

Alabama Literary Review



2013
Volume 22, Number 1

Alabama Literary Review

2013
volume 22
number 1

Editor

William Thompson

Fiction Editors

Jim Davis

Theron Montgomery

Poetry Editor

Patricia Waters

Webmaster

Ben Robertson

Cover Photograph

Lizzie Orlofsky

Alabama Literary Review is a state literary medium representing local and national submissions, supported by Troy University and Troy University Foundation. Published once a year, *Alabama Literary Review* is a free service to all Alabama libraries and all Alabama two- and four-year institutions of higher learning. Subscription rates are \$10 per year, \$5 for back copies. Rates are subject to change without notice.

Alabama Literary Review publishes fiction, poetry, and essays. Pays in copies. Pays honorarium when available. First Serial Rights returned to author upon publication. Manuscripts and editorial or business correspondence should be addressed to Alabama Literary Review, 254 Smith Hall, Troy University, Troy, Alabama 36082. Submissions will not be returned nor queries answered unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please allow two or three months for our response.

©2013 *Alabama Literary Review*. All rights reserved. ISSN 0890-1554. *Alabama Literary Review* is indexed in The American Humanities Index and The Index of American Periodic Verse.

CONTENTS

Jeffrey Alfier

- Walking Before Dark on the Last Good Day of
Summer1

Neil Arditi

- Noir Parenting2
Pantoum4

Gay Baines

- Miserere5

Dan Brown

- Consolation6

John F. Buckley

- February Love Song7

Rick Campbell

- Waiting for Everyman9
What I Might Want Today11
Peacocks Christmas Eve12
Reckoning13

Michael Cantor

- Havana14

Patricia Corbus

- A Quiet Walk16

Stephen Cushman

- There Are No Messages in Your Trash18
Want to Make Something of It?19

Contents

Richard Foerster

Beliefs . . . . .	.20
Undines . . . . .	.23

John Foy

Night Vision . . . . .	.24
Suboptimal . . . . .	.25

Loren Graham

Sleepwalking . . . . .	.26
Old Snowball . . . . .	.27
Story Time Girl . . . . .	.28
The Day of the Swarm . . . . .	.29
The Time I Didn't Drown . . . . .	.30

Jonathan Greenhouse

Invisible Toolbox . . . . .	.31
Different Worlds . . . . .	.33

Linda H. Heuring

Nibbling at the Bloodstains34
---------------------------------------	-----

H. L. Hix

If it <i>were</i> radiant, it would shine in such a dusk as this one.40
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----

Roald Hoffmann

Basket . . . . .	.41
Tectonics . . . . .	.45

Krikor Der Hohannesian

Outside the Window49
------------------------------	-----

Armine Iknadossian

333 Fragments (an excerpt)50
--------------------------------------	-----

David M. Katz

- A House with No Rooms53
 My Unfinished Garden54
 A Limestone Jew55

Christopher Kuhl

- Nocturne57

Lyn Lifshin

- Spiritual58
 Have You Ever Looked at an Old Diary59
 The Black Silk Skirt Falling60

Richard Meyer

- No Sanctuary61

Wendy Miles

- On a Monday, What You May Have Known ...62
 And Your Childhood —What Was It Like? ...63
 The Memories65

Devon Miller-Duggan

- Bone Poem67
 Piero Paints the Leaves68

Jed Myers

- White Fire69

Alfred Nicol

- Cellar Snake71
 The Passional72
 Believe You Me73

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

- On Finding a Copy of *The Wellfleet Whale*
 in Wellfleet75
 The Song of Things77

Veronica Reilly	
India's Best Kept Secret	78
J. Stephen Rhodes	
Economics	89
Steven P. Schneider	
Indolence in South Texas	92
Robert B. Shaw	
On the Death of Wilmer Mills	93
Two Villanelles	94
Janice D. Soderling	
A Long-suffering Wife Speaks Graveside	106
The Widower Visits the Bordello	108
Washing Dishes After the Last Guest Finally Went Home	109
Lisa Russ Spaar	
The Sound of Music	110
Good Friday, Looking Inward	112
To the Memory of My Mother	113
David Stephenson	
Wiring Simplified	114
William Thompson	
Recommended Reading	116
Daniel Tobin	
In a Station of the Retro	119
Three Cat Night	120

Will Walker	
Outside the Window	123
Batting Practice at Stanyan Park	124
L.A. Weeks	
Crab Country Litany	125
Will Wells	
Babushka	126
Near Fossil Butte, Wyoming	128
Robert West	
Devotion	129
Matthew Westbrook	
The Body Has No Idea	130
Lisa Williams	
Figural	131

ALR

Jeffrey Alfier

Walking Before Dark on the Last Good Day of Summer

Camphor leaves run before me up the street,
whispers tumbling through bright realtor flags

strung from a sign at an open house no one
came to today, the deepening sky rinsing itself

of contrails and a few unnamable birds aloft
in the late light-scatter, the realtor taking

the flags down now as they resist him
in on-shore wind, and in that wide silence

I drift for mere seconds back to a childhood
flaring with kites, returned to the present

by the falling sun knifing shoals of thinning
clouds to fire upper branches of camphors

and the glass eye of my attic window, the house
without a buyer tilting under the blaze.

Neil Ardit

Noir Parenting

for Mohini

As I push baby's carriage in circles through the playground,
Bouncing over woodchips,
Past bigger babies with food on their faces,
I imagine how different it might have been.
What if I were driving a 1947 Ford Super Deluxe
Down a dark, dirt road?
What if baby were a hardened criminal, or worse,
A cop? What if I hadn't pulled
The red canopy of the carriage over baby's eyes,
To protect them from the sun,
But tied instead a white handkerchief around his
grizzled head,
So he wouldn't know where we were going,
Where we hid the loot we had stolen?
One last job, you said,
Then we could quietly disappear.
Settle down somewhere like normal folks.
And it might still work,
If we can keep our heads,
Not panic,
Not break down like this
Big baby blubbering in the backseat.
("You're not going anywhere, pal,
So you might as well sit back and relax.")
I wish I could relax.
I haven't slept in days.
I could use a shave.
I could use a drink.
But I keep my eyes on the road in front of me,

Except to steal, from time to time,
A glance at you,
Painting your nails,
Turning the pages of your magazines.
“How’d we ever get into this racket, anyway?”
You ask, without looking up,
Because you know I won’t answer.
Because it’s pointless to ask.
Because the answer’s written all over my face:
We’re in too deep to turn back now.

Pantoum

Once you measured loss
inside a dream,
yourself a dream,
you found your own dreams beautiful.

Inside a dream,
you piled them high like clouds.
You found your own dreams beautiful
enough for waking and you woke.

You piled them high. Like clouds,
they would not stay put.
Enough for waking: you slept
more soundly, dreaming without words.

They would not stay put.
How could you sleep
more soundly, dreaming without words?
The words, the dream were one.

How could you sleep
once you measured loss?
The words, the dream were one,
yourself a dream.

Gay Baines

Miserere

Even through blinds we can tell
the sunset is boiling, a rage of
red seamed with blue, green,
gold. The opera of spring,
the hijinks of summer are over,
players are in mufti, flutes, horns,
and violins polished and packed away in
velvet-lined caskets. The sober time
approaches, pulled by the sun, that
faithless one. Soon darkness will
cover the earth, we'll feel it even on
the rare bright noon of mid-December.
Everything is serious, the *Miserere* is
sung, and then one day the sun
hesitates, gives us one extra
stripe on an afternoon full of apricot
light, and we know: Once we've passed
our time in the desert, life will continue
more or less the same. Until next year.

Dan Brown

Consolation

No, it's no reprieve.
No, it's not as though
The poet's a survivor in
The poem's being so.

Which isn't to deny
The whisper of a "Yes"
Arising from his dreaming on
Its ongoingness.

John F. Buckley

February Love Song

Even from my study two rooms over
I can hear the sounds of the latest episode
of *The Real Housewives of Inner-City Detroit*

playing in the living room as you largely
ignore the television while you take care of
your homework for graphic-design class.

One housewife frankly asserted the ad
with Eminem for Chrysler was “amazing,”
a comment which, obviously, effectively

disinvited her from the big party planned
by the local queen bee, the show heavy,
the former champion rhythmic gymnast,

the woman who had *clearly* established
that the 2011 Superbowl commercial was,
in fact, “the best thing to happen to the D

since Kwame Kilpatrick’s departure.” (The
network will ignore her chairing Kwame’s
reelection committee until the reunion show.)

All the glare from the television, I see once
I wander in, frames the little blue light
from your laptop like the psychic aurora

surrounding the core of the explosive
ki-blasts the hero releases in the anime
series you used to watch back in the day,

as they say, and the still, faux, Tropicana
advertisement you're working on appears
pretty good as I look at the screen. Do you

want me to provide positive reinforcement
or leave you alone? I wouldn't use that
shade for borders when the orange leaves

are such a dark green, but the composition
is pretty good, which I tell you without
your sending weird mental signals my way.

You are amazing, and I would be proud
to attend every party you host until each
drop of orange juice dries up into marmalade.

Rick Campbell

Waiting for Everyman

God him come and gone
and no man tricked
the one-eyed brute. Then

that guy, big man, washed
up on the beach. Folk
called him Esteban.

Mayan,
maybe Guatemalan, woman
today stood at the post office

window and pulled
wrinkled dollars from a baggie,
bought a money order.

One story.
Where is it going? I stare
at the map, imagining

or remembering
someplace different. Dental hygienist
told me I had a sympathetic

tongue and cheek,
tried to protect me from cold
water's pain. I think yes

Rick Campbell

my tongue's known sympathy
and desire, my tongue's
danced in Rio and sleeps

too far from home. I am
waiting. No one knows
but you.

What I Might Want Today

“I suppose I would like more beauty”

Kristen B, (reading contest manuscripts)

Yes, that and more freedom, love, wisdom,
generosity. More fish when I fish. More
runs for the Pirates, less for the other team.
More luck for my friends. More discipline
for me. Perhaps, in its way, more beauty
would accomplish all of this. Beauty,
as in elegance, grace — *there's a hole
in daddy's arm where all the money goes /
Jesus Christ died for nothing I suppose.*
All of this being, as they say, in the eye
of the beholder. If I lived dedicated
to the pursuit of beauty what old roads would I walk,
how parallel the roads to truth? Could I get
there from here, in this little poem, yes,
because nothing is given?

Peacocks Christmas Eve

When the peacocks sing, night's
not silent anymore. Off key
caterwauling, drunks caroling

who can't sing sober. Maybe
it's the dark moon, not the Savior's
birth, that panics them this winter night.

Why am I listening? These wailing
fowl are my prophets. I can't
avoid this ineluctable personification

though I know it's me who's desperate tonight.
Maybe the peacocks are just hungry or lost.
There's a coyote out there somewhere

following a star; the peacocks move
in a troop, safety in numbers, and even
the drunken hunters are home tonight.

Silent Night. Holy Night.
Let nothing I dismay.

Reckoning

The morning moon,
one white beech, nine shining branches spreading
like a candelabra. Hawk, rooster, crow,
six song birds. Four squirrels, one traversing
tree tops, leaping from the frail end of one branch
to the frail beginning of another. Back
and forth, three times in my counting; he seems
to be searching, crying out now and then —we can't
claim that a squirrel sings. I call him urgent, desperate,
not a lightweight swinger of birches, but a jumper
of loblolly and a rasper of sweet gum and oak.

I am remembering the last day
I woke happy, distracting myself by listing —what
I did not do last night compared to what I did. What kept
me up till 1:30 since I graded no papers and wrote no poems.
The Tigers lost and with that my slim chance of going
to the World Series lost too. Oregon, in their ugly uniforms,
beat Arizona in the middle of the night and I did not care.
I note the hawk again, its nest dark in morning shadow.
I measure the pain in my back against the rooted weeds
still to stoop and pull and come to favoring tools—the hoe,
the shovel's long handle keeping me from another day
on my hands and knees.

Believe me, I would be a pilgrim
and crawl through medieval streets to you, but the distance
between us
isn't time or miles, not dust and toil, but torn rags of duty and
promise.

Michael Cantor

Havana

From the photographs of Robert Polidori

This door may once have been a shade of blue,
imbued with green, perhaps, to match the sea;
the shattered walls show hints of apricot,
on swaths of plaster of some unknown hue.
Mistress of these heat-and-salt-air-sodden rooms
where paint has lost the will to cling to paint,
Senora Luisa Faxas sits
in front of her piano and bookshelves and art;
where drunken chandeliers and mirrors dangle,
irriguous and decadent and lush,
angled in the ruins of beams and laths,

Who is Senora Faxas, who was she
with her fifteen foot ceilings and marble floors,
and ballrooms flowing endlessly to other rooms?
Has she read the piles and piles of books
stacked on floors and desks, eroded, melted,
recongealed into blocks of ink and pulp?
Did she bring back the gilded frames and massive
canvases of nudes from trips to Paris and Milan?

And what of the Condessa de Buenavista?
Is she accomodating boarders now?
Antonio Machado Ponce de Leon,
white-haired, handsome, with a dueler's scar,
has a daybed in her tortured drawing room,
walled off by hanging cotton sheets.
And Jose Ortiz Arabella lounges
shirtless, cautious, on a mold-stained couch.

Or are these lovers, cousins, serving men?
There are no answers, only photographs.
A fifties Chevrolet has gone to ground;
two-tone-hard-top-blistered-red-white beast,
the mouth and trunk agape, propped up on crates;
it decorates a side street, soundlessly.
All clocks have stopped, the clouds of birds are gone,
the walkers on the empty Boulevards,
the watchers leaning on their windowsills
are blank and motionless, figures on a scrim
that will no longer roll. A gray sea pounds
unceasingly against the Malecon.

Patricia Corbus

A Quiet Walk

All my life I wanted a mind flush
with reason, exact as the point
of a plumb-bob, but, hell, it's June

and tonight I want to love everybody

I mean really love them down to their
clammy feet, ridged and imprinted
by all the buckles, tongues and eyelets

of all the shoes they have to wear

and I want to help everybody escape
and feel their souls and bodies
flutter together and throb as one

Now I'm turning onto some avenue

crowded with fragrance, not like Johnny-
one-note roses, but cloudy with fresh
everything in bloom all at once

Overhead the cicadas are screaming

Alleluia, rubbing their heels or something
together on a loud rollercoaster of love
Though I took a solemn vow never

ever to put cicadas in any poem

here they come falling out of the dark trees
flinging themselves by the thousands
at my feet, coral pushpin eyes, filigreed

wings and moist little bodies flush with love.

Stephen Cushman

There Are No Messages in Your Trash

Really? Could have sworn there was one
in the empty green bottle that used to hold beer
or can of spent insecticide, also green but another shade,
looking for a good time, let's take a walk so I can suck you,
me and my tick friends, chigger friends, all us mosquitoes,
Johnny-Come-Lately, Tiger mosquito, invasive species
from Southeast Asia, thanks a bunch, transmission vector
for viral pathogens, West Nile virus, Yellow fever, dengue fever,
St. Louis encephalitis, you catch that one it's usually mild
except if you're old, fatality ranges to thirty percent, suck suck,
does that feel good, have to admit people taste better
in Southeast Asia, something about them, could be the diet,
all that rice, one lady in particular, she was from Singapore,
told all our friends and they made her sick, so there's a lesson
for losers to learn, next thing we know it's off to America,
got trapped in her car when she drove to the port
to wave at her boyfriend, hopped on his neck and suddenly
we're out,
anchors a-weigh, next stop is Oakland, no no this can't be right,
we've only hit the eastern U. S., must have been a plane, cargo
hold,
don't bite a baggage handler, and then it's DC, what luck,
a soldier, back from the hot zone, guy has these eyes,
yellow, amber, hazel, ochre, you giving me a hard time,
suppose I say saffron or basically beer-colored, let's get over
this adjective hangover, the description thing, it's a little unfair,
what do we do, land and hold still while someone injects us
with his mental image, no time for that, en garde avant-garde,
here comes my ride, we're off to the wedding, she's a nice girl,
hates his deployments, maybe she's used to his some-color eyes,
the way they keep flicking, hard to connect with.

Want to Make Something of It?

