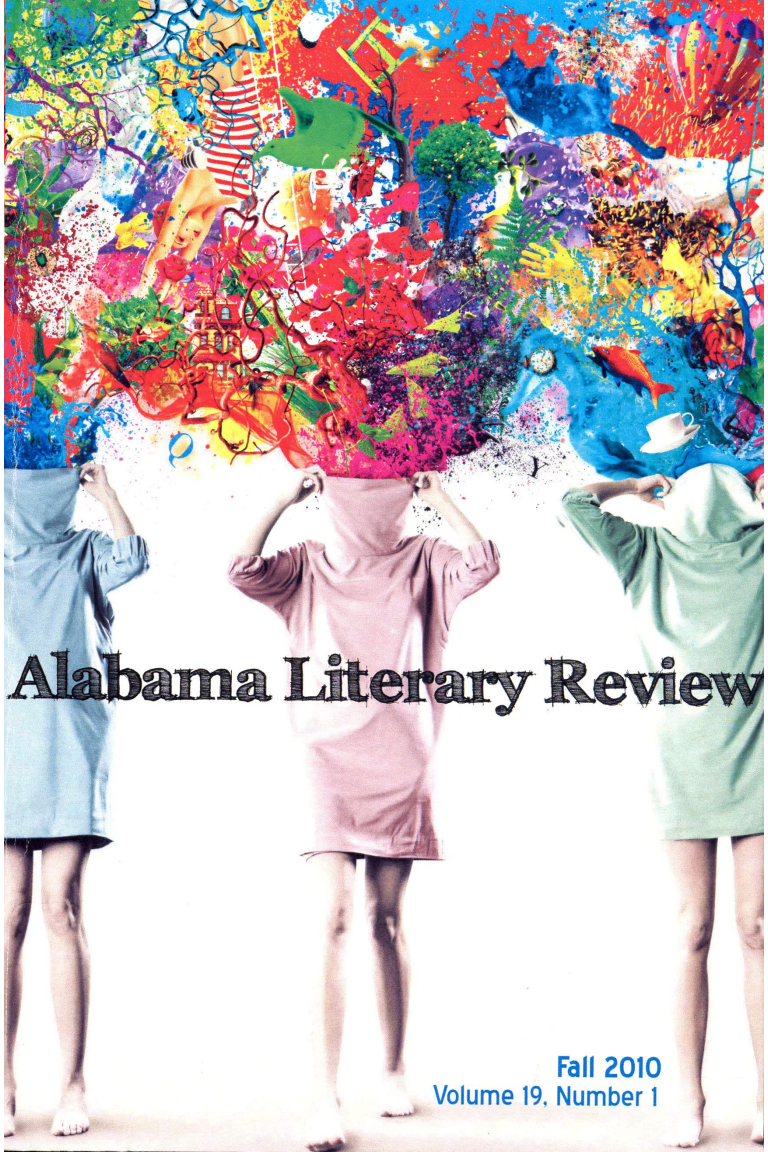

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ALR

M.C. Allan

The Umpire

In the sixth inning, Tanya starts walking batters. They keep going around the bases, one after the other shuffling through the startling May heat. She even walks Courtney Ball, who's only nine, thin as a splinter, and usually swings at everything. But the other coach yells, "Watch the ball, Courtney, you don't have to swing," and Courtney stands, shifting nervously as the balls go by, and finally scurries down to first base when the umpire points.

Kelly watches from the dugout as Tanya sits down on the mound and starts crying—first sobbing heavily, then just sitting, her head buried in her knees, her arms wrapped around them. The down on Kelly's arms rises and prickles, as it does whenever she is around something intensely embarrassing.

From the third base line, Coach McDonough calls Tanya. He's not allowed to go to the mound. It's a new rule: too many coaches were stalling, hanging out on the mound to delay they were winning so that the league time limit would kick in. Now a pitcher has to come to the base line to talk, but Tanya's not moving.

Coach McDonough comes back, his face flushed and irritated. Kelly's mom, the team's assistant coach, is leaning against the dugout wall holding the clipboard with the lineup sheet. Coach McDonough says something in her ear. Kelly's mom walks onto the field. "Tanya … honey, will you come talk to us?"

Tanya's voice, muffled by her arms: "I want my dad."

Coach McDonough peers hopefully out at the bleachers, but Tanya's parents never come to games. His chest deflates, making him look like the other dads. Normally he looks like the guy on the packet of Big League Chew—big jaw, cleft

chin, meaty ham-pink face.

"They're not here," he says to Kelly's mom.

"Tanya, sweetheart, you don't have to pitch anymore," Kelly's mom calls. Tanya starts sobbing again.

Coach McDonough pats Kelly's mom on the shoulder. "You tried, babe," he says.

Out on the mound, the second base ump squats down next to Tanya, talking quietly. Bees dive-bomb the trash can near the bleachers, investigating sticky rivulets of grape slushee and the remnants of hot dogs. The outfielders sit down in the grass, waiting. Kelly's glad her wrist is sprained; otherwise she'd be out with them, sweating and inhaling gnats. She is not the worst player on the team, but she's no star. She hates grounders, the way they skip over the stony infield dirt, ready to catch a pebble and shoot up at her face. Last season she'd dropped a fly ball that cost them the game, and for weeks afterward she could feel the team's collective resentment. She wouldn't trade places with Tanya for anything right now.

Out on the mound, the umpire—the one everyone calls Mr. Phil—keeps talking to Tanya. His shirt is blue with sweat under his arms and pulls up at the back of his pants. Kelly hopes it won't come loose; she doesn't want to see his butt crack. She digs into her packet for more strings of gum to add to her wad. Mr. Phil takes off his cap and wipes the sweat from his brow. There's a pink indentation on his bald head from the hat.

There's a burst of kicked-up gravel and shouting behind the dugout as some boys in Henderson Hardware's maroon jerseys run by with squirt guns. Kelly scuffs her cleats against the concrete floor and watches tiny dust storms circulate around them.

On the bleachers, parents shuffle and murmur. She hears Dr. Danvers say to his wife, "That girl is so high strung." His daughter Katie is the team's best pitcher, but Coach put her at second today to give Tanya a turn. Now Katie's toss-

ing her glove up and catching it, over and over. Smug cheerfulness radiates around her with the heat shimmer. She's mean, but she's the best pitcher, and Dr. Danvers is the head vet at Langley Animal Hospital, their sponsor, whose name is on their yellow jerseys.

Out on the mound, Mr. Phil keeps talking. It's weird how pink his mouth is, like he's been drinking cherry slushee, like Mr. Potato Head with Mrs. Potato Head's lips.

Tanya lifts her head. Her face is red, but Mr. Phil smiles, and she gets up slowly, brushes at her uniform, and picks up the ball. She nods to the home plate umpire. A scattering of applause runs through the stands.

Through the dugout window, Kelly can see Dr. Danvers rolling his eyes.

§

After the game Kelly and her mom help Coach McDonough carry the bulky burlap bags of helmets to his truck. They run into Mr. Phil in the parking lot. "If it isn't the miracle worker," Coach McDonough says, setting down the bag.

"Yeah, honestly," her mom says. "What did you say to her, Mr. Phil?"

Mr. Phil grins. "I just told her to buck up," he says. His eyes are big and pale blue behind his glasses, like the eyes of their neighbor's Weimaraner. Kelly can smell his sweat—not a stink, exactly, a dirt smell, but tangy. She hasn't noticed the smell of anyone but her parents before.

He sees her sniffing. "I'm ripe. Sorry," he grins, plucking his wet shirt away from his skin. Kelly looks away.

"That's all?" Coach says, shaking his head. "I don't think I've got the touch. I need to go back to the fourteen-and-ups."

"Why weren't you playing today?" Mr. Phil asks Kelly.

"I sprained my wrist," she says, holding it out. Then she

feels stupid: the splint was taken off the day before; her wrist looks perfectly normal.

"Looks OK to me," Mr. Phil says. "You sure Coach didn't bench you for partying?"

Kelly knows he's teasing but can't imagine how to tease back. His eyes are too blue. She shrugs and looks at her mother. "Can I get a drink?"

"We've got lots to drink at home," her mom says, but Kelly can tell she wants to stay and talk.

"I'll go fast," Kelly says, and sprints. She wants to show Mr. Phil how fast she runs—it feels like she's an insect or something, like barely any weight at all. The first and second diamonds whip by and she hits the snack bar steps two at a time. She pays for a soda and starts jogging back, careful so it won't splosh. She sees Mr. Phil coming towards her. He says, "Hey, number 12."

"Hey," she says.

"I hope your wrist gets better. They need you in left."

"No they don't," she says. "No one hits that far in this league. They just stick people there so they can't mess things up too bad."

He raises his eyebrows. "I hope your wrist gets better anyway."

She waggles her hand. It hurts a little, shaking it, but she doesn't wince.

"See you," he says, and turns to go.

"Hey," she says to his back. "What'd you say to Tanya?"

He turns. She feels a flutter of power: she has made an adult, almost a stranger, stay to talk to her.

His pink lips twitch. "I told you guys," he says.

"Yeah, but that wasn't it. You said more than that. Anyway, no one stops crying just 'cause someone tells them to."

He shifts, smirks. "I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

He looks toward the parking lot. Kelly's mom's in the car,

the window rolled down, still talking to Coach. “Cause, number 12, everyone wants to be an umpire. Lousy pay, angry parents, crying kids. Everyone wants my job. I gotta keep some tricks up my sleeve.”

“I won’t tell.”

“Kelly!” Her mom is calling.

“Promise?” he says. His eyes are serious, though he looks like he’s going to laugh. She nods. “I told her to get up so that little bitch Katie Danvers wouldn’t get to pitch.”

Her mom honks the horn. Kelly doesn’t know what to say. She flaps her hand goodbye and runs, sploshing soda on her uniform pants. She slows near Mr. Phil’s car: small, rust near the wheel wells. There are CDs on the passenger seat, a band called Creedence Clearwater Revival. The singer looks like one of the apostles in pictures from Sunday school.

In the car on the way home, Kelly crunches the ice cubes from the soda between her teeth and watches the neighborhoods roll by: green lawns, maple sparrows in a birdbath. She has a small scrape on her knuckles she can’t remember getting.

“Kelly, what’s going on with Tanya?” Mom asks.

“I think her parents are getting divorced,” Kelly says. “I really don’t know her except for softball.” They turn into their driveway. “How old is Mr. Phil?”

“I don’t know, honey. Maybe early thirties?”

“He’s bald.”

Her mom laughs. “That’s doesn’t mean anything. When I met Dad in college, he was already balding. It’s a hormone thing.”

They’ve been talking about hormones in health class. They show a lot of pictures of people’s insides and a creepy cartoon where these little bubbly hormones fizz around the shape of a girl and suddenly boobs and hips and pubic hair pop out.

Kelly’s mom turns off the radio and cuts the engine. “Does Tanya have a lot of friends at school?”

"I don't know. She's in the grade under me," Kelly says, getting out and leaning against the car. Her mom unlocks the door and the coolness of the house slides over them. "Why does everyone call him Mr. Phil?"

Her mom shrugs. "I don't know. How's your wrist?"

"Better. Can I listen to some of your records?"

Kelly's parents have Paul Anka, they have South Pacific, they have five Simon and Garfunkels, they have the Bee Gees and Joe Cocker and tons more vinyls lined up under the stereo. She has to flip through fifty albums before she finds Creedence Clearwater Revival. She takes it to her room. She has to move some books off the record player because she hardly uses it anymore—her only records are kid stuff, The Story of Thumbelina and Winnie the Pooh. She sits in bed reading the lyrics on the whispery paper sleeve.

She plays the record again and again until her dad comes in to call her to dinner. He starts singing in his actor voice and the hair on her arms stands up; she leaps out of bed to shut off the record. She feels like he's caught her at something. She used to like his singing, but lately she finds it embarrassing.

§

Over the next few days, she listens to the record whenever she can. She listens until she can hear "Who'll Stop the Rain" all through math class. She mouths it silently through lunch and gym, when the mile run takes her breath, but she makes her feet take a step for each syllable, using the song to pace herself.

And—I—won—der—still— I—won—der—who'll—stop—the—rain.

Listening to this music she feels older, like she's sitting alone on a weathered porch, watching a downpour. There's a fullness in it; she feels as though it's opened a door. Her reg-

ular face, brushing her teeth in the mirror, surprises her.

One day Mr. Phil is part of the scenery like the unused scoreboard in right field and the blue tarps rolled up along the dugouts for thunderstorms. Then suddenly he's everywhere. It's like after that day—after he told her what he said about Katie, after she listened to his music—she can suddenly see him.

She watches him when he isn't looking. When she goes to bat, she hopes for a double so she can stop at second. Standing on second puts her in front of where he stands to umpire, and the whole time she can feel him behind her.

He tries to make her laugh: "Hey, number 12, been out drinking again?" "That's quite a tobacco wad you got, slugger."

"It's gum, stupid," she says, and sticks out her tongue to prove it, the pink, teeth-marked gob halfway stretched around it, glistening with spit.

§

Between games, school is school: the restlessness of near summer, dull mustard lockers and the chicken nugget smell that saturates the afternoons. In biology, Mrs. Hunter dissects the frog that has been living in the tank in the classroom. She splays it out
on a board with pins and then removes its organs one by one, explaining the function of each.

Kelly stands at the back of the group gathered to watch. "That is so rad," Chris Conners whispers to Aaron Hayes as she holds up a tiny stomach.

"Wait till we get to high school," says Aaron. Kelly can just see the lab table between them, where Mrs. Hunter probes the stomach with a scalpel and something pale green seeps out. "In high school, my brother told me, everyone gets their own."

"Their own? Like, alive?"

"They paralyze them first," Aaron says. "But everyone gets their own body."

Kelly looks at the frog's organs. Alive, the frog had been a sullen, defiant presence that sulked with her through class, half submerged in the greenish water. Now it's a disassembled frog, an ex-frog, spread out beneath a poster of a diagrammed frog, names of organs floating around the drawing. She'd looked at the frog every day before class. She probably knew it better than she knew anyone else in the class—they were all just a blur of Neil's freckles and Lisa's pierced ears and Deepak's curls and Sherry's acne and Tina's long eyelashes. For a moment she pictures all of them without their skins and faces and hair, all pink and stringy underneath.

§

To make the clocks move faster, she dreams about Mr. Phil, awake-dreams that skip along her eyeballs like flat pebbles on a lake: plunk, plunk, then they sink in and she can't stop seeing them.

That Katie, she thinks she's so great, he says.

She's a good pitcher. In her daydreams she is nicer, more generous.

Not that good. She just gets to pitch 'cause of her father.

She says Chris Conners likes her.

He would. He's shallow. And he was held back a grade.

Sometimes she imagines he's there when she hits a homerun or makes an impossible catch. He never cheers, just smiles, as if to say he knows how sweet it is when the ball hits the glove just right, sending a puff of leathery dust into the air. Sometimes she and Mr. Phil are on the same team, playing outfield. They are there when the guy from the Big League Chew packet gets up to bat, grinning and scuffing his cleats. They hear the crack of the bat and see the ball going way, way up and far, and then, in one fluid motion,

Mr. Phil lifts Kelly onto his shoulders and she reaches up and snags the ball, and everyone in the bleachers gasps.

Kelly can see all of this—him grabbing her, lifting her onto his shoulders, her holding on with her legs and stretching out above him. She always pictures it happening on Field 4, because that's the field where the afternoon light comes in best, so when he lifts her onto his shoulders, the light makes them into one, like a centaur or something no one's imagined yet.

§

At night, Langley Field radiates white light into the neighborhoods. The floodlights at the field are so powerful that when they get turned on, Kelly can actually hear the thunk as the surge of electricity hits them, just as she's wheeling her bike into the woods above the bleachers. Mr. Phil's car is in the lot. There's not much of a path and branches snag at her hair, but she can survey the park without being seen.

She spots him behind the plate on Field 2, calling pitches for a boys' game, Mr. Sandwich against Henderson Hardware. She stashes her bike behind the snack bar then checks the stands. Coach Smith is watching his son from the Mr. Sandwich side. He knows Kelly because of her mother, but he won't try to make conversation. She strides out and climbs up the struts and slides up next to him.

He nods to her and keeps watching the game. The Henderson batter at the plate swings and misses, and Mr. Phil's voice rings out, "Strike!"

"Kelly! What happened to you?" Coach Smith's wife appears at the bottom of the bleachers, her arms loaded with food. "You have leaves and twigs all in your hair!"

Kelly runs her hands over her hair, pulling the leaves out. She can feel herself flush. Out of the corner of her eye she sees Mr. Phil step back from the plate and take off his mask. She hopes he didn't hear Mrs. Smith, who's squealed loud

enough for people at the snack bar to hear. Her mom's friends always comment on Kelly's grubbiness or scabby knees, as though they're things she should have outgrown. Lately—worse—they're saying, "You've grown so much!" This used to mean she'd grown taller, but now it means she's getting boobs, and she doesn't know how to answer: Thanks Mrs. Dietrich, yours are nice too?

Kelly doesn't want anyone to notice she's grown. She just wants Mr. Phil to think she plays well and runs fast and is pretty under her messy hair. And sometimes she thinks she wants him to want to kiss her, but just to want to kiss her, not to actually kiss her because she doesn't get how he'd do it so it's not dry like her dad's on her forehead and not gross like movies where it's like one two three four I declare a tongue war. It would be enough to know that Mr. Phil wanted to kiss her, wanted a kiss like that perfect catch when the ball smacks into the glove with just enough speed that it hurts a little, the catch so good it deserves the orange sun behind it.

Mrs. Smith hands a bag of popcorn up to Coach Smith, then a chili dog. She hefts herself up onto the bleachers. She is not fat, but like most grownups, she seems to be burdened with weight. Her shorts slide up her thighs as she sits down; her thighs sag against the bleachers like tired dachshunds.

