

The background is a vertical painting of a landscape. It features rolling hills and a valley. The color palette is rich and somewhat surreal, with deep blues, purples, and greens dominating the scene. The brushwork is visible, giving it a textured, artistic feel. In the center, the title 'Alabama Literary Review' is written in a white, elegant cursive font. The hills rise from the bottom left towards the top right, with a valley in between. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. In the foreground, there are some green plants and a wooden fence line.

*Alabama
Literary
Review*

Alabama Literary Review

2019

volume 28

number 1

Editor
William Thompson

Fiction Editors
Jim Davis
Theron Montgomery

Webmaster
Ben Robertson

Cover
Majô L. Foy, *Brazilian Landscape #1*

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.

©2019 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

Neil Arditi

Memorabilia 6

Ace Boggess

Advice for Taking Down Christmas Lights 8

Catharine Savage Brosman

Tulips in a Vase. 9

Richard Brostoff

Mexico 10

Rick Campbell

Forgiving Ty Cobb in Royston, Georgia. 11

Catherine Chandler

On Reading the 40th Statewide Investigating
Grand Jury Report 24

Terese Coe

Apollo and Daphne 28

Former Settlement, New York Bay 29

Patricia Corbus

Along Glassy Creek 30

Morri Creech

The Road. 31

Twilight 36

Burning the Leaves. 38

Search Engine. 39

Cape Cod Evening 40

John Foy

Alan Kurdi 41

Out of Body 42

The Wheelbarrow 43

Andrew Frisardi

Non-Noah and the Rainbow 44

Contents

Joseph Harrison

Stopping	45
Hardy's Writing Trousers	46
The Forsaken Singer	47
Late Autumnal	48

Charles Hughes

Love Keeps the Evening Sky	49
Late Bloomer	50

Julie Kane

Akhmatova	52
The Scream	53
Baby of the Family	54

April Lindner

Giant River Otters	55
Operation Secure Streets	56
<i>It's Beautiful, Like Birth,</i>	57

Richard Meyer

Self-Portrait	59
Exit Stage Left	60

David Middleton

Calling Down the Birds	61
Porches	63
Charts	65
The Gust of Wind	69
First Steps	70
Fairgrounds	72

James B. Nicola

Why I Write Daily	75
John Gould Fletcher	76

Nicholas Pierce

In-Flight Entertainment	77
The Invisible World	79
North of the Border	81

Daniel Rattelle

from Caledonian Postcards 84

Rainer Maria Rilke, translations by Susan McLean

Roman Sarcophagi 85

Römische Sarkophage. 86

The Death of the Poet 87

San Marco 89

Loneliness 91

The Courtesan 93

J.D. Smith

Golden Years 95

Memoir 96

Red-Letter Dates. 97

Lisa Russ Spaar

Invention 1 (Garden) 100

Invention 6 (Ballade) 101

Invention 7 (August) 102

Invention 9 (Breaststroke). 103

Daniel Tobin

To the Gentleman Watching Television on His Phone
in the Bathroom Stall at Charlotte Airport 104

In the Greencroft 105

The Calls 106

Little Hallows. 107

From Below. 108

Death 109

Patricia Waters

Bathsheba 110

James Matthew Wilson

At Season's End 111

In The Fullness Of Rhyme 112

The Love of God 113

The Wisdom of Old Men. 114

Melanie Almeder

Review of *Texasas*, by John Poch 115

Contributors. 118

Neil Arditi

Memorabilia

The Italian passenger
standing next to my father,
with his trench coat
cinched
and his hands
buried in his pockets,
looks like Camus
in a saturnine mood.
He stares a hole in the lens.
My father smiles,
brief case in hand.
He is nineteen,
and on his way
to America,
his oyster.
The photographer,
a passenger
we cannot see,
has an eye
for composition:
frames them
between the legible body
of their refueling
Trans-World-Airlines
Boeing 307
Stratoliner
(if I'm not mistaken)
and a sign that reads,
"Gander Airport."
The shutter clicks.
"Encore une, s'il vous plaît,"
my father says.
The shutter clicks again.
He takes his camera back.
The Italian passenger
lights a cigarette.

Later, in a diner
in New York City,
or a room in Baton Rouge,
my father sits,
thumbing through his prints,
turns this one over,
and writes on the back:
with Italian passenger,
Newfoundland, 1947.