Rain-sucking son of an acorn.
Photosynthesizing sack of sap.
Back off. You can spot a faith insufficient
to wither you like the fig tree cursed?
Care to risk it? Skipping breakfast makes one testy.
Especially on the road to town. Is that a dare?
I execrate your pollen-spewing. I abominate
your stumbling-roots. Bark-face. Leaf-bag.
Your xylem I anathematize. I'll make you wish
you had gone down in the weekend tornado.
I'll make you regret you excrete oxygen.
Add another ring? Don't make me laugh.
Say your prayers, arrogant angiosperm.
I'll teach your kind to mess with a teacher,
hungry and doomed, his last Monday morning.

Richard Foerster

Beliefs

Autumn had begun again
glancing blows of sunlight
on the pond we fashioned
broad as a tractor wheel
but shallow, with a bronze
faun to trumpet water
summer-long for three
mottled fish that'd swelled
since May from fingerlings.

We'd watch them breach
the patter, fiery ripples
in play through waning
afternoons into chill October.
Come, we called but they
would not come to feed
after a night scrimmed
our eye into that other-
world with ice.

The nursery's expert
advised we buy a heater
to float and keep a black iris
clear through winter's solid
freezes—a portal for noxious
gas to escape on a wisping
braid of faith—and hope
our Dantean hell retain
a modicum of heaven.

*

Leonardo's Vitruvian Man
could have fit within its circle:
the wicker of a prior winter's
wreath, its plaits storm-brittled,
the willow-bark in frays, rehung
under a side porch and forgotten
till it boiled into song last year
with the *teakettle-teakettle* call
of a wren that had nestled
at the bottom of the giant frame.

That November, the wreath
abandoned, I tossed it
on a burn-pile, but kept
the nest amid the worn-out
gloves and rusty trowels
in my garden bag, propped
in a far corner of the porch.
This spring, hunkered plump
within that nest, amid a puff
of cinnamon, two eyes

stared out at me, unbudgeable
in that instant as my belief
it was the same wren.
All summer she'd come
to the fountain, perch
at the trumpet's brim,
and drink, her tail flicking
like a baton to mark time
for the bright sonata
sluicing from her feet.

*

Cupped in my hands, a broth
that I whisper upon, its steam
rising like an augury, bearing
the willowy gray-green
up from the bowl's glaze
on which are bossed three
small fish. Caravans once bore
items such as this from China,
celadon so pure it was believed
the vessel would break
if touched by poisoned food.
What manner of death,
I can only imagine, ensued?
And what lesson must I take
along the path today as I plod
near waist-deep in snow
to stare down into that ice-
free ring, so stark and black
against the blinding white
enormity of my disbelief?

Undines

Miscanthus sinensis

Evenings the tasseled grasses concatenate light where redwings flared their shivarees, now flown; unbraided and brushed by wind,

they caress the afterthought of an emptiness whose every breath ignites the air; till the days darken and the snows break them

I'll watch how they keen the season the way another once craned when I leant in close and sent a whisper adrift

along the length of his neck and set it shuddering—then rode those waves that swept us drowning in their coils.

John Foy

Night Vision

You'll never see it if you look
directly at it in the dark.
It's just a shifting, black
on black, something just

a part of the perimeter,
no claim upon it as it comes
along the bales of razor wire
deftly and alone,

and it is near you now, has
somehow gotten in, at peace
with what it does
in the darkness, and why.

Suboptimal

I dwell at night among devices
that are linked up in the dark
and sometimes come alive
with lights, blinking on my desk
to indicate another message coming in
from a suboptimal world
I don't much feel like living in
tonight, wanting only, like a child,
to pull the covers up and close my eyes
to cables and wires and the on-line
lie and the rigged life they try
to make me think is uncompromised and mine
and beyond anyone's asking how this
makes better what's left of my hours.

Loren Graham

Sleepwalking

How far I'd walked and why, I'd never know,
but I could rise and dress and venture out
onto the moonlit farm, to distant fields,
wearing my coat if it were cold, all while
I was asleep.

Deep in a vivid dream
of another nearby place, I'd wake and feel
that I had been ghosted away, transported:
loafing on the porch while Dad played guitar
or watching while Mom laid the supper table,
I'd suddenly find myself among the boulders
beside the dark creek, puzzled as to what
I could be doing there, far from my bed
while heat lightning flashed against the midnight sky.
In a mere instant I could go from walking
a certain cow path in full noontime sun
to stumbling off that same path in the pitch
dark, dead broom grass crunching underfoot.
It was as if I'd merged with those broad pastures
and ponds and scrubby copses so completely
that even parts I never looked upon
became as much a part of me as those
I saw by day.

All unaware of dangers
and dumb to pleasures I was passing by,
I found myself in places I was dreaming.

Old Snowball

I wasn't supposed to get out of Old Snowball, our battered white pickup. But Dad had seen a friend and gone to jaw, so when the first few shovelfuls of coal had clattered down in Snowballs' bed behind me, I climbed out.

A black man had the shovel: he was old, bent down as though the coal had warped his back somehow. His overalls and shirt were dark, his thick work gloves filthy, coated with grime.

I knew that I was not allowed to talk to him, so I just stood and watched him work. He jabbed the shovel into the glittering pile, levering coal into the truck: dust flew around us for a bit, and then he dropped the shovel on the pile, pulled off his gloves, and rested his hands on the tailgate top. They were not black, those hands. I thought they looked like chocolate milk, and not at all like coal.

I knew that I would probably get in trouble for getting dirty, but I made a mark in the grime on that truck, a line that showed the white of Old Snowball, the black shards in its bed, the man's hands in between, my hands like chips or bread, the little dust spots settling over it all.

Story Time Girl

City-County Public Library

Of course I loved her miniskirt and bob-cut and the tinge of effervescent green that flashed each time she blinked—how could I not when she was so grown up, but with a sheen coming from every part of her? No girl I'd ever seen had dressed like her, had hair or eyes like her, or seemed—like her—from a world so distant from mine. I knew not to stare, but I did it anyway.

Yet what I saw was nothing to compare with what I heard: she told the red death and the yellow wallpaper and the great jumping frog, each word sharp and dangerous, each one with a glint as sure and momentary as the hint

of shimmer on her lids. I couldn't take my ears off her: she was like a library within the library—the place I prized most, where every adult I knew advised me that my future lay. A solitary book, all of them said, would be the book that left my way distinct and undisguised and cleared a path for me and swept it clean. I felt it coming toward me from those green-hazed eyes.

The Day of the Swarm

the bees swirled down all around me in long buzzing ropes

from under one of the many warped siding pieces

on our house that were forever loosening, slipping,
struggling against the persevering facts of weather

and gravity, against the tendency of this life
to lower, bees everywhere spiraling to a point
on the trunk of the sapling I had been playing by

where a ball of bees my size now hung as if waiting
for the bee man who had come to take them to a new
home. *Don't fidget*, he told me. *You just have to be brave,
and let them crawl all over you, because if you're still
and don't touch or swat them, they'll like you and not sting you,*

and I told him I would stay brave, and somehow he caught
the queen and put her in the big white box he had brought
and set beneath the tree. He tapped the trunk and all
that great wad of bees fell straight down together like one
creature into the box, and when they had settled down,
he put the lid on, and I felt the ones on my arms
and the back of my neck begin to whirr and leave me
for the hole in the end of their new house, their new white

perfect house the beekeeper would soon load in his truck.
And something was there, hovering behind the bee man,
behind the sapling, the bees mumbling inside their hive.
The measure of a life, no matter the circumstance.
Its constant, incremental decay. Its sweet despite.

The Time I Didn't Drown

In the middle of ice, I heard the sharp crack
and saw the long fissure streak its silver beneath me,
and I hung there over the farm pond and held my breath.

Would my family find me locked in place that evening,
my blue hood frozen in the pose it had struck
when I stopped struggling? And would it fracture something

in them that I was dead, the boy they all expected
to break out of the life they lived in that place,
the one who might have shown it was *possible* to leave,

even for the ones who stayed?

I slid forward gingerly,
not lifting my feet, and slipped off that mirrored surface,
and took a path dark with frozen mud and manure,

rutted with the hoof prints of the landlord's Holsteins,
and walked it past the barn in the blue winter twilight:
past Old Babe, our Guernsey cow, waiting

at the gate to be milked, impatient as always,
past where the chimney boiled black on the house top
from the front room coal stove that kept us warm,

Dad and some cousins probably talking over the TV,
punctuating their arguments by poking at the fire,
Mom and Grandma silent, starting cornbread and potatoes

in the kitchen, while a big pot of beans simmered on—
our supper, as always.

But I hadn't fallen through.
So far I hadn't slipped or fallen through.

Jonathan Greenhouse

Invisible Toolbox

Depression's like being trapped in an attic, & love's like a
toolbox,
& inside the toolbox are sledgehammers & drills & plastic
explosives,
but sometimes depression's so bad it's like a steel-plated attic,

fireproof & explosive-deterrent, & in the toolbox,
you've only got toothpicks & chewing gum & scotch-tape.
Sometimes love's like a toolbox with nothing in it.

Sometimes it's an IOU note saying she's going to bring back
the tools
in a couple weeks/months, but you know she'll never return
them.

You know the box she's left is becoming unhinged,

the handle coming off. You're trapped in this attic
& hear the faint hammering of reinforced construction,
like they're burying you further within yourself. You open
your mouth

but only hear the cement inside you, the scaffolding & signage
of a work-in-progress, a series of dead-ends. You look at
your toolbox

& wonder if you're not looking closely enough,

because sometimes love's like an invisible toolbox you suddenly
notice,

& you take all the tools & escape from the hole into which
you'd fallen,

then return to the open sky & breathe in the scent

of all the world's flowers; & this is love.
& depression's when none of this has happened,
because there's no such thing as an invisible toolbox,

& even the dream of one is entrapped within a fresh coat of
concrete.

Different Worlds

Somewhere, in a distant part of our galaxy,
a girl's thinking of me & foolishly believing I'll find her.
She's straightening her hair & putting on a red dress,
the one she'd worn when she'd met that last guy who'd done
her wrong,

& she puts on the earrings given to her by her grandmother,
who disappeared into a flock of starlings devoured by twilight.
If she were here right now, I'd tell her not to bother,
that we're light-years away & can't possibly meet, the two of
us separated

by the history of the cosmos, our two different worlds coalescing
so far from each other our small stars only catch
furtive glances at the other when there's an eclipse
of a hundred other stars at once, all aligned & holding their
breaths.

I'd appear to her in dreams & tell her how impossible it'd be,
how our body parts don't even fit, our chemistry
a clash of misunderstood compounds. Our sizes hardly correlate
& our colors & brightness could be alternately blinding

or susceptible to an invisible fate; & yet she waits,
somewhere, in a distant part of our galaxy, knowing she'll find
me

because this is what she has to do, just like all of us,
dreaming our revolutions will take us closer to where our other
selves wait.

Linda H. Heuring

Nibbling at the Bloodstains

This girl moves like she's underwater, practicing for some mermaid show at Weeki Wachee or something. What I really want to do is grab my sunflower seeds and water bottle off the counter and run out the door. Let mermaid girl keep my \$18.21 in change, put the cash in the pocket of that massive company smock that hangs on her pointed shoulders like a poncho and later buy a six-pack or some milk for her kids and never make a peep if the cops come asking.

Here I stand, though, waiting, watching, because she reminds me of my daughter, Melissa, a rescuer, the weight of the world on a narrow frame. There's a cross dangling from the chain around her neck, and not a plain one either, but one of those Catholic ones with Jesus stuck on there like that's how he'd like to be remembered, all nailed up and nearly naked. No, this girl would run after me, leave a note with my complete description "in case the poor woman comes back for her change."

My silver-blue-haired grandma would have handed over exact change to begin with, paying for a dozen aspirin with a nickel and two pennies and slipping the brown and yellow tin into her pocketbook, giving me the empty one. I packed it with dimes. I was six. She was 60. Now I'm that combined. Sixty-six going on nothing if I don't keep moving.

The girl waits for me to stick out my palm, and I raise my right arm, but substitute my left, like a kid playing games. She starts with the penny, layers on the dimes, the bills. She counts with her mouth, just like Melissa's husband Brandon does. Did.

"And twenty," she says. She smiles and bumps the register closed with the heel of her hand.

Bottle sweat stings the rope burn on my right palm.

“Have a good day, and God bless,” she says. I open the door with my hip and set off down the road to where my skiff is tied to a stake on the bank of the Okeechobee Waterway.

The air tastes like asphalt, as if the squiggly heat waves from the pavement coat my tongue when I inhale. I find a patch of shade under a trio of Christmas palms. Even in the shade the humidity holds me close, comforts me. The palms rustle from a breeze far over my head. At my nursery, only a few miles away by water, the rows of palms planted a year apart alternately catch the wind like this when it rises off the big lake. Will Melissa stand there today, listening to the wind play their fronds like harp strings?

I dump seeds in my mouth directly from the tube. I haven't eaten since lunch yesterday. I need salt, water. I chew the seeds to pulp. A pickup shows up on the horizon, fuzzy and shimmering. I step behind a tree trunk, even though its diameter is half mine. Age has spread my hips, and my shoulders are broad beneath my work shirt. My sun hat, rolled no bigger than a bratwurst, is snug in a pants pocket. I pat my waistband out of habit, but my gloves aren't there. They are on the bottom of the canal, somewhere west of Lake Hopcochee where I dropped them overboard last night. I figure catfish are picking at the frayed canvas. Nibbling at the bloodstains: mine, his. The story problem is this: if 200 pounds of flesh falls 15 feet at the end of 115 feet of rope on a four-inch pulley, how much friction will it generate? Enough to burn through a pair of heavy duty work gloves and rip a bloody trench into an old woman's hands.

My boat is where I left it. I yank the metal stake from the scrub and carry the line down the bank into the skiff. It's the same rope, practically, as I use in the shop: 12 strands woven together, not too much stretch, abrasion resistant. To the arborist it's a rope; to the mariner it's a line, but they serve the same purpose. They tie up things you want to stay put, and they keep your loved ones safe. That was the plan, anyway.

Just after two o'clock I reach the Caloosahatchee River that connects the waterway to the sound, and I motor past the

Ft. Myers bridges and into a nearly full marina, a world away from the lake that was my home. Here fancy trawlers with perfect canvas sport flat screen TVs. The sailboats are at least 32-footers. Behind me are million-dollar condos no one is buying, even though a flapping banner says they're now only \$359,000. Ten out of 200 are sold I read somewhere. It's the market, supposedly. That's what Brandon blamed for his failure in real estate, not his drinking, certainly, or that look in his eye that contradicted that capped-tooth smile he whitened with overnight trays from the drug store. Couldn't tell by my business. People never stopped wanting more shade, or more oranges, or more bougainvillea. Brandon had no eye for landscaping. No, his eye was on the brass ring, or more likely the belly ring barely visible under the silk blouses of our biggest corporate buyer. Meeting clients and marketing was what I hired him to do. But as much as Melissa prayed otherwise, he was really a meat market kind of guy.

"If he could just make a go of it," she told me. "Get his confidence back. He might not need..." She twisted a curly strand of hair into a corkscrew.

"You know," she said. "Those others."

There was a parade of them, and as each one was discovered, or blurted out in a drunken rage, I saw Melissa square her shoulders, set her jaw and narrow her eyes in determination.

Melissa could coax a neglected seedling to sprout leaves or an abused and abandoned kitten to eat from her hand. She tried her magic on Brandon, but unlike the seedling that grew to shower her with peaches or the cat who dropped furry field mouse heads at her feet, Brandon kept up his nefarious ways. No, he flat out defied her, and it was me who tired of waiting for him to change. I watched her shoulders grow thin, her eyes draw back in their sockets, and that determined jaw tremble more often than not. Melissa saw it as her personal failure and tried harder. Not me.

Two men work the condo grounds. One, on a stand-up mower, spins circles around a young azalea. Another sprays impatiens with a hose in full sun. I step off the brick walkway into the grass, then stop myself. Not my crew. Not by a long shot.

The harbormaster's nose is in a book when I enter the office. The cold air catches my tonsils unaware. I cough.

He looks up.

"What can I do you for?" He puts his book down open, spine up.

"That fresh coffee?" I point to a pot on top of the file cabinet.

"Help yourself." He stretches in his chair, a man in no hurry. A fisherman, no doubt.

I sip coffee. The bulletin board has snapshots of men holding big fish, some business cards, boats for sale, and one for rent. I watch minnows in the bait tank and survey a wall of lures. Five reels of line are mounted underneath. A red reel just like mine.

A young girl in a bikini walks by as I carry my coffee outside. Her sarong is tied low on her hips, and a belly ring sparkles against her tan abdomen.

