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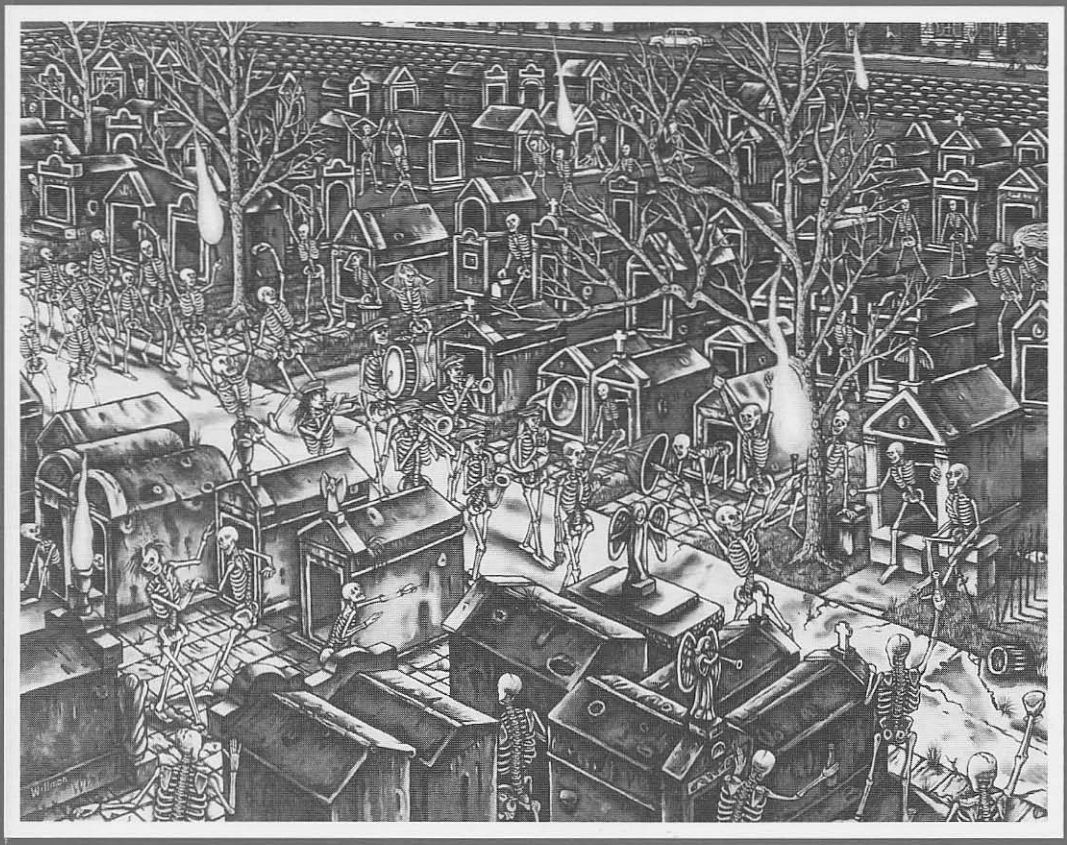

A Gallery of New Orleans Poets

plus Stories by

Sabine Hilding, Kris Lackey, John Tait

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New Orleans Review

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NEW ORLEANS

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Back Cover: "Triumph of Death on Royal Street," by Robert Willmon. Oil on Canvas. 16 x 20 inches.
Page 12: untitled photograph by Chuck Stern.

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Sabine Hilding

The Woman Who Wanted to be Gary Oldman

Well, don't we all need to be somebody else in order to get on with life?

I've been Gary Oldman since the end of September. He's a great comfort. Whenever things get very hopeless, I can snicker ironically. When life is too bleak, I remember that impoverished characters are really sympathetic, everybody has some good despite the bad, "Nothing a lot of love and a good cuddle wouldn't cure." He said that once in some interview about this thug delinquent character he was playing in *State Of Grace.* Well, who isn't attracted to the idea of a good cuddle?

I went to the movies and saw this actor last fall and I said to myself, "That's who I want to be, that's who I should have been all my life." He was in the process of gunning down a whole bunch of people, while listening to classical music on his earphones. Late as usual I'd walked into the middle of a scene, and he turns to the camera and says, "You have no idea what suffering is until you do it to Beethoven."

That's when it started. That's when I began renting videos and catching up on who I'd set out to be.

He was in *Murder in the First* playing a ruthless prison warden and there was this article in *Entertainment Magazine* where the director tells an anecdote about how Oldman's character beat up the star character, even after the director yelled, "Cut!" The director told the interviewer, "Gary kept right on, sometimes Gary gets too carried away, I had to run down into the sound stage and physically stop him."

I find that charming. Your actions getting away from your superego, wandering away like that in the safety of a movie set. Of course, Gary implied the story was apocryphal. "Any actor who says they become the character they're playing is bullshitting you," he said to the same interviewer.

The other day I was in the check-out at Target and I kept moving to the back of the line even though the kids were bored and munching on that awful candy they have, but I was in the middle of this *Esquire* article and it was like I couldn't help myself. It was about his second wife, Uma Thurman, and how she said their marriage was "a mistake,"— naive bitch, I thought— how, "He was my first, you know, love," she also said, and he was said to have commented, "She's an angel. You ever try to live with an angel?"

Oh! I confronted the children. "Quit eating that awful stuff until we pay for it!" They were wide-eyed and giggling over a *National Enquirer* article on

aliens from outer space. I could hardly fault their reading.

The truth is that this temporary glazing over at the check-out is just the tip of the iceberg, the gullet to the stomach, the narrow cave entrance to the vaulted ceiling where is located the permanent movie screen featuring my inner life.

Now, today, I've been playing someone else in my mind for years now.

I mean, I know about sex and death, love and loss, serious choices, irony, boredom. I've had a life. Though I must say my own experiences in memory are a lot more forgotten than the colorful stuff I'm able to imagine about Gary.

I was thinking about how secretly being Gary Oldman enriches my life, how fearless he is, how he conquers fear. "I can eat a big dinner before going on, kidney pie, steak, the whole works. I've seen actors actually throwing up with fright before a performance, them with their apples and cheese. I don't have that problem." That just thrills me, considering that the last time I had to give a presentation on the School Garden Science Project to the PTA, I threw up in the Lincoln Grade School girls' room in one of those perpetually flushing small girls' toilets on my way to the meeting.

I wonder how Gary would do it, how stay sane, proper, polite. How much insanity does he permit himself on the job? Those actors, they can allow themselves a certain amount of insanity, part of it.... But didn't he work at menial jobs before he made it? Didn't he have to clock in once, toe the line? He told an interviewer in *People,* "Yeah I've done everything, been a waiter, worked in a sporting goods shop, sold shoes, even worked in an abattoirs cutting off pigs' heads."

Well, I've never worked in an abattoirs. But I do have this part-time phone job, taking clothes orders for Marshall's Catalog Outfitters, so I can be there for the kids after school.

Whenever I get bleary taking orders, I become more Oldmanesque, young, poor, with dreams, worked selling shoes in the daytime, acting at night, only it didn't last of course as long as mine has, and he was, what? Nineteen? Graduated from Rose Buford School of Dramatics at twenty-one? And, I'm now, what? Twice that, whatever, which doesn't negate it of course, but don't mistake it for real life. Like that sex on e-mail thing. You shouldn't get all that excited. I know some who have, though. A friend of mine has a sister who had e-mail sex with a man she never met. And her husband was jealous! And she went back to him. From where, whom, and what, exactly, I'd like to know? Her fantasies? You couldn't get me to give up any part of my fantasies.

Anyhow, I flit through the halls at Marshall's, I work the graveyard at Marshall's— minimum wage, no benefits— taking orders from people up East,

see, because I'm far West. They're out of bed at six, having breakfast, and getting their telephone shopping over with while it's the middle of the night for us. You'd be surprised what kind of a hum occurs in that flat concrete building that's Marshall's Telephone Headquarters. At three AM, the parking lot's full of used cars.

I don't flit a lot. You can't. Not with the fifteen minutes they give you on break. But I flit with feeling, for myself more than anybody. I flit alone, bop up and down, in the back warehouse past the cardboard boxes on the way to where they have lockers for locking our sterilized headphones, or to the Ladies. It's not easy looking at yourself in that pale bathroom mirror, bags under your eyes, that amphetamine laced office coffee taste still in your mouth, and even remotely worry about what you've got between your legs.

Like I say, you flit for yourself. You feel for yourself. Makes the time go by.

And I answer the phones for myself too. My voice is as sexy as it can get. "Welcome to Marshall's By Mail, my name is Maria, may I help you place an order?" My name is not *really* Maria, but Maria inspires confidence.

Marshall's has praise letters posted on the bulletin board underneath the new sales prices Xeroxes. We have to read those— the Xeroxes— daily. One reads, "I was so happy with my new blue Marshall's nightgown that I got On Special only because Maria pointed it out to me. As long as there are people like Maria working for you, I will be calling Marshall's whenever I need bedclothes, sporting goods or household items. Some of those other mail-order places they're short and mean and they don't help you at all. But Maria made me feel special. Thank you Marshall's. Keep up the good work. Sincerely, Mrs. Farragut Jackson, #6 Roselane Court, Dothan, Alabama." I pass it every time I go to the Floor Lead's Desk for my weekly paycheck, and sometimes, when the board gets too crowded, I will detach the letter and pin it on the edge.

It's the sexy remoteness I put in my voice, like when Gary played the Reverend Dimmesdale in *The Scarlet Letter*. "May I be of some assistance? I'd be happy to go to the Products Room and check out the material on that faux camel hair jacket for you...."

My husband, he's had this home office now for four years. Ever since he got laid off from his company. So, if I work the early shift, he can get the kids off to school. He just forgets to make them brush their teeth. My girl's breath positively stank the other day— those are the trade-offs. He's on the phone already in the morning when they get up. His room's door's closed. He comes out just long enough to hand them each a dollar for lunch and he doesn't focus on them beyond that. They could leave in any old condition. Which is why I'm a part-timer. I get home about two, maybe I've made a few groceries on the way, and fall into bed for a mid-day nap. Then I make after-school snacks, take the kids to ball practice, and then dinner— sometimes he's home, sometimes

he's out on jobs— wash the dishes, help with homework, and early to bed because I get up at one a.m.

The other night, I dreamed of Gary Oldman in *State of Grace.* He's a punk in that, but a warm punk, who's loyal and lovable despite the fact he mows down a restaurant full of thugs. That little come-hither motion before he hugs his old friend. "C'm 'ere...," he says. Are there people on earth who really do that? I can't think who ever made such motions to me before hugging.

Mrs. Arneaux in Salinas, California orders 1,400 dollars worth of casual clothing. After her final polyester wool blend suit ideal-for-travel she's ordered for him in size extra large, she says, "We'll, he'll like it. He's a good man, easy to please. We've been fighting the cancer for a year now; this jacket is for a cruise, we'll be taking a cruise in fall." She speaks with a continental accent— French?— I imagine her small, she orders size small for herself. Her large, cancerous husband, easy to please at home— when he got there— at sixty-five or sixty-sixish, now dying of some kind of lingering cancer, though he's still fat enough to need extra large. Don't cancer treatments slim you down; don't you get skinny as a rail in the end? They still have time for one last cruise.

I guess he's kept her all that time. I wonder if she ever had to get up at one. Well, she's had a rich life for sure, but she's never had Gary Oldman. Sure she spent the money, made house, raised the children— they had to have been a boy and a girl— occupied herself with a myriad of unseen details. Some years she expressed herself in the garden, other years it was the living room rugs, the china, slip covers, curtains, outfitting the bathrooms, dressing the beds, dressing the children, dressing herself, and him, ordering, buying, assessing, getting bargains. Which made her feel competent. I can't fault her for that. Bargains make me feel competent too, 'cause here I am spending and saving.

But, I wonder if Mrs. Arneaux ever put herself out there the way Gary does every day. When he was making *Romeo is Bleeding,* and that woman is choking him with a chain from the back seat of the car, he did his own stunts, and he came into his trailer that was draped with extras and people who liked to joke with him and eat his food while he was on this Hollywood set shooting this scene, well he came in with this awful red mark around his neck, and there was the set doctor and he asked him if it could do permanent damage being choked like that, and the set doctor said, "Probably," and Gary nodded and said, "Oh, really?" and went right back out there, and did the scene over again.


I need
to end
this
but I have
no arms.
cicada

A Gallery of New Orleans Poets

New Orleans Review is pleased to present the following selection of one poem each from a large number of poets working in or hailing from New Orleans. We intend it as a gallery show, a sample of who is writing what, here and now, a cross-section of a poetic community of alluring diversity and depth.

Here then is our group portrait, an extended snapshot, of poetry in America's most complex and least reasonable city.

Louis Gallo

The Truth Changes

Notice the subtle edges
when Truth, once a dog
or tree or someone's tooth,
pauses, flickers out, sputters,
and you're thrust onto the sands
of some new place,
your own benumbed Columbus.
Years pass;
you sway religiously
in the old arc
like a rusted metronome--
entire decades lost,
faces blurred, money
igniting in your pocket.
Then Truth flares anew,
young and sexy, nudges you on,
hums like death.

Robert Menuet

At Cumae

Doctor, cut round
the neck; fold the
head back on its spine,
shine your torch to peer
inside the breast. What's
this? No lights, no liver,
no poems, no pluck.

The bells for vespers
sound; quick, unhinge
him, bring the head
to chapel; the priest
will make it sing.

Father, put it on the altar,
open wide its eyes, wipe them
with linen dipped with
unction. The words
you speak will make
a man. The oracle will sing
by matins. Look, inside
the mouth, is that a coin?
No, a piece of meat.
How many dreams
dreamt he? See the tip:
more than tongue
could tell.

Martha McFerren

Ten Weeks Without Underwear

Ankle cracked open,
tibia and fibula
both broken on the slant
like French-cut green beans,
which means no French-cut panties
or any sort of panties
for two and a half months
and I'm not used to
all this air.

It's like Jimmy Stewart
in his wheelchair
and two casts
spying on the
bleached and guilty Raymond Burr.
A whole new meaning
for "Rear Window."

Fifteen years ago
at this big shindig
for some ambassador
I'm staggering down the hall
looking for a potty
when a particular hand
comes out of some boudoir
and Jane Finch whispers,
"Martha, please, I am
just so drunk.
Tell this niiiice Hungarian
why Southern girls
sleep in their panties."

Now I know why.
It's because
their legs aren't broken.

Catherine Savage Brosman

Lunch with Pierre

For K.

Saturday evening, while friends were dining
at my place, he called from Baton Rouge
and asked me to lunch the following day
at Commander's Palace, with a famous philosopher
here from France. Typical Pierre--
less than twenty-four hours, and most

of my good fall clothes at the cleaner's.
I managed to get there for noon.
We drank for an hour or so, ate gumbo and salad,
then soft-shell crabs, followed by pecan pie
(in which the famous philosopher
was visibly pleased, while musing aloud

on the aporias of the referent). Later,
we stepped outside to take photos by the tombs,
under an arcadian oak, thrice centenary.
The day was perfect, leafily reflective; all
my sylvan sensibility stirred among
the fluid branches, dancing in their veils

of Spanish moss and resurrection vine. Finally,
after four hours, I left, having a thing
or so still pending. No need to eat
again, of course. Errands run, I cleaned up
from my own entertainments, read, went
to bed. Around 5, I awoke to the sound

of a streetcar sliding along the strings
of the neutral ground, and a Pied Piper flute
in the street, calling the city
out of its dreams with the notes of Poulenc
and Ravel. When Pierre had said, practicing
confession, that New Orleans was at best

miasma and decay, the old philosopher
had nodded over his pie. But the air was resiny,
the cemetery trees dryadic; and some wisdom
must be tasted in this cocktail of desire
and in singing before death, the masks
hieratic in their harmonies, the music pure.

Peter Cooley

For Ozma of Oz

When I will have descended lower
than this afternoon, even, nothing

to light the day, down in myself
where I have fallen as I write this,

I will stand then, on another afternoon
blacker in early spring, that rain

between me and the green in all things
outside me which is my correspondence,

and touch again the text enchanting myself,
discovering as I did at seven an antidote

to a darkness never lifting in my memory except minutes.
On the last page in which Dorothy says goodbye

forever, decreeing there will be no more books
because in the invisible country she and her friends

depart for, they will not be living, I found myself
a resting place when the world burned too much

in ice or fire, those extremes the polar soul
swings between, and knew by letter

the universe of print, received and welcomed
by Aunt Em and Uncle Henry as if I were their son,

companion of Dorothy as she roamed the volumes,
knowing our home would wait for us in Kansas.

This is the first book by which I found salvation.
After this: every book sacred if I made it.