Ace Boggess

Advice for Taking Down Christmas Lights

Stop what you're doing long enough to remember
when this was more than imposition,
an annoyance
like your weekly routine of trucking garbage to the curb.

What you'd give to be a kid again & care about your house
splashed with color like a laser show in the predawn dark;
watching your parents climb the ladder,
fumble with a tree skirt,
add aspirin to the stand's water for whatever reason.

How you loved holidays.
They were an orchestra with many instruments.
You can't recall a quarter of the ornaments,
even those molded from plaster
you made in school for your mother.

Wants & joys meant something to you,
unlike these strings of lights
that tangle in your hands
as you groan & carelessly drop them in a bag.

Catharine Savage Brosman

Tulips in a Vase

They know that they are beautiful. They turn
to show their profile, bend a willowy stem,
adjust their mien (one redhead seems to burn
with languorous henna streaks). Each stratagem

is clever, catching eye and thought. And we
respond indulgently with care and praise:
fresh water, stimulants, the eager fee
for beauty. One, pale pink, attempts to raise

her languid petals, parting at the throat,
while two, sun-yellow, shyly hold a pose
of modesty. Such tactics may denote
an ingénue who shuns the blowsy rose

and innocently keeps *le naturel*;
or can they be in fact some artifice
learned even in the tulip fields, learned well?
Their coquetry is *sui generis*

at least. And ours? It's ancient — budding girls,
old divas, all the same, instinctive, cool,
directed toward the flattery, flowers, pearls
that prove how far each sex can play the fool.

Richard Brostoff

Mexico

Dreaming, a new life asserts itself from Belmont's darkened suburbs; fresh images at forty. Late nights black tugboats chuff you off to Chiquila, trawling fish by ancient villages. Near San Buto below the water line you spy exotic schools of fish, whose scales flash jasmine, deep aqua-marine. Ashore you drink coronas in a seedy restaurant, order coffee in the proper accent. You rent a place above the bar to write your book. In the corner of your room, three speckled orchids bloom. Desert lizards scurry on the window sill, appearing out of shadows mornings, their striped skin warmed by sun. At corner stores in unsafe neighborhoods you filch small bottles of tequila. A duende visits you at night. At three a.m. a dark-skinned woman comes to you whose swollen lips remind you of the amaryllis bloom. You dance strange Latin dances you learned in your dreams. They have no name. Littering your doorstep, the locusts shuck translucent shells, and sing. You want to cut the darkness open like a vein.

Rick Campbell

Forgiving Ty Cobb in Royston, Georgia

How sharp were his spikes? Why does this seem like it has to be about forgiveness? How do we get forgiven? Be heartily sorry for our sins? Do good deeds? Buy it like Carnegie using his fortune to build libraries after his first life crushing competition and workers? Cobb came back home and built everything a poor Southern town could need. How great were his sins? Did he just play hard, make enemies, get a bad rep? Did Ty Cobb need forgiveness more than most of us?

I have to admit I'm a little bored, stir crazy maybe. I'm spending a couple of weeks being a writer, living in this great old house in a small North Georgia town that can best be described as just a notch or two above abandoned. There's a Dollar General store, two gas stations, three churches at the same intersection with the flashing caution light, and little else. Being a writer with nothing to do but write is great — until I can't stand it anymore. I need distraction and Ty Cobb will be mine.

Royston, Georgia, just a few miles down the road, is Cobb's home town and the site of the Ty Cobb Museum. You can't think of Cobb without getting caught up in the idea of how mean he was, so as I drive there I'm wondering how much of Cobb's an asshole is true.

Maybe this is also about redefining — the American tradition of making ourselves anew. Vonnegut put a positive spin on it when he wrote *we are who we pretend to be so pretend to be someone good*. But most of the time when this redefining of self or reputation occurs it is in either the tradition of the Con Man or the sinner becoming a Saint. What was Cobb? It turns out, as in most stories, there are at least two sides to the tale. People around Royston want a good Ty Cobb. Baseball writers and historians have a lot of stories of a man who was violent, racist, egomaniacal, driven, mean, competitive beyond any accepted sporting definition of the word. We sometimes say, but probably don't really believe it, that it's only a game, but it wasn't only a game for Cobb; baseball was his whole sense of self-worth, his measure of being a man, being a success and not a failure. Being a great baseball player was in the end and maybe always, all Cobb

had to show for himself.

