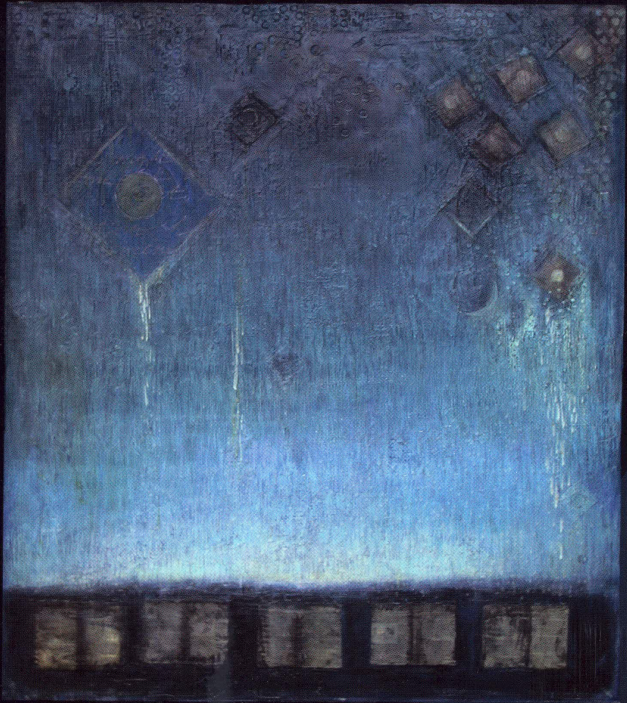


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Tim Murphy

Donaghy

At the eighth Conference on Form and Narrative at West Chester, I saw a fellow smaller than I, dressed in a black leather jacket, ruinously handsome in the way that a few men nearing fifty can be. I walked up to admire him and was astonished to learn that he was Michael Donaghy, whose work I knew from a broadsheet published by *Acumen* in Britain. I asked what had brought him across the Atlantic, and he told me, "I came to meet Dick Davis, Sam Gwynn and you."

That night Michael would recite brilliantly to the assembly, but even many rows back in the auditorium, Alan and I could see that the poet looked deathly pale. Afterward we found our host Michael Peich with Donaghy in the lobby. They were about to leave for the hospital. Donaghy had suffered something worse than an attack of stage fright. His cardiac arrhythmia was acting up—despite his youthful looks, the poet was prematurely afflicted with ill-health. But arrhythmia affected only Michael's heart, not his verse:

The Bacchae

Look out, Slim, these girls are trouble.
You dance with them they dance you back.
They talk it broad but they want it subtle
and you got too much mouth for that.
Their secret groove's their sacred grove —
not clever not ever, nor loud, nor flaunt.
I know you, Slim, you're a jerk for love.
The way you talk is the what you want.
You want numbers. You want names.
You want to cheat at rouge et noir.

But these are initiated dames —
the how they move is the what they are.

Michael's verse was jazzy it was sexy. He loved to jar people. Like Greg Williamson, he was an inveterate mixer of diction. His mind channel-surfed the world. He would hear a song, see a woman, read of ancient Greece—and all these disparate things would combine in a poem. "Initiated dames" indeed.

Donaghy spent his lifetime in three great cities: New York, Chicago and London. In the latter, he achieved wide recognition for his verse, winning major prizes for both of his collections. A skilled flautist and penny whistler, he augmented his miserable earnings from teaching and poetry by playing traditional Irish music with a variety of bands. He certainly carried that musical gift into his poetry.

Eight months after I met Michael at West Chester, we spent some time together in London, where I'd gone to launch my second collection, **Very Far North**, for Waywiser Press. Michael was teaching night classes in creative writing for City University of London. I recited poetry to his pupils, then accompanied them to a nearby pub for a round of ale. We were both on and off the wagon, but Michael's idea of sobriety did not involve desisting from marijuana and cocaine, which I had abjured twenty years earlier.

Michael's poems are full of violence, vodka, drugs, and melodrama. He assumed unpredictable voices—one could never tell whether his personae were imaginative projections or shards of self. He also invoked his Catholic upbringing in bizarre ways. Religious imagery is everywhere in his poetry. A tremendous spiritual tension drove his work, and his life. Charles Martin's great title "For a Child of Seven, Taken by the Jesuits," would be perfect for the yet-unseen Collected Poems of Donaghy.

Co-Pilot

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness,
Sitting on my shoulder like a pirate's parrot,
Whispering the Decalogue like a tiny Charlton Heston.
Tch, he goes. *Tch Tch*. He boreth me spitless.

Tonight I need a party with a bottomless punchbowl
Brimming cool vodka to the lip of the horizon.
I'll yank him from his perch and hold him under
Until the bubbles stop.

Michael couldn't kill the God perched on his shoulder, but death found him suddenly last fall, during the happiest period of his life, when he had married and fathered at last. He had already anticipated and rehearsed his own end in an eerie poem called "The Turning."

The Turning

If anyone asks you how I died, say this:
The angel of death came in the form of a moth
And landed on the lute I was repairing.
I closed up shop
And left the village on the quietest night of summer,
The summer of my thirtieth year,
And went with her up through the thorn forest.

Tell them I heard yarrow stalks snapping beneath my feet
And heard a dog bark far off, far off.
That's all I saw or heard,
Apart from the angel at ankle level leading me,
Until we got above the treeline and I turned
To look for the last time on the lights of home.

That's when she started singing.
It's written that the voice of the god of Israel
Was the voice of many waters.

Tim Murphy

But this was the sound of trees growing,
The noise of a pond thrown into a stone.

When I turned from the lights below to watch her sing,
I found the angel changed from moth to woman,
Singing inhuman intervals through her human throat,
The notes at impossible angles justified.

If you understand, friend, explain to them
So they pray for me. How could I go back?
How could I bear to hear the heart's old triads—
Clatter of hooves, the closed gate clanging,
A match scratched toward a pipe—
How could I bear to hear my children cry?

I found a rock that had the kind of heft
We weigh the world against
And brought it down fast against my forehead
Again, again, until blood drenched my chest
And I was safe and real forever.

Since my return to the Catholic faith, I have prayed for Michael's soul every morning and evening—the response he asked in “The Turning.” Through this disturbing work I hear echoes of C. S. Lewis' *Perelandra Trilogy*, where the Oyeresu (archangels) glimmer at impossible angles to the worlds they rule. I surmise Michael also had Stevens' Key West in mind. “The lights of the fishing boats at anchor there” prefigure the lights of the village seen for the last time by the young luthier as his death angel sings.

Above all, I hear the Bible, “the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying Alleluia.” (Revelation 19:6) Surely that is a source of Michael's unerring sense for lineation, something one finds so rarely in the fractured prose that generally passes for free verse. Donaghy is further proof of what R. P. Warren told me at Yale, and might also have told Michael in the Green Room of the West Side Y, when they met there in

1974: "Boy, if you want to write free verse, you must first learn to write formal verse."

The morning after his collapse at West Chester, Michael ridiculed the episode as "a gypsy wedding rioting in my heart." The previous day he had described his early job as a doorman in New York: "I kept my Hopkins hidden in my hat." Michael just spoke in perfect pentameter, and I tried for several years to write a poem about him. After his premature death, the unfinished project took on real urgency.

The Doorman

i.m. Michael Donaghy

You kept your Hopkins hidden in your hat
 to pass time when gypsy cabs were weaving.
 A matron in whose presence hats came off
 spotted the poet you were forced to doff
 and whisked you to her gracious East Side flat
 where thirty stories up
 Margaret are you grieving
 over Goldengrove unleaving?
 her voice was tea poured in a china cup.
 She bought you tickets to the 'Y,' that hall
 where Eliot intoned
 his *Four Quartets*, where Frost read *Mending Wall*,
 and Dylan Thomas sang his lines half-stoned.

Busking for the supper on your plate,
 you married Maddy late
 as gypsy weddings rioted in your heart,
 that tympanum where all our meters start.
 A frail expatriate,
 you wowed the 'Y.' Your patroness returned
 to hear firsthand how much her guest had learned.
 She watched you springing for the microphone
 to read without a text,
 master of pacing, phrasing, pitch and tone.
 Pity the poor bastard who went next,

Tim Murphy

yet even he is grieving
your prematurely leaving
a stage so few could ever wholly own.

It is a great grief that the angel of death took Michael in his fiftieth year; but *grace a Dieu*, he graced this world for two decades beyond the young luthier's age before *his* turning. The body of work Michael left us, with its "inhuman intervals," is "safe and real forever."

There was an outpouring of grief after Michael's death. Our friend Katy Evans-Bush, Michael's student and my colleague at the Eratosphere, provided me links to the London paper where condolences were offered. There were some memorable things said by minstrels and poets. Within days of the tragedy Paul Lake composed this reflection.

The Water Glass

When water poised above the rim,
He noted it was surface tension
That held the audience and him
Spellbound. That night, the whole convention
Trembled on edge till Michael quipped,
"What could a surface be tense about?"
And laughter broke like water. Then
He made a splash when he passed out.
The doctors looking at his chart
Were puzzled by the tinny tunes
His organs made, but Michael felt
"A gypsy wedding in my heart,"
And we all laughed. Now it's as if
With flute and whistle, he's danced off
To join that gypsy caravan
In noisy mirth, as dark drips down
Night's tent, beyond the edge of town.

After Alan Sullivan came to my rescue and helped me finish
The Doorman, Mister Gwynn weighed in with this:

For M. D.

September 16, 2004

Younger than I, perhaps the braver man
Or just the bigger fool, you kept on going
Down the fast track. Wired and wound tight, you ran
Circles around us all, Mike, surely knowing
Someday we'd grant you, browsing through your pages,
The same damned envious love we have for those
Who've spoiled us with their terse and primal rages,
Making our subtlest stanzas sound like prose.

Still, it's a lovely night, and these regrets
Shouldn't keep us from one toast, you'd agree.
I pull the cork, reach for the cigarettes,
And tilt one for you, Michael Donaghy,
Who spoke your lines like offerings to the gods,
Cheating at nothing, nothing but the odds.

Paul and I were born three years before Michael, and Sam
three years before us. Only Michael died at fifty. We are
being given time to complete our work, time that was
denied Mikey. Note Sam's words, "offerings to the gods." In
the last three days I have earned Michael a plenary indul-
gence which entails a spiritual exercise that I have reduced
to verse.

The Dispensation

My dear Lord, today is All Saints' Day,
and the Church offers plenary indulgence
to those who attend High Mass, who tend the graves
of their forebears and confess their grievous sins.
A mercy to be claimed or given away,
it is my gift to Michael Donaghy

Tim Murphy

for whom this day my unearthly love begins:
a fine poet who is beyond condolence.
Bless me Father, and let me not withhold
my shameful sins, not that I ever would.
Today I laid roses where headstones stood
marking the burial plots of my most dear
whom Jesus Christ already surely saves,
who on the Last of Days have naught to fear;
but Almighty Father, my dead friend must behold
the light of my Redeemer's countenance.
Rescue the soul of Michael Donaghy.

Father Jack

A diamond willow grew beside a brook,
roots undercut, bending above the bank.
Carefully carved, it made a shepherd's crook
for one who sorrowed at a bully's prank.

He stoked the campfires as his charges slept
and the dreamt bear crept from its forest cave.
Comforting the youngest when they wept,
tousling their heads, he said "A Scout is brave."

Why he renounced his vows no one can say.
Certainly not for leading boys astray.

Tim Murphy

The Bowline for Nicholas Robbins

A young sailor plummeted from a tree.
Stunned as though a spreader had cracked his head,
he lay six months unmoving, nearly dead.
To rouse him from insensibility
a wise doctor gave him a length of rope,
said "Bowline." The rabbit popped up the hole,
and hopped counter-clockwise around the bole.
Prayers had been heard, a mooring made for hope.

Antiphonal Responses

I. Look Before You Leap

Solitary confinement with your tears?
If hope and love elude you, live in dread
of what awaits your killer when you're dead:
grief measured in eons, not in years.

II. Prayer for Sobriety

Here is the sacramental cup we drink,
here the unleavened loaf on which we dine,
deliverance from the sins to which I sink.
Here is the book, the work of my Divine
Redeemer at whose Word the worlds revolve.
Let me return His passion with resolve.

III. The Reversion

Born to go astray,
I fled the Catholic fold
when I was twelve years old,
a lamb who ran away,
prey to the wolves, the cold.

My shepherd piped me home.
Filing into a pew,
I learned what Caesar knew:
all roads lead to Rome
where wolves are mothers too.

IV. The Climb

The summit loomed above
a muddy trail he trod.
Sex led him to love,
and love led him to God.

Tim Murphy

V. Surrender
Matthew 10:34

To wield
a sword?
My Lord,
I yield.

VI. "As for Man..."
Psalm 103:15

To every field, a flower.
To every scythe, a pass
where voles and angels cower.
To every gale, the grass.

Tim Murphy's latest books are *Beowulf, A Critical Edition*, a collaboration with Alan Sullivan which AB Longman published, and *Very Far North*, which came out from Waywiser in London. Last year, he "confessed to 35 years of mortal sins."

R. S. Gwynn

Minor Delay

The stylish matron, boarding at Lincoln Center,
Smiles and nods to the busman, who extends
The ramp, folding two seats for her to enter
The front-row space. Regally, she ascends
And, steering with her palm, spins on a dime,
Backing into her spot. He clicks two latches,
Secures her brake, and moves us on on time
While we check cross-street numbers and our watches.

Exiting in the crowd at 44th
Still two blocks and five minutes from our play,
We hurry, but she passes, speeding north
Ahead of us to catch the matinee,
Undaunted and unchecked and sallying forth
At a world of walkers yielding right-of-way.

R. S. (Sam) Gwynn has recently been named poet-in-residence at Lamar University, where he has taught since 1976. One of his poems recently appeared in *Best American Poetry 2006*. His most recent book is *Inside Literature: Reading, Responding, Arguing*, co-authored with Steven J. Zani.

Stephen Cushman

Austromantic

Weathercock, windsock,
One wet finger in the air,
As though direction mattered much
And wind meant nothing more
Than rain today, sun tomorrow;
As though to know the wind
By where it comes from
Or the speed it blows would be to know
More than any pilot knows, any sailor,
Farmer, dog, and what is what they know
Of air in all its motions
Compared to knowing it by touch
Against the cheek or neck,
By exhalations in the ear
Or ways it plays through someone's hair?

Semele

Come to me as you come to her.
Poor girl, pregnant and in the heat
of wanting to know her lover a god,

wheelles from him the promised favor
that can only mean the end of her
seismic skin and resonant lips.

Come to me as you come to her,
queen of heaven with studded sceptre
unable to conceive and fixed

on seeing this fertile rival
across the Styx into total blackness
where he will never hope to follow,

having come as she insisted
in the fullness of a fire
no human can withstand and overwhelmed

her hummingbird heart, its seizure
complete before the coupling
cremated her, still warm, and left him

alone to carry their issue,
holy and intoxicating offspring,
sewn up close inside him.

June

You probably thought it enough to be
the lightest month of the year
and wear your solstice like a sign

of royalty, a diadem of early dawns,
games outside or aimless strolls
after dinner, children tucked in

before rooms go dark. You've always been
the most desired (you know it's true)
by pupils and teachers, and I suppose

all that yearning goes to your head
with the annual fuss made over you
by brides and grooms, named as you are

for the goddess of marriage.

But now don't you see
not everybody likes you, whether it be
the allergy-wracked, for whom you're misery,

the farmer or gardener who seethes
under drought, or the introverted night owl
your thoughtless radiance has trespassed against.

As for brides and grooms, it depends,
I guess, on how much a marriage,
with each anniversary, takes after Juno's,

which one should celebrate in songs
that rhyme you not with *tune* or *moon*
but with *lampoon*, *typhoon*, *spittoon*.

White Rainbow

A trick
Of heavy fog
Blanketing our hollow
While from blue sky above a ridge
The sun

Glosses
Floating droplets
That somehow glow and bend
The light in one translucent arc
Like this.

You are
At the center
Of each rainbow you see,
Says my encyclopedia.
Uh-o.

A ghost,
An albino,
No prismatic spectrum:
What kind of covenant is that?
Soothe me

Again;
Say the center
Hasn't lost all color;
Say, We're richer unrefracted,
Aren't we?

Stephen Cushman

Pyromantic

Blue-tipped kitchen match,
Teach me how to strike
Anywhere and flare beyond
The reach of children, teach me
How to burn without burning
Up or down or out.

My Sister's Watch

keeps its own sweet time,
quarter to lilac, half-past apple tree,
sugar maple sharp, and makes time fly
now like a heron, Great Blue, loping
with folded neck and trailing legs, now
like a fish hawk already rising
from the talon-punctured sea. Waterproof,
yes, or at least enough to shed any tears,
while at night its dial, aglow in green,
presses a luminous face to hers.
Three sweeping hands patrol her cheek.
What makes them tick, the hidden works
behind the crystal, scored and cracked
by spills she's taken on foggy rocks?
Not much mystery for an average watchmaker.
What about her, though, the one who wears it
to keep appointments she's always making?
What about someone unspoken, disguised,
with whom she's secretly synchronized?

Paul Lake

The Man Who Knew Why Stars Shine

*"One of the most impressive discoveries was the origin of the energy of stars, that makes them continue to burn. One of the men who discovered this was out with his girlfriend the night after he realized that nuclear reactions must be going on in the stars in order to make them shine. She said, 'Look at how pretty the stars shine!' He said, 'Yes, and right now I am the only man in the world who knows why stars shine.' She merely laughed at him." --Richard Feynman, **Six Easy Pieces***

He knew why stars shine
But still hadn't learned
That a girl, growing tired
And bored, never yearned
To hear the one man
Who knew why explain
How the stars shine so prettily
Without commenting on
Those stellar attractions
Much closer at hand.
And so with face fired
By internal reactions
He watched as the one
Girl he deeply desired
First laughed at his gravity
Then left him to burn.

The Book of Daniel

Who wouldn't want to change
his name to Belshazzar, from Daniel,
and wear billowing robes and stroll
through Babylon's fabled gardens,
refusing to bow down
to the king's law
or the age's idol.

Who wouldn't rather live
among courtesans and dwarves
in a more lucid narrative,
where dreams are solved like crossword puzzles,
and Day-Glo script appears
on palace walls,
shimmering with portent
like a desert mirage,

or lives in memoirs
under shading palms
in distant spas.

Who wouldn't choose to dwell
in an ancient chronicle
where lions rasp
your martyr's flesh
with emery tongues,
till you emerge
alive and fresh
from their dark dens
with a loud *Ta-dum*

and your trio of doomed companions
with curling beards and biblical names
step from fiery ovens
like Hansel and Gretel--

thin gingery shadows
shaped like men
and browned to tan,

hurling taunts
down dusty roads
like a backward moral.

A professor of English and creative writing at Arkansas Tech, **Paul Lake** has published two books of poetry, *Another Kind of Travel and Walking Backward*, and one novel, *Among the Immortals*. He has just completed a new poetry collection, *The Republic of Virtue*. He is currently the poetry editor of *First Things*.