Looking down surreptitiously at her legs and droop of belly, Kelly thinks, how could Mrs. Smith imagine, anymore, how to leap up and catch a ball out of the air? Or to understand that if you didn't catch it, it could keep going, over the fence, into the storm
pipe and the creek beyond, where it would rot, covered in algae? Kelly feels like that sometimes, like she's one person when she goes to sleep and then sleep decays her, makes her someone else. Just when she gets used to the new self it happens again. If it keeps happening, who will recognize her? Her thoughts feel too big for her body. But her body is too big for some of her thoughts. She could wake up a few

sleeps from now and look like Mrs. Smith, and who knows what Mrs. Smith thinks or feels, except tired, which is what all adults say when someone asks how they are: Fine. A little tired.

"You girls aren't playing tonight," Mrs. Smith says, sucking the straw of her soda. "What are you doing here?"

Kelly shrugs. "Just watching."

"You're watching the game?" Mrs. Smith seems baffled, but then understanding floods across her face. She leans in conspiratorially. "Which boy?"

Kelly wants to smother her with her chili dog, but she doesn't turn from the game. "Boys are gross," she says. Mr. Phil's back is dark with sweat.

Mrs. Smith prods her husband with her straw. He doesn't turn his head from the game either. "You think that now," she says to Kelly knowingly. "You just wait—I thought that, too, at your age. Although I was an early bloomer, wasn't I, Bill." Coach Smith blushes.

On the field the next pitcher warms up his arm and Mr. Phil stands near the fence, talking to a mother lower in the bleachers. He glances up and sees Kelly. He says, "Hey number 12."A couple of people turn around to see who he's talking to, and she nods back: just a fan checking out the game, nodding to her buddy the umpire.

All the way home—she pedals so fast she nearly spins out on the gravel patch at the bottom of Wrightson—she feels triumphant about that nod.

§

On Thursday when they play SuperMovieHouse, Mr. Phil talks a lot to Kelly's mom between innings. While the pitchers warm up and the fielders throw the ball around, he keeps coming over. He sets his soda on the ledge of their dugout, sipping it at breaks, joking with Kelly's mom and Coach McDonough.

Kelly stands taking practice swings, cutting the air like a tree. She watches the grownups horsing around, and she feels the fullness of their world, how it hovers around them like those clouds of gnats in the outfield. Mr. Phil makes her mom laugh, and Coach McDonough squirts her with a water bottle. Kelly glares at them. She is practicing her glare; she wants it strong enough to burn the backs of people's heads. She stares at her mother and wills her with sheer glare-force to stop giggling.

Her mom doesn't stop, but Mr. Phil turns to talk to the home plate ump and sees her. She slices her bat through the air as he walks over. She makes herself keep looking at him; it feels like her eyeballs are scraping his.

"Hey number 12."

"My name is Kelly," she says.

"Oh yeah?" he says. "So I should stop calling your mom Mrs. 12?"

Her mouth wants to smile but she resists. She rolls the bat between her hands. "You shouldn't flirt with my mom like that."

His mouth opens. "I'm flirting?"

"I'm not stupid."

"Huh. And why shouldn't I flirt?"

Kelly has a reason ready. "Cause you're the umpire. People will think you're biased for our team." She can see he wants to laugh and it makes her mad.

"It's just joking around," he says. "People can do that, you know—joke around, flirt if you want to call it that. It doesn't mean anything."

She considers this. In her experience, every interaction has meaning. The idea that this will not always be the case, that one day she will "joke around" and tickle people and squirt water on them and it will mean nothing seems absurd, another adult lie, like the arbitrary dates her parents have for when she's allowed to do certain things: earrings when you're sixteen, skydiving when you're twenty-one and can

pay for it.

The home ump calls over, "Let's get this show on the road."

Mr. Phil nods. "We okay then, number 12?" he says.

She swivels her bat slowly. "I guess."

"Good," he says, his grin returning as he heads for second base. "So don't act jealous. I still like you best."

Kelly's whole body turns hot. All around him is a blur of green SuperMovieHouse uniforms and the thunderous thumping as the girls in the field turn and throw their practice balls into the concrete dugout.

§

She thinks about him so much it makes her stomach hurt. She thinks about her mom saying baldness is caused by hormones and she pictures the little pulsing circles from the health class cartoon skittering around Mr. Phil like haloes polishing his head. She thinks about how her dad is bald on his head but how his chest and legs have hair on them. She wonders if Mr. Phil's do, and thinking about it makes her stomach turn over like when she rides her bike down Wrightson Avenue and doesn't brake: a sickening curl of descent.

Before dinner on Saturday she sits on the patio steps, reading, watching fireflies switch on and off under the trees. She hears her mom answering the phone inside as she tries to decipher the French sentences in her book. Her mom is telling someone when their next game is, but her voice sounds strange, like she's not sure: Tuesday at five, field three. "Sure … yeah … just a minute," her mother says, and then she pushes open the screen door and hands Kelly the phone. "Don't stay on too long."

Kelly mouths, Who? Her mother shrugs, like she knows but doesn't get it.

"Hello?"

"Hey number 12."

"Oh. … Hi." Kelly stands up from the step.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing. Reading." The snack bar at the field has a bulletin board hung with printouts of the game lineups. Anyone can read them. Why did he call?

"What are you reading?"

"Something for French." Kelly walks up the back steps, back down and into the yard. If she stops moving she will freeze in place.

"Ah, lemme guess. No Camus for a few years. Le Petit Prince?" His accent is good and she imagines Madame Walsch saying, Tres bien, Monsieur Phil.

"Yeah. How'd you know that?"

"Hey, I went to Eisenhower," he says. "They made us read all of that stuff."

"Oh." Silence. She keeps waiting for him to say, So the reason I wanted to talk to you is, but he doesn't.

"What kind of music do you like?"

She tells him that she likes U2 and Green Day and Creedence Clearwater—"You like CCR?" he says. His voice lights up.

"Yeah, they're awesome." She reminds herself to call them CCR from now on.

"What's your favorite song?"

"I like 'Who'll Stop the Rain,' " she says, and she suddenly realizes that he has not called to ask her mother about the softball schedule. He has called to talk to her. Not just that, the conversation with her mother was a cover. Her stomach rolls over hard, coiling up like a fat hot snake.

"Yeah, that's a good one. I like 'Fortunate Son.' Those opening riffs are just mean."

Opening riffs. Mean. Kelly turns the words in her mouth like a butterscotch. No one has ever asked what she thinks about music, or been happy to like what she likes. She wants to tell him about the feeling she gets from that song, of rain

coming down warm and sad, but she fears sounding stupid and maybe he knows already.

"So how old are you, anyway?" he says.

"I'll be thirteen in two weeks," she says, and he laughs. "What's so funny?"

"Nothing. I just think you're cool."

"How old are you?"

"I'll be 34 in four months."

Silence.

"I like 'Down on the Corner,' too," she says, to fill it.

"So," he says, "do you want to come over to the field?"

"Why?" she blurts.

"Well, I don't know. We could hang out."

She can't believe he has said this. She looks at her bike; the kickstand is broken and the bike lies on its side. She could be at the field in five minutes. The ease of it is terrifying. "Um, we're going to eat soon."

"You're nearby, right?"

"Yeah."

"I could meet you."

"Yeah." She pictures him kissing her. How would she do it? She presses her lips quickly against the back of her hand, trying to make them soft and strong.

"So?"

In her head, Kelly can see the path from the field's parking lot down to the creek. There's a huge storm drain under the road even a tall person can stand in. It's dark and hidden and the water echoes and shimmers. Kelly catches minnows there. Used to catch minnows there. He'll know where it is.

"Yeah, okay," she says. It is resolved. She's going.

"You're coming now?"

"Yeah."

She bites her lips gently to get the blood redden them. She thinks what lie to tell her mother to get away. She puts her hand on her bicycle's back wheel and sets it spinning. She can hear his breath and then he says, "So who are your

teachers at Eisenhower?"

The only one she can think of who's pretty old is Mr. Slater. He's tall and skinny and has this scrap of gray hair that he combs over the top of his bald spot. He tells bad jokes
and wants to be called Captain Slater because he was in the military years ago. "I have Captain Slater for math."

"That guy's still teaching? We all hated him," he says. "Some of my friends slashed his tires when we were in 8th grade."

"Yeah, I liked him at first but now I hate him. He's one of those fakers who acts like he's all cool but he's totally anal." This sounds good; she's heard older kids describe their parents as anal.

"Whoa—anal," he laughs. "You like CCR and you know psychology."

She doesn't know what he means, but he seems impressed, so she says, "Yeah."

"How do you know Freud in seventh grade?"

"I don't really know Freud," she says quickly.

"Oh," he says. "But you know what anal means."

"It means stuck up," she hazards.

"Well, yeah," he says, "but calling someone anal—you're saying they're anal-retentive. It's one of the stages of development, right after the oral stage when babies get pleasure from sucking. The anal stage is when kids get pleasure from being able to control their defecation."

"Defecation?"

"Shitting."

"Oh," she says, looking up at the screen door. Her mom is looking out, a question on her face. "That's really gross."

"You said it."

"I just meant he was uptight."

"Well, but you're totally right, Slater is definitely anal. It's the perfect word. I bet he loves sitting on the can and trying to keep a big turd from coming out."

"Oh. Yeah."

Silence.

"Where are you, anyway?" he says. "Like, where in the house."

"I'm out on the back steps."

"So you don't even have to sneak out," he says.

"No."

"So are you coming?"

She tries to picture him lifting her up, the ball coming down at that tremendous speed toward her glove, but all she sees in her head is Captain Slater hunched on the toilet, his tuft of hair wildly flopping at the top of his head, his face scrunched up with delight. She feels a black wave wash over her, a nausea similar yet utterly different from the waves that have swelled in her for weeks.

"No," she says. "I think—I mean—"

"Oh," he says. "OK."

"Did you need to talk to my mom again?" she asks. Her voice trembles. "She's right inside if you still need to talk to her."

"No," he says. "I'm good."

"Well," she says. "I gotta go. See ya later."

She pushes the hang-up button on the phone and the wave rushes through her. All she can think about is naked bodies, hairy and pink and freckled, and what they're supposed to do. It is horrifying.

§

She has not noticed before how Mr. Phil's eyes bulge behind his glasses, as though they're being pushed slowly from his head. At the field he tries to talk to her, but she walks past without saying anything. When he cracks jokes to her, she doesn't smile.

On the way home from a game, her mom says, "Kelly, you've been really rude to Mr. Phil lately."

"He's lame."

"What did he talk about on the phone?"

She hesitates. "Nothing much."

She knows: She could tell the truth and get him in trouble. She could tell a small lie and the trouble would get bigger. She pictures him sitting at a meeting in a small, smoky room, surrounded by yelling coaches and crying mothers, accusations diving at him like mosquitoes. But she is not a tattletale, and the anger she could drag from the grown-ups is not the same as her anger. Hers is duller and less electric, less grounded in love and protection. Her anger is selfish: He did not give her what she wanted, and though she doesn't know what that was, she knows it's ruined.

§

She wants her anger to break him, but after a week of her turning away, he starts joking around with Tanya instead. He teases her and nudges her off the base during warm-ups; she giggles and preens.

Kelly imagines his car smashed up and his body crushed inside of it, the sharp edges of CCR CDs jutting from wounds in his fleshy stomach. When she swings the bat she imagines the ball is his mouth. One game she hits it so far that the little girls in the outfield have to run back to the fence, and she runs so fast it turns into a homerun. The team lines up to slap her hand, and Coach McDonough says, "You are really getting strong, Kelly!"

She is certain that something terrible will happen to Mr. Phil any day, but game after game he's still there, joking around with the mothers and kids. The games can't happen without him.

§

Kelly's mom is at a coaches meeting and Kelly's waiting in the bleachers, watching one of the boys' games and adding fresh strings of gum to the wad she's already chewing, when she sees Mr. Phil approaching from the snack bar. He's out of uniform and freshly showered, though he's still wearing his umpire hat. He heads toward the stands and Kelly is sure he's coming to her, but then she notices Tanya sitting two rows down.

She slides down the benches till she's right behind Tanya. Mr. Phil glances at Kelly, but turns to sit down with Tanya anyway, giving Kelly barely a second to slip half her wad of gum under his butt.

"Hey Tanya," he says. "What are you up to?"

"Just watching the game," Tanya says, giggling. She has been in a gray haze for months, but now whenever he's around she gets all smiley. She doesn't look like the same girl who was crying for her dad on the pitcher's mound only a month ago. She doesn't slump anymore; she holds her head up high. Kelly sees how pretty Tanya is, like someone has turned a light on inside. She wonders if she looked like that when she was the favorite, and jealousy mixes in her throat with the sugary juice from her gum.

"Want a slushee?" Mr. Phil asks Tanya.

"Oh, that's okay," she says.

"I'm going anyway," he says, shifting down the bench. "What flavor? Cherry?"

"Hey," Kelly says. Neither of them looks at her.

"Grape," Tanya says.

"Hey, Phil," Kelly says, louder. "Phil!" This time they hear, and both of them turn. "Hey, Phil, can you get me a slushee?"

Tanya frowns at her, and Kelly feels her mouth tremble, but she says it again. "I want a slushee too. Can you get me one?" A couple of parents and kids turn to look at them.

Mr. Phil looks at her and she looks back. She feels currents pass between them: the sounds of the fans, the umpire

calling pitches, that perfect catch that hovered in her head, the dark space of the storm drain and the echoes his voice would have made there: Hey number 12.

"Actually, I just realized I'm running late," he says, looking at his watch. "I'll get you kids next time."

He stands and walks away. The gum on the seat pulls a long pink thread out behind him that gets thinner and thinner until it breaks.

Tanya stands up and glares at her. "You are so rude, Kelly," she says, then scurries after Mr. Phil, her sneakers kicking dust clouds from the gravel. Kelly can hear her calling him. He's trailing the ribbon of wispy pink gum from his butt. It catches on the breeze and flutters behind him like a hairless tail.

Mary Jo Bang

Three Cantos from Dante's Inferno

XV

The hardened margin holds us and on we go.
The vapor rose off the boiling stream and became a hovering
Cloud that protected the banks and water from the fire.

Like the Flemish between Wissant and Bruges
Who, fearing flood tides,
Build a dike to keep the sea behind,

And like the Paduans who erect embankments
Along the Benta to protect their towns and mansions
From the summer snow-melt runoff,

So some Frank Lloyd Wright designed these banks,
Except whoever he was, he didn't build them
As thick or as high as those.

It was when the thicket was already so far off
Behind the mist—if I'd turned back to look
I wouldn't have seen it—

That we came to a group of souls
Running parallel to the bank; they stared up at us
Like men will sometimes eye one another

At dusk in the dim white of a fingernail moon—
Brows knitted and eyes squinting
Like a forty-plus tailor threading a needle's eye.

Studied like that, one recognized me;
He reached up, grabbed the hem of my coat
And cried, “What a thing! Isn’t this amazing?”

While he stretched his arm out to me,
I searched the scorched face and behind
The burnt features, I could see

A man I’d once known; lowering my hand
As if to touch his face, I said, Signore Brunetto,
“Are you down here?”

“My boy, I hope you won’t be annoyed
If Brunetto Latino retraces his steps a little
To talk to you and lets the group run on ahead.”

“Not at all,” I said, “I wish with all my heart you would;
Or if you’d rather, we could just sit here—
As long as the one I’m with doesn’t object.”

“My boy,” he said, “if any of this flock of birds stops,
For even a second, he has to lie down for a century
And not brush off the fire that falls on him.

Just keep walking ahead, I’ll hang on
To the hem of your coat and afterward catch up with the band
Of those who go about crying over their eternal outcome.”

I didn’t dare climb down from our higher perch
To his lower level but walked like the reverential walk,
With my head bowed.

He began, “What luck or doom brings you down here
Before your time’s run out,
And who’s this who’s playing docent?”

I answered, "Up there above,
Where it's light, I lost my way in a dark valley,
Even before I had had half a life.

I left the edge of it early yesterday; but then
Turned and went back in. That's when he came along,
And now he's leading me home along this walkway."

He told me, "All you have to do is follow your fixed star,
Your ship can't fail to arrive at greatness—that is, if
When I was happily alive I read the cards right.

If I'd lived longer,
Because heaven's clearly deemed you a golden boy,
I would have encouraged you in all your work.

However, that mob of malicious ingrates, who came down
A long time ago from Fiosole, but who still
Smack of the mountain rube and the crude rock pile,

Will become your enemies because of the good you do,
And that makes sense, sweet figs shouldn't ripen
In an orchard of bitter Whitty Pears.

They've famously been called blind; as a group,
They're greedy, envious and arrogant.
Don't let yourself be like them.

You're so clearly destined for such high honors
That you'll look like a tasty piece of Neptune's toast
To both parties, so don't let the goats reach the grass.

Let those Fiosole brutes eat themselves,
And not the plants—
If any still grows on that shite-pile

That contains the sacred seed
Of the few pure Romans who stayed
When the others built their viper's nest."

"If I had my way," I told him,
"I wouldn't have let you be banished yet
From humanity.

The image I have of you, which now makes me sad,
Comes from remembering how sweet, loving,
And like a father you were as you patiently and steadily

Taught me how we make ourselves immortal.
As long as I live, I'll feel compelled
To tell anyone who'll listen how grateful I am to you.

What you're now telling me about the future, I'll keep
In the vault with another text I'm taking to a woman
Who'll make sense of them, if I ever reach her.

I can tell you this much for sure—as long as
I've done nothing to bother my conscience,
I'm prepared for whatever fortune has in her lockbox.

I've already been told what I've been promised,
So let fortune turn her wheel—whatever,
And let the bumpkin hoe his row."

My teacher then glanced back at me
Over his right shoulder and said, "Remember
The proverb, 'Those who have ears, ought to hear this.'"