The buyer had a belly ring just like that, but a pale and puffy stomach. Did she sneak back in last night to get the rest of her clothes or did she pretend nothing happened? Make believe her lover's mother-in-law hadn't found them pressed together on a bale of burlap in the barn, Brandon's white butt lit purple in the bug zapper's light? I had tossed her abandoned shoe, a black Jimmy Choo with silver stars, into the baler with Brandon before I encased him in the net like a Christmas tree headed for the top of an Escalade. Let him sober up hanging from the boom of my truck, an evil-doer captured by Spider Man. When he saw his philandering naked self hanging 15 feet above the ground in a tree net, maybe he'd morph into a new man.

I squint in the sun. A man in a green shirt waves a

clipboard and points a pencil stub at an ailing palm tree harbor side of the closest condo tower. I see the problem: a load of mulch piled around the trunk. Between the heat and trapped moisture, the tree will die from the ground up. The workers take a shovel and tamp down the mulch, compacting it.

“No, no, no!” Clipboard man gets on his knees and pulls mulch away from the trunk.

“I wonder who made the first mulch volcano?” I say. He looks up at me and shakes his head. The base of the tree is exposed. It’s wet and soft. I kneel down and prod the bark with my fingers, looking for any hint of the telltale white wafer from gandoderma butt rot. It’s felling palms all over Florida, and there’s no cure.

“Looks like it’s just heat and moisture,” I say. “No gandoderma.”

I sit back on my heels and look him in the eye.

“She’ll need some looking after,” I say. “Not to mention the others. And the crepe myrtles? Could use an artist.”

“Done this before?” he asks.

I nod, but it doesn’t come close to how I feel. It’s all I know. It’s what I love. It’s all I have left.

“Ten an hour to start. No benefits, but it’s steady. Forty hours a week or more, if you’ve got the time.”

I nod again.

“I’ve got some paperwork in the truck,” he says, then stops when I shake my head.

“I’d rather not,” I say. “An old grandmother like me prefers cash.”

He looks past me to his workers digging at another palm, then back to me. I see him take in my chopped off hair, the lines the sun has sketched into my face and neck, and the slick red line of skin across my palm.

“Ok, Abuelita, long as you didn’t kill someone.” He smiles.

I plant my sun hat on my head, pulling it tight so the brim will shade the tip of my nose. I smile from my personal shade.

“At least not on purpose,” I say.

He laughs a big belly laugh, then fans himself with his clipboard.

“Tomorrow, seven sharp. I’ll get you the drawings. You set the priorities.”

We shake hands. I wince, and he tosses me a pair of gloves. I grab a fistful of soil and test it for moisture. It smells of the ocean, and sunlight, and fish.

I tuck the new gloves in my waistband and visit the harbormaster. By morning my skiff will be transformed into a dinghy, a fresh stripe of paint just below her gunwale and a paint-stenciled name that matches my rented sailboat will disguise it for now.

At dusk, a bartender squirts two shots of Cuervo Gold into a blender at a bar on the boardwalk. I hadn’t counted on Brandon getting sick and choking on the tequila and whatever else his stomach heaved up. I let out the rope to bring him down fast and steady, but he thrashed around, and I lost control. He gained momentum, and the rope ran through the pulley and across my palms. It didn’t stop until he hit the concrete floor, the net stretched tight against his skin and a four-and-a-half inch Jimmy Choo spike heel sunk deep in the middle of his chest.

The sky is red before night. From the cockpit I see whirlpools of surface-feeding fish. I let an ice cube melt in my palm, coating the burn. Yesterday I was the boss. Today I’m the little grandmother. Tomorrow, maybe I’m the mother Melissa forgives, the one who forced her to turn a nurturing eye on herself for once.

The tide tugs at my moorings, but I won’t escape to the sea. I’m anchored to the land as securely as these lines wrap the dock cleats. My roots run deep. My rhizomes, underground runners themselves, will take nourishment from the soil until they’re strong enough to surface once more.

H.L. Hix

If it *were* radiant, it would shine in such a dusk as this one.

Pale pink blossoms impertinent on the plum, apple trees whiskered white. Or so the spindrift insisted, and the smell, and the sizzle of hummingbirds and bees. This, despite chainsaws
at work half a mile off, the crack of a trunk surely a full hundred years old, impenitent whoops from the boys. Despite reminiscence of snow in the glow that time of day. Reminiscence, or premonition. Despite all the noise. Despite, or because of, my body's floating away.

•

Escape disguises removal from place, family, home.
It's right about there. Everything's fine here, how're things there?

They're no more than rolling hills, but here they call them mountains.

Again this year, she swore this would be her last visit home.
Some said we wanted in spite, some because, of the removal to return to the mountains. As if home had ever been there.

Roald Hoffmann

Basket

—for Billie Ruth Sudduth

to carry
somewhere
to someone
for a good
reason

to keep
something
meant
to be
kept
apart
safely kept
for someone

out of
something
grown
but cut
twisted
or shaved
so dead, yet

reborn,
no,
trans-
formed
in the hands
of someone
usually a woman

shared
space
carved
out of air
by one
over
the other
under

a construction
in which
you
can have
a stake
actually
you'd better
have many

a way of life
where
upsetting
is inevitable

where
the ends
need
to be
concealed
and the means
laid
bare.

stakes
high
stakes low
every basket
a gamble

along
a spoke
out of sight
(but not of mind)
tapered
to be
hidden

not
the only
part of life
where
in and out
out and in
can
tire
some.

where
loose ends
are part
of the plan

and
entwinement
flirts
with
interpenetration

Roald Hoffmann

the lesson
of a basket
Billie Ruth's –
an elbow
can make
a heart.

Tectonics

genesis

Not God, or Rabbi Loew.
Today it's just Roald,
squeezing a ball of clay,
his small stake in creation.
Did they begin this way,
two thumbs
hesitant in clay? Yes,
for now
there is the other,
a hole
in the wholly round.

he remembers

He was six;
June 1944, five Jews
walking out of hiding
to the Russian lines,
the fertile fields
sodden
in spring rains,
no way
but through the clay,
his uncles are leaning
on the women.
His mother carries him.

take clay

A thing with magic
begs
to be understood.
Kaolin and feldspar,
hydrated
aluminosilicates,
layer-like,
taking up water,
platelets sliding
past each other.
Reversible
to a point.
This lesson
May be of use,
but who
will do
the kneading?

centrifugal

in a world
of seductive
tugs out,
and not just
at the wheel,
all you can do
is keep plastic,
balance,
and build,
by hand,
the higher shape
within.

a hand

of clay is not
the clay hand
of a broken idol.
It's a woman
in Angola
reaching out
with a can of milk;
it's the hands,
now two,
moving nervously,
of a man
told his son
is missing
in Chechnya.

subtractive

so now
this wet object
faces me,
ample evidence
to being far out
of the creators'
league.
But God
was into salvage,
I recall, and
my teacher says
there are tools,
all those fingers,
a grater,
a curvy metal disk, and
this slip slurry.

Roald Hoffmann

Formation
is as much
a matter
of taking off
as adding on.

my hands

on the pot,
remember, oh,
how
they reached out
for yours,
hand over hand,
one spring
Rio day.

where

people were, there
are shards.
There is clay
on my hands,
there is clay
in my hair.
It'll wash off.
Not the clay
in my heart.

Krikor N. Der Hohannesian

Outside the Window

A blue norther rattles
the panes, outside
the world whirrs on,

three dopplered blasts
of the Downeaster's whistle
at the grade crossing
ride an icy gust.

A jackhammer butchers
the macadam, exploratory
surgery for a ruptured main.

Blue diesel smoke
trails the #80 bus
growling down the avenue.

The campanile at Saint Raphael's
peals evensong, the call to Vespers
plangent in limpid air, cloudless.

I stare at this white screen,
black words stare back,
grey meaning.

Armine Iknadossian

333 Fragments (an excerpt)

1

A motorcycle boy and an underweight naïf meet in Beirut.
She speaks only when spoken to.
He wears Levis and runs away from home.

2

Her eye shadow is cerulean,
the color of the Mediterranean.
She cries behind her veil.

3

She stutters and has a lisp.
Her mother sews all her dresses.
Her shoes are a size too small.

4

Men gather around when he speaks.
The Becca Valley is a patchwork
of orange and olive trees.

5

Time and again,
war sees
its own becoming.

6

Time and again,
a girl is born. Eight sisters.
My mother is number three.

7

She is named Shaké,
to let light in.
She survives on boiled lentil water.

8

Armen is the eldest boy.
Armen means man of war.
A horse kicks him in the teeth.

9

Like shafts of moonlight,
like tangled bed sheets,
like ripped stockings and fault lines.

10

She keeps stuttering.
I-I-I-I-do.
Mid-afternoon full moon.

11

Right in front of her, an ocean
as big as the longest day of the year.
He is the 2nd to last cue ball on a pool table.

12

Absolved of sin
of guilt
of consequence.

13

Wild flowers and lizards:
jasmine, alyssum, opium.
Kisses under a drooping cedar.

14

Man and wife and baby make three.
During the first trimester,
she craves bitters and sweets.

15

Lemons dipped in salt,
clementine and honeysuckle.
Iced rose water with pine nuts.

16

Above their bed, the moon
is in primal scream.
It happens before they know it.

17

I am born in August,
early afternoon.
I am named Armenouhi.

18

My left ear and foot don't work.
I wear corrective shoes and watch
Sidon burn from our balcony.

David M. Katz

A House with No Rooms

Its emptiness precedes it. It's a hole
Held in against the wind. We step right in
To possibilities: carte blanche straight through
From front to back, a soullessness for soul,
Square on each side, the timbers leaning in
To frame the chalet roof. There is no view
Except the inward one of me through me,
You through you, the house into itself.
How could we split it up? We start to think.
Where should the windows be? Inevitably,
We load our dishes on a future shelf,
Imagine water in a kitchen sink.
But it would take a sacrifice of space
To build the walls to renovate this place.

My Unfinished Garden

I want death to find me planting my cabbages, but careless of death, and still more of my unfinished garden.

—Montaigne

Planting in the morning sun,
I might keel over in the heat,
Or in mid-conversation,

Careless in my weedy garden.
I well might find the shadows sweet,
Planting in the morning sun.

I might depart when nearly done,
Alone at last with a single beet,
Or in mid-conversation.

I surrender to my resignation.
My nine bean rows are incomplete,
Gaping in the morning sun.

First seizure, then cessation:
The rotting cabbage leaf;
The dangling conversation.

Late afternoon is fine, or dawn
With shadows spreading at my feet,
Planting in the morning sun,
Or in mid-conversation.

A Limestone Jew

In the fifties, when he wrote
In “Amor Loci”
The words “Jew Limestone,” the phrase
Carried bitter hints
Of anti-Semitism
For Auden’s critics.
For him, it was merely stone:
His native landscape,

Which did not lack for its own
Bitterness, or rue.
True, the stone was soft and lost
Its spine in water —
Not the ground to hold him up
Without a father.
Love of landscape replaces
An absence, a search,

A walk on a limestone moon.
Local slang supplied
An adjective for the kind
Of rock he found there:
Lodes of crinoids and corals,
Fossiliferous
Record of migrating earth
Left by water: Jew.

Love of place, however, boils
Down to one of thing,
And thing at last to person.

David M. Katz

In Chester, Wistan
Discovered a limestone Jew
And wrote at Christmas,
As I think of Bethlehem,
I now think of you.

Christopher Kuhl

Nocturne

(For Barbara Gavin in memory of Tom Gavin)

I heard the sea pounding
pounding the sea pounding on the rocks
dashing against them:
I heard it and my ears were filled with the pounding
and the rocks and the sea

and in the morning
I arose and went down to the sea's rough edge
and I touched that edge where the night had touched it
and I remembered the sea dashing
dashing against the rocks.

Lyn Lifshin

Spiritual

Have you noticed anything about those who describe themselves or their writing or painting as spiritual? Do you cringe, as some might at the words “fuck” or “shit?” that, tho maybe crude, don’t offend me? The “spiritual” aren’t able to say them, out-loud at least. There’s something about the ones who say they are, like others who say they’re so glad they live in the north or south or east or west where people are lovelier, imply of course that you probably aren’t. I notice those who keep praising their spirituality say you don’t understand suggesting it is because you aren’t. But I notice these “spiritual” people often aren’t. Isn’t it phony to gush what a godly person you are and then dream a banishment room for your husband, care more about money you are making than about much else. When the spiritual gush, does your skin crawl too? Those Pollyannas you could never be, forget the mystical. And when they end their e mail with “life is good and it gets better every day if you think it is,” don’t you just want to go and take a bath?

Have You Ever Looked at an Old Diary

and thought that was who I was
at 15 and I still am? Forget
an idea that when you're
older, what tore you up then
won't, that you're not ever to
reminisce about the boys
so electric you put only
initials in a diary with a 50
cent lock, afraid the whole
name would scorch you?
Whoever said getting older
means anything but getting
older? Do you think I'll
toast wisdom or sense? Do
you really think there's
more and there's more that's
different? Look at your own
little apartment, your little,
little life and even if you've
won prizes—I've won some,
not the huge ones—but could
it be better, really different
than the few lines a diary the
old cover peals from, "went
to Morrisville and won 1st
prize" and all the exclamations.
Now, really is a yawn and is
ennui better than the litany
of boys who were dolls?
Or is it now you don't even
bother to look? And wouldn't
you like a day when the
big question is "I wonder if
I should pierce my ears?"

The Black Silk Skirt Falling

as if it was her,
something in her
leaving, stepping
out of her last
skin, chrysalis
about to be free
as the grackles
she watched those
last days. This
dream on the eve
of my mother's
birthday, there
was something in
the sound of her
skirt falling,
a pool blacker
than midnight
nothing was
reflected in. Then
the whoosh, the
wind of where
she was and then
wasn't. These days
of rain, as if to
wash her away.
Still, like the water
fall outside our
apartment window,
she tumbles like
a river, so loud and
close to me I
forget she
isn't

Richard Meyer

No Sanctuary

This January sky blue as June
doesn't move the sparrows.
They hunker down, little gargoyles
braced against the wind,
feather-puffed and patient,
doing gray penance
in a snow-stuccoed hedge.

Wendy Miles

On a Monday, What You May Have Known

The dark hollow throat of a bird
—caw-clack and pump of wings.

Mute tremor of the blue-tailed lizard
—its slash across the white swing.

The sagging heads of marigolds
bumped and bumped by the bee.

Or the trees, any of them, with their simple leaning,
lush ripple and heave in the wind.

If not trees, horses. One of them pulling
the quartered apple from your hand
—its muzzle like corduroy.

When you back away, you glimpse the wing
ground into gravel, quills fanned and severed.

Separated from belly and beak, the wing is a name,
an ache. You walk away

and you don't look back—the horse's coat like liquor,
the apple gone to juice in its throat.

And Your Childhood—What Was It Like?

I can tell you in dogs—
the brown-and-white beagle,
tumor at the neck, the one who buried my new pants
near the watermelons that never ripened.

In jars of canned tomatoes (the steam and grip).
In the old gold truck, my father's coveralls, guns,
harmonicas strewn on the dash.
(The metal-and-tractor-grease smell.)

I can tell you in green,
in dirt, in clods of red clay
and a rusted aqua swing set
that sliced my inner calf.

In potatoes—the white quartz rocks
I piled into pyramids at the end
of a tilled patch—the seed spreader
(its industry and ease).

In corn. My brother's shirts,
each sleeve cut for an arm cover
(to reach the ropy pods and twist,
the milky-sweet smell that clung).

In grass, in hay, and the green kitchen stove,
the big bed angled in the front room—theirs—
(if you stepped through the door).
I can tell you in weariness.

Wendy Miles

In black cattle plodding (dust motes rising).
In the gust of a train, its detonating blare.

And snow—once with a deep sheen of ice
I walked across, my father setting off
to open the store. It was *bread and gas*,
and *I'll stay if I have to*. My mother, silent, watching.

The Memories

The memories took it hard that year,
all the stars gleaming like that.
And the photographs—another insult.

Dolls tugged by armload from the basement.
The road to the dump riddled with potholes,
plastic arms pointing from the truck cab.

The memories just fingered their nylon hair,
pushed them in strollers, wheels whistling.

Abandoned memories clung to the window.
There was the father. There was the mother,
face streaked behind a roof of hands.

Anyone could have mistaken those memories
for rain the way they wept.