Terri Witek

Night Book

The chair is a book
she folds herself into.

Outside, the laurel oak's book
never closes although,

in the book of sleep,
she becomes another branch in its forest.

Soon the hero will pass.
In the book of his hands may be numbered

the sighs of his mount.
All ride for the ocean,

itself thumbed by what recovers
no word, no spine of sensation--

unlike the mirror's book,
bold-faced over the credenza.

The fragrant book of the past,
propped beside paperbacks,

avoids the narrowing eye of the hour
and one still shut but already burning.

And yours,
although you are written there.

The Map's Around Here Somewhere

Though native to more subtle islands,
contentment skims across the depths to steal us.
If in such company we seem unsound,

it confiscates our local weapons
(usually, flint filagreed with fuses).
Returning to more subtle islands,

contentment floods then calmly fastens
clouds to hills to creeks to sluices.
If in such company we seem unsound,

our huts re-thatch to feature dawn,
strange birdcalls lift or drop to steer us.
Though we're not native to these islands,

we learn to ply new gods with wampum
and dally with the most amphibious.
If in such company we seem unsound

and drowning still, postcards notify the mainland.
When search parties finally row to meet us,
they find no naifs marooned, no subtle islands,
just leagues of green, consoling sound.

Terry Witek directs the Sullivan Creative Writing Program at Stetson University in Florida. Story Line Press published her second volume of poetry, *Carnal World*, this year. Her first book, *Fools and Crows*, appeared in 2003. A chapbook, *Courting Couples*, won the 2000 Center for Book Arts Letterpress Contest. She is the author of *Robert Lowell and Life Studies: Revising the Self*.

Anne Stevenson

Waving Goodbye

To my son leaving wild Wales on a windy day

Shadows sweep over the hills at a furious gallop;
Cloud-horses form and reform, group and regroup—
Impermanence brushing inscrutable purples and greens
On a canvas of mourning you'll barely claim;
Nor will you remember it, travelling away,
Away from where we stand in the sunlight waving,
While you wave, too, from the car's bucking window.

So you went, and every thought, vowel and verb
Of what you are went with you;
Every syllable and page of what you will do
Or may say, all your everydays of solitude or multitude,
All the vague, massed cumuli of your intent
Went with you, out of an us, out of an ours,
As the gate clanged shut into a new story. Yours. All yours.

Anne Stevenson's fourteen collections of poetry have appeared chiefly in England, where her *Poems 1955–2005* were published last year by Bloodaxe Books in Newcastle. She moved to Britain after winning a Major Hopwood Award from the University of Michigan in 1954 and has since held teaching fellowships in London, Dundee, Edinburgh and at Oxford and Newcastle Universities. The recipient of three honorary doctorates, she received the £60,000 Northern Rock Writers Award in 2002. She is married with three children and four grandchildren, and lives in Durham (U.K.) and in North Wales.

Len Krisak

Double Villanelle from a Line by Weldon Kees

—from “A Late History, 4.”:

“...‘It is as late tonight as it will ever be.’”

How nice to know in time there’s nothing there to fear
Despite the dark, for all the dark that I can see.
My shrewdest guess is, this has always been the case,
Which demonstrates our comfort in the coldest laws:
It can’t get any later now that night is here;
It is as late tonight as it will ever be.

Now day is done, the worst is surely over, dear,
Which seems to mean that you and I at last are free
From every degradation . . . and from every grace.
It is enough to give a man and woman pause:
How nice to know in time there’s nothing there to fear
Despite the dark. For all the dark that I can see,

The darkness, like the future, looks quite bright and clear.
See how its blackest Bakelite shines abundantly?
There’s got to be a lesson there—some fact to face—
That humbles us with hope, intimidates, and awes.
It can’t get any later now that night is here;
It is as late tonight as it will ever be.

Why *do* we miss epiphanies when they appear
To all intents and purposes nothing to flee
From in the least? So often, there’s no other place
As softly reassuring and as free of flaws.
How nice to know in time there’s nothing there to fear
Despite the dark for all. The dark that I can see

Is deepest just before the early light draws near,
Confirming that a pessimist’s eternity
Can’t last forever; that Achilles *wins* the race,
Even as clocks wind down and darkest night withdraws.

Len Krisak

It can't get any later now that night is here;
It is as late tonight as it will ever be.

Courage. You're lovely when you're seen, but *I'm* the seer
My darling. Yes, the time grows late for you and me,
But we shall find there's more than world enough and space
Within the night, believe me. Why? Well, just *because*.
How good to know, in time, there's nothing there to fear
Despite the dark, for *all* the dark. That, I can see.
It can't get any later now that night is here;
It is as late tonight as it will ever be.

RILKE: SONNETS TO ORPHEUS, II.15

Provider; mouth; the fountain's mouth that speaks:
A pure and endless oneness is your space
That fronts the everflowing water's face—
A marble mask before the background peaks

That fill the aqueducts. From far away,
Past graves, and from the sloping Apennines,
They carry you the very thing you say,
Which down your aged black chin then twines

And spills, to fill the basin set before it.
This is the sleeping, upturned ear. You pour it
Endless speech in the marble that lies cupped—

An ear of Earth. She speaks her sibilant stream
To no one but herself. And it will seem,
Should you put in a cup, you interrupt.

Len Krisak has taught at Brandeis, Northeastern University, and Stonehill College. His two chapbooks, *Midland and Fugitive Child*, came out in 1999 from Somers Rocks Press and Aralia Press, respectively. In 2000, his full-length collection *Even as We Speak* won the Richard Wilbur Prize and was published by the University of Evansville Press. In 2004, *If Anything* appeared from WordTech Editions, and in 2006, Carcanet published his *Complete Odes of Horace*. His work has appeared over the years in *The Sewanee Review*, *Agenda*, *Commonweal*, *The Hudson Review*, *PN Review*, *The Formalist*, *The National Review*, *Margie*, *The Cumberland Poetry Review*, *Tennessee Quarterly*, *Classical Outlook*, *Pivot*, *Rattapallax*, *The Weekly Standard*, and *The Oxford Book of Poems on Classical Mythology*, among many others. In addition to the Richard Wilbur Prize, he has received the Robert Penn Warren and Robert Frost Prizes, along with numerous awards from the New England Poetry Club, the Los Angeles Poetry Festival, and over 50 other organizations. He reads extensively throughout New England. He is the former winner of the GoldPocket.com National Trivia Competition and is a four-time Champion on *Jeopardy!*

Jeffrey Shors

Poem

Responding to something seen or remembered, a cornice
Of blue light, a draught of molten snow, something
Unsummoned approaching with its own large darkness
And a call to order not resembling any previous alignment.
In the windward doors, the mysterious van
Unloads again, on a pallet of ice, its inscrutable wares;
And the laughing foreman stops in his tracks.
It might be the first horse in North America, spirits
Introduced among a sober people, or a new and unaccustomed
Flush or drain. Is it not terrible to be alone
Again, for the first or millionth time, with the sun,
A wave of darkness in the night,
With the evenhanded daylight that still plays tricks?

Even the agile spinners couldn't weave it all in;
Nor could the bellhops turn the sundry traffic
Into a ready quip. Nonsense narratives rise and
Falter in the dust. Light inscribes on tine and tea tray
A fragile, color-coded message as trees
Lose their leaves in phantasmagoric sadness. The angle
Was always there for us to see,
But never to hold, and we were mistaken to think so,
To believe that, with a caress, a motion
Of the mind, we could arrest, for one unbelievable moment,
The frantic pace of the light opera in which
We find ourselves ensnared, the dull bourgeois melodrama
That ends with a bang. It has come so far
To be nothing at all, cry the mice in the walls,
Moans the backyard ghost who flutters languidly
The laundry on the line. We will not be able to tell,
Now or next year, what impressed us so deeply,
What caused us to reset the clocks and unhock the silver,
On this lightest and greyest of afternoons.

The Sun

The small woven branches sheltered it, the century's
Last hope. Meanwhile it climbed trees, reckless
Of its future survival. Nothing got done
At the office that day. Permanently
Out to lunch, the radioactive jobbers
Drift through the endlessly reworded afternoons,
And nobody is surprised or ashamed when
It falls, like a bomb. Reports
Issue regularly from sewer and grate,
Not recorded in the official organs.

It's not merely a question of life and death
Anymore, or its nearest simulacrum.
It is about the apotheosis of the rubber
Stripping that circumscribes our lives,
The smile of the cat, our inaptitude
For the expanse of the sky, tragicomic ineptitude
In the face of all we have disowned.
And it could have been the rug of travels,
A necessary tale, poultice applied to the
Tender yet receptive area. The faces
We love in the distant daguerreotype. The
Sun.

Arthur Dove

He used, for his excuse, the elemental colors
Of dawn, the primal midnight of despair. So
When botany failed him, the organic world
Encroached—dark tendrils through a darker window.
But sometimes the bent leaves and buckled pastures
Resembled nothing so much as erratic lightning bolts.
The viewer is unable to reconcile the calm amorphous surface
With the fretted inquiry scratched upon it.

Finally, however, the staid environment comes
To mimic its devotees, arranging its colors
In a special performance. For him, that night,
The leaves were as luminous as islands,
Dramatic bays of blue and beige.
All the incidental details of a coming down
Or going up in the world—the sidewalk,
The emphatic turf—were as many eyes,
Starred like prisms, indecent like bars.
The hulking gasworks evaporated in a mist,
And there you were, privileged spectator
Of the formation of the first crystal, the last light.

Truce

Is it true about the bland figurines and the
Ducks, the gyroscope's blood, as it is true
Of the atomizer lost in the farmhouse
From the turn of the century, the oxeye daisies
Collected for you, a truce? Up against
The pellucid screen, nothing much matters,
Not the prismatic shimmer of a crushed insect,
Its own universe gone to waste. Not
The wind coming again out of last Christmas
Full of glee and muted feelings, alive
With the voices of those who have sailed
Past us. This house is empty, quiet,
With the exception of the demonic southing
Inside the pipes, and tomorrow
The household spirits won't tell us
Much more than they did today, rehearsing
The old story of the impermanence of the weather,
And how it can never alter the drab everydayness
Of the myth they and we have together been
Subsumed into.

Rest on the Flight from Nowhere

It was in the springtime of necessity
That the happy tagalongs first caught a glimpse,
Swallowed the necessary knowledge,
And the pilgrimage came to a halt, wonderingly.
These forensic forays have themselves
To be examined, held up to a light not filtered
Through the paper lanterns of yesteryear.
One shaver begged exultantly, but it was no use,
No good succumbing to the easy victory,
Every night's dream equation in straw.
And she recognized where she was, in the horse
Thieves' pond. Smiled tentatively into the
Remaindered day whose mobile cloud shadows dodged
And veered among the puzzled mendicants.

We are all falling, she said, into a well
To seek the shiny penny at the bottom
Until we wake up underwater. It's time
For a change, new wardrobe, eyes,
Hand-me-downs be damned. The naked offering
Basks in the fields, like you,
Like myself when I resemble myself
More accurately than I do today,
The slicing wing or disc we do not approach
To make it happen; it is its own.
Yet we are getting closer to it,
Rather than the other way around.

Jeffrey Shors is a writer living in St. Louis, MO. He is at work on a memoir and a new volume of poetry.

Patrick Whitfill

The Sparrow

It was nothing shocking,
the way it fit into my hand,
snug. But I wanted to name it
beyond the stiff feathers
and the distilled eyes.

Ashley tells me to wash
my hands before I sit
down to dinner, that disease
loves the dying, and I guess
that makes sense, that it fits
with some universal law

that the only thing I'll ever get
from a bird will be a disease,
some contagion the doctor
at the clinic will have to look up
in his fat, black medical book.

I don't wash my hands
and Ashley complains
that I spend too much time
on what I find in gutters.

I bury the sparrow
along the spine of an oak,
say a few words to the sky
about giving and taking
things that aren't mine.

With my fingers, I dig its grave.
I have no ritual, no concept
of finishing, only a few words
that make the most sense:
words about dust. About ash.

Ashley's going to bed and doesn't
want to deal with me tonight.
I tell her things die in gutters.
I tell her stars have a lifespan.
I tell her light and death both
travel and when we see them

we're seeing the past
and that *that* matters. She says
she didn't marry into poultry
and that tomorrow one
of the cats will uncover
my little sacrament and leave it

at the front door as a present
for the family. But maybe
that's what I want to see:
the sparrow stiff as the concrete
beneath it, blind and clawed
down past the red.

Because that's what I see
when I say *Present*: something
done with the bleeding.
Something that goes
in a burst, fast as flight,
but leaves a few feathers.
Kicks up a bit of dust.

Patrick Whitfill lives and writes in Texas. His poetry appears or is forthcoming in the *Mid-American Review*, *Briar Cliff Review* and *Concho River Review*.

Marilyn Taylor

Studying the Menu

Speaking of all those things you'll never eat,
my love—could one of them, in fact, be crow?
Of course it could. But you already know
how poisonous it tastes (if bittersweet).
These days you're craving quite another treat:
the one who will replace me. But that sloe-
eyed, slack-jawed creature's surely going to show
you all the nuance of a bitch in heat.

I hope she has the brains of a golden retriever,
the glamour of an aging manatee,
the refinement of a Packers wide receiver
and finds her favorite books at Dollar Tree.
—And darling, may she be a born deceiver,
and do to you what you have done to me.

Marilyn Taylor

Late November

—Barron County, Wisconsin

Frost blooms on grass
Sun drops through pine
Sleet splinters rain
Sod numbs to stone.

Soft air goes keen
Spores pock the snow
Stem dries to stalk
Sioux Creek runs slow.

Clouds dress in rags
Cat-tails spike tall
Bronze berries crack
Freeze where they fall.

Fierce crosswinds slice
Close to the grain
Ice on Deer Lake
Spreads its dark stain.

Night pierces day
With its cold knife
Leaf falls on leaf
Death comes to life.

Marilyn Taylor's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The American Scholar*, *The Formalist*, and many other journals. Her second full-length collection, *Subject to Change* (David Robert Books, 2004), was nominated for the Poets Prize in 2005. Marilyn is a contributing editor for *The Writer* magazine, where her articles on poetic craft appear regularly.

Christine Casson

Slip Knot

I.

I sat at my father's feet as he wrapped the twine around his index finger, pulled it taut into a single knot, then cinched it again, before I could read its course, that second knot different from the first, nestled by its side, anchor to a loop that would slide with ease to any size I liked. If he'd been well his eyes, pleased, would have gleamed, for a moment, at my confusion—before his quiet *Look closely, I'll show you again.*

Now, it was an effort to perform this usual task, eyes hard pressed to turn down, to focus on his hands though his fingers like a potter's recalled the routine, so he hardly had to look. He would do it once more, satisfy my compulsion to preserve this simple skill that would be lost like so much else when he was gone though it tired him, all motion deliberate, limbs weighted with his illness, a slow transformation into stone.

II.

The slip knot isn't sound
as its name suggests,
must be used with care
to raise floating objects
fallen overboard, their heft
tightening the knot's grip
easily released,
though in our house
it appeared regularly,
its noose sliding, expanding
or contracting to fit,

pulled close to secure.
My mother, forced to move
when my father died
never fully unpacked:
*What use have I for these?—
I don't entertain—*
would open over time
incidental packages
still sealed with tape,
the vases and bowls
wadded with newspaper,
linens folded in tissue
thin with wear.
Hesitant to part
with her rich cargo,
she'd set them on the floor:
*I'd like you to have this ...
and this ... when I die—
but make for me, would you?—
a few lengths of cord
to keep these boxes
closed while you're away.*
And I turn to the work
at hand, unravel line
into usable lengths,
spin loops
that will suffice, for now,
against the slip of earth,
its silent undertow.

Arrangement

(i.m. Lawrence V. Casson, 1923-1998)

When I was young and heard
 the vinyl record drop, and music lift
 from the lumbering Magnavox

weekend afternoons, watched the needle
 thrum its course through spiraled grooves,
 and you, father,

in your sturdy chair, arms reclining
 on its rests or folded in your lap
 after the long week's work,

I didn't know it was a gift—
 fluid chords and notes engaged
 in polyphonic strands

and your bright face inclined,
 absorbed in shimmered sound,
 your fingers sometimes fluttering

in the living room's soft air
 as over keys you couldn't play
 like wings of nesting birds.

Christine Casson has completed *After the First World*, a manuscript of poems, and is currently working on a study of the poetic sequence titled *Sequence and Time Signature: A Study in Poetic Orchestration*. Most recently her poetry has appeared in *Agenda*, *Natural Bridge*, *Slant*, *South Dakota Review*, *Alabama Literary Review*, in *Fashioned Pleasures* (Parallel Press, 2005), and in *Never Before* (Four Way Books, 2005). She has also published essays on the work of Leslie Marmon Silko and, most recently, on the poetry of Linda Hogan, published in a recent issue of *Agenda*. She is presently Scholar/Writer-in-Residence at Emerson College.

Maryann Corbett

Suburban Samsara

Season finale:

last fall, the street
was flaked in yellow,
flecked with sheet-flame,
leaf-gold layering
over the lawns.
The garden buddhas
sat bare-bellied,
navel deep
in a dreamed nirvana,
almost conceding:
Not all is suffering.

Arid, this summer.

After, when air
chilled, and the days
damped down, cheerless,
small color came:
the crabbed rust-brown,
the dull, dry green.
No gold this go-round,
wealth we waited for.
Only the work—
the raking, bent,
the wrenched back.

We, the gullible,

get what we get,
gold in one year,
rust in another,
and always, always
the empty branches,
their iron angles
scraped on the sky.

Airheads

These past few days, our local air
displays its moves with floating fuzz:
cottonwood seed scintillulas
accost my nostrils, haunt my hair.
They dance like Salome; they tease
with half-cracked helices of flight.
Waffling at each offered breeze,
fluff-head flecks, electron-light,
ride downdrafts like adagio rain—
the next half-second, loft again,
jumping at every chance to shirk
the settling down, the rooted work.
Bad moves, but just how I behave.
The weighty efforts that might save
my soul, my health, my solvency
I balk at, loving faddish stuff—
the fizz of tabloid and TV,
light music, frothy poetry—
composing life from airhead fluff.
No hundredfold of yield is found
from seed that never hits the ground,
so I take comfort when I see
white seed-fuzz piling up in grass,
brought down to earth by modest mass,
a ratio that pleases me:
Some gravitas, much levity.

Maryann Corbett

Light, Motif

June night. Light hangs late for us, porch-swing lazy.
Truck goes by with the windows open, spilling
blue notes, tenor saxophone lines unwinding
into the twilight.

Corner. Turning. Gone. But the world is altered
now, because those measures of hopeless longing
tumbled on us under this sky whose blue notes
lean into nighttime.

(Lolling summer, you with your long vacations,
lawns and pools and languorous blue-note evenings,
hear it? Here: your end, in a dying line of
saxophone solo.)

