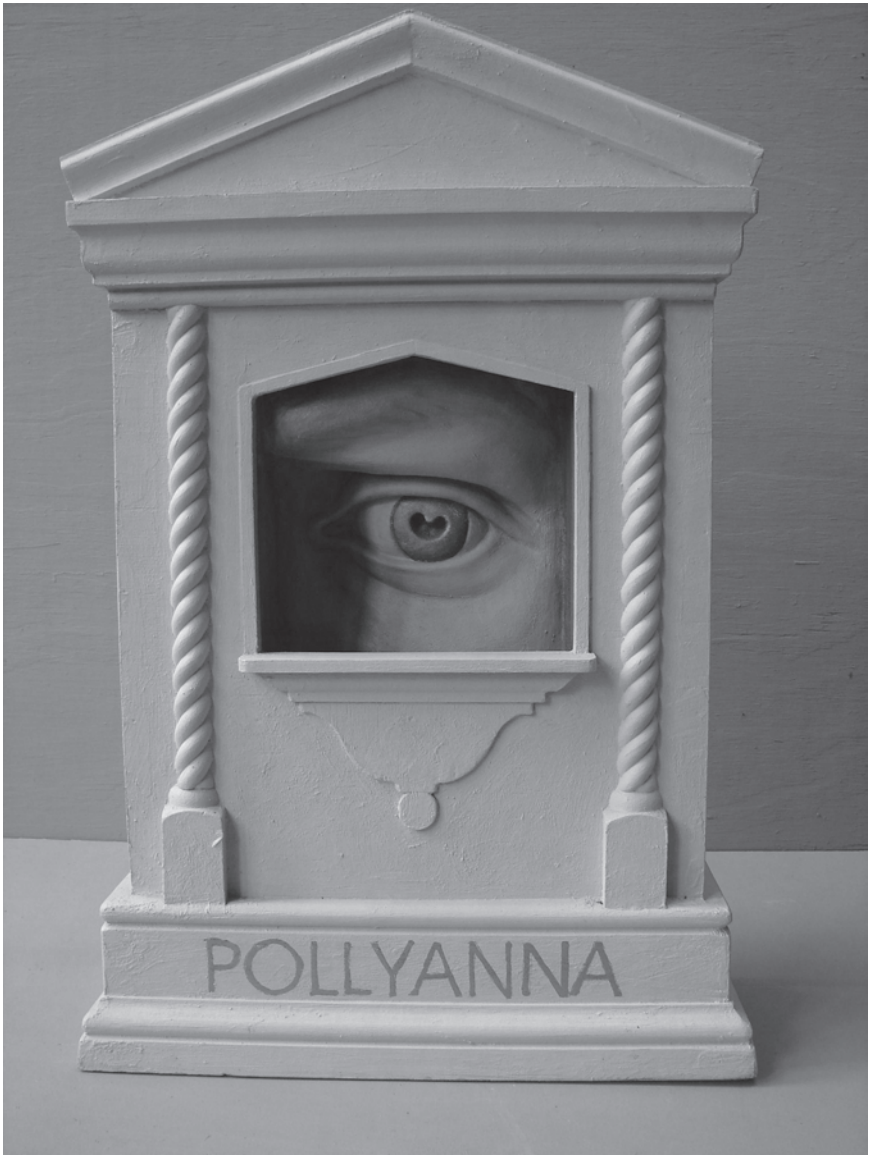
Oscar Wilde

9 x 12 inches high, oil on board, 1990

The Mobile Obelisk for the National Movement Party of Spain
Polychromed wood, 1996

Sentimental Buoy

Polychromed wood, 1995



Pollyanna

Maquette for puppet theatre project created for
Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts, Annapolis, 2002

Psychological Portrait of Georgia O'Keefe
12 x 14 x 12 inches, mixed media, 2005

DARCY COURTEAU

Scissors, Knife

The pony was roughly on schedule. She knew who held the grain and molasses: the same one who fretted at the breech birth, who rubbed her warm with a gunny sack afterwards, guided her to the mare's swollen nipple. The one who trimmed her hooves so that her legs grew straight and then shod her before the first long ride, holding the nails in his mouth while he shaped each shoe on an anvil. But she did not want to go into the trailer. She would have to learn, for what could be done if she foundered? If her leg began to swell? She would have to go into town, to the vet, but if she could not load? A horse has to load.

The horseman's daughter stood nearby, playing with a bone-handled jackknife. Chigger bites, scratched raw, circled her ankles like a string of pink pearls. Cutoffs and a T-shirt whose limp knit betrayed the secret of two points underneath. She thought no one knew about them, no one saw them. She flicked the knife the way she'd seen older boys do it, using her wrist as a hinge, trying to thrust so the blade stabbed the earth, stood upright. But the blade slapped once more onto the fine, moist sand near the pond.

She had come, at first, to watch the loading. Any diversion from late afternoon, the summer heat. But it was slow: to ease the process, her father had dug a shallow trench, hitched the trailer to his pickup and backed the rear wheels in. To make the step into the trailer even shorter, he shored up the trailer's open end, forming a ramp from the sandy soil. She meant to help, but the sun had made her sloppy. She accidentally threw sand on her father and nearly chopped his foot with her shovel. "Go play," he ordered. She did,

and when she came back a few minutes later, asking to borrow his pocketknife, he instantly handed it to her.

Now he stood inside one of the trailer's two stalls, gently shaking a bucket of grain. The kernels tapped on the bucket's tin sides, made the sound of an overfilled maraca. The pony strained forward, muzzle twitching toward the bucket. The forelegs, she would allow in. A snatched mouthful of grain, one stolen cookie from a jar, and then out, hooves rattling the floor.

The jute slid through his palm as he staggered after. Holding the pony, he reached for the rawhide gloves in his back pocket and, trading the rope from hand to hand, pulled them on one at a time. Never coil a lead rope around your hand, he would warn anyone who set a boot in his barn. A horse could jerk your fingers right off your fist. He led the pony past the pickup and trailer, then circled back, trotting, hoping she would follow his easy gait into the stall. But again, only the two legs. Then the third. The last hoof hovered, almost brushing the floor's raised edge, and he eased back the bucket of grain.

A sudden pulling back, but this time the man held fast, rotating his wrist for purchase. Casting her head from side to side, the pony's neck writhed like a hooked trout flapping above water. Finally, she bucked backward, striking her head on the trailer roof, and he had to let go. He would need a longer rope to pay out.

The girl squatted in the shade of an oak. A white moth flitted over her rough knees, and, quick as a lizard, she trapped it. Its wings tickled her gritty palms. She brought her cupped hands to her face and peered in with one eye, the thin bars of light between her fingers illuminating the insect. Oh, it was frantic. It would do anything—she opened her hands, now dusted with a shimmery powder, and the moth flew back into the drowsy woods.

The girl heard a more urgent clamor from the direction of the trailer and saw the pony throw herself backwards from the rig, the front hooves drawing an arc in the air before she thudded onto her

back, onto the hoof-scarred sand. The girl heard a throaty, beard-muffled curse and the sound of a rope's end-knot hitting the metal wall. She saw her father stand over the pony, watching. "Feel sorry for yourself," he muttered and calmly struck her flank with a flat hand. The horse leapt to her feet and shook off the sand.

It was the girl's pony, but she hadn't ridden in over a week. It was recovering. "Fistula," her father had said, gently squeezing its withers. The flesh was spongy and hot. He shook his head, letting go of the horse's shoulder. "Another few days of this and we'd have a case."

He had gestured to the saddle at their feet, which lay tilted on its pommel. "What were you thinking?" He yanked up the leather and strode into the barn.

Embarrassed, she had stayed, guiltily petting the pony's neck. Her favorite saddle was too big for the pony. She had known that, at the back of her mind, but expected her father would catch a mistake. He didn't, and so she kept on using the saddle, its too-wide tree riding flat and hard.

She had become careless with her pony. The way it trotted across the barnyard, crowding her against the split-rail fence and nuzzling for grain, used to please her but became annoying as the filly grew. And it made her look foolish: on rides, she and the pony would trail behind her father, her helpless heels flapping at its ribs as she tried to leg it into the bit. "No butterfly legs," he would turn in his saddle and scold. And then on the return, the pony's bolt to the barn, the girl's feet slipping from the stirrups, the reins dragging through her fingers until she clung to the saddle horn.

She ran a hand over the withers, and the flesh twitched. The pale gray hair had started to curl, a sure sign of the inflammation beneath. In truth, neither she nor her father had yet seen a true case of fistula, the flesh erupted and oozing, chronically inflamed. But then, he had taken care with the animals, taught his daughter how

to groom them before each ride, to shift the saddle blanket only from front to back when she slid it on, never against the hair's direction of growth.

The girl remembered how the horse had shrunk from the saddle the day before, the same motion that brought her father over for a closer look this time.

But she was forgiven. He brought a bucket from the barn and dipped it in the water trough, set her up with a cool compress for her pony, upended another bucket to sit on nearby. They would work on loading, he said, something they should have started on last year. But so much to do. The pony would be fine in a few days. It was fine now, but they might as well give it a break. He reached into a wooden box of leather scraps, tools, and broken tack and began repairing a bridle.

He was getting angry. The pony was so close—the fourth hoof was sheer stubbornness. He built a loop in one end of the long rope and from that fashioned a halter; if the horse resisted, the rope would tighten. He slipped it over the pony's head. Again, he walked her back to the trailer. Three legs. He drew in the rope. And then she was inside. He knew not to tether a loaded horse before latching shut the trailer doors—the horse could lose its footing. Its legs could slide out from under it, get cut on the floor's edge. But breathing hard with fury, he tied the pony—a slipknot through a ring welded to the front of the stall.

He walked through the second, empty stall to the back doors and had not reached them when the pony panicked, struggling against the rope. She did lose her footing, and she did fall onto the floor, onto her side with her forelegs wedged against the wall. Her hindquarters and hind legs hung out the back of the trailer. The rope held, pulled her neck straight, and she could not move without further tightening the rope. The man yanked on the free, dangling end of the rope, but the knot bound.

A pocketknife is made for this situation. A dozen times a day, he would pat his jeans to make sure it was there. But this time, he felt nothing. He called to his daughter; when she did not answer, he ran to find her.

Evolution is such a strange thing, so what happened next should really come as no surprise, though why it happened at precisely the time that it did, who could say. Maybe the scrapes on the pony's shoulders had something to do with it, maybe they rasped away just enough, for suddenly, there in the straw and manure of the trailer floor, two wings were born from her shoulders. Opening the flesh as two buttons slip through slit cloth, the little nubs appeared, then the bone over which the thick, furred membrane would stretch, and finally the folded skin itself as the wings, filmed in fluid and gummy scraps, pulsed open to dry.

The trailer floor registered the sound of footsteps, light and fast. A knife's spine slid along the quivering skin of the pony's jaw. The girl cut the cord. More steps, and a jackknife sank point-first into sand.

For a moment, the creature lay there, unmoving, unbreathing. And then a snort, a furious squeal, a rush of breath and a lunge as she rolled onto her fine legs. The wings flattened. Three backward steps, and the pony was out.

The horseman rounded the trailer with the nearest blade he could lay his frantic hands on, a pair of plastic-handled scissors. You may imagine his face when he saw the wings. His mind could not attach them to his horse: he thought that a great bat must have fallen from the sky, draping its dead wings over the pony.

The pony faced him; his sudden appearance made her uneasy. She flung her head from side to side, rolling her eyes and pulling back—the hind legs bent, the forelegs braced—as if still held by an invisible rope. It was then that the wings moved, unfolded a bit and then contracted, unfolded, contracted, the better to settle in place. It

was then that the man knew the wings were live, and their stirring frightened him.

Not only the man was afraid. The sight of the wing tips moving in the periphery—their *weight*—shocked the pony. She wheeled on her hind legs. But the motion only made matters worse: the wings seemed guided by an entirely different mind, for they rose and spread. The pony was now in a total panic. She started to run. Over the hill on which the barn sat. Past the barn, the feed troughs. Past the clammy, tongue-hollowed salt block. Then through the pasture, along the hard path cut through the grasses. The man and girl scrambled after, then stopped and stood atop the swell.

The galloping, winged pony was a gorgeous thing to watch. The pale flesh glowed against the flat green of the darkening grasses. And the wings—at first they bounced discordant, flapping like a loose skirt, but then they fell in stride, dipped with the forelegs' downbeat, rose along with the suspended knees.

The new rhythm seemed to soothe the animal; her pace slowed to an easy canter as she reached the fence and strode alongside. All along the fence's barbed wires, horsehair from the herd had collected—short, stiff brown of a bay gelding; black colt's tail. The wings shifted down, and as they did, a bit of the fine, gray fur caught. Another step left the hairs snared and stiff against the breeze. The pony reached the second hill's crest, the farthest corner of the pasture, when the wind picked up, lifting her with it. The girl let out a cry. Surprised, her father jerked at the sound, and so he almost missed it: the few crow-hops and then the leap, the taking to air. For a moment, the wings showed nearly transparent against the sun before they slipped over the knoll and out of view.

The man stood opening and closing the scissors he still held.

ANDREW ERKKILA

A Kind of Flight

When the plan first materialized, I experienced water
turning into a cloud, a condensation
of involuntary memory and a treason
of the forms and like all newborn precipitation
I thought I was on my way towards a flower,
bedding in gentle roots and sleeping
beneath still grass, blue-eyed and admired.
When it was winter I had all winter
to plan and instead I salted away in bars,
waiting for the Air Force to take me
and in the freezing tenements of clouds,
commercial airliners cut through every half hour
waking the snowbirds
who had not yet migrated
to their warmer timeshares of the world below
where pilot's daughters gazed for planes
(and would in the future still love
the men who flew them).
Spring brought swallows under the magnolias
and the rain slipped easily over the leaves
like fingers through a harp and into the cold earth
where worms breed and trees begin.

The Air Force sent my flight information,
requesting I report three days after my birthday
but I wasn't ready to go there yet, not there,
not the cold ground either.
The weather report called for a fifty percent chance
of rain and then Ella Fitzgerald
came on the radio. Leaning back against the bed,
I watched a woman take her clothes off.
By then I'd decided
the plans had changed.

PAUL MERCHANT

Horace and the Birds

1
At the blue hour before dawn
I can fill this chestnut wood
with fragments of song
says the brown nightingale.

2
So nature persists. See how
even on cleared ground
she makes her furtive
brave recoveries.

3
But the chill wind has
something to say to us
the birds who spent
all winter here.

4
My dreams were answered:
this villa, its vineyards
and olive groves, and
my little chestnut wood.

5
He prayed: O generous
god, provider of unmerited
rewards, let it never
be taken from me.

6
That evening so long ago
I fell asleep, the doves
gathered a blanket of
laurel leaves to cover me.

7
It was a way we found
to keep him safe from
viper and bear, this
child, time's favorite.

8
My delight was the icy
spring Bandusia. who
whispered messages I
almost understood.

9
We sparrows love this
colonnaded garden filled
with trees and fountains,
and its vista of distant hills.

ANDREW MCCARRON

Love After Lovely Leaves

The problem of pathos must be resolved the hard way. And what we cannot speak about we must pass over silently. So much psychical intensity is invested in questions far less mysterious than the act of asking. So, when an answer cannot be put into words, neither can a question be put into words. The facts of a life contribute to setting a problem, not a solution. Around gourds of a still life movement emerges from every possible angle, aesthetically and otherwise. We can rearrange the gourds but the day around us will do the same to us. In other words, our ship may be ordered just how we like it but the hurly-burly increases the atmosphere's disorder; entropy turns up the wind of causal time. All the haves and have-nots, the valentines and times there was nobody to speak to come to a similar end. Time shows that it isn't how things are in the world that's mystical, but that it exists at all.

PIOTR FLORCZYK

1989

1.

It was a strange life we lived. Strange
people knocked on our doors at strange hours
and asked for flour, two eggs, a frying pan.
Strange how we dressed in the same gray
suits, knee socks, and hats. Remember?
Our future was unpaved. The choices
we had were strange too. If we stretched
our arms out, took five steps to the right
or the left, there was the wall. So we moved
little, like shadows at the onset of night.
Then you showed up, with a scoped-rifle
slung across your sweaty back, pushing
on a dolly a top-load Maytag, snow-white.
We greeted you as if you'd never left.