I suppose only sociopaths don't want to be forgiven. Even God wanted forgiveness. No more floods, he said, no destroying the earth, my children, just because you get a little randy and put some false idols up in lights on the big scoreboard. We all say we're sorry, won't do it again. Was Cobb that different? Was Cobb ever sorry and what for?

Cobb said, "The base paths belonged to me, the runner. The rules gave me the right. I always went into a bag full speed, feet first. I had sharp spikes on my shoes. If the baseman stood where he had no business to be and got hurt, that was his fault."

This is often said about him: he was mean, the meanest man in baseball. It's a narrative that followed him through his baseball career and the rest of his life as well. Did he hone those spikes to razors each night or was one good slash enough? Maybe he was like the falcon trained to rid the city of pestful birds — he knew he could scare the shit out of a whole flight of pigeons by just killing one or two. Cobb spikes a couple of infielders and the rest back off the next time and the next time he comes sliding in. Just the idea of sharp spikes, the memory of another guy's bleeding calf, can make a fielder give away too much of the bag when Cobb only needs a little. A smart player wants to stay in the game, play tomorrow, and not risk losing his job to the rookie who is always waiting.

Let's say those spikes were too sharp and they opened more calves than they should have: how evil was that? How much forgiveness for playing too hard, for relying on intimidation, does Cobb deserve? Playing baseball hard, playing well, was Cobb's ticket to fame; it was his and other players' roads out of coal mines, factories, small town jobs and poverty. Baseball's been very good to a lot of men with very singularly amazing skills. So if Cobb needed a town full of forgiveness, I'm guessing it had to be for more than the way he played the game.

Cobb's good deeds included helping down and out ballplayers, building schools, clinics, hospitals, endowing scholarships. There are a bundle of good works in his name. Ty Cobb Hospital, Ty Cobb High School. Ty Cobb Nursing Home, Ty Cobb, Ty Cobb, Ty Cobb, all over town. Ty Cobb Street. Ty Cobb painted on the sides of old buildings like *See Rock City*. This town made Ty Cobb and then Ty remade the town. Then he left for a nicer place.

2.

Cobb is a prick. But he sure can hit. God almighty that man can hit.

— Babe Ruth

Cobb by the numbers that don't lie — his lifetime batting average, .366, the best ever. Hits 4189, runs 2246, stolen bases 897. In 1911, Cobb hit 420; he had 248 hits, 44 walks, 83 stolen bases, 147 runs scored. For his career, he's first in almost everything that counts but homeruns; he dropped to second in hits when Pete Rose broke that record. Cobb hit over 400 three times, hit over 380 six times. If there can be more remarkable stats than these it would be that Cobb almost never struck out. In 1922 when he hit 401, he only struck out 24 times in 667 at bats, that's fewer than four strike outs every 100 at bats. In 1923, when his average "fell" to .340, he struck out only 14 times in 703 at bats (I'm counting walks here); 14 strike outs in 145 games. He must have hit a hell of a lot of line drives right at someone. You could watch Cobb play a ten game home stand and maybe not see him strike out at all. There are superstars now, sure tickets to the hall of fame, who go down swinging or watching more in one week than Cobb did in a season.

Those of us who labored through our baseball dreams without homerun power think a hitter like Cobb hits the way a man should. Make contact. Get up each morning and work hard. Do the most with what you have. We know we can't hit tape measure homeruns, but we think we ought to be able to put the bat on the ball. Cobb was 36 years old in his 17th major league season in 1922 when he hit 401. Cobb was a worker, and in a sport that the working class used to worship, Cobb could have been a saint. Could have been.

Cobb's numbers were good enough to get into the Hall of Fame for sure. When he entered it, the first player elected to such an honor, morals weren't high on the list of attributes to be considered during the voting. If they were, maybe Ruth, Hack Wilson and few others would have been in trouble too. Then, and maybe now, no one seems to doubt that Cobb ought to be in the Hall of Fame. During his career he gave the people more than an honest day's labor, though it was in a game. He hit, he ran, he hit and hit and hit. But there's a lot more violence in the Cobb story

than a baseball game called for. There's a photo of Cobb "sliding" into a catcher who isn't blocking the plate as much as trying to protect his genitals. Cobb is in mid-air; he looks like an oddly dressed UFC fighter drop kicking his hapless opponent. Cobb's spikes, however sharp, are about to plunge into the catcher's thigh and the catcher looks scared shitless. So maybe Cobb's unnecessarily violent, but these are baseball sins by a man who, let's admit, played the game too hard. If the story of Cobb's transgressions ended here, then maybe he would not have needed to buy all that forgiveness. But Cobb had a litany of other sins too.