Meanwhile, I continue talking to Signore Bernetto
As we walk along; I ask him who's the most notorious
Of those he runs with, who's the most distinguished.

He told me, “It’s good for you to be aware
Of some of them, but as for the rest, let it go;
There’s not time enough to name them all.

What you should know is that those in my group
Were all clerics and great and famous scholars
Who were ruined in the world by a single sin.

Priscian travels with those degenerates, as does
Francesco d’Accorso; and if you have a taste for lowlifes,
You might have spotted in the middle of them

The Bishop who the Servant of Servants transferred
From Arno to Bacchiglione
Where his erect nerves are now interred.

I’d love to stay and keep talking but I can’t;
That smoke you see in the distance coming
Off the sand means a group of souls

I’m not allowed to be with is headed this way.
Keep my Trésor in your memory; that’s where
I go on living. I don’t ask you for more than that.”

Watching him turn back, he reminded me of a runner
In the yearly race at Verona; he looked a lot like the one
Who comes in first and takes the green-flag,

And nothing like the one who comes in last.

Notes for Canto XV

10: Frank Lloyd Wright: American architect (1867-1959) associated with the Prairie School movement; Prairie School buildings are usually defined by horizontal lines and solid construction; the primary tenet of the school was that the structure should appear "organic" to the site.

19: At dusk in the dim white of a fingernail moon—: Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Moonrise":

I awoke in the Midsummer not to call night, in the white and the walk of the morning:
The moon, dwindled and thinned to the fringe of a finger-nail held to the candle,

29: Signore Brunetto: Brunetto Latini (c. 1220-1294) was a Florentine philosopher, orator, translator (of Cicero), author, and statesman. He wrote, as Dante did, in vernacular Italian. His most famous works are (in Italian) a long poem titled, Tesoretto, and (in French) Li Livre dou Trésor, a prose work.

55: your fixed star: Sylvia Plath, "Words":

Years later I
Encounter them on the road—

Words dry and riderless,
The indefatigable hof-taps.
While
From the bottom of the pool, fixed stars
Govern a life.

While Dante's exact date of birth is not known, many Dantists interpret lines 151-154 in Canto XXII, "As I revolved with the eternal twins, I saw revealed from hills to

river outlets, the threshing floor that makes us so furious," to mean he was born under the star sign of Gemini (May 22-June 21).

61-62: malicious ingrates, who came down/A long time ago from Fiosole: Fiosole is a hill town in Tuscany, approximately 5 miles from Florence. It was originally the home of a Roman traitor, Catiline; the town was conquered by the Romans who then built Florence at the foot of the hill, there "they welcomed into their midst those Fiesolans who wanted to stay on and live there." (Villani, I, 38).

66: Whitty Pears: Whitty Pear is another name for the Sorb Tree; because the fruit is high in tannins, when first picked from the tree it is extremely astringent.

71: a tasty piece of Neptune's toast: Shakespeare, Troilus and Cressida, Act I, sc iii, lines 45-48:

where's then the saucy boat
Whose weak untimber'd sides but even now
Co-rivall'd greatness? Either to harbour fled,
Or made a toast for Neptune.

"Toasted bread immersed in wine, ale, (or for weak stomachs,) water was considered a delicacy." Footnote to line 48 in Troilus and Cressida, ed Harold N. Hildebrand, supplemental ed, T.W. Baldwin. (J. B. Lippincott Co, Phila and London, 1953): 45.

76-78: That contains the sacred seed / Of the few pure Romans who stayed / When they built their viper's nest: Villani (I, 38) described the situation: "The Florentines are always in disagreement and at war among themselves. Nor need that cause amazement, since they descend from two so opposed, inimical, and very different peoples—namely, the

noble and virtuous Romans and the crude, war-embittered Fiosolans." Dante believed that he himself was a direct descendent of pure Roman blood.

82-85: The image I have of you . . . as you patiently and steadily . . . Taught me how we make ourselves immortal: It's not clear what Dante means by "how we make ourselves immortal" but many commentators point to the fact that Brunetto also wrote rhyming allegorical didactic verse in Italian; Dante is very possibly gesturing toward his debt to Brunetto for the poetic model he's using for the Comedia.

89-90: In the vault with another text I'm taking to a woman / Who'll make sense of them, if I ever reach her: The woman is Beatrice; "another text (altro testo)" refers to Farinata's prophecy in Canto X. In the event, it's not Beatrice who interprets these prophesies, but Cacciaguida, Dante's great-great-grandfather, who acts as her spokesperson in Purgatory (Canto XVII).

108: a single sin: The nature of the single sin that unites the group is unstated however most commentators argue that the sin is sodomy. If that is the case, placing the sodomites in the 7th Circle, instead of in 2nd, where sins of lust are punished by tormenting hurricane-force winds, suggests that Dante was defining homosexuality not as a crime of lust but as a crime of violence (against nature—or reproductive sexuality).

Many writers suggest that Dante's feelings about homosexuality are nuanced. His obvious deep respect for Brunetto suggests a lack criticism, as does his choice of Virgil, who "was inclined to passions for boys," as a guide. (quoted from Donatus's (fl. mid-4th C AD) Life of Virgil,—which is believed to have been based on Vita by Suetonious (a Roman Empire historian c. 69/75-130). In addition, the Sodomites

are placed with the lustful in Circle VII of Purgatory, not with the violent. Those who argue that the single sin is not homosexuality but rather blasphemy or the denial of the supremacy of the Empire point to the fact that there are no descriptions anywhere in recorded history of Brunetto, Priscian, or Francesco d' Accorsco that suggest they were homosexual.

109: Priscian: Priscianus Caesariensis (c. 500 AD) was a Latin grammarian; his work, Institutiones Grammaticae (Grammatical Foundations), written in Old Irish (and possibly in Ireland) was the standard Latin textbook in the Middle Ages and parts of which have remained in print until the present. To see reproduction of a page from a copy, done in 850-1 (with handwritten notes, in pen): http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/en/csg/0904

110: Francesco d' Accorso; Franciscus Accursius (1225-1293) was a Bolognese jurist and professor of civil law. He taught at the University of Bologna and at Oxford University in England.

112-113: The Bishop who the Servant of Servants transferred/From Arno to Bacchiglione: Andrea de' Mozzi (d. 1296), born in Florence, was appointed Archbishop of Florence in 1287 and served until 1295. Because of his "unseemly living" (Footnote, Singleton, 271), he was transferred by Pope Boniface VIII to Vicenza. "The Servant of Servants" is a phrase used by Popes, in Latin, at the beginning of Papal bulls (announcements); Dante is using it sarcastically here to express his disdain for Boniface who reputedly convinced Pope Celestine to step down and then conspired to have himself elected in his place.

114: Where his erect nerves are now interred: De' Mozzi died in Vicenza five months after he arrived and he was buried there; those who argue that he is a Sodomite, take his "erect nerves" to suggest a state of permanent sexual readiness. That reading is contested by those who argue that these men are guilty not of homosexuality but of other non-sexual crimes.

119: my Trésor: Treasure in English. This possibly refers to Brunetto's book Li Livre dou Trésor, an encyclopedic prose work on history, natural science, ethics, rhetoric, and political science, which he wrote in French when took refuge in France after learning that the Guelphs had lost decisively to the Ghibellines and the latter had expelled him from Florence. Boccacio argues for this volume, as does Longfellow. Robert Hollander suggests that the book in question is the Tesoretto, the long allegorical poem written in Italian. He points out that in the text of that volume one finds Brunetto calling the work "this rich Treasure, which is worth silver and gold."

122-123: In the yearly race at Verona; he looked a lot like the one/Who comes in first and takes the green-flag: The footrace, established in 1207 to commemorate a military victory, was run annually on the first Sunday of Lent. The winner received a piece of green cloth, the loser, a rooster. The race was run naked.

XVIII

There's a place in Hell called Malebolge;
It's made of stone that looks like iron that matches
Exactly the color of the cliffs that surround it.

Dead center in the middle of that vast malevolent expanse,
There's an excavation, both extremely wide
And incredibly deep. I'll get back to this later.

Between the pit and the high hard escarpment
Where we walked, are ten circular ditches—
Each separated by a circular path.

Similar in design to a system of numerous moats
That circles a castle and offers protection
To those inside, this arrangement too

Had its rationale. Just as a fortress
Like that would have a series of narrow bridges
That went from front gate to outer rampart, so here,

Beginning at the base of the cliff, ridges of broken rock
Ran across the ditches until they met in the center
Where the pit cut them off and gathered them in

Like spokes at the hub of a wheel. This is where
We found ourselves once Geryon had shaken us off;
The poet kept to the left and I came close behind.

On my right, I saw new miseries—
New punishments and new tormenters;
The first ditch was filled of them.

There were two moving columns of naked sinners—
The closer line was walking toward us around the circle;

The farther walked with us, but went faster.

This was the scheme the Romans used
To get pilgrims across the bridge in the year of the Jubilee
When the city was packed with huge crowds;

All those on one side walked facing the castle
As they proceeded to St. Peter's; on the opposite side,
Those coming back from St. Peters faced the hill.

The black rock ravine was lined with horned demons
With huge bullwhips
Which they used to cruelly lash the backs of their charges.

Amazing, how devilishly good they were at making them
Race forward with a single flick of the switch.
Trust me, no one waited around for a second or third.

While I was walking along my eyes met those of one
Who made me think, as soon as I saw him,
"I'm sure I've seen that face before."

I stopped to have a better look;
Virgil, ever-patient, stopped too and suggested
I should go back a bit if I wanted to.

The one being whipped tried to conceal his face
By tucking in his chin, but it didn't work. I said,
"You, staring down at the ground,

Unless you're wearing a Halloween mask,
You must be Venedico Caccianemico.
What brings you to this bitter Sing Sing?"

"I generally don't like to talk about it," he said, "but
You sound as if you know what happened in the world

Which makes me feel like speaking. I'm the one

Who tricked my sister, Ghisolabella, into allowing
The Marquis in so he could have his way with her—
Whatever other awfulness you may have heard.

I'm not the only Bolognese down here weeping,
This place is packed with us; there are more down here
Than live between the two rivers that border Bologna—

That area where they're famous for saying 'whatever'
instead of
Simply saying 'yes.' If you doubt how many are down here,
Just think of the enormous and varied appetites we indulge."

As he was talking to me, a demon lashed him
With his whip, saying, "Keep moving, pimp,
There are no women here you can enlist to line your
pockets."

I went and rejoined my escort;
After a few steps we came to a natural bridgeway
That juts out from the cliff;

We scrambled up, then veered to the right
Along the top of the stone reef's ragged surface,
Leaving behind the walls that go on circling forever.

When we reached the part of the ridge that's open,
And underneath which the whipped ones trudge,
My teacher said, "Stop and take a look

At these other poor souls who were all born on a bad day;
You haven't seen their faces before,
Since they've been moving clockwise with us."

From the primeval ridge we could see
Those in the file now coming toward us,
Rushing forward, like the others, in front of the lash.

I hadn't noticed one until my teacher pointed him out.
He said, "Look at that undaunted one headed this way.
He's in great pain, but not a tear.

He reminds me of the Queen. It's Jason,
Who through nerves of steel plus street smarts,
Finessed the Golden Fleece so adored by the Colchis king.

He stopped by the Isle of Lemnos
After those crude and ruthless women
Had murdered all the men among them.

There, with sweet talk and a few trinkets, a pelican of lies
He loosed to deceive the girl Hypsipyle, who had
Herself already deceived her sorority sisters.

There he left her, pregnant and alone.
That's why he's suffering here, and why he should be—
That, and also the way he betrayed Medea.

Like him, all the others in this trough were tricksters
And double-crossers. That's all you need to know
About those you see between the jaws of darkness in this
ditch."

We were now where the ridge meets
The second embankment and buttresses
The arch beneath it.

We could hear people in the next ditch whimpering
Loudly, chuffing air through their noses,
And smacking themselves with their hands.

The banks were covered with a thick crust of mold
That comes from a miasma that drifts up from below;
It stuck to the walls and burned my nose and eyes.

The bottom was so deep and shrouded in darkness
We could only see it by climbing up to where
The high point of the ridge forms the apex of the arch.

So we went up and from there, looking down
Into the ravine, I could see people immersed
In what had to be untreated sewage.

While examining the bottom, my eyes lit on a man
Who was so plastered with shit I didn't know whether
    he had
A full head of hair, or was tonsured like Friar Laurence.

He called me out, "You got a problem with me?
Out of this whole filthy lot down here?"
I told him, "If I'm not mistaken,"

I saw you once when your hair was dry—
You were called Alessio Interminei of Lucca.
That's why I'm looking at you instead of at the others."

He tapped his gourd several times and said, "I'm sunk
To this because of a bad habit; I couldn't open
My stinking mouth without drooling flattery."

Then my teacher said, "Lean a little bit
Further forward
So you can get a better view of the face

Of that nasty, disheveled handmaid-slash-harlot
Down there scratching herself with her dirty nails.
Now she's squatting; now she's standing up.

That's Thais, the whore who, when her lover asked,
'Do you thank me much for what I gave you?'
Said, 'Much? More like a million trillion thanks.'

With that, I think we've seen enough."

Notes for Canto XVIII

1: There's a place in Hell called Malebolge; Dante invented this name by combining the words male ("evil") and bolge, which Benvenuto interpreted as "valleys"; other commentators, however, have interpreted bolge as "pouches," "sacs," or "purses." The Sansoni English-Italian/Italian-English Dictionary (The Centro Lessicografico Sansoni under the general editorship of Vladimiro Macchi, 3rd Edition, 2001) gives the following definition for bolgia:

bolgia f. (pl. –ge) 1 (dell'inferno dantesco) pit (in Dante's Inferno). 2 (confusione) bedlam. infernale pit of Hell.

Malebolge makes up the eighth Circle; the entire circle is comprised of a series of ten circular valleys—each representing a different kind of fraudulent behavior—that are arranged like moats around a fortified castle. Here, however, in place of the castle, we have the central pit that forms the bottom of Hell, the ninth and final Circle.

16-17: Beginning at the base of the cliff, ridges of broken rock/Ran across the ditches until they met in the center: All except a crucial one of these natural bridgeways span the ten valleys, like drawbridges connect a series of moats and lead to the castle in Dante's simile. Here, the bridges end at a deep central pit, rather like an inverted castle.

25-27: There were two moving columns of naked sinners . . . The farther walked with us, but went faster: The inner column, those walking clockwise toward Dante, is made up of panderers—those who deceived women for money; the outer column, moving counter-clockwise, is composed of the seducers—those who promised women marriage and then afterward abandoned them.

28-30: This was the scheme the Romans used / To get pilgrims across the bridge in the year of the Jubilee / When the city was packed with huge crowds: During a Jubilee year, any Roman who visited both the Cathedral of St. Peter and the Cathedral of St. Paul for thirty straight days (for non-Romans, fifteen days) would have all his or her sins pardoned, provided the sins had been, or would be, confessed. Pope Boniface VIII (who Dante places in hell) proclaimed the first Jubilee in 1300. For that event, to commemorate the birth of Christ, Villani writes that at all times, two hundred thousand pilgrims were either in Rome or entering or leaving. (Villani, VIII, 36) The bridge is the Ponte Sant'Angelo, which goes over the Tiber. It was the only bridge to St. Peters so would have been extremely crowded. Some commentators say Dante was in Rome in 1300, others says he was there in 1301 but even if he hadn't seen it with his own eyes, would have undoubtedly heard about how the bridge traffic had been ingeniously handled. Currently the Jubilee is celebrated every twenty-five years, the last one was in 2000.

50: You must be Venedico Caccianemico: The son of the head of the Bolognese Guelph party, he killed his cousin. He also, for money, admitted his supporter, the Marquis of Este, to his sister's bedroom where she succumbed to his advances. The Marquis then discarded her. She later married Niccolò da Fontana of Ferrara.

51: What brings you to this bitter Sing Sing?: Sing Sing is a maximum security prison in Ossining,
New York. For the history of Sing Sing, see
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sing_Sing.

61-62:That area where they're famous for saying 'whatever,' instead of/Simply saying 'yes.': In Dante's day, the Bolognese dialect substituted sia (modern sepa) for si. Both mean "yes."

85-87: It's Jason, / Who through nerves of steel plus street smarts, / Finessed the Golden Fleece so adored by the Colchis king: In Green mythology, Jason was the leader of the Argonauts when they went to the land of Colchis to steal the golden fleece.

88-94: He stopped by the Isle of Lemnos . . There he abandoned her, pregnant and alone: Hipsipyle, daughter of Thaos, king of Lemnos, was leader of a group of women who had killed all their husbands. During the massacre, she saved her father. On the journey to Colchis, Jason seduced and abandoned her. She had twins by him. When the women of the isle learned she had spared her father, she was forced to flee.

91-92: a pelican of lies/He loosed: John Berryman, "Dream Song #20: The Secret of the Wisdom":

When worst got things, how was you? Steady on?
Wheedling, or shockt her &
you have been bad to your friend,
whom not you writing to. You have not listened.
A pelican of lies
you loosed: where are you?

95-96: That's why he's suffering here, and why he should be— / That, and also the way he betrayed Medea: Medea, the daughter of King Colchis, in exchange for his promise to marry her, helped Jason deceive her father so he would give him the golden fleece; Jason did marry her but later abandoned her for Creusa, the daughter of King Creon. Medea avenged herself by killing Creusa and her own two children. Jason is being held up as the prototypical serial seducer of women. He abandons two women, the one before marrying her, the other, after.

98: That's all you need to know: John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn."

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

99: About those you see between the jaws of darkness in this ditch: William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act I, scene i:

And ere a man hath power to say 'Behold!'
The jaws of darkness do devour it up:
So quick bright things come to confusion.

116-117. I didn't know whether he had/A full head of hair, or was tonsured like Friar Laurence: Tonsure is the practice by religious orders of shaving the crown of the head. Friar Laurence is the well-intended go-between in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet.