2.

Which is why nobody noticed your breasts
or the glasses atop your aquiline nose.
The less-than-perfect teeth. The stars
tattooed on the inside of your right wrist.
The way you wrapped your hair around
your finger, nervous before strangers,
even though you were raised on fate alone

and then schooled in East and West.
What happened after your hot-air balloon
escape? Like others from this side of sense,
we got hard labor, but not like your grandma's
stint as a slave at Carl Zeiss in Nazi days.
At least we knew you wouldn't grow up
to work from five to five at the coke plant.

3.

Everybody had a job there: your father,
uncles Bruno and Stephen, aunt Stella,
the red-haired twins who lived below us.
They rode together the rickety tram
in the mornings, never missing their stop.
On weekends we fished for King carp,
checked our place on the list for the Fiat
family car, attended the Sunday mass.
Then the strikes began: politicians went down
or up, through trap doors, over the fence.
The air stung. Imagine the fear we felt
hunkered between ferns on the balcony,
when for every stone skipped at them
the soldiers fired three that rippled out.

4.

Next our food rations were cut: one loaf
of bread a day instead of two. A small
brick of butter mixed with lard per week.
Hardly any meat, except chicken bouillon,
which we diced like a Rubik's cube.
The waiting lines became talk of the town.
Yesterday's news served as toilet paper.

I wish they had not closed down the six
famed colleges and interned the faculty,
which only increased our literacy.
Words don't grown on trees, your father
woud say, so we read the same way we ate—
slowly, carefully chewing each word—
unsure which we were allowed to keep.

5.

This is how we found out about the tanks
in Budapest, Prague, Sofia, Bucharest.
Monks transcribing prison verse. Bards
rewriting Beatles' songs for bound hands.
I too wanted to sing our way out of here
with a guitar I got from a Swedish friend,
but it broke while I was being chased.
Tell me, where did you learn to speak
so fluently? Ten years, and your accent
hasn't changed—you still roll your R's
and shorten those pesky Slavic vowels—
is what I said when you had a chance
to sit down with a cup of icy tap water
(your boots stood at attention in the foyer).

6.

You told us that your balloon flew
high above Europe, across *La Manche*,
before the winds carried it back to Munich,
where you were shot down accidentally.
A refugee, you were granted an asylum,
and attended a boarding school run by
the Ursulines. You prayed in German

for those who tried to pole-vault the barbed
wires but would never walk again.
Lucky for you, you said, by the time
you graduated from college, the Cold War
had entered its final dawn. Still, you
stayed up late, calculating how far
a heart travels from home with each beat.

7.

And if you were a boy, I would've asked
how often you nicked your smooth jaw
before you learned to shave, but since
you were a girl, my girl, I wanted to know
who showed you how to put a tampon in
or how to fit a bra. Was there a man
in your life? I wept, knowing how much
we'd missed. But with the neighbors
bringing cakes and Bulgarian wine,
your father and I kissed and hugged you
instead—we didn't ask about the gun—
suddenly unwilling to share with anyone,
though we couldn't help you dodge
the bullets of your cousins, Alex and Jan.

8.

Believe me, we were besides ourselves
at the sight of the washing machine
made in the USA. Those buttons and knobs.
The days of bending over a washbowl
were over. Sheathed in aluminum

was a drum the size of a sauerkraut barrel,
you explained, and while the cycles
were limited to cold and hot, the spin
to fast and slow, meaning there was no
way for us to lose control, our faces
had already been bleached by wide grins.
We couldn't wait to finally sieve,
sort, and disembody the heavy metals
along with other impurities in our garb.

9.

Or in our lives. You're free, you said
to us then, to do as you please.
But who would've thought the Maytag
would be such a gift, and work to this day.
Buried under scarves, towels and coats
in the basement, its motor revs up
dutifully, then the whole thing shutters,
slides like a continent towards its future.
Doubtless, my daughter, it will last
until the final wash, until the ants
march it out through the back, even
though there's a tendency in this house
to overload the guy with too much
that just won't come out.

ROSALYNDE VAS DIAS

Raven Comes Home

Raven: pale
as a stripped pine branch.
Visible even when moonless.

Then Raven's a hero.
Comes home coaled.

His friends so loud
and proud,

stammering honest, drunk.
Trailing sentences.

He can't see his hand in front of his face.

The wing brushes his wife—
quizzical even in sleep.

He raises his face to
her pondering. His

face? Whose
face is this?

Raven's in a garden.
Light and dark.

"All yours, all yours" say the leaves.
Didn't ask for it.
Shadow and reflection

joined at hip, toe.

Light bursts from his black and
the sky a slow flag
dragged over.

He's fumbling
up, the black wing draws

its line through morning.

ERIC PANKEY

And

Hawk-call, echo:
autumn edges into ice.

Solvent, hours loosen, dissolve.

How unlikely tomorrow:
a bridge
Of *and* and *and* and *and* and *and*

Held up on shallow-driven shadow pilings.

Each word is belated.
A thing
Falls into ruin by its own weight.

The echo of echo hardly hawk.

ERIC PANKEY

Short Sentence

The soul enters the flesh
and, in the crossing,
Is fed and threshed

As a flame is fed and threshed by wind.

To pray for souls caught in Purgatory
Is itself a purgatorial act.

The soul inhabits its unruly body,
abides the abject,

Bides the time of its short sentence, for now,

For the promise of a bodiless ever after.

ERIC PANKEY

Pure

A fox gleans fallen mulberries;

Rain-dusk bleeds from the edges inward,
The rain, at last,
a wash of lamp wick char.

If the world hates a thing too pure,
I've got no troubles.
Years ago, I walked

The old battlefield: found no bones, no ghosts,
Just the horizon's heat-bruised air,
a mirage

With the substance of,
as substanceless as a mirage.

CALEB BARBER

What All Foxes Know (Two Ways Out of Their Burrow)

In the apartment night, my friend smokes
in his robe and further ruins the air
with oil lamps. I squat by the sewing machine
that shot through his great aunt's finger
and read his essay. The bag is tied
about the tea cup's handle, and this

would have all seemed quite civilized
had we only been in a field tent
on the eve of battle with Yanks, instead
of a ramshackle building down the hill
from a college neither of us attends.

Winter gusts blow my Stonewall beard back
through the single-paned, second-story
window. My friend tucks up his violin
and begins tightening the bow. By the end
of the essay, he's misspelled "cigarette."

CALEB BARBER

In a Twilight Town

At these hours a girl shows me the scar
she earned after her father's chainsaw
bucked against her calf while he evened
the backyard stumps. "It cut clear to my meat,"
she says. "They had to fly me to the city."
The rough, shiny lump is not grotesque.
Her leg has grown around the wound
same as how trees will hatchet swings.

She stills wears skirts, for now, because
her body won't be a woman's for a few
more years, and free magazine offers
don't come this far out in the country.
The bald slice through one eyebrow is either
from barbed wire or dog. Could have
been her brother, before they sent him
to that school for boys just like him.

I'd like to hear about all those goldfish
that never survived through winter
on her parents' porch. I'd like to know how
the couch felt when it froze through.
But the plane for the mail route is spinning on
and this place will always be her stop.
The night makes us all older, and just walking
toward it, she covers her thighs with the dark.

MARTIN POUSSON

The Donner Party (Or How We Spent Our Hurrication)

"We oughta go west," she said, and—as good as manifest destiny—it was all laid out before us: the maps and brochures, disposable Ziploc bags, baby wipes and warm wet rags. Fishing tackle and lures.

"West" is relative someone contested, about to quote, no doubt, Said or, worse, Chomsky. *Orientalism*.

"If you're in California, West is Indonesia, West is Taiwan, West is Vietnam…"

"If we were in California," Mother broke through, "We wouldn't be in this fix."

"No, we'd be sitting on broken pieces of continent."

"Continental breakfast."

"Crumbs of America."

"Clinging little crumbs broken off from the continent. Cling-ons!"

Someone made the Vulcan sign.

"NO! Get the language right. Vulcans spoke Vulcan. Klingons spoke Klingon."

And from such science fiction, from such scatological beginnings, our hurrication began. Our family headed away from the gulf with

all the vision and direction of a purblind 40-pound flounder: a flat mass of spastic muscle and a single glassy vertiginous eye. There was a rumor of devastation at our backs, drowned houses, flooded throats, the floating cargo of bodies, a black river that used to be a street. There was flap and gossip on the news about store windows bursting like levees. There was a man on TV, a skinny blue-black man with a wiry halo shooting sparks over his head. "Cain't find her body," he kept saying about his wife, "Cain't find her body," as if she were a spilled sack of flour that might be scooped back into place, as if any woman might somehow be separated from the unsealed jar of her body. There was a woman on TV, ghostly white, speaking in little puffs of air about the sins of the city and some unnatural force she kept calling Divine Retribution.

"Isn't that a John Waters movie?" one of us cracked.
"Minus the hairspray and the sight gags."

There was a man, there was a woman, both in heavy rotation before us, but where was the real unnatural force of a 300-pound drag queen when you needed her?

"Dead. Divine is dead."
"Yeah, And even Waters couldn't direct shit like this."
"What do you mean? He already shot this movie. The city has become a cult film star, a scar-faced drag queen, bursting out of her polyester seams, made to stoop over the fresh produce of a government-issued MRE…"
"Dog poop!"
"It's not over till the fat lady scats!"
"Presenting *Divine Retribution* as directed by…"
"MUDDY John Waters!"

No, it wasn't funny, not one bitter bit of it, and, yes, we were

already eating our own. But we'd always done so, just as we'd always turned a funeral into a party. It was perhaps our single defining quality, and the single most compelling reason why everyone else in that button-lipped nation on top of us would end up dancing naked in our flagstone streets, a bunch of drunk white folk shadow-dancing for an ornate set of plastic beads.

"The Dutch got an island; we got ripped."

Maybe we never solved the riddle of crime, the puzzle of education or even the proper configuration of the Rubik's Cube, oh, but we produced philosophy with all the vigor of Chance the Gardener:

Third World & Proud of It
America's Own Banana Republic
It's Not the Heat, It's the Stupidity

From shipping out furious heads of cotton grown in surrounding fields to shelving outsourced stacks of philosophical Ts, listen, if the shirts were right, if we were a colony, then we were one that no longer produced an image of itself. Instead we consumed it. Blues, jazz, powdered *roux*, sandbags of *gris-gris* and voodoo, hot peppers, and frozen mudbugs were sent back to us in shrink-wrapped packages from Taiwan.

"See, I told you we should've headed there."

That's right: this was supposed to be a vacation. Parents and children and old folks too, all sandwiched in a Korean SUV headed—where else? West. Dominos? Check. Ouija Board? Check. Fortune-telling fish? Check. Symbolist poetry? Check. Tabasco & tarot cards? Check. Tank full of gas? Oops!

Not five miles outside home, and we already had to refuel. On the pump, numbers spun and whirred like the flashing fruit of slot machines. On the road, numbers towered over us, rising and falling in a system no one could identify. In the car, we pressed our face to the window, looking for a flicker of recognition, some isolated scene that might look like the news. The talking heads were mute now, pasted onto billboards, but they still accused us of not listening, not tuning in, not heeding their gospel. The sky was falling; they had told us that. Summer was ending; they had told us that too. We refused to drop the violin, refused to stop playing.

"All right, who's the wise guy who dragged along Aesop's Fables?"

Their moral accusations caught in the grill of the SUV, along with the musical plague of mosquitos and lovebugs. It all became a manic Babel in our ears and—with one mind—we thought: when will we leave this state?

We always used to hold our nose as we crossed the river that marked the Texas state line, and we used to roll our eyes at the jumbo souvenirs all molded into the shape of our outsized next-door neighbor, the one who stole our daily newspaper, our government checks, even our welcome mat. Now, we rubbed rosary beads and counted miles like lines of Deuteronomy. At some point, the Old Testament had to yield to the New. At some point, the plagues had to end.

"Oh, no, see, already you're bringing in politics."
"Am not."
"Am too."
"That's not English."

"Neither are we, *mais cher*. Cajun, remember?"

"And the Bible's not politics; it's religion."

"Oh, brother. Not that old song!"

Saddled with an Old Testament president, what other horse could we ride but the one named The Revelator? Did we mention there was a war humming in the background?

"Buzzing?"

No, humming, definitely humming. A mighty hum, like the hum of a choir about to explode into terrible song. But the choir, like the war, was only a backdrop for the pulpit, only a soundtrack for the apocalypse to come. First, a group on the left sang out the line, then a group on the right sang it back louder and with a twist. One group clapped its hands; the other clapped and stomped.

"Oh, can't you hear what's coming?"
"Why can't you see the change?"
"Oh, we gonna lose our words."
"Gonna forget our names."
"March over the promised land."
"Right over that new reign."

And, just like the song prophesied, we lost it all in the storm before the storm. In the first war, we lost the cotton, then we lost the sugar. Two more wars, and we lost our tongue. The young couldn't talk to the old anymore, and the old couldn't talk to anyone. Imported French teachers from Paris couldn't talk the *Beowulf* grunt of Cajun French or the *Faerie Queene* hiss of Creole. The Cajuns couldn't talk to the Creoles either, and even the prairie Cajuns couldn't talk the talk of *"les autres,"* the chicory-colored Cajuns who lived in the swamp. The words and names just rose and rose into a twisted cloud of unmeaning. What had no meaning suddenly had no value

either. We signed an X to the forms in front of us. We signed an X next to our names. Boudreaux, Thibodeaux, Comeaux. In a flash, we lost the farm, the land and the devil's blood underneath. We lost the fish off our shores, the minerals in our ground, and the trees in our sky. We were a colony, all right, a colony lost in the rain and fire, the delinquent Pentecost of a dead speaking tongue.

"But we kept our sense of humor."

The one thing we couldn't sell or sign away. Until we did. Advertising the biggest free party in the country.

"Yeah, and everyone knows the value of a free hooker."
"Is *that* what we came in search of?"
"Don't go confusing presidents."
"Oh, now who's dragging in politics?"
"If only semen were oil, we all know who'd be king."
"Slick Willie!"
"No, us, sugar, us! Everyone knows we come like geysers in the bayous."

As children, we played games like this, games with missing letters, games with heads in a noose. We hopped over imaginary dead bodies and ate pies made of mud. We laughed and whistled while we were at it. If anyone approached, we shut up and played dumb. Now in the car…

"SUV"

…in the *tank*, we played other games. With glitter and feathers, we decorated dominos for a game of Cowboys and Indians. With a long string of plastic beads, we marked off separate territories. One of us pushed further and further against the rest until we were

no longer in a seat but on a strip, a thin strip by the edge of the window.

"Are we there yet?" we sang out again and again.

So we were still children after all. Still in search of a *there*, a place outside, only to discover that we were stuck here, a place we couldn't escape.

"Eeew. Something stinks."

"That's incense, *'ti fou*."

"Smells more like sulfur."

Rotten eggs and burnt matches and black blossoms of mold, that was the smell of our state now. So when we were far enough past the entry to Texas, we all stuck our heads outside in search of somewhere to eat. The smell was clean enough, but we couldn't pick up a trace of anything worth savoring. Past the state line ran 1000 miles of fast food signs, 1000 miles of static scenery, 1000 miles of antiseptic desert air.

"Where's a good old-fashioned leaky septic tank when you need one?"

"Or the sweet toxic perfume of an oil refinery?"

"Oh, clam up, where we live ain't never been nothing but a toilet—between the Mississippi and Atchafalaya, we drain more than half the nation."

"Maybe we *are* just a septic tank, but what happens when you rip the basin out of a house? Where you do you go when there's nowhere left to flush?"