I don't know if he thought he needed to buy forgiveness, but I am sure he knew he was not liked by very many people — players, fans, umpires, and especially black people. If he had ever behaved as a good man, then the fact that he spread his wealth around (and by the end of his career he had no small stash) might not need to be so skeptically examined. But Cobb was not a good man.

It must be admitted here that there's very little agreement about how mean or racist Tyrus Raymond Cobb actually was. There are two camps in the Ty Cobb argument. Some writers and the historical record show that Cobb was a man with a really bad temper and a racist too. He makes Billy Martin kicking dirt at umpires, Sambrano smashing innocent water coolers, look like guys with some minor anger management issues. Cobb beat up players on other teams, beat players on own his team, fans, thugs and, especially, black people. Cobb beat a black groundskeeper during a Spring Training season. Beat up a black construction worker and beat up a black elevator operator in Cleveland. Then Cobb stabbed the black hotel security guard who tried to come to his comrade's aid. Cobb was not arrested for any of these things, though he was banned for a year from the state of Ohio. Had this banning actually kept him from playing ball, maybe it could be seen as punishment, but it did not. Cobb was forced to go to Canada and more or less sneak into Cleveland, though since he was there in the outfield and the line-up card said Ty Cobb, no one was really serious about being sneaky or keeping Cobb from playing. He was banned from entering Ohio, but not being in Ohio.

The list goes on. A fan, admittedly a rude, asshole of a fan, in New York was heckling Cobb, saying nasty things about Cobb's wife. Finally, Cobb broke and went into the stands. As he was beating the crap out of the guy, the fans yelled "stop, he has no

hands.” Various sources say the man had either no hands, no fingers, or a piece of a hand, but when the fans yelled out, Cobb supposedly said, “I don’t care if he has no feet” and went on beating the crippled man until other players pulled Cobb off the heckler.

In three or four reported incidents Cobb also beat up thugs who tried to mug him, and though it’s unproven, might have left one of them bleeding and unconscious on a city sidewalk where he died. Cobb told Al Stump, his biographer, that “In 1912 — and you can write this down — I killed a man in Detroit.” This confession would hold more water if Stump hadn’t been so obviously out to make his fame and some money. No one knows what to believe in Stump’s book. But it’s also been reported that Cobb walked around tough neighborhoods flashing money and jewelry, sorting of baiting thugs to come after him, and then leaving them bleeding on the curb.

And there are writers who say little of this really happened. Cobb is on record as giving generous praise about black players such as Roy Campanella and Willie Mays and also stating that there’s no reason black players should not be in the major leagues. This was many years after Cobb retired from the game.

I don’t support the Cobb-is-a-good-guy group, but I am sure there’s some doubt surrounding his misdeeds too. It’s complicated, as is the story of most legends, and the story of race in America.

Say we add up our sins — venial, mortal — like notches on a barrel. Forgive me, Father, it’s been 50 years since my last confession. There’s a lifetime of penance for a decent man. But for my Ty Cobb, it was hard slides, sharp spikes, beating up black folks, a little bloodletting here and there and then you build a hospital. It’s the man without a fat wallet who must work for redemption.

3.

They say every man needs protection

They say every man might fall

— Dylan

How? When? Where?