Old memories curled in the neck of a sweater and—
nostalgic, spinning the wheel of the toy motorcycle—
gazed at the steady light of the Easy-Bake oven.

One anxious memory scraped her back
slipping under the fence. There was
the loose, rusted nail. There was the mother.

Plump pinch of wasp and gasoline heat
to the bone. A wet cigar—sopping tobacco
drew out the sting. She asked

*Who would you want to live with,
me or him? I'm just asking you—who?*

It's thankless being a memory.

One Sunday-memory skulked
toward the old pink bedroom, slumped
on the bed, ran a hand across the spread.

After awhile the room might have been
almost a happy room. Her skinny legs.
Corduroys that matched her shirt.
There was her heartbeat thumping. There too
was the wood-grain wolf revealing itself
in the hollow veneer door across the hall.

So there was the eddy in the gut.
There was the darkness entering.

There were the stars being eaten.
There were the old cows lumbering.
There were the cats set with night vision.

There was the weight of a hand
light as—lighter than—a doll's.

Devon Miller-Duggan

Bone Poem

old bones
dry as a bone
bare bones
dinosaur bones
bone-weary
worn to the bone
dog without a bone
hambone
soupbone
marrow bone
bone-of-my-bone
bone of contention
fishbone
wishbone
funny bone
bonehead
no backbone
old bones
rattle bones
Mr. Bones
skin-and-bone
dem bones
known in your bones
bone-deep

Piero Paints the Leaves

There's gold falling on them, the leaves on all four kinds of
trees

Outside my study window. Any good morning light
Turns every single leaf into Danae's lap,
And sunlight pours itself right down through the canopy,
Leaves every leaf rich, rich, rich as a god's imagination.
Not Piero della Francesca's leaves, though.
They're broody things for all their wrought-iron laciness.
The lights along each fretted edge can barely hang there long
enough

To be remarked, and even then they slide away.
Piero's leaves spurt up and out from trees whose sole and
only purpose is

To hold the ground here long enough
So Christ may walk across it, stop, stare out at us—
Reproach and invitation twining through that gaze—
As if to say he plants his feet down here so hard
So earth can't fling itself away and lose the sky.
Therefore, Piero's leaves are heavier
And darker than the leaves my trees unfold.
Therefore, the green he paints them with is mineral —
Irgazine green—and fuses green with gold itself, at least the
color gold.

And yet, he knows before he chooses it, irgazine green
Comes off the brush and onto plaster transparent as the air.
He has to build each tree in
Green laid over green laid over green until its leaves grow
Dark enough to reach their edges toward the light.

Jed Myers

White Fire

The infant—near-bald peachy pate
half in shadow half in light,
in a room whose eastern wall's a plate
glass fresco of midmorning in the lake country—
lies on the carpeted floor in his one-piece
blue flannel uniform, zipped into the wet
and stench of instincts that will not abate

while he lives. He correlates
a hand's drift above him in space
with his vision. He blinks—the shape
and shade of his palm and fingers persist
against the white sky of the ceiling.
He prepares, while it appears he waits,
for the war that is always flickering

in the trees on the lake's far shore
to get here. Each dusk, through the glass
he sees the thousand small darknesses, crows,
flying in over the water to gather
in the high branches above the house—
no one else notices. His mother,
out of sight in the kitchen, stirs

the rice with its traces of iron and arsenic.
The quiet hiss of the pot, the fine pop
and gurgle of spittle that's trickled back
into his reflex-wired throat, the hum
of a mower crossing the neighbor's plot,
drone of the three mosquitoes and one

black fly inches from his dripping nose—

these, along with the burble of hunger
behind the shriveled umbilical stump under
the tight teeth of his zipper, whirl
and rumble of a march. How like the soft thump
and whisper of booted hordes approaching
the highland border! His bootied foot whomps
the floor—cadence of remote mortar fire.

How shall desire's tensions be discharged?
I kneel with a white cloth to wipe the sweet-
and-sour froth of spit-up milk off the pink
and the pigmentless lanugo of his cheek.
In the silver of his irises, that white fire
flashes, as in the trees across the water,
as the leaves, or swords, play the light.

Alfred Nicol

Cellar Snake

Since spring, I guess, we've shared the same address.
The snake's been living with us, more or less.
But we don't share a group mentality.
And we don't want him living here for free.

My slinking cat is equal to the task.
His eyes glow green behind a cobweb mask.
He can't be recognized when he appears
to occupants whose rent is in arrears.

The snake has got his tail between his legs.
In fact, he's got his legs between his tail—
He's got no knees to kneel on when he begs.
If the serpent's got a prayer, it's doomed to fail.

Already he's been turned back empty-handed.
Bent at an angle, cornered where he landed,
his shapely S is wrenched into an L.
But is the letter dead? It's hard to tell.

He seems to have a fatal bloody nose.
Beside him—clearer than you would suppose—
a little pool of liquid on the floor.
Too late, I think, to show him to the door.

I stand there doing nothing, like a god.
The cat can't wake his plaything with a prod
so he gets up and walks away. He's bored.
It's overrated, being overlord.

The Passional

The saints have got a sickly look.
As pale as death. Or paler.
He saw their pictures in a book
his aunt kept in her trailer.

He looked at St. Sebastian, caught
and tied up to a tree
with arrows in his neck. He thought,
There's the life for me.

He wanted to have wounds like that
and suffer for the Lord.
He tried to irritate the cat.
It hurt to be ignored.

Sometimes he stood outdoors at night
without mosquito spray.
It made him think he'd rather fight
a lion any day—

Some martyrs get their bellies torn
to pieces in arenas.
He broke a brambleberry thorn.
He held it near his penis.

It's not as easy as it seems
to get a chance to die
and prove you're not the kind that screams
and almost starts to cry.

He wouldn't make a lot of fuss.
He'd face the evil forces
unruffled as Hippolytus
yanked apart by horses.

Believe You Me

*"I cannot wrap my brain around
how different you are from me."*

"What difference? You make it sound
like crossing the Sargasso Sea
would take less effort than to find
where both of us are of one mind."

*"If there were only two of us
the crosswind wouldn't be as strong.
There's you and me to ferry, plus
the third you always bring along.
That's our Bermuda triangle.
We sink because the boat's too full.*

*My own decisions are my own.
I don't let others think for me.
I don't rely on the Unknown.
I take responsibility.
Before you act, you run it by
the great Commander in the sky."*

"For my part, I don't understand
why you should care what I believe.
One can't 'think freely' on demand.
Not every kind of faith's naive.
Whoever wants to see what is
has got to look past surfaces."

*"And let me guess how that is done.
Shutting your eyes to what is there,*

*you see—though you're the only one—
a world you conjure from thin air.
You don't perceive Reality.
You just see what you want to see."*

“Photographers will sometimes squint
to better read a value range.
I focus too, to catch a glint
of diamond-light that doesn't change
when most of what we're taking in
winds up in the recycling bin.”

*Oh, please! The things you're telling me
are even worse than I supposed.
I think this 'diamond-light' you see
when you have got your eyes half-closed
gets in through where your brain is cracked,
and that explains the way you act.*

You're making fun of what I said.
How do I act? Inform me, please.
*Like you've got tinfoil on your head
Tuned in to alien frequencies.*
All right, it sounds absurd to say...
But you believe it anyway.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

On Finding a Copy of *The Wellfleet Whale* in Wellfleet

*Master of the whale-roads,
let the white wings of the gulls
spread out their cover.
You have become like us,
disgraced and mortal.*

Stanley Kunitz

I hefted you in my hands,
sturdy friend,
traced the woven ropes
 stretched across your boards,
the black ink print
 three-inch square—
blue window to the sea—
 the curling waves,
the grounded ships,
 and two dead beasts
borne ashore.

I loved your narrow sorrow
 the lore of the local
announcing abroad,
 What happened here matters, and how,
your strange tale
 pulling me in,
helpless fish hung
 at the end of each line.

Like him

*You seemed to ask of us
not sympathy, or love,
or understanding,
but awe and wonder.*

I pressed you, a promise
 against my breast,
carried you down the cloister walk
 of the dusty book shop,
then set you down
 on the counter,
a place and a state,
 as something to come back to,
a wild prize
 not proper to be caught

until I saw the hand,
 your poet's mark,
blue news inked across the page,
 the *Master of the whale-roads*
already gone the way
 of his own Wellfleet Whale—

you his song,
 his signature and sign,
disgraced and mortal,
 and mine.

The Song of Things

Making use of the useless—a beauty we have less than not deserved.

Wendell Berry

The feather shed (its bird fled)
dropped on an old stone
dislodged from the wall (hence its fall)
calls its owner home.

The bottle cap, the fabric scrap,
pieces good and small,
ghost their missing counterparts
each adumbrating all.

Nail clippings, lipstick tubes,
pens empty of their ink,
the chipped coffee mug
in the brown-stained sink.

Veronica Reilly

India's Best Kept Secret

We are hurtling along the Highest Motorable Road in the World in a beat-up Jeep. The young Ladakhi driver, who seemed so kind and friendly back in the capital city, Leh, is clearly mad. He swings around blind hairpin turns on this single lane road carved out of a mountainside without the customary horn blaring. The almost continuous use of the horn is the way that people drive on these one-lane mountain roads in the high Himalaya without having frequent head-on collisions. Our driver likes the aspect of Himalayan driving custom that requires hurtling along at preposterous speeds, but does not accompany this reckless behavior with anywhere near the requisite amount of horn usage. Himank, the road's authority here, has even painted large signs black letters against a yellow background, on the bare rock walls above us that read, "Horn please."

Immediately to my left and thousands of feet below lies the rocky brown bottom of a ravine. There are only intermittent guardrails. I try to imagine that the window overlooking the precipice is actually a television screen. I breathe deeply and try to let go of my attachment to life. We are among Buddhists, after all. Perhaps our driver gains his cavalier attitude from a firm belief in reincarnation, a belief that I don't share, although I am suddenly reevaluating the possibility.

The beginning of the trip, several hours ago, was jocular, and the five of us, thrown together for just a few days, introduced ourselves. Michael, a heavysset, balding, ever-cheerful Brit, had been the first person to answer the ad I left at the Instyle German Bakery in Leh, requesting travel partners for a jaunt to the remote Nubra Valley. I couldn't afford

the Jeep on my own, and the infrequent bus didn't fit into my other travel plans, so I posted the ad. Soon Samara, a tall, confident Israeli woman in her thirties, and Helga, a rather remote Swiss woman in her fifties, phoned my guest-house. We all met at a travel agency, and a day later we were on the road to the Nubra Valley.

Now we all lapse into silence, partially brought on by terror.

"Well, if we survive, it should be a fantastic view," Michael says suddenly, after a particularly harrowing turn. We were only yards from a head-on collision with an army transport.

"It's not very funny, Michael. We really could die," Helga says in a clipped Swiss German accent. Silence reigns again. Helga is not the life of the party.

Gradually, miraculously, without one single head-on collision, we wind our way up to the Khardung La pass, the entrance to the Nubra Valley in Ladakh, India. There is a military checkpoint here on the rooftop of the world. While the crazy driver takes our permits and passports to be checked by the Indian Army guys with the big guns, we get out of the cramped Jeep to stretch. Unfortunately, the World's Highest Motorable Pass has been littered with discarded oil drums and heaps of rotting prayer flags.

Spread below us is a view of China and Pakistan, with the tiny finger of India that is the Nubra Valley stuck delicately up the middle. Michael points out the second highest mountain in the world, K-2, over in Pakistan. After a while our driver is still not back, so we visit a small shrine. It is a tiny wooden building full of pictures of every sort of religious teacher imaginable. A candle is burning. I suspect that the army guys are not responsible for this, but begin to wonder, because there does not appear to be anyone else around to take care of the shrine.

Samara has a headache. This is hardly surprising at an altitude of exactly 18,380 feet, as a yellow and black

Himank sign informs us. This is around the same altitude as Everest base camp. We began the day in Ladakh's capital city, Leh, which is at an altitude of about 11,000 feet. Our rapid ascent, 7,000 feet in a matter of hours, is about twice the maximum recommended ascent for one full day, and it has not given us time to acclimate. There is no other option when you travel on the Highest Motorable Road in the World, because there is nowhere to stay between the outskirts of Leh on one side of the pass and the Nubra Valley on the other side. As it is, Samara will just have to hope her headache dissipates when we rapidly descend into the valley below us.

I cannot believe that I am not dreaming. Coming into this place from the pass is like finding a hidden fertile valley on the moon. The floor of the valley is brilliant green, in sharp contrast to the many browns of the mountainsides and their snow-capped white peaks. The sky is a brilliant blue with wispy white clouds. It almost never rains here. All the houses are made of mud brick, and the crops are irrigated with glacial streams that flow down from the tops of the imposing snow-capped mountains that are ever-present in Ladakh.

When we arrive in Diskit, our destination for the day, it is late afternoon, and the main guesthouse in town is full. Helga and Samara take the last available room. Our driver confers with the guesthouse proprietor in Ladakhi and then takes Michael and me to a small white house. We go through a lopsided gate that protects the vegetable garden and into the kitchen.

A small woman in a colorfully embroidered black robe greets us. This is her home, and she lets out a few rooms when there is some demand. It is unclear to me if these are usually rooms that her family members use and she is just doing us a favor, or if she usually lets them out. Michael and I take a room with two twin beds. The sheets are fairly fresh and have colorful flower patterns on them. I

imagine two young girls telling secrets in the dark on a cold winter's night, long after the tourists are gone. We drop our bags on the floor, discuss the price of the room and what we want for breakfast with our hostess, meet her cheerful young son who tries out his English on us, and set off for the nearby town of Hunder in the Jeep.

* * *

At 4 a.m. we find out that our guesthouse is right next to the mosque. A small percentage of Ladakhis are Muslim. Although there are not Muslims in every village, there must be quite a few here in Diskit, based on the intense volume of the call to prayer. After the muezzin finishes rousing the faithful, I fall back to sleep for a few more hours. When the sun rises, we get up and have breakfast. I drink the sweet Indian-style milk tea with spices and nibble on some delicious homemade biscuits. Our hostess cooks these fresh for us in her wood-burning stove. We meet a young Frenchman who came to Diskit by the local bus. We ask him if he has seen any of the camels in the dunes, since he has been here a few days, but he has not. We wonder aloud if the camels really exist, but our hostess assures us that they do.

“Good morning,” her young son says, appearing from the back of the house, ready for school.

“Good morning,” we all say.

“Where are you from?” he asks us, just as he did yesterday afternoon.

“America,” I say.

“Britain,” Michael says.

“You have already asked me that, every day,” the French guy says.

The boy grabs a biscuit, having exhausted what is apparently his entire stock of English on us, and races out the door to school.

We ask our hostess about the wintertime in the valley. She speaks very good English and tells us that it is difficult to get out in the winter, but usually the family hitches a ride

on an army convoy before the snow has completely blocked the pass. They fly to Delhi from Leh, using the proceeds from the room rentals, and then they spend a few months going on pilgrimages to Buddhist sacred sites. In the same way, with tourist money, she has sent several of her children to school in Delhi and Jammu.

“Do you think they’ll come back to live here?” I ask her.

“No, they like the city life. They want to get good job, live in Delhi, maybe Leh,” she says, sighing. “No one to help with the farm now. I don’t know who will take care of the farm many years from now.”

* * *

Today we drive to Sumur, where we stop at the Stakray Guest House. Samara and Helga stick around long enough to secure a room, and then they leave for the hot springs to the north for the afternoon. Once again, Michael and I are left without lodgings. The owner of the guesthouse, a very cheerful man in his late forties, who is also the headman of the village, offers to let us stay in one of the eating rooms. We will have to sleep head to toe, or perhaps toe to toe, on carpets over thin cushions along the wall. This is a typical Ladakhi- or Tibetan-style set-up, and the mats are often used both as seats and beds, especially in the winter when everyone wants to sleep around the stove. We agree. Nothing seems nearly as serious now that I have gotten over my attachment to life, thanks to our insane Jeep driver. Not that I don’t treasure every minute, since I could easily die on the road back tomorrow. I accept this and the room-less sleeping mat situation with equanimity, and Michael and I set off in search of a famous local monastery, the Samstem Ling Gompa, on foot.

It is much faster, the headman tells us, to take the footpath up through the village rather than the road. This is the first large Ladakhi village I have walked around. Small dirt paths intersect with the irrigation streams at regular

intervals. There are many orchards and small fields of wheat and barley. High mud walls, built mainly to keep the animals in at night, surround the houses. The paths seem almost like a walled maze in the densely populated areas.