Joseph LaCour

Omnibus

I'm reading and I'm noticing how fast the ride seems to be going
how rapidly the stations are going by

when at Brunoy
we don't start up again.
Two or three times the door alarm beeps,
then the engineer announces
"Ladies and gentlemen,
please do not interfere with the closing of the doors."

Like a bride who feels her train catch on something,
he tries again, but the doors do not close.
A drunk or a kid somewhere has stuck a bottle or his foot in
to hold us up.

Silence. Then we are off again.

Just past Brunoy I can see a park below,
with rows of trees where the light falls.

Boussy Saint-Antoine,
with its Speedy muffler and tire service.

Combs-la-Ville—Quincy
streetlights beyond the trucks planted a little above grade,
then darkness beyond.
Truck depots— Garonor—
then the dropping sixth of the engineer's salute.

Lieusaint-Moissy,
level with the tracks, whose level
is a compromise, always,
between that of any station and the next.

My own face and my pencil reflected in the window
along with empty seats.

I am in a square of light moving through
quiet noisy places:
Savigny-le-Temple— Nandy,
ugly and temporary as its own light.

Ahead is Cesson,
and I am nearing home
planned woods full of wild daffodils trucks dust
with their soot.

The electric train's only soot is the light
and the tritium in our children's bones.

Le Mée, its children answering in chorus, "Yes!"

Melun. We are home.
This little boy so beautiful
two of us have all we can do to love him.

Lisa Lynn Kotnik

A Song of Disguise

I am only half-dressed as it should be.
I wear my hair past my breasts
so as not to expose peachy colored nipples
that trip sunshine off the rocks where I sit.
I am looking in the mirror at myself,
at my lover who lies in the sand
half-dead from contamination.

He has swallowed water
and bits of sharp jagged white shell
are caught in his gray locks.
He is spitting up granules of wet sand
as if sand could be dry in the mouth.
I am fixing my hair
combing the glitter from my eyes
transfixing a glaze upon his spit.
I am lying half-naked on a rock
then roll to his side to push his stomach.

Spit all of it out old man,
spit all of that death into my lap
and I will turn the jaundice of your skin back to fire.
For now I have forgiven myself for luring him,
forgiven myself that he could not cling to my scales,
forgiven myself for pretending that he is the only sailor I still sing to.
For now my voice only howls that his voice
not sink into my lap and never be heard again.

Alex Rawls

Big Band Machine

Johnny beamed, playing "mommy-daddys"
    with pencils on his desk
making goo goo eyes at a Buddy Rich
    already aswing and asweat
his cavebrow shielding cocaine eyes
unaccustomed to that damned light
New (for him) Beatle hair
swoops over his expanding forehead
the Jackson Pollock polyester shirt hides a waistline
    growing like alimony payments
After a little karate talk
a few thrusts
a broken board
Buddy leads Doc Severinsen
and the Tonight Show Band in
...something... and to my young ears
it sounded like a trap
twenty musicians chewing their cuds
reading their charts
deaf to Buddy's VietVet-like
rick

tick

tock

... and they were dead as veins no one has— like suspension bridge supports— throb in his neck and temples He's one 8x10 of an ex-wife away from throwing his sticks at Ed's fool fuckin' head and playing with his fists smashing them through the skins up to his biceps shredding fuckin' Slingerlands— can't even make a decent snare- - ply by ply reducing them to wood pulp The lugnuts, bolts, fitting and hardware he grabs by the handful and for three minutes or more, it seems he shrapnel-like carpet bombs the audience 17 killed 17 killed 17 killed 20 more injured 20 more injured 20 more injured 2 2 2 in intensive care

Johnny beams.
plays another paradiddle on his desk
Buddy Rich
everybody
Givein a hand

William S. Maddox

JEREMIAH

He insisted he was born on the 31st of June.
He sat in the tavern at a booth by the window
Raving about how that wasn't the moon,
That was God's porch light.
He told the same stories over and over
But like Leaves of Grass, they changed a little
With every telling.
His heritage varied with the seasons.
In the summer he was descended from a Creek squaw
And a Scotch-Irish farmer.
But by the fall his grandmother had become a Russian Jew
And her husband a French fisherman.
He was all lies, that man, and when we buried him
We put on his tombstone the inscription
WE THINK HE'S DEAD.

Randolph Bates

AFTERNOON

Another Sunday, sounds
up from the street, the river,
citronella, salt on our lips,
haze moving past the window

toward a girl in blue autumn,
the scent of her hair,
a fur collar
she held under her face.

We are sleeping.
The wax hardens.
My hand moves a shadow
to hold you.

Joy Lahey

Pine Straw

I know only this:
He was in the garden

But no more sinking
Into inwardness
No smug content with the present

"She effaced herself a trifle
more than usual
and when I looked around
she was no longer there"

A priest came to meet
The mourners

Voyeurism filled with the empty pages
From April to June

Nothing

Then yellow berries cascaded
From Texas to Arkansas

From beginning
To end

Change was set in print

Susan Barker Adamo

Crisis Care

You say the same false phrases when I ask you
how you are. Your head and eyes don't match:
Your fingers glow like candles in your lap.
I wonder if you spent the night outside
hoping not to hear their threats
their placating discussions.
You want to calm me down, to calm the whole world down.
You think, I know, of school ahead
escape into hard work, a future, an apartment
and American food. You hold onto this view,
I nod as though I'm not preoccupied.
My inexperience as a person shows.
In this moment that isn't mine
I have a sense of my own needs.
I watch people passing through, leaving
their behavior, and I trace it with my nails
leaving questions like charcoal
etched around their doubts.
You see, you have fallen into my cage.
I am not sure what to do
so I hold you here by the keeper's door
waiting.

Marcus Smith

Eating Vulture

Oh, horrible vulturism of earth from which not the mightiest whale is free.

Moby-Dick

Once you've got it, plucked and cleaned, use any reliable recipe for large bird.

Here's one:

1 lb. fresh imported sauerkraut
1 ancient apple, peeled, cored & quartered
1 white onion embedded with 5 cloves or 6
1 freshly pulled mandrake
1 four-to-five pound vulture--remove its head.
Dash of salt, freshly ground pepper
1/2 cup clear drippings from the pig

1. Preheat oven to 2700∞.

2. Combine sauerkraut, apple, onion, etc. Stuff vulture. Pray if you wish. Close cavity with a clean flat stone. Put bird on rack in roasting pan. Anoint breast with pig drippings. Roast one hour, or until well done.

(Ah, but you ask, how do you get a fresh vulture? There's the rub. Well, you lie down, dying, on a rock in the sun— just like they do in the movies.

You lie there until you start to stink. Keep absolutely still. Don't open your eyes. Wait eight days.

Don't move.

You will feel the hot air move and a sort of clack as the first one lands.

Stay still!

It will watch you carefully to make sure you are dead.
An hour or two. Days. Then it will go for the loin in
your back.

When you feel its beak, make your move—)

3. Serves several.

(Easter 1991)

Malaika King Albrecht

What He Said

New here, right? Moving too quick
for a regular. Jerking beer
to your mouth and staring.

You want to meet locals,
get the flavor? I'll tell you
a flavor--a red fire ball,

and if you keep sucking,
it's no longer hot. It's sweet,
and you like it.

Doesn't matter what my name is.
Names are a way to call you
you and me, someone else.

Live here long enough,
you'll step over someone bleeding
on Bourbon Street, and think

what drink you'll order at the bar.
Got you. You're looking
at the quarters in my ears.

Could say I always have change
for the phone, but I don't call no one.
These quarters tune me

into my inner voices, like antennas,
which makes me crazy.
That doesn't mean I'm insane.

You're fighting it. Your heart
won't stop, and the body'll
take over.

Ken French

Transylvania Prison Farm

Uncle Man took birth control pills
To stop the bleeding in his stomach.
A diagnosed hypochondriac
Weighing 87 pounds.

In fading letters
Written across his tattooed chest
The Second Man In Louisiana to have Open Heart Surgery.

Marty
His third child
His only son
Died at 6 months.
His blood and her blood mixed.
A water-head baby.

Producing the most productive vegetable garden in East Carroll Parish
every season kept Aunt Doll sane.
The overripe tomatoes were given to the prisoners across the highway.
She willed away every bug, every insect, every harmful worm out of her
vegetable garden.
She willed away most everything.

On those long summer nights when I was theirs
I could hear them whisper
Uncle Man
Aunt Doll
He's not like the other nephews that come to visit.
They chase wild country kittens
Ride ponies with no saddles
Get stung by yellow bumble bees
Get sunburned
Do boy things.

Staying in the house
Close to the kitchen
Near the homemade jelly in fruit jars
Hanging on Aunt Doll's apron strings
I would count the days until I could leave
I would wait to hear the Transylvania Prison Farm whistle blow
I would watch Uncle Man take birth control pills
To stop the bleeding in his heart.

Faithfully,

Kena Marie Presley

James Nolan

Impossible Cases

Anonymous as the skull-white altar.
As separate votive tongues
pulsing a fugue in unison
in the darkness.

As hands clasped
together next to mine. As sin—
or whatever they call this whiff
of mortality, like meat
starting to go bad.

Anonymous
as prayers I stumble through, prompted
by the lady next to me who doesn't know
why I am here— and I no better about her—
but we're related

because death,
anonymous as dirt, gets all over
everything. And because I am I
and another unnamed animal dying
I come to you,

St. Jude,
stop to search for a crack
in the rock where your anchor
catches, but am not entirely taken in,
see the seams

of this holy show: wheezing,
a sexton stacks crates of dollar-candles,
a mother shushes her shrill child,
hoisting him to touch the plaster hem
then hurrying out.

Which he'll forget--
if he's lucky— or will it all come back
in fifty years in the grim hotel room
God-knows-where, the bearded saint
afloat a sea of candles?

Already,
anonymously, he has joined us
kneeling: His quarter rocks
in the offering box

as the anchor drops.

Camille Martin

STONEFLESHING

(after Laura Riding)

A wall is that stonefleshing
It quivers and does not know
When not turning it is not happening
When happening it is not turning
When turning it is not happening
Between the sun and mind
Quiets the body of separation
Which delights all memories
Of passing eyes and moments and places
Quick from the anything of speech
The world sung hum of the radio
Holds its air
And the blue wind is heard to commingle
While the seas wash

It loves and does not breathe
When the loving is written
There is only other
Every thing encounters like a dream
Till a bird like death crumbles in the water

Bill Lavender

Useful Information

USEFUL INFORMATION
FOR
BUSINESS MEN
MECHANICS AND ENGINEERS
printed out of pittsburgh in 1940
943 pages saddle stitched
in leather
two and an eighth by
three and three eighths inches
and
one inch thick
the edges of the tissue-thin pages
painted gold, the corners rounded,
he left
three copies in mint condition
buried in the clutter of the
"office"
in the spare bedroom
which his wife and three daughters
had then to sort through
salvaging from the yard sale
these three small items
thinking that
I might want them
they are unmarked
except
on page 741 of one copy
he has appended in pencil the table of
WEIGHT AND SPECIFIC GRAVITY
OF VARIOUS MATERIALS
which albeit encompassing
ANTIMONY, CAST
ASPHALTUM
BASALT

GRANITE, GRAY
GUNPOWDER, COURSE
SNOW, FRESH-FALLEN
&
WAX, BEES
made no mention of
wood
which he noted at
30 (Lb./Cu. Ft.) — .40 to .50
there are no other marks
neither the
TABLE OF RADII, ORDINATES,
DEFLECTIONS, ETC.
nor
NATURAL TANGENTS
nor the
DIFFERENCE IN LONGITUDE EXPRESSED IN TIME
BETWEEN WASHINGTON D.C. AND OTHER CITIES
were marred
nor is there one page
in the three volumes
that has been creased or folded back
or so my preliminary inspection
leads me to believe
fanning quickly through the pages
odor of must
unmistakable

March, 1995
in memoriam Al Lentz

Rodger Kamenetz

My Poem-in-Law

My third cousin, twice removed, owes me a thousand.
He lives in the caves of doubt, he phones me late
in code. "Mountains of wind," he cries and click.
"Grains of doubt." Leaves me to uncode,
cold, looking for my damn slippers. Rocks
in the mail, carefully packaged, stamps from
Mysore, and lines from Irving Layton.
"Poems-in-law!" he hisses into the receiver,
which travels through a forest of voices
on its way to my ear. I hang up, I interpret.
My cousin has paid me back a thousand times.
Irving, I say, get a job. Send me five
a week, there are enough days. He bows
seven times and bites my neck. "Do I owe
you?" That's "Am I my brother's keeper?"
multiplied into debt, doubt. "Do I owe you
when the wind is free and rocks cost
nothing to mail? I've paid you back
within an inch of my life and you talk about
money. If you were really a poet you'd be
skimming gold from molten lead, your hair
singed, your eyebrows on fire.
You'd lick the bottom of the vat, you'd swim
in honey. You wouldn't worry about money orders.
Angels would call you collect. And the grand muse
with mechanical wings would creak overhead
blasting poems into your hair. Instead
all you've got is me, Irving, your poem-in-law.
Think I'm going to stop? No. I owe you.
Try to stop breathing. It's easier."

John Biguenet

The Name, the Shadow, the Thing

The writhe of fleshy roots
beneath the oak, the rat
that scuttles past my boots
beside the bed, the hat

on the table, even the toy
(glowering in the moonlight on the lawn)
forgotten by the neighbor boy,
the crumpled socks, the dawn,

the woman to whom I cling,
and most of all the sea—
the name, the shadow, the thing,
it all reproaches me.

How many more times
must I grant myself forgiveness?

Patricia A. Ward

A Southern Story

On the surface
things were going easy
between blacks and whites
at the beginning of summer 1922.

One day some boys
decided to have fun
and made the mistake
of messing with one of Louella's sons;
tried to take his bike
while he was delivering milk.

Lou's cow gave milk so sweet,
its fragrant blossom kept
from time of nipple drop at dawn
past last pearl poured
from chilled urn at dusk;
that's how sweet that milk was.

That hot summer day
when things got uneasy,
hard feelings came up
between blacks and whites.

Talk galloped uptown, downtown,
front-a-town and back-a-town,
all swifter than sugar cane
falling from a machete's blade.

Men said they'd ride;
Louella said, "Come on."
Children were sent to bed early.

Sheriff acquired sudden wisdom

and drove uptown, downtown,
front-a-town and back-a-town
until the sultry undercurrent
of hate fermenting simmered to a cool.

The men did not ride,
and Louella moved the cauldron
of boiling water from the front porch.

Nancy Cotton

West Meets East

When I see your eyes loose,
going where I can't stop
them, my heart turns Arabian
stallion, all nerves and passion,
rears up front legs like flared
nostrils wildly gasping air.
Then I understand the Moor,
Othello, loving not
wisely but too well. What
is love if not desperation?
I sympathize with sultans
surrounded by desert like a woman, bare,
curving, sloping, rising, smooth,
shifting itineraries
in sand, sand slipping through
fingers. Of course they confine
women. It's not clear why
they leave eyes free. I'd cover
stares with thick glasses gauzed
over, eyes like tents in the desert
folded away at sunrise
when the sky is orange morocco,
leather tooled with gilded vines and keyholes.

Commentary

Liberated from an eastern harem,
the moon sighs, dark smudges on her face
from drudging in a coal mine. Tired
and inattentive, she touches
a dirty finger to yellow pearl.

Joel Dailey

Dollars Damn Me

La causa forksplit
Oolong tea i.e. rollercoasta
How the rich & famous stay young & beautiful
Speaks volumes
Vis-a-vis
Me & my paranoia
Styrofoaming at the mouth
Reality dictates
Hardfarts come dawn
Wast thou born in a barn
Very like a whale
The horde removes this edge first

Kay Murphy

The Impossible Life

I who never loved birds am growing wings.
Linda Gregg

Upon those who want a thing too badly
falls a curse

Eddie, my blue-eyed Blackfoot Chief told me
as he wove me a crown of sweetbriar
left at the camp
for a girl so young
she curled up and died
in the moment
I desperately wanted her back
watching my Eddie
the way she did
before he drank himself bowlegged and I
drank myself
between his legs
the night he danced uphill
scrawny as a scarecrow under a cat's moon.

In the pictures of our wedding
where Eddie stood
just a shining
like foil
wing of a crow at noon.
One drink, Eddie said,
And my first wife was a goner.
Me, I could drink and drink
that not being my curse.
Everything else I discarded
for fear
each
was my undoing. No
That's not why I gave him up
or our child
or the cabin between two flowering almonds
but for the razors by the river's edge
the crooked hope
without rest or dry salvation.