Checking the Funeral Musicians' Schedule

January, 2006, Saint Paul, Minnesota

Start doing funerals and you notice it:
the time of year the old people decide
they've lived enough—that death might be more friendly
than winter is. Some go outside to meet it.
They toss the snow from walks in reckless swoops,
till their hearts bank and dive, and then the sirens
call us to muttered prayer. Mostly it's men
who get this easy out, who cheer themselves
right to the end with reasons to be, to do.
Their women, cursed by common sense, hang on,
caged in their houses, living on crumbs of care.
Their houses keep them alive and their houses kill them:
Rooms, more and more, resist the readying
for visits that rarely come. A room at a time,
they fill with the useless things that will not stop
singing the litanies of the dead and absent,
till living shrivels to a room or two,
a few clothes, dishes, everything hand washed,
warm water the last solace where the drafts
insinuate at every uncaulked crack
to say, Give up, dear. I don't know how long
persuasion takes. I do know where it ends.

There's nothing for it but to sing, although
my aging mezzo sinks more every year.
I curse the cold and salt the icy steps,
pray at the wakes and sing the funerals.

Maryann Corbett's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Able Muse*, *The Barefoot Muse*, *kaleidowhirl*, *Nimble Spirit Review*, *Raintown Review*, *The William and Mary Review*, and other publications in print and online. She has recently received a Pushcart nomination. She lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, where she works as a legal writing advisor, editor, and indexer for the Minnesota Legislature.

Daniel Tobin

Load Bearing Wall

That morning when he lifted the faucet arm
In the bright kitchen with its view of a house,
Its not distant turret vaulting like a wish
Above the cross-hatched lines of winter trees,
And the un-thought, familiar rush of water
Choked in the pipe's throat, he felt the ice
Of his anger welling up from its source
In years of slow attainment and making do.

He half-expected as much, seeing his life
As pitfalls and obstacles, a turbulent course.
And could have predicted this latest travail
When his neighbors began the renovation
With a floor-shuddering hammer stroke
Days before that inaugurated the plan
For more living space, more room, more light—
Their dream of betterment: more of what he had.

Where they came from downstairs he pictured huts,
Hoards of homeless in dirt lanes, their escape
One of an endless stream; though no excuse,
He brooded, for this thoughtlessness, this cheap job
He'd believed he'd find and did—pipes routed
And boxed against the shared, frozen shingles,
The new wall that would have to come down,
The wall that had and should have remained.

As he stood with them in the dumbfounded room
Talking reason through his teeth, he foresaw
Tense visits of inspectors, contractors,
Raw exchanges in the common hall, lawyers,
The unkind cut of himself as polite victim.
That's when he longed for insulation,
For the lone house with its protected lot,
For the turret with its singular prospect

From which he could survey his world, apart
And safe, though entirely magnanimous.
He saw himself there, but inside his thought
Felt a wall come down and a view open
Of vanished sufficiency, whole cities
Of mold and spore, whole civilizations
On a leaf's underside, and each thing alive
On its shaking stem, its flawed resilient fuse.

Daniel Tobin

Financial Statements Eaten by Rats

Big numbers, small appraising hands...

Debits, credits, spread-sheets consumed,
the deft, anonymous sleights consumed.

No numbers, no fraud, no future
for the defrauded, since one needs
evidence to pinch
even the pettiest crook.

Nothing left but this black bullion,
these dots of blithe shit trailing
across the floor like decimals...

New Millenium Blues

I've been waiting for the sun all day
That's not so much behind a cloud
As the old blues men say, but the cloud
Itself: the gray, dead body of the sky.

The new earth's a ruin with sheen of gold,
And soul's what's left in the brass spittoon.
The soul's what's left in a brass spittoon
And the new earth bleeds as red as the old.

I'll have to wait like ore inside the stone.
I'll have to make my way like a seam through rock,
Make my way like a trickle through rock
Without a notion of the world to come

Till I find that ocean unimaginably wide,
Till I find that ocean but it won't be soon.

Daniel Tobin is the author of three books of poems, *Where the World is Made*, *Double Life*, and *The Narrows*, as well as the critical study *Passage to the Center: Imagination and the Sacred in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney*. Among his awards are "The Discovery/The Nation Award," The Robert Penn Warren Award, The Robert Frost Fellowship, the Katherine Bakeless Nason Prize, and a creative writing fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Widely published in journals, his work also has been anthologized in *The Bread Loaf Anthology of New American Poets*, *The Norton Introduction to Poetry*, and elsewhere. He is Chair of the Department of Writing, Literature, and Publishing at Emerson College.

Jeffery Donaldson

Garden Variation

An Epithalamion for Glen and Elizabeth Gill

Gardens can rise and fall through the seasons
like a prow, fountains of water lunging
on all sides ahead of their fresh breezes.

But there is a moment that the painter loved,
in later August, so the story goes,
at dusk, when blue still backs the gold leaf,

and before the sun's incandescent wick
slips under the rim of the shallow bowl,
when the air is opened like a decanter

and breathes and is poured out over the stone
pools, still warm, and the faery lanterns
that children bring glow like dimmed chandeliers.

And there is an arbour where amorists
might lie down, and without which the garden
would lack its metaphor of the nuptial canopy.

In June, the sunsets are garish, July's
parched ferns nod in the haze, and September
is too late for any number of reasons.

So he came back those evenings in August
for the same twenty minutes, with the case
of paints under his arm, and set to work.

And we may never know how many times,
for that one scene, he returned to finish
what he'd started, what menial tasks detained him

at the house, what single cloud mass sauntering
through his sky at the pace of a hay wagon
lengthened the days between his return visits,

what stretch of unlucky rains intervened
in the given weeks, when he was all but ready,
or indeed how many long winters passed

when the hard ground was jabbed with sticks
and the bitter northerlies made
any trip to the garden a waste of time.

And in the end, to judge by the painting,
it might as easily have been winter
there all year round, where the painter lived,

and never the best possible moment
to go looking for the unfastened light
full of serendipitous intention.

We really just have the story itself
of *Natura Naturans*, the garden unfolding,
as he called the final landscape that years

after was discovered among his works,
the floating lanterns, the breathing air,
the gold leaf, the lovers' nuptial arbour

and its short-lived gloaming, ephemera he loved
so well he went back to get them right
just for that once, more times than we will know.

Jeffery Donaldson teaches poetry and American Literature at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. *Once Out of Nature* was published by McClelland & Stewart in 1991 and *Waterglass* by McGill-Queen's in 1999. He lives on the Niagara Escarpment with his wife and two children.

Charles Rose

Vigil

"You do it the way you put a dress on. You fit the cover over the seat and slide it on down like so. That's called dressing the seat." Jo Ann Hathaway lifted her arms and pulled an invisible dress off. "Undressing the seat, you slide the cover up, like you were taking a tight dress off."

Shirley Carmichael looked over Jo Ann's life insurance application. She slipped the application into her briefcase along with Jo Ann's check for the first month's premium. She should be on her way, but Jo Ann wasn't about to stop yacking at her. After Les died, Jo Ann had gotten this part time job sewing up the covers of school bus seats. Jo Ann had to tell Shirley about dressing and undressing the seats, how she supplemented what she made at Hair Expressions. "Patching them up, that isn't so bad, it's undressing them that gets me down." Jo Ann was back in her kitchen chair, her glass of iced tea dipping down a little. "You have forty or fifty seats to undress, all you want to do is get out of the bus. These kids have no respect for public property. And it's the kids who are well off that are the worst offenders."

Outside the open kitchen window, Traci, Jo Ann's six year old, swinging upside down on a trapeze bar, grabbed the chain on the swaying swing, jiggling Kelli, Jo Ann's four year old. Jo Ann called out for Traci to stop what she was doing right now. Traci swung herself right side up on the trapeze. Kelli dug her heels into a corduroy patch of exposed clay in the backyard's unmown crabgrass, like Shailah would do when she was that age. Shayne, Shirley's ex-husband, had repainted their swing set a soothing pink. Their back yard, Shayne had kept it mowed.

She'd go straight home, not to the office. She'd mail the app off tomorrow morning. Driving back, Shirley looked forward to showing Wiley the check. "You got it, then show it to me, Shir!?" "I got it right here for you, hon." she'd say, "but first I'm going to give you a big kiss." She had brought home a check last night, but Shayne had called before she could

give Wiley his kiss. Shayne had asked her to keep Shailah for two weeks. She'd said no, then said she would think about it. She'd told Wiley that too, she would think about it.

Having Shailah in the house for the first two weeks in November, two weeks, she could manage that without Wiley. Wiley used to take off when Shailah came. He'd say she's your daughter, not mine, and head south for the Gulf Coast.

The road ahead dipped as she passed the mill race frothing on her right, pond-pooling out on her left, how nice it would be to get your feet wet, take your clothes off, merge with the water, Nice, but it would never happen.

When she got to the house she lit a cigarette. It was a frame house sitting back from the road, paint scaling off the window frames, with a front porch Wiley never sat out on, a big back yard that ran back to the creek.

She found Wiley cane pole fishing down by the creek, on the near bank, a purple worm lure in his bait can. His head was all that was big about him now. The rest of him was all skin and bone. "I got a bite Shirl." Wiley yanked the line out, a worm lure jittering past her nose, plopped the worm lure back in the creek. "So how'd your day go?"

"It went as well as can be expected." Wiley should be talking to her, not the creek. "Actually, I had a pretty good day. I took my medication. I watched television. I trimmed my toenails. I turned the sprinkler on as you might have noticed, and as, you see now, I did some fishing."

It came to her, what he'd forgotten to ask. "You forgot to ask me if I got the check."

He didn't ask her to show him the check. She didn't say first she would give him a kiss. He shifted the pole so the bobber bobbed, creating bubbles that quickly disappeared. "We're going to need all the checks we can get, so we can satisfy Shailah's wants and needs."

"Two weeks." She tried to keep her voice down. "Is that too long for you? Can't I have my daughter with me for two weeks?"

Wiley yanked up the line, swung the bobber, slapped the worm lure back in the creek.

None of the things Wiley Peichart had done before was he capable of doing now. Wiley had been a keyboard player in a

country and western group in a north Nashville honky-tonk, had sold life insurance, had been a post office clerk temporarily, a Catholic Action Bible salesman in New Orleans, been a keyboard player in Biloxi, a dance instructor in Pensacola—fox-trot, waltz, jitterbug, tango, rumba, cha cha, mambo, he could do them all.

It was the dancing he let go of last. He'd put a tape on, open up his arms, cock a foot out, *come on Shirl let's dance*. She'd feel his hot hand flat on her spine, his fingers pattering up her back, they would waltz and she'd step on his feet. But the cha cha, that wasn't so difficult, *now remember Shirl you step out on two, like ONE and TWO I taught my baby how to cha cha cha, cha cha cha, cha cha cha so you swing your hips, you shake it Shirl*, that she could get into special for him, and he would turn her, they were doing the waltz, *he was the waltz king, he was dancing with his sweetheart to the Tayyyy...naaseeee Wahhhllllluzzzz!*

They had made this pact, Wiley's idea. When he decided it was time for him to overdose on Halcyon, he would let her know so she could be with him. He wouldn't off himself behind her back.

They kept the bottle in the medicine cabinet, a sturdy sentinel guarding a shelf full of after shaves Wiley no longer had any use for. The Halcyon caplets had a threaded middle, tiny plastic eggs that you could pull apart.

Shirley called Shayne on a Saturday. She'd keep Shailah for two weeks so Shayne and Betty Jean could go on their November Caribbean cruise. Because she'd said yes to Shayne, Wiley had moved the Halcyon bottle out of the medicine cabinet. He'd taken it out to the creek. He'd put a hook in one of the caplets, used the ruined caplet for bait. She went out to him without making a fuss and told him quietly, "return the bottle please." He pulled the bottle out of his creel and handed it over *no comment Shirl*.

Coming in after work a day later, Shirley went to the fridge to get a beer. The Halcyon bottle was in the crisper. She was sure some caplets were missing because this time Wiley had left her a note. "I hide, you go seek, Shirl." She grabbed

the bottle and made for the back door. She found Wiley sitting in front of the bird feeder, arms Xed over his knobby knees, egg droppings haphazardly mixed in with the seed.

"You want to kill yourself, here be my guest," shaking caplets out of the bottle, shoving them at his nostril hairs, "come on, show me what you're made of."

Maybe he'd hide the shotgun next, and all the knives and razor blades. He'd come in to pee while she was in the shower. He had taken the caplets out of the medicine cabinet. He hadn't flushed the John because *as you know Shirl* that would screw up the water pressure. And don't forget to squirt the shower tiles with shower tile cleaner because you couldn't count on Wiley to do it, get rid of mildew stains, stains on the John, couldn't count on him to do anything that might be a little help to her. Cleaning up after him before she got in the shower, shaving cream blobs in the cheapo pedestal sink, stains rimming the toilet bowl, squinch up the sponge in the scummy water, apply Comet, scrub hard, wipe the bowl free of hairs, she'd done all that but not today, scanning items lined up on the toilet tank lid on each side of the prominently displayed, yes legible note, first his shaving brush sprouting out of his mug, his battery operated nostril hair trimmer, seldom in use, seldom applied to those adorable tufts of nostril hair, yes and the sopping wet bath mat, how did that happen, the slippery tile, how many times had she told him *please Wiley put it back where you found it, just hang it up over the shower curtain like a good boy, all right?*

He had the nerve to lay out her pink chemise on his side of the bed. The missing bottle imprinted his pillow. He still had the set on mute when she got to the living room. He was watching a baseball game in his gunked-up bathrobe.

He had agreed to keep Shailah for one week if she would do the cha cha for him. In her cherub pink chemise. She had the Halcyon back in the medicine cabinet, had Wiley back in bed, his big head on the pillow. She pulled the bedspread up over his chest. She wouldn't know what he might do with his hands while she was doing the cha cha. He used to tell her he'd rather lose his legs than his arms or hands.

Does that mean you 'd rather play the keyboard than do the cha cha? I'd rather put my arms around you than do the cha cha, that you know, Shirl.

Across the road from the Lazy Bee pampas grass shimmied in the curlycue wind, needling her shoulder blades, topspinning through her hair. She was trying to pat her hair back into place when Shayne got out of his Buick four door. The vented coat in his navy blue suit snapping out, he managed to get past the Exxon pumps without swiping his hair down more than once.

He sat down across from her, held his open-in-friendship right hand out, "Great to see you, Shirl, but you could have come to my office "

She felt the fleshy mass at the base of his thumb press deep into her thumb and forefinger vee. "I haven't been out this way for awhile. Not since we were both with Liberty Mutual."

"Well I'm still with Liberty Mutual." *Would you please let go of my hand?*

"And from what I hear you're hanging in there." Shayne was talking to her like she was still married to him. "For me you've always been a winner. And if you ever think about jumping ship, I'll be glad to have you on board at Prudential."

"Thanks Shayne, but I'm satisfied where I am."

Shayne glanced at his manicured fingernails, lifted his hands from the picnic table as if the scuffed paint might be contaminated. One week, not two, she was telling Shayne, she would only have Shailah for one week.

"Shailah can stay at your mother's for one week. You know that as well as I do," she said.

Across the road pampas grass shimmying just for him, for Wiley. *Come on Shirl let's dance. Shayne might as well be talking to a brick wall Shirl.*

But Shayne wasn't, he was talking to her. He wasn't yelling at her; he was reasoning with her, what he did when he wasn't yelling at her.

"I want you to know when Wiley goes—and he will go Shirl—you'll wish you'd spent more time with Shailah. You won't have Wiley for an excuse. You won't have anyone to blame but yourself."

She scrunched her toes up till Shayne finished. Pampas grassshushshushshushing, shimmying pampas *grass, for you, Wiley, I'm doing this for you*, but with Shayne's white teeth in her face she had to get away, just go.

She pulled her hair tight on her scalp, One week, one week only Shayne.

On the road, she filed Shayne away with the other bad things in her life. But she couldn't file Shailah away. Shayne was right, she didn't see Shailah enough because of Wiley, the way he was when Shailah was there. She thought of Wiley peeing off the back steps because both bathrooms were in use, how when she took Shailah to church he'd sit out in the car and honk the horn during the service. She'd give Shailah a birthday party and he'd go out to the creek and smoke a joint.

Instead of going home, she drove out of her way to the high school. Shailah wouldn't see her parked down the street from the parking lot. Shailah had died her hair a brassy orange. She had on blue tinted glasses the size of poker chips, hip huggers showing sickles of bare butt. She was fooling around with a skaggy boy. She plumped her butt down in the passenger seat of a Toyota Camry, swung one leg out of the open window. Shirley could feel the ache in her arms from wanting to hold Shailah close, feel Shailah's heart beating. She wanted to comb out the tangles in Shailah's hair. She wanted Shailah to come back home to her, but already Shailah was too far away.

Wiley had tried to mow the front yard, but only ten feet of September grass had been cut. She had to put the mower back in the garage. The keyboard, the amps, the synthesizer, and now the lawn mower he'd never use again.

Wiley was laying out cards on the coffee table. "As you might have observed I tried to mow the lawn today. I gave it my all but I didn't get far."

"We'll pay someone to do it. That won't be any big problem."

She watched Wiley scoop up the cards and shuffle the deck. "Another thing I ought to do around here is move the

cable into the bedroom. I'll be spending all my time in bed pretty soon."

They had moved the set two years ago. They'd tried watching TV in the bedroom, but they'd get to fooling around and miss something they really enjoyed watching.

Wiley started dealing, he did it rapidly, one face up, six face down, talking to the cards, not her. "I'm thinking we should get it done soon, while I'm still ambulatory. You'll need me to pull the cable through." He looked at her the way he did when decisions had to be made, and he wanted her to do it his way.

"All right. We'll do it this weekend. Is Saturday morning all right with you?"

Saturday morning was good for him.

She had to crawl under the house and move the cable. That used to be Wiley's job. After they'd decided where the set should go, he'd drill a hole in the hardwood floor, put his work gloves on, click the flashlight. It was Wiley who used to crawl under the house; she used to be the one looking down at the hole he had drilled, looking at the beam of Wiley's flashlight, at the cable nut wiggling up through the hole, not under the house wigwagging the damned cable.

On a Saturday morning in October she increased his dosage of morphine from five hundred to eight hundred milligrams a day. She spooned a laxative, made sure Wiley got it down. If his bowels locked he was finished, that his home care nurse made sure Shirley knew. She gave Wiley an enema twice a week. She set a morphine caplet on the tip of his tongue. The bent straw poking out of a paper cup, she lined it up with his jittering lips, kept it steady until he was sucking on it.

She called Shayne, told Shayne Wiley was worse. No way she could keep Shailah for him. Shayne hung up on her. She didn't tell Wiley what she'd done. She wouldn't give Wiley the satisfaction of knowing she'd done what he wanted her to.

Ethel Lee Baker had her space heater on. A shutter banged, starting up again when you'd just gotten used to not hearing it. Ethel Lee was spilling bills out of a Crisco can,

spreading them out on the coffee table. Shirley was counting out bills, twelve ones, a ten, a five, then fifty-nine cents for her coin changer, smoothing the creases out in the bills and putting them in her money belt, filling out receipts for the premium payment and signing each one, tearing them off her receipt pad.