There are many intersections, and we stop frequently to ask for directions. Most people recognize the words “Samstem Ling Gompa” and point in one direction or another. Every few minutes we run into someone on the path, and we notice, for the first time since arriving in Ladakh, that people almost invariably raise their hand so that their thumb is on a level with their forehead, and their fingers are together and say “Joo-lay” whenever we walk past. While asking a young woman with a basket full of sticks on her back for directions, we also ask her about the hand-Joo-lay thing. “It’s just like hello,” she says. “Or good-bye, or how are you, or thank you,” she adds.

“So what do we say in return?” Michael asks.

“Just say ‘Joo-lay,’” she smiles.

“Thanks,” we say.

“Joo-lay,” she says, raising her hand to her forehead, and we part ways.

* * *

After about an hour, mostly uphill, we arrive at the Samstem Ling Gompa. The courtyard is covered in intricate sand paintings. We walk around them, examining them from various angles. A monk appears while we are doing this. A couple of German tourists also show up.

“You want to see Buddha?” the monk asks.

A bit perplexed, we agree to see Buddha.

“Moment, please,” the young monk says. He is dressed in a maroon robe like all monks in Ladakh, who follow the traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, and his head is shaved almost completely bald.

He reappears in a minute with a key chain and gestures for us to follow him farther into the large monastery complex. We go up a rickety wooden staircase, and he

unlocks a large, ornately carved wooden door. He slips off his sandals and waits while we unlace our dusty boots. Then, we enter a large shrine, with a golden statue of the Buddha and some beautiful, old Thangkas, traditional Tibetan Buddhist religious paintings on cloth, hanging along the walls. The smell of incense lies heavy in the air, and the monk lights a new stick. There is a small plate for donations below the altar of the Buddha. We leave rupee notes on the plate. I feel it is especially wise to leave a small donation for the Buddha now, since he is the only religious figure I will have contact with before the drive back tomorrow.

The monk is standing by the door, with his eyes half-closed.

“Okay?” he asks as we move past him toward our shoes.

“Thank you,” we say.

“Do you think this is an appropriate situation to use Joo-lay in?” Michael asks me under his breath while we are putting our shoes on.

“I don’t know,” I whisper back.

The monk smiles at us.

When we get back down to the courtyard, it seems very bright.

Another monk, older than the first, comes out of a low building to the right of the entrance. “Welcome to our monastery,” he says loudly, beaming at us.

“Joo-lay,” Michael says.

“Hello,” the rest of us say.

“Would you like some tea?” the monk asks us.

We all agree to have some tea and follow both of the monks into the low building, which turns out to be a big kitchen. We sit on carpets around the edge of the room. A few other monks, including one who is clearly the cook, are sitting around in the kitchen. Things are cooking in big pots on the stove. I realize that it isn’t a wood-burning stove at all. Every now and then the monks are feeding what looks like large, dried pats of mud into it.

“What is that?” I finally ask the cook.

The young monk answers instead, “From the yak.”

Of course, dried yak dung! This is the fuel source of the high Himalaya. Hardly any trees grow up here, and the ones that do grow are cultivated to produce fruit. I’m not sure how I feel about this morning’s biscuits now.

Soon steaming hot cups of milk tea are served to us. The monks speak very little English, but we get involved in a discussion about the dunes between Diskit and Hunder. The fact that all of us, monks and tourists alike, have visited the dunes has been communicated, but now Michael and I want to convey our disappointment about not seeing any of the wild camels. The main problem here is the word *camel*, which meets blank stares, as does the more obscure word *dromedary*.

“You know,” Michael says, reaching around to hit himself on the back and then drawing two hills in the air, “Camel.”

The monks look at each other, converse briefly in Ladakhi, and shake their heads.

“Don’t know,” the one who invited us to tea says. We all sit for a minute, sipping our tea. Then one of the Germans draws a crude two-humped camel in the dirt of the floor. The monks gaze at it for a moment, then smile and nod vigorously. They point at it and say a word that clearly means camel in Ladakhi.

“We know this word; how do you say in English?” the cook asks.

“Camel,” Michael says.

“Camel,” they all repeat, laughing.

“In Hunder,” Michael points in a direction that may or may not be toward Hunder, “No camels.” He makes a sad face.

“Yes, there are camel,” the young monk tells us.

“Yes, yes,” I say, “but we can’t see them.”

“Ah, too bad,” the monks commiserate.

We try to finish our tea. Whenever we are close, the oldest monk, without asking, deftly fills our cup. Our protests do not affect him. Finally, one after the other, we put our hands over the tops of the cups. The Germans begin speaking in German. After a few minutes, they say, "Okay, we must go now."

"We should get going too," Michael says.

We say good-bye to the monks both by bowing and by raising our hands to our foreheads and cheerfully saying Joo-lay. They respond in kind, and we are off, back through the streams and tempting orchards. It strikes me that it is a bit like Eden here. There are even apple trees, with the most delicious apples. Michael's presence in Eden would have obviated the need for a serpent. I feel guilty when he stops to pick the tiny apples. They are tart and delicious.

* * *

In the evening a group of us from the guesthouse, at the prodding of our host, take flashlights and wend our way through a maze of streams and paths to a village festival. Homemade barley wine, called chang, fresh apples and dried apricots all flow freely. At least a hundred people are here, and the elders are dressed regally. The women are most impressive, and their appearance echoes old photos I have seen of Native Americans. They wear black cloth headpieces with long flaps that come down to their waists, and these are covered in pieces of turquoise. They also wear long black elaborately embroidered robes and handwoven shawls. Their felt shoes look positively elven, with long pointed toes that curl up at the end.

Everyone sits in a large circle, drinking chang out of tin cups, and people take turns in the center singing traditional songs and dancing. A few drummers keep the beat. We join the circle and accept mugs of chang from a friendly, middle-aged woman. Five young boys come and sit behind us. They giggle and tap our shoulders.

"Hello," some of us say. I still can't get used to using Joo-lay.

“Hello, hello,” the boys say, giggling some more. They offer us apricots warmed in their clenched fists. As soon as we accept them, they run away.

I think alcohol hits you harder at a high altitude, or maybe the chang was just strong. During a long, slow circle dance, almost like a conga line in slow motion, but with intricate, shuffling steps, somebody gets the idea that the tourists should join in. Some of the people from the guest-house laugh it off; but a bunch of us, maybe ten people, join in to claps and shouts of what I hope is approval. I’m behind an older Ladakhi man in a long brown robe. Most of the older men are wearing a robe like this in a shade of brown. I shuffle around the circle, trying to keep the slow, strange rhythm. The effect of the monotonous music, repetitive movement, and alcohol is hypnotic. Except for the Western-style clothing of the tourists and some young Ladakhis, this celebration could be taking place any time in at least the past thousand years. Time stops on the rooftop of the world, and we all keep dancing.

* * *

Time starts up again the next morning. We have to leave after breakfast, to make it back over the pass before dark, and Samara decides that she wants to stay in paradise until her permit expires. Jacob, a young Israeli photographer who came in by bus, replaces her.

The ride back seems to take less than half the time that the ride over the pass took. We are saying good-bye to one of the most remote places in the world, a place that we will probably never visit again. I am suddenly so jealous of the people who live here. The people who don’t need a special one-week permit to come and go from this place.

We have already seen K-2, and the shrine, and the abandoned oil drums on the top of the world, so we mill around, and Jacob takes photos with a polarized lens while our permits are checked.

Michael and Jacob and I sit in the back most of the

time, talking about everything under the sun, while Helga sits silently in the front. Every so often she says to the driver, who is blaring Indian dance music, “Could you turn it down please?” Each time he smiles, nods, and fiddles ineffectually with some dials. The volume never changes one bit.

I don’t even notice if he is using the horn.

J. Stephen Rhodes**Economics**

The first mornings of my first job I see
 how different our white brick house is from theirs—
 rundown porches that dangle broken stairs
 onto Nelson Street and Techwood. While we
 drive to my father's business each day,
 I look at him and ask myself what deal
 is involved, what unwritten principle.
 A click of the tongue is all he might say.
 Neither of us look at the other, his hand
 on the wheel, mine in my lap. Outside, men
 pass a brown paper bag, an omen
 of unsteady peace we can't understand,
 a sign of our unequal station.
 Neither of us is up to the question.

Neither of us is up to the question,
 so we plunge into the day and dismiss
 the gap between home and work—stickiness—
 as if closing your eyes makes you virgin
 again. My father strides to his glass walls
 while I slip to the stockroom where Roger
 is bragging about his night with a whore
 eating bananas while he was in thrall,
 to the Monday morning joy of Leslie,
 Oscar, and Jack, my new-appointed clan,
 who have now pronounced that I am *the man*,
 at thirteen—*boss's* son, crowned easily.
 The black patriarch calls me Mr. Steve,
 a status I don't know how to receive.

A status I don't know how to receive
becomes a mystery I can't comprehend
each week—an envelope of bills I spend
as I wish, suddenly off childhood's leash,
without rent to pay, or loan sharks. No boss,
at least that I can discern or admit,
except for my father, whose face is split,
Picasso-like, between grim and serious.
I can buy whatever I want. Nothing
like the late bus, landlords I hear about,
broken teeth and cars, currencies of doubt.
In my calculus, dread comes from dreaming
not a lack. Having much is the riddle,
unlike that of my new friends' too little.

Unlike that of my new friends' too little,
my job is designed as a teaching game
in my dad's economics, with the aim
of showing me ropes, firming my mettle,
and enshrining in my mind the dollar—
its girth, its weight, and sacramental
meaning, being a holy, visible
sign of invisible worth. My father
explains: A one-spot is not real, but rather
the market's homage to a person's trust,
a show of faith that societies must
have for people to survive together.
While my father rarely expresses zeal,
the greenback shines bright for what is most real.

The greenback shines bright for what is most real—
a balance of trade, a quid for each quo,
he says, though I see we can come and go,
where Jack and Oscar can't. Something's unequal
about the scales, making the caustic grace
for the boss's son less blessing than curse.
My new friends become my nighttime's new ghosts:

The patriarch plants a smile on his face
 in an economy of polite lies
 I have no clue for how to navigate.
 I do my dance, sing along with my fate,
 listening to discordant melodies,
 one foot in our red-shuttered, white brick home,
 one foot in what I'm programmed to become.

One foot in what I'm programmed to become,
 I divide into the stockroom bat boy
 and—learning from peers—trash-talking bad boy.
 The fresh-faced kid flies away with no home,
 that part of me like cardboard planes I cut
 from stock and launch out the warehouse window.
You're a tough age, my father says. *You'll grow
 past this*, as if I could keep my eyes shut
 some day. I wonder what he himself sees
 driving to work, or in a stockroom face.
 He looks like he's longing for a safe place
 so much that he watches his employees
 with one eye, the other on the future,
 his job in life to see the big picture.

His job in life to see the big picture
 means he lives ahead of the rest of us,
 loses sleep, carries his worries close—
 spends weekends over his calculator.
 To me he is a silent mystery
 when we drive home with the radio off.
 Unasked questions bounce off the Chevy's roof.
 It's pointless to press my inquiry
 too far, since to untie even one knot
 might unravel the underlying net
 that, holding our family up, won't let
 us loose without our house falling apart.
 Silence seems the best way to live safely
 the first mornings of my first job, I see.

Steven P. Schneider

Indolence in South Texas

All afternoon on a warm December day
Three red-eared sliders

Hug the floating log on curlew pond,
Basking in the sunlight

After days
Of cold rain and fog.

Unwilling to budge,
Their necks outstretched,

They soak in as much sun
As the day will offer,

Much like Winter Texans
Reclining in lounge chairs

Outside their RV's,
Content to think of nothing at all.

Robert B. Shaw

On the Death of Wilmer Mills

This bruise discoloring my upper arm
came, as most of them do, quite by surprise,
bumping into a post or someone's elbow.
The run-in shows itself beneath the skin,
the busy lymph collected in a pond
of beige and gray, paling to feathered edges.
It pays witness to the world's buffetings,
and at a touch recalls its birth in pain.

Just so with this imponderable event.
Decades too soon, disheartening to grasp,
your death has put its mark upon the mind,
a thought that lingers, waking to itself
with each recurrent impact of your absence,
a pain unfinished now that yours is finished.

Two Villanelles

(Plus a Couple More)

I

For poets writing in English, certain imported verse forms are tantalizing challenges that more often than not become pretexts for embarrassment. Except for the thoroughly domesticated sonnet, forms deriving from Italian and French have gained only a tentative foothold in our poetry. Triolets and rondeaus are scarce enough to be viewed as stunts. The vogue for the sestina, noticeable in the late twentieth century, has somewhat subsided, retreating into the MFA workshops that gave it much of its impetus. The villanelle is in a somewhat similar condition. As with the sestina, the ratio of successful to unsuccessful examples is dispiriting.

For those averse to symmetry and impatient with predetermined structures, the villanelle must be a nightmare; even those favorably disposed toward such things may find reading an uninspired example irritating in the extreme. And there is more than one way for these poems to be irritating. They may do it by wandering too wide of the rules of the form, and they may do it by sticking to the rules too closely. An academically correct villanelle may be dexterous in fielding its rhymes and refrains, but that does not guarantee it to be a poem anyone would read twice. A blatantly incorrect one may lead readers to wonder why the form was chosen in the first place, if it was to be so notably disregarded. Rhyme no doubt poses a problem for such pieces in English: a nineteen-line poem is long for the two rhyme-sounds required. But the two refrain lines—spawned in stanza ¹ and alternated stanza by stanza until they join at the close—are more

severely challenging. If they are repeated exactly, and as frequently as the form dictates, they comprise 42 percent of the poem, and it is easy to see in this fact a difficulty for forward movement. It is no accident that the movement of thought in most villanelles is distinctly circular, persistent in returning to an initial premise. The repetitions have been described as hypnotic, but less susceptible readers may find them deadening. Making the repetitions meaningful, not merely perfunctory, is the goal in a strict use of the form. In freer adaptations, the task is to make deviations from the form justify themselves as something more than self-indulgent corner-cutting.

Before coming to the two poems with which this essay is chiefly concerned, I am going to digress briefly, to give a nod to two modern examples that neatly illustrate this dilemma. Dylan Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night" is probably the most often anthologized villanelle of the twentieth century. If you want a villanelle that exactly follows the rules, this one does it. It does it, though, by spinning out verbiage that is at best flimsily supported by thought and feeling.

Do not go gentle into that good night,
 Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,
 Because their words had forked no lightning they
 Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright
 Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,
 Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,
 And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,
 Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.¹

The more I revisit this poem, the more distasteful I find it. Even more offputting than the juiced-up rhetoric of the piece is the spectacle it presents, of the poet presuming to stage-manage his father's deathbed scene when the old man almost certainly would prefer to do it his own way. The perfect, ritualized repetitions suit the windiness of the piece, and to this reader they bespeak an attitude that is emotionally exploitative and morally obtuse.

Many modern and contemporary poets take liberties with the form, as I have noted. Theodore Roethke's late poem "The Right Thing" can serve as a handy example of what I would call a diluted, or half-hearted villanelle.

Let others probe the mystery if they can.
Time-harried prisoners of *Shall* and *Will*—
The right thing happens to the happy man.

The bird flies out, the bird flies back again;
The hill becomes the valley, and is still;
Let others delve that mystery if they can.

God bless the roots!—Body and soul are one!
The small becomes the great, the great the small;
The right thing happens to the happy man.

Child of the dark, he can out leap the sun,
His being single and that being all;
The right thing happens to the happy man.

Or he sits still, a solid figure when
 The self-destructive shake the common wall;
 Takes to himself what mystery he can,

And, praising change as the slow night comes on,
 Wills what he would, surrendering his will
 Till mystery is no more: No more he can.
 The right thing happens to the happy man.²

The form here is discernible, but Roethke's deviations are both plentiful and haphazard; and one is not persuaded that there was much purpose in his engaging the verse form at all, given that the patterns of refrain and rhyme on which it depends are so negligently treated. The vaporous nature-mysticism of the piece seems to have relaxed the poet's grasp of design to the point of laziness.

It is against extremes like this—on the one hand a rigidly carpentered framework hollow at the core, on the other a spongy, meandering approximation of the formal paradigm—that I wish to exhibit the two villanelles that I will now turn to.