Mary McCay

A College Professor Dreams of Glory

If I worked in a circus,
I would paint my face,
Bright eyes and mouth,
So I would not disappear in the dark
As I hung, sequined, upside-down
Above the puzzled lions.
After the main event,
I would make love in a cramped gypsy bed
To a dwarf who really understood Newton.

Ken Fontenot

My Nephews in May

A few good things emerge from the TV's mouth.
The rest you can have. But my nephews
seem to have to watch. I want to tell them:
TV is a bandit, but I settle for saying nothing.

My nephews love their dog. I love just sitting
as the Zen masters recommend. What's this?
I'd give anything to feel like a drunk, yet
without having had so much as one glass of wine.
Booze only simulates freedom. While time erases it.

In the old days girls winked and waved at you
from their cars. You could still walk
a long ways with your uncle, and it rained less.
But maybe this nostalgia has got it all wrong.
Maybe objectivity should be insisted on.

Today the May air is special: special and mild.
I expect the best from May as a teacher expects
the best from her student. For May is the most
diligent of months, since it has spring on her side.
Always making what we care about--bees, flowers, grass.
Always the right temperature, the one we'd like
to have year round. 60 degree nights, 70 degree days.

Again my nephews are playing soldiers in the yard.
For the time being they have forgotten about TV.
Childhood, after all, is meant to be excelled in.
By dreaming, by signing, by entering what vanishes.

Don Brady

Photograph 1905: Crowd Crossing Canal Street

Bundled up with importance, burdened down with goods
bustling to make their marks, imprint the day,
depressed with merchandise yet mindless
of the cumulative shortcoming of sales, they crowd forever
in this significant bit of flight,
busy with affairs that went nowhere,
with colliding ambitions, wrestling intentions,
assignations and assignments,
contracts and connections
driven by the demands of the day and the relevance of the deal,
all these long gone enterprises and their errands
caught, in the exposure of a second, in this forever yesterday,
with all their sundries and notions.

What was bought? What was sold?
What was spent? At what cost?
Was the day as advertised?

What store could have what they were looking for?

Dennis Formento

To the City of a Thousand Suns, Roar

Pierre Revery!

as the sun plies later into the day
& the plane flies with it
transcendence is one of many loopholes
on one of many days of infamy

The only thing better than having no one sit next to you
is having a pretty woman sit next to you
and suppose she's a radio!

The pilot pulls the little string & the flaps rise
& flap
the jet rises on its lovely wings

John Gery

Unemployment

This uselessness arrests you
like the highway police.
Who's speeding?
you wonder at first
but before you've put away
that part of you assignable,
stacked neatly in your
efficient brain, something
as mysterious as sleep
drags you from this wheel
you've clutched so long
and holds you in contempt.

You plead, your whole face
twisted in disbelief
at such an unbecoming turn
of events. Then you pluck
whatever has gotten you
this far--compliments,
good works, physical love.

But uselessness takes you on
to chaos, justice
of the peace, who will not
let you go. Nor
will your bootless cries
trouble a deft heaven,
clever enough to have put
plenty of unknowns between
you and it, thick layers
of consciousness hazy
as chalk, its laws full
of directions you now can't
possibly need, as you wait,
delayed, for whatever creep
made all this happen.

Sophia Stone

Mysterium

The honey gets hot, melts
in this crowded space
between stucco and studs,
Don said. They cool it

with their wings. The paneling
where we pressed our ears
vibrated with a thick,
high humming. Don's face

shone wet under the eaves.
He'd bore holes, pump
his mixture in, he said.
The toxins break down quick.

I watched his hose slither
upstairs. The motor
bleated in the truck bed.
Then the bees crawled out,

more and more of them
fumbling into the air,
spilling on the concrete patio.
Don doused the outside wall,

and Lenny Della Rocca,
I thought of you, the only
sprayman poet I ever met.
If you read this, I am still

working my metaphors in a fixed
frame. In the wall, the comb,
without its bees, is rendering
an undrinkable and fragrant mead.

James M. Marvel

Laurel's Breath Dismantled

In a sense,
one could not win
her, despite the sighs

she heaved against
the world. From
within her awful house

of bones,
a moist phantom
of breath emerged,

existing only in
as much as shape
proved it there.

But, having no shape,
Laurel's breath was
dismantled, her music

collapsed, the workings
of her body shut down
and closed up forever.

Margo Davis

From Where I Sit

Her Bloody Mary spots her spandex,
a pool of red on white. Soft laughter.
Her Anthony leans across for a hot roll,
tears it slowly to study steam,
and presses the warm loaf to her stained leg
to tease the spot dry. Oh my.
When her hand gropes for a water glass,
I suspect she'll cool her pants
or douse his eager face. But no,
she pours on her lap a fresh wet spot,
an invitation for him to wipe
what she made wet. With relief I find
there is no bread. He mouths "waiter," folds
bills beneath a plate as if linen
were her bodice, her skin porcelain.
She mouths "oh" or "no" (her eyes say "more"
from where I sit) and those two are gone.

Karen Maceira

Monstrance with a Relic of John the Baptist

We could not be content with less
than this ruddy finger bone
inside its glass cylinder,

In its gilt tower, the centuries profess
our steady hunger for honey and locust,
our need for a hand that can touch
God's human face.

The bone is quiet in its tight house.
Its wonder bestows on all who gaze
a gentleness.

Gerardo Aristimuno

Fragmentary Exegesis

Provisional coffin,
reality inscribes
interpretations.
We, as accomplices,
recreate the chimera
of happiness portrayed
on venetian glass.
Exegetes cadavers,
the ones we wish not to become,
take us, by the hand,
and attempt to decipher for us
the flower, the bird,
the chemistry of sadness,
the genetics of hatred,
the physics of God.

Interpreters of nothingness,
the dead, dictate, regulate,
classify boxes and bones.

Meanwhile, seizing time's brevity,
the bird keeps inventing the sky,
the leaf creating greens and ochers
from sap and sun,
it rains and thunders,
and the moon rebirths
in every corner.

It is in the fragments
we are,
where plunder
and kisses
confound their dogmas.

December 23, 1996

Phanuel Akubueze Egejuru

NDI NKUZI

Dedicated to the rainbow team: Louisiana Fulbright Teachers

Please let go my mouth that I
May sing the praise of my fully bright teachers,
They who gave substance to a vision I
Espied long ago. I,
Guide of a team of scholars half blind
Marching to the cleansing waters of truth
To wash off the dirt that obscured and
Colored their vision of Africa. I,
Teacher of teachers in that expansive
Conference hall—Africa—uncovered, caressed
By loving hands of truth seekers imploring
Open your naked truth to doubting curious minds!
And she opened her gourd to let her truth
Flow and bathe the body and soul of seekers of truth.

I stood by to watch the team plunge
Into the deep end of understanding.
I swallowed a smile to savor the intricate
Taste of fulfillment—*mmezu.*
Poor me, I started groping in the
Bottomless bag of Igbo *oka okwu*
Searching *les mots justes* for the thank yous
Pushing from the throne of my heart to my mouth.
But my teachers beat me to the race of
Appreciation in words and deeds for
They enstooled me on *nyansapow gwa* whose
Wisdom knot only the wise can undo
And with their gesture they ate my mouth
Because I am not wise the least or else
Should have known they are the only
Wrestlers who could throw me down in a
Wrestling match of gratitude.

Still, my mouth a prisoner in your grip
I dare to mumble *ndewo nu*! heard only by
The ear of my heart bursting its veins
To give voice to muffled joy, joy of
Dreams made ultra real by concrete reality—
The soil or should I say, sands of Africa!
Yes, we all stood and walked across that
Womb that bore us all—humans, Red, Yellow
Brown, White, Black and all their shades.
The Fulbright teachers stood one rainbow team
On Africa's shores still sore
From wounds inflicted by greedy darkened hearts.
Briefly our tired eyes and feet followed the
Bloody trail of captors and captives

Through the dungeons and doors of no return
In slave castles of Goree, Cape coast, Elmina.
And we sighed and cried and murmured why?
Yes the rainbow team was sullen and subdued
By Goree, Cape Coast, Elmina
But it was a fleeting mood for
The rainbow brings sunshine and
Those upon whom it sprays its rays, *they sparkle*!
And when you shape your African experience
Into words like cannon balls they
Fly out your mouth and bang! on minds and ears
Deafened by prejudice and ignorance.
Your words heated by suppressed tears of
Joy and rage will melt the stereotypes formed or
Forming round the edges of your listeners' minds.

You witnessed the truth of Africa's being—
You speed boated down the Senegal and
Saw where she throws up her waters into the Atlantic.
You walked in the ankle-deep sands of St. Louis,
You oohed and aahed over lush greenery of Ghana,
Your eyes scaled the walls of forests and
Landed on domes of towering silk cotton and baobab trees
As the van meandered around hills and valleys of

Arusha, Mampong and Koforidua.
Your noses smelled the fishes drying in
The salted heat of Joal or smoking in
Barrels at Cape Coast and Takoradi.
Your ears heard languages you thought
You did not understand but your hearts locked in
Kinship with the speakers and friendships blossomed.
Your teeth sank into the succulent flesh of
Giant mangoes of Thies—that was your first taste
Of real Africa, that taste remained to sweeten
The sour *kenke* of Legon Guest Center, that taste
Returned with you to sweeten the lives of all who
Smell your breath and swallow your words.
You shook hands with real kings and queens,
You listened to the oracular voice of a maiden seer,
You visited Artists' villages and bought
Carvings, jewelry and kente from the weavers.
Yes, you pictured, you videoed, you recorded,
Yet these may fade or erase with time.

But your feet and hands touched living Africa and
No scrubbing will wash off the substance
Now absorbed into your psyche.
You need no machines to project your experience
On to man-made screens for
You will snap your fingers or tap your temple and
Memory goes to work, after all, you are
Not only bearers of light, you are *Ndi Nkuzi*—
Those who make straight what others made crooked—
Teachers, working in alliance with God to make man!

Lee Meitzen Grue

Portrait of the Artist:
Vincent Van Gogh at the Musée D'Orsay

Fur parts around the backbone
of his face, the nose
prominent but not large,
each brush stroke like the rough comb
of a cat's tongue lapping the fine coat
of oil paint. Sure. The eyes steady
within the whirling landscape.
No hint there of the infinite cyclonic stars
or fields at Arles turned by invisible winds.

Comfortable
in this skin mysterious gods
whirl on the hidden fingers,
on the strokes curved around each cheek,
the bones bearded in paint, wolfish changes
not yet recognizable.

Two islands of repose
a moment before eruption:

Life being most visible when it leaves the body:
steam, fleas.

Jessica Henricksen

The Night Before My Father Tells His Daughter He's Dying

All night long
the silent face of the moon
stares down. My father
listens to the darkness,
to the sound of the river
in the distance.
In the distance, his hands
like waves
brush the river bank
in the back room
of his little yellow house.
The black pearl floating
on his tongue
looks like night
from here
where my lover talks
in his sleep, says
I love you,
small boat
sinking.

Brad Richard

An Excerpt From
IN DRAG : *VERA SIMILITUDE, AT HOME WITH AN ADMIRER*

3. *requiem*

Here's a little ditty for you,
the oldest one I know.

There was a girl named Sibyl
who set up shop in a cave. For a price,
she'd tell you what you wanted to know
in her wigged-out way, wrapped in riddles.
It was an act divine, so the gods said,
"Live forever, girl!" but forgot her good looks.
Centuries sashayed by, and she grew so feeble
someone locked her in a birdcage
where she withered to a sexless wisp,
the shriveled, rattling husk of a voice,
as if she'd almost sung herself to death.
One day two boyfriends found her
in their travels (some Old World sex tour).
One look and they knew they'd never
let themselves go like that: vitamins,
the gym, surgeons and silicone, whatever
it took, they'd preserve their nubile boyselves.
A card on the cage synopsized her tale.
But what could Old Miss Thing tell them
that they would ever need to hear?
The prettier boy, feeling tender, said,
"Can we get you anything? We're just passing by."
Words hissed like smoke from smoldering bones:
"Baby, don't you know I just want to die?"

The boys decayed, as all decay and fall.
Heartsick at dawn, I think I hear her call.

Kathleen Gasparian

The Beginning of Grief

From our mouths lift origami cranes:
convoluted and intricate,
triangles of wing, head, tail,
wingnet of shrimpboats easing into the false dawn,
a sadness of cypress sucking from the mud.
Corner to corner in an accordian fold
creased with a thumbnail
a virginia reel of spins.

Gina Ferrara

The Cosmos of Your Hand

Each day
the sun sets
within
the cosmos
of your protective hand
as it folds
my compliant
fingers
in succession
with an archangel's
precision
My knuckles
bend and brush
agains the crevices
of your palm
a breathing sky
which vespers
and gives life
through gleaming
meteors
and jubilant
constellations

Richard Katrovas

Second Marriage

I am embarrassed by all my old poems,
as Robert Mezey said I would someday be.
"Someday" arrived in increments, broken
promises to a dear friend who thought me
wholly incapable of deception,
though in fact lying to her was easy,
even, in some grotesque way, necessary.

When I hold my daughter, the fruit of my
deception; when I tickle her till she
shrieks and punches me again and again,
shrieking; when my six-year-old girl is so
happy she screams and punches me and climbs
on me shrieking for more, more tickles, more hugs,
more wrestling on the bed before she sleeps;
when my daughter is so alive to all
I am and all she is the lie of life,
that is, the lie that life is telling for
the moment, is our uncluttered joy,
and though it justifies nothing I have done,
there is nothing sullied it does not cleanse.

Christine Murphey

St. Louis Cathedral's Religious Store

Jackson Square, New Orleans

A few Mary cards in hand
I search the rack of magnets
for where she stands on the world
sunlight streaming from her palms.

Bernadette rings up a sale--
gives me a nod,
confides it was the cathedral priest
who said the marriage for Marie Laveau,
to which she adds
Laveau was not evil.

Priestess-saint religious-crosser,
another Queen to please us all--
her icons in stock:
our whispers below the shelves.

Young girls lean over the counter
comb a pile of medals for St. Jude--
ask who to wear for jobs.
They want to buy St. Cecilia,
know she's worth more than even music.
I'm lucky, find the Black Madonna
and take ten of the Virgin standing barefoot
on the horn of a crescent moon.

John Verlenden

Crazy Didact

The whole gaga world raves on:
crooks, whores, creepy poets.

If only this irascible dictum of mine
had chosen another fleshly agent,

More perfect, for its jarring dissemination.
God should be damned then, not me.

Our Sisters of Divine Mercy are full
of me and my kind, speaking our minds

Atop safety rubber chairs propped atop
everyone's tax dollar. We submit:

God is damned. Yet his truth still stands,
unvarnished, unargued, solitary,

Like a billy goat in everyone's shit.
I believe people need God, and needed me,

As they need cosmic questionnaires
asking what the fuck they're doing here.

Okay, so I'm not the one to carry the final truth,
but that One, by my lights, should have been me.

Cynthia St. Charles

Strawberry Girl

Baking soda cut
glass tube light
90 proof Bacardi

Heavy oil best
rainbow pearl
not for easy
        Strawberry girl

Bumper shoot
Desire, Louisa St. stroll
for the cum
in the car
for easy
            Strawberry girl

Run the walk
suck the trash
hours by the minute

Cocaine lie
stay high
            Strawberry girl

            You die

Helen Toye

Note to a Friend, Crying

After I burned the butter
I had to start...minus over.
Look again at the evening
spreading out. Leave the
two rooms where my mind
wandered when far from the butter
away from the heat and moisture
as this evening from its afternoon.

After, the smoke hit the ceiling
sputtered from the water-plunged skillet
exhaling like a mongrel jointing a two-
room capacity. After I burned the butter
I opened the door to the night; purged
out remnants (the burnt-out butter)
as the stain lingered on extending over
the edge like a canvas in a gallery
might clutch out over its frame
into the wall and hold.

Douglas MacCash

First Class Doesn't Go to New York

What did the gay sperm say
to the traveling salesman
when his car broke down
and the hitchhiker asks the bartender
How many lesbians does it take
to give me a beer
but the monkey on his shoulder is an alchoholic
that said, Okay
you can stay here for the night
as long as you don't sleep with my
rabbi, a priest and a Baptist minister
who are playing golf
and the Polack sticks his
hand in the hole and says, Four? I only have two like everybody else
who thought the parrot came in with you
So, St. Peter says to Jesse Jackson,
You have to answer three questions:
The first one is easy because
that wasn't my finger
and the farmer's daughter says
That wasn't my belly button.

Rebecca Black

The Prodigal

I watch you sleep in your father's house.
In sleep you have none of his swagger,
lately prodigal, fist clenched, thumb out,
one nipple pert, the other smooth.
Whose dreams do you hitchhike through?