Ty Cobb’s little museum in Royston is humble — despite all

the Ty Cobb signs and the street with his name on it, his museum is hard to find. I can't be the only pilgrim that drove around the block twice, drove right past it, and then on the second pass noticed the little sign and drove into the medical clinic parking lot thinking *this is really weird*. I expected Cobb to at least have his own building, his own entrance, his own special door, but here I am slowly, tentatively, walking down a sidewalk under a blue sheet metal awning toward blue steel double doors and entering a clinic where three black families and a white one are filling out forms, waiting to be seen by doctors or nurses. No one's dying — not obviously bleeding out, gut shot. It's a Walk-In Clinic. I walk in and feel sort of guilty that I'm pretty healthy — at least for today. I don't need my heart checked; my cancer seems to be gone. I'm not limping, and I don't even have a cold. My supply of cholesterol and blood pressure pills is full and doing, I guess, their work well. So I sheepishly skirt around the sick people and cross to the other side of the room. The light's different; there's a lot of glass, blond wood, display cases and a sign that says *Ty Cobb Museum. For admission go to the Admissions Desk*. It's so simple. I rub the blond wood — nearly the same color as a Louisville Slugger and I walk toward the admissions desk, still intent on apologizing for not being sick. It's not how I imagine Ty would do it. My spikes are dull. I am apologetic though I am sure I have done nothing wrong to anyone here. There's a gift shop behind the admissions desk, but both seem unattended. I make some shuffling noises, and in a moment a woman calls in a sweet tea voice, "Just a moment." Then she appears, smiling, motherly, cherubic. "Yes," she says, "can I help you?"

"I want to go into the museum," I say.

"Sure honey." She takes my five dollars.

A bargain, I think, to see Ty. She walks through the clinic waiting area, not at all sheepish about the sick people sitting there, and unlocks the museum doors. Lights slowly go on — maybe sensing our presence, our body heat, my desire. The first stop is a little theatre, about as big as the alcoves that vendors sell gyros out of on New York streets, or a McMansion's walk-in closets.

"Sorry," she says, "but the fancy DVD big screen thing's broken and so we have to use this old TV and the VCR. Good thing we didn't get rid of it."

"That's fine," I say. I don't tell her that I never sit and watch these things, but this time there's nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. It's just me and the Sweet Tea lady and she's trying so hard.

I sit. The lights go down and the film begins to roll; as she walks away she says, “if you have any questions, come see me.” I have a lot of questions.

This is pretty good. Cool and dark. It’s late June in Georgia outside. Hot and bright. And I drove around and around missing the museum so much that I built up, if not a hard sweat, a sort of anxiety tic. How can I get lost in this little town I kept asking myself as I drove, turned left and left, back to the sign, the arrow, and then just sort of gave up and drove into the clinic parking lot. I figured if this was not the Ty Cobb museum surely someone here would know where it was. So now I sit, relaxed, ready to enjoy, to learn something or at least regroup.

The film’s good. I learn about Cobb, relearn things I’d forgotten. I’m amazed at how great he was. Twelve batting titles in 13 years. I’m a little stunned, here in the dark, by Cobb’s numbers. I know enough about base running to understand Cobb’s greatness there; you try to make the infielder think you’re going left, then you fade right. Then the next time he thinks last time you went right and this time you slide left and catch the bag with your trailing hand. Then the guy doesn’t know anything for sure anymore. The more he thinks the deeper in trouble he gets. After a few games, or a few years, he starts telling you which way to slide. You read his body, his eyes. They say the ball’s here; it’s high, wide, it’s not going to get me. Or they say, my God, it’s close. Then the sharp spikes come up high and glint in the afternoon sun. They are fabled, dangerous, a rattler in a red clay cotton field, and the fielder moves a half step off the bag. Gives away the bag and hopes that the swipe tag won’t look like the desperate gesture it so often is. Cobb knows what he can do and he does it. He knows how to kick the ball out of a glove, how to spike the soft flesh on the inside of a shortstop’s wrist, when to cut that fat calf muscle to shreds. When those fangs strike, most men let the ball roll out of their glove into the pocked, cleated dirt, and then Cobb reaches back and tags the bag again, just to make sure. His eyes, his disdainful grin, say remember this next time.

I think damn, this man invented the baseball I know — base-running, bunting, sliding — the hook, fade away, feint, give, take, glide. I learned all of this too, all but the honed spikes; I’ve taken out a few infielders, even hit a runner between the eyes with the ball when I was turning two because he would not duck. But I was no Ty Cobb.

I learn a lot there, sitting in the dark. I'm amazed at how rewarded I have been here in this little museum in the Ty Cobb Medical Center, across from the Ty Cobb Hospital, just off Ty Cobb Street, just a few blocks from the Ty Cobb mural where the 17 and U.S. 29 intersect. The holdings here are modest, but they have made their mark on me. Most of the Cobb artifacts are in Cooperstown, but there's enough of Cobb here: his bats, gloves, uniforms, his Coca-Cola ads, his glasses, pictures of Ty duck hunting, Ty addressing the U.S. Congress, Ty sad when his children die, Ty old and posing with a bull dog.