II

Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art" (1976), which aside from Thomas's poem is probably the most famous villanelle of our time, is an example of the freer sort. Like many twentieth-century villanelles, this one takes liberties by pairing rhyme with half-rhyme and by varying the phrasing of the refrains:

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
 so many things seem filled with the intent
 to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
 of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.

The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (*Write it!*) like disaster.³

The formal deviations here are carefully judged: Bishop is visibly bending the form, but only a precisian would grumble that she is breaking it. Moreover, each particular departure from form is supported by its thematic function. "Fluster" calls attention to itself and thereby suggests a whole range of feelings of embarrassment, inadequacy, self-accusation. "Gesture," by representing only a tenuous sound-link with the other rhyme-words, suggests how fleeting, how easily lost this particular item is, as it strains to hold its place in the catalogue. In general, the feminine rhymes afford Bishop expressive opportunities. Together with frequent enjambment, they help to sustain the flow and the tone, which are kept casual and conversational.

The end word of the second refrain, "disaster," brilliantly reflects the emotional tension of the piece. It is a striking enough word to serve the function of a refrain even when the phrasing in the lines it appears in alters markedly

each time. And in thematic and tonal terms, it encapsulates the paradox of Bishop's presentation, in which an edgy, perhaps desperate humor contends with perceptions that are anything but humorous. A mosaic rhyme like "last, or" in line 10 would be at home in a piece of light verse. And "disaster" is a word whose usage in conversation is often trivializing: "My hair is a disaster," "This pie is a disaster," etc. Or its actual meaning is kept at a comforting distance: when we say, as Bishop does in line 3, that something is "no disaster," we are enjoying the assurance that real disasters happen in other places to other people. Only in Bishop's final use of the word, as the last word of the poem, does it disclose its true and dire meaning, and in doing so it epitomizes the darkening of the poet's outlook, and her faltering resistance to that.

In an appendix to her selection of Bishop's unfinished poems, Alice Quinn presented the sixteen drafts, manuscript and typescript, of "One Art" in facsimile. (Elsewhere in the book, interestingly, Quinn offers the opinion that the villanelle form was one that Bishop "apparently instinctively associated with catastrophe.")⁴ The drafts are revealing in a number of respects. Draft 1 is an unmetred, even sprawling *cri de coeur*, an unwieldy catalogue of the speaker's losses. The word "disaster" does not appear. At the bottom of the typewritten text Bishop has written by hand the rhyme-and-refrain scheme of a villanelle. In Draft 2 (as in all subsequent ones) the poem is a villanelle-in-progress, and the refrain words "master" and "disaster" are firmly in place. She knew, early on, what the last word of the poem would be.

Bishop's crimped and diffident handwriting is sometimes hard to make out, but it is clear that one thing she had to work at determinedly was mastery of her persona's tone—the gradually disintegrating nonchalance of it. The insistently casual title "One Art" first appears in the next-to-final draft. Tonal control was crucial, one imagines, for enabling the

startling effect of stifled emotion at the end. One remarkable thing about the poem is that, although it would appear to draw a good deal of dramatic power from its conclusion, it is not clear that anything has been concluded. While Bishop's catalogue of losses is arranged to give the piece forward momentum, the recurrent appearance of "disaster" works against this. The repeated word almost certainly stands out more in Bishop's ostensibly casual treatment than it would in a refrain line duly repeated word for word. In the punctual cropping up of this rhyme word the fundamental circularity of the villanelle form maintains its overriding force. The last stanza subverts the speaker's wishful thinking, making it obvious (to the reader, at least) that there is one kind of loss that is absolute and thus truly disastrous: the death of a loved one. And yet in the final line the speaker continues to fight against recognition of this bleak truth, as her startling parenthetical exhortation makes clear. The debate within the self is not ended—or is ended only in the sense that it reaches here a new plateau of pain, and of painful self-disclosure.

The poem is one of Bishop's more autobiographical ones, written after the death of her Brazilian lover and the end of her residence in Brazil after many years. It harks back as well to earlier losses that were by no means casual. "I lost my mother's watch" may simply state a fact, but it serves as a metonymy for the loss of the mother herself—institutionalized throughout most of Elizabeth's childhood and young adulthood, unable to "watch" over her daughter. One must acknowledge that some commentators, focusing on Bishop's curious manipulation of verb tenses in her last stanza, believe that at the end she is not dwelling on a loss already suffered but one fearfully anticipated. Yet the lines seem Janus-faced. Bishop's drifting from her earlier past tenses by means of a participle into the present and finally the future perfect defies any rigid sense of chronology. Her "Even losing you . . . I shan't have lied" might mean, "Even contemplating the fact of my loss of you, what I have been saying

remains true.” Or, in equally plausible paraphrase, it might mean, “Even contemplating the likelihood that I will lose you, what I have been saying remains true.” The important point here is that this loss, whether bygone or prospective, is felt as something *present*, and as so disturbing that the final line of the poem can hardly manage to complete itself.

Bishop was no Confessionalist. Pleasures and sorrows are more often alluded to than directly invoked in her work; they subsist beneath the surface of her descriptions, whether these are realistic depictions or surrealist fantasies. It is a common perception that an exacting poetic form may provide an appropriate channel for unruly emotions. Certainly the villanelle as Bishop uses it enacts a tug of war between a refined esthetic enterprise and a gratingly raw set of feelings. The astutely measured rule-bending of her poem keeps these tensions continuously on display.

III

Bishop’s is not the only villanelle to explore the theme of loss. Catherine Davis, a poet nearly as obscure as Bishop is famous, published “After a Time” in 1957, nineteen years before “One Art” appeared in print. Davis’s strategy for confronting the villanelle’s demands is different, but no less daring: rather than revising the rules, she follows them unflinchingly:

After a time, all losses are the same.
 One more thing lost is one thing less to lose;
 And we go stripped at last the way we came.

Though we shall probe, time and again, our shame,
 Who lack the wit to keep or to refuse,
 After a time, all losses are the same.

No wit, no luck can beat a losing game;

Good fortune is a reassuring ruse:
And we go stripped at last the way we came.

Rage as we will for what we think to claim,
Nothing so much as this bare thought subdues:
After a time, all losses are the same.

The sense of treachery—the want, the blame—
Goes in the end, whether or not we choose,
And we go stripped at last the way we came.

So we, who would go raging, will go tame
When what we have we can no longer use:
After a time, all losses are the same;
And we go stripped at last the way we came.⁵

While many recent poets have, like Bishop, found it in their interest to muffle the hammering-home effect of the refrains, here that insistence is of the essence. Each repetition drives another nail into the coffin as the poem pursues its inexorable course. Rather than struggle against the circularity of the form, Davis relies upon it as her chief source of rhetorical power.

Bishop's mode, as argued above, is dramatic: colloquy that stands revealed as interior debate at the end. Davis's mode is not dramatic but meditative. She does not spend any time cajoling or persuading, because the poem's assertions are disquietingly indisputable. The voice in the poem gives no suggestion of a particular *character*, with door keys or more vital things to lose. It is impersonal because what it says is not an individual's epiphany but a truth applicable to all. The speaker might be an oracle expounding the world view of Classical Stoicism. But the wisdom offered is compatible with other traditions. Reading "And we go stripped at last the way we came," we are likely to remember Job's acknowledgment: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb,

and naked shall I return thither.” The Burial Service in the Book of Common Prayer is in agreement: “We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we carry nothing out.”

For contemporary Americans, living in the most acquisitive society in history, these are hard sayings. People’s knowledge at some level of consciousness that they can’t take it with them rarely affects their rates of accumulation and consumption. Inevitability is not something modern western civilization is happy to accept. This may explain the popularity of that other mid-twentieth-century villanelle, Thomas’s “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.” Thomas’s refrain line, in which he exhorts his dying father to “Rage, rage against the dying of the light,” offers the kind of heroic posturing that is bound to be appealing: sonorous, oratorical heat to ward off the chill of reality. Davis knows how futile such “rage” is. “Rage as we will,” she says, it will not change the outcome. “So we, who would go raging, will go tame / When what we have we can no longer use.” Reading her poem immediately after Thomas’s, moving from the orotund to the austere, is a distinctly sobering experience. Numerous readers, of course, have found Thomas’s poem uplifting, but a contrast with Davis’s “After a Time” prompts one to suspect that a lot of that uplift has been furnished by hot air.

When she wrote, “No wit, no luck, can beat a losing game,” Davis was sharing what her life had taught her.⁶ She was so plagued by misfortune that it is no surprise that she published relatively few poems; rather, it is surprising that she was able to complete as many as she did. In some respects her story uncannily parallels that of Elizabeth Bishop, but in a few crucial ones it differs. Both poets were bereft of parents, and both suffered from alcoholism, depression, and physical disabilities (Davis’s left side was partially crippled, and Bishop contended with life-threatening asthma). Both were lesbians at a time when there was much social hostility toward their preference. Both were in many

respects rootless and peripatetic. As poets, both were formalists, Davis in an exacting, Bishop in a more relaxed fashion. The differences, though, are striking. Davis's career was largely derailed by the time she reached middle age. Encouraged by Yvor Winters, with whom she studied, she published her poetry in some highly selective magazines and anthologies, but collections of her work were limited to a few small-press chapbooks, some of which she printed herself. Bishop, although she published far less than many of her contemporaries, had won great acclaim by the time of her sudden death in 1979, and her reputation has if anything increased in luster since then. Davis, younger than Bishop by thirteen years, died destitute and intestate in a nursing home in 2002, and her work has yet to emerge from obscurity. Publishers, fearing the claims of as yet unidentified heirs (who are probably non-existent) have so far declined to risk publishing a book of her poems. "Orphaned works," the term used by copyright lawyers, seems in this case wrenchingly apt.

The chief difference between the two poets, stated baldly, is that Bishop had something of a safety net while Davis had none. Bishop was, in the absence of parents, raised by caring relatives; an inheritance paid for her education at Vassar and for most of her life shielded her from having to work for a living. Davis was radically alone from an early age. Her father deserted the family when she was very young. When her mother discovered her lesbianism, she drove Catherine (then sixteen) to a railroad station and never saw or spoke to her again. Always living hand-to-mouth, Davis worked her way through college in sporadic bouts at a number of schools, finally receiving her B.A. from George Washington University at the age of thirty-seven. By all accounts, life did not improve much for her thereafter, and the present fiasco of the copyright dispute that keeps her poems in limbo seems a particularly depressing piece of posthumous bad luck.

There is not much point in comparing the misfortunes of poets (no point at all, if Davis's first refrain is accurate). Comparing the poems in which they responded to their adversities, though, is a matter of some interest. In this case, the similarity of subject matter in the two villanelles draws attention to the variance in technique and tone. Both poets exploit the circularity of the form, Bishop by ostensibly evading it, Davis by preemptively embracing it. Bishop's lines gather heat as they go along; by the end of Davis's poem, though, we may feel plunged in dry ice. In regard to tone and formal requirements, Bishop's expansive approach could be called Romantic; Davis's tenaciously observant performance could be called Classical. Davis's mentor, Yvor Winters, was often preoccupied with *ranking* poems, and it is easy enough to guess how he would have ranked these. For some readers, though, the choice may not be easy. Speaking for myself, I find that my preference between the two pieces shifts according to my disposition. Both poems are considerable technical achievements, but in each case, on certain days, in certain moods, the ability to feel in tune with the sensibility it expresses stays beyond reach. And in both cases the message, if fully absorbed, leaves an ache.

IV

Davis's use of the word "rage" makes it evident that she was in part responding to Dylan Thomas's villanelle as she wrote. Is it possible that Davis's villanelle is in some sense a source, or at least an impetus, for Bishop's later one? The 1957 anthology in which "After a Time" and a few other poems by Davis appeared, *New Poets of England and America*, edited by Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson, was widely distributed and discussed at the time.⁷ It is exactly the sort of book to which Bishop, living in Brazil, might well have turned to keep up with current poetry in English. Robert Lowell mentioned the anthology to her

in a letter of October 25, 1957.⁸ No mention of this book or of Davis, however, appears in Bishop's published correspondence, and hence her familiarity with either remains a surmise. As surmises go, however, this one seems unusually plausible. The categories "loss" and "villanelle" could easily have linked and lingered in Bishop's mind after her conscious memory of Davis's poems receded; and years later, when her own contemplation of the nature of loss resulted in the writing of "One Art," such a phantom impression could well have steered her toward the villanelle form. Of one thing I am certain: had she had any active recall of Davis's poem, she would never have cast her own exploration of the subject in the form of a villanelle. Consciousness creates inhibitions, as we all know, and Bishop in writing "One Art" already had more than enough inhibitions to circumvent. If this is what happened, her loss of memory of a precursor may have enabled her to write her own fine villanelle on loss. The two poems need not be viewed as rivals. Twin peaks, perhaps, in the rocky range of formalist poetry in the twentieth century.

¹ *The Collected Poems of Dylan Thomas* (New York: New Directions, 1957), 128.

² *The Collected Poems of Theodore Roethke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 250.

³ *Elizabeth Bishop, The Complete Poems 1927-1979* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1983), 178.

⁴ *Elizabeth Bishop, Edgar Allan Poe & the Juke-Box*, ed. Alice Quinn (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 260. Bishop's drafts appear on 224-240.

⁵ In Donald Hall, Robert Pack, and Louis Simpson, eds., *New Poets of England and America* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 55-56.

⁶ Details of Catherine Davis's life included here are drawn from an article by Cynthia Haven, posted on the news section of Stanford University's website ("Versed in school of hard knocks, poet to get posthumous homage on campus," <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2008/april23/davis-042308.html>). I am grateful to Kevin Durkin for directing me to this and other source material.

⁷ The book was reprinted, including the same selections by Davis, several times into the 1960s.

⁸ *The Letters of Robert Lowell*, ed. Saskia Hamilton (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 301.

Janice D. Soderling

A Long-suffering Wife Speaks Graveside

Lately fond of gin and rum,
here lies my household's head
who hid his bottles here and there
and underneath the bed.

Confronted with proof positive
he gaped in mock surprise.
There are no hidden bottles here.
And still he lies.

The Widower Visits the Bordello

A vague unrest, a hollow sense of loss.
Forget the sparkling start. It's how it ends
that counts: a limp balloon, a double-cross,
a vague unrest, a hollow sense of loss.
His guilt hangs heavy as an albatross.
He tries, he sighs, he lies, he condescends.
A vague unrest, a hollow sense of loss.
Forget the sparkling start. It's how it ends.

Washing Dishes After the Last Guest Finally Went Home

It was that wordless voice
clamoring in his eyes
that made me drop
the gilt-edged saucers
and turn from the sink
to meet his mouth.

It was that interior tidal surge
loosening my legs
pounding against all my doors.
It was that soft loss of strength
oiling the golden hinges
with frankincense and myrrh.

It was his wordless voice
it was celebration
it was all those little cries
crowding my throat with
yes, yes, yes, pulling
him down on the kitchen floor.

Lisa Russ Spaar

The Sound of Music

April, pleached nerve-ends,
tangles firing, expiring

in demented light, swallows, my mother's
pansy face, blankly sly,

as God hums, distracted at the yard's edge.

I'm inside with her, before the TV's flicker, dirndls,
alpine backdrop, staircase,

& the trompe l'oeil notion of a woman
teaching children to sing.

Wet rosemary plosion of the tine-burst, roasting lamb.

Easter 1965, the Madison Theater, Detroit:
herding us kids in beneath the light-bulbed

anvil marquee, smart in pumps & sunglasses,
out of the burned lament

of her streets, cigarettes, anger jammed, secret in her shoes.

Double-dutching blue shadows, I pray now
to know where is the soul,

rhododendron & Russian olive. Is it in her stare
on the wall, untouchable voice warbling

hands fluttering, as though conducting a choir, practicing
scales,

Soon her mama with a gleaming gloat heard,
yodeling along with the white-haired crone-goat puppet

pushing her girl across the stage toward a yokel goat-herd
held up by strings, *Layee odl, layee odl layee-oooh—*

or in the purl & flux of sky without, gruffly clearing its throat?

Good Friday, Looking Inward

Conversion. Why locate it
in the mind? After shared crusts,

legumes in black broth, sharp salad,
chaste at vitrine café window,

noon turned biblical, leaden scrim
uncanny as cars arterial & veinal

coursed the roadside. *In new*
& *old ways*, you said in the parking lot

of our long love, & if there is a place
one story invades another,

shuts, opens it, we were there,
damage & repair, your arms already

full of release, showing me how.
Sulphur singe, plashed asphalt,

a file of still locked-down cherries
alongside ghost-lushing my pelvis

as you witnessed, waiting
not for the world to recall us.