You are robed in a bright cloakof leaving,
surrounded by the trappings of travel,
currency smoothed into a pouch,
shirt buttons buckling, sewn too tight.

Someone has swept the covers open,
drawn down the shade. Even at this late moment,
provisions have been made. Early, the dark house,
black suburb-husk, will watch your going,
eager tourist, owning nothing.

Your body turns, leaves the fold
of covers rumpled, as I must turn from you
to write this down. As we are always turning
from love to something more durable
than the baggeage of the body,
breathing deep in sleep.

Andrea S. Gereighty

Gris-Gris

A door that's barred
A bed rumpled
A sea-slow Sunday
Your words wash me

Listen to the howlings:
The winds misinterpret
all that we are.
The flick of your tongue,
the wind lifts
everything into place.

You nestle between my breasts
I hear buoy bells
The music of distance.

You trace words through my hair
Phrases flow from your fingers
Your hands move metaphors

up my thighs
nearer the source.

Elizabeth Thomas

Mexican Wedding

He was sneaky!
At the dance he held my hips
like a weapon. I flew
a bird in happy tarrantism.
I was in love with his one blue eye.
But blind. He dried up every cell of my body;
inside I'm the color of clay.
Our house baked down to a skull,
my twisted knees went to the devil.
I spat on the floor, ground it with pumice,
and moved closer to the grave.

One evening dusk winds sucked
my children from a bus.
I wander everywhere
expecting to find them
blooming like cactus--round and tall
and unexpectedly beautiful.
But if they see me, they'll mistake me
for a tongue, a body of thirst.
My feet and legs wind towards them
like a corkscrew.
They would try to kill me.
They would do anything for love.

Michael Laughter

Size Matters

In 1963, Elizabeth Taylor
reclined as *Cleopatra* thirty feet high
on a billboard at the Capitol Theater.
I was eight. Her eyes, sentient, defined
by kohl and ardor, were the size
of any backyard wading pool.
Monoliths litter my life. Big Tex,
Christo-shrouded Grand Canyon, Giza,
Marianas Trench, the Great Wall, Hope Diamond,
Guernica, the mile-strewn AIDS Quilt, Big Ben,
the twelve-hundred-pound man entombed
in a piano case, behemoth
Mississippi, Colossus of Rhodes.
The only status is in Guinness.
Spare and slight as spring in the tundra,
I self-prescribed steroids in my twenties.
Looking like a bonbon in a pair of 501's,
eliciting slobbering awe from masses of men.
Cantilevered pectorals, biceps
round as nautilus shells, the bloom of flesh.
Only then, inured, did I know the heft
was in dreams.

Sonya Reeves

Baptism

Cly was sixteen when she was called,
and stepped forward, trembling.
She'd had a vision of Jesus and John the Baptist
in off-white linen wet at the ankles,
how afterwards Jesus would sling his wet locks back
like copper chains against his unmarked skin.

As she leaned against the pastor's flattened hand,
his cotton kerchief sealed her mouth and nose.
He dropped her down,
his muffled words turned foreign in her ears.

When he brought her up from the shock of the creek,
she'd taken a breath of the water
and now coughed it out.
Her lungs felt full of rust,
her body rinsed in sediment.
But the preacher kept on dunking them, one by one,
while she lay on the sandbar alone.
She was sure that someting essential
was trailing down the Topisaw
bumping into logs carrying soft-backed turtles,
twisting like a muscadine vine in underwater currents,
that it would float into the Bogue Chitto, travel through Slidell
before it reached the delta to sink into the silt,
as frail and trivial as a scallop shell.

Maxine Cassin

Marina Tsvetaeva: A Projection in Time

Who can imagine her voice on the Internet --
such a high-pitched voice... remember your
surge protectors!
Who will not sit up straight before his Monitor
when lightning is simultaneous with thunder?

No miles to count. It is better to lie low,
not under a tree, but inside where there is
shelter;
for she is a torrent of love. You will be
battered.
Unplug your hard drive, your Read-Only-Memory.

Close your eyes a moment; recite a mantra.
Let the mouse find its separate salvation.
How deep is her despair. She hears you
"dot dot com";
on the line at the end— she cannot answer.

Nancy Harris

Hex-Breaking Mojo

Prescription from divine eye
temple of the healer-priest
who hands me the list.
I hand him my Visa card:

purification
protection
hex-breaking
black light removal
employment
angel communication
manifestation
grounding of the body
grounding of the spirit
grounding of the soul
white light casting

I divide the packets into five
& energize my bath
dropping the rice, seeds, beans,
peppers, twigs, leaves & petals
into the claw-footed tub
water swirling like the bottom of a tea cup
once every 7 days
for 30 minutes

after 35 days I am cured
& dream a potent green-diamond snake
pours itself around my throat
slithering up through my chakras—
vulva to adam's apple—
thrashing out through tongue-twisting mouth

so I put on my silver snake necklace

& sacrifice the words ina cauldron of flame
& demand the manifestation of job, house, poem.
tomorrow I will contact the doctor
who will check out my spiritual treatment
a prognosis to measure my progress:

a desire fulfilled
as I willed it
cruel cure
I am delivered

my emerald eye contains power
of an egyptian priestess
& at my crown I wear the purple-hues
of manifestation
the blue angel keeps guard when I weep
& the heart yearns to breathe gold light:

take this poem
& divide it into five portions
bathe in it, breathe it.
it's heart-breaking
hex-breaking
it really works—
money-back guarantee

I realize everything
I need spills
spells out of my throat
when I cast the true words
whose cryptic carvings
tumble from rune-stones
right before my eyes

you'd better believe it

Kerry Poreé

FED-DAWS EVERYWHERE

Neighbor found me
under the red-light,
mauled,
weightless,
withered,
feathers, everywhere.

Blackbird?

I motioned that
movie scene,
death scene,
whisper.

She's a small brown tiger,
Clear nails.
Hips.

And I went
with only fixity,
to fight her,
for her kisses,
and take the young kill,
from her mouth.

She's a small brown tiger,
with tinsels,
rivets of pond weed,
at the underbelly of her coat,

Her stripes are eye fabric.

Clear nails.
Hips.

And I move close enough
to move
with only voice,
those light fibers
on her jawline,
to say... I am...

Unspent.
Unraveled.

Worsening,
like a worsening spottiness.

Reduced to fumbler,
stumbling
in inappropriate shoes.

A commotion of graphite.

A disfigurement of hotness.

Touch me, outline
the four line scratch
that
tampers with my quill,
tampers with my dreams...

A tiger stretching.
Smallish.
Bookish.
Brown.

Her wrist bent
like leaves.
Pinning me
flatwise
passion-wise,

saying...

"Blackbird, we are...
late.

Citify my limbs,
my legs.
Dance me.

Fancy up the likelihood,

and
conjure me iotas
of old love songs.

Kiss me with half notes
and catch up-- quickly the numbers.

Redeem me, this
incredible sadness.

Write me.

Write my prettiness,
like weaponry.

Overpraise,
like talons.

Then
say it to me plainly Blackbird...

and interpret for me,
Je t'aime avec mon ame.

Say it...
So
I can coo it,
when
tigers talking
say...

elixirs,
tonics,
serums,
and medicine,
are
useless on feathers,
useless on stripes.

Say it to me
plainly, Blackbird...

No floral rant.
No sheet music.

No hand strength.
No ribbon.
No pretended steep.

Not,
in the proximity of magic.

Not,
embossed on old bottles.

Not with untying
the troubling hair of children.

But to my ear,
with greenness.

Isolated
like a daybed,

say it
to me plainly, Blackbird...

say...
with incredible sadness

say...

with its dissolving
at the distance
between mudsills.

Say...
with its descent
plain.
The artless fall,
of fragments.

Cut-water edges,
of one
that can't recover.

The disarray
of ordinary drygoods,
boxed
with brass figure pieces
for finding...

Wrapped with cloth
are
Indians,
Pirates,
Tankermen,
Prize fighters,
Cavaliers,
and Gypsies.

Find me six pieces
that stand akimbo,
of which one
has eyes that can't recover.

Indenture the six of them
to become woundable
for my hands [the sake of my hands.]

The six of them words

Hooded.
Their lee sides concentric,
plain.

The six of them coins,
on the desk of a purser.

The last one upright, leaning.
Engraved differently.
Marked without remedy.

Interpret for me the
closing time of primrose.

Like finger tips of
the same hand
merging.

Accuse me of sorcery

Of building an embassy
for voice falsetto.

For face momentary,
in design patterns.

Interpret for me, Blackbird...
Je t'aime avec mon âme."

It is discolored
roof shingles
cowered down to the ground.

It is summer coming
like an impending doom,
because I won't see you.

It is a penny.

My envy of singers
making canvas audible.

It is a love poem.

It is a vestry,
wed to the north side
of a chapel,
with parapet wall,
white brick,
white soffit,
catbrier, and hawkweed
for perimeter guards.

Inside me,
I toss handfuls
of sweeping compound
onto the floor,
and push it
back together,
to keep the floor clean,
to keep my eye from
the window,
to keep my loneliness...
in quiet marble.

It is my needing
of
a lot of string,
just to tie a knot
at my chin,
to keep
my hood on,
because I won't
see you.
It is cuplike dents
in tin
holding water
on the banister,
plain...

Caught.

It is my inventing...
my concocting...

My misprize of
heights.

My stumbling.

My sportiness.
My sight.

My sadness...
Mon âme.

Je t'aime avec
mon âme...

And the closing time
of primrose,
my evenings...
folded, with an incredible
sadness,

for
a woman,

a small
brown
tiger,

with
tinsels...

light
fibers
on her jawline

Kris Lackey

Way Up in the Middle of the Air

During the late fifties, some modestly prosperous men (and a few women) who had lodged their families in the new fan-like tracts of northern Oklahoma City began to long for country living even farther north, and a little east, in the shady hills along Harrison Creek and the Deep Fork of the Canadian. The useful land there was still in pasture or crops, owned or rented largely by cash-poor farmers who lived in declining two-story frame houses built thirty years before. These farmers drove ancient pickups and Fordson tractors. They attended Baptist churches built of native red sandstone during the depression. The churches were named after biblical places or crossroad communities— Crutcho, Lone Star, Witcher.

When the land began to be wanted more for its beauty than its fertility, it fetched enough to coax the farmers to sell their quarter sections piecemeal, like burial plots. By the early sixties you could drive up and down dusty red roads cutting stands of blackjack oak and fields of alfalfa, crossing clear sluggish creeks on one-lane bridges redolent of creosote, and see, every quarter mile or so, a red brick ranch-style house set back on a tidy acreage trimmed with junipers, honeysuckle, and Chinese elms.

Not many years later such houses— a few in grander styles like Tudor or Colonial— dominated the rolling hills, and the old farmhouses loomed like unkempt relics, their yards barren of ornamentals, barren of anything but the inconspicuous stone-and-mortar hump of a buried smokehouse. The new houses often sported buried counterparts— bomb shelters with knobby aluminum air ducts sprouting from their neat concrete domes.

From my fifth birthday until I was seventeen I lived in one of the new houses, a squat blond ranchie that sat on five acres cut from a scrub oak-and-sumac hillside overlooking Gooseberry Creek, a tributary of the Deep Fork. My father, who managed an appliance store on May Avenue in Oklahoma City, bought the land from Ezra Mixon, a man of about fifty whose great-grandfather had homesteaded it in the Run. Mixon lived with his large family in one of those dilapidated farmhouses, locked in on every side by a few acres of blackjack thicket, a remnant of the old claim, most of which had been sold by his grandfather. His yard, which was littered with derelict harrows and bushhogs, windowless old cars perched on cinderblocks, and a wealth of unidentifiable iron skeletons, was patrolled by vicious mongrels and a few bred coon hounds. On summer nights the hounds' baying fell in with the yelps of coyotes and the piercing calls of whipoorwills to reassure the city folk that they had bought a patch of the real thing.

"When your daddy bought that five acres," Amelia Mixon told me the year we turned twenty, "we plumbed the house." She was clutching her blouse and bra, shivering as I kissed her bare shoulders in the front seat of a 1965 Chevelle. An October norther had surprised us in the picnic turnaround on Lake Weogufka, a hundred miles east of our hometown. Blue light thrown from a mercury lamp made her breasts seem incandescent.

I stopped kissing her and watched her gaze over the lake, whitecapped by the cold wind. I snatched the blouse from her hand and covered her. "He cussed your daddy, Mike. And good. The night he sold that five acres he sulked for a long time, then he threw a royal fit. We were scared, I'll tell you. He tumped over his bed and smashed Mama's Avon bottles on the wood stove. Then he took his twelve gauge outside and shot all the chickens. Every last one. We could hear him in the yard. 'Goddamn rich bastards!' Blam. 'Just hand me a check!' Blam. We kids thought we were next... I think he ran out of shells."

Suddenly feeling the chill myself, I started the engine and turned on the heater. "My God, Amelia. I didn't know that. What made you remember it just now?"

She laid a hand against the passenger window and spread her fingers. A few acorns, broken off by the wind, tocked the hood.

"The weather," she said mournfully. "That night was just like this one."

I tugged at the crotch of my jeans to reseat everything. "That's not all, is it?"

"I guess not."

A gust of blue snow scudded over the windshield.

"Mike, the good times are about to end. You know it's true. It makes me sad."

I blushed and turned away.

Amelia and I had entered first grade together at a four-room Oklahoma County school named Deer Lick. Though a Deer Lick School had occupied the same township ground for fifty years, a new flat-roofed brick building had replaced the old one-room frame schoolhouse in 1957 to accommodate the flood of children whose parents wanted a country life.

The long yellow Bluebird bus trundled many miles both morning and afternoon, gathering its far-flung children. On the first day of school, I boarded with a knot of acreage kids like me at the meeting of two dirt section-roads. We were scrubbed and combed, outfitted in new tartan shirts or skirts, and saddle

oxford shoes. We carried mint-new metal lunchboxes and clean canvas book-bags with chrome buckles.

But the Deer Lick bus, no respecter of persons, also stopped at the drawn, pasty farmhouses. The children who boarded there did not live in my world.

The bus fell silent at these stops. We watched as the half-doors swung opposite directions and the farm kids rose into view. Their hair must have been cut with blunt scissors, by their mothers, though at the time I had thought it just grew crooked because they lived in old houses and were poor. Shampoo was not as common as white bread in those days, and some of the farm kids looked like they had been dunked at breakfast, their hair was so oily. Their books were bound with baling twine, and they carried paper lunch sacks splotched with grease. The girls wore thin slumping dresses, handed down since Roosevelt (Teddy, I think), frayed socks and cracked patent shoes. For the boys, patched overalls, stained plaid shirts, and western boots that had warped up at the toe like Aladdin slippers. Their rare smiles were marred by gross cavities and shellacked by tartar. They said "ain't."

The first time I saw Amelia she stepped aboard just like the other farm kids. The memory seems remarkably clear, but it must be partly recreated. Her white hair fell over her eyes, and her cheek was stained with ketchup. She ate ketchup for breakfast! (I learned much later she doctored her eggs with it, as did her entire family.) Her flowery dress swallowed her, and it was not clean. It looked as if it had literally been handed down, by many pairs of unwashed hands, that very morning.

Not once looking up, she took the front seat and scooted to the window, clasping her notebook and sack lunch to her chest. Throughout the long ride she kept her face turned to the glass though her body faced resolutely forward. I ignored my friends to gape at the dazzling shock of her hair and wonder at her exotic poverty.

Not long after we had filed into the boxy schoolhouse and taken our assigned desks under the beady gaze of Miss Flewelling, the boy who shared a desk with Amelia Mixon suddenly shot up from his chair and began hopping like a kangaroo. "She peed! The dirty girl peed!" he exulted.

We turned to see what it would mean. Amelia was sobbing, her forehead mashed against the desktop, her arms falling straight down at her sides. Her dress and socks were soaked, and a great pool of urine glistened in the morning sunshine.

Miss Flewelling tromped to Amelia's desk, shaking her head. She yanked the child up by her arm and dragged her to the bathroom. The hopping boy sprinted a circle around the room, waving his hands in the air. "I can't believe she peed! I can't believe she peed!" he shouted. The rest of us were wishing some grownup would appear, soon, so we could ask permission to use the restroom. Just as the boy was completing his second circuit, the principal, Mr. Beets, materialized from nowhere, snatched him by his hair, and yanked him

away. We froze.

Somewhere deep in the building we heard the paddle going whap, whap, and a small boy's yodel.

As I put the Chevelle in gear and negotiated the gullied tracks of the picnic ground, Amelia somberly bent into her bra and shouldered her blouse. The headlights briefly caught a circle of Indians squatting around a fire. We passed close by and heard their keening tune and the thump of a small drum. Yea yea yea ah. Yea yea yea ah. Their beer cans winked like falling coins in the firelight.