With talk like that, our hunger faded, and our stomach became a thorny cactus, a succulent living off the dewy moisture of some long ago rain. 1000 more miles and the cactus would begin to

bloom. 1000 more miles and it would shoot up a century stalk, a long antenna in search of a lost signal. Everywhere you looked, the land was barren. Fields without crops, rivers without water, and predators the only birds around. Wide-winged hawks and snaggle-toothed eagles traced out ominous patterns over-head. If our finger followed, we could describe an expanding set of fractals, little pieces of the sky cut out in their path, and yet the whole firmament stayed in place. It frightened us to think that you could lose bits and pieces of something and never know the loss, that there were holes in space where even a hawk could momentarily disappear. This was a rich state, we knew. We just didn't know where they hid it all.

40 more miles and we came to a crook of the state called Big Bend. The Tabasco bottle drained, the jambalaya gone, the fuel tank once again on empty, we were—once again—beginning to get hungry.

"Let them eat gumbo!" someone proclaimed.

And a vision of the president's mother appeared overhead. With a frosted wig and cultured pearls, she looked down on us, children of the hurricane-ravaged colony next door. She swatted away a gnat, craned her head back and forth, and flashed a single sharp tooth. Her eye left no doubt that she saw us as a bunch of poor suckers lucky enough to enjoy a "hurrication" in her state. "Underprivileged" she called us, seething with compassion. "Better off here," she said, with a violent click of her tongue. But our father still called for her son's presidential head on Mount Rushmore with italicized words like *National Hero* and *Patriot Act*.

"If gas prices keep ballooning, they'll call for his head, all right."
"They beheaded four other presidents, why not him too?"

All this talk of decapitation only made us hungrier. But Father refused to stop until we reached our destination. We'd already begun pissing into plastic water bottles and Ziploc bags. We hurled them out the window, like the homemade bombs of insurgents on the road. We aimed for fast food signs and saved the biggest bottles for dry counties. Our golden showers rained over the desert in drops of amber that sizzled as they hit the ground. We cheered and hollered and stomped our feet. It was almost like Mardi Gras.

And just like that grand party, no one questioned whether we should drop our waste out the window. Everyone laughed when we waved baby wipes like tiny flags of surrender. For Father, though, there would be no surrender. He wouldn't stop the car, the SUV, or the tank until we were *there*. Besides, he had charged this trip, mile after mile, until the plastic card melted in the desert heat and he announced that we'd have to "wing it."

"What? Catch a chicken and pluck it?"
"Be resourceful," he said.
"But what if our resources are tapped?"

Don't worry: not one of us made a tap-dancing joke. And not one of us stuck a fishing pole out the window. We were shrinking now. Mama from Ol' Mother Hubbard to Thumbelina, from Thumbelina to Tinkerbelle. Finally, we were all just the rays inside a couple of empty quote marks. We would soon be living inside our father's nutria coat, crouching behind the lining, begging for a crumb with visibly hungry eyes.

The question arose: What kind of people eat their own?

Maybe we should introduce our father, the one who gave us the name. Donner, rhymes with Renee, he'd try telling people. But they

insisted on the hard R at the end, Donner, even after he'd delivered his lecture about the dying race, the shrinking culture. What happens when people can no longer pronounce your name, he wondered aloud? Who do you become?

"Donny?" someone would helpfully offer.

And we'd get visions of Donny and Marie Osmond, two latter-day saints, ice-skating on a frozen bayou, tossing links of boudin back and forth against a backdrop of fireworks, cayenne pepper falling like glitter on Donny's cheeks and Marie's hair.

Come to think of it, our little brother looked like Donny, and Donny began to look tasty. Donny began to look like chicken. Billboards we passed featured vertical cows in fashion eyewear. Eat more chicken, they urged, and we began to agree, feathers hanging from our mouths.

Later, he was a cat, a candy-striped pussycat. "Can you barbeque that?" someone asked. And we all waited for Dr. Seuss to answer.

Still later, he was a dog with a human face. Or a face with a canine torso. With that long emaciated stomach, with that arched back and truncated tail, he'd offer about as much meat as an anorexic raccoon. Still, we all stared at the torso. With candelabra eyes, he was made of alabaster, this dog. We couldn't eat him. We could only stare until he stared back and we got the answer we'd all come for: you must change your life. Delphic dog! We decided to call him Knucklebone.

Crawling on the floorboard with a bleeding belly for a little bit of love, Knucklebone led us to the Scooby snacks, little paw-sized treats of pralines we'd forgotten under the floorboards. Those sitting in the front seat snapped into position as waiters. Father

wouldn't stop to feed us, so they'd have him stuffed. They served him praline after praline, until finally, presented with the last sugary confection, he simply burst. The waiters leaned toward Father with tin buckets and a porcelain bowl, but he spewed forth like a geyser, like a renegade oil derrick.

There would be tears at this point. There would be a funeral to plan, too. Or, if we were really Donners, if we were really American, there would be dinner. Instead, there was a shout and a cry and the high whine of a violin.

"*Ah yi yie*," someone cried, and we all cried along. Little did we know that the dog was right: we'd have to kill our father to get back home. Before we moved though, we forced ourselves to remember him: that stubborn protrusion of his jutted chin, the chill of his bluejay eyes, the big, soft line of his mouth, stretching into a perpetual snake-eating grin.

"And the nose, don't forget the Roman nose."

"For the love of Pierre, you make him sound like a damn Caesar. He was just a coonass."

"A hide-tough, tissue-soft, pepper-tongued, damp-eyed, bittersweet old coonass."

"What did Huey say? Everyman a king!"

Suddenly, we remembered needling our father about the president, that king of kings.

"Look on, ye mighty, and despair," we laughed.

"Ozzie Mandias, isn't that a name for a drag king?" we laughed again.

"Laugh," our usually jokative father said, "Go on and laugh." Then he asked the question that hung over our heads, "What becomes of a faithless people?"

And, just like that, we stopped laughing until we found the answer. What do a faithless, fatherless people do? They raise a flag and hit the road.

"Turn this tank around!" we shouted.
"Direction?"
"Back East, where it all began."
"That's it! Set the compass to Eden."
"No, no, EAST of Eden!"

In the backseat of the SUV, our legendary Cajun makeup artist went to work, transforming every face with smears of new foundation, smatters of rouge, daubs of powder, and bold streaks of eyeliner. On some, he went with a patriotic All-American theme, sparkling red, white, and blue eyelids with star-encrusted cheeks. Others, he rendered in Gothic strokes, pasty faces with lots of hard, heavy black lines and thin angular crosses. Still others wore a gaudy Mardi Gras face: purple-laced eyes, green-striped nose and gold-lined lips.

Then, suddenly, before our unbelieving eyes, Mother's trunk exploded with all kinds of goodness: yellow chiffon, silver lame, and white tulle. Pearl-drop earrings, cameo broaches, and diamond chokers. Purses, handbags, clutches. Wigs, wigs, wigs! A rising tower of new hair pushed against the ceiling of the SUV in beehives, flips, and even a shock-red mullet. We strapped a glittering choker on Knucklebone, now our little diamond dog, and slapped the wigs on top our head. With boas and pumps, we reported to the front of the tank for duty, ready to serve the mission to its end.

"Just what that ship-wrecked state needs…"
"An army of drag queens!"

We weren't all drag queens, of course. Not everyone wore a wig. Not everyone clutched a purse. But we all slipped out of character into costume; we all became someone else for the trip back home. Still, how could we turn back without a Miss New Orleans? How could we go home without a Miss Louisiana? Every man-lady and lady-man, every old kid and young geezer, every somber fool and giddy scholar on board pledged allegiance not to the flag but to the party. We'd lift the skirts of the city and drop the trousers of the state. Together, we'd break into a grave laugh—or maybe a gallows song. Every war needs its entertainers; every apocalypse needs an army of sideshow freaks. So here we were.

Of course, we shocked and awed. Of course, we shamed and appalled. Did anyone really expect us to act like somber pilgrims, with decorum and reason? Ours was a city and state founded not on reason, not even on reasonable chance but on an early burst of irrational exuberance. Without the promise of terra firma beneath our feet, without a defense against malaria, yellow fever, flood, fire and a host of other infirmities, without even a clear choice of church, we set ourselves on, in, and around that boggy marsh. Then we laughed our robust colonial laugh every time the hand of God punched its way through our membrane. We laughed our way through Texas, too, and we'd laugh our way home.

When we were stopped at the border on the way back, none of us had IDs, but the guards didn't seem willing to face an SUV full of assorted merry pranksters. To their every question, we simply batted our lashes and answered in our crude French, *"J'connais pas. J'connais pas."* One of us offered the nice guards a pearl necklace; another started humming the tune to *"Jolie Blonde"* while hiking up her hose. Together, we all broke into the chorus of "Lady Marmalade."

"Voulez-vous coucher avec moi, ce soir?"

And Lord knows every man is a sucker for a French girl, so they let us cross. We had to remind ourselves that it would rain again, that fire would break out again. The finger of another storm would flick at the city; the eye of another hurricane would close in on us. We'd have questions again, we'd have doubts. We'd lose our sense of place. But we'd remember the one lesson we kept from our father.

"When the ship's going down," he said, "You don't cross your legs and stare at a point between your eyes. You take action!"

For every act, we knew, you need a costume and a script. We certainly could dress for the part, but we'd never really been known for our deeds, and we hardly ever wrote anything down. Like a constant chorus of *gumbo ya-ya*, all these voices only lived in our head. We were story-tellers, that was all. And we knew how to throw a lively party for the dead.

Yet this is not the story of who we are or where we're from. This is not the story of our hurrication. This is not the story of where we're headed or what we've done. This is not, not the end of the story.

POETRY FEATURE

Joanna Klink

JOANNA KLINK

Quarry Comes to Me in Sleep

Quarry comes to me in sleep.
Hollow-of-rock, radiant and smoldering.
Farewell to the animals who cannot find rest there,
the fever that drizzles into the groundwater pool.
The road comes to me in sleep, slips
to the horizon free of dawn.
You come to me in sleep and brace against
those spaces made wild from pain, the fists of cold.
In my sleep the quarry holds a snow of bird-down
and rock-vein, fringes of mineral and moth orchid…
My sleep here is a quarantine from a town
that cut through rock saying *You have no reason to stay*.
I would lay my arms over that lusterless earth
and feel the way emptiness, gradually, amassing,
takes shape in us, rough truck-of-blanks
we carry into sun and night's hard sleep.
You came to me in sleep and shook away
the blacker dust, the last of the brutal weeks,
rock that had to be removed.
Quarry comes to me in sleep, as if a ladder lead me down,
as if one fish like an ember flickered.
I imagine the rock glows there.
Comes out safe. Ends well.

JOANNA KLINK

The Graves

How could you not
feel the spring heat—flies
drowsing through the river,
cattails sharp in sand. I have held
on to a dream and called it everything.
The praise that rose in me as I
took the blows was more real
than the very man I touched.
It's not enough to witness
your own brutality—your hopes
must be utterly broken.
Inches below the surface,
cold, water-pocked, are fish
that brighten with pain.
Not a ghost wilderness.
Their scales are gifts,
their skeletons weights
rising and falling. In my
anorak I am not much more
than a bit of skin in plastic.
I did not ask for it
but it came—the stream of
shock, the spot where the boulder
holds through blasting snows
and damp sun, strenuous

freedom won from the
reeds and spores and men
in high-blue water-boots who,
after the slow cast and hours of
near-quiet, release the frantic
flapping bodies
back to their haunts.

JOANNA KLINK

Goodnight Daylight

He seems to me a city
both an island
and a seaport

in riverside moorings gray
    or starred-in
at the moment of abandon

I can't be sure what moonlessness
overtakes him in the anonymous hours
when iron grates
dust over with snow

quiet cells
undetected
forgettable by dawn

And even if the blood-rushes of commuters
subdue the day at its opening

even if he shrinks from fighting
for the dark goods
of new love

plotting from scratch
   the *middle* and *end*
like some merciless almanac

plunging straight into
aftermath's spring-
and-weather-safe withholding

still he would place his hands
against the window's
ice-burned sheet

and trace wet stars
that rose in ghostly lines
during the city's
night-slowed
snowfall

warehouses leaping
to his touch roughed in brick—

skin of sleep
   whose cold dry snow neither exposes
nor covers over

what was
only briefly there

Why do we love what has not yet begun
and hold on to it
as if there were no days to speak of

Nerve patterns
feather through the city's
winter trees
the cloying
racket of traffic
in a second clouds them out

Where do I go
if there can be no
winter of our own

filled with the hazards of
    by-the-night light-
headedness

not stalled like the subway train's
blanched faces
in terribly-lit overcast
trances

set in place by the very
absence of sky
    and its winter-laced
peripheries

in motion
but lost to space
and ashamed by joy

And if you have wanted that
a borough a river
a harbor freed
  from the skyline's
dread-horizon

an immeasurable space
to move within

inside your heart muscle's
motives

and hope that its blocks of trash-heaps
along schoolyards
  flown over by light might
fill with themselves in the blue-sooted evenings

windows fire-bled
so that the figures at meals seem to rise
in gray radiance—

if you have held on to the thought
that one's own incapacity
can soften

however much the world
is no longer for *us*
  for you and me
you may, still,
find it

pure thing

in your head
in your hands

Not like this
would I ever have wished parting

having never lived what was brought
abruptly to a halt

as if I should pretend the city's
buildings that give the minor scattered
    life below them shape
were not there

as if I could avoid
along frozen streets their
    shadows whale-
surfacing

Once I lived throatless
believed that
    holding back sorrow
would make sorrow soften

So easy to place an X
over who you were
the soil under night-fields
    now the fires
shifting plates beneath
this white cement

And if I have hoped for more
it is only the whole of loneliness
    swept away
by understanding

Goodnight almanac
Goodnight cold-twining shadows
fraught with future
newly-loved

What heartbreak would you spare yourself
if you knew it were coming?

Goodnight daylight
luminous and larchless
gorging on the measurements of
probable dawns

Until you can say *it is worth a fight*
until you can say *the city is more than some*
  fogged-out prospect
always there for you in time

a place to sidle up to when
the sum of thought's
  three-in-the-morning flight-paths
have become
unbearable

and you must touch the *real* skin
of the one you hold
  yourself apart from

until you hazard ruin
and see the room that is your life
  as fierce nocturnal at times causing pain
shamed by nothing

You desert yourself
You stay the same

ANDRÈS SANABRIA

The Parachutist

After seeing him floating like a giant jellyfish in the purple morning, Dione, who just minutes before had been commuting to her job in Bogotá, abandoned her car by the side of the road. She jumped across a shallow drainage ditch in her heels, then crawled beneath the barbed-wire fence that divided the road from a muddy potato field, accidentally tearing out the hem of her skirt with one of the barbs.

Dione walked across the field, stepping through rows of pink potatoes, to a rusted tractor nearly buried in the dirt. She pulled herself onto the tractor's iron seat, crossed her legs at the ankles, buttoned her denim jacket to the collar to ease her shivering and looked up at him, the man hovering in the sky, without a doubt the most beautiful parachutist she had ever seen.

And yet, because he was still too high above her, Dione didn't see the full extent of his beauty. She didn't notice, for example, that his eyes became tiny eclipsed moons when he closed them, that his hair was the color of space and curled into galaxies near the ends, that the copper gauges on his vest, which measured the temperature and altitude of his flight, shone like the powdery rays that were rising from behind the cordillera at that very moment. What Dione saw from the tractor, what moved her almost to tears, was more personal. It was the way his parachute caught the night in its taut canopy with a confident grace, the way his toes traced invisible circles over the plateau as he hovered, the way he appeared in the sky so suddenly, the way he reminded her that mangoes were her favorite fruit and that *azucenas* were her favorite flower, the same as her mother's. Of all the other parachutists Dione had seen in her life, and there

had been hundreds, every one of them a bitter disappointment at the end, this parachutist filled her with the most longing—a desire to be present when he landed, a wistfulness for his safety because he descended too slowly, sometimes rising more than falling, gliding like a condor on the warm Andean thermals. She feared it made him vulnerable.

Day was coming, and along the road the long line of eucalyptus trees swayed in the warming air. The *autobús Bolivariano* drove by with its interior lights off en route to Bogotá and inside, the sharp silhouettes of workers and students from Mosquera or Facatativá rested their heads on the vibrating windows to sleep.