No. No way either to take
or turn back wounded pages.

I saw. But first, as at every first,
I was blind.

To the Memory of My Mother

Heat eats the pond dry.
Dementia is one reply to wonder.

What part of her (me)
knows me (her)?

Pulpit self, you are experiment.
A puddle's cataract.

Would you like to use the port-a-potty?
I ask. Nothing. Then, "I'll make that into jam."

She, young, whipping yard-sticks.
Cracking an ice-cube tray over my head.

Some who believe they are absolved
are not. None of this matters.

A piano can be hauled
through the upstairs window

of a house whose doors
& stairwells are too squirrely & small.

What is pardoned as the lid lifts
at the last. The shed dread?

David Stephenson

Wiring Simplified

When I was ten or twelve years old, my dad
Got interested in electricity
And got into the fuse box, and soon had
A plan for beefing up the circuitry.

He kept his books and magazines downstairs,
Variously stood up, stacked, and filed
On a workbench by his reading chair.
There was soon an addition to the pile,

A burnt orange booklet from the hardware store
Called *Wiring Simplified*, Illustrated,
The Home Handyman Series Volume IV.
We brothers were told not to mess with it.

*It had pictures of all kinds of wires
Cut open with the insulation stripped
And rubber-handled screwdrivers and pliers
And meters rigged with alligator clips*

And a fold-out wiring diagram
With grids of lines connecting staggered rows
Of Greek letters and cryptic pictograms
Like hieroglyphics or a secret code.

One day he came home with coils of wire
And metal tubing and a paper sack
That clanked when it was set down on the drier,
And he started getting things unpacked

And measuring and pencil-marking spots.
Then he used his electric drill to bore
A long series of rafter holes, and got
Wood shavings in his hair and on the floor.

Then he sawed and filed the metal tubes
And fitted some ends with a metal box,
And drilled more holes and tightened lots of screws
To mount them to the posts and cinderblocks.

Then he fed wire through the holes and pipes
Into each box, and trimmed and stripped the ends
To leave small clusters of bare copper spikes
Sticking out like fingers or whole hands.

I was upstairs when he cut the power
To wire his circuits into the main box.
You could hear him working through the floor,
Muffled footsteps, flashlight clicks, and coughs.

When I went back downstairs he was done.
There were plugs and switches everywhere,
Plus a pull chain fluorescent shop light hung
Over his workbenches and his chair.

He showed me all the galvanized hardware,
The wires snaked through the rafters overhead,
The holes all lined up, all the angles square.
I wish I could remember what he said.

William Thompson

Recommended Reading

Taking the Occasion, by Dan Brown (Ivan R. Dee \$22.50)

In 1978, while browsing through the poetry section in an Atlanta bookstore, I opened a volume called *Tenebrae*, by somebody named Geoffrey Hill. My eyes landed first on these lines

empiness ever thronging
untenable belonging
how long until this longing
end in unending song

and ever since I have held a special admiration for poets in whose hands the short line really sings. But, as I was to learn, such poets are not easy to find.

These days, I do most of my browsing online, at sites like Lisa Russ Spaar's *Arts and Academe*, a poetry blog for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, where in 2011 she featured this poem by one Dan Brown:

The Birth of God

It happened near Lascaux
Millions of dawns ago.
For dawn it was,
Infusing radiance
And cuing avians
The way it does,

That saw the two of them
(Odds are a her and him,
Though maybe not)
Emerging from the mouth
Of a cave a couple south
Of the one that's got

All that painted fauna
All but snorting on a
Wall. That is
To say, from the mouth of a cave
Unconsecrated save
By the sighs and cries

Of the night just past. The pair
Has borne the bliss they share
Out into the bright.
Where silently they stand
Thanking, hand in hand
Before the light.

Their gratitude is truly
New beneath the duly
Erupting sun.
A gratitude that so
Wants a place to go
It authors one.

Here was a poet with a gift more valuable than skill, whose singing trimeters and dimeters lured me into the world of the poem before I had any inclination to admire his technique.

Winner of the New Criterion Poetry Prize for 2008, *Taking the Occasion* sustains its melodic clarity from start to finish. (It was not much of a surprise to learn that Brown studied musicology in graduate school or that he taught music theory at Cornell and Dartmouth. He has also

authored an online book devoted to the works of J.S. Bach.) But one also encounters in Brown's good-humored poems a clear and clarifying moral sense, a generosity of spirit:

**On the Audience's Standing
for the Hallelujah Chorus**

A vote for the tradition
Least worthy to be lost
Might go to this: an instance
More visible than most
Of bowing (in our rising)
To the power of the great.
One of those subjections
That only elevate.

Yes, poetry can still delight *and* instruct — and Brown is an unusually talented but also a *wise* poet. These are reasons enough to turn again and again to *Taking the Occasion*.

Daniel Tobin

In a Station of the Retro

Into the halting, halted
car of the Red Line train
walk two lobster claws,
enormous, inside a plastic bag

followed by the carrier
who holds them from himself.
Whatever passes for a face
on the prelapsarion—bead eyes,

slack, crustaceous whiskers—
must be staring at fog
like mudwater in an ancient sea,
something akin to incredulity:

mine, as if somehow I've been
trapped by chance, or the alien,
into the scene, and not a soul
but myself, apparently,

(with all the antennae sundered
by the scuttlings of the day),
lifting an astonished gaze
from mobile phone or Kindle.

I go back to reading my book.
How distinguished they look—
the claws, black, brackish, tinged
red like oncoming dawn, or a town

burning just out of sight: the claws—
protruding, still, each fastened
with a yellow rubber band, curved,
perfect, and wholly parenthetical.

Three Cat Night

1. Cita

This morning she brings us her gift—
Murdered bird, a wren, displayed
On our back porch, feathers matted,
Head turned from us like a distracted child.

She came to us in spring, nursed her litter
In the open shed—new life nested
Behind nattered brooms, boxes, the shears
We use to prune excess from the wild

When garden and yard begin to flesh
Beyond custom or care. At the door,
The two we'll keep fix on her, she
Who can abide them less and less,

Who would have them out—blind urge
To set them on their way, the release
The charge from her body's ciphered code.
The one will have to go. She reaches

Now to where a bite scabs badly over,
The wound we salve, the salve she'll lick
Sleekly on her lone perch—such skill,
Such scald beneath the brave coat, un-healing.

2. Darcy

Again brazenly up
The forbidden table,
Nuzzling newspapers,
Pill containers, books
(Our lives' haphazard
Safeguards, fritterings
Aspirational), on such
He'd impart his scent,
His sign of ownership;
And down, then, racing
Around the room, toy-
Ing with titular toys,
Catnip mice, the wands
Feather tethered, plush,
Mimicking lineaments
Of prey; or he's whirling
Suddenly after (like us)
His own tail, hotwired,
After whatever he's
After, concupiscent,
Before he chirps, nips,
Mews, to be lifted up,
Or leaps, collapsing
Into a lap to writhe
There, a furtive look
Before he turns, stills,
His long body lax,
Athletic soft tuxedo,
The paws pausing now,
His silk eye narrowing
As though in an ecstasy
That says we love him
As we love ourselves,
Perfectly imperfect,

Before he startles off
Again, elegant flame,
Again in pursuit, now
Looking out, glancing
Back from the glass door—
Lithe in the scattered sunlight.

3. *Sean*

In the potted sage, your whole body curled
Like a fresh croissant, blazing ginger fur
Tiger striped, torso quietly lifting
With every easy breath, you stretch to wake,
Paws splayed open, two Chinese fans,
Back arched in an un-breaking, rippling wave
That folds, unfolds, into nothing other
Than yourself: O risen, imperious yawn.

Infant, ancient, you tumble in front of us
Buddha-bellied, expectant, and when we
Take you up it's as if in you the world
Had called home some lost tenderness.

Your tail, that rhythmic semaphore, keeps
Its own time. When a hand un-halts
The faucet's bland, directed rush, it's you
Who comes leaping to embrace the rushing
Wonder we take for granted. Let your eyes
Lazar their topaz to the presence sensed
Behind the wall; crouch, still, or amble back,
Your body curled again in the potted sage.

Will Walker

Outside the Window

I hate the living. You, dear reader, excepted,
provisionally, pending further analysis
of the usual problem areas, beginning with odor assessment;
what the black and white faux medical TV experts
loved to call halitosis; regrettable sports attachments;
political fixations; odd fits of snorting laughter;

an affectation of familiarity and love for the obscure tribe
of pygmies, gorillas, or nicotine-drenched Frenchmen
or demoiselles with whom you spent your adventurous
twenties,
fighting off dysentery, climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro, and learning
to say

All men are brothers in fluent and lyrical Swahili.

Tonight, though, right outside the window, lurks a figure
of the usual unfortunate sort, a little maelstrom
of insanity induced by God knows what cocktail
of hormonal, chemical, and circumstantial misfortune,
perhaps a spokesman for some truly psychotic deity
or fallen angel, the Hornèd One or worse, not malevolent by
plan
but in such pain he curses at the shadows, as if to cow them,
herd them away from his stinking threadbare foul-mouthed self,

and we—so the experts tell us, unless they're true followers
of St. Francis—can do nothing except stay inside, silent,
unmoved, enjoying the end of an uneventful day, hoping
for him to get help somehow, but first to please move on.

Batting Practice at Stanyan Park

Somewhere close by just over a hundred years ago
someone is taking batting practice at Stanyan Park,
an hour before game time. Is it Lefty O'Doul, swinging

from the heels, launching ball after ball toward our front
steps,
into the living room, or maybe creaming a real screamer
that bounces all the way into the backyard and settles
in the little kingdom under our apple tree? Hard to tell,

we're perched somewhere in the cheap seats removed
more than a century from the peanuts and Cracker Jacks,
somewhere deep in the outfield, perhaps we'll never know

if it's left or center or right, maybe it doesn't matter
where they stuck home plate, or if the Seals
ever played down the block, or if the field was still
green and tended when our house was built

before subdivisions and the Influenza and The Great War,
before Mickey Mantle's grandfather ever heard of baseball,
before Babe Ruth or Tyrus Cobb, when it was still

just a game, and someone who maybe knew my grandfather
in his prime was sitting in the stands talking about the real
'49ers

and watching the high lazy flies leap off that long-since
broken bat

and head into a future only a few hundred feet away,

but always out of sight, even if he squinted to see it.

L.A. Weeks

Crab Country Litany

Let the ocean dazzle; if we build on today's sliver, let us
build for today.

Let it bring in a haul of horizons.

Let Spartina stretch forever to our fathers' crab pots.

Let the fog horn find its berth between midnight and
morning.

Let sherry propose marriage to roe. Let it dally with
Old Bay.

Let the carrier group be gray as it rounds Cape Henry.

Let red shift restlessly at the pier.

Let July's bathtub foam with sting.

Let a cracked claw shatter winter.

Let the salt marsh oracle buzz beyond ocean's heft.

Let us be smaller than the unborn in a Mermaid's Purse.

Let us lie pungent at noon on a tide line we cannot claim.

Let tomorrow's cyclone devour the spit and what we built
for today.

Will Wells

Babushka

I had no name for what Grandmother wore.
Almost a scarf, it fluttered there, a flag
of foreignness which she refused to lower.
It formed a nexus of arcane power,
accessory to her vast repertoire
of Yiddish insults and special curses.
It rode above them, a phonetic mark
super-scripted for added emphasis.

She removed it at bedtime, then undid
her lattice-work of braids. And what unfurled
was long red hair which she took pains to brush
before the mirror, flashed back to the girl,
Emma, courted by Selzer who dealt in junk.
Her preference was young Levi, who wept
and waited, too timid to compete for her —
the first of many sorrows that she kept.

She'd rise at five to bind her hair again
beneath a fresh kerchief, magician's cloth
under which doves with clipped wings lay hidden,
but fidgeting and pecking at her brain.
When grandchildren rampaged her house, she swore
That new storm-troopers had barged in to smash
the few belongings she had worked hard for.
She peeled a stick and dealt us each a smack.

Long past the men she'd set her cap at,
she set her jaw and worked, angry at dust
that swirled and settled, swirled and settled,
the constancy of doing what she must.
Her laundered scarf was exile's counterweight,
familiar as the rustle of her skirts.
Her last remnants of faith were saved for it.
She tugged upon the knot until it hurt.

Near Fossil Butte, Wyoming

My wife rubs a quill across a sandstone slab,
abrading lake sediments cemented down
in the Eocene. Ridged vertebrae stab
through, strung like abacus beads summed in stone.
The feathered end flicks aside loosened dust
till a fossil fish swims into focus,
fine membranes of each fin engraved in rust –
iron leached by ground water's slow stylus.

I probe an outcrop, seeking the layer
of mortality, the stark addendum
of a lake boiled up by volcanic flare
then imprinted in a stony album.
I chisel to pages that are still stuck
and split catastrophe into good luck.

Robert West

Devotion

If God should read,
or rather, if You do,

what should I leave behind
to say perpetually to Him—

I mean, to You?

What kind of prayer
beyond my time of being?

What else but one
that asks forgiveness

for perpetually forgetting
He was—

rather, You were—there?

Are everywhere,
and surely reading

both now as I've composed
and once my eyes have closed

beyond all seeing.

Matthew Westbrook

The Body Has No Idea

There are handcuffs beneath the bones,
but the bones don't know it.
And the dragonflies that knit the eyebrows
can barely detect their own wings.

The bars that form the cage of the heart
have no concept what they contain.
Some even say that that caravan,
the backbone,

doesn't believe in beasts of burden,
while those shopworn furniture, the feet,
know nothing of their separate toes.
So many have written

about the lost city of the soul,
yet the belly's gravity cannot fathom
its own laughter, those ignorant contractions
sober as onions.

These days the mouth itself is at a loss
to contradict the notion of a voice,
long sunken, deep within the chest,
or the rumor the opposable thumb

has developed a brain
that no longer grasps for significance,
preferring instead the gray wall the eyes stare at
when the mind won't see.

Lisa Williams

Figural

Cezanne does not let him come beyond the paint.
That is its purpose—
to set a man there, thinking, before us,
the man's hands gripped as if they hold onto themselves.

That is its purpose
and nothing else—a body—
the man's hands gripped as if they hold onto themselves
composed of reds, browns, and golds

and nothing else—a body—
and inside one closed fist, blackness
composed of reds, browns, and golds
because that's what it is, flesh in a place

and inside one closed fist, blackness.
Even his hand resting on his thigh fights for its place
because that's what it is, flesh in a place
surly and impartial as the apples piled on the table beside.

Even his hand resting on his thigh fights for its place,
so much himself that we see him only,
surly and impartial as the apples piled on the table beside,
not ourselves, not him looking where we are.

CONTRIBUTORS

Jeffrey Alfier is author of *The Wolf Yearling* (Silver Birch Press, 2013) and *Idyll for a Vanishing River* (Glass Lyre Press, forthcoming). In 2013, he was a finalist in the Press 53 Poetry Contest, and short-listed for the Fermoy International Poetry Festival, Ireland. Recent work appears or is forthcoming in *South Carolina Review*, *Louisville Review* and *The Fourth River*. He is founder and co-editor of *San Pedro River Review*.

Neil Arditi teaches literature at Sarah Lawrence College, where he holds the Esther Raushenbush Chair in the Humanities. He is a frequent contributor to *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, and has also published work in *Raritan*, *Philosophy and Literature*, *The Keats-Shelley Journal*, *Chicago Review*, *VQR*, and *Lumina*. He lives in Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y. with his wife, Mohini, and their two sons, Alexander and Gabriel.

Gay Baines lives in East Aurora, New York, and is a member of the Roycroft Wordsmiths. Her poetry has appeared in *Poet Lore*, *Rattapallax*, *Cimarron Review*, *Slipstream*, *Atlanta Review*, and other journals. She is co-founder and poetry editor of July Literary Press in Buffalo. In 2002 she published her first novel, *Dear M.K.* A book of her selected poems, *Don't Let Go*, was published in 2010. She is working desultorily on a chapbook, *The Book of Lies*, and a short story collection, *Ancestor Worship*.

Dan Brown's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Parnassus*, *The New Criterion*, *PN Review*, and other journals. His collection *Taking the Occasion* won the New Criterion Poetry Prize. His *Why Bach?* is an online appreciation of the composer.