122: Alessio Interminei of Lucca: A knight of noble birth from Lucca, and apparently a habitual flatterer.

133: That's Thaïs, the whore who, when her lover asked, / 'Do you thank me much for what I gave you?' / Said, 'Much? More like a million trillion thanks.': Thaïs is a courtesan in Terence's comic play, Eunuchus. In the play, she doesn't actually speak directly to her lover but to an intermediary. Commentators believe the error arose because Dante wasn't familiar with the play itself, but was only aware of the character through Cicero's use of her as an example of the language of flattery (see Vernon, 60).

XIX

O Simon Magus! And O you miscreant apers of him!
The officers of God should only marry goodness
Gratuitously given but you sell church favors like sad
women

On their backs sell sex. And leave me to walk around
Like a town crier ringing a bell to tell the world
That you live down here in the third ditch.

We had reached the cemetery that was next
In the series and stood at the summit of the ridge
Where it overlooked the middle of the valley.

O infallible judgment, what an artwork you've made
Of the heavens and the earth and the evil world
And what perfect punishments you mandate.

All along the walls and the bottom of the ravine,
Circular holes, each the same size,
Had been drilled in the dark rock.

They appeared no larger than the small fonts
Designed for baptismal priests to stand in
Inside my beautiful Church of San Giovanni,

Where not long ago I broke one—and let this be
My sworn story if anyone out there thinks otherwise—
Not out of sacrilege but to save someone who was dying
in it."

The feet of each sinner, along with his legs
Up to his thighs, poked out of the mouth
Of each hole; his head and torso remained tucked inside.

Both soles were on fire; the naked legs
Thrashed with such violence they would have broken
Any strap or band designed to tie them together.

You've seen how fire consumes the outer layer
Of a well-oiled surface, that's how it blazed here
All along the sole from tip of the toe to the back of the heel.

I asked, "Whose legs are those kicking more furiously
Than any of the rest and whose feet
Are being eaten away by a redder red than all the others?"

He said, "If you'll let me carry you down
To the low point of the slope he can talk to you himself
About his crimes and misdemeanors."

I said, "I want whatever you want. You're the liege
And I'm the loyal follower, you know that;
You even know what I want before I ask."

We walked down to the fourth embankment,
Then turned left and made our way
To where the cramped bottom was riddled with holes.

My helpful teacher carried me on his hip
And didn't put me down until we were just outside
The opening where the man was kicking like crazy.

"Whoever you are, miserable sinner, feet up
With your head in a bucket, planted like a post,"
I said to him, "talk to me, if you can."

I was crouched down like a friar hearing the confession
Of an unrepentant killer about to be buried head-down
And who calls you back only to delay his inevitable dying.

He shouted, “Is it you already? Is it you already,
Boniface? Standing there? If so,
The book of time was off by several years.

Are you already finished consuming the riches
You so blatantly swindled from our lady of religion—
And afterward bartered her body for cash.”

I stood there like someone embarrassed
Because they’ve been asked a question they don’t understand
So can’t possibly give an answer.

“Tell him quickly,” said Virgil,
“‘I’m not him, I’m not the one you think I am.’”
I quickly said what he said to say.

At that he vehemently flapped his feet,
Then sighed and whined,
“Then what do you want with me?

If you’ve scrambled down the bank and come all this way
Just to learn my name, I can tell you
I once wore the magnificent red cloak of a pope.

But behind that, I was the son of a she-bear, so eager
To advance my own pups that up there
I stuffed my pockets with money and here I put myself
in one.

Underneath me are the crushed others
Who were Simonists before me, flattened now
Into the fissures of the rock.

It will be my turn to drop down next
When that one who I thought you were
When I questioned you a little too quickly arrives.

I've already spent more time having my feet
Seared while standing on my head
Than he'll have to remain planted here with his feet on fire.

After him a rogue shepherd will come
From the west, one whose even worse corruption
Will make him a fitting lid for the two of us.

He'll be another Jason from the Book of Maccabees;
Just like that king favored that one,
The king of France will favor this one."

I don't know whether it was foolish of me
But I took a tone when I answered:
"So, how much money was it

That Christ asked St. Peter to pay
Before he agreed to let him be keeper of the keys?
Didn't he simply say, 'Follow me, etcetera'?

And the same for Peter and the others,
They weren't promised gold and such by Matthias
In order to be chosen by lot to take the Judas spot.

So stay right where you are, you've earned your pocket.
It's where you can keep the dirty-money
You took to stand firm against Charles d'Anjou.

If reverence for the divine keys you once held
When you were happily alive
Didn't keep me from speaking

I'd let you know what I truly think of you.
Because your kind of greed cripples the world,
It makes the good go without and elevates evil.

It's clergymen like you that John the Evangelist

Had in mind when he envisioned a harlot
On water having sex with kings. She was born

With seven heads, each a gift from the Ghost of God,
And with ten horns, each a commandment; she only knew
How to govern as long as her husband was virtuous.

You've built yourselves a god from silver and gold.
Is this any different from idolatry, except that those
Worshipers have one god and you have a hundred.

Constantine, look what evil you instigated,
Not by your conversion but by the lavish gift
Of money you gave to the first church father."

And while I sang this song to him, whether he was
Bitten to the quick by the all-shaking thunder of rage,
Or by shame, he kicked fast and hard with both feet.

I suspected my teacher approved
Of my forthright diatribe because he listened
Throughout with a look of intense satisfaction.

And afterward picked me up and clasped me
To his chest and retraced the steps
He had taken for the descent.

He held me tight the entire way without tiring
Until we arrived at the summit of the arch
That crosses from four to five.

It was here he gently set his cargo down;
He had to be gentle, the rock was so steep and jagged
We would have had trouble climbing it even if we'd
been goats.

From there, another enormous valley was unveiled.

Notes for Canto XIX

1: O Simon Magus: A first century A.D. sorcerer from Samaria who was converted to Christianity by Philip the evangelist. Most accounts of him come from early Christian writers. According to Acts 8:9-24, he attempted to purchase the power of "laying on of hands" from the Apostles. The sin of "simony" has since been applied to the buying and selling of ecclesiastical positions or influence. Simon Magus was mentioned by Chaucer in "The Persones Tale" and may have been the inspiration for Christopher Marlowe's Faustus and Goethe's Faust.

13-15: All along the walls and the bottom of the ravine,/Circular holes, each the same size,/Had been drilled in the dark rock: This architectural regularity gestures toward the Florentine Baptistery mentioned in the lines that follow.

16-17: They appeared no larger than the small fonts / Designed for baptismal priests to stand in / Inside my beautiful Church of San Giovanni: In Dante's time, the Cathedral of San Giovanni in Florence had a central octagonal baptismal font that incorporated four wells in which priests would stand during the rite of Baptism—which was usually done on Easter Eve when large crowds were present. The wells, which were waist high, protected the priests from being jostled and possibly dropping the infant.

19-21: Where not long ago I broke one—and let this be/My sworn story if anyone out there thinks otherwise—/Not out of sacrilege but to save someone who was dying in it: Commentators are unclear whether this event is to be read literally, or allegorically. Most believe Dante is referring to an actual, but otherwise undocumented, event where he must have broken one of the wells with an ax to save someone, possibly a priest who was in some distress and couldn't be

otherwise removed from the well. He appears to want to quell any rumors that this was done as a political gesture.

23-33: whose feet / Are being eaten away by a redder red than all the others: Papal shoes are red—velvet slippers for indoors, leather for out.

36: About his crimes and misdemeanors: Crimes and Misdemeanors is the title of a darkly comedic film written and directed by Woody Allen and released in 1989. It was nominated for several Academy Awards. The central dilemma involves the question of whether it's possible to live with the guilt of having committed murder. This moral quandary echoes that of the novel Crime and Punishment by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, first published in 12 monthly installments in 1866 and later published as a complete novel. For the novel's publishing history, plot summary, themes and structure, etc, see: wttp://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crime_and_Punishment
For more information about the film, see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crimes_and_Misdemeanors

52-54: He shouted, "Is it you already? Is it you already, / Boniface? Standing there? If so, / The book of time was off by several years: Pope Nicholas III mistakes Dante for Boniface VIII and expresses his surprise that Boniface has come early—since the poem is set in 1300 and Boniface will not die until 1303. (See note to Canto VI, lines 67-69 and Canto XV, lines 112-113 in for previous mentions of Boniface.)

55-57: Are you already finished consuming the riches / You so blatantly swindled from our lady of religion— / And afterward bartered her body for cash." Villani writes about Boniface (VIII, 6, 64): By aggrandizing the church and his relatives, he became very rich; nor did he have any scruples

about making profits, for he said that everything that belonged to the church was lawfully his. . . . In his time he created several cardinals from among his friends and confidants, among them two very young nephews of his, and an uncle who was his mother's brother. He also created twenty bishops and archbishops from among his relatives and friends in the small city of Anagni, giving them rich dioceses; and, to his other nephew and to his sons, who were counts . . . he left an almost infinite fortune."

69: I once wore the magnificent red cloak of a pope: Pope Nicholas III (Giovanni Gaetano Orsini) was a Roman nobleman who was elected Pope in 1277 and died in 1280. He was only Pope for three years but his tenure was characterized by nepotism and simony.

Popes in Medieval times wore a long red cape. At the papal coronation, the bestowal of the cloak, which symbolically represented the bestowal of papal authority, was accompanied by the words "Investio te de Papatu Roman out paresis urbi et orbi" ("I invest you with the Roman papacy, that you may rule over the city and the world.") Today the mantle is white, not red.

70-72: But behind that, I was the son of a she-bear, so eager / To advance my own pups that up there, / I stuffed my pockets with money and here I put myself in one: The Italian word for "bear" is orso and the members of the Orsini family were commonly referred to as filii ursae, or "bear cubs." Bears were thought to be especially protective toward their young.

82-84: After him a rogue shepherd will come / From the west, one whose even worse corruption / Will make him a fitting lid for the two of us: Since Nicholas died in 1280, he's been on his head in Hell for twenty years, Boniface will

arrive in 1303 and he'll be supplanted in 1314 when the next pope, Clement V, dies. (Commentators take this to mean that either this Canto was written after 1314 or that Dante was able to go back and revise the Canto after 1314 in order to accurately predict the papal reign and 1314 death of Clement V.)

85-87: He'll be another Jason from the Book of Maccabees/ Just like that king favored that one, / The king of France will favor this one: Clement V (Bertrand de Got) born in Gascony, was made Pope in 1305. It was during his papacy that the papal see was moved to Avignon, where it remained for seventy years—a period called the Babylonian Captivity. According to Vilani, the French king, Philip the Fair, set Clement up as a puppet pope. Jason, whose brother Onias III was the High Priest in the Temple of Jerusalem, in 175 BCE bribed the king, Antiochus IV to unseat his brother and make him High Priest. He then tried to re-introduce pagan rites. The Book of Maccabees relates to the first book of seven collectively referred to as the Books of the Maccabees. Book I covers the history of a Jewish rebellion from 175-134 BCE.

93: 'Follow me, etcetera': Matthew 4:18-19: "As he was walking by the sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea (for they were fisherman). And he said to them, 'Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'"

95-96: They weren't promised gold and such by Matthias / In order to be chosen by lot to take the Judas spot: Acts 1:26: "And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles."

98-99: the dirty-money / You took to stand firm against Charles d'Anjou; Nicholas was involved in many plots for and against various royal houses, one of which was a rebel-

lion against Charles of the house of Anjoy which was later known as the Sicilian Vespers.

106-111: It's clergymen like you that John the Evangelist / Had in mind when he envisioned a harlot . . . she only knew / How to govern as long as her husband was virtuous: Revelation 17:1-3: "And there came one of the seven angles that had the seven bowls, and he spoke with me saying, "Come, I will show thee the condemnation of the great harlot who sits upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication . . . And he took me away in spirit into a desert. And I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns . . ."

110: And with ten horns, each a commandment: The Ten Commandments

115-117: Constantine, look what evil you delivered, / Not by your conversion but by the lavish gift / Of money you gave to the first church father. Constantine (c. 272-c. 337) was the first Christian Roman Emperor. He supported the church financially and exempted the clergy from taxes.

Claire Bateman

Ten Small Stitches

1. Artisans of Lyons Relocated to the Ocean Floor

Outcasts of the Industrial Revolution, they embroider the tides, adorning each wave with lace.

2. Parachute

How freakish is nylon, all flop and fluster; I extol the aerial fluency of lace!

3. So You Aspire to Become a Perseid!

You must harbor no hint of aesthetic hesitation over shredding the radiant darkness into lace.

4. Narrative Theory

Situation, conflict, rising action--isn't a story the opposite of lace?

5. The Interred Brides of History Surface Through the Earth's Crust at the Sound of the Last Trumpet as the World Goes Up in Flames

Drenched with the violent gold of exhumation, they ascend in ream upon ream of molten lace.

6. Local Waterfall
We churn our silk into foam, then pour it over. Would the tourists clear out if they learned that it's nothing but lace?

7. Curtain

Between the fictitious and the misremembered: merely the peekaboo privacy of lace.

8. Again the Aliens from Advanced Civilizations Vote Against Obliterating Us, Though With No Less Narrow a Margin Than on the Previous Occasions

We may not turn out to be wholly devoid of potential; we've invented piano jazz, video poker, and lace!
Claire Bateman

9. Forensic Study

Only the holes could be preserved intact from the grisly autopsy of lace.

10. Requesting Baptism by Immersion, the White Map Speaks of the Longed-for Vita Nuova

"I will arise from the font reconstituted, an illegible geography of lace."

The "Introduction"

Though there must have been a specific point
when it was first inserted into the universe
as some person or persons became aware
that a particular entity or occasion needed
or warranted
"something" about
(though significantly smaller and less prestigious than)
itself
to set the mood, pave the way, and provide build-up
or at least context),
and thus we have
the appetizer, the epigraph, the drum roll, the phrase The envelope, please!,
the foreword, the overture, the prologue, the red carpet, the lead-in,
the lead-up-to, the tykes strewing rose petals, the cover band, the frontispiece,
the herald, the prolegomenon, the fanfare, the vanguard;
we have the prefix, preamble, the preface, the prelude, pre-prom, the pre-game,
we have, in fact, "pre" itself
(occupying a surprising amount of what used to be
"empty" space),
all of this showed up,
by definition,
"after the fact,"
since "before" the beginning
there was no prelude
to ease us into
the event in question
which turned out to be
existence itself:

no preliminaries,
no gradually sloping ontological shallow end,
no throat-clearing on the part of the announcer--
in fact, no announcer
or announcement--
only the unmediated shock of
LET THERE BE.
Yet if we were all going to
so unprecedentedly
occur,
don't you think we might have benefited
from an introduction
(nothing too formal or overwrought)?—
but there was nothing of the kind —
not even that one goofy guy
ever unable to keep himself from yelling
SURPRISE!
just before the lights flick on.

Pommes de Terre

Let chandeliers blossom,
the fountains of the ceiling
while beehives smolder,
the lanterns of the grove;
& coffins cascade,
the luges of the dead;
& horses billow,
the high tides of the prairie;
& sunsets fester,
the heat rashes of heaven;
& twilight tear loose,
the unraveling hem of darkness;
& trances boil over,
the cumuli of the brain;
& pearls effulge,
the onions of the sea.
Let this directive
be chronicled in snow,
the far-flung sawdust
of the solstice,
on leaves,
the scattered analects of trees.

To the Night

Spun home at dawn
rock-pitted, grit-embedded,
wracked and gouged and gorged,
again you must endure
the sieving and churnings,
the palpations and wringings-out
to be once more poured forth
as smoothness upon the earth.
Cyanic angel, all splendorous
and ever uncomplaining,
how finely you suffer
for your fluency.

Rose Black

Bag Lady

but they the plastic bags that is keep flapping
from trees riding the wind turning

somersaults all down the street billowing
from fences like fat white flags

I pick them up to use again even the ones
with holes what are you doing here

tending this dead end street so sweetly as if it were
a garden I need to do things that need

doing that are possible to do in a place with a lot
of things that need doing in a place that has more
than its share more
than my share is what I have they are caught

in chain link stuck in the storm drains storm
drains suck them in suck them in to the ocean I can't

keep up millions and millions flapping
from trees on wind on water

SAFEWAY ingredients for life I need
to do things in a place with a lot

of things that need doing
what I speak of is

out of control
flying against walls

Galloping, Galloping

In sixth grade there was a boy his name
was Tommy, and once Tommy took me
to the movies, groped for my hand in the dark,
my greasy hand with popcorn butter, nervous
sweat. You needn't feel obliged, I said, having just
learned the word obliged. Tommy took his hand
away really fast, said, don't worry, while on the screen
the war planes dive-bombed, exploded, burst
apart.

Then the cowboys and the Indians, guns against
the bows and arrows, but the Indians were trapped
and didn't have a chance. I wiped my hand
on my pants and slowly inched it back onto the arm
rest that lay between us, the cowboys shooting
from behind the rocks, then galloping, galloping hard
out onto the open plain.