We were bound for Heebee Baptist College, pushing curfew as usual. The dorm matron, who bore a chilling resemblance to Miss Flewelling, would be guarding the hour with a railroad watch and a pad of citations. We beat her every night, as a matter of honor and spite. She knew what we had been up to, which gave us great pleasure. In fact, our conspiracy had for some months softened the passage from sad dutiful lovemaking to lonely rest in our dormitory cells. At 11:59, in the suspenseful imminence of the chapel gong, I kissed her thoroughly (the matron was peeping through the window) and bobbed down the stairs into the snow, measuring my steps with the strokes of midnight.

I lay awake all night in the stifling overheated dorm room listening to my large roommate grumble about Hayden in his sleep. Though I was properly aroused and deeply ashamed— locked into one of the three or four possible Southern Baptist frames of mind— I planned treachery against Amelia with almost comic detachment. It was like a man who held a match to his fingertips so he could plot a car bombing. That is what the Baptists teach you.

She knew we were finished, and she knew why: she was a climbing cracker, studying to be a nurse, and I was a smug suburban kid trying on the intellectual life like a new pair of sneakers.

Amelia clerked thirty hours a week at a declining pharmacy in downtown Weogufka, selling bunion pads and charcoal tablets to a clientele without the means to patronize chain stores out on the Kickapoo Spur. She walked three miles each way to this job (except when I drove her to work), returning to her dorm room each week night just before ten to study her lessons for the next day. Her pay covered tuition, room and board and kept her in second-hand dresses, which she washed by hand and meticulously starched and ironed. I enjoyed a scholarship and a modest allowance from my parents and so spent my weekday evenings bullshitting about Nietzsche and Camus in the dorm or beer-cruising with buddies the moonlit section roads seldom patrolled by zealous deputies. I was a dangerous romantic, exulting in the innocence and promise, the null ecstasy of my very own life.

I was the fiddling grasshopper, and she was the laboring ant.

All this she knew well. So when I shunned her, I believed, she would understand. And in time forgive me.

After six years at Deer Lick I had gone to a junior high in Oklahoma City, and Amelia's parents had paid a small tuition to send her to a rural county school. So I had not seen her for eight years when we met at a clandestine dance in the country.

Dances were forbidden at Heebee College because they stirred up animal lusts. To publicize such events, student impresarios used the clinical euphemism "function." Some had once tried "orgy," as a little joke, and were expelled.

A racy married couple, sociology majors, who rented a farm six miles out of Weogufka on the Illinois River, had wired their barn for strobe lights, a refrigerator, and a massive stereo. Their nearest neighbors lived a mile away. This allowed a wide berth to all means of stirring animal lusts.

None of us needed the retreat, or the appliances, of course. A Baptist youth and a Baptist college had made us all mad with desire.

And shyness. Not knowing how to drink, I leaned on the refrigerator and chugged five Coors inside fifteen minutes. The strobe snapped through prairie-hay dust, transforming dozens of distinct, frightening young women into pleasing freeze-frame tableaux. Hurling the fifth empty against the barn wall, I lurched toward the nearest plump form and maybe asked her to dance.

We flailed and jumped for a spell. When the music stopped, we leaned, sweating, into each other and laughed. She was drunker than I was. We did not care where we put our hands. Alcohol was a gift that banished a whole life of dour prohibitions. Music thumped up again, even louder. "My name's Mike!"

"Amelia!"

"Celia, does Jesus want you for a sunbeam?" I shouted over the Grateful Dead.

"I doubt it!" she cried back.

Song followed indistinct song as we worked the elixir out. Sometime very early in the morning we limped— arm-in-arm, tired and sober— out of the barn and into a maze of moon-polished cars. I steered her to my Chevelle, and we sat together on the hood, holding hands and snorting out clover-scented hay dust. "So that's why horses do that," she said, looking out over the rolling hills toward the distant glittering patch of Weogufka. I admired her fine cascade of white hair, fanning over her shoulders and reaching almost to her waist.

But even in the moonlight, something about her dress caught me. It was— I hadn't noticed before— unfashionable. A formless shift, probably homemade, with a nondescript print, it hung slack from her shoulders and breasts like a sheet thrown over a stuffed chair. The soothing democracy of beer and darkness fell away, and the tumblers of the Baptist padlock began to click, I admit it, before I recognized her.

Poor girls are easy. Lust and sloth lie side by side in a bed of Satan's making. I eased my hand to the back of her neck and pulled her toward me. She shook her hair back and tilted into the kiss. I stopped and drew back.

"Amelia Mixon," I said.

She dropped her chin and turned a frown on me. Withdrawing her hand, she studied my face. "Who goes there?" she finally said.

"Mike Parish."

She smiled half-heartedly and nodded. "I must be moving up in the world," she said.

"The Baptist world is small and perilous."

"There's more than one Baptist world, Mike. You know that."

She meant that although we were both Baptists, strictly speaking, I had squirmed through sermons on velvet pew cushions and had shot baskets in the glossy gym of parvenu Misty Oaks Church. She had borne the same hard lessons on steel folding chairs, under the rusted ceiling fans and naked bulbs of Calvary Baptist Church, an ancient sandstone redoubt on Waterloo Road.

"God is no respecter of persons," I said, to show her I had learned the general lesson.

"And neither is Satan."

"You mean lust," I asked.

"Yes," she laughed, throwing her arm around me and giving my thigh a stout squeeze.

If you have ever been a Baptist, you will know why I patted her shoulder and offered to drive her home. If you have not, well, the instant Amelia broke type, she was my charge.

Drifting along section roads through sweet-smelling pastures on our way back to Heebee, she reminisced about her years at Deer Lick. I had imagined that Amelia would speak to me of her childhood as a time of loneliness and humiliation, in the new confessional way. But she recalled blind box suppers, cake walks, races, spelling bees— times when chance or skill were on her side. Every kid I knew despised her. But she recalled the years at Deer Lick tenderly, as her first relief from coarse treatment at home.

During that half-hour drive I fell in love with Amelia Mixon. There is no such thing, of course, just (in my case) a gumbo of pity, admiration, lust, and gratitude. I pitied her her poverty, which out of blind arrogance I imagined she would have outgrown, as if it were a childish habit. I admired her for aspiring to my lofty station, for moving up in the world, as she said. And I lusted after her partly because she consented to be lusted after and partly because she was poor and plain. You see, I lacked a chin, and my hips were suspiciously broad. I was not made to catch the fancy of young women, and I was a virgin.

Except for some comradely girls I had seen home after basketball games, I had never brought a date home to the women's dorm, much less at three hours before dawn. I knew from experienced upper-classmen that late girls were

smuggled in through the "slut-slot"— an unscreened vent in the basement laundry room. The campus policeman, Calvin Coolidge, was reputed to watch the slut-slot closely— not so he could report the malefactors, but so he could learn who the sluts were. He was sixty or thereabouts, and harmless, but a talkative voyeur. He would communicate his intelligence furtively to the rougher frat boys, assured that they would act on it immediately. Perhaps sometimes they did.

In any event, as we drove onto campus, Amelia told me to drive around the Oval. "Ovulate and make sure Calvin's asleep in his Rambler." He was, or appeared to be. "Now let me out behind the chapel and I'll run over and drop in the slut-slot." She squeezed my arm and kissed me on the cheek. "It's been real."

Her savvy was a relief, but it was also a shock. Had she done this regularly? For all my worldly pretentions, I wanted a girl as innocent as I was. Someone who would owe me that for my attentions.

I parked behind the chapel, and Amelia laid her hand on my thigh again. Who cared if she were innocent. "Mike, you're a Christian boy, no matter what you do or say. My roomie told me how to do this. I know you're worried." Then she opened the door and bolted, her legs splayed under the wrinkled shift.

In the months that followed I abandoned study, friends, late-night bull sessions— everything— to be with her. She kept hours at the pharmacy but otherwise neglected her schoolwork. For me. The Amelia I had known at Deer Lick slowly faded and, I thought, disappeared. In her place appeared a clever and soft-spoken girl who befriended me and began to care for me as no one my own age ever had. Because she said nothing about distresses at home or anywhere else for that matter— nothing, at any rate, until she revealed that sordid memory of the night Dad bought the acreage— I came to wonder at her buoyant spirit, her gentle but striking satire of "the puffed up," as she biblically referred to self-important people. Once she said of a lean, pipe-biting dean as he strode across the oval, "He must have been in Brooks Brothers when the Lord handed out enemas." What she wore, how she held her body— I became oblivious to all that as we conspired to scrub our missions into the future, and ignite the present.

To recite our doings in practical terms, we played hearts in the dorm lounge (at least one foot apiece on the floor at all times), parked out on the airport taxiways and necked to John Denver eight-track tapes, gradually raised the stakes at the Weogufka Yucca drive-in theater and finally, just before Thanksgiving break, shed our clothes in a derelict farmhouse far from the nearest neighbor.

Once every few years when I am bitten by the sentiment bug I drive back to Oklahoma to visit that weed-curtained house by the Illinois River. I can never imagine, much less recover, the force that drove us to tumble around

naked on its cold and rodent-carnivaled floors. Though a longing for it occasionally seizes me when I am inching through a dull brief or thumping through the endless soybean fields of the delta on the way to visit a client, I simply can't imagine it anymore.

We waded through a quarter mile of Johnson grass to reach the shack. I kicked the door open, and the first sweep of my flashlight sent a menagerie of critters pattering for cover in the floors and rafters. There was a gibbous moon, so I found a fairly clean spot in the middle of the front room and quickly switched off the light. Kneeling, we embraced in the dusty light, then bent to the awkward chore of undressing. The house fell away, the world vanished, for the first and last time in my life, as we feasted on the secret clefts and sinews of our miraculous bodies.

Amelia and I had not plotted every deed of that chilly night, and I think we were both surprised when our tugs and embraces pitched us, after many hours, to a desperate and clumsy end. It seemed wrong, too, that our fevered gentleness and murmurous joy should give way to such a painful contortion. This violence broke the moment and spilled us back to the world. Our heads struck the floor at the same time. We said "Ahhugh" together.

"So," Amelia said to the rafters, "this is what people kill and die for."

"With good reason, you mean?" I asked.

"I didn't mean that, but, yes, I guess with good reason."

"How do you feel?"

"Strange. Floating. But not disgusted. I knew I wouldn't feel that way. Preachers don't know what sin is."

"Nothing was ever so interesting."

"No."

"I know it's a saw, but do you feel different?" I asked.

"Yes, Mike, I have splinters in my butt. I have never in my life had splinters in my butt."

I took her in my arms again, and we laughed at the great banality of our happiness.

It was two years later when I resolved in my bunk to end the affair by telling Amelia half the truth— that I had been accepted several days before the snowstorm by the Tulane law school in New Orleans and would be leaving Oklahoma in the early summer. The beginning of our courtship had cost me a semester of C's, but I had recovered with much late-night study and was then on track to graduate cum laude in Letters. I had taken the LSAT early and scored in the highest percentile. Our carousing had cost her much more— a semester's academic probation and an extra year's work for the R.N. She would

be laboring through her practicum at a hospital in Oklahoma City during my entire freshman year of law school. The other half of the truth she knew—that, as she said, the good times were past and gone, eroded by the ordinary weathers of desire.

When I entered the lounge of the women's dorm the next evening I found Amelia sitting stiffly in one of the pretentious French provincial armchairs provided by the Women's Missionary Union. She was wearing a blue and white striped cotton sweater too small for her by a size, and tan corduroy bell-bottoms that were frayed at the hem. Her cheeks were bloated and raw, and she was biting her nails. I was perversely grateful to see her in such poor shape, because I thought it meant she had already told herself the bad news. "Mike," she said, "We have to go for a drive. Right now."

"OK." I took her hands and lifted her up, and we walked out into the damp, blustery dark. She huddled against me, and I hugged her. We walked silently to the car. Before I could get the key in the ignition she burst into tears. "Oh, Mike, I couldn't tell you last night. I wasn't going to tell you at all." She laid her head on the dashboard and let her hands fall straight down, just as she had fourteen years before, when she peed on the floor of Deer Lick school. My legs and feet went dead, and I had trouble getting the key in.

"But how!"

"I held the diaphragm up to the desk lamp, after Pat was asleep last night, just like they say to do. It had a tiny tear down near the ring. Mike, I was careful, so careful!" she moaned. "But I know how it happened, now. One night the matron knocked when I was washing it out in the room sink. I stuffed it in my purse, and it must have hit something in there. Oh, God, this is a terrible cliché. You're going to hate me."

I could hardly drive the car. My arms felt like prostheses I had not yet learned to move. After what seemed like a long while the last lamps of Weogufka faded from the Chevelle's mirror and we were winding along the Illinois. Oak skeletons leaned into the headlights. Amelia rolled her window down, and I could hear her breathing hard. The air smelled like pencil shavings.

"Am I going to marry you, Amelia?"

"Stop it, Mike."

"I was asking you to tell the future."

"Don't you fiddle-fuck around with me, Goddamn it. I can manage a cute tangent as quick as you any day. I know what you want, and I want it, too. That should oil your conscience. What there is of it."

There wasn't much, she was right. And it did, she was right again. A warmth of blood sluiced into my calves. I was as dizzy with happiness as I had been with fear, a half hour before. I frowned (with some effort) and reached for her hand. She recoiled and drew up against the door. "Take me home. I'll do the work."

We were going to miss curfew, but Amelia insisted that I bring her to the front door of the dorm. We were greeted by the matron, who stepped on the landing and ceremoniously hauled out her railroad watch. Before she could utter a word, Amelia said, "I don't give a good fuck what time it is," and marched inside. I stood staring at the matron. She sighed, snapped the watch shut, and dropped it in her dress pocket. There was something sad and fierce in her mouth as she faced me. "Go home," she said. "You've made some demand on her," she added vaguely, like a seer, and walked inside.

The morning Amelia and I left for Kansas City in my roommate's unsteady Galaxy a cold rain fell from dishrag clouds scudding over the low hills of the old Cherokee nation. Before we reached Claremore the rain had begun to freeze like melted glass on tall grass and tree limbs. The earth remained warm, so we still traveled fast. The Galaxy's heater blew tepid air, and Amelia sat wrapped in a dingy blanket. Her face was gray and stern. She said nothing until we crossed the Verdigris River near Coffeyville, when she told me to stop because she had to throw up. She let me hold her as she retched, again and again. When we got back in the car we were soaked. She began to shiver and cry. There were flecks of rusty bile on her second-hand peasant blouse. She looked like a Dorothea Lange waif. I was disgusted— and frightened by my depravity.

Near the state line she caught me looking at her and spoke for the last time before we reached Kansas City. She said, "I feel a lot like shooting some chickens." And then she turned away.

In the waiting room I thumbed through worn copies of *Time*, looking at grisly photographs of the war I had escaped with a lottery number of 362. There were peasant corpses and bandaged infantrymen lying on medivac stretchers. That, too, I had written off as irrelevant to my bright future.

I counted the money I had left— eighteen dollars— and wondered if it would be enough to see us back to Weogufka. I had sold the Chevelle for four hundred dollars, which would require an explanation to my parents.

Every half hour or so a pale girl with tangled hair would limp into the room from the clinic, her eyes red and evading. Sometimes a boy would leap up and take the girl by the arm, solicitously, and walk her out. Sometimes the girl would stumble out into the raw afternoon alone, clutching her purse against her belly. My neck cinched up each time the dazzling white door swung open. But Amelia did not come out.

The haunting file of wasted girls seemed to have no end. I tried to drift from them, to think of them as extras in a movie scene about some distant totalitarian purge. I imagined greeting funky old New Orleans with a whoop, cruising its oak-shadowed streets. Smelling jasmine, gardenias, ginger blossoms.

Still no Amelia. I asked the stern nurse at the reception desk if she could check on her. She didn't reply, but rose and went into the business end of the clinic. In a few minutes she came back, still expressionless. "Miss Mixon will be out shortly," she said, and returned to some paperwork.

A long half hour passed. There were no more anxious beaux fidgeting on the arm chairs.

What little light had made it through the smudged venetian blinds (drapes of lath, to Okies, the old joke went) had faded, and the fluorescent light made the room stark and foreboding. I approached the nurse again, and again she left and returned to say that Miss Mixon was resting.

Something had gone wrong. "I thought she was coming out," I said.

"She just needed to rest," the nurse said.

"Oh. OK."

Another hour passed. I had given up reading or thinking on old New Orleans. I paced, wrestling, finally, with visions of butchery and death. Of course I was furious with Amelia for bringing me to this pass. The Baptists had taught me well.