John F. Buckley lives, studies, and works in Ann Arbor, Michigan. His collections *Sky Sandwiches* and *Poets' Guide to America* (with Martin Ott) were released in Fall 2012, as was his second chapbook, *Leading an Aquamarine Shoat by Its Tail*. His website is <http://www.johnfrancisbuckley.wordpress.com>.

Rick Campbell's most recent book is *The History of Steel: A Selected Works* (2014), from All Nations Press. His other books include *Dixmont* (2008) *The Traveler's Companion* (2004); *Setting The World In Order* (2001); and *A Day's Work* (2000). He has edited two anthologies: *Isle of Flowers* and *Snakebird* (Anhinga Press) and won a Pushcart Prize, an NEA Fellowship in Poetry, and two poetry fellowships from the Florida Arts Council. He's published poems and essays in *The Georgia Review*, *The Florida Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Fourth River*, *Kestrel*, *Puerto Del Sol*, *Story South* and other journals. Campbell is the co-director of Anhinga Press and teaches English at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Florida.

Michael Cantor's full-length collection, *Life in the Second Circle* (Able Muse Press, 2012), was a finalist for the 2013 Massachusetts Book Award for Poetry. A chapbook, *The Performer*, was published in 2007. His work has appeared in *The Dark Horse*, *Measure*, *Raintown Review*, *SCR*, *Chimaera*, *The Flea*, and numerous other journals and anthologies. He was also a finalist for the Nemerov (twice), Richard Wilbur and Robert Penn Warren poetry competi-

tions, and he has won the New England Poetry Club Gretchen Warren and Erika Mumford prizes. A native New Yorker, he has lived and worked in Japan, Latin America and Europe, and presently divides his time between Plum Island, north of Boston on the Massachusetts coast, and Santa Fe, NM.

Patricia Corbus holds a Master's degree from UNC/Chapel Hill and an MFA from Warren Wilson. She's had poems published in various reviews, including the *Paris Review*, the *Georgia Review*, the *Madison Review*, and the *Notre Dame Review*. She lives in Sarasota, Florida with her husband and two cats.

Stephen Cushman has published five collections of poetry, *The Red List* (LSU, forthcoming 2014), *Riffraff* (LSU, 2011), *Heart Island* (David Robert Books, 2006), *Cussing Lesson* (LSU, 2002), and *Blue Pajamas* (LSU, 1998), as well as two books of criticism, *Fictions of Form in American Poetry* (Princeton University Press, 1993) and *William Carlos Williams and the Meanings of Measure* (Yale University Press, 1985), and two books about the Civil War, *Bloody Promenade: Reflections on a Civil War Battle* (University Press of Virginia, 1999) and *Belligerent Muse: Five Civil War Writers* (UNC, forthcoming 2014). He is general editor of the fourth edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012) and Robert C. Taylor Professor of English at the University of Virginia.

Richard Foerster is the author of six poetry collections. His most recent is *Penetration* (Texas Review Press, 2011), which was awarded a Maine Literary Award. He has been the recipient of numerous other honors, including the "Discovery" / *The Nation* Award, *Poetry* magazine's Bess Hokin Prize, a Maine Arts Commission Fellowship, the Amy Lowell Poetry

Travelling Scholarship, and two National Endowment for the Arts poetry fellowships. Since the 1970s his work has appeared widely in magazines and anthologies, including *The Best American Poetry*, *Kenyon Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Boulevard*, *The Southern Review*, and *Poetry*. He has worked as a lexicographer, educational writer, typesetter, teacher, and as the editor of the literary magazines *Chelsea* and *Chautauqua Literary Journal*. Since 1986 he has lived on the coast of Southern Maine.

John Foy's first book is *Techne's Clearinghouse* (Zoo Press). His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The Swallow Anthology of New American Poets* (Ohio University Press), *Parnassus*, *The New Criterion*, *American Arts Quarterly*, and an anthology of poems about TV called *Rabbit Ears*. In July he was a guest blogger for the *Best American Poetry* website.

Loren Graham teaches creative writing at Carroll College in Helena, Montana. His books of poetry include *Mose* (Wesleyan University Press 1995) and *The Ring Scar* (Word Press 2010). The poems published here are from a new manuscript about a boy growing up in rural poverty; *Places I Was Dreaming* is scheduled for publication in November 2014 by CavanKerry Press.

Jonathan Greenhouse won *Prism Review's* 2012-2013 Poetry Prize and was a finalist for this year's Gearhart Poetry Contest from *The Southeast Review*. He's received two Pushcart nominations, is the author of a chapbook, *Sebastian's Relativity* (Anobium Books, 2011), and has had poetry appearing or forthcoming in *Artful Dodge*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *The Malahat Review* (CAN), *Poem*, *Willow Review*, and elsewhere. He and his wife are being raised by their ten-month-old, Benjamin Seneca.

Linda H. Heuring is a Southern short story writer temporarily transplanted to a rocky Lake Michigan beach on Chicago's North Shore. Her stories have appeared in *Rosebud*, *Concho River Review*, *Kestrel*, *Southern Women's Review*, and *Clover, A Literary Rag* among other publications. She was awarded the Fish International Short Story Prize in 2012 (Ireland) for her story, "Roommates," which was the flagship story in the 2012 *Fish Anthology*.

H. L. Hix's most recent poetry collection is *As Much As, If Not More Than* (Etruscan Press, 2014). He lives in the mountain west with his partner, the poet Kate Northrop, and writes in a studio that was once a barn. His website is www.hlhix.com.

Roald Hoffmann is a chemist and writer long at Cornell University. In 1981, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. The poems in this issue were written in the course of a stay at the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina.

Krikor Der Hohannesian lives in Medford, MA. His poems have appeared in *The South Carolina Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Peregrine*, and *Connecticut Review*. He is the author of two chapbooks, *Ghosts and Whispers* (Finishing Line Press, 2010) and *Refuge in the Shadows* (Cervena Barva Press, 2013).

Armine Iknadossian was born in Beirut, Lebanon but has been a California girl since the age of four. A resident of Pasadena, she received her BA in Creative Writing from UCLA and an MFA in Poetry from Antioch University. She teaches high school English and freelances for music magazines. She has received two fellowships from Idyllwild Arts and has won numerous awards from Writers at Work.

Publications include *Backwards City Review* (honorable mention), *Margie, Pearl, Rhino*, and *The Nervous Breakdown*. Visit armineiknadossian.wordpress.com to view her body of work.

David M. Katz is the author of two books of poems, *Claims of Home*, Poems 1984-2010 (Dos Madres Press) and *The Warrior in the Forest* (House of Keys). His poems have appeared in *The New Criterion*, *PN Review*, *Poetry*, *The Cortland Review*, and many other publications.

Christopher Kuhl holds a Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Arts from Ohio University. His work has appeared in a variety of print and on-line journals, including *Prairie Schooner*, *The Piedmont Review*, *Big Muddy*, *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, and *zbbaggins*. He has just finished a new book, *Splitting the Tree: Freestyle Haiku*, and is looking for a publisher.

Lyn Lifshin has published more than 130 books and chap-books and edited 4 anthologies of women writers. She is the subject of the documentary film, just re-released, *Lyn Lifshin: Not Made of Glass*. Her website for more books, photos, prose and news is www.lynlifshin.com

Richard Meyer, a former English and humanities teacher, lives in the home his father built in Mankato, a city at the bend of the Minnesota River. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in various publications, including *Able Muse*, *14 Magazine*, *The Raintown Review*, *Measure*, and *The Evansville Review*. His poem "Fieldstone" was selected as the winner of the 2012 Robert Frost Farm Prize, and his poem "La Gioconda" was chosen as a top sonnet in The Maria W. Faust Sonnet Contest for the 2013 Great River Shakespeare Festival.

Wendy Miles's work has been anthologized and appears in places such as *Arts & Letters*, *Memoir*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *storySouth* and *The MacGuffin*. A finalist for the 2013 Perugia Press Prize and a Pushcart Prize nominee, she teaches at Lynchburg College in Virginia.

Devon Miller-Duggan's first collection, *Pinning the Bird to the Wall*, was published in 2008. A chapbook of off-kilter poems about angels was just published in September by Finishing Line Press. She teaches Creative Writing at The University of Delaware.

Jed Myers is a Philadelphian living in Seattle. Two of his poetry collections, *The Nameless* (Finishing Line Press) and *Watching the Perseids* (winner of the 2013 Sacramento Poetry Center Book Award), are soon to be released. He won the 2012 Mary C. Mohr Editors' Award offered by *Southern Indiana Review*, received the 2013 *Literal Latte Poetry Award*, and was a 2013 Pushcart Prize nominee. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner*, *Nimrod International Journal*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Barely South Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Heron Tree*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Crab Creek Review*, *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, and elsewhere.

Alfred Nicol's collection of poetry, *Elegy for Everyone*, published in 2009, was chosen for the Anita Dorn Memorial Prize. His first collection, *Winter Light*, received the 2004 Richard Wilbur Award. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Dark Horse*, *The Formalist*, *The Hopkins Review*, and other literary journals. His most recent publication is *Second Hand Second Mind*, a collaboration with his sister, artist Elise Nicol. <http://www.alfrednicol.com>

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell teaches English & Creative Writing at Fordham University in New York City and serves as Associate Director of Fordham's Curran Center for American Catholic Studies. Her publications include three collections of poems, *Saint Sinatra* (2011), *Moving House* (2009), and, most recently, a book of elegies entitled *Waking My Mother* (2013). She has also published two chapbooks, *Mine* (2007) and *Waiting for Ecstasy* (2009). Her work has appeared in many journals, including *America*, *Comstock Review*, *First Things*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Potomac Review*, *Runes*, *String Poetry*, *Verse Wisconsin*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, among others, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, the Best of the Web Award, and the Arlin G. Meyer Prize in Imaginative Writing. O'Donnell also writes essays on contemporary poetry and is a regular Books & Culture columnist at AMERICA magazine. A memoir, *Mortal Blessings*, is forthcoming in 2014. Readers may visit her website at <http://angelalaimoodonnell.com/>.

Lizzie Orlofsky is a junior in high school. She enjoys photography and has won several first place awards at the Alabama State Superintendent Art Show. She also has garnered numerous TroyFest and county wide awards for her photographs and artwork. The photograph on the cover of this year's *Alabama Literary Review* is titled "Fallen Soldier" and was taken by the artist at the Florence American Cemetery and Memorial in Florence, Italy.

In addition to writing, **Veronica Reilly** enjoys hiking in the many beautiful parks in the Bay Area. She practices Zen Buddhism, and currently volunteers as an assistant cook at Berkeley Zen Center. Her two delightful and energetic cats are brothers who were rescued through the East Bay SPCA.

She works as a Teacher on Special Assignment for the San Francisco Unified School District, where her passion for educational equity is a daily labor of love. www.veronicareillywrites.com

Poems by **J. Stephen Rhodes** have appeared in *Shenandoah*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Theodate* and in a number of overseas journals. His second poetry collection, *What Might Not Be*, will be brought out in the summer of 2014 by Wind Publications. Before taking up writing full-time, he was the co-director of the Appalachian Ministries Educational Resource Center in Berea, Kentucky, where he helped to prepare seminarians for ministry in the Appalachian region.

Steven P. Schneider is Professor of English at the University of Texas Pan-American, where he also serves as director of new programs and special projects for the College of Arts and Humanities. He is the author of several collections of poetry, including **Borderlines: Drawing Border Lives**, a collaboration with his artist wife Reefka, *Prairie Air Show* and *Unexpected Guests*. He edited most recently a scholarly collection of essays entitled *The Contemporary Narrative Poem: Critical Crosscurrents* (U. of Iowa Press, 2012). His recent awards include a Helene Wurlitzer Foundation Residency and two Big Read grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Robert B. Shaw is the Emily Dickinson Professor of English at Mount Holyoke College. His latest books are *Blank Verse: A Guide to Its History and Use* (Ohio University Press) and a volume of poems, *Aromatics* (Pinyon Publishing).

Janice D. Soderling has published fiction, poetry and translations. Current and forthcoming examples of all these gen-

res can be read at *Hobart*, *New Walk*, *Per Contra*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Raintown Review*, *Literary Bohemian*, *Rotary Dial*, *Sein und Werden*, *Metazen*. She is assistant fiction editor at Able Muse(USA) and poetry editor Frostwriting (Europe).

Lisa Russ Spaar is the author and editor of seven poetry collections and anthologies, most recently *Vanitas*, *Rough: Poems* (Persea Books, 2012) and *The Hide-and-Seek Muse: Annotations of Contemporary Poetry* (Drunken Boat, 2013). Her awards include a Guggenheim Fellowship and the Weinstein Poetry Award. She teaches at the University of Virginia.

David Stephenson's poems have most recently appeared in *Measure*, *Slant*, *The Lyric*, and *Blue Unicorn*. His collection *Rhythm and Blues* was published by the University of Evansville Press in 2008. He lives in Detroit.

Daniel Tobin's latest book of poems, *Belated Heavens*, won the Massachusetts Book Award in Poetry. A book of essays, *Awake in America*, is newly out from the University of Notre Dame Press. Among his awards are fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.

Will Walker lives in San Francisco with his wife and their dog. He is a former editor of the *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, where his work has appeared often. His poetry has also been published in *Bark*, *Passager*, *Spillway Review*, *Alimentum*, *Nerve House*, *Crack the Spine*, *Lame Duck*, *Street Spirit*, and *Street Sheet*. His full-length collection of poems, *Wednesday after Lunch* (available on Amazon), was the winner of the 2008 Blue Light Press Book Award. A chapbook of his called *Carrying Water* was published by Puddinghouse Press.

L.A. Weeks grew up in coastal Virginia, and now lives with her husband in Vicksburg, Mississippi. She owns Lorelei Books, where poetry is regularly shared. Before opening her bookstore in 2006, she worked in the healthcare industry.

Will Wells' most recent volume of poems, *Unsettled Accounts*, won the 2009 Hollis Summers Poetry Prize and was published by Ohio Univ/Swallow Press in 2010. An earlier volume of poems won the Anhinga Award. Will has work forthcoming or recently appearing in *The Southwest Review*, *32 poems*, *Image*, *Tampa Review*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Unsplendid*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Chrysalis Reader*, and *River Styx* among others. The two poems in this issue are drawn from his latest manuscript, *Odd Lots*, *Scraps*, and *Second-hand, Like New*, which is currently in circulation.

Robert West's poems have also appeared in *Christian Science Monitor*, *Still: The Journal*, *Assisi* (St. Francis College, Brooklyn), *Poetry*, and Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*. His third chapbook of poems, *Convalescent*, appeared from Finishing Line Press in 2011; with Jonathan Greene, he is co-editor of *Succinct: The Broadstone Anthology of Short Poems*, published in late 2013. He teaches in the Department of English at Mississippi State University.

Matthew Westbrook's poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry*, *The Hopkins Review*, *Measure*, *32 Poems*, *Poetry East*, and *Alaska Quarterly Review*, among other journals. Past honors include two Individual Artist Awards in poetry from the Maryland State Arts Council.

Lisa Williams' third book of poems, *Gazelle in the House*, will be published in March of 2014 by New Issues Press. She teaches at Centre College in Kentucky.

CONTRIBUTORS

JEFFREY ALFIER
NEIL ARDITI
GAY BAINES
DAN BROWN
JOHN F. BUCKLEY
RICK CAMPBELL
MICHAEL CANTOR
PATRICIA CORBUS
STEPHEN CUSHMAN
RICHARD FOERSTER
JOHN FOY
LOREN GRAHAM
JONATHAN GREENHAUSE
LINDA H. HEURING
H. L. HIX
ROALD HOFFMANN
KRIKOR DER HOHANNESIAN
ARMINE IKNADOSSIAN
DAVID M. KATZ
CHRISTOPHER KUHL
LYN LIFSHIN
RICHARD MEYER
WENDY MILES
DEVON MILLER-DUGGAN
JED MYERS
ALFRED NICOL
ANGELA ALAIMO O'DONNELL
VERONICA REILLY
J. STEPHEN RHODES
STEVEN P. SCHNEIDER
ROBERT B. SHAW
JANICE D. SODERLING
LISA RUSS SPAAR
DAVID STEPHENSON
WILLIAM THOMPSON
DANIEL TOBIN
WILL WALKER
L.A. WEEKS
WILL WELLS
ROBERT WEST
MATTHEW WESTBROOK
LISA WILLIAMS