Catharine Savage Brosman

Blue Norther

We used to watch blue northers blowing down
from the Glass and Davis Mountains,
occupying in the distance the full theater of sky,
with rain cascading hard in a dark scrim
behind the proscenium arch. Then,
as in courtyard drama, the vanguard edge of cloud—
its outline inked in strokes of black
and Prussian blue—would advance toward us,

pushing aside the warmer air and hanging almost
motionless, it seemed, its underside
exposed and caught along the ramparts and rocky
palisades that overlook the rangeland. A few
ragged threads would dangle from the laden
mass, as the front ranks stormed ahead,
baring their teeth.—This afternoon, we've come
out, happy, to our balcony, with perfect sunshine, sky

the hue of robin's egg, adorned by only cirrus
feathers and one great egret gliding
calmly to the bayou. But yesterday, commotion
reached us from the Panhandle, besieging
Houston with theatrical machinery—
curtains of rain, lightning exchanging charges,
thunder blustering, and clouds the blue
of angry waters, or mad eyes. It's déjà vu, the best

and worst together.—Demons will be with me
always, I believe: childhood apprehensions
lurking, dancing, eddying, marsh deities cavorting

in the darkness, flashing false light, or perhaps
real conflagrations. It is not enough
to say "How fortunate I am!"—books, music,
family, friends, and, foremost, love. Look
at Steiner in La Dolce Vita! One must exorcise, yes,

exorcise! "Oh, the horror of it all!" Where are
my parents now, who watched the storm with me?
Dead, of course, but that's just pushing back
the question. Mexicans still celebrate
El Día de los Muertos by eating sugar skulls,
decorating graves, and carrying dark-eyed skeletons
in the streets, or visiting the mummies
on velvet cushions in the catacombs of Guanajuato,

"Hill of Frogs." Somehow, demons must be changed
to daemons, those attendant spirits or powers
who guide us better than ourselves. It's Halloween:
high above the city's scenery, a small plane
pulls a sign proclaiming "Houston Haunted House."
But I have ghosts enough; I'd prefer
herald winds, a dark assault of nimbostratus
cloud, memories: the words "Blue Norther on the Way."

Rick Campbell

Heart of Dependent Arising

My wife is rolled into surgery
and as the drugs wash over her
she tries to remember her
Medicine Buddha meditation.

Her heart is still at the center
of her chest, the lotus flower
still eight-petalled and white.

The Healing Buddha, though
his light's still blue, has begun
to float off his moon disc. The
icons that surround him: Actualized
Wisdom, Simultaneous Wealth
are only colors now. But Peacock's
Throat, she remembers. Remembers
too blissful, radiant light.

I figure this is enough
to let her go with the nurses
to the hands and scalpel
of her Georgia gynecologist
who yesterday told us
that the ovary is the size of a pecan.
I am left to sit in the cafeteria
with pager 209—that will flash
and beep when her doctor wants me.

We go for refuge to the Buddha.
We go for refuge to the empty clarity

of our minds. She prays too
to the Virgin, but skips
in the hour of our death.

I have echoed our doctor's mantra
that this surgery is routine, a quick
in and out. But nothing
to the terminally nervous
is routine, anesthesia's 2 % death rate
looms in her thoughts.

She dislikes hospital staff's blanket
reassurances and rolls
to surgery with yak bone mala
twisted in her right hand,

her Immaculate Heart of Mary scapula
wrapped around her wrist.
My pager blinks every three seconds
like a slowed heart beat,

and I wait in the secular world
I've made for myself through subtraction,
through sloughing off catechism, prayer,
Jesus, God, the saints and archangels.

I've nothing left but sin and hope.
A resolute faith in whom and what I love.
Many paths in a wood.
Many shafts of light.

Catherine Chandler

Of Diminished Things

Each morning at exactly nine o'clock,
our fellowship of grizzle-headed men
meets at McDonald's, métro Frontenac.
We take our customary seats, and then,
despite the posted warning, "PAS DE FLÂNAGE,"
drink discount coffee for an hour or two,
surrounded by a motley entourage
of students, "filles," families — and you,
who snicker at our mild grandiloquence;
who live, for now, in Never Never Land;
who think life's written in the present tense;
who evidently cannot understand
our joie de vivre, or grant that it's no crime
to squander what one's left of change and time.

Ghazal

A farmer celebrates the clouds and rain,
his thirsting field awaits the clouds and rain.
A weatherman without an ounce of pride
grins and guesstimates the clouds and rain.
A woman reels her clothes in from the line
as thunder iterates the clouds and rain.
A pallid tourist in Miami Beach
broods in his room and hates the clouds and rain.
A fierce wind gusting down from Canada
swiftly expatriates the clouds and rain.
An artist, palette smeared in shades of grey,
paints and recreates the clouds and rain.
A poet pens her sorrow and despair,
weeps and articulates the clouds and rain.
In pure delight she'll praise the newborn day
as sun evaporates the clouds and rain.

Robert Cording

The Longest Day: Some Thoughts on the In-Betweenness of Art

It's 1970. I'm twenty-one, in the rare book room of my college library reading Chinese poetry and making notes for a poem—no doubt a bad poem—and yet I am caught up in it entirely. Below, out the library window, in the college's main quadrangle, there is a large protest going on against the Viet Nam War. Students are yelling, faculty members challenging each other's beliefs in public, and the whole school debating whether it should shut down early, cancelling the rest of the semester's classes in protest of the Kent State shootings and the Cambodian bombings and occupation. I'm caught between my personal enjoyment of the poems I've been reading, the poem I'm trying to write, and the world outside my window. And the moment is even more complicated because I'm acutely aware that what I am doing inside the library—reading and writing poems—hardly matters in the historical scope of what is taking place outside.

I'm fast forwarding now to 1996. I've driven to the National Gallery in Washington, D.C to see the Vermeer exhibit. I've come not just because I love Vermeer as a painter, but also because, a few days before, leafing through a New Yorker, I was stopped by two small images that had been superimposed over one another: one was the face of Dusko Tadic, a Serbian accused of multiple rapes and murders, of supervising the torture of Muslim prisoners, including at one point, of forcing one man to emasculate another with his teeth. The other image was the hauntingly beautiful face of the young girl in the Vermeer painting we know as "The Girl with a Pearl Earring," sometimes referred to as "The Girl in a Turban." These images, so incongruous, were

the lead-in to an article by Lawrence Weschler called "Inventing Peace." The origin of the article was a remark by an Italian jurist on the Yugoslav War Crime Tribunal in Hague. Asked by Weschler how, obliged to listen to and adjudicate atrocities like that of Tadic's each day, he kept from going mad, the Italian judge replied, "as often as possible I make my way over to the museum to spend a little time with the Vermeers." Now one might conclude that the judge simply found a respite in Vermeer's oriental rugs or those lush, velvety folds of curtains and dresses. Or in those moments of human life when, absorbed in the act of writing a letter or pouring milk or weighing pearls, we enter the rhythms of shifting light that falls through a casement window. But for the judge, Vermeer's achievement resided in the way the painter invented a "zone filled with peace, a small room, an intimate vision" at a turbulent juncture in history when the geography of the Netherlands, the distribution of Protestants and Catholics, and threats from both the English and French were being sorted out and contested.

We might say that Vermeer's curtains, dresses, windows, and oriental rugs, all manifest the order that is already there, in things as they are. Not the order we think should be there, but the one that is. I don't mean to suggest that Vermeer did not choose to apply a thin glaze of blue paint over a base of reddish brown so that a plaster wall seems to radiate its own inner light. Up close, of course, the threads of the Oriental rug reveal themselves as thin, brushed lines of white paint, and surely a wooden table was placed perpendicular to the picture frame to achieve a compositional balance. But I do mean to suggest that the serenity of Vermeer's work always seems to lie in Vermeer's refusal to privilege one thing over another. Vermeer inherited the epic tradition of history paintings and the already culturally determined idea of what subject matter was appropriate to that tradition. His great strength was to reside in the in-between of his paintings, looking away from what society had learned to see so that he

might look at the specific individual in those moments that make up our everyday lives. Intimacy and distance: Vermeer makes an accurate report of both and, in doing so, invents the peace that both Weschler and the Italian judge find so dear.

Chinese poetry and Vermeer: two moments, twenty six years apart. What links these two moments is the tension between one's responsibility to the personal demands of making art and to the social world one shares with others. As writers, we are always in conversation with the world we live in, whether or not we write directly or indirectly about the events of our day. Evan Boland, the Irish poet and essayist, notes that "who the poet is, what he or she nominates as the proper theme for poetry, what self they discover and confirm through their subject matter—all of this involves an ethical choice." True enough. Poetry is an act which gathers and shapes, which looks for wholeness, even as our daily experience is continuously shattered against what Wallace Stevens called the "pressure of reality." If, as Stevens says, the pressure of reality is always a force of disintegration and self-division—the sufferings and sorrows which daily cross our path—then poetry must be an equal and counterbalancing force, the acts of the imagination pushing back against the pressure of reality. And yet if "reality calls for a name, for words," as Czeslaw Milosz put it, we also know, as Milosz knew all too well, when that reality draws too close, the "poet's mouth cannot even enter a complaint of Job: all art proves to be nothing compared with action." Poetry, of course, as Auden said, "makes nothing happen." It cannot stand in the way of political and historical encroachments.

But I do believe poetry makes something happen. So did Auden. The line I quoted from Auden is almost always quoted out of context. It appears in Auden's elegy for Yeats, written in 1939, in a time when nations were gearing up for WWII, "each sequestered in its hate," as the poem puts it. In

the section of the poem where the line about poetry making nothing happen appears, Auden considers how "mad Ireland" "hurt" Yeats into poetry and how, now that Yeats is dead, Ireland's madness continues. In that context, "poetry makes nothing happen." But, there is a too often forgotten colon after the word "happen" and what follows in this section and the next is an explanation of what poetry does make happen. Consider:

> For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
> In the valley of its making, where executives
> Would never want to tamper, flows on south
> From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
> Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
> A way of happening, a mouth.

Auden's poem continues, in its next section, to advise poets in the voice and meter of Yeats' "Under Ben Bulben," to

> Follow, poet, follow right
> To the bottom of the night,
> With your unconstraining voice
> Still persuade us to rejoice,
>
> With the farming of a verse,
> Make a vineyard of the curse,
> Sing of human unsuccess
> In a rapture of distress,
>
> In the deserts of the heart
> Let the healing fountain start,
> In the prison of his days,
> Teach the free man how to praise.

In context, the often quoted line about what poetry cannot

do, helps delineate what poetry can do, must do even. If we ask poetry to stop a bullet, to feed the hungry, yes, it can do nothing. Perhaps poems only "survive" because the people that "matter"—executives who wield and deal power and money and people's lives—pay it no attention. Or perhaps these executives never want to enter what Auden calls the "valley of poetry's making," a valley where for Auden the poet holds up a mirror to the self, and struggles to "make a vineyard of the curse." As Auden knew, poetry cannot make us good, but it can prevent us from imagining that we already are. John F. Kennedy, speaking in honor of Robert Frost at Amherst College in 1963 shortly before his own death, said quite powerfully, "When power leads men towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence."

But how does poetry (and art, in general, of course) create such transformations? In the title essay of Seamus Heaney's book, The Government of the Tongue, Heaney gives us a parable about poetry; it's based on a familiar parable from the gospel of John. In the Gospel narrative, the Pharisees bring a woman who was caught in the act of adultery before Jesus. The Pharisees say the woman must be stoned according to the law commanded by Moses. Jesus does not answer the Pharisees when they ask him for his judgment. Instead he writes with his finger on the ground. When the Pharisees persist with their questions, Jesus responds, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast a stone at her," and goes on writing in the dirt. Here is Seamus Heaney's inspired response: "The drawing of those characters is like poetry, a break with the usual life, but not an absconding from it. Poetry, like the writing, is arbitrary and marks time in every possible sense of that phrase. It does not say the accusing word or say to the helpless accused, 'Now a solution will take place'; it does not propose to be instrumental or

effective. Instead, in the rift between what is going to happen and whatever we would wish to happen, poetry holds attention for a space, functions not as distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves." As the executives and the nations were in Auden's poem, the members of the crowd in John's parable are convicted by their own conscience. The accusers of the adulterous woman—you and I and each of us who say 'This is someone whom I am better than'—are forced by Christ's silent writing to reflect back on their own moral position. Poems, then, are like Christ's writing in the dirt—they can create an interval where cause and effect logic is suddenly undermined. In that interval, the writing's very lack of moral judgment is its morality, a morality that changes the direction of the Pharisees and brings them face-to-face with the individual woman who is standing before them. The woman must be responded to not as a type—adulteress—but as someone worthy of their fullest human response. That is what poetry makes happen: poems create that interval in which we can see the very fullness of our existence; or, to say it another way, poems create a space in which it is possible to turn away from the dim, reductive hearts inside us.

I want, now, to look a little harder at that interval which Heaney called a "rift" in our usual thinking. I just said that the very lack of moral judgment in that rift or interval is writing's morality. Keats famously said that the best poems have "Negative Capability" –he was trying at the time to define great achievement in art, especially in literature (Keats wanted, quite simply, to define the quality which made Shakespeare, Shakespeare). Negative Capability, Keats said, occurs when a person is "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." What Heaney called a "rift," what Keats called "Negative Capability," I'm defining as in-betweeness,

a word I am borrowing from my friend and colleague at Holy Cross, James Kee, who informs me that he found the idea of the "in-between" in Eric Voegelin who, in turn, was working on Plato's use of the preposition "between" in the dialogues. I'm using the word "in-betweenness" because I want to suggest that in-betweenness is the condition of our humanness. We live between our birth and death, about which we can know almost nothing. And in between our birth and death, we try, simultaneously, to make sense of the unexplainable, terrifying and painful aspects of human experience as well as the intrinsic joy of being. The tools we have to make sense of these contradictions are, on the one hand, the demystification that a necessary deconstructive self-consciousness brings to bear, and, on the other, an openness to the mystery that consciousness can never represent or master. Our life, as the philosopher Simone Weil knew so well, takes places on the cross of these contradictions.

So, too, I am arguing, does poetry, and art in general. The poem, as Wallace Stevens, has said, must exist,"in the difficulty of what it is to be." Part of the "difficulty of what it is to be" has to do with how hard it is for the writer to capture what Anne Carson, the classicist and poet, calls an "understanding of what life feels like." Reality by its very nature, remains extraordinarily complex and opaque. As Vaclav Havel has written: Spirit, the human soul, our self-awareness, our ability to generalize and think in concepts, to perceive the world as the world (and not just our locality) and lastly, our capacity for knowing that we will die—and living in spite of that knowledge—surely all these are mediated or actually created by words." As words users, Havel subsequently points out, we have tried "incessantly to address that which is concealed by mystery, and influence it with our words. As believers we pray to God . . . . as people who belong to modern civilization—whether believers or not—we use words to construct scientific theses and political

ideologies with which to tackle or redirect the course of history—successfully or otherwise." Note Havel's use of the word "influence": we want to influence that which is concealed by mystery with our words. For Havel the power of words is neither unambiguous nor clear-cut. Words can compel us with their freedom and truthfulness and they can deceive us, madden us. Havel's warning about words is simple and direct: it pays to be suspicious of words, to be wary of them since "the same word can be true at one moment and false the next, at one moment illuminating, at another deceptive."

So what is the writer to do? In her wonderful essay, "The Sublime and the Good," Iris Murdoch reminds us that when Shelley said that "egotism was the great enemy of poetry," he meant that writing is an exercise in overcoming one's self, in attending to something "quite particular other than oneself." As such, art's greatest enemy is fantasy since fantasy constantly deforms the reality we are sunk in. Instead of attending to reality, it is easier for us to deform it, to create theories and explanations that give us a kind of control of its mystery and, in turn, make us monarchs of all we survey. Our task, then, as writers/artists is to make the real world as real as possible, to paraphrase Gary Snyder. To overcome fantasy, egotism and solipsism requires love according to Murdoch. She defines love this way: "Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real." But for Murdoch love entails a tragic freedom. The tragic freedom is this: "we all have an infinitely extended capacity to imagine the being of others. Tragic, because there is no prefabricated harmony, and others are, to an extent we never cease discovering, different from ourselves. Nor is there any social totality within which we come to comprehend differences as placed and reconciled. We have only a segment of the circle." Yes, we have only our in-betweenness, our segment of the circle, from which we must

keep imagining the circle. In a poem of my own called "Czeslaw Milosz's Glasses," I say about Milosz that "he knew words/could never navigate the roundness of things./and yet knew, too, that his work was to catch/the complexity of all in one unwritable sentence/he tried to write again and again." If art is an act of attention, that attention necessarily involves an act of love, an act which we can only extend out of our in-betweenness—that is, the infinite extension of imaginative understanding towards that which remains irreducible in its otherness and yet open to our understanding and recognition.

In-betweenness. The Saturday between Good Friday and Easter. At the end of his book, Real Presences, George Steiner writes:

> There is one particular day in Western history about which neither historical record nor myth nor Scripture make report. It is Saturday. And it has become the longest of days. We know of that Good Friday which Christianity holds to have been that of the Cross. But the non-Christian, the atheist, knows of it as well. This is to say that he knows of injustice, of the interminable suffering, of the waste, of the brute enigma of ending, which so largely make up not only the historical condition, but the everyday fabric of our personal lives. . . . We also know about Sunday. To the Christian, that day signifies an intimation, both assured and precarious, both evident and beyond comprehension . . . . If we are non-Christians or non-believers we conceive of that day as the day of liberation from inhumanity and servitude . . . . But ours is the long day's journey of that Saturday.

Steiner knows that in the face of the countless inhumanities that take place, all art is helpless. But he also knows that

without the figurations of art, which tell again and again of our sorrows and our pains as well as our hopes and happiness, we could not wait and wait. The artists' responsibility is to Saturday. To want the certainty of Good Friday or Easter would be, an "irritable reaching after fact and reason," as Keats said. But on that longest of days, the artist must make the most accurate report he or she can muster, not because the artist is in search of what Milosz mockingly calls the "golden fleece of a perfect form," but because artist's report is as necessary as love and is the only way we have of balancing the violence of reality.