Hearing the bus drive by reminded Dione of the sacrifice she was making by lingering in the potato field. If she waited for much longer, she'd hit traffic in Fontibon, be late to the library where she worked and run the risk of being fired when jobs for BA's, even for graduates of the Nacional like she was, were almost impossible to find without connections. Her mother had gotten her the job at the Biblioteca Luis Angel Arango before retiring.

She knew it was better to be prudent and ignore the rapid swirling of her blood, the romantic urge to stay in the field among the mud and the potatoes waiting all day and all night if it came to that for the parachutist to finally come down. She should leave. She could still make it into the city on time if she left now, but God, *Dios m'o*, maybe he'd make it, maybe this parachutist was the one, the one that unlike the many others—the ones whose parachutes were always flawed, too thin, too heavy or too shot full of holes—would softly land on the Andean soil on his bare feet. Her beautiful daughter, Andreita, would have a father then.

Dione had to stay in the field for Andreita's sake. Dione had to know if this parachutist had the eyebrows of a good man, a kind, honest man who loved children and wouldn't leave her begging on the kitchen floor, kidney bean soup boiling over on the burner, as Nestor had done.

Nestor had told her on Saturday evening as she ladled his soup

into a baby blue bowl that he had slept with her older sister, Marcela, in his mother's house. He had expected Dione to dump the thick bean soup she'd been preparing since ten in the morning over his jeans, to scream curses at him, *muérase desgraciado hijo de puta*. But it hadn't happened that way. Instead, afraid that no one else would ever want her crooked front teeth as Nestor had wanted them, afraid that Andrea would grow up without her daddy, she tried to forgive him—begged him to please let her forgive him, that she wanted to give him another opportunity, that divorce was a sin. "But I can't," he said. "I'm not a good man, and I can't love a saint."

As Dione waited on the tractor, more buses and cars rushed by on their way to the city. Only one, a new Renault, pulled off the road behind Dione's car. The woman who got out, a first semester law student at the Universidad de los Andes, had also seen the parachutist from the road and trekked past the ditch and the wire fence into the muddy field. She climbed up the treads of one of the tractor's oversized wheels to sit on the flat iron next to Dione, who had never met the girl before. "How pretty," said the student pointing at the parachutist still gliding in circles high above them. "He's like a little piece of cauliflower I could eat up."

An hour later, another woman, a poor campesina driving a mule-pulled cart loaded with canvas bags full of grass clippings, abandoned her mangy mule and cart on the side of the road to cross into the potato field. Her two sons and daughter followed her into the field in their small wool *ruanas* and rubber boots. "The potatoes need more water," said the little girl to her brothers, her face smudged with dirt and chlorophyll from all the grass they'd cut for Don Pepe's cows that morning with their belt knives. The boys, their threadbare pants patched at the knees, agreed with their sister. This was Don Pepe's land, and he would be by soon to water his crop. He owned a black horse and a shotgun, and last year he'd shot a mangy dog that dug up his potatoes.

Dione watched the campesina walk towards her through the shallow crop trenches. The woman's grey *ruana*, her panama hat, the

iron sickle in her belt convinced Dione that the woman was a farm hand who'd been sent by the owner to run the trespassers off the field. The student thought so, too, and when the campesina and her children approached the tractor, the student yelled curses at them, which embarrassed Dione. This student, her brown hair dyed an artificial blond, her fingers full of emerald rings, reminded Dione of her sister, Marcela, who cursed at waiters and taxi drivers.

"No," said the campesina to the student, "I'm not here to run you off." The campesina only wanted to share her impressions of the parachutist with Dione and the student. She'd first noticed him a few hours before as she was collecting fresh grass near the creek off the road. He was floating below the waning moon just as Dione had seen him, except that to the campesina, who had never left the central cordillera, the parachutist looked nothing like a jellyfish, a creature she had never seen. Instead, because she'd been thinking about having to clean the *doña's* bathroom that afternoon for the pesos at the end of the week, the parachutist looked like an enormous toilet brush to the campesina. Her daughter, sitting on the ground watching her brothers stab their knives into the potato dirt, told the women that the parachutist was a white balloon. And when the boys were asked, they both agreed, the parachutist was Carlos Valderrama holding up the World Cup.

Another full hour of waiting patiently for the parachutist to come down passed without much progress. He had only descended a few more meters to everyone's disappointment. Each one of the women and the children hoped he'd suddenly decide to stop sailing over the savannah like a wind-filled bedsheet and land beside them instead. Dione, the campesina, the student—all of them had their reasons for wanting him to come down as quickly as possible.

The campesina worried that the time she spent in the field watching the parachutist would cost her the job collecting grass for Don Pepe's cows. She worried that in the end the parachutist would disappoint her, that he'd be shot dead like Gaitan or be another fraud like Samper, that her sacrifice would be for nothing. For that

reason, the campesina decided to stay and wait for him but only until noon; it was nine-thirty. She wouldn't risk losing her other job, the job cleaning the *doña's* house. It didn't matter that this parachutist reminded her of Luis Carlos Galan because she'd been wrong before. Dione, on the other hand, had decided to stake her job, the little money she made as a library assistant, on this parachutist. Her daughter, Andreita, needed a father, but more than that, she needed to know that it was OK to hope, to sit and wait and pray for something better.

Dione wanted him to hurry and touch down. She knew he was the one, and she worried for his safety. And yet, it was that innocence, that courage, the way he flew through the low Andean clouds unafraid of what he saw happening in the city and the mountains, which made him different from the other parachutists who more often than not were destroyed by what they saw below.

The student from Los Andes, annoyed at the parachutist for descending so slowly, left in her Renault. She had waited for the parachutist long enough she said—there were other eligible *churros* in her major, so what if the parachutist had gringo eyes and gringo hair, *me vale guevo* if he's lovely—she was studying law at Los Andes, her dad was Diego Herrera Perez, mayor of Mosquera, she'd even fucked a blue-eyed German in Lyon so it wasn't like she had to have the parachutist because he was an attractive foreigner.

"I'm leaving," she said to the women, and then just to Dione, whose lips were chapped slivers, "I wouldn't wait around for him if I were you. I'm sure he's a *maricón*. Don't you see his fingernails are painted pink?"

No, all Dione saw were his tan hands, brown and warm like *tienda* bread, the kind of hands that could easily rock Andrea to sleep. This girl from Los Andes, a liar, an arrogant *gomela*, was so similar to Marcela—Marcela, the bitter lawyer in the Ministry of Justice who earned only slightly more than Dione, the receptionist, as Marcela called her—Marcela, the self-righteous daughter who hadn't come to her own mother's funeral. Death was death, Marcela had

said to Dione, Mami is gone and she'll decompose into the wall of coffins in the Cementerio Central like all the other cadavers there.

Dione hated Marcela. She hated her for everything she'd done and everything she hadn't. Yet it hurt Dione to think of her sister like this, especially now on the tractor in the middle of the potato field while she was so full of hope, the parachutist flying over her head like an enormous lily.

Marcela had called Dione this morning to say she was sorry. She'd called while Dione was leaving for work, but Dione, *la santa* who would forgive anything, slammed the phone back into the cradle when she heard it was Marcela crying. She had forgiven her sister too many times, she thought, and yet it was Marcela and not Nestor or Andreita that Dione was thinking about when she first noticed the parachutist through her windshield on her way to work.

At ten o' clock, Dione and the campesina lost sight of the parachutist in the morning sky. He was engulfed by a cluster of low clouds and disappeared from view. "That's it," said the campesina suddenly gathering her children. "It was beautiful while it lasted."

But it's not over, protested Dione, trying to convince the campesina that the parachutist would make it through, that the clouds hadn't killed him. "They might as well," said the campesina, "because if the clouds don't get him, the *narcos* will sooner or later. And if they don't *la guerilla* will kidnap him into the mountains. We aren't allowed anything beautiful anymore."

Dione knew it was true. It was the sad story of her country, the story written on all three cordilleras, on the plains, the jungles and the Magdalena. Dione knew in her heart that if the parachutist re-emerged from the clouds, he'd be shot through the stomach like so many others before him. She saw the owner of the potato field on his black horse, galloping across the field with his shotgun cocked at his side. "*Colombia nunca gana nada*," said one of the campesina's little boys as they walked back to their cart and mule on the road. Colombia never won anything.

Alone now with only the farmer in the distance, Dione felt her solitude like the muddy drabness of the field for the first time since she'd seen the parachutist. Her mother, she remembered, lay in a coffin in the Cementerio Central while Andreita napped in the day care in Facatativá. Nestor had vanished from her life just as the parachutist had vanished into the clouds, and Marcela, her older sister at the Ministry of Justice, was crying in a bathroom stall so no one would see her.

Meanwhile in the cloud, the parachutist opened his eyes and through the vapor saw the Bogotá savannah.

He saw a homeless man sweeping dried orange peels for coins. He saw a chicken laying an egg. He saw two buses crashing head to head, a window shattering like water and water spilling like glass. He saw an Uzi in a suitcase, an *amapola* in a Coke bottle, a bloated pig in the river, and a shrine to the Fallen Man on Monserrate Hill.

The parachutist saw his own bare feet. He saw a photo of an amputated hand on the cover of the *Espectador*. He saw Botero watching himself in a funhouse mirror. He saw the dead dreaming about the living. He saw a naked woman smoking a cigarette with her foot, a parrot licking its tail feathers. He saw a soldier picking his nose, another raping a girl in an alley, another wishing he was home tending his grandma's rose garden. The parachutist saw a rainbow in a puddle of oil and a swastika on a tombstone. He saw a portrait of El Che carved on a church bench in the Plaza Simon Bolivar, on a wall in Pablo Sexto, on a tree in Ciudad Jard'n, on a garage door in El Restrepo. He saw soap suds floating on the Bogotá River like snow, a boy with a hole in his pallet, a mother with a deformed finger, a grandmother with a fused hand. He saw a shoe leave a footprint, saw the rusted tip of a steak knife pierce a heart and the blood cascade like the dark waters of the Tequendama. He saw 482 Americans, 612 Spaniards, 500 Russians, two of them dying, 132 Turks and one Korean woman whose eyes were slender dunes of sand.

And just below him on the potato field, the parachutist saw

Dione. He saw her daydreaming about receiving him, about kneeling on the mud as his naked feet gradually descended to the height of her lips and she cupped her hands around his heels. She would be the first thing his perfect feet ever touched.

But no, always no. The parachutist saw his death approaching as he reemerged from the cloud that hid him, the small explosion of black powder inside the potato farmer's shotgun, the saboted slug separating from the red shell, the rippling of air as the slug cut the sky, then the bleeding circles of flesh—his own flesh, what used to be his stomach.

He twisted in agony when the bullet struck him and the large silk chute tangled in his arms. To Dione below, he looked like a flower wilting, his beautiful parachute crumpled around his body, losing its shape, turning pale and limp. He fell from the sky, crashed into the field of potatoes a few meters from the tractor where Dione stood crying.

Dione ran to the spot on the earth where he had had fallen and crawled under the deflated parachute that covered his body like a canopy. His stomach had been pierced, his bones broken, his tongue chewed. She wanted to be with him before he died.

The light that filtered through the silk, a soft white light filled with the dust of the field, the cold humidity of the ground—the earthy smell—reminded her of being in a cathedral. She had crawled into the somber light of this deflating temple on her hands and knees where once again like on the day of her mother's funeral her hope was dying.

She kissed his eyebrows. She prayed to God, give me peace, peace to face it all again.

She wiped the blood from his mouth, from his face, grabbed his hands, kissed his broken feet. She whispered something in his ear. No, he said, his eyes slanted shut, his mouth dribbling blood over his shaved neck, Dione, he said, don't give up, there is always something more.

When she crawled out from under the parachute into the grey sunlight cast over the Andes like fog and onto the potato field, she saw the farmer bent over the soil crying like a child. The farmer had realized seconds after shooting the parachutist, as always happened, that he'd killed something far more beautiful than himself for no reason at all. He was one more instrument of chaos. The curse of his blood, the curse of his country.

Help me bury him, said Dione, and together they dug a grave in the open ground, unearthing dozens of healthy potatoes. They wrapped the parachutist in his silk, his body lighter than paper, then lowered him into the ground like a seed. The soil was sprinkled over his eyes and his body was covered with soft dirt, but even after they watered the spot with brown water from the creek and waited by his grave for the sun to reach its zenith in the sky, the parachutist didn't sprout out of the ground as happened elsewhere. The parachutist was dead, and for the potato farmer the story ended in a choking guilt so fierce it ruptured capillaries in his throat so his food always tasted of blood. And for Dione, what remained at the end was the knowledge that she had lost her job at the library for nothing, that she was still alone and Andrea was without a father because of her sister, Marcela. Nestor would never return, Marcela would never change, the sun had passed the center of the sky, wounded and falling to its death. What could she do?

Dione walked back to her car, her ankles scratched and caked with cracking mud. She drove across the pungent Bogotá River into the labyrinth city choked with cars and people. She saw their faces were dirty with mud and their fingernails were clogged with filth as if they, too, had spent the whole morning in a potato field. At stoplights young girls, refugees from the conflict in the country, juggled bowling pins for coins, some boys wiped windshields, one drank gasoline from a bottle and breathed fire.

Having driven nearly an hour, Dione finally turned onto Calle 11 and parked on the street in front of the Library Luis Angel Arango.

Inside she begged the manager for her job back, trying to explain her reasons for being late, her torn skirt, the dried blood on her jacket and hands. But it didn't matter. She was more than five hours late.

Back outside, maybe because she was worried about making the rent, maybe because she'd thought about her mother and all her friends, she called Marcela's office from a phone booth on the corner. There was no answer. Marcela had left work early, too overcome by her crying to attend any of her afternoon meetings in the ministry. She was thinking about her Mami decomposing in the box, about losing her sister, when all hope sapped from her body. Every face on the street, every person on the sidewalk looked gritty, sad and desolate as she drove home through the boxy shadows of the grey city. She looked up at the overcast sky.

Dione left a message on Marcela's machine, *llámame cuando puedas*, we should talk. She had to get back to Facatativá before four-thirty to pick up Andrea at the day care or she'd be fined for being tardy.

As for the parachutist, Dione didn't think of that; she'd seen hundreds like him in her life, all of them beautiful while they lasted, but as of yet not one of them had ever landed.

RAYMOND MCDANIEL

The Persistence of Espionage

Chameleon Boy rides the maglev to Montauk,
nobody on that train, its bare tremble
socialist, synthetic slide down the future,
its dead white world's fair.
Empty stations, empty agents—
no more buttons, no more coats.
Reep Daggle dreams of Durla, her imagine-ocean,
her drowned city neither coral nor spire.
Its epics are a collective colossus,
generations beached and bleached,
over two hundred tons of elegant elbow
sunk in diatomaceous sand, fallen body
of friend and foe and family,
right angle of the wrist risen to vertigo.
In the last exploit of the Espionage Squad,
all the useless heroes will die
except Chameleon Boy, his neural net
polyform and plasticene, eternal.
But yes, the Phantom Girl, the Shrinking Violet,
the Invisible Kid. A lost city looms
behind the wrecked and ruined dunes.
Forty thousand colors, eighty thousand ages.
The world is not like this at all.

RAYMOND MCDANIEL

Ferro Lad Memorial Action Figure

soldier boy

Happy as a waltz with you in my palm.
Jar-head, miniature metal marine, heroic force
since 2959, how do you come in your mutant
shine to the utter jungle of my backyard?
Legionnaire, I flung you like a grenade, all heft
and lantern-jaw, all intent, flung you at mud
which only yielded bubble, flung you at birds,
scarlet roped from long tricky scarves.
Nothing could shake the mask from your shiny shell,
or empty your innards of iron, chrome cast
all the way to skin. How happy I was
with your ideals of sacrifice, your martyring,
your faithless marriage to terrible tasks.
No iris in the iron orbit of your skull.
No hair saved but that combed by magnets,
when you were molten-red, just born,
missionless without me.

future man

Your weight greater than a stack of drawings,
each page a frame of colonial fun.
Stupid cloisonné helmet, white

that could be chipped, stupid silver-blue
suit that held the gleam of your mutant muscle.
I cut you open with a hacksaw and found
iron, opened your absurd weight to vacuum,
left you to die again and again and again.
Transsuited for space, yet you sank even in tubs,
refused rust though stranded in sewers.
The hard minor bulk of you was my every hope.
Why, if I am ugly, can I not alchemize to isotope?
A red handkerchief quartered with ball-bearings
barely slows you in your descent from my roof.
Squat man, hero-type, so weighty.
What is it, deep in the heart of the sun,
that wants you so near.