She couldn't finish the glass of iced tea. She had to move on, get the route covered; she had two more places to go to and already it was a quarter to four. Coming out, moving on to the car, she felt the wind take hold of her hair and pull.

Driving back, she was sure Wiley had taken his life. She could think of his life as over. She could stop off at the office and put the cash in the safe, do her paperwork, make sure he had time to get it done. Make sure, that was a terrible thing to think.

It was dark when she got back to the house. The porch light was on, and a light in the living room window. The TV was on mute. Wiley wouldn't take the Halcyon with the TV on, not Wiley, *I'd rather go quietly Shirl*. She lit a cigarette, unable to go to him yet. She went to the bathroom off the hall, laid her cigarette in the soap dish. No rush, she even had time to comb out her hair, put on lipstick, touch up her eye shadow. She took another drag, opened the medicine cabinet. He'd scotch taped the note to a shaving cream canister—*I hide you go seek*.

When she got to the bedroom, Wiley turned the TV off. Right away she told Wiley Shailah wasn't coming.

Wiley opened and closed his fingers before he folded them across his chest. With his head propped up on pillows, he looked like he might float off the bed and around the bedroom like a sailboat cruising around a lake. But that didn't keep him from bullshitting her.

"We've been through some tough times, Shirl. Shailah would have been another tough time."

"For you, maybe."

"No, for both of us. But if she had come we would have gotten through it. Just like all the other times, we would have found a way, Shirl."

At first she didn't want to get near him. But she had to pull open the bed table drawer, shake it out, golf tees, package of condoms, dental floss, a cascade of paper clips.

"You and me, we're partners, Shirl. I have a right to know what you're doing."

She had to ask him where he had hidden the Halcyon caplets.

"I didn't hide them, Shirl. I wanted to, but I couldn't. They're right here, under my pillow." He took her hand, patted her knuckles, she felt the force of him pulling her toward the bed. She was sitting on the edge of the bed, looking down at him, poor sick Wiley.

"We'll find a way out, believe me, Shirl. Do you remember that basement room in north Nashville? Remember, you called it the midget room. Two inches of clearance above your head. You had to duck under the furnace pipes to get to the toilet, wasn't that fun? But for two days we got through it."

It was no fun then, and it wasn't now, but if she had to she could play Wiley's game. "After two days we packed up and left. Bye bye Music City."

Hot air was rushing out of the vents. Shirley wanted to turn the thermostat down, but she couldn't pry Wiley's hand loose from hers anymore than she could keep him from running his mouth. "You remember that night in Biloxi. I mean the first night, before I started that gig at The Shores. We checked in at this old hotel on the beach. Remember it said on the marquee, newlyweds could have the bridal suite. And you said we can't check in as newlyweds because neither one of us is wearing a wedding ring."

That hadn't stopped Wiley from wanting to stay there. For Wiley, old beach hotels had class. They could sign a tab for their meals and drinks. Later they had found something cheaper, a rent-by-the-week, beach-view efficiency. It was over, the rumba, the cha cha, what they did when he came off his gig at the Shores. It was over and done with so why make a face, why are you dragging your mouth down like that, what is it? "What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing."

"You have to tell me."

She saw words floating out of Wiley's big head, what he said, that didn't matter as long as he felt he could say it, say anything, what he had to say to justify what he had done.

"I had a dream while you were gone. In the dream you were thinking I'd offed myself, and then I saw you standing beside me. It felt like I was between two plate glass sheets. I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, but I was conscious, I knew you were there. I was god damned dead and you weren't. So when I woke up I had to ask myself, how would I feel if you'd come in here and I'd really done it?"

Wiley spread his fingers out flat on the sheet, he raised his head off the pillow, his. She held his head up, pulled the bottle out from under the pillow. It looked like most of the caplets were there but she couldn't be sure how many were gone. She laid dry fingertips on his forehead. *Go to sleep, Wiley, let it all go.* But he wouldn't let go, not Wiley.

Even now he couldn't keep his hands off her. He put his hands on her hips, shake it Shirl, swing your hips like so. They used to do ballroom dancing after Wiley got through at The Shores. We did the cha cha, we did the fox trot, we did the mambo, we did the cha cha, she'd have to do it herself, on her feet swinging her hips like so, one two, one two three. She would dance for him, she would stay by his side, but that was all she would do for him.

On her way back from Jo Ann Hathaway's she stopped at the Lazy Bee for cigarettes. She had delivered Jo Ann's policy, picked up three referrals, form letters by Jo Ann recommending Liberty Mutual.

Parked in front of the house, hers now, she decided not to light a cigarette. The ash tray was loaded with cigarettes. She had scattered Wiley's ashes over the creek, all but a tablespoonful, which she'd kept in a spare sugar bowl—that's how Wiley wanted it so that's what she had done. She's given his keyboard to Goodwill. She'd flushed a handful of Halcyon capsules down the toilet.

She go out of the car, tugged her coat tight around her neck to keep the cold out. She'd left a light on in the living room. The light in her living room window, like the others

along her street, kept the same intensity and hue. Wiley had said about lights in windows, they reminded him of fried eggs sunny side up. But that wasn't how she saw hers now. Anyone passing by would think of life going on inside her window. Normal life, not Wiley's kind.

She started walking, hunching her shoulders to keep out the cold. It hadn't quite turned dark yet. When it did, she knew it would get colder. She passed discarded flower pots that hadn't been picked up yet. She passed a light tintured, sodded front lawn. She passed windows impacted with TV glows, others curtained, yet light slivered, walked beneath clicking twigs, bare branches, under streetlights. The lights in Shayne and Betty Jean's front windows were off. They must have gone to the movies, all three of them, or were they eating out at Denny's like she and Shayne and Shailah used to do. Or was Shailah with another skaggy boy, doing what she didn't want to know? But maybe Shailah wasn't with a boy. Maybe all three would be back later on.

She hadn't seen Shailah since the funeral. Shailah had come to the house afterwards, Shayne too. Sitting across from her in the love seat in the front parlor, Shayne had tried to comfort her. Shailah hadn't worn her blue tinted glasses. She had washed and combed her hair. She had a pretty dress on and high-heeled shoes, just the right touch of perfume. Her embrace was brief, why wouldn't it be? Yet there was warmth in it. Since then, Shailah had not been back. Shayne had. He'd offered her a job at Prudential, but she wasn't having any of that.

Five trash bags lined up behind the curb showed her Shayne had sucked up dead leaves with a blower. Shayne used to rake the leaves when they married. She'd help out, holding open the mouths of the bags. Shailah too would help out. They would take turns, all three of them, filling the leaf bags.

Returning, she passed the same window lights. She shivered, walked faster. When she got home she would turn the heat up. She would drink a beer, smoke one cigarette. When then? What then? She would make a salad, heat up a frozen dinner in the microwave. Shake lentils into a stock pot, bring eight cups of the water to a boil. Sautee diced

carrots, a diced onion, sliced mushrooms. She would keep watch over her lentil soup until it was just right, stirring it with a wooden spoon. She would keep it overnight in the fridge; it always tasted better the next day. Tomorrow night she would call Shayne, ask to speak with Shailah. What would she say to Shailah? Not come over and sample my lentil soup. She would say something better than that.

Thinking of what she would say to Shailah, she looked up at the darkening sky, sprinkled with traces of fading light. Her house lay still, ahead of her, waiting.

Charles Rose received an Alabama State Council on the Arts Fellowship for 2004-05 in literature/fiction. NewSouth Books recently published his memoir, *In the Midst of Life: A Hospice Volunteer's Story*. He has published short stories in numerous reviews, including *The Sewanee Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *Willow Springs*, *Crazyhorse*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *Blackbird*, and *Shenandoah*. One of his stories appeared in *Craft and Vision: The Best Fiction from The Sewanee Review* (edited by Andrew Lytle). He retired from teaching at Auburn University in 1994.

Bill Coyle

Baltic

i.

Before it was inhabited, this island rose
from the sea each morning, then sank each night—
or so the saga has it; it was only
when the first man landed on the shore and lit
a fire there that the spell was broken.

Waking from a nightmare I can't remember—
Is it the same one every night?—I hear,
when my heart has stopped pounding and I've caught my
breath,
the sigh of the tideless surf not far from here.
I fumble for the light-switch. It's here somewhere.

ii.

We hear a church bell tolling
just as we cycle past
a house with a flag at half-mast,
just as a dull blast
from the limestone quarry causes
the landscape to skip a beat.

iii.

Hard by the hospital, by the narrow pathway
that led down to the harbor, stood a truncated pyramid
topped not by the caduceus but by Hermes' staff
with its twin, twined snakes. That
was the self-same symbol we saw every day,
most often backed by the red cross
decorating an amulet pinned to the breast
of the nurse who monitored your mother's morphine.
On each of the pyramid's four sides,
an image: an egg, a serpent coiled clockwise,

the serpent devouring its own tail, the serpent
coiled again, though counter-clockwise this time.
A copper plate at the pyramid's base
read *Lyss till naturen*, or *Listen to Nature*.
God knows we tried, but we heard nothing but
the laughter
of gulls and the thirsty lapping of the waters.
Back at her bedside we watched the sunset
turn the entire, exemplary world
to earth, air, water, fire.

iv.

Not a sound out of your mother
save for her shallow breathing
and the bubble of oxygen
and water by her bedside.
While she went in and out
of consciousness, we sat
whispering to each other
or silent stared out through
the sick room window to
a horizon that—no doubt
this was a matter of
perspective—loomed above
the hospital, the island.
The sea was tranquil, save
for when the mainland ferry
arrived or departed, sending
wave on unnatural wave
undulating in.

v.

August sun, fair breezes. The days of summer
last, at least in relative terms, forever.
Time still passes, naturally: clouds pass over,
cloudberry ripen,

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fledgling sparrows take to the air and vanish,
and the days, past Midsummer, have grown shorter.
Still, these things—days, berries, birds, clouds—are symbols,
meaning eternal.

Is this, then, the paradise I have looked for
all my days, in all I have read and written?
Is this the redeeming, the quintessential
lyrical moment?

No, since if it were I would see in the garden,
standing with the patience of lichen crosses,
all our dead, their faces like suns, their arms wide
open in welcome.

Airports: An Ode for Michael Lind

If the poetic line,
as seems to be the case, is
that there could not be any less
poetic places
than major airports, then I guess
I ought in all good conscience to resign
my membership in the great brotherhood,
since I can't help but think these places good.

Granted, the meals are bland
(though laughably expensive)
the travelers bored beyond belief
(though apprehensive);
granted, a soul might come to grief
(and many have) trying to understand
a given airport's kabalistic maze.
Still, these are places worthy of our praise,

worthy because in fact they are
a means by which we realize
the ancient dream of humankind:
not just to travel fast and far
but to ascend into the skies
and, living, leave the world behind.

And if the terminals,
their faults being so apparent,
seem lowly means to that high end,
that's still no warrant
for purist bards to condescend.
Let them remember that within these walls,
among kitsch art and commerce, we await
translation to that other, higher state.

Let them remember, too,
that air travel, however
standardized it has grown, remains

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a bold endeavor:

Safe though they are as houses, planes
crash upon take-off, plummet from the blue
or serve as flying bombs in an assault.
So let the poets leave off finding fault;

let them, as is meet and right,
recall how, in antiquity,
that engineer extraordinaire,
father of Icarus and flight,
arrived bereft in Italy.
What he did once we daily dare.

Episodes

America

He's stopped at an abandoned service station
next to a vacant road in the southwest.
Fishing a pack of Winstons from his vest,
he lights one, spreads a map, checks his location.
You the viewer have already guessed
that here, beyond the veil of civilization,
he will be put to some dramatic test.

England

His car, sleek as those spaceships on the covers
of science fiction mags from days of yore,
purrs as he puts the pedal to the floor.
Down darkened, cottaged byways he maneuvers,
coolly evading spies or smugglers or...
But then you see it: there in his rear-view hovers
a ring of lights around a pulsing core.

The Continent

A distant *au revoir*, then, on the landing.
The waiting, now, bathed in the pool's blue glow.
The grounds, space being scarce, are modest, though
the house itself is vast, with a commanding
view of the starry city spread below.
He and the Countess have an understanding:
he'll slip back in when all the others go.

The Far East

Separated from his expedition,
lost in a blizzard in the mountains, he
is welcomed in by a community
of monks who are, according to tradition,

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only a legend from antiquity.

One of them sees in him—not quite contrition,
no—but something no one else can see.

The Man in the Moon

No, he is not Cain, wandering still in exile,
dogged by a dog we take to be "the foul
fiend" incognito, burdened with a thornbush
emblematic of the thorns that grew
in answer to God's curse on our first parents...

No, he is not Endymion, that shepherd-
prince whom the goddess of the moon so loved
she took him up into her dwelling, where
he lives on, now immortal and the doting
father of some fifty demigoddesses...

No, but he is a small grey man—grey hair,
grey eyes, grey trenchcoat buttoned to the top—
who blends chameleon-like into the moonscape.
The type who, had he lived among us, surely
would have been no-one or a master spy.

He lives alone here in a little crater
left on the shoreline of the Sea of Storms,
the roof that he will never build his shelter,
the stones he gathers every day his bread,
the gathering of stones his occupation.

This is the kind of life that he was born to.
He finds it hard to imagine any other,
and when he thinks of us, it is with pity.
How, he wonders, can we bear to live
where there is still so much left to be lost?

Here he sits watching wave on non-existent
wave break on beaches that do not decay,
counting above him in the darkness stars
that do not flicker (like our own) like candles—
though they are burning just as surely down.

Bill Coyle's poems and translations have appeared in such journals as *The Hudson Review*, *Poetry*, *The New Republic* and *PN Review*. His first book, *The God of This World to His Prophet*, won the New Criterion Poetry Prize and has just been published by Ivan R. Dee.

Don Kimball

How Frost Met Pound

—a poem from a paragraph by Jeffrey Meyers in his
biography of Robert Frost

Once Flint told Pound about our Frost
being in town,

why Pound invited him to stop
by Number 10

Church Walk, in Kensington; the fox
sending him

that dodgy red Ezraic card
which said, "At home,

sometimes." Now, Frost, provoked by Pound's
impertinence,

was not about to drop by until
his firstborn book

A Boy's Will had come out. So, late
that following March,

1913, the bard
from north of Boston

found himself, at thirty-nine,
sounding out

a beaten path, hedge-rowed between
gothic steeple

and burial mounds, then made to wait
while the renowned

impresario towels off
his flaunt

of ferruginous hair, Frost knocking on
Pound's door.

Don Kimball lives in Concord, NH. His poetry has appeared in the *Edge City Review*, *The Formalist*, *Lambs & Trochees*, *The Lyric*, *The Blue Unicorn*, and various other journals. His poems also appear in four anthologies, the most recent one being *The Powow River Anthology*.

Poems by Louise Labé

Translated by Annie Finch

SONNET I

Not even Ulysses, or someone as wise as he,
would guess that a face like yours—so full of grace
and honor and respect—such a divine face—
could bring suffering like the pain you're causing me.
Yes, Love, your eyes in all their piercing beauty
have stabbed my innocent breast in the same place
once nourished and kept warm in your embrace;
and still, you are my only remedy.

Hard destiny makes me act like one who's been
stung by a scorpion but still hopes to heal,
taking an antidote of the very same poison.
Wounded as I am, I'm asking you, and you alone—
please don't extinguish the burning you make me feel.
Losing this love's life would rob me of my own.

SONNET 7

We know this: everything that feels life move
dies, if the soul and body separate.
Now, I'm the body, and you are my own soul-mate.
So where have you gone to now, my life, my love?
Don't make me stay here soulless while you rove!
You'd come back too late to save my life! Don't wait!
This body of yours has reached a terrible state!
I need you now; I need how you move above
me. Come easily, so it's not dangerous
for us to meet again, all amorous;
don't be too hard on me, and I know you'll move
me to appreciate your grace. Restore
your beauty to me gently— so it will prove
gentle, although it was so cruel before.

SONNET II

Ah! The soft looks of your so beautiful eyes
are tiny gardens growing amorous flowers;
Love's dangerous arrows nestle in their bowers,
and my eye has been arrested by the prize.
Ah! Your violent heart is so rude and cruel: it lies,
and binds me with such unrelenting powers
that my tears pour down in oh, such langorous showers,
at the torture of my ripe heart's ardent cries!
My eyes, you have discovered such great pleasure,
so much good fortune in his two eyes' treasure—
but my heart, the more you see the eyes' condition,
the more you languish, the more you feel the pain.
Do you think that I feel easy, that I gain,
when I feel my eyes and my heart in opposition?

SONNET 23

What good is it, alas, how well you sang
long-ago praises to my golden hair
or said the beauty of my eyes compared
to gorgeous suns from which Love's arrows sprang
and caused your heart new torments with each pang?
Oh tears that dry so quickly in the air,
oh Death, on which you promised you would swear
your love—on which your solemn vows still hang—
or was the aim of your deceitful malice
to enslave me, pretending to be in my service?
For once, at least, oh love, please pardon me
this mixture of despair and wrath entwined;
but I feel sure, wherever you may be,
you endure your martyrdom as I do mine.

SONNET 24

Ladies, don't reproach me that I've felt
such love it makes a thousand torches burn,
a thousand cares, a thousand sorrows turn
my days to days that tears consume and melt.
Don't let your words cover my name with guilt,
since if I fail, I feel the pain I earn.
Don't sharpen the needles further; you will learn
how hot Love burns each time it is heartfelt,
even if there's no Vulcan for an excuse,
no beauty like Adonis's to accuse.
Love, at his whim, could make you burn more, until—
even with less occasion than I have—
you'd endure a stronger and a stranger love.
So watch out, or you'll be more unhappy still.

Annie Finch's books of poetry include *Calendars* (2003), shortlisted for the Foreword Poetry Book of the Year award; *Eve* (1997); and *The Encyclopedia of Scotland* (2004). These poems are from her translation of the *Complete Poems* of Louise Labé, forthcoming from University of Chicago Press. She has also written for music and opera collaboration and has edited and written a number of books on poetics including *An Exaltation of Forms: Contemporary Poets Celebrate the Diversity of Their Art* with Kathrine Varnes (2002), and *Lofly Dogmas: Poets on Poetry*, with Maxine Kumin and Deborah Brown (2006). Her collection of essays, *The Body of Poetry: Essays on Women, Form, and the Poetic Self* was published last year by the University of Michigan Press. She is Professor of English and Director of the Stonecoast Brief-Residency MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Southern Maine.

Louise Labé (c. 1520-66) was an important literary figure in the Renaissance world of Lyons, France, and earned the nickname "La Sappho Lyonnaise." She is known both for her book of poems published in 1555, which included 24 sonnets and three long elegies, and for many colorful legends about her life, her illustrious love affairs, and her skill at jousting.

Richard Foerster

Aix en Provence

... and then the world arced open
like a door, a blue ventricle

pulsing with muscled flow,
yet the space between my heart

and brain seemed a suitcase
stuffed with shadows, a gorged

terrain of misunderstanding.
Along those ancient stuccoed streets

the windows were iced with summer
blaze above swarms of red

umbrellas—so many medusas
casting about their tresses of shade.