I was just a confused, bad poet as I sat in that library room some forty years ago. But I knew poetry's magic; I knew words gave the world life and the "savor it possesses," as the poet Wallace Stevens once said. And I knew poems had to confront those events which are beyond our power to tranquilize. This is not to say that those events are the same for everyone or even that certain subjects should demand a writer's attention. But it is to say that poetry is a counterbalance, an act which gathers and shapes and looks for the "whole" when we are confronted with the forces of disintegration and self-division. The writer must learn to live "in-between"—he or she must be part deconstructionist, "wresting the past from fiction and legends" (a phrase of Milosz's) so that things may be described as they are, and part fabulist so that what is seen and described is recreated in the imagination and becomes, as Wallace Stevens put it, "a revelation in words by means of words." When we hear those words, they must come to us as a need fulfilled. Wallace Stevens, Vermeer, Auden, Milosz and Seamus Heaney all insist on art's power to "redress"(Heaney's word). Though the title of Heaney's famous essay, "The Redress of Poetry," uses the word redress in its usual sense as a noun, Heaney's interest is clearly in the suggestions of redress as a verb. In this time when poetry, and art in general, is too often viewed as mere-

ly a reflection of the power structures that produced it, when poems are too often praised or criticized solely for their politics, Heaney rightly insists on poetry's power to redress—that is, "to set a person or thing upright again." Heaney explains how this setting upright occurs, when he writes, "I want to celebrate [poetry's] given, unforeseeable thereness, the way it enters our field of vision and animates our physical and intelligent being in much the same way as the birds shapes stenciled on the transparent surfaces of glass walls or window must suddenly enter the vision and change the direction of the real bird's flight."

Poems must know the "nightmare of the dark," as Auden named it, but the poem's work is always to free us from the curse of being locked inside of our own self-isolation. The poems we turn to induce a "swerve" in us; they change the direction of our flight not by telling us where to go, but my transmitting the "thereness" of the world to us; in doing so, they create an interval in which we might choose the light of justice and the goodness of the cosmos, even if we live in darkness, and know that darkness as part of ourselves.

In It

I'm watching a wall
of fast moving grey-blue clouds
turn into a door the sun walks through
on this windy 29th day of October.

It walks down the yellowing hillside
and right up to a pair of scrub locusts,
which are of no importance at all
and yet, wired up with bittersweet's

red and yellow, seem just now to be
electrified by the light that just keeps coming,
crossing the street, extending itself
so that I am standing in it as well,

the skin on my face growing warmer.
I close my eyes and then, as if I had been
sleeping in a strange place, I let the light
wake me and tell me where I am.

Sartre's Entourage

> *After I took mescaline, I started to see*
> *crabs around me all the time.*

He first saw them while strolling in the Midi,
three, then four crabs, lobsters really,
he'd later say, clacking along behind him.

After the drug wore off, he knew
they were imaginary, but they'd already become
part of his life. He never walked them

on a leash like Nerval, or said they knew
the secrets of the sea, but they kept him
from forgetting how he was here, simply here,

without justification. When he taught,
they sat at his feet, absolutely still.
He could never tell if they were arrested

by what he'd said, or were just sleeping.
At the movies, one might sit on his leg,
its stemmed eyes waving in disbelief

over a hero too gun-ho to dread
the responsibility of what he's decided
he must do. Sartre liked their assent,

but needed their reproach—they'd cross
their claws in disgust whenever he mistook
narcissism for an inner life. He wanted

clarity. They helped him live with
the knowledge that it was possible to be
duped by almost everything, always

another truth underneath the truth
he could see. When they disappeared,
he felt a vague and incoherent fear.

What was he to do now that he was alone
with a gaping, always deceitful self
he could not possibly begin to know?—

that made him feel as if he were standing
alone on the edge of a cliff,
absolutely nothing holding him back.

Stephen Corey

Love

We are asked to get it right
the first time through, to walk through
thousands—thousands—of poppies,
to clutch one going past
then never reach out again.
This we call purity. This
we call faithful choosing. This
we call lost in love.

Brian Culhane

Problems of Usage

i. Disinterested / Uninterested

Best disinterested like a judge,
Not arrested by dislike
Or its converse, not molested
By the tug of a mind
Out on some hike
Laboring behind
With unspoken grudge,
But rather wholly free
As one who, past the chasm,
Peers into infinity
Without spasm:
Quizzical, perhaps,
That Death came so near
(Only to disappear, running laps
With his companion, Fear).
But you're uninterested,
Dear, already gone to bed.

ii. Imply / Infer

Regarding last night's shove:
I must infer your love,
As from such gestures made,
Whose meanings (lie, lay, laid?)
Under cover of night,
I extrapolate delight

When muscles tense.
Just as this sentence
Makes its implication felt
Rather than openly spelt,
So your touch may turn
Out to be a hint
The one shoved must learn.
Take color and tint:
A difference of heft,
Like leaving and left.
Brian Culhane

iii. Cite / Sight / Site

Every affair
Has a site
Where
Two met:

A first set
Of coordinates,
With dates
And times.

The lines
Crossed there!
Lovers can cite
Each stair,

Each stone,
Or how near
Their sight
Once alone.

iv. Ensure / Insure

Uncertain means unsure,
But ensure not insure.
Does dirty mean impure?
And when's a fly a lure?
Or some trip a tour?
Or wall in, immure?
Our thesaurus holds no cure:
The last may not endure.
Brian Culhane

v. To / Two / Too

Too true
That two
Who diverge
May yet merge,
Come to
Their senses,
Make amends,
Mend fences,
Again become
A sum
Beyond friends.

vi. Weather / Whether

Love's natural weather
Is where you are.

Love's a romp in heather
If you're there.

Love's never a tether,
Ever.

And this is so, whether
You love me or no.

vii. Number / Amount

Mistakes which weigh
On grammarians may
Be of little account.
So number and amount.

Who cares if pins, coins,
Stamps, foes, kisses, loins
Come to a goodly number,
Or that standing lumber,
Brian Culhane

Sheer terror, heart's delight,
However solid or slight,
Can never be added up
Like chips from a broken cup?

The number of headaches,
Amount of trips to lakes:
Aren't arbitrary rules
Fit for pedantic fools?

Aren't such truly made
To be lost or mislaid?
Three centuries from now

Will any strike a brow
On encountering such?
Dear, we love so much,
No solecism mars
The meaning that is ours;

Indeed no usage book
Helps parse a narrow look
Or insures happiness,
Or makes joy any less.

Weather teachers agree
Or site our impropriety,
We'll lay together long,
Content in being wrong.

Carolyn Elkins

Il Mercato Centrale

The last day he came out
to set up his crates on the corner
it was colder than usual.
He wore his jacket and hat
and kept one gnarled hand inside a pocket
whenever he could.
I looked through his baskets
and bought a few things I didn't need.

Maybe it was the way he looked down the street
like he was seeing something sad
far off. Maybe it was the strange way
bits of wrappers and newpapers
gathered around his feet, swirling,
rising like white birds.

What Is Required

After we buried her
her father walked out
to the edge of the wide lawn
and stood there alone.

He stood like a man
stands in the desert,
who divines Day from Night
in the ancient way,
holding two long strands
of a woman's hair, one black,
one white, in his open palm,

who waits for the moment
when it is possible to tell,
or not tell, which is which,
both at dawn and darkness,
the fault-lines of time
where life divides sharply
into yes and no.

He stood a long time,
the air around him changing
almost imperceptibly,
the dusk thickening
around his empty hands.

Juan Carlos Galeano

Anaconda

Una Anaconda vive feliz enroscada en el cuerpo de un hombre por las noches.
"¿Por qué no te acuestas derecha como yo lo hago?", se queja el hombre.

La Anaconda le dice que él tiene más calor que todos los árboles que ella conoce.
"Además me sueño con mis remolinos y los ríos mientras duermo".

"Pues sería mejor que te soñaras convertida en un canal"
(piensa el hombre, pues no quisiera herir a la culebra con palabras).

Pero no puede dormir bien, y decide comprarle una cama a la Anaconda.

Por las mañanas la culebra se despierta con dolores en la espalda.

El hombre le da muchos masajes y le ruega que trate de dormir sola,
que lo considere, que él también necesita dormir bien.

"Una culebra tiene que dormir bien", le dice llorando la Anaconda.
"Una culebra tiene que dormir bien. Una culebra tiene que dormir bien".

Anaconda

(translated by Lucas Christenson)

An Anaconda lives happily coiled around the body of a man
at night.

"Why don't you lie straight like I do?" the man complains
one day.

The Anaconda tells him that he is warmer than all the trees
that she knows.
"Besides, I dream of my eddies and the rivers while I sleep."

"Well, it would be better if you dreamed you turned into a
canal"
(the man thinks, careful not to wound the snake with words).

But he cannot sleep and decides to buy a bed for the
Anaconda.

In the mornings the snake awakes with pains in her back.

The poor man gives her massages and begs that she at least
try to sleep alone,
that she at least consider him, that he also needs to get a
good night's sleep.

"A snake has to get a good night's sleep," says the sobbing
Anaconda.
"A snake has to get a good night's sleep. A snake has to get a
good night's sleep."

Lawrence Hetrick

Under Dark Magnolias

Someone in a tan raincoat
Idles, turns, and disappears,
Leaving the sloped lawn empty,
Muffled by descending fog.

From a concrete bench under
Dark magnolias I watch
Rain pierce the fog. Drops clatter
Overhead. Across the lawn

Some last reflected sunlight
Silvers blood-budded branches
Topping swamp maples. Then fog
Recovers everything.

It clouds slow automobiles
Droning louder, their low beams
Illuminating each drop
Exploding from the pavement.

Above, apartment windows
Glitter gold, flickering with
Blue, indefinite shadows
Of you, them, someone, at home

After responsible work
Before television sets
In ordinary cycles
I will never know again.

H. L. Hix

Take You a Course, Get You a Place

Art, all art, ... is a foreign city, and we deceive ourselves when we think it familiar.

(Jeanette Winterson)

The woman beside me this morning had a large freckle inside her left ear. Not that we were intimate in the way you might think first; merely near each other in the crush at rush hour on the metro. That she wore her hair pulled back revealed her ear. Her dress signaled purpose: sleek glasses, silk blouse, slender attaché. She seemed not to notice me noticing her. If, as I suspect, she rides to work at this time each day, many before me must have noticed this freckle. Like me, others must have lost sight of it, and of her, in the station, never to see it again.

At the time the ear-freckled stranger and I left that train, more people animated the station we stepped into than live in the town I call home. Maybe more than in my state. I live in Laramie, home of the only university in the least populous state in the union, Wyoming. The university is halfway across town from my house, so it takes me almost twenty minutes to walk to work. I'm on a metro today because UW has a faculty exchange with Shanghai University, so I'm here in China for three weeks, to give six lectures on the subject of American poetry. Of the two substantives, "lecture" seems less to the point than "exchange": immersion in this context has highlighted my assumptions in such a way, and to such a degree, that surely I am learning more than my students about American poetry.

My time here interrupts a writing project that has me reconsidering my understanding of poetry and my ways of

valuing it, but because my hosts asked for recognizable figures — citing Robert Frost as their example — I've structured things in a predictable, even retro, fashion: lecture one, Whitman and Dickinson; two, the modernists; three, African-American poetry; four, Frost; five, Bishop; six, contemporaries. Not the platonic form of poetry in America, but a version I permit myself with the excuse that, in fifteen hours of instructional time, no structure would be whole or perfect.

I began the first lecture with a contrast. For all its changes in dynasties, I observed (in a sweeping and surely indefensible generalization that exhausted my knowledge of the matter), Chinese history has been continuous in the sense that the majority in what we now know as the nation of China would trace their lineage to peoples who occupied this same region forty centuries ago or farther. U.S. history, in contrast, is defined, I said, by a rupture, in which groups from another continent arrived about 500 years ago, and displaced the peoples who had occupied the region since the ice age. Soon enough, the newcomers imported, in large numbers, persons from yet another continent. So that today the majority of citizens in what we now call the U.S.A. would trace their lineage to peoples from across the sea. The fact of the rupture, I asserted, leads the occupiersto preoccupation with two problems: to justify their claim to the land, and to assert as independent their identity in relation to those who stayed on the continent from which they came, or to those who stole them from their continent of origin. Keeping those preoccupations in mind, I promised my patient auditors, would help make sense of American verse.

And indeed it does so. Even though I'd been winging it — I'd prepared, yes, a small anthology beforehand, but my digest of world history was just making up shit at the last minute — seeing history through this observation did highlight features I'd missed before in poems with which I had thought myself familiar. So in that first lecture, I began to

see, for instance, Whitman's love of the word "destined" as combining both of the rationalizations I had claimed that "we" so urgently pursue, as when, in "Thou Mother With Thy Equal Brood," he calls on the "Brain of the New World" to "recast poems, churches, art," because the Old World brain is dead, and "Its poems, churches, arts, unwitting to themselves, [were] destined with reference to thee." So it is destiny that we fulfil (and in fulfilling replace) the old world, and destiny that we do so here, that any impediments to our poems, churches, and art be just that: impediments, to be overcome or, if need be, eradicated. Impediments all, be they bison or Pawnee, passenger pigeon or Sioux.

My learning, though, was not to come from my own invention of undefended pronouncements to apply to the poems; instead it was to come from the starkness with which, in so different a context, premises that can stay tacit at home announce themselves. This became clear early in the first lecture. In my anthology, I had offered first "The Chambered Nautilus," as a way to show what Whitman and Dickinson were reacting against. I pointed out the regularity of meter, in preparation for listening to Whitman's more flexible metric. The blank expressions of the students alerted me to my own stupidity: I was speaking of accentual meter to an audience whose first language is tonal. As difficult as it is for me to hear the variations in tone on which meaning in Mandarin is based, so difficult must it be for them, native speakers of Chinese, to hear accentual meter in English. So accustomed had I grown to arguing that regularity of meter is a faulty ideal, that I'd forgotten that meter's having any role at all is accidental, not essential, wholly contingent on the language in which a poem is composed, by no means necessary or universal.

I have kept proposing dubious hypotheses. Of Frost, for instance, I decided — on the bus to class — to declare him interested in home, in having us look again at what feels

familiar. I will contrast him, on this count, to Bishop, calling him a public poet because his starting with the familiar invites everyone in, and her (next lecture) a poet's poet because her starting with the unfamiliar selects for her a smaller audience from the start. Frost's poems, I declared for a verity, take us to a familiar place, but orient us differently toward it. He situates his poems in New England because that is "home" to America, the familiar place, in contrast to the "frontier," the "wild west," which to this day stands for the strange and unfamiliar.

I continue, though, to be brought up short. This afternoon's on Frost was my fifth lecture. The students have shown the elaborate courtesy I had been led to expect: at the end of each lecture, they applaud; they listen attentively, whether or not I am making sense; and they hold questions for after class, never interrupting me. Except once. Today, as we discussed (read: as I pontificated on) "The Road Not Taken," I drew on the board a picture of a stick Frost standing at a Y in the road. I explained that stick Frost knows nothing about what is at the end of either road. In this way (I went on, growing more pompous and absurd), stick Frost stands for all of us, at each decision point. We don't know if choosing law school will make us rich, or film school make us famous. We decide based on all-too-limited information, and must take what follows. So stick Frost knows only that a lot of feet before his own have ventured one of the roads, few the other. He follows the few. It was at this point that the prior strict decorum was breached. A young woman raised her hand. I almost forgot to call on her, so surprised was I. Her puzzlement showed on her face: "Why would he do that?" Good question, and one to which any answer will make more sense if you have internalized a culture that regards the frontier as a place of opportunity, inhabited by an other who possesses none of the rights one must accord to those who inhabit home, a culture accustomed to a concept

of destiny that resembles Whitman's.

Plenty for me to think about when I return to my writing project at home. Meanwhile, between lectures I am seeing fragments of Shanghai. Though a visit to the Yu Yuan a day or two ago has soured me on seeing what "ought" to be seen: any sense of tranquility in that place has been overwhelmed by shops and vendors. God keep me from amassing trinkets. Of my trip to Shanghai, let me remember not the Yu Yuan but that woman's freckle. For my lectures I hope I shall be shriven, as I hope to be provoked by their flaws to reconsideration of their subject.

Armine Iknadossian

United States of Love

We don't say
I am on love.
We say I am in love.
Not I am with love
like one would say I am with child.
Or I am under, over, next to love.
You cannot be inside or outside love either.
But you can fall in or out of it.
You can be loveless but not lovefull.
You can be loving and loveable,
unloved, lovelorn, lovesick.

I once fell in love with a film director
but never a love director. A love detector,
on the other hand, sounds like a good idea.
Or a love investigator who gets to the bottom of things
for a nominal fee. There is no such thing
as a love star, although rock stars
are known to get so much love
they throw some of it away.

How I wish I could have my very own
love jockey or, even better, a personal lover
instead of a personal trainer.
And instead of being an overeducated
and underpaid associate professor,
why not be an associate lover
or, even better, a dean of love.
I personally think we need more
love officers than police officers,
and although fire-fighters are, well,
lovely, I would feel much better

marrying a handsome love fighter
or a love mechanic.

And, it's quite a shame that all Americans
do not have love insurance or
even love security for that matter.
Dog walkers are necessary,
but what would a love walker do exactly?
Armine Iknadossian

Or a love-stylist? A love designer?
If only we could replace traffic citations
with love tickets, demanding
that one be more affectionate with one's children.

If only there was a love meter you had to feed
every hour, or a love-station where
trains are never on time
and nobody cares because they're
all listening to their love-pods or
updating their status on Lovebook.

Serial lovers! What a grand idea!
Or a correctional lover
who carries a lovestick
and a lovelight everywhere she goes.
If I could, I would be a taxi-cab lover
or a love-guide on a double-decker love bus
in Manhattan, pointing out
where the Battle of Love was fought
and how the man-made miracle
that is Central Love was built,
and where John Lennon was almost loved to death.

Somebody's Done For

We have bizarre ideas
to keep ourselves from death:

Tea leaves and rosaries,
astrologers and numeraries.

I keep my jewels hidden
in the broom-closet.

You hang your mother's
crucifix from our bedpost.

We have two rottweilers
like gendarmes in the front yard.

After work we sit on the porch
with all the house lights on.

We still believe we can outrun it,
believe in God's law and miracles,

even as the sun drags a bloody gown behind her.

Jacqueline Kolosov

Julie Manet Walks with Renoir: A Sketch In the Luxembourg Gardens

Black and white are not colors.
Black is a hoarding of light,
white its utter refusal.