At last she came through the door. She was not, like the other young women, pallid and disheveled. Her hair was combed and dry, and she strode purposefully to the door while I hurried to catch her.

But when we got to the car, she climbed in the back seat and immediately lay down. "I can't do the drive home, Mike. I have to sleep here. In this town, I mean. Is this town Kansas City?"

"Yes." I was rattled by her confusion. "Sure, we'll stay here. Listen... " But she was already asleep.

I cruised several miles of neglected motels along U.S. 169, stopping where neon signs were more or less intact. In the end even these were too expensive, and I signed us in as Mr. and Mrs. Parish at the Sunflower Court, a knot of peeling frame cottages that had no doubt once been charming bungalows, between the wars.

Amelia was a stout girl, and I had some trouble carrying her into the cottage. After I had covered her and taken a lukewarm shower, I sat in a metal folding chair and watched her sleep. The only light in the room was a naked bulb sagging from a broken fixture.

God, I wanted to be walking up the steps of the men's dorm after a date, ready for the jabs and catcalls that always smoothed down the memory of our bleak tussles. For a while I had resented this ritual as a breach of privacy, but in time I welcomed it for what it was, a friendly shriving. Whether a guy had done wrong by design or duty, he had been uncertain and afraid the whole night, and he deserved a welcome home. Tacit threats of fatherhood, marriage, eternal loyalty called for debunking. What better way than to impugn the wenches who made them?

Amelia shook me awake early the next morning. "Mike, I'm starving. Let's

get out of this dump. It reminds me of home."

On the way south we stopped at an I.G.A. for Kotex and baloney. I spent the last of my money on twenty-one gallons of gas, knowing it would almost get us home. We rolled the baloney delicately before stuffing our gobs with it— the last thing we laughed at together, and it wasn't very funny. Amelia turned to the window and soon fell asleep. I drove slowly, though I was crazy to go fast and tie up this mission. On the rare downhill stretches I killed the engine and coasted to save fuel. Probably it was impossible to save fuel with an engine the size of a washing machine. Quarts of gas were evaporating in the carburetor. A little after noon the Galaxy bucked a few times, then sputtered out. We coasted, bumping over the road's old-time sloped apron and onto a shoulder of dead Bermuda. Before she opened her eyes Amelia shook her head. "You're not surprised, are you?" she said hoarsely. "I mean, you expected that the mess I made would grow bigger and bigger until nothing you could do would make any difference."

"No," I said. "I just ran out of money this morning, that's all."

She bolted up on the seat. "Bullshit! You can't run out of money. You don't even know what that means. It's like telling a beggar you don't have any spare change— and believing it— when you have a fiver in your pocket."

"But Amelia, I sold my car."

"No, Mike. You're not listening to yourself. I don't give a hoot in hell about money, or responsibility or duty or guilt. How far are we from Weogufka?"

"About twenty miles."

"Yeah. About twenty miles of fatalism and weakness. You're reckless, Mike. You think there's some core of goodness in your heart. It shields you from everything that threatens the wide spaces of your future." She was up on her knees in the seat slicing the air with stiff hands. "Look, you got tired of me. You got used to my kisses, my breasts, my talk. That's OK. Sad, but OK. I was fond of you, and I thought we might make a go of it. I was disappointed. But why did you have to get scared of me, afraid for me? That hurt worse than the abortion. The Baptists have ruined you! You pity me and scorn me because you pity yourself and despise yourself. But you have no control, no dignity! You've wrapped yourself around that warm little blankie of goodness, and you're hugging it with all your might because the grownups are fighting in the next room. We're the grownups, Mike."

I beat a tattoo on the steering wheel and stared at my lap.

Amelia walked across the bench seat on her knees and turned my face to hers. "I don't need you to take care of me. I need you to care for me. You've got to think of me as a man, I think I mean. And you can't do it. You don't know how. As a woman I have to be your enemy— making claims, stalking you. And by God I never have done those things. I would never have a man like that." She kissed me softly— for the last time— clapped her hands, set her

chin, and said, "Let's hitch."

We got a ride with a kindly farmer who drove us all the way to Weogufka. His border collie sat in Amelia's lap, keeping a sharp eye out for aimless livestock. The farmer, hunched into several sweatshirts covering his overalls, said only one thing during the trip: "I b'lieve the world is getting colder and colder as time goes along."

Though after that I saw Amelia on campus from time to time, we never spoke again. She hung up when I called to see if we could talk things over. And she was right. I was warped past straightening, and we had to go our own ways. She knew I was only after forgiveness, which wasn't worth even a how-dee-do.

In New Orleans I rented half a shotgun double on Magazine Street and studied bankruptcy law. As I sat reading, through all seasons, the shade of banana leaves darkened the wonderful arcana of debt and failure. For three years I made no friends except Shavette, a wry African-American woman who tended bar at the Steeple, a drab and very un-New Orleans dive where I drank Saturday nights. And I never spoke to her about Amelia.

For the first year, my parents (who still think I sold the Chevelle because its rings were shot) paid my tuition and sent me an allowance, then I put a stop to it and took out a loan.

I stopped believing in that core of goodness Amelia had divined. And then there was nothing left. Gradually the terrible thing I had done to her notched itself into my hours. You know, the Baptists teach denial well, but they graft guilt, right onto your bones. So when I came to miss Amelia deeply, when I found no other woman who even vaguely interested me, I may have imagined (as a salve) that I had punished myself already, by leaving her. I don't remember.

For twenty years now I have been a lawyer, and the long nights composing briefs, the stifling afternoons spent waiting on the lawns of delta courthouses, the polite smoldering interviews that have come my way— have all dissolved into a dreamy sadness.

I live alone in a handsomely refurbished bawdy house in Natchez. I am rich. But even so I have yet to take control of anything. And sometimes, lying beneath the chiffon roof of my four-poster bed, I overhear them in the street. The grownups, fighting.

John Tait

The Stepdaughter

A squirrel had fallen into the chimney, and it tried to get out now and again. Melissa sat and listened to the tired scratching of its claws on the brick. She rooted, silently but hopelessly, for the animal as it fought its way upward. A moment of silence would always come when Melissa thought it might have actually escaped. Then she would hear the hard thunk of its falling body hitting the flue again. Each time she winced and turned up the volume on the television a little. In a few minutes, it started again.

Melissa went to get more soda crackers to put in a cup inside the fireplace. She'd laid a trail of crackers across the carpet to the open screen door, but the animal wouldn't come out. It was afraid, she guessed. She studied the fireplace, peering up past the flue into the sooty darkness. Her mother's house hadn't had a fireplace, and she didn't know how they worked, why the squirrel couldn't escape. She would have to wait for Martin. He might be able to do something when he got home. She didn't know exactly when that would be. Martin was coming in later all the time. Melissa went to the dining room to sit and wait, away from the sounds.

Martin had set an extra place at the dinner table across from his own. This was strange, and she wondered if it was for someone from the dealership, maybe even his boss. She had met only a few of his friends from work. Melissa had wanted to ask him about the extra place setting, but she knew better. If she asked who was coming to dinner he would just say "the Pope" or "the Queen of Sheba" and shake his head.

Martin came in at seven-thirty, walked past Melissa into the kitchen and stared incredulously at the kitchen clock. He checked his watch, removed it, played with the buttons on its side, then stuffed it in his pocket.

"I thought I was late," he said. He was wearing a shirt with a dirty collar, and his tie was undone.

"It's okay," Melissa said. "I haven't started anything." He didn't look at her. He lay his battered stack of folders on the counter beside the three steaks she had left out to thaw. Pulling a sheet of paper towel from the dispenser, he blew his nose loudly. He wadded up the paper and pushed it absently in the same pocket as the watch, then drew it out, wandered to the trash and tossed it, missing. The bundle settled over near Melissa's feet where it slowly unfurled.

"What do you feel like tonight" she asked and gestured to the steaks. "I thought I'd make some pepper steaks, and rice or potatoes."

"Yeah," he said. He opened the cupboard over the fridge and peered inside. "No – I mean." He glanced over at her. "I'm eating out tonight."

"Okay," Melissa said and nodded. "I'll put these away." The steaks had

nearly thawed, and, as she peeled them from he counter, each left a wet oval of blood where it had lain. She wrapped the steaks in foil. "Who are you going out with?"

Martin looked at her for a moment as if he were about to say something, then headed up the stairs. Melissa listened to him stamping above her. He walked heavily for such a thin man. She heard the water run in the bathroom briefly, the toilet flush, the closet door thud against the wall. Melissa placed herself in the recliner by the front door, a copy of People in her lap. When Martin came downstairs fifteen minutes later, he wore a different suit. His hair was neatly combed, and he smelled of shaving. A small dollop of foam still clung to his right earlobe, and she thought of telling him about it.

"How was your day?" he asked while he laced his shoes.

"Oh, all right. I think there's another squirrel caught in the chimney. I can hear him." She watched the shaving cream on Martin's ear as he straightened, smoothed his hair, patted his pockets. She though how she should tell him about the cream before he went out and embarrassed himself.

"Uh huh," he said. "Stupid squirrels."

"How do you think we can get it out?" she asked.

"Light a fire under his ass." Martin smoothed down his pant legs. He had bow legs and wore baggy pants to disguise it.

"So where are you going? In case somebody calls?"

He looked at her. "I don't know yet." He frowned and pulled at his cuffs.

Melissa slapped the magazine shut and dropped it beside the chair. "Have fun." She said this flatly and too loudly. She turned away, facing the wall, tensed for his response. But he simply stared at her for a moment before heading out to his car.

Melissa vacuumed, then tried to watch her Tuesday evening programs, but the squirrel sounds were driving her crazy. Occasionally, she muted the TV to listen to the animal's agonizing, futile progress. He was going to make it, she thought each time. Then came the inevitable thud, the small, sickening collision of the animal and the metal flue. The squirrel was tiring, she could tell, maybe dying. Before she went to bed, she placed a cup of water and several crackers on a ledge up inside the chimney, as high up as she could reach. When she brought her arm out, it was streaked with soot from fingers to elbow. She washed it in the kitchen sink, watching the gray suds spin down the drain.

Melissa was asleep when Martin returned. She heard the car engine shut off, the opening of one door then a second. Both doors slammed at once. Martin spoke and was answered by a young female voice. Melissa pulled the comforter up to her chin. The front door slammed, and she heard their voices downstairs, in the kitchen now. She heard the faucet run, the fridge open, glasses clink on the table. The voices were faint, and Melissa lay still and held her breath, straining to hear what they were saying. Suddenly, they were coming up the stairs. An odd hot panic, a bewilderment, had begun inside Melissa.

The entire moment seemed impossible. She was struggling to listen to them at the end of the hall, and the sudden, close knock on the bedroom door startled her. She found herself pulling the covers almost over her head – a child's reflex.

"Lissa," Martin whispered. "Hey, Lissa." Melissa remained silent. She would make no noise, and they would go away. It seemed like the logical thing to do.

"Lissa, wake up. I want you to meet someone." Martin sounded eager and earnest.

Numb, Melissa crawled from the bed and pulled on her robe. She turned on the small bedside lamp and saw her frightened self in the vanity mirror. Absurdly, she caught herself checking her hair, pulling at the bedhead tangles. The bright hall light was on, and she squinted as she opened the door, feeling braver, ready to face whatever was there.

Martin stood in the doorway beside a young woman. She was about eighteen or nineteen, much too young and much too attractive for him. Melissa nearly laughed with relief and confusion. Martin was flushed. His tie was partially undone, and his bangs had begun to fall sloppily over his eyes. The girl looked sober and nervous. She was small and had her strawberry blonde hair in a single, loose braid. She wore a summer dress with a cardigan over top. The girl stood very still and shy in the doorway and stared at Melissa.

Melissa smiled warmly in spite of herself. The girl smiled back. With her bangs parted in the center, her face was a pretty diamond. She had large, quick, dark eyes.

"This is Jocelyn," Martin said, scratching his neck. "She's my daughter. Deborah and mine."

"Martin?" Melissa turned to him. Deborah had been his first wife. She lived in Montreal, and Martin rarely spoke of her.

"I know," he said and winced. "I should have told you. I know. I'm a jerk. We'll talk about that later." He shrugged. "Anyways, she's out here from Halifax, from Dalhousie University." He smiled. "We've just had the best time tonight, the best."

"Hi," Melissa said and shook the girl's hand, which was small and agreeably warm. "This is such a surprise. I have to say, I'm a little ticked off with Martin." She turned to him again. "Martin, you never even –"

"I know." Martin winced and threw up his hands. "I should have told you. We'll talk about it later. Okay?"

Jocelyn smiled nervously. "Dad's told me all about you, and I was looking forward to meeting you. I want to apologize for missing the wedding. Dad and I weren't really in contact until recently."

"Oh, that's O.K." Melissa laughed. "You didn't miss anything, just a few minutes in the court house. It was all pretty sudden. My mother had just passed away, and I decided to move in with Martin, and then we decided . . . it all happened pretty fast."

"Josie has a summer job in Victoria," Martin said.

"Victoria." Melissa nodded. "Great."

"She says she's got a youth hostel booked, but I was thinking that we should force her to stay here for a couple days."

Jocelyn began to speak, and Martin waved his hand to dismiss any argument. Blushing, the girl turned to Melissa. "It's a summer research job. I'm in marine biology. I just thought I'd visit since I was here. I didn't come here expecting to stay. Really. I hope this isn't an inconvenience."

"Oh, no, it's great," Melissa said.

Later, Melissa excused herself while the other two were still talking and went up to prepare the spare room. The room was still filled with things from her mother's house, stacks of unopened boxes. Martin kept urging her to get rid of it, but Melissa didn't know where to start. She'd suggested a yard sale, but he didn't like that idea. She had thought he'd be more sentimental about yard sales. After all, they'd met at one. Martin wasn't a very sentimental person.

The yard sale had been at Melissa's mother's house. Her mother had made her sit out in the yard one afternoon with all the old junk they wanted to get rid of. Only five or six people had been there when Martin stopped to browse. Melissa's mother had watched happily from an upstairs window while Martin and Melissa talked on the lawn. She hadn't even minded when Melissa didn't serve the dinner until well after dusk. After dinner, Martin had left with the chair that Melissa had sat on in the yard, and a needlepoint display her mother had made. "Love can do what hate cannot," it read in fat calligraphy. Martin thought it was funny. Both items were in the back room of their house now, the chair holding a fern, the needlepoint design on the mantel over the fireplace. That yard sale had been almost one year ago.

Martin came into the bedroom very late and undressed noisily in the dark. Melissa felt him roll in next to her, his humid presence almost startling her as it did very night. She heard him breathing shallowly beside her. Then, for the first time in weeks, she felt his hand grope beneath the hem of her nightie. She pretended to be asleep for the first few moments. She didn't want to seem overeager.

Sometimes Martin stopped when she was too eager. She was very excited, though, and she trembled as he moved over her. He worked vigorously for a short time and came quickly. She called out once loudly, and Martin cupped his hand over her mouth. Melissa moaned into his palm, half embarrassed, half hoping that her cry had carried down the hall. Finished, he rolled off her and allowed her to crawl into his arms.

"So what do you think?" Martin asked.

"What?" Melissa turned to look at him.

"Of Josie? What do you think of her?"

"I like her. She's lovely."

"I know." He squirmed to his side of the bed and was silent for a time. "I wasn't ever a father to her, really. I was ashamed about that. I was ashamed that

I hadn't been a better man. That's why I didn't tell you about it. I hope you understand, sort of."

"I understand," Melissa said. She didn't quite, but she said this anyways. It was easiest.

Martin called in sick the next morning, and the two women sat in the kitchen while he made breakfast. Melissa had never seen him so active in that particular room. He bustled about, asking her occasionally for the location of tea bags, sugar cubes, jams and marmalades. The women exchanged amused glances as he juggled pans and wrestled with the cappuccino machine. The breakfast, itself, felt slightly awkward. Jocelyn sat quietly, laughing at Martin's jokes and answering Melissa's questions but saying little, herself. She seemed to be watching the two of them, studying them with her large, dark eyes. Melissa felt unsettled whenever she saw the girl watching.

After eating they went out on the back patio. Martin suggested they go for a swim. Jocelyn took off her sandal and dipper her foot in the pool.

"Wow, it's warm," she said appreciatively. "This is great. Halifax is still pretty cold now."

Martin smiled. "Go put on your suits, you two."

"I'm all right,' Melissa said. "I don't really feel like swimming." Jocelyn was already heading upstairs.

"C'mon." Martin glared at Melissa. "C'mon. This is important. It's important to me." His expression changed. "Are you starting your . . .?" He made a vague gesture at his mid-section.