MARY MOLINARY

Disclosure: the things per se

When 40 days with no rain but ineluctable twilight When deep sounds throaty as a nightjar When the winds mount their ghost-horses When the mesquite trees tremble When in the sparse trees' nightening branches silhouettes of birds' breath—a breathing visible to a passing eye When a final horizontal heave of sun thins deepens descends When then the first star When then the second When without variation all stars appear exact

When where we expect and when When we are sewn to the same stars When the predictable seems more miraculous than the anomalous When without warning: the spare beans on the bean trees rattle their small dry prayers

MARY MOLINARY

Anatomy of the spine, its miracles

The poisoned dog story. The trope of the body bags, the fallen leaves, a woman gathering them.

The memoir of the final decades of the twentieth century as recorded on undeveloped film. The remembrance of the stolen record album which is really the story of album covers. An account of one's family as an enactment of history as told by an innocent bystander. The profile of a person, any person, according to the history of cars driven or owned—or the lack. The folktale of the Hopi color *sakwa* as untranslatable; as the idea of language always preceding, always. The broken narrative behind Brueghel's painting *The Beekeepers and the Birdnesters*. The testimony of a young woman who wants nothing more than to move to the nicer parts of the Arctic because of the animals there. And the sound she imagines. The hallucination of the summer signified by a paucity of fireflies. The urban myth of the *real* shrunken head ordered from Marvel Comics that cost one dollar plus postage. The proverb of miniscule desire in a time of tragic disregard.

The saga of becoming. The epic of epoch. The abridged version of the history of mankind. The apothegm of women spoken in secret rooms in secret languages. The rumor of civil wars. The anecdote of catching leprechauns in mayonnaise jars. The plot of juniper and gin. The exposition of a last confession. The intermezzo of Goat Song and Ghost Light. The not-story of the unexpressed verb. The prophecy of the suggested impossibility of the past tense.

The curse of literary remains. The literary remains of the curse.

The final and real tale of revenants: *here is the tail/ of Bow, sweetest little cat,/ lost his life/ under the train, he was hungry.* The interlude of lute, cello, piano, and drum. The bildungsroman of conclusion. The fable of the stark consonant. The revelation of the duplex: the Pentecostal couple, their brutal sex, and *sweeeet jesus i'm comin' home!!* The op-ed of the Three Quick and the Three Dead.

The mythology of Great Aunt's bosom and how it never ceased growing until she could no longer walk upright and so she was buried in a specially-ordered brassiere. The disclosure of the eternal bosom of Liberty. The ballad of rayon. The prayer of the periodic table. The shanty about all the tea in China. The natural histories of Linneus, Lewis, Huxley, and the Monk. The exposé of Neither Here nor There. The chronicle of chicken pox on LSD. The story of the word *pox*. The story of the word *word*. See also: *Good* word. *Cuss* word. The epistle of the Catholic saints as statues driven across the Mississippi into Arkansas on the back of a flatbed truck by two inconspicuous nuns. The lais of the smooth stone. The romance of the long bow. The novella of infinite interpretability. The exaltation of larks, the murmuration of starlings, and the clutch of eggs. The legend of return. The translation of St. Jerome and fragments of others as told in true fresco: all things intended and unintended. The miracle of the raven and the poisoned bread.

DILRUBA AHMED

Fable

(with a phrase from Su Tung-P'o: "dirt soft enough to knead")

Soon, I will arrive at a house aglow
with lights and an endless meal, plate
after steaming plate to feed all
who enter. And if my feet are muddy,
my hands cold; if I have stumbled,
as I will tell you, now, I have stumbled—
with my faith returned to me like a pouch
of broken bones—I found my face
among the villagers. I haven't walked
here alone. And now the night holds my name
in the thicket, the sky the ribbed scales
of a fish, phosphorescent, back-lit.

Behind the house, I'm told, there's a river
full of minnows, now drawn together, now
drawn apart. Beyond that is a woods
dark enough for disappearing,
and at each root, a dirt that's soft enough
to knead with my hands.

ALLISON FUNK

The Holy Family with Three Hares

After a woodcut by Albrecht Dürer (about 1497-8)

It's an old story.
  Yet the artist returns with his knives
Sharpened to carve the folds
  Of the gown, the child
In his mother's arms.
  Like the little hare and its mother
At her feet, Mary and her boy
  Overlap. They could be one body,
Much as the tree in the distance
  Is forked. The pages
In the book the child is holding
  Are bound. Can't she guess
How their story will end?
  No mother's intuition?
The third hare on its way out
  Of the picture when Dürer catches it
Mid-flight senses something.
   The small birds, too,
Winging east and west. Even Joseph,
  Walking stick in his right hand,
Hat and cloak in the left.
  But Mary, doting on her son,
Misses the angels we can see
  Suspended above her

Bearing the crushing weight of a crown.
  By the time the child turns the page,
Hares, father, will have flown.
  Another page turned
And the son, determined to die,
  Is gone.
But what of the page Dürer hasn't given us,
  The mother afterwards?
After the rending
  And weeping, shiva,
Yahrzeit, amen and again amen,
  After the rains of winter, the winds?
That we must imagine
  For ourselves.

MATTHEW NIENOW

The Smallest Working Pieces

When my brother wanders home, we know
his figure, but we cannot yet tell
whether he is a bird wing or bone, many
hollow pieces, or one fallow stem—

This man could be water
in a glass nearly empty, he could
be evaporation itself, working upwards,
perfecting the trick of removing himself.

He could be a leaf
that papers and curls when the wind
massages him, a leaf that waits and waits
for autumn to singe, then release him.

This brother could be a stalk
of corn, or the husk, each ear deaf
to the world's whispering. And I can't
even begin to imagine how many

fields of ears are not listening.

PETER OBOURN

The Liberation

The bicycle was on the verge, next to a light pole, the handlebars facing the wrong way, the front wheel twisted. A police helmet, the headlamp still lit, rested undisturbed in the middle of the road. Then I saw the body—legs on the curb, head in the road, a member of the Elite Guard lying in a pool of blood in front of the house next door.

I closed the blinds, trembling. We were in the wrong place, but my wife, my son, and I, as innocent as we were, sat waiting, knowing there was no other choice. To run would signify guilt.

In less than an hour, a van removed the body, the bicycle, and the helmet, then a truck arrived with a crew of two men in white overalls, who washed the blood off the road. All this time, no one left their homes or apartments.

An hour later several trucks with red and blue lights flashing arrived, and everyone on the street was taken to the new Bokali Prison, named for our Liberator. At the prison door I was led away and did not see my family or my neighbors for more than a year.

The Guardsman who was killed had bicycled past our house three times a night, making sure the curfew was obeyed. The single rifle shot could have been fired from any house on the street. We were all suspects.

I was put into a cell with a man named Albert. He had been in prison since before Liberation. He had killed his wife. He said Bokali Prison was a lot nicer than the old one.

While I waited to be questioned, I got to know Albert. He gave

me advice. When I complained to him about the wait, he said, "You don't want to be in a hurry." He explained that the New Regime, being short of policemen, decided they had to resort to the Old Regime's effective system of solving crimes. The system was simple: torture the suspect until he confessed or was beaten senseless. If he confessed, the crime was solved; if not, he was probably innocent and was let go. Even if he wasn't innocent, he had learned a valuable lesson.

He also said, "Above all, avoid Solitary." Albert had never been in Solitary. He knew of a few guys that had, but he'd talked to only one, James Krakmayer, who was a lifer. James told Albert how dark it was and about how the silence was worse than the darkness, but it was hard to believe it all, said Albert. "The crazy guy said he'd been in solitary for over a year, and we all knew it was five days." Then there was Freddie "The Thumb" King, who was in for three days, but he always said he never was there.

I was in Bokali for almost a year before they questioned me. The whole time I had no idea where my wife or son was.

Finally, one morning they questioned me. I was stripped naked and ushered into a brightly lit room, bare of furniture. Five men stood around me. They told me I was the chief suspect, because they never found my rifle. When the main questioner said, "Where did you bury it?" I told them I never owned a rifle. At that, another man came up to me and smashed his fist into my face and then kneed me in the groin. I rolled on the concrete floor in pain. As they kicked me they told me they would kill my wife and son unless I confessed. Then they just kept hitting me. The questioning and beating and kicking took all day.

Then they threw a blanket around me and dragged me to the Commandant's office. My eyes were open only a slit. He glanced up me and then looked away, shading his eyes with his hand. "My God, what did you do to his face?" he said. "This is not the Old Regime."

"He's clean, Commandant," said the man who had hit me the most.

"What have I told you about the face?" said the Commandant. "I've got a member of the President's Council coming tomorrow. We can't send him anywhere looking like this."

"I'm sorry," said the man who punched me in the face.

"It's all right," said the Commandant, who still wouldn't look at me. "Just get him out of here. He's ruining my appetite. Put him in Solitary where no one can see him."

"For how long, Commandant?"

"Who knows? We'll see."

They dragged me down several flights of stairs and turned me over to a guard I had not seen before. He was so strong, he held me up by one arm and whispered, "Now, I have to kick you." And he gave me a violent kick in the ass that sent me flying into the darkness.

For a long time I lay on the stone floor. The pain was everywhere in my body. I thought some bones must be broken. Even if I lay still, the pain came in waves. I hoped I would die. Finally, I passed out.

When I came to I opened my eyes, and there was nothing but darkness. The darkness is the worst part. Even after what Albert said, I wasn't prepared for it. I held my hand an inch from my eyes and could not see it. Then there was the silence. The last sound I had heard was the door slamming behind me.

I was afraid to move, afraid I would run into something or fall into the void all around me. I waved my arms one at a time and crawled, inching my way along. I could not walk. I felt my way around the room, found the walls, found the cell door again, which was now just a door-shaped crack in the wall. I estimated that the room was about six paces from wall to wall one way and seven paces the other way. Across from the door was a wooden bench attached to the wall. There was no mattress, no pillow. There was a

pail in one corner. I had the blanket they had covered me with. That was all.

In my cell with Albert, there had been light and noise all the time. Even in the middle of the night, there was some noise and enough light to see shadows and silhouettes, and, of course, I had Albert. They let us have books, pencils, and paper. Now, I was naked and alone. I had nothing. Nothing.

I found my way to the bench and crawled onto it. I sat in silence and darkness. When I held my breath and sat still, there was no noise. It was so dark, I could feel it closing in around me. I had known all this—that it was going to be dark and that there was going to be silence—but knowing it and actually feeling it are two different things.

I realized that if I sat just right now, there was no pain, only a dull ache. The only thing to do was sit. I sat and stared at nothing and looked at nothing and lost all sense of time. I don't remember what I did, except that I did nothing. It seemed like a long time, maybe a day, but it could have been two days. I don't know. I just got hungry and cold.

Then, after a long time, the dark and the silence and the cold and the loneliness and the hunger and the nothingness overwhelmed me, and I pitied myself and I wept. I wept about my wife and my son and my helplessness and despair until, finally, I lost any sense of consciousness. I believe I wept in my sleep.

When I woke up I did not move. I lay there on the bench. I wasn't sure if I was alive or dead. If I was alive I guessed they were going to let me starve to death in the darkness.

Time had now become something else, not time, but something mysterious, something unknown, another thing that was not there.

The only noise was my breathing or the noises I caused when I moved. If I moved in my sleep, I woke myself up with the noise I made.

After a long time—whether it was several hours or a few days, I will never know—I heard something. It sounded like it was coming from the other side of the door, just a click maybe. I rolled off the bench and crawled over to the door and felt all around and found a place where I could insert my finger and I could slide open a small door I had not detected before. There was a metal cupboard on the other side of the door at floor level, and I felt inside it. It was about one foot square and one foot high. Inside was a tin plate and water in a tin cup. It was only a small hunk of bread and a half a cup of water, just enough to keep me alive. Even though I was desperately hungry, I decided I would save the bread and water as long as I could. I sat on the wooden bench, with the bread and water next to me, and waited for what I thought was a long time. I didn't touch it. I covered myself with the blanket, and I was still cold, but I knew I would just have to be cold. I woke up and I was so hungry and thirsty, I could not help myself. I ate the bread in two bites and drank the water in a single gulp. I lay down again and slept again. I woke up cold, hungry, and thirsty and crawled to the little food door. There was no more bread. There was no more water. I put the tray and the cup in the hole and closed it.

There was nothing to do but be cold and hungry. I lay on a bench for a long time. And at some point, I slept.

Then, in my sleep, I heard a roar, like when you hold a seashell to your ear—that kind of roar—except it kept getting louder and louder, until it woke me and the roar was all around me, a steady, unbelievable roar, like standing next to a huge waterfall or a jet engine.

I stared into the darkness and saw a giant, dark wave moving toward me, growing larger and larger, and I knew when it reached me, it would drown me. I closed my eyes and held my hands over my ears and cowered, expecting to be run over or blown away.

Nothing happened. I opened my eyes and there was blackness and silence again.

I was sweating in the cold. I wrapped the blanket around me and shivered. I kept staring at the place where the wave had been, afraid it would come back. After a long time I fell asleep sitting up.

When I woke up, cold and hungry. I crawled to the little door, and there was bread on the tin plate and water in the cup. And I ate the bread and I drank the water and I was still hungry. I put the plate and tin cup back, and I lay on the bench for a long time. And I knew that I would go crazy, and I knew what they were trying to do. And I knew they would break me. They would keep me there until I was broken.

After another long time I fell asleep again. When I woke up I crawled to the door, and the empty plate and the empty cup were still there.

The whole cell smelled like the pail, which now smelled like my shit, and I lay on the bench for a long time, and I realized that, now, I was the only person in the world. And there was no light, and there was no noise, except the deafening silence, and there was only blackness, the sound of blackness, the smell of blackness, and the feel of blackness, and I knew I would not make it. Maybe I already was crazy, because I knew the noise and the waves were not real, but they were real, because I could hear them and see them. I didn't know if it was day or night or if I had been there one day or only a few hours or many days. I went to sleep cold and hungry, afraid of what I was going to hear in the silence and see in the darkness.

When I woke the next time, I crawled to the door, and there was bread and water, and I ate the bread and I drank the water and I was still hungry and still cold, and I sat on the bench, and I knew that I would have to wait a long time—at least two sleeps and be hungry the whole time—and I knew that the silence would become louder and louder and that the wave would come again, so I sat with my eyes closed, because maybe I would not see the wave in this double darkness, and I put the blanket over me, and I could cover my whole

body if I lay on my side and curled up like I was before I was born. I covered my ears with my hands, because maybe I would not hear the silence, and I curled up as close to the wall as I could be, and I tried to think about nothing, nothing, nothing.

After a long, long time, I woke up, and I ached all over, and I decided I must be sick.

I uncovered my ears, and there was the roar of silence.

I kept my eyes closed and slithered off the bench and crawled to the door, and there was bread and water, and I crawled to the corner, and I could smell my own shit.

I did not eat the bread or drink the water. I would save it.

I set the bread and water on the bench and crawled around the room again with my eyes closed. I went very slowly, infinitely slowly. I felt every inch of the floor. It took a long time. In one corner there was a crack between the floor and the wall, and I felt something in the crack, and I dragged it out of the crack with my fingernail, and it was round and smooth, and I stood and carried it over to the bench. And I sat on the bench, and I felt the round, smooth thing in my fingers.

And I knew that it was amazing that I had found anything. I have no idea how it got there. It was impossible for this thing to be where it was, for this thing to be found in that unlikely place. It was something real, something I could touch and feel.

It was a button.

I put it to my nose. It smelled cold and smooth.

I could feel four small holes in the center.