And the snipped sycamores squatted
like green hens on Cours Mirabeau,

where I brooded over my own
clutch of regrets while the bistros'

cranked awnings lowered
their indifferent lids. A waiter

swept from Les Deux Garçons,
out to a table for one. His cloud

of pastis pearled around
a single cube. Across my knees

a creased white napkin spread
like a map in all directions.

Richard Foerster

I stared as pigeons scoured
the pavement: *Where to? Where to?*

A Field in Bohemia

*"On this site the so-called 'Gypsy camp' used to be."
— Information panel at Lety Concentra-
tion Camp, Czech Republic*

A marker plots the old geometry,
redrawn atop the latest property lines:

a square jackknifing to a right triangle,
the ragtag buildings sketched-in, numbered,

and keyed to the necessary legend: Isolation,
Disinfection, Delousing, Deratization.

And so in steps, three hundred twenty-seven
Gypsies died, another five eleven crated off

to Auschwitz—such precision in those numbers,
abstractions that almost obliterate what we can't

see and yet survey to pin it down as history. Here
the State demarcates the garden of its mean regret:

a tract of waste between a barley field
and a row of barns that slurry the sun-washed

Bohemian air with the pungent slop of pigs—
all left unchecked, where weeds now outnumber

any counting, their flowerings useless as lost souls,
till in the not-forgetting we might recall their curative

lore: that yellow mulleins' woolly leaves, dipped
in rationed drops of fat, once served as lampwicks,

that nettles' prickly stems can be boiled for soup
and yarrows brewed to ease the ache of unrelenting

Richard Foerster

sorrow. To tread among the camomiles,
toadflax, and thistles, the lupines' patches

of blued earth, the wild carrots' fragile lace,
is to know at last that we, too, trample

the unruly litany of outcast names.
Their profusions cluster like gaudy caravans

for the dead. So let the scattering seed-winds
tend what we must neglect.

Flame

*I don't want to think about anything,
except to become language.*

—Stanley Kunitz

Once again the poppies:
I'd stay the wind to keep

their pure scorch, this
conflagration thrusting

up from mulish roots
despite years of my spade's

accidental loppings.
This morning it seemed a hundred

crimson Hydra heads
rose through the seadrift fog,

the kind of monstrous beauty
we demand of myth in the aftermath

of winter. That's the problem,
isn't it: the splendid seduction

of these Salomes, what they unveil
in stages, the black intent

they keep hidden till the end
within scrolled parchments,

the taunting logic we can't help
thoughtlessly lusting after,

and would, at a stroke, become,
even as the leaves drift

Richard Foerster

toward jaundice beneath
brittle, rattling pods.

A Young Horseman in the Camargue

He rode into view, all rumbling thunder,
bare-chested, bronzed, yet little more
than a boy atop the gelding's bellows-flare.

Like combers rolling in from the sea, the sheer
dare and thrill of him carried me in their sweep
as he hunkered to the animal's heaving

crest, the thin arms stretched to their limit
around the brindled neck, and I knew
that gallop would soon outpace his prowess,

that slick flanks must sap a boy's
clamped thighs, and the two-as-one
fall out of sync. And yes, he was spun

to the sand, lay there dazed while his mount,
no longer compelled by heel and crop, grazed
on dune grass, mighty in its indifference.

How does one plummet with purpose,
approach again an overshadowing,
unbridled force? Before I could reach him,

the boy had stood, unbroken, and I thought
I glimpsed the youth that I had been,
or wanted to be, gripping a frenzied mane

that seemed at once blast-furnace white
and glacial as a page, and I remembered
that broodmare twitched with attention

when I first whispered in its ear—as if
into the din of chaos, beyond all fear or falling—
how I wanted to haul our weight into air.

Rapture

Driving along the Mass Pike
near Amherst, I let
the radio stray, till I was seized

by an evangelist's rising pitch
on the last days, the coming
Rapture, "with a capital R,"

and I tried to understand
his fervor for the universe
to end. The highway before me

unreeled its illusion of infinity
while I clocked 80 and the world
flooded past in a blur of inattention.

Whatever intimations I've had
were lowercase, and yet
those little raptures came

clawing through my skull
with wingbeat thunder
till each thought was pinioned,

finally beyond struggle.
—In Dresden once I laughed
at Rembrandt's *Ganymedes*:

the boy, infantilized,
beshits himself, not comprehending
the god's ravenous grip and cry;

his pudgy feet paddle the air,
desperate for any toehold, any
anchor to the comforting mundane—

but in Rome, Bernini's Teresa
was so meltingly marbleized
in the eternal moment of what seemed

orgasm, that she embodied
rapture's helpless ascent
so that the angel's arrow

poised above her convulsing
heart already pierced deep
to a farther, immaterial core.

How much sillier, then, for me,
confronted with dis-
concerting beauty—a passage

from *Petrushka*, the fervent
greens of Van Gogh's *Starry
Night at Arles*—when my body

shuddered, welled with tears,
irrationalizing the world
while onlookers scoffed,

until that vision left me
(as every time it must)
humbled, back inside

the tremored flesh, torn
out of paradise, remortalized,
and gasping still in life.

Richard Foerster's fifth collection, *The Burning of Troy*, has just been published by BOA Editions, Ltd.. He lives in York Beach, Maine, where he edits *Chautauqua Literary Journal*.

Lisa Williams

Laurel

(after Bernini's "Apollo and *Daphne*")

The man leaped lightly through the fields,
an arm's length from my heels. I felt my feet
burning, lifting bits of wrenched grass—chunks
of dirt, pebbles, root clumps—as I lunged past
where I had been, each former green harbor
abandoned. Air rasped in my ears,
whirred through the bristling foliage
that crowded my path, sent out spikes
and appendages. Twigs and leaf-edges
scraped me, drew stuttering lines on my skin.
Through the blurred, varying canopy
I glimpsed a sky riven to pieces, slivers
of its blue patina like a broken vase,
the thing I'd looked up to, all its shapes
wasted; soft, blowing forms—horns and sheep
and goats, billows of noble cloth, bridal veils
—marred by the dimming fringe
overhead. Shadows and light climbed
my skin as if witted, racing over
flesh to some end—but what was it—
complete blinding white, like a temple?
Darkness of Proserpine's throne?
Little bits of both flecked my path: broken
poses, scattered fundamentals.

Each pound of my heels struck like needles.
Each foot dribbled blood

but I kept pushing, through one scrim
of branches to another, arriving

somewhere that was only on the way
to more evasion. I ran towards *me* from his

outstretching hands, a me that bloomed
in the distance, as if my self were the goal

all along. I heard him call:
Apollo. He pounded and glowed

behind me, his name flung through the narrow
scope of our flights, the air filled

with leafy ligatures and long, strangling vines.
I follow. He drove me from groves

calling "sister", "sister," "beloved"
as he flattened the fields. I looked behind me

to see the gold-spattered skin
of a God, smell the fragrance of honey

—too rich, cloying, reminding me of bees,
a swarm I witnessed when I was a girl:

all momentum and hum
and restless needling: a thunderous colony

of bodies: cacophonous wings.
I had been sitting on a log, had moved away

and then seen them: exactly in the place
my body had been a few seconds before

Lisa Williams

as if to inhabit the air still rich
with my breath—as if my previous presence

formed a portal, a sudden arch
for arrival. It was like this with Apollo:

each place I'd been was opening to him
even as my steps fled, the air emptied of me

ripe for his existence. Escape
belonged to me, and he wanted that too.

Apollo, the fetid smell:
the pound and call: his want. I hoped

the landscape would bury me,
that I could slip into the background,

as if into relief, the flat place
around those outstanding ones, icons raised

on white portals. *Father, father, protect me . . .*
Then the bark gnarled up between our limbs.

Then the hair he craved coiled to leaves.
He supposed me a surface, like a river

he could embark on, a fleet of waves,
silvery and involving . . . reveries

I hindered or interrupted, snapping fresh
tendrils mid-stretch. Now we are caught

like two stones. I wrench into bark,
my nerves numbed. An umber rush

floods my skull, and my mind
dulls and hardens, entrenched

with gold sap. Clenched, but freed.
Dropped questions, dropped fluidities—

The clefts in my hands splay to leaves: white
roots from my toes pierce cold ground.

No man will pry loose this body.
No god will wrack what is mine.

Midas' Pause

I tried to ornament my life
with gold unfoldings, luteous curls

like antique horns and old illumined scrolls,
mosaics in an emperor's bath, or temple

hearths where virgins guarded fires,
those pyres Aeneas piled high for the dead.

I wanted brilliance spooling from my fingers
as brown sprigs burst to floral Springs,

to leave gilt in the dust each time I turned
away, and glister venerable trails

like the sheen of an exotic snail
streaming across the underworld,

fine threads of my bestowal. The gods
would not be more admired than I

with each branch of my royalty,
whatever I touch exploding—now—with value

new to itself, no longer just itself,
poor fingertips' bequeathal! Could I guess

embellishing the plain, this precious vice,
would leave me starved for what is ordinary,

would leave *us* ruined, whoever shared
a meal with me, whomever I might hand

a thing, or lay a palm on, kindly, warmly?
I can make a surface glitter. But I can't

drink or eat. No ladle of river water,
no crumb of bread or ripening autumn fig

brushes my lips before it strikes like lead,
each bruising gulp a new coin in the void

of my stomach, a hoard of grandeur
harder to bear each hour, undigested

and contrary to flesh. I languish
for the lack of what seems common: a tomato,

a simple root from a clump of musky soil,
my wife's familiar breath. What worth is worth

if it closes me from life? I lower myself
to the floor and watch the awful beauty

creep in circles ranging farther out
from where I sit, making the sound

of cracks and splits as it transfigures tiles
like a fleet of molten serpents lashing

from my still-lumpish flesh along
the floor into the blooming garden

where my wife bends now, clipping vines . . .
I see her gesture slowly as she sees

—too late—the alteration climb
from soil to overtake her body's standstill,

a metamorphosis that kills
as adders' poison does. She can't escape

without ripping her leg from her own ankle,
and so must freeze there, horrified,

as it crawls to fossilize her flesh,
her sex, her mother's milk

and then—slowly, at last—entrap
the small pulse of her throat, stopping her breath,

her mind that still beats tinnily in its cage
till all thought's wings are smothered ...

But I move too fast, imagining that which
hasn't happened. What does what weighs

in the hand and gleams before my sight
turn into a tyrant? How I want

to take one soiled and gardening hand
of hers from the dirt and kiss it! She absorbs

what light falls on her body, doesn't glow
as cold and as unfeeling as my opus.

Death and Transfiguration of a Star

Ambitious beam,
what's physical in your case "strains
all concepts of the conditions
of matter." Trillions of times
strict as steel, thousands the pull

of the earth's magnetic field,
spinning and spinning
on mercurial impulse
as if in a race to defeat
only your past increase, earlier

your inner center became your cloak
in a brash refashioning,
your deepest matter worn now on the sleeve,
old metals polished,
a world of sword blades clashed

a millisecond. What's physical
in you swells beyond mere image. Numbers pale.
Surface "smooth as a billiard ball"
won't cut it. Pre-intellectual,
dependent on the mind

to be imagined but not to exist,
after the ultimate solipsist-
ic meltdown--all guns in the arsenal
for despair, all hooves in the stable
of soldering force,

all shards of the heavenly mirror
held in your fists--you stabilize
instead of disappear,
your silver arms stretch light light years
ahead of dying.

Some hole awaits
as blackness must

Lisa Williams

the most boggling volts. You will be
zero volume, endless density,
when words don't leave a trace.

Jellyfish

Movement means closure,
a thrust from where you are,
that gelid other plane,

your bell-like head
with wordless aperture
emptying, emptying,

the pleats of your innards,
a shallow accordion.
Your tendrils trail neon

lit cities of cells
--you, pellucid ferry,
invisibly carried

spun dome like the ghost
of some merry-go-round.
And we who don't float

with such unconscious ease
think it terror to rise
from our notions of *land*,

rock, and *ownership*, can't
ride a bottomless plain,
colored trust in our sails,

in the lax, placid matter
that holds, not from falls
(for you too fill your head

so your gossamer motors
move onward) but holds
your shape firm. Even you,

Lisa Williams

if you never once moved,
if you didn't take in
the first place where you are,

fold around that cold present
then push out, with liquid
momentum (like knowledge)

from flushed, chambered cells,
would ascend nowhere new.
In the planktonous dark,

a touch is the world,
the devouring of touch
motion's guidance. Your emptied

bell head tolls the thrust,
the sole luminous effort—clear
life thinking's lost!

Woman in Front of Firelight
after a painting by Franco Mondini-Ruiz

This was a different light, but still familiar.
She felt illumined and she felt afraid
—serpents of color lashing through degrees

of ambience, heat. She knew their streams would fade
to ash, that their beauty would decompose,
like a passion that blazed into display

then dwindled, and there was a little sadness
to this hard truth: she lived in a world
where such lush burnishings arrayed

only a moment before they smouldered.
But now, enfolded in a pause
of orange flamboyance, even though its cause

was material, finite (unlike feeling),
she felt her life drawn through her eyes
toward some liquid body, rimmed in wings

beating and beating, that would not lower her
down to time. There were many things
outside this room she should remember,

that she should be turning in her mind
for these kindled minutes, golden, rare . . .
but thoughts left as she watched the fire.

Lisa Williams

At the Church of Santa Prassede

In the Chapel of the Garden of Paradise
(Rome)

Heaven must be dull compared to this:
panes and flecks of color

curving over us, bright celebrants.
Every surface covered.

Every surface jewelled.
Coral and jade. Turquoise, topaz, agate.

More succinct than paint,
these glassed, transcending hues.

From the smallest scale they widen
into landscapes more intense

than we imagined, obliterating
even the idea of sin, and creating

a realm that we can look to from our realm.
Who cares if there is no horizon, no sun,

no home like this dreamed mosaic
except in memory?

Who cares about the doorway
(which must be entered) to a dimmer world?

—Or that there is nothing
of our language rendered clearly,

when there is this vision made entirely
of particles assembled,

which didn't *arrive*?
See how the eye moves

from cut, shimmering square
to cut, shimmering square,

each increment's aspect placed
(like the flecks of an insect's scale)

by hands that have disappeared?
Can it matter that those hands were human?

Restoration

Decline is this blue dusk
sharp around the steeple
and a bell tower's edge,

in which street lamps glow orange
and shoes clatter on cobblestones.
A person or two stops

to speak of what they know
while hurrying past, and I listen
to their words pry the weight of darkness.

Wholly anonymous,
I watch light sink into stones.
I watch alleys, baroque facades,

shop fronts and fountains all slide
toward decay, and I grip them with sight
--this medieval church, for example,

its chiseled, elaborate face.
Inside, I find shadows draped
in chapels and on marble tombs

but I wander until the lines
of the paintings and sculptures fade
so much I see the way out

alone. There's a little more light
outdoors, and I think of the church
left behind overspread with shadow

as I and the others leave,
of its hard and silent altar.
We restore the things we need

in mind; restore and preserve
with vision, or with fresh thought,
in passing only, the icons

established, not quite our own,
thus witnessed, and slightly altered,
as we walk through the holy city

(just as we move through a poem),
choosing what to let dim, what grace
with a transient inner light.

Lisa Williams has poems forthcoming in *Measure* (formerly *The Formalist*), *Quadrant* (Australia), *Image*, *Raritan*, *The Southern Review*, and *Salmagundi*, and an essay forthcoming in *The Hollins Critic*. Her book of poems, *The Hammered Dulcimer*, was published in 1998. In 2004 she was awarded the Rome Prize by the American Academy of Arts and Letters. Originally from Nashville, Tennessee, she is currently assistant professor of English at Centre College in Danville, KY.

Richard Freis

Night Flight

The pilot, backlit by a yellow sunset,
prepares the cockpit, dimmed to silhouette.
His dashlights flush the dusk. The cabin's cold.
A German tourist wipes his hands of sweat.

Along the runway green drains from the pines.
The engines rev and roar, roll us toward flight.
Our light plane lifts and wobbles, lurches and lulls,
as, strangers to each other, we climb into night.

The sunset rides beside us, a fluorescent
fresco, ocher, orange, neon rose;
a river like a ribbon hung on darkness
unrolls sunset below us where it flows.

Amazing how tenacious this last light is!
Ghosts of snowlight blur the nearer slopes.
Across the mesa reservoirs and lakes
shine like dimes tossed on a countertop.

My eye is ready to let darkness come,
weary of the light, too long awake.
Each separate self sits lost in dreams of home.
The plane climbs on the way the pilot takes.

Lesbia

I sometimes think the poems more than he
were my true lovers. Urgent to exist,
they made him love me, knowing I'd become
inevitably their mother; and in them
he found the greater self that he could love.

I've numbered other poets as my lovers.
They understood how much such love affairs
are like the art of writing pleasant verses,
knew how to keep the beat right, to compose
a music with beginning, middle, end.
And knew that they weren't of the selfsame
substance as their love. Or as their poems.

He wanted me to love him for his words,
to earn by them unbroken love, almost
a wife's obliged fidelity. He couldn't see that
women don't marry poems, they marry men,
and not, with luck, obsessed, possessive ones.
His famous plaint that I did not prefer him
before all others was unjust: if I
had asked, he'd not have burned his poems for me.

The Liminal Ones

They wear a layer less of skin
than others do; are, in any company,
the first to feel hot or cold; have borne
in their bodies every
side effect of every
medication they have taken; and
their senses are too alive:
each nuance of color or light
incises their eyes;
and they, when listening,
so completely hear, they
are all ear.

They are so pervious, you'd think that,
standing against the light,
they'd be transparent;
instead, we, the solid ones,
are transparent to them:
they know what people mean
before they speak,
and in the slightest shrug may rightly read a soul,
though others won't believe them.

And, finally, they prefer
this disbelief, prefer to be
as unnoticed as that silence which they are.

Empty of themselves, they
let what-will-unfold-itself
unfold itself as it will.
In their contemplation,
their seeing their blessing,
they walk through creation
inviting it to be; and are
themselves a liminal place,
where stone and spirit marry,
healing within themselves
the divisions of the world,
a poverty filled, an unnoticed mystery.

Richard Freis is an Emeritus Professor of Classics at Millsaps College. He has published studies in the fields of classical and modern literature and the history of criticism. He is also a poet, translator, and librettist. His present deep engagement with integral frameworks is reflected in his website www.body-mind-spirit-integral.com.

Garrick Davis

Of Théophile Gautier

“Il perira, je crois, tout entier.”

--Faguet, *Études littéraires XIXe siècle*

On forty consecutive nights, his applause
led the Romantics at the first enjambment
of *Hernani*, until he had won the cause
over the bourgeois, in a cherry doublet...

that shocked the crowd at the Théâtre-Français.
On red squares the secret word *Hierro* was passed,
while orgies at the Impasse du Doyenné
began as costume balls where young artists danced...

le galop infernal. Black hair to his waist,
he refused to stand with the National Guard
and was jailed, because he only served good taste
“in an army that respects the human form.”