"No, I just don't feel like swimming."

"Sit in the sun, then. That's what I'm doing. C'mon, get changed." He walked inside, then returned with a six-pack of Pacific Draft balanced on his hip. Melissa stood and grimly climbed the stairs. Passing the guest room, she heard the girl singing. She stopped and listened. The girl had a sweet, purring voice. Melissa entered the master bedroom and found her suit beneath a heap of thrown-aways and forgotten-abouts in the bottom drawer of the dresser. She hated the suit as much as the last time, but she pulled it on and checked herself in the mirror. Her skin was doughy white, and the varicose veins made her legs resemble a blue cheese.

The girl was already in the pool when Melissa came down. Through the screen door Melissa heard the splashing and Martin's excited shouts. Martin was sitting on a deck chair in his trunks. Jocelyn hoisted herself out of the water on to the pool's edge and smiled at Melissa. The girl seemed more relaxed now. She was very beautiful, Melissa couldn't help but notice. The girl wore a green triangle bikini, a skimpy one, and her flesh gleamed golden in the sunlight. Melissa glanced down at her own blue-cheese thighs, whiter in the outside brightness. Jocelyn lifted herself out of the pool, padded around to the diving board and dove neatly back in. Melissa pulled a lawn chair towards Martin. He was enraptured, watching the girl. He'd absently opened two beers, and he

waved one under Melissa's nose. She accepted it and drank a swallow.

"She's gorgeous, isn't she?" Martin said quietly. The girl was swimming underwater now, her limbs forming lazy triangles. Her shimmering golden shape passed by them, and Martin shook his head.

"Yes. She is very pretty," Melissa said. "I'm almost surprised that she and you – I won't say it." She smiled mischievously and watched him, gauging his reaction. The joke might have been a mistake. She was relieved when he laughed.

"I'm surprised too," Martin said quietly. "Genetics. Go figure."

The girl swam evenly across the surface of the pool now, her arms arching high. She halted and treaded water near them. "Someone else can come in," she said. "There aren't any sharks. I checked." Melissa laughed, and the girl disappeared under the water, grinning.

"Go get my camera, okay?" Martin said, opening a second beer. "Go get it. It's in the front hall closet."

Melissa re-entered the house and watched from the back room as the girl swam and dove like a porpoise. She liked watching from there, cool and unseen. Melissa studied Martin. He was sitting on the pool edge now, trailing his legs in the water, puffing his chest and gesturing boyishly around him. The beer and sunlight had made Melissa feel happy and sentimental, and she whistled her way through the house to the hall closet. Of course, the camera wasn't where Martin had said it would be. Melissa found it upstairs, on the bedside table. By the time she got back, Jocelyn was out of the pool, stretched on a white towel. Martin sat very close to her. Melissa studied the pair of them. He seemed oddly grotesque next to her, with his wiry legs and hairy, pale shoulders. Closer, Melissa could see a hint of resemblance, though, in the corners of the eyes, the shape of the lips and jaw. The similarities fascinated her, but they made her feel something else, a vague unease.

"I found it," she said, waving the camera. "It was upstairs."

"Uh huh," said Martin, distracted. He accepted the camera and studied it for a moment before turning back to Jocelyn. "So tell me more about this Jeremy guy."

"Dad," Jocelyn sighed and smiled faintly.

"No, he sounds all right," said Martin. "I'm just curious about him. You say that he doesn't play any sports of any kind, right?"

"No. He does a lot of other things."

"But no sports. I can't believe that. He just sits and reads. I guess he would get on fine with Lissa, here. The two of them could sit inside all day and bore each other to tears." He smirked. "So he thinks he's going to be a doctor."

"He is going to be a doctor."

"Oh, I'm sorry. But no sports. I'm forming a mental picture, here. I imagine he's kind of a skinny, runty, little guy."

"Like you?" Melissa said sweetly. She couldn't resist. Martin glanced at her in annoyance. Jocelyn looked at Melissa, and the two of them laughed together.

Melissa felt good, sharing the joke with the girl. Even Martin smiled after a time.

"But, I still get the idea he's this scrawny little –" Martin scratched his head and grimaced.

"He's not big. He's not a bodybuilder. There are things more important than that."

Melissa was surprised. There had been something sly and even lewd in the offhand delivery of this last remark, a suggestive undertone. Melissa glanced at Martin to see if he had noticed it. He did look slightly uncomfortable. Jocelyn rolled onto her stomach and smiled back at Melissa. Melissa smiled too, and, after a moment, both women laughed again.

Melissa caught herself staring at the girl's behind and legs. They were so exquisite and vividly defined in the sunlight. The small of the girl's back fairly shone. Melissa made herself look elsewhere. Her gaze lighted on Martin's paunchy little pot belly, then her own thighs, spread across the plastic straps of the deckchair. She completed the circle, glancing furtively again at the girl. Had she ever looked quite like that when she was young.? Or even close to that? She didn't imagine she ever had. Martin was really the only person who had ever told her she was pretty.

"Okay." Martin stood. "I'm taking some pictures now. I need a picture of my two bathing beauties. C'mon, give me a pose, you two.' Melissa moved beside Jocelyn who groaned and stood. The girl struck an exaggerated cheesecake pose, her arms behind her back and her hips tilted. She stared sulkily at the camera for a moment, then giggled.

"Jesus," said Martin. "You've got a career in modeling. Forget this marine crap. I'm serious. Have you ever looked into that?"

Jocelyn stood at ease and laughed. "Dad," she snorted.

"I'm serious. Okay, first shot, just Josie." He waved Melissa out of the frame, and she shuffled to her left, almost tripping over a deck chair. He aimed and took the photo, turned the camera onto its side and frowned. "It's rewinding. That was the last one." He studied the camera. "Damnit."

"It's okay," Melissa said.

"It's okay." He glared at her. "I had a full roll here. I just put in a new roll. But I have a feeling I know what happened. Here we go again." His jaw clenched, and he looked away. "Lissa, did you take some more pictures of that stupid house?" he asked, almost calmly, mindful of the girl's presence. "I'm getting kind of sick of this. I'm sick of getting a roll of film developed and ending up with three pictures of my own and sixteen of your mother's Goddamn birdbath.' He dropped the camera into the grass. "Jesus. I just wanted two more damn shots. Just two." He stood for a moment, his scrawny body tense, then in a clumsy explosion of action he kicked the other lawn chair over, spilling his beer and losing his sandal in the process. He breathed heavily for a moment, then stomped into the house. The two women watched after him. Melissa heard the front door slam, the roar of the car starting out front.

"Is he really that mad?" Jocelyn asked anxiously, drawing the towel around her shoulders. "He seems really mad."

"What?" Melissa was picking up the deckchair and the camera. "He'll be okay." They re-entered the house, and the girl went upstairs to shower. Melissa sat in the back room and listened to the sounds in the fireplace.

Martin returned a half hour later with a half gallon of strawberry ice cream. The three of them sat in the kitchen and ate and joked. He was slightly apologetic and embarrassed, but he glared at Melissa now and then.

That night, in bed, he nudged her awake. "Lissa, I've been thinking, and it seems kind of nuts to have Josie paying through the nose for some apartment in Victoria when it's so close. I'm thinking of having her stay here. I can get a leased car for her at work for peanuts. I mentioned it to her, and she said she liked the idea, but she's worried about you. She thought you might not like the idea."

"Me?" Melissa paused. "Why would I --? No, it's fine."

Martin kissed her, then slumped against her shoulder and slept. Melissa lay awake for some time.

The next morning, after Martin went to work, the two women got up and ate breakfast leisurely. After, Melissa did some dusting in the back room, then sat in the kitchen and read a magazine. The girl roamed the house, looking at pictures and ornaments. She wore a Dalhousie sweatshirt that barely reached her pretty legs. Melissa watched her now and then.

"What's that noise in here?" the girl shouted form the back room.

Melissa looked up from her magazine. "Oh, it's a squirrel. It's caught in the chimney. They fall in sometimes and can't get out."

"That's awful." Jocelyn entered the kitchen. "Can you . . .? Have you tried --?"

"I've tried everything." Melissa shrugged. "He keeps trying to get out the top where he came in, but he can't. His little claws slip and he falls down. It's awful. I don't know what to do to help him."

The girl deliberated. She wore the same contorted expression that Martin wore when he puzzled over something. "Has anyone gone up on the roof?"

"No. Martin . . . Martin might, some time."

"I'll go up," said Jocelyn. "Let me get dressed, and I'll go. Is there a ladder in the garage?"

"I don't think you should. I don't know how safe it is. We'll wait until Martin gets back."

A short time later Melissa found herself helping the girl lean Martin's big ladder against the eaves on the house's side. She protested weakly now and again, but the girl was intent. The ladder was heavy, and they sweated and strained. A joint in the ladder pinched the flesh beneath Melissa's thumb. She cried out, and the girl rubbed Melissa's hand with her own.

Jocelyn scaled the ladder quickly and surely. Melissa watched, impressed by

the girl's agility. When Jocelyn was out of sight, Melissa backed up and craned her neck.

"Lissa," Jocelyn shouted. "You're right, there's a little opening here. It's all metal for the last foot or so. I can't see the little guy."

"Okay. are you going to come down?"

"Just a minute. Lissa, could you throw me up some of that burlap? See those strips over by the rose bushes? Throw a couple up here."

Melissa fetched the strips, remnants from some of the transplanting Martin had done a month ago. They were stiff from dirt and dried rainwater, and she balled them up in her fist and threw. The bundle came unraveled as it flew, and only two strips made it onto the roof.

"Thanks," Jocelyn shouted. A few minutes passed. Melissa wished the girl would come down so they could go back inside. Finally, the girl appeared at the edge of the ladder and waved. She turned, finding the top rung with her foot, and began to climb down. Melissa gripped the base of the ladder tightly, steadying it. She watched the girl's careful descent. A quick, strange image flitted through her mind. It was a brief vision like a snapshot. For just an instant she imagined her hands yanking the ladder away from the eaves, the girl's pretty body tumbling to the ground. The idea, its violence and perversity, frightened Melissa, and she held on even more tightly, feeling the ladder dig into her palms. When the girl reached the ground, Melissa hugged her in relief. Jocelyn smiled and rubbed her hands on her shorts.

"I hope that does the trick," Jocelyn said. "I made a little burlap ladder. I tied it and hung it down. Hopefully, when he gets up there, he can grab hold and climb out."

That's a great idea," Melissa said. "I never would have thought of that." Together they returned the ladder to the garage, then went into the kitchen where Melissa made coffee.

"It's nice having you around," Melissa said, inside. "I usually have Martin do things like that, but he's very busy these days," Melissa said. She took a chair across from the girl, and they sat and drank in silence for a moment.

"Is Martin your first husband, Lissa?" the girl asked. Melissa was unprepared for the question, and she hesitated.

"Yes. I waited a long time." She laughed. "Some people thought I waited for too long. My mother sure did. But I think Martin was worth the wait."

"Yes." Jocelyn stared down at her cup for a long time. "Lissa, I have to tell you something. I don't want you to tell this to Martin. Not yet."

"Yes." Melissa sat very still.

"The job in Victoria. It's actually not that great. It doesn't pay well, and it isn't really related to what I want to do." The girl smiled grimly.

Melissa shook her head. "Oh no, honey. Did you have any idea?"

Jocelyn rubbed her eyes. "Oh yeah. I knew. I had a better job in New Brunswick lined up. But I took the one here because, well – because." She frowned into her coffee and shrugged.

Melissa said nothing. She felt herself holding her own cup tightly. She watched the girl's down-turned eyes, her small red mouth.

"I guess I wanted to see him again," the girl said quietly, not looking up. "I couldn't admit it to myself at first. I told myself I was coming here for the weather, but I know now. It's funny, I never thought it bothered me before. I can't really remember when he lived with Mom and I. Later on, he just came at Christmas sometimes. All my friends' parents were divorced too, so I never thought that I wanted him." She paused. "But I wanted him. I did." The girl had begun to cry soundlessly.

"Oh, honey." Melissa moved a chair over and placed an arm around the girl's small shoulders.

"This has really meant so much to me, Lissa," the girl continued, whispering against Melissa's cheek. "It's been better than I imagined. I was so afraid when I came here that first day. When I called him, I thought he might just hang up. But I realize that he does care about me, and I've met you, too, and... it's been amazing. It's been so nice here. It's only been a short time, but I feel so good here. I feel so at home."

Jocelyn shivered in Melissa's arms for a moment then was still. Melissa stared over the girl's shoulder into the back room. She saw there was a place on the shelves she had missed when she was dusting earlier. She would have to take care of that later. When the girl had stopped crying, Melissa drew back and kissed her on one wet cheek. Jocelyn smiled and blushed. Melissa kissed her again, this time on the lips. The girl recoiled, still smiling but with a twinge of panic in her eyes. She sniffled and sat back in her chair. Melissa leaned forward and kissed her again, this time more forcefully, parting her lips. Jocelyn pulled herself away and stood up.

"I'm sorry," the girl muttered. "I'm . . ." She walked quickly down the hall and up the stairs, one hand pressed over her mouth. Melissa heard the door of the guest room close and the long silence after. Melissa moved to the back room. She dusted the section of shelf, then finished her coffee. She sat across from the fireplace, across from her mother's needle-point motto. "Love can do what hate cannot," it said. Martin had thought it was funny. That was why he'd bought it.

Melissa sat in the silence and realized, after a time, that something about the room felt odd. Something was missing. After a moment she realized the squirrel was no longer scratching. She supposed it had escaped and felt a momentary thrill of relief, then a strange sadness. She would miss him. She set down her cup and headed for the door, leaving behind the house and the silence upstairs. She took the camera with her, and bought some film down the street. At her mother's house she took a series of photos of the back garden, then sat for a time under a tree.

By the time Melissa arrived home it was dusk and Martin's car was in the driveway. He was at the kitchen table, surrounded by empties. The contents of

his folders were strewn along the linoleum.

"Melissa," he said. His eyes were red, his face slack. Melissa sat across from him at the table and took off her shoes.

"She went back to Goddamned Halifax," he said.

"Josie?" She couldn't force any surprise into her voice.

"Yeah." He finished the beer he held, choking on the last mouthful. "Did you talk to her at all? Why did she go, Melissa?"

She shook her head.

"I don't get it. I leave for work this morning, she's here, she's with me. I have a daughter, my daughter, here." And then I get home, and all I've got is a Goddamn picture, one picture. And one Goddamn note."

Melissa sat still. "What did she say?" She saw the crumple of paper in his left fist.

"I don't know. Some crap. She has to re-evaluate her life. She wants some distance from me to think. I don't know." He grimaced, fighting, his face trembling.

"It's okay, Martin."

"No, it's not. It isn't." He shoved the bottle away onto the crowded table top. Several of the empties teetered and clacked. "I know that I did something. I did something wrong. I just want to know what it is this time. What the hell did I do this time, Lissa?" His voice rasped and he covered his eyes with his palm.

Melissa watched him cry. "I'll make something to eat, and then we can go to bed," she said. "You'll feel better after you eat.' She walked to the fridge, opened it and drew out the foil-wrapped steaks. "We should eat these before they go bad," she said, mostly to herself. "I'll barbecue them. They'll be really nice. I'll boil some vegetables." Martin said nothing.

Melissa carried the plate of steaks through the back room towards the screen door leading outside. Something smelled. She stopped and sniffed the steaks, poked at them with her finger. They seemed to be all right. The smell seemed more in the room, itself. She looked about, at the old couch, the television, the ferns in the corner. She looked over a the fireplace, stared into its yawning mouth. She stopped and for just a moment imagined a small, gray *body, its neck twisted, lodged up in the soot and ash. She hurried out onto the* patio, ignited the barbecue, and slapped the steaks down on the grill.

The *Mail* Male

Mameve Medwed, *Mail,* New York: Warner Books, 1997.

What does a nice young woman who has all the advantages of a Harvard education, a social climbing mother, and an ex-husband who teaches James Joyce at the most prestigious institution in the country do with her mail man? Whatever it is, neither rain, nor sleet, nor hail, nor dark of night will keep Louie Cappetti from his appointed assignations with Katinka O'Toole.

Mameve Medwed's first novel, *Mail,* is a very funny story about star crossed lovers who meet at the mail box, find love and, of course, adversity , and like the characters in a Shakespearian comedy, get the lovers they deserve, even if they are not the ones they think they want.

Class is everything in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and in a place where Boston Mayors (when they were Brahmins) always sat on the platform with the Harvard President at the University's graduations but where Mayor Michael Curley was seated in a chair in the corner of the audience because he was too working-class Irish for the Board of Overseers, Katinka O'Toole has a lot to overcome falling in love with a mailman who lives in a triple decker in the neighboring working-class town of Somerville.