It was smaller than a dime—maybe about half the size of a dime. One side was flat and smooth. This would be the side that would lie against the shirt, because I decided this was a shirt button. The holes would be there to hold it with thread against the shirt. But there was no thread. There was only a button. On the other side there was a ridge around the outside, like the ridge on the outside

of a china dinner plate. The outside of my button was thicker than the center where the holes were. I could feel this with my thumb. It was in the shape of a perfect circle.

I wondered what color it was and what it was made of. I opened my eyes and held the button up to my eyes, but I could not see it. Probably it was plastic, but it seemed too smooth for plastic—maybe it could be ivory or mother-ofñpearl.

I tapped the button on the wood of the bench, and it made a noise. I tapped it on the wall, and it made a different noise—a real noise. I held it in my hand between two fingers, and the two sides were different, one smooth and one curved—I think the word is concave—with a ridge and four little holes. And I could feel the holes, and I could feel the ridge. I could run my finger around the ridge.

I lay the button next to my head, and I slept for a long time.

I woke up and reached for the button, and I held the button in my hand. And I ate some of the bread and drank some of the water and left the rest of the bread and the water on the bench to save for later.

Then I turned the button over and over and touched it with each of my fingers and rubbed it on my cheeks and on my arm. I felt its smoothness and its concaveness and its roundness and its little holes and its ridge for a long time. Then I had a bite of bread and a drink. Then I felt my button.

Then I did an incredible thing with my perfect, round, mother-of-pearl button in the silent darkness.

I threw it away.

I flicked the button with my fingers like flipping a coin, except I sort of pushed it away from my body as I flicked it and sent the button into the air, across the room, into the blackness. I heard it hit the floor with a click, and then I heard it roll.

Then I sat on the bench, and I ate a little more bread and drank

a little water, and I thought about how I would find my button. I thought I could tell from the sound it made where it landed and which way it rolled.

I stood up and discovered I could walk, and I walked to where I thought it would be, and then I crawled on my hands and knees, and I felt the floor, but I could not find it, and then I could not remember where I had started to look. So I went back to the bench, and then I went back to what I thought had been my starting point. And I started crawling slowly and methodically in an ever-widening spiral, feeling every inch of the floor, and then, after a long time, I found my button, and then I went back to the bench and tasted the bread and water, and it tasted good. And I lay down with my button, and I slept for a long time.

And that's what I did. I ate and drank and I flicked my button.

First, when I woke up, I had just a little taste of bread and a small sip of water. Then I flicked the button, and then I searched for it and then I found it. I flicked it so many more times and listened to where it hit and where it rolled that I became an expert. I got so good at it that I could flick my button, listen to it hit and roll, walk a few steps, and pick it up. I could find the button in a very short time.

Then it became too easy. So I would throw the button across the room into a corner so it would hit the wall and bounce, then I would crawl on the floor and feel with my hands until I found it. Sometimes this took a short time and sometimes a long time, but I always found it, and I was always glad to find it. When I found the button, I would reward myself with a little bread and a drink.

Then I had to make it harder. I would throw my button and make shouting noises so I wouldn't hear where it hit and know where to look from the noise the button made, or sometimes I would cover the pail with the blanket, and then I would spin around until I was dizzy, then throw the button, so I wouldn't be sure what direction I flicked it, but I always found it, sometimes after a long time and

sometimes after a short time. When it was a short time, I always had a drink to celebrate, and when it was a long time, I usually had a drink too, because I was so relieved to find my button and to be holding it in my hands again.

I learned how to eat the bread and drink the water so that right after the last bite and last sip, I would have a long sleep with my button next to me, and when I woke up, there would be fresh bread and water.

Then one time, after maybe hundreds or thousands of flicks, I spun around to get dizzy and threw the button as far as I could, like I was throwing a stone, and I shouted so I couldn't hear it, so that I had no idea where it was.

I crawled and crawled for a long time. It was a very long time, and I could not find my button.

After so much time, after I had been around every inch of the cell at least three times, I was beginning to think I would never find it when my fingers covered something different, which was not my button.

It was half a button.

At first, I thought I had found a new button, but then I realized this was impossible, and I felt it and there was a ridge on the half button, and I knew it was my button, and it had broken in two.

Actually, it was not half the button. It was less than half. It was like the crescent moon. So I knew that there was another piece, a bigger piece with only two holes, because I could feel the edges of the holes on the smaller piece. Two of the holes were gone. And I sat on the bench, and I held the small piece in my hand. Now, it had a sharp edge and two points, so sharp and pointed, I could cut myself.

I sat on the bench, holding the half button for a long time. Then I set my half button on the bench, and I crawled on the floor, and I felt for a long time. I found the bigger half and went back to the

bench. I put the two pieces together, and they fit together perfectly.

I had some bread and a drink, and I lay down on the bench, covered myself with my blanket, and I was warm, but I did not go to sleep. I thought about what I would do next, and I decided that I would flick both halves of the button at the same time, and then I would look for them. I would call the halves Biggy and Smally, and the one that I found first would be the loser, because this was like hide-and-seek, and the one I found second was the winner, and I would want Biggy to win, because it would be harder for him to hide, because he was bigger than Smally.

Then, while I was making my plans, I felt sleepy.

I knew that more bread and water would come after this sleep, so I would wait for the new food and drink, and after this sleep I would play the new button game, and maybe it would be like a big tournament, like the World Cup, so I finished the bread I had left and had a drink and felt good and fell asleep.

When I woke up the door was open, light was coming in, and the guard was shouting. "Come on out, kid."

I wrapped myself in my blanket like a chief and walked out into the light, and the guard looked at me and said how you doing, and I smiled and said, "I'm great." And then they let me go home to my wife and son.

Anyway, that's how I got through it and didn't go crazy, by flicking a button a million times.

I don't have the button now, because, before I left the cell, I kicked the two pieces with my big toe into the crack in the corner between the floor and the wall.

JON WOODWARD

Pretend Torso

There are two detached right hands,
both marble, one pressing the other
against a partial torso,
massive, lifelike
and unlike, cold, (flakes

of marble everywhere blind underfoot,
numerous as questions with
pretended unknown answers

(Before long he arrived
at a landscape he'd never seen—
distant mountains scrolled slowly
and water cheerfully flowed
as he ran along the causeway.

The sun was bright for him for the first time in years.
His running form felt strong to him, and light and young.
Light was everywhere, and he ran for what seemed like years.

Water slowly flowed
and water slowly flowed and
water slowly flowed

Before long he arrived
at a landscape he'd never seen—
distant mountains scrolled slowly
and water cheerfully flowed
as he ran along the causeway.

JON WOODWARD

Food Fit For

Once it starts the narrative your daily life
my daily life caught in a record skip
my record skip caught in a daily
caught in a zipper (a .zip file

Emphasis alights with a simple touch
with a simple wave of the wand over
the word for a thing DOES NOT
luminesce (carrageenan

Tightly curled up small particles of something
smooth substances are made of
smooth particles, curly particles
are used (as food additives

Hold a daily thing steadfastly in your attention and
all this zen enlightenment crops up
downtown buildings or rows of
corn (which the Indians called Maze

Daily! Every day begins the narrative of
how things begin, the problems start
the problems dissipate or dissolve
into magical states of mind (oh, okay

Use the same words again today use
the same words again I be like
carrageenan carrageenan & then like
carrageenan (vitriolic

Like if I, or, if the word "headphones"
which I daily use, doesn't light up
but begins to stomp on the other
words (and the word particles

The word particles are the things for the
words are the things the particles of
the words are the particles and
the things (are made of…

Headphones in particular are a good example
they stay on your head and they give
the impression, from both sides, they
call and response (additive

At the sunset use the word for the sunset
At the sunrise use the word for the sunrise
This foregrounds what 'use' does, and what 'for' does
Maybe they don't do anything (unexpected

A brittle star lives at the bottom of all of this
and eats maze kernels the Indians dropped
and turns them into algae which
we put in our toothpaste (food too

RACHEL DEWOSKIN

American Highway

All that land blasted flat with dynamite rode by,
cliffs gone, highway blank as white noise on my
back across the backseat, trees went upside down,
the branches bats and icicles, nooses. We moved fast across
other people's roots: Detroit, Cleveland, the animals and silos,
highway lines sucked underneath the stomach of our car.

Each house we passed I thought I could have ended
up in easily. Reading *Lolita*, imagined my
foot on the gas, speed inside me, thin limbs
in a backseat pretzel tangle. I was 13. Shell station,
seeking out the gaze of a man pumping, daring him
to be middle-aged, sophisticated, drama for my drive.

But he pulled away without a sigh in my direction. Fire
of that summer, Steve B, on his way to Oberlin, had taken off
my shirt. Fresh memory: my best friend's basement, musty
on a cool-ish night, and I could taste the rest of my life
in his mouth: Sam Adams beer, clove gum, the whole Midwest.
Rough couch against my newly naked back, this feeling

also had a taste—a breaking off in chips and melting
peanut brittle one I wanted, want. Steve B is now
Hasidic, now Lolita would be sixty, now I'm married
with a baby, once you see you—see?—you're gone.

DANIEL COUDRIET

Projectorlight

This movie theater collapsing
each time those we have touched
each time the film clouds
we cannot remember their faces,
so we are held, naked
pulled from round bodies
of rubble to a dawn of milk
to faces we recognize from the film.

DANIEL COUDRIET

Coda / Ayacucho

Small membranes of trafficnoise slide around my feet, my legs, my hips.
No one can hear the end of wind against my windows.

When air is outside me, the colonies chewing themselves in my lungs
make you their god.
So much worship it is impossible to move
without puncturing.

Please join me here, promptly naming my parts balconies.
Please help me hang the banners, which colors and where.

STACY KIDD

Introductions

This is the snow
that fell with music,
that canted for cards and fortune
telling, with lice
in its hair and grievance
and tillage or husbandry.

This is the thin snow
that bared its paws to the night,
that loved the daughter,
as if the thought were the thing,
and thought it stood
on the roof, losing its teeth.

These are the teeth
which fell out
in two's, the godling teeth
with little red roots
and ugly blackened teeth
placed under the children's pillows.

This is the changing direction
of wind, which to the chorister said,
yes, yes, we'll bless
these palms laid out like funerals,
this house, which empty,
shows corners not seen for years.

STACY KIDD

Lantern, then Light

Tell me again, she says,
why we should know only half-moons
and crater. Who said softly *again*
softly, pianissimo and hum.

Mead carries itself like music
to the moon's hinged horn, and stops,
and cackles. And why shouldn't we.

The drum of a thin ghost
plays like any other. Why not return
as something more
nervous or pallid. What's the difference.

If you were a child once, I can't remember—
the ground growing inside itself,
the earth you fell out of love with.

COLIN RAFFERTY

The End of the World

One: The Liturgy of the Word

I don't understand the language, but I still know what's happening.

At the altar in front of me, the priest speaks the words of greeting. The crowd responds appropriately. I hear a few words that I understand; no, not true. I hear one: *Bog*. God.

Few things in this world are quieter than a small Polish town on a Sunday. In a country where 90% of the populace is Catholic, just about everything shuts down, and all activity centers around the Masses that run every hour of the morning, churches packed to overflowing each time.

My stomach growls loudly, protesting the small breakfast I ate this morning at the Centrum Dialogu i Modlitwy—the Center for Dialogue and Prayer, where I've been the last four days—and, in response, I try to remember if I saw any open restaurants when I walked across the bridge over the Soła River this morning, crossing from the outskirts of town into the center. I come up empty but promise my stomach that we'll find something after Mass ends.

I shift in the wooden pew. Normally, I'd feel bad about letting my mind wander during Mass, but I know that we're in the middle of the homily, and I don't speak much Polish beyond the basic travel phrases. Still, though, it's an amazing trick of memory and tradition that I can follow the ceremony from beginning to end, from readings to offertory to consecration to Eucharist. I anticipate the moments when we stand or sit, and when it comes time to exchange a sign of peace, I know, thanks to last week's Mass in Warsaw, that I

should simply nod at the people around me instead of shaking their hands, as Catholics do in America.

I'm often aware of my body as a Catholic; the pop of a knee as I kneel, the agonized Christ hanging from the crucifix, the stories of saints' suffering. At the moment the priest raises the bread of the Eucharist over his head, it will be transformed into the Body of Christ—literally the Body of Christ, according to the doctrine of transubstantiation. Even though the priest's words are incomprehensible, I believe that this happens. The body matters to the Church.

I walk out with everyone, past the group of people waiting for the next service. In America, when I go to Mass, I can leave my apartment five minutes before Mass starts and still get a seat; here, each ceremony is packed to capacity.

The sky is overcast, the first time in days that the Polish weather hasn't been postcard-perfect. Rain seems like a distinct possibility.

I follow the street back up to the town square. There's little activity now that I'm away from the church; a mother and child walk up the sidewalk on the opposite side from me, and I can hear a few voices from a beer garden in the center, but the only restaurants open are "Pizza Hit" and a nondescript burger place.

For speed's sake, I pick the burger place, and after eating a burger on a sliced kaiser roll, with shredded carrots and peppers and some sort of white cheese melted on top—after I address my own bodily needs—I walk over to the nearby building (the city hall, I'm guessing) that occupies one entire side of the town square.

The building has a number of commemorative markers on it, including the usual ones I've seen all over Poland for Solidernoćś activity in the region and the Polish Home Army during World War II. Next to the others, one plaque catches my eye, and although it's in Polish, I recognize one word—*zydów*. Jews.

I don't understand the language, but I still know what's happened.

Despite having been in the southern Polish town of Oświęcim for four days, this is the first time that I have been to the town square, or over the bridge that leads to it, or anywhere else near the heart of the town. I, like most visitors to Oświęcim, have been concerned with a site at the town's edge, a site that makes Oświęcim famous not because of its reputation as "Land of the Night Heron," as one birdwatching brochure points out, but because of its role in the largest murder in history.

Each morning, for the last four days, I have woken up, showered, eaten breakfast, and then walked four blocks, past open fields and houses and a roadside shrine to Saint Christopher, to arrive at Auschwitz.

Along with thousands of other tourists each day, I visit the site where a million and a half people, 90% of them Jews, were killed in the largest and most lethal of the Nazi concentration camps.

Most people visit Auschwitz on a day trip from Kraków; they take a train in the morning, tour Auschwitz, maybe tour Birkenau (the much larger subcamp where the vast majority of gassings and murders took place), and then get on the train back to Kraków, back to their hotels or homes in time for a nice dinner. I, on the other hand, am staying at a Church-run hostel, where I appear to be one of only a few guests. I'm staying here for five days, five times longer than any guidebook suggests. I have time, nothing but, to wander around, seeing everything, making it my mission to see everything.

The sky is gray, the barometric pressure falling noticeably. Stomach full, I walk away from city hall and its plaques and start moving toward the main road, the road I need to follow.

I have nothing new to say about Auschwitz. I knew this coming here, on the train, that Auschwitz was simply too big, too well-known, for me to produce any sort of new thought about it.

The Holocaust killed millions of Jews in numerous ways—starvation in the ghettos, the *Einsatzgruppen* mobile killing squads

in the occupied Soviet Union, random killings all over, even indirectly, through suicides, but for many of us, Auschwitz simply *is* the Holocaust. Auschwitz is the gas chambers disguised as showers, the ovens, the chimneys, the barracks for 52 horses which held almost 800 people.

Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg argues that Auschwitz's symbolic nature comes from three factors: first, that more Jews died there than anywhere else; second, that they came from all over, from as far away as Greece and Norway, France and the USSR; and third, that the camp continued the process of annihilation long after the other killing centers—Treblinka, Sobibor, and others—had been shut down, long after it became obvious that Germany would not win the war.

Another historian, Robert Jan van Pelt, puts the case for Auschwitz's dominance of memory more lyrically. Speaking of Crematorium II in Birkenau, he says, "In the 2,500 square feet of this one room, more people lost their lives than any other place on this planet—500,000 people were killed. If you would draw a map of human suffering, if you create a geography of atrocity, this would be the absolute center."

But everyone knows this, that Auschwitz was the center of pointless mass murder. No one needs it explained the way he or she might need things like the *Einsatzgruppen* or the Aktion Reinhard camps explained. Say "Auschwitz," and the word comes pre-loaded with a concept. All I can offer is a catalogue of what is there, of what surrounds it, of every memorial marker that dots the place.