Dressed like a Turk in caftan, fez and daggers
he brought home a small lioness from Algiers
to his salon of cats and antique sabres,
where Mallarmé and Flaubert came to hear...

of far countries from his verbal photographs.
Of the Duchesse de Plaisance, met in Athens,
whose infant daughter rested in a vat
of alcohol that she travelled with, for her sins.

And of the *soirées* of the Duc de Nemours
attended with Hugo, where they shined as guests
among royalty, since appearance was the core.
“Nothing is beautiful unless it is useless.”

He found Tin Tun Lung, professor of Chinese,
in a silk robe of chimeras and flowers,
with pigtail and parasol wandering the streets
and brought him home, a teacher for his daughters.

Le Corsaire-Satan published his conversations
as remembered by guests he entertained:
“in the midst of the crumbling of arts, religions...
only the stacks of banknotes remain.”

From a few lines of Heine, he wrote the ballet
Giselle and idolized the lead, who imbued
the decor with myth by her leaps on the stage.
“There is something fine in loving a statue.”

When it swept Paris, he denounced the polka
as a boring fashion perfect for the coarse
theater crowds, who asked why they should applaud
“heroes who did not speculate at the Bourse.”

Exotic scourge of a mercenary age!
Yet he heard rhythms in the mechanized din
coming, as prophet of art for its own sake:
“The new Pegasus will be a railway engine.”

But, supporting three Italian mistresses,
he turned critic and was crushed beneath the Press;
writing elegant copy on subjects not his,
he filled three hundred volumes, to cover debts.

His demon was the article. And his heart
waited, in between, for a grant of small script.
Denied the post of Inspecteur des Beaux-Arts,
“I am nothing now but a pen with three nibs.”

Regretting a first and lost career in paint,
this pupil of Rioult left easel for pen
only to scrawl “transpositions of art” and make
a religion of color, vague description--sin.

At the funeral of the word-magician,
the priests left at the tributes, and poets saw
no blessing but their own cast on the coffin.
Friends sang, the best requiem, from the Opera.

O Gautier, your letters locked from view
to rot in the library at Chantilly
in the collection of Vicomte de Lovenjoul...
all that was modern, of which you were the key!

For Madame Liliane Ziegel

Of what is life composed? Of such moments
As stirred the heart's fire—coals, these eighty years
Amassed into a pile.

A Jewish girl
Awaits the Metro, nearing dawn, and keeps
Her star's yellow quite covered by her coat.
She must not board the train. For if she's caught
She knows she'll disappear—it comes—she leaps
And hugs the railing close until the halls
Of her Sorbonne are clear. Why risk one's life?
To take this last exam? She slips inside,
And finds her seat, quite late—the teacher coughs
And then her classmates stand, as one, and raze
Her shyness with applause.

That did not save
Anyone from dying. Of course, soldiers
Still carried off her grandmother one night
By pallet—the deathbed to Drancy—
And all the pale cousins were ground to powder.
Only her father, Baron Rothschild's doctor,
Kept them alive by never staying home.
And so, the doors were locked and no one slept
As she, tonight, alone in Paris, shall not sleep
But that is forty years later.

For now,
She's still a girl of twenty who is called
To the Ritz to help Ernest Hemingway
Translate *The Sun Also Rises*. The door
Opens and he's drunk, and naked, at noon.
He dresses, and they repair to the bar
Which Hem "liberates" with his "serve it up."
That was nineteen forty-four. A great day.
The start of her love-affair, one could say,
With America.

A few years later,
She marries the gallant Olivier;
Helps Henry Miller find his umbrella;
And St. John-Perse his grand country villa;

The Count Robert de Montesquiou

“Le sujet est inépuisable... Les injustices ont leur temps. Et au moins en esprit et en vérité il renaîtra.” -Marcel Proust

Where shall I go, where shall I go?
To that Circe of the Plaine Monceau?
In the starry firmament of Paris
All admire her carriage...

No, I was speaking of her bust
And please, please do not interrupt.
The Commander of Delicate Odors
Must bequeath his orders

To dear Yturri for the day.
There is yet so much to arrange
For my new Pavilion of the Muses:
Cloisonné and roses

Shall endeavor to present me
In my glory at the entry.
At this year's ball? Ah, we shall hear Verlaine,
Wreathed in pipe-smoke, declaim

From his latest moon-tinctured tears
To a perfumed chorus of cheers.
But the ladies of Faubourg Saint-Germain
Deserve Art, all the same.

For me, life began with a ball
Given by some baronne one fall
When I was twenty. And there Coppee,
Barbey d'Aurevilly,

And Heredia were excused
From a room stuffed with cockatoos.
And there I was ushered into Beauty!
Now, all else seems silly..

The ladies with fans and corsets,
All adorned like circus horses,
And those young fops of the debutante scene,
Wild hair plastered with cream!

Poor father at his Jockey Club,
And mother's gauche-blue chinese cups...
How stupid the scaled genealogies,
The dumb cousins at teas!

Instead I refined my disdain,
Chose a fine tailor, and became
Lord of both the auction-house and salon.
Friend of Proust and Gramont.

The national Petronius,
Not des Esseintes or Charlus.
To be recalled as a pervert and fake,
Not a priest for Art's sake!

Of course, to husbands I was queer
Since I made no move to endear
Myself to their wives with some stale caress,
But with thoughts on their dress.

But the bourgeois are always dim,
With each pale cravat and weak chin
Serving notice of their sworn attention
To the day's convention.

They could not condescend to me
Who made his dull countrymen see
That he lived, in spite of the age he graced,
A religion of Taste.

Garrick Davis is the founding editor of the *Contemporary Poetry Review*. His poetry and criticism have appeared in *The Weekly Standard*, *The New Criterion*, *Pacific Review*, *Verse*, and *McSweeney's*. *Child of the Ocmulgee: the Selected Poems of Freda Quenneville*, for which he served as editor, was published by Michigan State University Press in 2002. He is the literature specialist of the National Endowment for the Arts in Washington, DC.

Jacqueline Kolosov

Slovenia in Shadow

I

Why does she kneel within
the hard oak pew, hazel eyes

held by Mary presiding
within immanent stained glass?

This ageless girl-mother the pattern
my own mother, on ice-floe days,

patterns herself after. Why
—when her mother never lived

to see the shadow farm her husband
created on American land?

—When her sister wearied
a hospital bed, her cancer-
ridden body consuming its own flesh,
a four year old daughter

asking after her? Why? I ask,
having asked these questions
since I first knelt beside her.

II

...Only now, in the misting
alchemy of morning,
beyond cricket chirr and absent
star, a path unfolds,
mossed and earth-fragrant.

Up ahead, and almost
within reach, a russet-haired girl
in pigtails and scuffed leather shoes,
who fled the sharp-beaked village
geese, big as swans,
but greedier, and without
the swans' prism grace.

Tucking a jay's wind-riffed feather
 behind her ear, she pauses
to scout mushrooms
 and the eared chance of rabbit.
She is eleven. In one year
 the government will seize
her family's farm, and her father
 will be hauled to jail.
But for today she is still
 a girl who mounts a horse
and makes it all the way
 to the poppy and yarrow-stitched meadow
before the clutch of mane
 slips her grasp.

III

My mother's mother, my *Oma*
 of the sorrow-dark eyes and pale
freckled skin, gave birth at seventeen
 to my mother, *Helenca*.
Fourteen years *Oma* helped
 my grandfather turn grapes
into *cvicek*, the Slovenian wine
 they sold in barrels in Ljublana,
a half-day's journey from their farm.
 My mother helped
coax seedlings into life, pick
 fruit from the gooseberry and
currant, feed the cows,
 even gather eggs still warm
from the hens. Yet she was
 too young to help
with the wine, source of
 her shoes, schoolbooks,
and satisfied smile.

IV

Mostly, I remember Oma's
gentleness, the soft way she moved
her fingers through my own
russet hair. She brought me
jelly bismarcks from the Cicero bakery
and tucked me in when I visited,
but she never told me her stories...
It was more than twenty years
after she died, my mother revealed
why Oma never drank the milk
she once coaxed from the cows,
having come briefly to America
with her own mother
in the depressed years
following the First World War.
Oma, whose grandmother
once petitioned the bishop
for Oma to attend private school,
joined her mother
in the airless assembly
of a milk bottling plant.
For years, she woke
from nightmares of bandaged
hands that would not heal.

V

My mother, whose memories
of the farm resemble dandelions
buoyed by wind, now tends
her own thicket of gooseberry
and currant, peppery

rosemary, and for Oma,
 a rosary of bleeding heart.
Of their months in a refugee
 camp, she remembers only
hours of English classes
 taught by a former prisoner of war.
Of the ship's long crossing
 to New York (how the sky-
scrapered horizon must have exalted
 and terrified)
and the overnight train ride
 to Chicago, she says even less,
though she, at sixteen,
 her English surpassing her parents'
by far, must have been
 their American voice.

VI

Last July, my mother journeyed
 back to Slovenia
for the first time, found relatives
 still growing wine,
though the horses had been replaced
 by tractors, and the gypsy songs
by the haze of a TV screen.
 Yes, she found the timbers
of the farmhouse decayed.
 Yes, she wept when strangers
chased her off *their* land.
 Yet there remained time
enough to discover swallows
 still nesting in the ruined barn,
to eat from the currant, and catch
 the evergreen drift of rosemary.
The geese, she believes,

are still the village's reigning terror.
When she returned to the States,
her only photograph was a swan
and her young. And although
she has not said so, the scintillate
ripples fanning from that continuum
of birds I keep thinking of
tell me, somewhere
between the school
and what was once her family's farm,
is the shaded path,
and the silhouette of a russet-haired girl
in scuffed leather shoes,
a girl who lingers
as long as she can
before the path gives way
to a meadow, and the un-stolen
glimpse of the beckoning land.

Answer Me

Take that I am afraid of a world where the robins can build a nest, tend their eggs,
nourish their young, then lose each and every one.

Take that yesterday's fallen fledglings, speckled breasts rigid beneath
the pear tree, sharpened my own vision of the rose bush's second flowering.

Take that this morning we spied a surviving fledgling perched far out
on the pear tree's branch, calling to her parents so that they could find her:

Take that the baby redbreast woke us to the bowl of sun-warmed peaches basking
in a downpour of light.

Take that I could not sleep last night for fear of the orange cat who overstepped
the chicken wire blockade you strung around the branch harboring the nest.

Take that you pried a robin's young from the cat's mouth just after dawn.

Do birds grieve? I ask, recalling the robin's frantic circling when we stooped
to examine the dead fledgling half-hidden in the grass.

You don't answer. Next question:

How many afternoons make up a robin's life?

This is our garden bordered by pear and the last owner's chain-link fence.

Here a tenacious rose buds forth hundreds of luxuriant, scarlet
blooms twice each summer. Here the robins have begun another
nest along a branch directly above the last.

Umber eyes half closed, the orange cat drowns towards noon's slow overture of sun.
Behind the monkey grass, the female robin forages among drooping iris and desiccated
leaves. We'll have to buy the cat a bell, drug her food, keep watch.

We live among these creatures, as if within a secret text. Once initiated, we wake
to a three-week robin exploring the leafy luxury of pear amid the constant
riot of sparrow.

You stand at the fence's edge gazing at the robin through binoculars that distill
the speckled feathers he will shed, if he survives the season.

We plunge our hands into the deep-wood lilies transplanted to our garden.
Watch butterflies coupling in electric light.

Jacqueline Kolosov

A single fledgling survived.

But do birds grieve?

And whatever the morning's birdsong communicates, do we not also hear a current called joy?

Answer me.

Field Guide to North America's Birds, An Ode

I've little use for the male prairie chicken's courtship sac of clementines, or the turkey vulture's lifetime diet of carrion. Sure, that accidental wanderer, the blue-footed booby, gregarious fisherman of the Salton Sea, is awfully cute, until a frigate bird's pursuit prompts him to disgorge his midday meal. Still, who wouldn't covet the zigzag plummet of woodcock, or the whiskered auklet's ability to swim tidal rips off Alaska's coast? Given witches broom or a surfeit of wishes, I'd like just one afternoon in the upper reaches, following a pygmy nuthatch's voracious climb, several more hours trailing the bushtit through chaparral, and an entire aerial blue afternoon exploring the Sangre de Cristo Mountains as a fleet violet-green swallow. True, the feedlot cluck of cowbird merits scant admiration, and the hunch-backed skua's habit of stealing may explain solitary confinement well beyond the Antarctic Coast. Still, there remains the stalking gait of the least bittern, patrolling mangroves along the Gulf, and the jade-footed little blue heron, contemplative keeper of Florida's coast. Perhaps if I save my crusts for the rock dove, and pray for elf owl, three-toed woodpecker, and boreal chickadee, I'll manage to come back as the evening's whip-poor-will, who wakes to a mountain woodland, the night sky just a curtain sheering thought.

Jacqueline Kolosov's first full-length collection of poems, *Vago*, is forthcoming from Lewis-Clark Press in November 2006. *The Red Queen's Daughter*, a young adult novel, will be published by Hyperion later in 2007. New poetry and prose appear in *Orion*, *Shenandoah*, and *Lifewriting Annual*. She is on the creative writing faculty at Texas Tech University.

Clive Watkins

OLD STORY

This is what he heard, resting in the shade of the plum-tree: a stifled cry that dragged his thoughts from the story he was reading.

Behind him, the house was silent, the windows closed. The book slipped from his grey blanket on to the grass.

This is what he saw, peering through the screen of the hedge: plucked flowers on the pond's clear water, a sun-hat dropped on the lawn, its mauve ribbons tangled, the heel of a boot turning by the old conservatory.

The cry again, muffled, more distant.

Too late: a brightness flashed and was gone. Earth-shadows at the wall-foot, a sound as of rushing wheels, a machinery of air grinding.

Smoke, oils.

Then this: the woman weeping, her black skirts trailing in the uncut grass.

Nettles in the flower-beds; the windless air choked with pollen, with bitter juices; the pond dried to a hole.

He sat down again and returned to his book.

Twilight, owl-light: his glacial daughters brought tea, and bread and butter.

The sky thinned and thinned. Soundlessly, a plane flew over, a hard seed shining.

The pages of the book flickered on the grass—black and white, black and white.

FIVE WASPS

for Bob Etherington

On the white sill of my little hotel room
three wasps lie dead, their black and yellow bodies
cramped and curled like tiny bristling hooks,
still venomous in death. Drawn to the light,
they butted out their lives on the cold pane.
Beyond the glass the mid-October sun,
watery and mild, flickers across the fell,
a sharp wind buffets the wood, the beck is roaring –
and now here's a fourth, a live one, buzzing up
from the apple core I left on the wash-stand.
It flies into the window's deep embrasure
where I crush it with a map against the glass.
So, how are they getting in? I ask the girl
who draws my evening pint in the residents' snug.
A nest in the wall, she says, beneath the sill;
and I imagine the frail papery cell
lodged in the dark between the canted slates –
their laborious hum, their long homing flights
for the last late-fallen fruit, last insect prey,
last gobbets of sweet carrion, before the cold
returns to crisp them in their banded shells.
And overnight indeed the weather clears –
frost on the scarlet hips in the little garden,
frost on the bracken and scrub along the fell,
a fringe of ice where the beck goes jouncing down
through the sunless gill over rocks the colour of blood.
My last day, and I climb the ancient track
to the small tarn and the broad summit ridge:
the wind, shrill harbinger of fiercer cold,
flies howling upon me as if it would bear off
the one unrooted thing in this stony place.
On the far slope cloud-shadows stream away
past intake, fold and garth, while wave upon wave
beyond the crags that close the valley in
the higher fells unroll. They glitter as if

with snow-light in the bright, abounding air.
But now this evening, crossing from the shower,
my bare foot finds a fifth—dead, though its sting
pierces my heel with a needle of quick pain.
The kindled smart cools to a fiery ache,
but I am weary from my walk and know
sleep will come soon. —A last look at the sky:
the moon is up, and fine stars prick out
the roof of heaven in zones of wintry jet.
I dream and am the tenant of my dream:
stone, and grass, and the tarn as hard as iron,
and this pattering in the dark cove of my skull—
the wind's dry ghost, the white whisper of frost
fastening itself once more on berry and leaf,
the rustle of wings sealed in the frozen rock.

Great Langdale, Cumbria

"Intake" —A piece of land enclosed from the fell

"Garth" —The lower ground in Great Langdale (and in other Lake District valleys) is separated from the higher slopes by a more or less continuous wall, the ring garth, which dates from the middle ages.

"Cove" —A recess with precipitous sides in the steep flank of a mountain, a feature of many Lake District valleys.

Planting the Fence Post

Soft rasp of cloud,
bog, bird-haunted upland:
day declares its bright distances,
miles of unaccommodating air.

The black shawl drawn close about her head,
she steps sideways down three
steps to the grooved stone of the yard.
Her dog barks furiously at nothing.

Dead leaves frosting into the grass,
a whistling at the edge of silence:
stone walls skewed, briars
choking the field-corner.

Stooping, he sinks the pit in its place,
the dark socket.
Balked by stone, the blade returns
through polished shaft and handle,
through hand and arm,
the ring of his downward thrust.
His shoulder jars.
He leans into the mute clay.

The crow maintains in the larch top
its posture of attention.

Black Clough

For a Gift of Hokusai Prints

***Carp in a Waterfall*¹**

Thrashing her thick tail
against the heavy scour,
she leaps into the spill,
leaps and will not tire.
Thundering down the gorge,
ice-melt and spring rain
quicken in her the urge
to mount the falls and spawn.

***Fisherman*²**

Into the wind he leans
above the grinding roar
to drag upon his lines.
What hunger drew him here
to this narrow tongue of rock?
Some rare undreamed-of fish
that, arching its strong back,
gleams in the sucking wash?

***Exile*³**

He turns to watch the moon
rise in a vast sky
and shine as white as bone
on the small boats in the bay,
but instead what haunts his gaze
are hills, far-off and green,
on which her lustre lies
like cool hands on skin.

¹According to a Chinese story, a carp which succeeded in climbing the falls at the top of the Yellow River and reaching its source was transformed into a dragon. The dragon was a shape-changer, a symbol of power and the human passions and a bringer of good fortune.

²The fisherman is holding the lines to which his cormorants are tied.

³Abe no Nakamaro (698-770 AD), sent as a youth by the Japanese court to study in China, was never allowed home and died there fifty-four years later. Hokusai's print illustrates Nakamaro's most famous *tanka* in which he describes himself watching the moon and thinking how its light falls on his home-land.

Nuit Blanche

We turn the key and enter. The room is white –
white walls, white floor, white ceiling, curtains, bed –
everything emptied of colour as if colour –
even the lily's drained passionate white,
apple-blossom, orange-blossom, pear – might burn and burn,
nothing to save the maddened flesh from itself.

Bone-white, ash-white: snow's feathered silence
drifting into the dark; and we must breathe
as slow as those ghost flakes, and soft and slow
your stirring at first light, the awakened blood
glowing – that deep bloom – in cheek and lip.

Christmas Morning Visit

Frost is a powder on the grass,
the ground iron, setting a ring to the heel.