So Renoir explains, pausing
every now and again to observe
the sunlight suspended in the leaves,

or a butterfly's velvet dark,
more violet than black
against the bright head of marigold.

Since her mother's death,
when Julie woke to December
sunshine and the surprise of

just-fallen snow enfolding
the new sky's greens and yellows,
Julie has come to see

black and white as absolutes.
The morning light left her
mother's eyes, black

became absence. But white—
Julie envisions the chartreuse
reflection of light on snow,

light like those childhood

mornings she and her mother drew
copper teapots, a bowl of peaches

ripening in sun, the blackbird's
glossy wing. White became
the glimmer on a silver jar,

the sheen of a pomegranate seed,
a baby's tooth, the taste of pearl.
White became hope …

No, my dear, Renoir says gently.
White reflects light away from it.
White absorbs almost no light.

White has a black heart.
Julie listens, for she loves Renoir
and his smiling, happy pictures.

Julie loves Renoir, though she prefers
Degas and his obsessions;
and admires above all Manet,

her father's brother, and the great
love, the only love, of her mother's life.
(Why Julie cannot like him.)

But Manet's art… Berthe Morisot
with a Bouquet of Violets.
Swathed all in black lace, her mother

sits, her gaze luminous and blue
as the Magdalene's robes,
though Manet painted Berthe Morisot's

eyes black, not their actual green,
like cut jade, that secret color,
suggestive of gardens.

Renoir gestures towards a bed
of yellow poppies. Yellow is the light
in nature, her mother taught her,

teaching Julie to distinguish
between turmeric and marigold,
mango and variegated saffron.

So many yellows. Julie loves
the earthy amber most, its ancient
sense of land as a living being

returning her to that steep, wild place
she and her mother visited that last
August before Julie, and then her mother,
Jacqueline Kolosov

became ill. Wandering away
from the sunlit meadow, they entered
the cool dark of forest—

a shadow is a veil.
There violets bloomed beside ochre-
capped mushrooms. Violet, the last

color in the rainbow spectrum.
Violet, where the known ends,
and the unknown begins.

Is it true, Julie asks Renoir now,
bending to examine the butterfly,

surprised by the hints of crimson
along the wing—how easily reds fade—
that butterflies can see purple but not red?
Funny girl, what makes you think of that?

I read it somewhere. In a scientific journal.
I don't know.
I don't have an answer.

Shadows always have a color.
A shadow is a veil.
Julie smiles.

She clasps Renoir's hand more tightly.
She listens more carefully.
She believes it must be true,

just as she believes violet
to be the last color of the rainbow,
a belief that brings her mother,

dressed in Manet's violet blacks,
closer, the bouquet of violets
pinned to her bodice becoming

neither intimate or familiar,
but just near enough
for a daughter to beckon.

Rereading The Velveteen Rabbit *at 37 Weeks*

Just six days until Christmas,
and our first fir tree perfumes the air.
Adorned with bracelets of colored light
and a single seam of white twined around
its middle, I cannot look at that tree
without thinking of you. Even the glossy
green leaves that frame the deep pink lilies,
the blossoms opening now; and the snow
on the neighboring rooftops, the pulse
of ice falling from the rafters—
are made new by your coming.

This morning, curled beneath the afghan,
the dog a stout parcel beside me,
I read The Velveteen Rabbit straight through,
all the while imagining
the day I would read the story to you.

What is Real? asked the Rabbit.

You become. It takes a long time.
That's why it doesn't often happen to people
who break easily, or have sharp edges,
or who have to be carefully kept.

How often I've been told mine is an old soul,
vessel or star-streaked planet bearing
echoes of other lives. Always,
I believed this to be true,
though only now I understand how much
more Real my life has become

because I carry you, whose face
I cannot yet capture, whose petal fingers
will soon curl around my own.
In this ninth month, even the memory
of my body before you has grown thin
as the velveteen of the Rabbit's hide.
Still, I know I once walked through a day
without you.

When a child loves you…then you become Real.

Does it hurt? asked the Rabbit.

Sometimes….When you are Real
you don't mind being hurt.

Real is not just become,
but a constant becoming
real as your rhythmic paddling.
Head down, held by my pelvis,
this lightening is the sign of your coming,
your becoming. How many times
—waking to the ebullience of lily
braced against December's cold—
have I conjured the moment when
they will place you in my arms,
umbilical cord, that life-line joining us
since the beginning, about to be severed,
as you are born into a new life,
your coming defined by hospital lights
and by faces I, too, do not yet know.

Does it hurt?

Never again will the days—

yours and mine—be so self-contained.
Even now, my breath moves
inside you, my unborn child
unfamiliar still with wind and cold,
but also with the caress of lip,
the touch of hand.
Does it hurt?

How soon before they lay you
close to my heart still bearing traces
of the journey I cannot imagine,
no matter how often I try, the truth
of your coming as unreal to me still
as the hind legs the Velveteen Rabbit
finds turned to flesh and blood, the hind
legs he comes to recognize as his own.

As I will recognize you.

Robert Mezey and Dick Barnes

Eight Poems by Jorge Luis Borges

1. Rain

Evening, a sudden clearing of the mist,
For now a fine, soft rain is freshening.
It falls and it did fall. Rain is a thing
That no doubt always happens in the past.

Hearing it fall, the senses will be led
Back to a blessèd time that first disclosed
To the child a flower that was called the rose
And an extraordinary color, red.

These drops that blind our panes to the world outside
Will brighten the black grapes on a certain trellis
Out in the far, lost suburbs of the town

Where a courtyard was. The rain coming down
Brings back the voice, the longed-for voice,
Of my father, who has come home, who has not died.

2. To Luis De Camoëns

Without regret or anger, time shall burr
The heroic swordblade. Penniless and sad,
You sought the land you had longed for from abroad,
Oh captain, so that you might die in her,
Wíth her. The flower of Portugal had died
In the enchanted wilderness, and the tough
Spaniard, who earlier had been driven off,
Menaced again her unprotected side.
I wonder whether, this side of that last
River to cross, you humbly realized
That that flag and those arms you had so prized,
Lands of the East and West, all that was lost,
Would live, aloof from men's inconstancies,
In your Æneid of the Portuguese.

3. Blind Pew

Far from the sea and from the lovely war
(For so love praises most what has been lost),
This blind, foot-weary pirate would exhaust
Road after English road or sodden moor.

Barked at by every dog from every farm,
Laughingstock of the young boys of the village,
He slept a poor sleep, trying to keep warm
And freezing in the black dust of the ditches.

But in the end, on far-off golden beaches,
A buried treasure would be his, he knew;
This softened some the hardness of his path.

You are like him—on other golden beaches
Your incorruptible treasure waits for you:
Immense and formless and essential death.

4. Allusion To A Ghost Of The Nineties

Nothing is left. Only Muraña's knife.
Only the brief account in the grey twilight.
I don't know why he haunts me night after night,
That murderer I never saw in life.
Palermo was meaner then. The yellow wall
Of the jail loomed above the outskirt slum
And the mud streets. Through that jungle he started from
Wandered the squalid knife, as shadows fell.
The knife. The face has long since been erased,
And of that mercenary, whose cold trade
Was simple courage, everything has decayed
Except a flash of steel and a dim ghost.
And though it blacken marble, let time's flame
Spare Juan Muraña's hard, unyielding name.

5. In Memoriam A. R.

The vagaries of chance or the precise
Laws that govern this dream, the universe,
Permitted me to walk our mortal course
A pleasant part of the way with Alfonso Reyes.

He knew the art, completely known to none,
Not Sinbad nor Ulysses nor their hands,
Of sailing from one land to other lands
And living everywhere like a native son.

If memory sometimes pierced him with its arrow,
He worked that violent metal into song,
The noble alexandrine, stately, slow, and long,
The fourteen-syllable threnody's burden of sorrow.

In all these ardent labors he was aided
By human hope, and by its light got written
The sturdy verse that still is not forgotten,
And Spanish prose refreshed and renovated.

Beyond My Cid, off to the war again,
And the great herd that hopes to remain obscure,
He tracked the fleeting prints of literature
Down to the meanest slums of our thieves' jargon.

In Marino's gardens, equal in their beauty,
He tarried awhile, but deep inside him stirred
Something essential and deathless that preferred
The trials of scholarship and sacred duty.

Or say, rather, that he preferred to tend
The gardens of meditation, where Porphyry

Set in the midst of darkness and lunacy
The Tree of the Beginning and the End.

The indecipherable providence
That metes out the extravagant and the stark,
Gave most of us the sector or the arc,
But to you, Reyes, the whole circumference.

You went in search of the sadness or élan
Hidden by frontispieces and renown;
Like Erigena's God, you wished to be no one
So that you might at last be every man.

What brilliance your style attained, that precise rose
Unfolding in delicacies and plenitude;
To the Lord's wars the ancestral soldiering blood
Raced back once more, making a joyful noise.

Where can he be (I ask), my Mexican friend?
Does he now contemplate, with all the dread
Of Œdipus before the Sphinx, the unswayed
Archetypes of the Face or of the Hand?

Or does he wander, as Swedenborg prayed to do,
A world more real and closer to perfection
Than this one, which is scarcely a reflection
Of that high welter and heavenly hullaballoo.

If (as the arts of lacquer and ebony show)
Memory shapes its intimate Eden, then
There are already in glory better men,
A better Cuernavaca and Mexico.

Only God knows the colors destiny
Presents men's eyes beyond the ephemeral;

I walk these streets, thinking of death, and still
Very little from that world reaches me.

I know just one thing. That Alfonso Reyes
(Wherever the waves have carried him), awake,
Eager as always, will happily undertake
The laws and mysteries of another place.

Let us yield up to the matchless and diverse
The bays and songs of triumph and renown;
And let no tears of mine defile this verse,
Which our commemorating love sets down.

6. A Key In Salonika

Abarbanel, Farías or Pinedo,
Persecuted and driven out of Spain
By the unholy Inquisition, still retain
The key to a certain dark house in Toledo.

All liberated now from hope and fear,
They look at it in the last light of day:
Its bronze speaks of the past, the far away,
Old fires, and quiet suffering year by year.

Now that its door is fragments, it has thinned
To a cipher for the Diaspora, for the wind,
Like to that other key of the Second Temple,

Which someone flung up when the Roman legion
Fell on the Jews to make them an example,
And which a hand reached down for out of heaven.

7. Snorri Sturluson (1179 - 1241)

You, who left to posterity an unsparing
Tribal mythology of ice and flame,
You, who made fast in words the violent fame
Of your forebears, their ruthlessness and daring,

Were stunned to feel, as the mythic swords towered
Over you one evening, your insides churning,
And in that trembling dusk that bides no morning
It was revealed to you you were a coward.

Now in the Iceland night the heavy seas
Tower and plunge in the salt gale. Your cell
Is under siege. You have drained to the lees

A shame never to be forgotten. Now
The sword is falling above your pallid brow
As in your book repeatedly it fell.

8. Rafael Cansinos-Assens

The image of that people, stoned or scorned,
Immortal in their endless martyrdom,
Kindled a kind of sacred dread in him
As he sat sleepless and the candle burned.
He drank like one who drinks a noble wine
The Psalms and Canticles of Holy Scripture
And came to feel, that sweetness and that rapture
And, above all, that destiny were his own.
Israel called him. In an intimate hush
Cansinos heard her as the prophet heard
On the secret mountaintop the unseen Lord
Speaking in tongues of flame from a burning bush.
Oh may his memory stay with me forever.
I leave the rest for glory to uncover.

Timothy Murphy

Our Thirty-seventh Pentecost

Two ways is this our anniversary:
five years ago your cancer was diagnosed.
Tonight I'll kneel to pray a Rosary
and offer homage to the Holy Ghost
who brought two boys together long ago,
steering us to the high plains from the sea,
condemning you to decades in the snow,
me to subarctic darkness of the soul.
Our westward road entailed a heavy toll.

"Like to a lamp that shines in a dark place"
the morning star rose in my heart, then yours.
For one condemned to death, the state of grace
is blinding as the cornered spirit soars
like a sage grouse flushing from bitterbrush
or rabbit brush, seeking the sun's embrace,
primaries pumping in a frantic rush.
We both thirst for a waterhole, where calm
grants to the heart the solace of a psalm.

Footsore

"Tough as the leather on a Red Wing boot,"
said Steve, on Alan's tolerance for pain.
Though drugs and radiation dull his brain,
today he calls himself "A well-armed coot."
He's bought a new support, a cherry cane.

Cherry is hardwood, and the handle bent
into a shepherd crook around the haft
had so much heft our cancer patient laughed,
"The staff of Moses from Mount Sinai sent?
Carving and carpentry? My savior's craft!"

Grant us the courage, Lord, to cope with loss
when strength deserts us as it drains from him.
There is a stream which every soul must swim
after it walks the Stations of the Cross.

Fathers' Day

i.m. Vincent Murphy

Sunset, and mallards poured down on the pond.
You shot from a low saddle in the hills,
felling them like a wizard with his wand
while I was wading to retrieve your kills.

Ten years since absolution for your sins:
six children by your bed, age eighty-three,
your last words to the family, "Vince wins."
Today our young priest speaks a homily

on God the Father and the Son he gave
to save this sorry world. We're told to pray
for every father resting in his grave,
for each child who is fatherless today.

Lisa Russ Spaar

Ash

This heaven gives me migraine. – Gang of Four

Forgive this stroke cashmere,
thumb-print to the glabella, powdered smear,

palm-char paste, part spit, part bone-
boss, dental floss, whole envelopes

of outagraphs, faces I've forgotten, holes
of moments I've pictured that weren't mine to hold,

to picture, all I didn't say but meant, told,
took without asking, hid, feared, sold;

hawk talon, stain, cloth sacked
by placenta, ink husks, saline, subtracted

shadows, lost cosmos of menarche, brain cells,
& this bindi fascicle of worry, the cross I draw myself.

Music Lessons

And my heart, where have I wasted it?
– Chopin

For so long, these exercises,
clots of grapes hung from pergola staves,

red fox arpeggio, shiver of civet smoke, abandon, abandon,
moths threshing the windowscreen.

So why weep into the piano of dimming field,
ensnared, wired for loss, one note still to sound

between this day's scale & its erasure?
What does it matter now, that wedging of wood shims

between gripe-clad fingers all night to extend my range
one, two, notes beyond the octave?

Afraid was what I didn't want to be,
turning the last page. Now I see

there is no landing, just the last tread & rise,
then the crypt of stars.

Before that, for as long as possible,
the exquisite, felted climb & fall.

Julie Stoner

At Peace I Will Sleep

An Introduction to Psalms 3 through 6 in the Sullivan-Zohar Translation

While he was moderator of The Deep End forum of Eratosphere (the online poetry workshop associated with the journal AbleMuse), the inimitable Alan Sullivan panned a villanelle lullaby of mine as "Soporific. And not in a good way." I remembered that characteristically wry—and, alas, characteristically accurate—assessment with a chuckle upon noticing, not far into the Sullivan-Zohar version of the Biblical book of Psalms, that insomnia is a running theme in Psalms 3 through 6. It is my pleasure to introduce these four decidedly non-soporific translations to readers of The Alabama Literary Review.

Alan devoted the final fifteen months of his battle with leukemia to translating the 78 Psalms (out of the Bible's 150) that Jews attribute to King David. The goal was to take them directly from their Classical Hebrew into accurate but lyrical English. Aware of the mistranslations that have plagued English renderings since the King James Version, Alan worked in collaboration with an Israeli member of Eratosphere, Seree Cohen Zohar.

A formidable personality in her own right, Seree did not expect smooth sailing when she embarked on this project with Alan. Past experience had left her wary of the Christian propensity for seeing messianic prophecies everywhere they look in the Hebrew Scriptures—sometimes in blatant disregard of the literal definitions, contextual connotations, and cultural nuances of the words themselves. In an email message that Alan was proud to share on his blog, Fresh Bilge, Seree discussed "why—as I once mentioned—so many of us

stopped trying to assist the non-Jewish world with deeper explanations: because in 99.9% of the cases, the explanations are then forced into proving a theory predetermined by the whomever seeking them. You are a rare bird, indeed—and that is a major compliment. I was truly expecting that after a short short while, our ways might have to part on that very basis. And to hit on an appropriate wording within the constraints of versification just boggles my mind."

That brings us to the subject of Alan's versification, and what it contributes to a modern appreciation of this material. As evidenced by prefatory stage directions such as "to the choirmaster" and "for the flutes", the psalms were originally composed as songs. (The untranslatable term "selah", seen here in Psalms 3 and 4, is another indication of this. Although its precise meaning is uncertain, "selah" seems to indicate an instrumental bridge, a pause, or a participatory response from the community.) Alan's metrical translation admirably preserves the musical feel of King David's compositions.

Several distinct types of song are represented in the psalms, the most frequent of which is the lament. Psalms 3 through 6 are individual lamentations—that is, of the same genre as the more famous Psalm 22 ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" in the Sullivan-Zohar rendering)—as opposed to communal lamentations, which bemoan the woes of an entire nation. Their personal nature is highlighted by the imagery of insomnia, which afflicts individuals rather than communities. Psalm 6 contains the most detailed account of agonized sleeplessness in this grouping: "My groaning has exhausted me: / I inundate my bed each night / and soak my bolster with my tears" (Psalm 6: verse 6).

Compare the strum of Alan's tetrameter to the New American Bible's unmetrical translation of the same verse: "I am wearied with sighing; / all night long tears drench my bed; / my couch is soaked with weeping." Or the King James

Version: “I am weary with my groaning; / all the night make I my bed to swim; / I water my couch with my tears.” To my ear, Alan’s setting is far more evocative of a song, particularly one whose introduction specifies that it is to be performed “with strings.”