I'm down to my last two books. I don't speak the language, and for the two weeks I've been in Poland, my conversations in English have been limited to ordering meals and checking into hostels. I'm able to read e-mail from friends and family back home only sporadically, when I can find an Internet café. I feel like I'm beginning to exist without words that I can understand, and that when I finish my

last two books, I'll be lost, without any way to communicate to the people I encounter in Poland.

At breakfast, I read Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* over my cereal and cheese and meat and coffee. Frankl spent three years as a prisoner at Auschwitz and, since he was a doctor, worked in the camp's medical ward. His book, published in 1946, is both a memoir of his experience at the camp and an explanation of his psychiatric theory of logotherapy; he writes, "Logotherapy...focuses on the meaning of human existence as well as man's search for such a meaning." Hence the title.

In the evenings, after the camp museum closes when I have little else to do, I read my second book, Dorothy L. Sayers's translation of Dante's *Inferno*. At first, I felt self-conscious about reading such a book in such a place. But now, four days after arriving at Auschwitz, after four days of seeing gas chambers and ponds filled with ashes, after four days of mass gallows and starvation cells, I'm relieved to return to my room and read about how those who tried to predict the future will have their heads twisted 180 degrees. Such comically impossible, such metaphorically appropriate punishment makes far more sense than a medical ward where inmates received injections that killed them instead of curing them and a shower that murdered.

There are three main camps in the Auschwitz complex. Auschwitz I, the original camp, was mostly a site where Polish political prisoners were kept. It was the site of the first gassings in the camp, which took place in the camp's mortuary, renovated for that purpose. However, most of the gassings took place in Auschwitz II, generally known as Birkenau. Those who were not immediately killed upon arrival worked in satellite labor camps, of which Auschwitz III, called Monowitz, was the largest.

Monowitz is my destination this gray morning, the reason that I have walked the two miles into town. Last night, I asked a taxi driver

in the Auschwitz Museum parking lot how much it might be to go there, and when he gave me a price that was more than the nightly rate of my room at the Centrum, I decided that I would walk.

Heading toward Monowitz, located on the other side of town, I think about what I've seen the last few days. At Auschwitz, the same barracks that housed the Polish prisoners still stand; now, they contain exhibits on the camp's history, as well as the evidence of the crimes committed there: mountains of shoes, suitcases, brushes, eyeglasses, and the shorn hair of women, not yet shipped to Germany to be made into haircloth when the Soviets arrived in January of 1945. After its founding in 1947, the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau restored the gas chamber, which had been converted into an air-raid shelter in 1943, after the much larger crematoria of Birkenau went into operation. The museum staff reinstalled the original ovens and rebuilt the chimney, and now it is possible, after walking past a black stone marker, to stand in the spot where thousands of people died, to close one's eyes and imagine, in vain, what it might have been like to die there. Auschwitz is now evidence, the extant site. Walking there, alongside the barbed wire and guard towers, I sometimes feel as though the Germans have just left.

Birkenau, on the other hand, is a ruin. With the Soviets approaching from the east, the Germans ceased killing operations in November of 1944 and began dismantling the crematoria, attempting to cover up the evidence of their crimes. In January, 1945, just days before the Red Army arrived, they blew up the three remaining buildings (Krema IV having been destroyed in an attempted uprising by Jewish workers a few months earlier). Of the three hundred or so barracks that housed hundreds of thousands of prisoners, about fifty remain, the rest reduced down to the brick chimneys that still occasionally crumble to the ground, reminders that this place was only supposed to be temporary.

Monowitz, which I'm slowly moving toward, is apparently just a monument, a simple installation on the former site of the prison

camp. The Monowitz monument does a lot of work; it stands not only for that sub-camp but also the 27 other sub-camps of Auschwitz, places where prisoners (including Primo Levi) labored for the German war cause. When, in 1947, the Polish government set aside Auschwitz and Birkenau as historical sites worthy of commemoration, they neglected to do so for Monowitz; as a result, nothing remains of the camp but a monument marking where it once stood.

And then there is Oświęcim, the town unfortunate enough to be chosen by Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsführer* of the SS, as the center for the final solution of the "Jewish Question." Between evidence and ruin and monument, it sits, trapped by its own history, all these juxtapositions of time and place, tour buses arriving in the parking lots not for the night heron but for the place where night descended.

Two: The Offering of the Gifts

What am I doing here?

I'm asking this on a few levels. Frankl argues that a "will to meaning" drives humanity as much as any pleasure principle or survival instinct, that we try to give our lives some sort of meaning, "something by which to live." I suppose that I'm trying to find some sort of meaning here at Auschwitz.

I became aware of the Holocaust, and by extension, Auschwitz, in fifth grade. In our social studies class, we covered the basics: Hitler, six million Jews, the yellow stars of David, Anne Frank, the gas chambers. I read a book, a choose-your-own-adventure-type in a series called "Time Machine," in which the reader had to go back to the Warsaw Ghetto in order to uncover the location of a cache of documents; a series of choices led me to Auschwitz, where I observed inmates headed toward the gas chambers before I "jumped" in time back to Warsaw.

The unit couldn't have lasted long, but despite that, I kept think-

ing about Auschwitz, trying to picture it in my mind, trying to see the gas chambers disguised as showers, trying to see the trains arriving. *How could that have happened?* I wondered, and then, *I should go there and see it.*

Auschwitz became, for me as for so many others, the Holocaust itself. This was how it happened: they were rounded up, they came on trains, they were killed in gas chambers at Auschwitz.

Now I am here, eighteen years later. I have seen all the things I have read about: the metal gate reading *"ARBEIT MACHT FREI"* under which the prisoners marched each day on their way to work, the steps that lead down to the ruins of the disrobing room of the gas chambers, the guard tower at Birkenau that seems to be pictured in every history book, the piles of hair and shoes and pots and empty cans that once held Zyklon B pellets.

Yet I'm not sure that I understand this place any more after having been here for a few days. Even though the sight of the metal gate of Auschwitz and the guard tower of Birkenau were enough to stop me, literally, in my tracks—*they're real, they really exist*—I still don't know how to talk, much less write, about what I've seen.

So I've decided that the way to do that, the path to understanding, is to see *everything*, to be the anti-tourist, to be a traveler, to have a stake in what I'm seeing, to map out and track down every last monument and memorial, to understand the scope and enormity of the site. "Down we must go, to that dark world and blind," Virgil tells Dante at the entrance to Hell. "According to logotherapy," writes Frankl, "we can discover this meaning in life in three different ways: (1) by doing a deed; (2) by experiencing a value; and (3) by suffering."

If I do this, I tell myself, *surely, I will know the place, the evidence, the ruins, the monuments*. All of it. And then maybe I'll know what I'm doing here.

I ran out of film yesterday while taking pictures at Birkenau of

the water cisterns near Kremas II and III, so while walking to the Monowitz monument, I keep an eye out for camera stores. After a half hour of walking, I begin to realize that nothing's going to be open today—all the supermarkets I check are closed, and the one gas station that I find doesn't carry any film.

Even though I know that Oświęcim functions as a town now, it still seems impossible that I should be able to do things as mundane as buy groceries or gas here; I feel as though the town should have frozen in the late 1940s and, like the camps, been set aside, declared unusable because of the significance of what happened there.

When my train arrived a few days ago, I bought groceries at a small store that I found in a residential neighborhood on the other side of the State Museum. I shopped as though I was twelve years old, filling up my basket with Nutella, bread, sodas, and an onion-flavored corn chip called "Mr. Snaki." I bought bottles of raspberry-flavored beer and Okocim dark lager, and walked back to the hotel, a plastic bag in each hand to eat a meal that my parents would never consider dinner.

I walked past a playground where children ran around while their parents watched, passed young couples out for a stroll in the early evening. The sun was low, the light hitting the Communist-era high rise apartments and making the painted concrete shine with a loveliness they should not have possessed.

It was a beautiful June evening, the very beginning of summer, and as I walked back, I looked at brick houses, wondering if they were built from the bricks of the *krema* or the barracks. I walked through a park with a sunken center and a plaque declaring it to be the site of a mass grave, filled with the bodies of hundreds of prisoners who died after liberation. And I passed Auschwitz itself, the gas chamber chimney glowing red in the sunset.

Auschwitz bleeds into Oświęcim. The town is forever its former self, a colossal graveyard, a monstrous evidence file, a monumental monument.

At an intersection, just past a quietly busy Sunday flea market, I come upon Oświęcim's Jewish cemetery, closed this early in the morning. As I cross over to it, I'm surprised that it's still here, still maintained, given the extermination of the town's Jewish populace, as well as the destruction of Jewish cemeteries in other towns in Poland.

I peer through the gate at tombstones set in rows, similar to the Jewish cemeteries in Warsaw and Kraków. At those places, however, there were attendants and guides. In Kraków, I worked my way around tour groups leaving written prayers at the graves of *tzaddiks*, wise men. I look around the cemetery, trying to see if any folded pieces of paper lay scattered around any particular grave, but I can't find them.

The Jewish cemeteries in Warsaw and Kraków felt like part of the community, however reduced by the Holocaust those communities might have been. In Oświęcim, though, the Jewish cemetery feels like a monument that existed before the event it commemorates, a graveyard that must be re-evaluated and reassigned meaning in the wake of what happened after it. It feels like yet another reminder of the necropolis, the city of the dead, that encroaches upon Oświęcim at all times, the triple fence of barbed wire that surrounds Auschwitz but keeps the city contained as well.

After the establishment of the State Museum, each country was invited to establish an exhibition in one of the former barracks of Auschwitz. They still exist, although all the exhibitions have changed over time, through Communist and post-Communist governments; the vast majority of them now tell similar stories, which I realize after walking through a half dozen of them: *we suffered; our Jews suffered; yes, it's true, some of us collaborated, but many of us resisted, too*.

Many of the exhibitions seem to reflect the general character of their countries. The Netherlands exhibit is clean, well-lit, and very informative; Italy's, in contrast, is nothing but a vortex of fabric,

stretching through several rooms, that offers wordless comment. France's, rededicated in January of 2005 during the ceremonies commemorating the 60th anniversary of the camp's liberation, is well-designed, though a little standoffish. The USSR's is closed for renovations.

Poland's is defensive. Often, it leaves Auschwitz entirely to bring up Poland's suffering during the war in general; it mentions the non-aggression pact between Germany and the USSR that divided the country between two sets of invaders in 1939, as well as the Katyn massacre of Polish soldiers and citizens by Soviet troops during the war, the existence of which was never fully admitted until after Poland elected a democratic government.

All this reminds me of the fact that Auschwitz, especially during the first twenty years of its existence as a memorial site, was essentially a site of Polish commemoration and martyrdom. Poland thought of itself as "Christ among the nations," a sacrificial lamb of Europe, and for a long time, Poles, not Jews, were the focus at the site. Tellingly, Birkenau was left mostly unvisited (and, to an extent, unprotected) for many years, and although the fact that Jews made up the vast majority of victims at Auschwitz was never denied, the exhibitions downplayed that fact, preferring instead to present the camp as a memorial to the victims of fascism—socialism's greatest enemy.

In 1967, dignitaries finally unveiled a long-awaited memorial at Birkenau, installed partially in response to mounting pressures from outside Poland, including a large number of Jewish visitors coming to see the sites of their families' destruction. And in 1968, the State Museum opened up an exhibit called "The Martyrology and Struggle of the Jews" in Barracks #27, where the carved inscription in a stone in the final room asked, "Cain, what have you done with your brother Abel?"

The stone is gone now—the exhibit was remodeled in 1978—but

the current Jewish exhibition, like the other national exhibitions, are rarely visited by tourists. Emerging from each one, I see tour groups walking past, on their way from the execution block to the reconstructed mass gallows. I suppose that their tour guide gives them the history; they don't need it presented, over and over again, from each country's point of view.

Auschwitz lets itself stand as a monument; apart from the black stone marker at the entrance to the rebuilt gas chamber and a redesigned cell door, incorporating a stylized lamp, at the site of Polish martyr Maximilian Kölbe's death, there is nothing that resembles a traditional monument—no obelisk, no commemorative plaque. Flowers pile up at the base of the black wall in the execution block and candles are lit within the gas chamber, but nothing at Auschwitz has a monument that negotiates its traumatic history. Sometimes, all you need to see in order to understand that people died in a gas chamber is a gas chamber.

Three: The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Gazing up into the sky, I wonder if the raindrop that just hit my arm is the first of many or only a suggestion of what may come in the next few hours. Nothing else follows it, so I keep walking. I would have kept walking anyway.

At this point, I have crossed through most of Oświęcim, into its industrial sector. Instead of passing by storefronts and restaurants (closed, of course), I'm now walking by factories and warehouses. The steel structures tower over the town and me, smokestacks filling the sky with white smoke. I wonder if any of these are from the synthetic rubber plant that drove the camp's expansion.

The I. G. Farben company chose to build a plant in Auschwitz because of the camp's supply of slave labor and the town's location on the rail system; in turn, the camp grew larger to meet the demand

from the factory, which led, in part, to Himmler's decision to centralize the killing process at the Birkenau camp.

Unlike at Auschwitz and Birkenau, I don't really know what I'm looking for here. I've never seen a picture of the monument at Monowitz and only know of its existence because I asked an attendant at Auschwitz a few days earlier. I assume I'll know it when I see it.

Among the ruins of Birkenau, there are a few more memorials, though not many: an obelisk for the Sinti and Roma, hidden behind the barbed wire of their assigned section of the camp; a small, white marker for French nationals who died in the camp, located in the women's camp; a larger, concrete memorial at the site of the mass grave of Soviet P.O.W.s, the first victims of the gas chambers in 1941, far beyond the camp's perimeter; and more of the black stone markers, at the sites where ashes were dumped into ponds or buried in fields, or at the locations at the edges of the camp where the first, temporary gas chambers stood.

And then there is the Monument to the Victims of Fascism, the 1967 monument. It stands between Kremas II and III, at the opposite end of the camp from the famous watchtower. One day, I find a group of Israeli soldiers laying a wreath not at the monument but near it, at the end of the railroad tracks that run alongside the selection ramp. As they go through the ceremony—there is music and speeches and military precision in their actions—the monument stands behind them, like the afterthought it essentially was.

Birkenau, unlike Auschwitz, has a number of monuments, but, like those at Auschwitz, they feel superfluous, unnecessary. At the edge of one of the ponds, I kneel down and pick at the ground, having heard a tour guide tell her group that all the white flecks around the pond were ashes, still there after sixty years. Looking at a piece of ash not much bigger than a grain of rice, I realize, horrified, that this bit of "ashes" is actually a chip of bone, the bone of someone

murdered sixty years ago in a crematorium not twenty feet from me, whose body was then burned in an oven and the ashes dumped into a stagnant pond.

With Birkenau itself refusing to hide its dead, with the bones of the murdered surfacing at the end of the tracks, what use is an abstract monument for those soldiers?

Looking down the road, I can see an intersection of some sort and a gas station, and I realize that I must be approaching the Monowitz site, if only for the reason that I'm shrinking the territory it could possibly be in. I press on and continue down the sidewalk, passing only a woman pushing a stroller while cars zoom along the road. I spot a green space, start angling toward it, and see something promising—a clearing, by the highway, with some sort of structure in it.

I'm still crossing the street when I make out the details, and understand that this must be the Monowitz monument. It's not a large monument, especially when compared to the sprawling Birkenau monument, but it's effective enough: rough concrete stacked to resemble the fence posts of the Auschwitz complex, with sharp angles of metal that call to mind barbed wire crossing them in three places. At the base of the posts, a tangle of tortured metal figures rests. A nearby plaque explains that this was the site of the Monowitz subcamp.

Beyond the official monument, other monuments stand: the factories of companies, many of whom used and profited from Monowitz's slave labor, who helped the camp toward its eventual size, who supplied Auschwitz with Zyklon B for the gas chambers, whose cremation experts traveled to the camp to witness executions and suggested methods to improve them. Many are in business still, although some have gone to certain lengths to acknowledge their guilt.