Crusts on the lawn are baked hard by the cold;
gulls bloom whitely in the parks.

Turning, I notice how empty the world this morning:
a year's love will not fill these hours.

White between stiff trees and houses,
the sky crumbs into fine, soft snow.

The Address Book

The address book
is down at the
bottom, buried

under last year's
holiday maps. It is
full except for

those strange letters
X and Z – mostly
in Father's

hand. Father,
you have been dead seven years.
Mother, your wife, has

crossed out
some, has added.
Her handwriting still

keeps your slope
though stiffer now, less
fluent. – Thank you,

she says.
Now I can
get on.

Clive Watkins's poems and essays have appeared in many journals, both in the UK and elsewhere, including *The Hudson Review*, *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, *The Malahat Review*, *PN Review*, *The Dark Horse*, *The New Welsh Review*, and *Agenda*. His collection, *Jigsaw*, was published in 2003. He is Associate Editor of the Waywiser Press, London, and lives in Yorkshire, England.

H. L. Hix

Song of Songs

I thirst for god as a doe thirsts for the flowing stream.

The skies sing god's glory, the heavens her handiwork.
Day speaks to day, one night shares knowledge with the next.

With no need of tongue, god's song spreads across the earth,
wedding baldachin for the sun and his lucent bride.

Daughters of the holy city, spirits of the rain,
guard my love's sleep until her own desire rouses her.

My mourning dove, call your falling notes from the ramage,
for your dark eyes lull me, your voice soothes like cool night rain.

Seal your heart with my heart, knot your legs and arms with mine,
for love is stronger than death, and passion more cruel.
Heavy rain cannot quench love, nor flood wash it away.

•

Finding loans more pleasure to labored seeking;
indirection stimulates the seeker's hunger.
God grants truth only to desire.

N: I have tried to find a way to tell you what I don't know how to say
something about a rooftop garden and its ornamental trees
organizing the gridded gravel roofs around it lending to the view
from this room I've never been in something I know not to name
though naming it *hope* would lurch toward the thing I would be thinking
if I knew how to think what I know I want to think if I could think
as dogwood petals think releasing light for their beautiful few days
calling to birds that haven't lived here since before the tree's seed split
since before you ushered me out of my last life which I now know was not a life
but had gardens on the ground into this life which is no more a life than the other
though the gardens here grow for these few days brighter and smaller and higher
almost above the birds the dogwoods no longer know how to call
though call them they must these birds that know what to say and say it insistently
but in this city mostly to those of us who listen with lust but without understanding
the birds I no longer know how to name though they be as vivid
as gold
and scarlet and indigo hidden in these trees as they would be held in my hands: H

H. L. Hix

E: of the several reasons I don't trust movies the foremost is that in them the characters do the reckless thing and come to regret what they have done but I regret nothing having done nothing worth regret nothing reckless ever having realized so little of my will having flown over my desires as a bird migrates over water whose end it cannot see

emigran y huyen pájaros que dormían en tu alma

I regret all and only what I have not done what I failed to do failed always from some deeper failing since each of my failings so many I no longer try to name them each is deeper than the last my failings hold one another up as the planets and stars hold one another in orbit so here I am failing again looking down on my desires that reach to both horizons and call each other by your name: H

H. L. Hix teaches in and directs the creative writing MFA at the University of Wyoming. His recent books include a poetry collection, *Chromatic*, a collection of essays on poetry entitled *As Easy As Lying*, and an anthology, *Wild and Whirling Words*.

Alan Sullivan

Harvest

His grief is a house he should never have built,
an orchard untended, flowers that wilt,
a lane that a downpour churns into flood
where his axle will crack in bottomless mud.

He plods his round like an ox in a yoke,
harnessed forever to fields that he broke.
Hailstorms or locusts ruin his crops.
He can't put them right, though he works till he drops.

His forebears were Nordlanders, born to endure
fishing or farming—the toil of the poor.
For them, a stavkirk sufficed as a church;
their Garden of Eden was bracken and birch.

He put them away like plates in a chest
shipped over sea and hauled to the West.
He staked out more land than a man can afford,
but love only pines for mist on a fiord.

The shoulder that bars half of the bed—
why did it turn? Was it something he said?
Or maybe his gambles, debts, and arrears
furrowed a face and streaked it with tears.

It's worse than winter—the silence each night—
the shuttered eyes—lamps without light.
And who bears the blame?—the hauler of wood,
when the blaze he kindled goes out for good.

Alan Sullivan

Long Bay Jump

Sun drop down with a flash of green.
Moon lift up, and the palm tree lean.

Jack fish bake in banana wrap.
Pi-dog snap up the table scrap.

*Full of the moon, ganja and rum,
Long Bay jump 'til the morning come.*

Steel band shake up the Bomba Shack;
rooster crow and the rafter crack.

Rasta man blow Jamaica toke.
Road Town van fetch the hotel folk.

*Full of the moon, ganja and rum,
Long Bay jump 'til the morning come.*

Sun lift up as the moon drop down.
Church bell ring, and the preacher frown.

“All you sinner now kneel and pray.
Hear no more what the Devil say.”

*Full of the moon, ganja and rum,
Long Bay jump 'til the morning come.*

Alan Sullivan was born in New York City, educated in Connecticut, lived in Minnesota and North Dakota, retired to a boat in Florida. Founder of The Deep End poetry forum at Eratosphere. He blogs at www.seablogger.com.

Lisa Russ Spaar

Magnolia

Morning at last, but sky
still scored by night's unleashings—

the slimly departed storm leaving
its silver, anginal shiver of aftershocks—

blenched and fallen branches,
leafdross, a strew of burs, nuts, crotchets

disquieting the windshield, puddles,
the drive out—and a lonely salvo of sirens,

distant, salvaging what remains;
and in this house, an impotent,

residual sadness of sundials
that even this washed light,

its burlap sheen on the window,
can't dispel—nor can this magnolia,

emerald-shingled tenement
of clinquant glints and florid cones—

stand in for what the wild storm
silenced when she stopped singing.

Sycamore Tantra

Insular majuscule
of this remnant
scrappy text—scarlet ivy
and copper witch grass
at the margin of our yards—
I'm on fire for your stuccoed font,
threadbare, friary, stripping
daringly above the fray,
day-wracked and boldly
discarding your dun
and ochre clothing
leaf by leaf, each lone raft,
each bit of sleeve, patch of jacket
settling quietly into the net
of emerald bamboo below—
daring to be—just— *initial* —
to be left, an elegant,
isolato scribble, inarticulate
and pure, like our bones
which cannot always
belong to our bodies.

Be Mine

Am throat: pent syllables
adumbral. Am serif
wedded to the blinding margin.
Am tide. Am cordate lace
on this hour's sand.
Am self , mine,
who no more knows how—
 the orchard
italicizing into fruit,
starlings the air translating,
inflection of my body, my soul,
with you—
yet, am asking.
Am yours.

Pond

Slave to the sky
with its seven sorrows, seven joys,
this hour grows a candid gold

that magnifies and keeps private
a few first bats,
cloud lattice, nest of shadows,

our last minutes before parting.
And these thistle specks
of chipping sparrows—

quick sounds for the spirit's work.
Noun or verb, that singing?
I know, love, that I should leave.

Now their silver word, again.
Or did it stir inside me?
Imperative or query,

the saffron yolk of sun,
descending? the wind
that lakes the green wine

of the evening air,
then settles?
Leave. Love.

Equally, the water
holds them
in its grave unbroken trance.

Vineyard in Spring

The world is rife, strained
with the old work of beginning again,

smalt, sexual, congested with blossom;
but here, among lean sorrel fields

scored by cane-trained crosses,
we are novice, tongues fugal

and devout as two mockingbirds
in chevron surplices, flickering

through files of wicker plaits,
feasting in cursive orison, note

mating note, air donning the pelt
of our meaning, the flesh made word.

Natural Bridge

If this were our terminus,
pelvic atrium plied by swallows, jet-trails—
crest of limestone glyphed with stains,
bolts from the highway
we traveled here, gauntlet of billboards,
bus hordes—and our fate to find
my head in your lap, looking up
beyond ourselves into the torrents
of scalpel sea , all our histories—
dead loves, lost homes, selves—a backwash
of leaves in the flushing trees,
& the glass stream beside us a transcript,
trout, cloudlace brushed by shadows of the dead
& these cliffs souled without humanity,
then I'd know us infinitesimal,
prehistoric, naked in blue gaze, the span of us—

Chinese Maple

Last fall, your death came thrillingly,
destined, hormonal, a burning abduction;

winter brought this strangulation,
livid, naked.

But if I could be for myself
even a dream of what I,

heavy-hearted, saw at dusk,
the ghost of your red arousing,

fable of birth, garment
of blood we wear into this world,

I might never grow old.
You make me homesick for remedies

with cordial names: japonica,
tulip poplar: a reverie

of the deepest hibernations
which know no infidelity,

have no other future
but their own awakening.

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Kirk Curnutt

Hellow Liz, Goodbye Teeth

"Hey Mr. Seagrove," Nina says as we cross the Alabama state line on the road to Atlanta. "You going to be on the barricade tonight?"

I watch her giggle in my rearview. My daughter, Chloe, is too far to the right of the backseat for me to see, but I'm sure she, too, chuckles at my expense. I'm chauffeuring the girls to this evening's Liz Phair concert at the Roxy in Buckhead, and they're amused that I would buy myself a ticket rather than wait in the car. Liz Phair is Chloe's latest musical obsession, which is odd given that, ten years ago, when I was only in my late twenties, she was mine, too. I was an original devotee of *Exile in Guyville*, the indie-rock epic that made Liz Phair a household name—at least in households inhabited by overeducated, underemployed graduate students with enough free time to fret over what music back then was and wasn't truly "alternative."

"I'm too old for the barricade," I admit, pretending the question was serious. "I used to love concerts, you know, being right at the pit even. But anymore I'm claustrophobic. Plus the body odor. I smell other people and I can't relax."

"Uh, Dad." Chloe leans forward. Ever since she bobbed her hair Louise Brooks-style every word out of her mouth has seemed precociously brash and sophisticated. "Exactly which concerts were they? Ozark Mountain Daredevils?"

"Pure Prairie League," Nina offers.

"No, no, no," my daughter decides. "I remember now. It was Pablo Cruise."

Actually, I did sit through Pablo Cruise once. It was 1977. I was twelve, and it was my sister's fault. Like every other sixteen year-old that August—my sister was the same age Chloe and Nina are now—she was into that band, and come September, she wasn't. But I won't tell the girls that story. Instead, I impress them with tales of the concert injuries more likely to qualify me for cool: the broken toe from Concrete Blonde, the black eye earned when I stooped to tie a shoelace at Cowboy Mouth. A stage diver once decked

me while Babes in Toyland blazed through "Sweet '69," and way back in 1984 when I was a college freshman I literally lost the shirt off my back at the Violent Femmes—though exactly which tune, I can't remember. I even start in on the time that several women frustrated by long toilet lines at David Allan Coe invaded the men's room just as I began relieving myself in the urinal trough. Then I realize some stories are better left untold.

"Hey, Dad," Chloe says. "Tell Nina your Shelby Lynne story."

The last time I drove two hours to the Roxy was to see Shelby Lynne. It was such a bittersweet experience that I haven't been back in the three years since. Part of it had to do with my date, my second wife, who was then only a week away from becoming my second ex-wife. We'd set aside our mutual dislike long enough for a reunion tryst. Of course, that's not the story I share. That one involves my meeting Shelby Lynne. We ran into her behind the Roxy, where she was autographing napkins and plastic beer cups for female fans, most of who appeared to be gay, or at least drunk enough to act like it. On a lark I grabbed the Shelby Lynne CD from my car and joined the long line. As I waited I rehearsed the obscure tidbits of knowledge about her I'd recite so she'd know I was a true fan. When my turn came, however, all I could manage was a nervous blurt. A swirl of a hand later I had my autograph, and I was jostled aside.

"That's not the funny part," Chloe assures Nina. "Get to the funny part, Dad."

"The funny part? Well, the funny part is that she was signing in black ink, which you'd expect, I suppose, only the CD cover is black, too. I mean, it's printed on black paper. There's no way to see black ballpoint on black paper. If you hold the CD up to the light you see a little chicken scratch there, but you can't tell it's a signature, much less hers. It just looks like a crease."

Nina laughs, but only mildly, because at the end of the day the funny part isn't all that funny. I have much better stories I could tell, but I won't. They're not appropriate for sixteen year olds.

“So you going to try for Liz Phair’s autograph?” Nina wants to know. In the rearview I watch her twist sideways and stretch her legs across Chloe’s lap. The motion flips back the hem of her mini, exposing half a thigh. Nina’s a good kid, I suppose, but recently she’s anointed herself a sexpot. She can’t show up in a tank top that’s not tight enough to crush the ribs of a third grader, or pull on jeans whose plunging waistline won’t bare her coccyx. Tonight she sports a thin cami that exposes a countywide swath of belly, plus shiny knee-high boots. In my day you had to scout out a Rick James video to find a woman dressed like this.

“I’m too old for autographs,” I admit. Only it’s another question that isn’t begging an answer. It’s just a joke, and as usual with my daughter and her friends—as always with them—the joke’s on me.

Exactly a week ago tonight I walked into my daughter’s bedroom to discover her and Nina singing “Fuck and Run,” the most famous entry in the Liz Phair songbook. Although neither girl is particularly musical, they’re threatening to start a band, and each knows enough guitar to strum the chorus, which goes *I can feel it in my bones / I’m gonna spend another year alone / It’s fuck and run, fuck and run / Even when I was seventeen, fuck and run.*

Ten years ago when I had time to worry about what lyrics mean I interpreted these words as a protest against presumptive sex. The man that the song’s addressed to takes intimacy for granted, leaving the narrator pleading for romance. *Whatever happened to a boyfriend?* she wants to know. *The kind of guy who tries to win you over?* I like to think I’m sympathetic, even if I have been divorced twice, but there’s something rather startling about the first time you hear your child say *fuck* that prevented me from sharing my interpretation with the girls. Instead, I did what I’ve always done when I’m in the same room with Chloe and a nude scene flares up in a movie or a rapper unleashes a scatological sluice of rhyme: I turned 180 degrees and walked away.

Only later, after Nina was called home to dinner, could I confront my daughter. She was in the kitchen, flipping

through a magazine while a pot of spaghetti boiled on the stovetop. To confirm my suspicions I checked the bookcase of CDs I keep in my study. Sure enough, my Ps had been ransacked, and all five of my Liz Phairs—three official releases and a pair of bootlegs that cost me thirty bucks apiece—were gone.

"You know," I told her, "I've never had a problem with you borrowing my CDs. I've always *wanted* you to because music was—you know—something we could share. But some stuff I have can be a little...*rough*, and there's—uh—words and—oh—ideas even that I'm not sure you're ready for. So before you grab one next time, you ask me first, okay?"

She looked at me with the kind of baffled face that humans are only capable of between the ages of twelve and twenty, the look of supreme indignity says *you can't be serious*.

"You can't be serious," she said.

"Well, no, I'm actually very serious." Bubbles of hot water jumped through the twists of steam, splashing the pot sides and hissing on the orange stove coils.

"It's not anything I haven't heard before."

"That's comforting to know. You better check your noodles. I don't want my pot burned."

As she rose to spoon through the foam I poured a glass of milk and thought of how I hadn't always been the best of dads. I was only twenty-one when Chloe was born. I was one of those guys who marries young and divorces after learning he's even younger than he knew. For a lot of years distractions kept me from her. I always paid my child support, but somehow work, trips, parties, and girlfriends all seemed more pressing. It's only been since my second marriage failed that Chloe's stayed regularly at my place. I'm more lenient than her mother, she tells me.

"There's an article on her in that magazine."

"On who?" The milk coated my insides.

"Liz Phair. She's got a new CD coming out, and critics are creaming her. They say she's too poppy. The message boards are going nuts on. They say she's sold out. Here she's trying to be a teen idol and she's almost your age."

"She's almost my age? Wow. That would mean she's...not even forty yet."

"Yeah, but she's *acting* young, being sexy and all. I'm surprised you ever heard of her."

"Why would you say that?"

She strained the noodles through a colander and opened a can of sauce. I was wishing I were gulping something stronger than milk. "You don't listen to girl singers," she said.

"That's not true. Go look at my CDs—just don't *take* them. There's a lot of women in there: PJ Harvey, Tori Amos, Kristin Hersh and Tonya Donnelly, Courtney Love, L7, Veruca Salt, Poe, Sleater-Kinney. And that's just off the top of my head."

"Maybe so," Chloe observed, "but you've only got *one* Kristin Hersh and *one* L7, as opposed to *every* Replacements, *every* R.E.M., *every* U2. But you've got *lots* of Liz Phair."

I'd never realized I was this inconstant when it came to women singers. Story of my life, I guess.

"I bought her because she was intelligent, witty, strong, and fun. She could be shocking, but it wasn't contrived. She had candor. When I listened to her I felt enlightened. For a while there I listened to her so much she almost became my id."

"Your what?"

"Never mind."

She was still skimming the article. "You know what, though? I don't think you'd have a shot with her, Dad."

"That's too bad. I guess I'll stop writing her letters promising to shoot a president if she'll only love me."

"She likes strong men. Alpha males. It talks here about her making out in a bar with a Marine she just met. She says they got kicked out of the place things got so wild."

"Well, God bless America. And nice to know you think so highly of me."

She closed the magazine and returned the spaghetti to the pot. "I *do* think highly of you. Those things you liked about her—intelligence, candor, stuff like that? They're the things I like. That means we have similar tastes."

I was halfway through a swallow. "I think I'm being snookered," I admitted.

"It's all right—you're good at it. She's in Hotlanta in a few days, only Nina's parents won't let her go unless there's an adult driving, so we nominated you."

"Just for the record, I won't let you go without an adult, either."

"Then we're on the same page!" She poured the sauce atop the drained spaghetti, mixed it with a fork, and began eating straight from the pot. "Tickets are \$25. They're general admission, but we're afraid it'll sell out, so could you get them today? I bookmarked the order form on your computer."

A hundred miles into Georgia we arrive at the Liz Phair show, only I have the distinct feeling we've strayed into a PTA meeting. The floor of the Roxy is evenly divided among teenage girls and adults old enough to be their parents. Chloe and Nina disappear into a sea of peers, all of who flit and gambol about. On my side of the room, the enthusiasms of youth are more annoying than amusing. Here we've paid good money only to be reminded that ours is no longer the freshest of generations. Why is Liz Phair playing an all-ages show, anyway? She's ours; she's one of us. We weren't that old when we discovered her, and when we discovered her wasn't that long ago—just a president away from the current one, one Honda Rabbit removed from the Ford Expedition we presently drive, only a marriage or two in our past. Surely, we're thinking, surely it's not yet time for us to be middle-aged.