Psalm 3, subtitled “a psalm of David when he fled from Avshalom [Absolom], his son,” seems to depict a poet who has trouble nodding off because he fears a nocturnal assassination. Even the lines themselves seem a bit jumpy—trimeter, in contrast with the more flowing tetrameter lines we’ve just considered. After affirming his faith, David optimistically proposes that undisturbed—but still finite!—rest will constitute the best proof that God has heard his prayers. The verse “I will rest and sink into sleep; / I will wake: the Lord will sustain me” (3:5) immediately follows “I shall cry out loud to the Lord; / he will hear on his holy mountain” (3:4).

Similarly, Psalm 4 begins “Hear my entreaty, […] Heed my prayer” (4:1) and ends “At peace I lie down, at peace I will sleep, / for you alone, Lord, make safe where I dwell” (4:8). Psalm 4 also hints that David wouldn’t mind sending his political opponents some insomnia, too…or that he would at least like to send his defiant “Kinsmen” (4:2) to bed to ponder their transgressions: the poet scolds them, “search your heart on your couch, and be still” (4:4). Even so, the soothing quality of Alan’s accentual (loose) tetrameter rendering contributes to the overall impression that David is seeking peace and reconciliation with these opponents, rather than destruction of them.

Although Psalm 5 does not explicitly refer to sleep, the promise “Lord, you will hear my voice at daybreak; / at daybreak I pray to you” (5:3) suggests that the poet is bartering future praise for a safe night’s rest. I dare such a reading because King David adopts a similar bargaining position in Psalm 6. After imploring God to “Heal me” (6:2) and “preserve me” (6:4), the poet points out that “In death is no recall of you. / In sheol who will give you thanks?” (6:5)

This line of reasoning suggests that, since good songwriters are hard to come by, keeping this one in service topside makes more sense than sending him into the shadowy underworld. Perhaps David had the opportunity to perfect such appeals while harpist to his notoriously volatile predecessor, King Saul (1 Samuel 16:14-23; 19:9-10).

Sheol's less-than-rosy picture of the afterlife accounts for the poet's eagerness for divine retribution and reward in this world, not the next. "And you, oh Lord, how long?" he asks impatiently at Psalm 6:3, and note his plea for the Lord to act "instantly" in 6:10. David exults when such waiting is over, as in Psalm 3: "You have struck my foes on the cheekbone, / shattered the teeth of the wicked" (3:7). Whether the violence of his enemies' subjugation is literal or metaphorical, physical safety in the here and now seems to be what the poet means by "Salvation comes from the Lord" in the following line (3:8).

Despite the armed rebellion alluded to in Psalm 3's subtitle, this group of psalms characterizes King David's enemies primarily as political dissenters, not warriors. A wordsmith himself, the poet identifies those "rising against me" (3:1) only by their statements (3:2). Psalm 4 alludes to troublingly blasphemous and, by extension, treasonous questions within the unstable community (4:6). David particularly underscores the vocal nature of his opponents in Psalm 5. After a four-line, trimeter introduction in which each line contains a reference to speech, the poet expands into tetrameter to remind God, "You abominate the troublemakers, / annihilate those who speak with guile" (5:5-6). The poet then shifts back into trimeter to catalog oral transgressions: "No faith is in their mouth; / […] their throat, an open grave; / they flatter with their tongue" (5:9). David may or may not have such dissenters in mind when Psalm 3 refers to "shatter[ing] the teeth of the wicked" (3:7), but he certainly does when proposing a fitting fate in Psalm 5: "Let their own counsel fell them" (5:10).

The poetic justice of that last quotation illustrates David's adherence to a doctrine of tit for tat. Mercy, as distinct from pity, must be deserved. As part of the poet's appeal to God's mercy in Psalm 6, he inventories his own sufferings, thereby implying that he regards this mercy as something already earned, rather than a gift. The poet tallies his acts of worship, too—frequently mentioning his prayers (3:4, 4:1, 5:1-3, 6:8-9), and promising in Psalm 5 that "I will enter your house, blessed in abundance, / and bow toward your holy temple with awe" (5:7). After invoking the "God of justice" (4:1) and warning his kinsmen that they deserve divine retribution, David advises them to "Sacrifice rightly" (4:5) to offset their crimes and get back in God's good graces. In Psalm 5 he emphasizes the deserved nature of divine rewards, as well: "Let those who love your name/ also exult in you. / Lord, you bless the just" (5:11-12).

In sum, Psalms 3 through 6 prefer the predictability of a just God to the unpredictability of a boundlessly forgiving one. Still, despite David's confidence in this rigid moral accounting system, his inability to reliably calculate the Lord's next move by means of it is one of the things costing the anxious poet so much sleep.

Alan Sullivan & Seree Cohen Zohar

3 a psalm of David when he fled from Avshalom, his son

01: Lord, my afflicters multiply!
Many are rising against me.
02: Many declare of my soul,
"No rescue for him in God."

selah

03: But you are my shield, oh Lord,
my glory, who lifts up my head.
04: I shall cry out loud to the Lord;
he will hear on his holy mountain.

selah

05: I will rest and sink into sleep;
I will wake: the Lord will sustain me.
06: I will not be frightened by thousands
surrounding and set against me.
07: Rise and rescue me, Lord God.
You have struck my foes on the cheek-bone,
shattered the teeth of the wicked.
08: Salvation comes from the Lord,
your blessing unto your people.

selah

4 to the choirmaster: with stringed instruments, a psalm of David

01: Hear my entreaty, God of justice.
You widened my way in narrow places.
Favor me now. Heed my prayer.
02: Kinsmen, how long will my honor be stained?
Will you love vanity, seek out deceit?

selah

03: Know that the Lord sets the faithful apart;
the Lord will hear when I call to him.
04: Tremble in awe, and sin no more;
search your heart on your couch, and be still.

selah

05: Sacrifice rightly and trust in the Lord.
06: Many inquire, "Who will show us the good?"
Turn on us, Lord, the light of your face.
07: You have gladdened my heart more than you did
in the time when grain and new wine abounded.
08: At peace I lie down, at peace I will sleep,
for you alone, Lord, make safe where I dwell.

5 to the choirmaster: for the flutes, a psalm of David

01: Give ear to my words, oh Lord;
pay heed to my murmuring;
02: attend to the sound of my call:
I pray to my king and my God.
03 Lord, you will hear my voice at daybreak;
at daybreak I pray to you, and I watch.
04: You are not a god to welcome offenses,
neither shall evil dwell with you.
05: The boastful will not abide in your gaze.
You abominate the trouble makers,
06: annihilate those who speak with guile.
Lord, you loathe the bloody and false.
07: I will enter your house, blessed in abundance,
and bow toward your holy temple with awe.
08: Guide me in your righteousness,
oh Lord, and thwart my enemies.
Make straight the way before my face.
09: No faith is in their mouth;
their innards are abysmal;
their throat, an open grave;
they flatter with their tongue.
10: Hold them to blame, oh God.
Let their own counsel fell them;
expel them for countless crimes,
since they rebelled against you.
11: Let those who trust you rejoice
and always shout for joy
because you shelter them.
Let those who love your name
also exult in you.
12: Lord, you bless the just:
your favor girds him like a shield.

6 to the choirmaster: with strings, on the eighth, a psalm of David

01: Lord, reprove me not in anger;
nor torment me with your wrath.
02: Your pardon, God, for I am weak.
Heal me, Lord. My bones are shaken;
03: my soul is sorely shaken also.
And you, oh Lord, how long?
04: Return, my God; rescue my soul;
preserve me for your mercy's sake.
05: In death is no recall of you.
In sheol who will give you thanks?
06: My groaning has exhausted me:
I inundate my bed each night
and soak my bolster with my tears.
07: My eye has shrunken with my grief,
aged because of all my foes.
08: Away, all evil-doers!
The Lord has heard the sound of my weeping;
09: the Lord will heed my supplication;
the Lord will carry out my prayer.
10: May all my enemies be shamed
and sorely shaken; may they turn back,
instantly ashamed.

Robert West

Survivor

O daisy
dazed and

dizzy in
what seems

like endless
wind, who

wouldn't praise
you? you

who hold
your ground,

and somehow
too your

lovely head
so high.

Gail White

A Spin Of The Prayer Wheel

for Timothy Murphy

Hunter, when you are pursued,
kneel and let the hounds go past.
All our demons, first and last,
fear the scent of solitude.

As the lamas of Tibet
fling paper horses on the air
to rescue pilgrims from despair
when caught in winter's wiry net,

so take from me, a distant friend
who cannot reach you at your source,
the courage in a paper horse
that counsels you to rest and mend.

Though the winter chills you numb,
let the demon hounds race through.
Strength is storing up for you.
Hunter, you will overcome.

The Way It Ended

So time went by and they were middle-aged,
which seemed a crazy joke that time had played
on two young lovers. They were newly caged
canary birds - amused, not yet afraid.

A golden anniversary came around
where toasts were made and laughing stories told.
The lovers joined the laugh, although they found
the joke – but not themselves – was growing old.

She started losing and forgetting things.
Where had she left her book, put down her comb?
Her thoughts were like balloons with broken strings.

Daily he visited the nursing home
to make her smile and keep her in their game.
Death came at last. But old age never came.

CONTRIBUTORS

M. C. Allan's poetry and fiction have appeared in *Blackbird*, *VQR*, *Tar River Poetry*, and other publications. She is a graduate of the writing program at Hollins University and works as an editor for the Humane Society of the United States. She occasionally blathers about writing at ecstaticdoggerel.blogspot.com. But she does not tweet, so that's something.

Mary Jo Bang is the author of six collections of poems, most recently, *Elegy* (2007), which was awarded the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *The Bride of E* (2009). Her translation of Dante's *Inferno*, with illustrations by Henrik Drescher, will be published by Graywolf Press in 2012. She teaches at Washington University in St. Louis.

Dick Barnes's *A Word Like Fire: Selected Poems* was published in 2005. He died in May, 2000.

Claire Bateman's collections are *Coronology* (Etruscan, 2010); *The Bicycle Slow Race* (Wesleyan, 1991); *Friction* (Eighth Mountain, 1998); *At the Funeral of the Ether* (Ninety-Six Press, 1998); *Clumsy* (New Issues Poetry & Prose, 2003); and *Leap* (New Issues, 2005). She has received the New Millennium Poetry Prize as well as grants and fellowships from the NEA, the Tennessee Arts Commission, and the Surdna Foundation. She lives in Greenville, SC.

Rose Black lives by the Union Pacific Railroad tracks in Oakland, California, where she and her husband operate Renaissance Stone, a studio and supply source for stone sculptors. Some of the places Rose's poetry has appeared are *Runes,* the *South Carolina Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Spillway* and *Slant*. Her books *Clearing* and *Winter Light* were accepted by Yale's Beinecke Library for the Yale Collection of American Literature. She is the Associate Editor of the *Marin Poetry Center Anthology*.

Catharine Savage Brosman, who now lives in Houston, is

Professor Emerita of French at Tulane University. In addition to numerous volumes of French literary history and criticism, her publications include two volumes of non-fiction prose, and seven collections of verse, including, most recently, *Range of Light* (LSU Press, 2007) and *Breakwater* (Mercer University Press, 2009). Forthcoming collections are *Under the Pergola* (LSU Press, fall 2011) and *On the North Slope* (Mercer, spring 2012).

Rick Campbell's newest book of poems is *Dixmont,* from Autumn House Press. His other books are *The Traveler's Companion* (Black Bay Books, 2004); and *Setting The World In Order* (Texas Tech 2001) which won the Walt McDonald Prize; and A Day's Work (State Street Press 2000). He has won a Pushcart Prize, an NEA Fellowship in Poetry, and two poetry fellowships from the Florida Arts Council. He is the director of Anhinga Press and the Anhinga Prize for Poetry, and he teaches English at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida. He lives in Gadsden County, Florida with his wife and daughter.

Catherine Chandler was born in New York City and raised in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. In addition to her work as a French and Spanish translator, she has lectured in Spanish at McGill and Concordia Universities in Canada. A Pushcart Prize nominee, Catherine's poems and translations have been published or are forthcoming in numerous journals, magazines, anthologies and ezines in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia, including *The Raintown Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *The Lyric*, *The Barefoot Muse*, *The Book of Hopes and Dreams*, *The HyperTexts*, *Candelabrum*, *Umbrella*, *Möbius*, *Modern Haiku*, *First Things*, *Iambs and Trochees*, *Texas Poetry Journal*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and many others.

Lucas Christenson graduated from Carroll College in Helena, Montana in 2008 with a degree in writing. He acquired Spanish at Carroll and while traveling abroad in South America.

Robert Cording teaches English and creative writing at College of the Holy Cross where he is the Barrett Professor of Creative Writing. He has published six collections of poems: *Life-list,* which won the Ohio State University Press/Journal award, in l987;

What Binds Us To This World (Copper Beech Press, l991); *Heavy Grace*, (Alice James, l996); *Against Consolation* (CavanKerry Press, 2002); *Common Life*, (CavanKerry Press, 2006); and his newest, *Walking With Ruskin* (CavanKerry, 2010). He has received two National Endowment for the Arts fellowships in poetry and two poetry grants from the Connecticut Commission of the Arts. His poems have appeared in numerous publications such as the *Nation*, the *Georgia Review*, the *Southern Review*, *Poetry*, the *Kenyon Review*, the *New England Review*, *Orion*, and the New Yorker.

Stephen Corey has published nine collections of poems, including *There Is No Finished World* (White Pine Press, 2003). He is the editor of *The Georgia Review*, with which he has worked since 1983."

Brian Culhane's *The King's Question* (Graywolf) received the Poetry Foundation's Emily Dickinson Award, given to a poet over fifty for a first book. He lives in Seattle and teaches there at an independent school. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *Memorious*, *Able Muse*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Harvard Review Online*, and *Sewanee Review*.

Carolyn Elkins is the author of three books of poetry, *Angel Pays a Visit*, *Daedalus Rising*, and *Coriolis Forces*. Her poetry has been published in *North American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Gargoyle*, and *Red Rock Review*.

Juan Carlos Galeano is a poet, translator and essayist who has worked extensively in the Amazon basin. He grew up in the Amazon region of Colombia and is a professor of Latin American culture Spanish American poetry at Florida State University.

Lawrence Hetrick has published poetry in *New Virginia Review*, *Sewanee Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Terrain*, and many other journals both print and online. His collection of poems, *Derelict Tributaries*, will be published by Anhinga Press in 2011. He currently teaches at Georgia Perimeter College in Atlanta.

H. L. Hix's most recent books are a "selected poems," *First Fire, Then Birds: Obsessionals 1985-2010*, published in Fall 2010 by Etruscan Press, and a translation, made with the author, of Eugenijus Ali_anka's *from unwritten histories*, published in Spring 2011 by Host Publications. His website is www.hlhix.com.

Armine Iknadossian was born in Beirut, Lebanon and moved to Southern California when she was four years old. A resident of Pasadena, she received her undergraduate degree with an emphasis in creative writing from UCLA and earned a graduate degree in poetry from Antioch University. She teaches English, journalism, and poetry recitation and has received two fellowships from Idyllwild Arts. Publications include *Ararat Quarterly*, *Arbutus*, *Armenian Poetry Project*, *Backwards City Review*, *Common Ground Review*, *Margie, Rhino*, *Spout and Zaum*. She has work forthcoming in *Pearl*.

Jacqueline Kolosov's poetry and prose have recently appeared in *The Missouri Review*, *Orion*, *Waterstone Review*, and *Under the Sun*. Her second poetry collection is *Modigliani's Muse* (Turning Point, 2009).

Robert Mezey's *Collected Poems: 1952-1999* won the Poets' Prize in 2002.

Timothy Murphy has three new books forthcoming from the Lewis and Clark Foundation's Dakota Institute Press. *Mortal Stakes* and *Faint Thunder* appear in April. *Hunter's Log* appears in September.

Lisa Russ Spaar is the author and editor of six books, most recently *Satin Cash: Poems* (Persea, 2008). Her awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Rona Jaffe Award for Emerging Women Writers. She teaches at the University of Virginia and is poetry editor of the Arts & Academe poetry feature of the Chronicle of Higher Education Review.

Julie Stoner was part of the international task force behind the posthumous publication of *Grasshopper: The Poetry of M.A.*

Griffiths (Arrowhead Press, 2011). She lives in San Diego, California.

Alan Sullivan, co-translator with Timothy Murphy of *Beowulf*, a Longman Cultural Edition, devoted the last sixteen months of his life to translating *The Poems of King David*. Bearing the imprimatur of the Roman Catholic Church, the book will be published by the Lewis and Clark Foundation's Dakota Institute Press in 2012.

Robert West's third chapbook of poems, *Convalescent*, should appear from Finishing Line Press in the summer of 2011. His poems have appeared in Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, and other venues. He is an associate professor of English at Mississippi State University.

Gail White is the author of *The Accidental Cynic* (a winner of the Anita Dorn Memorial Award for Poetry), and *Easy Marks* (a nominee for the Poets Prize). She is also the subject of Julie Kane's essay “Getting Serious About Gail White's Light Verse,” which appeared in *Mezzo Cammin*. She lives in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana with her husband and cats.

Seree Cohen Zohar was born in Australia to an orthodox Jewish family in which Biblical Hebrew was used daily in prayer and study. In 1976, aged 20, she ‘returned home’ to Israel, married and spent some two decades farming while raising the family, translating, and continuing her Biblical studies. Farming experiences are often echoed in her art, poetry and flash fiction. Her work has appeared in publications such as *Routledge's International Feminist Journal of Politics, Voices Israel*, *Arc*, *Skive*, the *Jerusalem Post* and is forthcoming in various print and online magazines. She lectures in Europe on Biblical texts, with focus on the intersection of literal and esoteric in Genesis. "An exhilarating experience" is the only way to describe the translation and versification of the Davidic Psalms in collaboration with Alan Sullivan. In what’s left of her free time, Seree might be found trying out new flash-recipes on her unsuspecting family.

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