She must, first of all, overcome the snobbery of her mother, a woman with a nose for a pedigree, and, since she knows she can't overcome that, she decides on stealth and cunning, tactics that only lead to more confusion and difficulty as mail keeps coming.

In an amusing sub-plot, her mother, a no longer wailing widow, moves from Maine to Cambridge to live with the widower, Arthur T' Haven, "Harvard BA, MA, Ph.D." who, "is seventy, wears tweed, and has aristocratic cheekbones." Things do not look so good for Katinka, who lives in the same apartment building as Arthur. Thus, the plot thickens. Mother and daughter pursue their romantic illusions under the same roof, and Medwed, on the skein of the two loves, is able to weave a richly comic tale that both laughs with and at the foibles of her characters.

There is no doubt that Louie Cappetti is a hunk--just right for a *Playgirl* centerfold, and that might well be the appropriate place for him, right next to the story that Katinka (always the hopeful writer) publishes in that magazine. While it is dangerous to make a character too close to Stanley Kowalski, Medwed succeeds in making Louie sexual, sensual, and troubled by his past without overburdening the story. There is a delicate balance between the adversity in his life (he has a deaf child out of wedlock with a high-school sweetheart) and the striving to better himself that makes him so irresistible to Katinka.

Enter Jake Barnes, blissfully unaware of the stigma attached to his name by those who are familiar with Hemingway. He is Katinka's blind date who looks as much like a frog as Louie does a prince. But he has other attributes to recommend him – he is a

corporate lawyer--and Medwed, rather than simply relying on a broad character sketch, paints his funny body down to the "red whorls of hair tufting his knuckles."

Medwed makes her novel like a little Hasty Pudding soap opera with characters coming on stage for a brief interlude and then waiting in the background until they are needed again. One character, Seamus O'Toole, the Joyce scholar whom Katinka married and with whom she spent " seven good days, not including [the] wedding night," almost makes it to the point of high farce: "His back was delicate, his sinuses were unreliable. He piled Ian Fleming paperbacks behind the toilet seat." Katinka realizes life is not a romance novel after she has been deserted by him for "Melissa and Melinda, sophomores with nothing between them and their Calvins but a little baby fat." Seamus is certainly a lecher, and, at times he becomes the stage Irishman with a vengeance, but always Medwed keeps it funny.

Katinka is more than just funny; she is a character whose voice is hauntingly familiar and yet strangely compelling. She is totally honest with herself and sees the limits of her imagination as well as the limits of her social possibilities: "I pass a hermit's days and nights writing, reading, going out for an occasional movie or a dinner with old friends. I'm thirty-one now and ready to make my literary mark. I want to be a writer. My mother thinks it time once more for me to be a wife."

What happens to Katinka might be as predictable as the postal service , but the surprises that come with the delivery are charming, funny, and sharply incisive. *Mail* is first class.

Reviewer *Mary A. McCay* is Chairperson of English at Loyola.

Dave Davies, *Kink,* New York: Hyperion, 1996.
Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain, *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk,* New York: Grove Press, 1996.
Fred Goodman, *The Mansion on the Hill,* New York: Times Books, 1996.

In *Dead Elvis,* Greil Marcus discusses the quote often attributed to Elvis Presley's producer, Sam Phillips. According to Marcus, Phillips once said, "If I could find a white man who had the negro sound and the negro feel, I could make a billion dollars." In *Elvis,* Albert Goldman presented the same quote, but with a significant difference: "If I could find a white boy who sang like a nigger, I could make a billion dollars." Which version people believe depends on their agenda. Robert Pattison, in *The Triumph of Vulgarity: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* used Goldman's version. Marcus writes that Pattison believed Goldman's version because it was "'more vulgar,' and in the annals of popular music, 'vulgarity is always closer to the truth.'"The Phillips quote is a kind of gossip in that it is an unsettled fact,and history is made from such gossip.

While official and unofficial biographers contribute to histories, the public, as it tells and retells someone's story,writes the dominant narrative, and in that narrative,

believed gossip is treatedas fact and becomes part of the unofficial story. In the case of Phillips,people find it easier to believe a racist, opportunist, Southern male than an enlightened one, so he is likely saddled with Goldman's version of the quote. However, gossip is also part of the counter narrative, the history that Marcus and Phillips' defenders tell. The exemplar of gossip/biography is Dave Davies' *Kink.* Davies tells the story of his life in The Kinks, and even in its conception there is an element of gossip as he answers his brother Ray's autobiography, *X-Ray,* meeting Ray's gently fictionalized account with a first person, 'just the facts, ma'am' version. The relationship between the Davies brothers has always been a prickly one, and more than one Kinks show involved a brawl between the two. In *Kink,* Dave tries to show evidence of Ray's cruelty. Discussing the song "David Watts," Davies tells of Ray offering to trade Dave to the wealthy, gay David Watts in exchange for his house. Davies writes, "It was not the first time Ray had demonstrated his lack of regard for my feelings." The irony of Davies' complaint is that he never seems particularly aware of others' feelings either. He was oblivious to his parents' feelings when he lived at home, a fifteen or sixteen-year-old smuggling women into his bedroom. "Eventually, my lifestyle and insatiable sexual appetite became more than Mum could handle," he writes, "specially after she caught me in bed with five girls." In addition to sex stories, Davies tells of such indulgences as being late for a gig because the band wanted to watch England play West Germany in 1966's European soccer championship. "We didn't get there until around midnight," he writes. "When we arrived at the gig, everyone was packing up and the last of the crowd was wandering home... But I mean, what were we supposed to do? England had won the World Cup, for Christ's sake!" Such excesses could be interpreted as supermale posturing, but those stories are side by side with decidedly unmacho tales of homosexual encounters, mental instability, and unconventional religious experiences. He explains how he and one of the backing vocalists talked about "religion, magic and philosophy," and their attempts to redirect the audience's energy back toward them. At a show in Seattle, "the show was going quite well but the house was only half full and Ray was having difficulty getting the audience 'up'. Midway through the show Shirlie and I did our 'thing', and all of a sudden the crowd instantly came alive and Ray became more in control of the audience."

Stories like these make *Kink* one of the more interesting autobiographies because little in it suggests Davies is worried about burnishing his image, unless it is by some abject route. In some instances, like Legs McNeil and Gillian McCain's *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk,* the focus on gossip is ideological. New York claims its punk bands influenced British punk, while British punk bands claim more spontaneous origins. McNeil and McCain use stories of sex and drugs— traditional gossip fodder— to approach the contested question of whose bands were the purer punks. In 1975, McNeil and cartoonist John Holmstrom created *Punk* as a way to get into gigs and get free drinks. The magazine's title became the name for the style of music it covered— the hard, fast music of The Ramones and The Dictators and the wise guy attitude it embodied. While they coined the name for the music though, the face of punk belonged to Johnny Rotten, largely due to Malcolm McLaren's manipula-

tion of the media surrounding The Sex Pistols. *Please Kill Me* is a history of New York punk and its precursors that puts an American stamp on"punk," countering Jon Savage's excellent *England's Dreaming*, which performs a similar function for British punk. Both brands of punk are inevitable products of the music that preceded them. British punk, reacting to the ponderous art rock of Yes, Genesis, Gentle Giant and Pink Floyd, rejected their ugly, class bound values and became a scathing expose of contemporary British media culture. *Please Kill Me* portrays New York punk as the logical extension of 1970's rock 'n' roll culture, with people living out its legendary indulgences on a Bowery budget. The lives the participants led are chronicled here in their own words, and for the most part,those lives were as accelerated as the pace of the music. Johnny Thunders, who died in New Orleans in 1991, is emblematic of the scene depicted. Even before his death, he had become the patron saint of rock 'n' roll junkies, charismatic and lovable, even in his debauchery, and musically, the father of the 'Chuck Berry on speed' guitar sound. His experience, however, explains why American punk wasn't more of a popular success. The reluctance of radio to touch it was part of the problem, but the stories of Thunders and Dee Dee Ramone going through withdrawal on the road point out that the bands could only travel to places where they had connections. In the largely-autobiographical *Go Now*, Richard Hell tells the very unpleasant story of a junkie driving across America, and reveals how central heroin can become in a person's life.

A harder question than why punk didn't happen is why it did, and McNeil and McCain's reporting suggests an answer. As the eyewitness accounts of life at CBGB's pile up, it becomes clear that the scene was composed of a few hundred people at most, with cultural tourists and celebutantes passing through, and the regulars were hardly society's elite— strippers, artists, poets and dropouts. Had this not happened in a media and industry center like New York— or London,for that matter— punk might never have happened, or it would have happened in a very different way.

Please Kill Me is subtitled "the uncensored oral history of punk," but "gossip" could be substituted for "history," and this is never clearer than in Fred Goodman's *The Mansion on the Hill*. Goodman's book is about "the head-on collision of rock and commerce," but that story involves both traditional gossip— the book couldn't end without mentioning the outing of David Geffen, though it has little to do with him as a business man— while it examines the oldest contested fact in rock 'n' roll: who sold out. Goodman's book is the typical 'backstage' story, ostensibly tracing the growth of rock music as an industry distinct from other forms of live entertainment, but his waggling, moralistic finger is on every page, scolding the excesses of manager-turned-executive David Geffen and critic-turned-manager Jon Landau at every turn. Their sins were not, however, recreational sins, but sins of commerce. They were businessmen. Goodman writes that Landau encouraged Bruce Springsteen "to accept the music as a business," and suggested he "acquire a more explicitly political voice— a voice that echoed the work of earlier artists who clearly hadn't been motivated by commerce," and coming at the end of a chapter, the line is meant to sound as damning as boasting about selling crack in the schoolyard. Ethical compromise is the greatest sin for Goodman,

and almost everybody in the book commits it. The world is divided into white hats and black hats, good and evil. The good guys are those who stayed pure and protected the music, and they include Bob Dylan's manager Albert Grossman, activist and MC5 manager John Sinclair, and Neil Young, who in the early 1980's dealt with his son's cerebral palsy by recording a series of "intimate records that no one but Young could appreciate," angering David Geffen, who thought, according to Young, "I was making those records to laugh at him, as a joke at his expense." The bad guys include everybody else, whether they are actively corrupt, like Geffen and Landau, or dupes like Peter Frampton and Bruce Springsteen.

Goodman's simplistic belief that money is bad undermines the impact of *The Mansion on the Hill*, but it makes it easier to identify the sell-outs and reinforce the mythological purity of rock 'n' roll. His approach to the gossip, to the contested fact, is driven by his ideology, as is the case in each of these books, as will always the case. In gossip/history books, the sides will remain embattled because sides are taken for ideological reasons, and no evidence will settle the dispute. Eyewitnesses are discredited because their loyalties taint their accounts, so this matter cannot be settled.

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Correction

The editors of *New Orleans Review* regret the misspelling of Dr. Lois Palken Rudnick's name in the review of her book, *Utopian Vistas: The Mable Dodge Luhan House and the American Counterculture*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), in NOR Volume 23, Number 1.

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John Gery's second collection of poems, *The Enemies of Leisure*, received a 1995-6 Critic's Choice Award from the *San Francisco Review of Books* and *Today's First Edition*. He is the author of *Nuclear Annihilation and Contemporary American Poetry: Ways of Nothingness*. He teaches at the University of New Orleans.

Lee Meitzen Grue is the present editor of *New Laurel Review*. She has recently published a book of poetry, *In the Sweet Balance of the Flesh*, and a collection of short fiction, *Goodbye, Silver, Silver Cloud*. Her work has appeared in *Ploughshares* and *Xavier Review*, among others.

Nancy Harris, author of the poetry collection *Ape Woman*, is long-time director of the Maple Leaf reading series.

Jessica Henricksen has been published in *Northwest Boulevard*. and has work forthcoming in *The Hollins Critic*.

Sabine Hilding lives in Portland, Oregon. Once a New Orleans resident, she taught in the public school system.

Rodger Kamenetz's books of poetry include *The Missing Jew: New and Selected Poems, Nympholepsy*, and *Stuck*, which will be published in December. A writing teacher at LSU, he is also the author of the nonfiction book *The Jew in the Lotus.*

Richard Katrovas teaches at the University of New Orleans and is director of the Prague Summer Writer's Workshop. His fifth collection of poetry, *Dithyrambs*, is forthcoming from Carnegie-Mellon.

Lisa Lynn Kotnik has a chapbook out published by the Ohio Arts Council. Her work has appeared in *Poetry Motel* and *Impetus*, among others.

Kris Lackey's book, *RoadFrames: The American Highway Narrative* is soon to be published by the University of Nebraska Press. He teaches literature at the University of New Orleans.

Joseph LaCour, born in Gentilly, is a technical translator and television subtitler living near Melan, France, with his wife and two children.

Joy Lahey works in the Tulane University library.

Michael Laughter's work has recently been accepted by *Crazyhorse.*

Bill Lavender edits *Baddog*, an online journal (http://members.aol.com/wtlav/baddog.html), plays guitar for the Glick Bros., teaches English at the University of New Orleans, and sets the type for *NOR.*

Doug MacCash, *NOR*'s art editor, has recently become director of visual arts for the Contemporary Arts Center.

Karen Maceira's poems have appeared in several publications, including *Negative Capability*, and her reviews and essays have been published in *Harvard Review*, among others. She teaches at Alton Elementary School in Slidell.

William Maddox is the author of *Scacciato* and *Beyond Liberal and Conservative*, and the novel, *Scacciate* (Portals Press, 1996). His work has appeared in *The Maple Leaf Rag* and *Fathoms*, among others.

Camille Martin recently published a collection of poems entitled *Plastic Heaven.* Her poems have been published in *Kiosk* and *Fell Swoop.* She is the co-author and co-translator (with John Clark) of the forthcoming work *Liberty, Equality, Geography: The Social Thought of Elisee Reclus.*

James M. Marvel's work has been recently translated into Czech for *Jedmi Okim/ One Eye Open* and appeared in Oxford University's journal *Manutius.*

Mary McCay, *NOR*'s book review editor and chairwoman of the Loyola English Department, is the author of biographies of Rachel Carsen and Ellen Gilchrist.

Martha McFerren is the author of *Delusions of a Popular Mind* and *Get Me Out of Here*, as well two other books of poetry. She has also been published in *Georgia Review* and *Southern Revie*

Robert Andre Menuet is a psychotherapist, marital therapist, and clinical supervisor. He is the publisher and founding editor of *Desire Street*, the Internet e-zine of the New Orleans Poetry Forum.

Christine Murphey coordinates the Environmental Studies Program at Tulane University. She has been recently published in *Sistersong: Women Across Cultures.*

Kay Murphy teaches at the University of New Orleans. A widely published poet, she is the author of several volumes.

James Nolan taught writing last year at Tulane University. His collections are *Why I Live in the Forest* and *What Moves is not the Wind*, both from Wesleyan. His book *Poet-Chief* is out with University of New Mexico Press.

Kerry Poreé is an electrician at Methodist Hospital. His work has also appeared in *Xavier Review* and *Desire Street.*

Alex Rawls teaches at Delgado College. Besides publishing poetry, he is the talking guy in the spoken word band, The Glick Brothers.

Sonya Reeves' poems have appeared in *The Greensboro Review* and *Kansas Quarterly*, among others.

Brad Richard's poems and prose have appeared in many magazines, including *American Letters & Commentary* and *Asylum.* He teaches creative writing at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts.

Marcus Smith is a professor of English at Loyola University.

Cynthia St. Charles is the pseudonym of a New Orleans poet.

Sophia Stone, associate editor of *NOR*, is a recent graduate of the UNO MFA program.

John Tait is a native of Ontario, Canada who has lived in New Orleans for the past three years. He is a recent graduate of the MFA program at the University of New Orleans and will be pursuing his doctorate in English at the University of Missouri-Columbia in Fall 1997. This is his first published story.

Elizabeth Thomas has two poems forthcoming in the anthology *Something in Common*, due out from Louisiana State University Press in 1997. She teaches at UNO.

Helen Toye is the author of the novel *Perhaps Oz* and is currently working on her autobiography, *Shadow on My Face*. She has published in *Louisiana Lyrics* and *Lowlands Review*.

John Verlenden teaches at theUniversity of New Orleans. His work has appeared in various journals, including *The Missouri Review* and *Exquisite Corpse*. He is the co-translator of Muhammed Afifi Matar's *Quartet of Joy*, due out in October.

Patricia Ward's poems have been published in *1989 American Anthology of Southern Poetry* and *A View From the Edge*, among others. She teaches Language Arts at Eleanor McMain Magnet Secondary School.

Robert Willmon is an artist represented by the Still-Zensel Gallery in New Orleans.

New Orleans Review

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