"I blame the new shit," decides the blonde who elbows my ribcage each time she chugs her soda. She's already complained about the unavailability of beer—the Roxy can't serve alcohol at all-ages shows. By "shit" she refers to Liz Phair's current CD, which, if I'm overhearing her right, is controversial because it's not really Liz Phair's voice we're hearing, not the *authentic* Liz Phair we once knew, loved, and, in our delusions, *possessed*, but someone who's out to conquer what this woman calls the "lip gloss market." "It's a

mid-life crisis," she tells her friend. "It's like your dad buying a sports car on his fiftieth birthday—it's just not dignified."

If I were Liz Phair I wouldn't take the criticism too hard. This woman has been at every concert I've ever attended. She's the Fan Who Feels Betrayed. She's the type that so associates a piece of music with a certain pivotal but remote moment in her life that she can't stand the fact that both time and her band have marched on. I've heard her (or at least her kind) say with a straight face that "I Want to Hold Your Hand" is a better song than "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," that Nick Drake was smart to die when his best work was behind him, that Elvis Costello never made a better record than *My Aim is True*, his first. (Hello?—*Imperial Bedroom*, maybe?). If she were eighty instead of forty she'd say Sinatra never should've split from Tommy Dorsey, and if she were three hundred she'd claim Mendelssohn was washed up after *St. Matthew's Passion*—which he conducted when he was all of twenty. As annoying as I find The Fan Who Feels Betrayed, she's not nearly as bad as the Perennial Frat Bro, a pair of whom loiter to the far side of the blonde and her friend, doing what Perennial Frat Bros do: talk bumptiously about Things That Aren't Likely, like their having a shot with Liz Phair.

"What a piece," says the handsomer Bro. He's staring at a commemorative poster the Roxy is handing out. It's a picture of Liz Phair, splayed and seemingly naked, a guitar covering her private parts.

"I wish I was that guitar," says the chunkier and less-attractive Bro. I see the Fan Who Feels Betrayed scowl at her friend, who, not surprisingly, is also chunkier and less attractive.

"Idiots," the blonde decides.

"Morons," her friend agrees.

"They probably can't name a Liz Phair song besides 'Fuck and Run.'"

This is me butting in. I speak only because I feel foolish pretending I'm not privy to their conversation. We're jammed so tight together I'm afraid to exhale for fear of blowing a new part in the friend's hair. "That's my favorite,"

I add. "That and the one where she brags about being the queen of blow j—"

The women give me a disapproving glare. One more word out of me, they're thinking, and out comes the pepper spray. I can't blame them. They've seen me at concerts all their lives, too. I used to be *The One Down Front Having Fun*, but somehow I've ended up *The Creepy Guy Standing By Himself, Arms Folded, Even During the Fast Songs*.

It's nearly eleven p.m. before Liz Phair takes the stage, and, boy, do we need her. The crowd's energy is flagging, at least on the adult side of the room, where most of us are twenty minutes past our bedtime. We've watched the roadies test the mics and amps, and we've sat through a tedious opening act. But then lights go out, and the Roxy explodes in cheers as the silhouettes of Liz Phair and her band strut into view.

She's blonder and more ebullient than I remember from her old CD covers. She's also a lot more naked. She wears a cami that's flimsier than even Nina's, and when she slings her Fender Stratocaster across her hip to cock a pose, she reveals that her short-shorts have been strategically unzipped and peeled back to expose a cherry red triangle of panties. The crowd goes wild.

I do my best not to gape at that triangle as she slices into "6'1"," the opening cut on *Exile in Guyville*. Suddenly, neither The Fan Who Feels Betrayed nor her friend seem all that betrayed. This is old Liz Phair, after all. Both women hunch forward, expectantly, demanding from the performance the balm that I suspect the song has given them through ten years of listening to it in the sadness of dark bedrooms or parked cars or whatever isolated place they retreat to to nurse the disappointments of love. They want a transfusion of its confidence, a graft of the steeliness that's flexed in each downward cascade of its stoic melody. *It's co-oh-oh-oh/d out there, and rou-uh-uh-ugh!* Liz Phair twice yells, taxing the upper limits of her register on her way to the chorus: *I kept standing 6'1" / Instead of 5'2" / And I loved my life / And I hated you...*

Even though it's a song for women, I like to think I can empathize. I myself topped out at 5'8½". Yet I wonder if I'm not compromising the message that women don't need men to know themselves, because by the time the song's over, I have to admit that I'm ogling Liz Phair. And I'm not alone.

"I love you, Liz!" a male voice screams. It's the first Perennial Frat Bro, the good-looking one.

"Love you back," she answers.

"I love your underwear, Liz!"

Just in case nobody knows that it's him, Bro No. 1 yells the same thing three songs later, right after the slinky drone "Mesmerizing," and then again after another seven songs, just as the singer is about to rip into "Help Me, Mary."

"Idiot," decides The Fan Who Feels Betrayed.

"Moron," agrees her friend.

I'd agree, too, but I suddenly realize that I haven't checked on Chloe and Nina. I strain for a glimpse of the pit. Sure enough, the girls are on the front row, dancing under the watchful eye of a grim trio of security goons. I've never watched my daughter dance before, at least not since her fourth-grade ballet recital. It's sad to see her twist and swirl so uninhibitedly and know that she'd never allow herself to express such fluid grace if she had any inkling I was watching. The last concert we attended together she fell asleep. It was nine years ago, and she was seven. I had an extra ticket to the Rolling Stones, but I wasn't dating anyone at the time, so I took her, even though the show wouldn't start until after her bedtime. She fell asleep before Keith Richards finished his first cigarette. I held her two and a half hours straight, right up until "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" ended in a fireworks shower that scared her into a teary fit.

"Love you, Liz!"

The singer ignores the catcall, but the audience is fed up. Nasty looks are dispensed; scattered boos break out. The Bros love the attention. The last song is a new one, a lilting ballad called "Little Digger" that's more somber and self-critical than the carnal odes Liz Phair is famous for. From what I can tell, it's about a single mother who must explain to her young son why the man in her bed isn't his father. *I've done the damage, the damage is done, she sings. I hope to God*

that I'm the damaged one. You don't have to guess which half of the room applauds when this line is delivered. I wonder what Chloe and the kids her age make of it. Can they appreciate adult regrets? Do they believe us when we say we're sorry we're not perfect, that we've made mistakes, that if we could we'd go back and do many things differently? Or do they find our apologies burdensome, a sneaky plea for their forgiveness and reassurance? I'd really like to ask my daughter these questions, but I won't. She's let me know she hates it when her mom tries to talk to her. Maybe instead I'll buy her copy of the new Liz Phair and hope she appreciates this song. Meanwhile, she and Nina rock slowly to the beat in a sisterly embrace. My own arms remain folded at my chest.

"'Fuck and Run,' Liz! 'Fuck and Run.'"

The crowd chants for this song. The stage lights dim and the band retreats offstage, waiting for the ceremonial clapping to call them back out. From the corner of my eye I see the Bros push their way up front. The Fan Who Feels Betrayed shakes her head. "Grow up, already," I hear her say. But the Bros are oblivious, and they jostle themselves a space directly behind Chloe and Nina. They laugh and make lusty faces, gaping at the girls' hips, their legs. I decide I'm ready for this show to end.

But it hasn't ended. The band returns, and to everyone's delight, the first bars of "Fuck and Run" blast from the PA. Live, the song is tougher and meatier than the skeletal CD version. The crowd so far has been lively but not raucous, but now they bob up and down, throwing out hands as if trying to clutch at whatever wisdom the lyrics hold. The security goons begin backing kids off the barricade, including Chloe, who leans over the railing for a pick, a handshake, or some acknowledgment. Suddenly, the chunkier Bro dips to his haunches, disappearing. The next thing I know, my daughter's legs are thrown straight up in the air, white as a pair of dagger blades. Before she's flipped over the barricade, her skirt falls up around her waist, revealing panties every bit as cherry red as Liz Phair's.

I lunge forward, knifing between The Fan and her friend as I break through the rows of spectators. Drinks fly, people

tumble left and right. By the time I make it to the Bros—it only takes a few seconds, but I feel like I've run an obstacle course—my entire right arm is drenched in soda. The stuff drips off my fingers. At least it's not beer. I crash into the chunky Bro, who bellyflops to the floor. I almost fall myself, but I catch my balance just in time to grab the other Bro by the hoodie, and with a tug I jerk him to his knees. I drag him two feet to the pit, his head swallowed in collar. Across the barricade I find my daughter bucking in the arms of two goons. There's a look of panic in Chloe's eyes. She doesn't know they're not pawing for fun but wrestling her off to eject her, as they do all stage divers these days.

"She was pushed!" I cry out.

I keep yelling this because I can't hear myself over the speakers' roar. But then the buzzing in my ears suddenly isn't "Fuck and Run," but something rawer, more primitive. It's me, my voice. The band stops, the crowd goes silent. When I squint toward the stage, I see Liz Phair hunched over a monitor, gesturing at me like a schoolmarm flustered by a disruptive pupil. Only I don't think too many schoolmarms wear their short-shorts unzipped. "No fighting!" she screams.

I say the first thing I think. "This isn't how I wanted us to meet," I tell her.

The words are hardly out before I'm interrupted by a cymbal crash. At least, that's what I think it is, until I decide that a cymbal would make a buzzing noise, not a buzzing sensation, which is what's vibrating through my gums. The vibrating shoots through my skull before I understand what's happened. The Bro has punched me. He's wiggled to a crouch that gives him just enough height to drive a blind uppercut into my jaw. I know it's a solid hit because when I go to gasp two incisors drop to the Roxy floor.

"You're lucky," says a paramedic as he hands me my teeth in a cup of cool water. "They came out in one piece. If we can find a dentist this late at night, he can probably glue them back in their sockets. And if not, well, nobody will notice implants. Either way, you'll get your choppers back."

I'd thank him, but there's a cold compress in the gap that formerly held my incisors. Already the paramedic and his

partner have cheered me with a rendition of "All I Want for Christmas Are My Two Front Teeth."

"We ready to roll?" A police officer strolls to the ambulance I sit in. A few feet away, under the flashing strobes on his squad car, sit the Perennial Frat Bros, looking imploringly at me. My teeth no sooner hit the floor than they were begging me not to press charges. The handsomer one promises to pay for my dental care. I really can't decide what to do. I'd like to forget the whole fracas, but the paramedics are worried that my jaw's fractured, and my head pounds so hard I can't parse my options.

"My daughter," I lisp. My words sound like kettle steam. "Her friend, too—I need to find them. They're still inside."

"You better go round them up," one paramedic tells the cop. "Those teeth won't be any good much past thirty minutes. We're pushing it as it is."

The policeman disappears beneath the Roxy marquee. The paramedics insist that I lie down to stop the bleeding, but I'm embarrassed. A crowd has gathered on the sidewalk, stealing peeks at my swelling face.

"Where were you?" I ask Chloe when the cop returns with her and Nina in tow. Their arms brim with posters, shirts, and CDs.

"She wanted to talk to us."

"Who?"

"Liz Phair. She's really cool. She was worried about us. Look at all the stuff she gave us. It's all autographed, every last thing."

"I was worried about you, too," I say, but my point is lost a paramedic returns the compress to my numbed gap. There's a moment's confusion before we can leave. Only Chloe can ride in the ambulance with me, it turns out. A squad car will have to take Nina. She looks a little frightened as another cop leads her away, her mini and black boots even more inappropriate for the occasion.

"So what's she like?" I ask once we're moving. The pot-holes along Peachtree Street set my incisors spinning in the water.

"She's cool." She's at my side on her knees, so close I feel her breath on my neck. "Funny, caring, too. She said to tell

you she's sorry she yelled at you. She didn't know I was your daughter. She didn't even see that guy flip me. All she saw were my legs. She thought I dove the barricade. They all thought I dove it."

"Well, someday you probably will. Rushing the stage is half the fun. Just don't do it until you're old enough that you don't need me to drive you. I'm too old for the barricade."

Her hand strokes my hair. She's trying to comfort me.

"She gave me her manager's email. She wants to know you're okay. And some of that stuff she signed is for you. She asked how to spell your name. Here, look."

She unrolls a poster. I see my name scrawled across the picture of Liz Phair covering her body with her guitar, along with a long message and a signature. I'm just glad it's not black ink on black paper.

"What's that all about?" I ask, pointing at a line. "Why did she write 'God Bless America' there?"

"That's the funny part," Chloe admits, smiling. "She was asking about you, and Nina and I, we kind of lied. Not a big lie, just a little one. For you. She wanted to know what you do, and I said something a little farfetched."

"Spill it, will you? My mouth hurts."

Swear to God, with that Louise Brooks bob, she's no longer a teenager. She looks twenty-five, at least.

"Well, Dad, okay, um—I told Liz Phair you're a Marine."

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Harry Moore

Some Love Poems or *GP Ponders His Blended Family*

I. License My Roving Hands

Watching *Law and Order* reruns
from the worn loveseat our daughter gave us,
you lean forward, my cue to rub your neck
and back, kneading tight muscles, pressing
thumbs beside the spine, releasing a day
of early church, Sunday dinner, two children,
four grandchildren, your mother, and
deep planning for the beach. That hurts,
you say, when I squeeze your tender
shoulders, remembering how firm
and smooth and tan they were that night
three decades past when first I watched
your shirt drop away. Finally tissue
and tendon go soft, and you lean into
my pressing fingers, saying it feels good
and offering me a bite of chocolate
Weight Watchers' bar.

When I pat you saying that's all,
you lean against me, resting
snug beneath my arm. On TV,
the news at ten parades a troubled world.
Tomorrow I do *Beowulf* at 8:00 and
you teach Olivia words and drop
my shirts for cleaning. But now we sit,
your hair against my cheek, my hand
lightly on your hip, our little sunroom den
an everywhere.

2. A Summer's Day

High in the La Platas, by spruce and fir,
my son shows me relics of the Lucky Moon Mine:
tan-colored tailings, like sawdust, rusted
iron bucket, corroded tin roof
from a collapsed cabin, and a growing
cover of currant bushes. In August sun,
he waves toward distant mountain rims,
ribbons of switchback road, sheer slopes
down which he boarded last winter.
Fingering rocks, he speaks of glaciers,
granite, limestone, fault lines
up which the molten metal surged.
Behind us, thunder jolts the earth.

When he was four, he piled flint and sandstone
by my mother's door, salvage
from a gravel road we walked.
She left them there for weeks, she said.

I've fled my Eastern classroom where language
is my trade, he his kitchen-concrete shop.
We're out for alpine air, chasing lost years.
I climb the slope, snapping cheap pictures,
naming phlox and cinquefoil, while far below
he probes the earth, kneeling, peering,
tossing, piling rocks. With loaded arms,
he yells we'd better get to the jeep
or he will break it down.

At the treeline a hailstorm hits,
marble ice pinging the hood,
drumming the canvas top, filling
wood and ruts till we bounce and slide
laughing down slopes, through sharp turns
of the ancient road. All around us,
beneath the ghostly aspens, the ground
is white, like some winter world
where time has stopped.

3. Time's Fool

"Daddy?" she said, her cell phone voice rising toward some question, "We're getting married. David's taking off Thanksgiving and we're going to St. Simon's. You can have a reception for us later, and Mom can too."

She didn't say she missed me when I left, the golden books we read when she was two, songs we sang, or waffles we two made while others slept or that weekend roads were long and houses far. She didn't say she needed me with nouns and numbers and thunderstorms that shook her sleep. She didn't ask how we who bore her could not speak, why in our years apart we built no bridge a child might walk, no place a girl might marry.

In the tape she sends of palm trees and marbled seaside houses, they stand outside before a man in black robe, who calls them by their names, wind scuffing the hidden mike and blowing her dark hair. When she pledges lifelong love, through riches, hunger, health, and the quiet chill of time, her voice trembles, her eyes glisten, and I weep.

4. A Gift

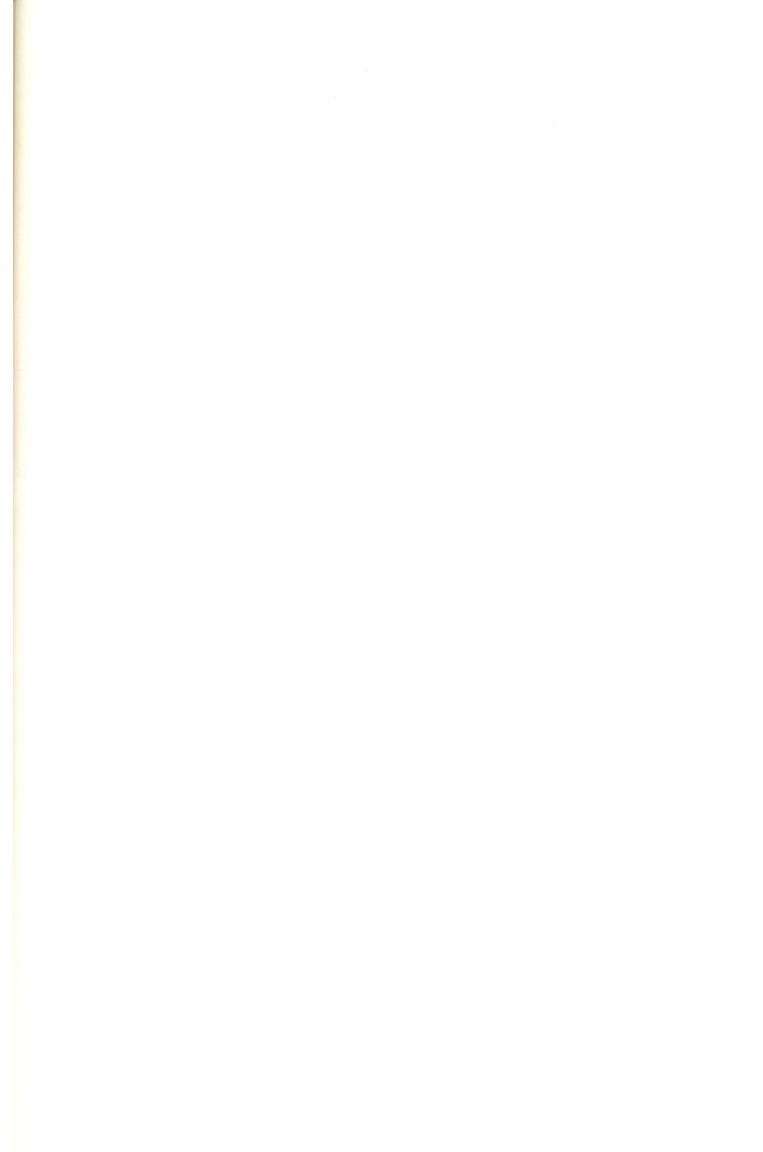
Nathan, Heb., gift
My macho grandson swings
an orange bat, driving the plastic ball
beyond the neighbor's car, sliding home

Harry Moore

safe in a shower of sand. On scooter, board,
and bike, he wheels like a circus acrobat
past all rivals. He speaks beyond his years
of football, hurricanes, and what color
God is, wearing like a small mantle
the prophet's name who counseled kings.

But crossing the wide street at dusk
behind our laughing family,
he rides my arm in silence.
Under oaks that burst the soil
a hundred years ago and now rise
dark as old houses, he leans forward,
kisses my cheek, and settles
snugly on my arm.

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