Dozens, hundreds even, of companies and corporations that, despite their regret or lack thereof, are still inextricably intertwined

with Auschwitz. They work in Oświęcim, but they cannot avoid the ghosts of those who, unwillingly, ran their machines and toiled in their workshops. Everything pushes to the top: the bricks, the memorials, the chips of bone working their way to the top after each rain, even sixty years later; nothing can be kept hidden.

Catholics go to confession, one of the bits of doctrine that differentiates us from Protestants. When I am cognizant of my sinfulness, I am supposed to make a confession to a priest, who will absolve me of my sin.

So here goes:I am a thief. When I held the bit of bone in my hand, I did not return it to the mud of the pond where it had been dumped six decades earlier; instead, I put it in my shirt pocket and walked away. I have stolen part of a murdered person's body—man or woman, child or adult, I do not know—all because I was attempting to understand what had happened at a certain place at a certain time, because I could not make meaning out of the monuments there. I stole to try to understand.

I walked around Birkenau with a bone in my pocket. I thought of saints' relics, bits of bone and cloth, enshrined in the altars of Catholic churches. I thought of the Israelis I'd seen, young Jews who'd come to their site of martyrdom, at the end of the railroad spur marking the end of the world. I thought of the eighth circle of Dante's Hell, where the thieves are placed, of how they lose their identities and forms there, the distinction between themselves and others gone in the afterlife because they could not make that distinction while alive.

I am not a Jew. I'm a tourist, not a traveler. The people I can understand here are not the Israeli soldiers, laying a wreath at the tracks' end; my people here are the Polish citizens, the bystanders, not the victims, the ones who saw their town transformed into the final des-

tination and forever marked as the end of the world, frozen like the bottom of Dante's inferno.

I put the bone back. A few hours later, I walked back to the ash pond and pressed the chip back into the earth, muddying my hand as I did so.

Four: Go Now in Peace

Two days after my walk across the town, I stand on the platform at the Oświęcim train station, waiting for the train to take me back to Kraków. I've eaten a final meal at the Centrum and thanked the staff as best as I could for their hospitality. I feel like I've seen everything I could see here, although I'm just as sure that I've missed something. I know this site as well as any bystander, anyone not directly connected with it, could.

I don't understand the language, but I know what has happened here.

I am, like the city, now inextricably linked with Auschwitz. And when, as he or she will doubtlessly in the next ten years, the last remaining first-hand witness of what took place here, victim, perpetrator, or bystander, dies, the task will fall to everything else—evidence, ruins, monuments, cities, historians, and even visitors like me—to recreate Auschwitz, to keep the fact of it rising to the surface, to keep it from disappearing into Oświęcim and the void of forgotten history.

The train arrives, idling on the track for a few minutes to let the few Kraków-bound travelers this morning board. I find an empty car and sit down on the cracked vinyl seat, open my copy of Dante to the final canto, where he emerges, "back to the lit world," and before long, the train sets off, and Oświęcim, Oświęcim slips away quickly.

CONTRIBUTORS

DILRUBA AHMED has appeared in or will soon appear in *Blackbird*, *Born Magazine*, *The Cream City Review, Drunken Boat,* and elsewhere. Her poems received first place for *The Florida Review's* 2006 Editors' Award, and honorable mentions for the 2005 James Hearst Poetry Prize and the 2006 *New Letters* Award.

SHERMAN ALEXIE is the author of many books of poetry and prose, including *Face*, a book of poems from Hanging Loose Press and *War Dances*, a book of short stories forthcoming from Grove Press.

CALEB BARBER earned a BA from Western Washington University in English/Creative Writing, and received an MFA in poetry from the Northwest Institute of Literary Arts, based off of Whidbey Island. He currently lives in Bellingham, WA, where he works at an aerospace machine shop. His poems have been most recently published in *Rattle, Portland Review, Los Angeles Review*, *Makeout Creek*, and *Forge*, as well as a feature in *Poet Lore*.

ONI BUCHANAN is the author of *Spring*, selected by Mark Doty for the 2007 National Poetry Series, and published by the University of Illinois Press in September 2008. Her first poetry book, *What Animal*, was published in 2003 by the University of Georgia Press. She is also a concert pianist, has released three solo piano CDs, and actively performs across the U.S. and abroad. She lives in Boston where she maintains a private piano teaching studio.

DANIEL COUDRIET lives with his wife and son in Richmond, Virginia, and in Carcarañá, Argentina. He is the author of *Say Sand*, forthcoming from Carnegie Mellon University Press in 2010. Poems from this collection, as well as from a manuscript-in-progress, have made recent appearances in *Verse*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Ploughshares*, *Fourteen Hills*, *Octopus*, *American Letters & Commentary*, and elsewhere. His

translations of the Argentinean poets Oliverio Girondo and Reynaldo Sietecase have appeared or are forthcoming in *American Poetry Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, and *Fascicle*, among others.

DARCY COURTEAU studied writing at Loyola University New Orleans and Arizona State University. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Night Train*, *Roanoke Review* and *The Wilson Quarterly*. She grew up on a farm in the Ozark Mountains of Arkansas.

JOSÍ MARÍA CUNDÍN was born in Getxo, Euskadi (Spain) in 1938. Esteemed as an outstanding advocate of the historical "Avant Garde" in his native Basque Country, his first one-man show was in Bogota, Colombia, where he lived during the '50s and created wide-ranging projects. Cundín's paintings and sculptures are in numerous private collections in Europe (including Spain, France, England, Germany and Belgium) and the Americas (the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil and Colombia), and his works hang in such institutions as Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao; ARTIUM, Contemporary Art Museum, Vitoria, Basque Country, Spain; Museo de Zea, Medellin, Colombia; New Orleans Museum of Art; and Johnson & Wales University. He has presented over 40 one-man exhibits and has participated in numerous collective shows. He now resides in Folsom, Louisiana, with his wife, Marion, at approximately 50 feet above sea level.

ADAM DAY received his MFA from New York University. His work has been nominated for a 2008 Pushcart Prize, included in *Best New Poets 2008*, and published in *American Poetry Review*, *Guernica*, *AGNI*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *The Iowa Review*, and elsewhere. He is the recipient of a Kentucky Arts Council grant (2008), and his chapbook, *Badger Speaks*, will be published by Destructible Heart Press (2009). He currently teaches workshops at the Carnegie Center, and co-coordinates both the Baltic Writers Residency in Latvia and the Sarabande Books Reading Series.

RACHEL DEWOSKIN is the author of *Foreign Babes in Beijing* (W.W. Norton, 2005), which has been published in six countries and is being developed as a feature film by Paramount Pictures. Her novel, *Repeat After Me*, is forthcoming this spring. She has published poems in magazines including *Ploughshares, Seneca Review, The New Delta Review, Nerve Magazine,* and the forthcoming *Helen Burns Poetry Anthology: New Voices from the Academy of American Poets*. She is a Poetry Editor at *Agni* Magazine, and an artist in residence at Teachers & Writers. She teaches creative writing at New York University.

ASTRID DUFFY is originally from England but now lives and writes in Houston. She holds an MFA from the University of Arizona, where she was a Beverly Rogers Fellow and was awarded an Arthur Miller Scholarship by the University of East Anglia. Her fiction has appeared in *Passages North* and *Fuselit*, and is forthcoming in *The Los Angeles Review*. She is finishing a collection of stories set in and around Beijing.

HAINES EASON has poems in *Shenandoah*, *Barrow Street*, *Indiana Review*, and other journals. He is an Associate Editor with *Boulevard* and attends Washington University in St. Louis.

ANDREW ERKKILA currently resides in Jersey City and is a graduate student of English at New York University. "A Kind of Flight" was first conceived during a game of dodgeball at the YMCA in Biloxi, Mississippi.

JOHN ESTES teaches at the University of Missouri and lives with his family in Columbia. Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI, West Branch, Ninth Letter, LIT, Ecopoetics, Tin House* and other places. He is author of two chapbooks: *Swerve* won a 2008 National Chapbook Fellowship from the Poetry Society of America, and *Breakfast with Blake at the Laocoön* is available from Finishing Line Press.

MIRANDA FIELD's first book, *Swallow*, won a Katherine Bakeless Nason Literary Publication Award. Her work has appeared in several anthologies, and has received a Discovery/The Nation Award and a Pushcart Prize. She was born and raised in London, UK, and currently teaches poetry at the New School and New York University. She lives in New York City with poet Tom Thompson and their two children.

PIOTR FLORCZYK is the editor and translator of *Been and Gone: Poems of Julian Kornhauser* (with foreword by Adam Zagajewski), out from Marick Press, as well as co-editor of the special issue of *An Sionnach* dedicated to the work of the Irish poet, Ciaran Carson (Creighton University Press).

ALLISON FUNK has published three books of poems: *The Knot Garden* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2002)*; Living at the Epicenter* (Northeastern University Press, 1995)*;* and *Forms of Conversion* (Alice James Books, 1986). She is Professor of English at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, where she is also an editor of *Sou'wester Magazine*.

TESS GALLAGHER's selected stories, *The Man from Kinvara,* for which her poem in this issue is the epigraph, will be published by Graywolf Press in September, 2009. *Dear Ghosts,* is her most recent collection of poems. She published *Barnacle Soup: Stories from the West of Ireland*, a collaboration with Josie Gray, in 2008. She is working on her *New & Selected Poems* in her cottage in Ballindoon, Ireland and at Sky House in the Pacific Northwest.

TERRANCE HAYES's most recent collection of poems is *Wind in A Box* (Penguin 2006). Honors include a Whiting Writers Award and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. *Lighthead*, his fourth collection of poems, will be published with Penguin in the Spring of 2010.

MAJOR JACKSON is the author of *Hoops* (Norton, 2006) and *Leaving Saturn* (University of Georgia, 2002). His third volume of poetry, *Holding Company,* is forthcoming from W.W. Norton. He is the Richard Dennis Green and Gold Professor at University of Vermont and a core faculty member of the Bennington Writing Seminars. He serves as the Poetry Editor of the *Harvard Review*.

CASEY KAIT is the coauthor of *Digital Hustlers: Living Large and Falling Hard in Silicon Alley* (HarperCollins). She received her MFA in Fiction from the New School, where she was selected as a Len Riggio Writing and Democracy Teaching Fellow. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Cadillac Cicatrix*, *Lullwater Review*, *Rambler*, *Willow Review*, and *The Yalobusha Review.* She lives in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, with her husband and daughter

STACY KIDD is Poetry Editor for *Quarterly West* and a Teaching Fellow in the Ph.D. Creative Writing Program at the University of Utah. Her poems have appeared recently in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *The Journal, No Tell Motel*, *Washington Square,* and *WITNESS*, among others.

JOANNA KLINK is the author of *They Are Sleeping* (University of Georgia Press, 2000) and *Circadian* (Penguin, 2007). She is teaching at Harvard University.

ELIZABETH LANGEMAK lives in Columbia, Missouri.

JENNIFER MALESICH grew up on a cattle ranch in southwestern Montana. Her work has appeared in *Fourteen Hills, Oxford American, West Branch* and *Rattle*. She received her MFA from the University of Mississippi where she was a John and Renee Grisham Fellow in Poetry.

ANDREW MCCARRON is a poet born and raised in the Hudson River Valley of New York State. The inspiration for his work continues to draw from the Hudson River, Catskill Mountains, and a small hamlet called Annandale-on-Hudson in northern Dutchess County. Poems of his have appeared in the *Hudson Review, Colorado Review, Southwest Review, Evergreen Review, Harvard Divinity Bulletin,* and *Hanging Loose Magazine.* His first collection of poems, *Mysterium,* is slated to be published by Edgewise Press in 2009.

SHANE MCCRAE went to school at the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and Harvard Law. His poems have appeared, or are forthcoming, in *The American Poetry Review*, *Agni*, *Octopus*, *The Kenyon Review Online*, *Colorado Review* and others, and his first chapbook, *One Neither One*, was published in February by Octopus Books. He lives in Iowa City.

RAYMOND MCDANIEL is the author of *Murder* and *Saltwater Empire*, both from Coffee House Press. These poems are from the forthcoming *Special Powers and Abilities*, a book about the Legion of Super-Heroes, the longest-running serial narrative of all time.

BRIAN MCMILLAN´S poetry and fiction have been published or are forthcoming in *The Arsenic Lobster, The Aurorean, and Takahe.* He lives with his wife and two sons in Michigan, where he is finishing a memoir about his search for a homeless man. Contact him at brian@mcmconsult.com.

PAUL MERCHANT has directed the William Stafford Archives for the last ten years, and is their archivist in their new home at Lewis & Clark College. A native of Wales. he taught for fifteen years at Warwick University before taking up residence in Portland in 1989. His fourth collection of poems, *Some Business of Affinity*, was a finalist

at last year's Oregon Book Awards. His third volume of translations from modern Greek, *Monochords* by Yannis Ritsos, was published last year by Trask House Press.

MARY MOLINARY presently administers, coordinates, and teaches at the Memphis College of Art in Memphis, Tennessee. The poems appearing here are from her manuscript *What it Means to Walk Upright*.

MATTHEW NIENOW is the author of *Two Sides of the Same Thing*, winner the 2007 Copperdome Chapbook Award. Other new work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in several magazines, including *American Literary Review*, *Nimrod*, *Pebble Lake Review*, *Poet Lore* and *Best New Poets 2007*. You can read more of his work online at matthewnienow.com.

PETER OBOURN lives in upstate New York. His short fiction and poetry has been published in several literary journals. He is currently completing his first novel.

ERIC PANKEY is the author of eight collections of poetry, most recently *The Pear as One Example: New and Selected Poems 1984-2008*. He is the Heritage Chair in Writing at George Mason University.

CARL PHILLIPS is the author of ten books of poetry, most recently *Speak Low*. He teaches at Washington University in St. Louis.

GLEN POURCIAU´S short-story collection, *Invite*, won the 2008 Iowa Short Fiction Award and was published by the University of Iowa Press. His stories have been published in *The Paris Review*, *New England Review*, *Ontario Review*, *New Orleans Review*, and other magazines.

MARTIN POUSSON was born and raised in Acadiana, in Louisiana bayouland. His first novel, *No Place, Louisiana*, was a finalist for the John Gardner Book Award in Fiction, and his first collection of poetry, *Sugar*, was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award. His stories and

poems have appeared in *Epoch, Icon, Parnassus, Cimarron Review,* and *The Louisiana Review*. He currently lives in Los Angeles and teaches at California State University, Northridge.

COLIN RAFFERTY lives in Fredericksburg, Virginia, where he teaches nonfiction writing at the University of Mary Washington. He's grateful to George Wolfe at the University of Alabama for sponsoring the Wolfe Travel Grant, which made possible the three weeks of travel in Poland and Germany that resulted in the writing of "The End of the World."

STEPHANIE REENTS received her B.A. from Amherst College, and a second B.A. from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. She has an MFA from the University of Arizona, and her short stories have been published in *Epoch, StoryQuarterly, Gulf Coast, Pleiades, Denver Quarterly,* and *O. Henry Prize Stories 2006* among other places. She was a Stegner Fellow in Fiction at Stanford University in 2002-2004, and was recently a scholar at Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. She is currently finishing a novel set in Oxford about severed limbs and disappearing gargoyles.

ANDRÉS SANABRIA was born in Colombia in 1982. He is currently enrolled in the MFA program at Indiana University where he is working on a collection of short stories set in the Colombian Andes. This is his first publication.

ROSALYNDE VAS DIAS lives in Providence, Rhode Island. Her poems have most recently appeared in *The Cincinnati Review* and *Crazyhorse*. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Warren Wilson College's Low Residency Program for Writers.

JON WOODWARD´S second book of poems, *Rain*, was published in 2006 by Wave Books. He currently lives and works in the Boston area. Find more information at jonwoodward.net.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The *New Orleans Review* is made possible thanks to the support of the Department of English, and the College of Humanities & Natural Sciences, at Loyola University New Orleans, our subscribers, and our patrons who include:

Shannon Cain
Grace Clerihew
Douglas Ebbitt
Brian Fitzgerald
Frank Groves, Jr.
Juli Henshaw
Carey Herman
Peter Hodgson
Mary Ramke
Ashley Schaffer
Theresa Sherrod
Sophia Stone