There's a lot that's not here too. None of the stories about Cobb beating up black people that look like the black people sitting only a few feet away in the Ty Cobb clinic. The Cobb baseball stories here are mostly good ones, and accounts by those from around here who knew Cobb ignore and even refute those more public stories of his fights with teammates, of the claims that he was, mostly, hated by everyone in baseball.

There's another big story that's largely missing too. Ty Cobb's mother killed his father. It ought to be a pretty big deal, but here it's largely ignored. When Mrs. Cobb was on trial, it was just up the road in Lavonia. When the killing happened, it dominated the local papers, possibly regional and state too. It did not get much national attention because Cobb had not yet made the big leagues, but he was very close. It was just a couple of weeks before he got called up to the Detroit Tigers that Cobb's mother shot his father with either a pistol or a shotgun. Again there are conflicting stories: Amanda Cobb and the court transcripts say the weapon that killed W.H. Cobb was pistol; Ty Cobb and almost everyone who has written about this say the weapon was the family shotgun, a gun that Ty Cobb kept around his house despite the fact that he supposedly thought that shotgun and his mother killed his father. More conflicting versions — Cobb's supporters, almost all locals, say Cobb's father was trying to sneak back into his house after a night of drinking. Of course, being a pillar of the community, he did not want his wife and others to know. Others, some local, some not, not everyone liked the Cobb family, say he suspected his wife was having an affair and W.H. wanted to catch her, or someone, with their pants down. Local gossip claimed that Amanda might have been pretty bored with her married life and was looking for a younger lover. W.H. Cobb married Amanda when she was only 14 (she was his student) and he was the only

man she'd ever been with.

If that's what old man Cobb was worried about, it got him killed. If he was really trying to sneak into his own house, and he thought sneaking into the bedroom where his wife was sleeping was a good way to do it, then he was not as smart as most people gave him credit for. Friendly gossip said that there was another man in her bedroom that night and that man killed W.H. Evidence never turned up another lover, and in a town as small as Royston the fact that no other lover was ever confirmed would seem to prove that one never existed. And, maybe more telling, Amanda Cobb never remarried, never ran off with a lover. She did get arrested, charged with killing her husband, and put on trial, but she was acquitted. Ty Cobb sat in the courtroom and watched the trial, but again, gossip and his biographies say that he was never again very close to his mother. He said, in a rare moment of candor, near the end of his life, "My father had his head blown off with a shotgun when I was 18 years old — by a member of my own family. I didn't get over that." Though he never publicly accused his mother of murdering his father, when Amanda Cobb died in 1936, her son did not go to the funeral.

4.

I had to fight all my life to survive. They were all against me, but I beat the bastards and left them in the ditch.

— Ty Cobb

There's some first-class paranoia in that statement. Some of it's true. A lot of people in the baseball world did not like Cobb because he was such a jerk. A few fought him, either in anger or self-defense. Certainly, everyone who played against Cobb wanted to beat him and no small number would have enjoyed seeing him crash and burn, but that rarely happened in Cobb's long career. Cobb's claim that "all" his life he had to fight is either exaggerated or false. He certainly had it better than many of those around him. His father was a college educated teacher who became the superintendent of schools and later a State Senator. The Cobb family was respected in the community and had some money, but money can't buy love. Ty Cobb was not a happy man and probably not a happy child either.

Cobb speaks often of how he dedicated himself to becoming a great baseball player because his father never got to see him play. He does not mention that his father did not want him to play; Cobb's father wanted him to be a doctor and he disapproved of Cobb's de-

sire to be a ball player. One version of the story says Cobb's father told Ty to "not come home if he did not succeed." It was sort of a "with your shield or on it" farewell.

So, maybe Cobb needed to forgive as much as he needed forgiveness. Maybe he suspected his mother killed his father on purpose. Maybe he never knew if there was another man in the bedroom or not. He might have known that making a saint of his father and dedicating his tough, dirty and violent baseball career to a man who probably would not have cared about baseball success lacked the ring of truth and maybe that made him even more angry. Maybe he played as dirty as he did to teach his cold, hard to please, domineering father a lesson. Something made Cobb mean.

Ty Cobb did not die well. At the end of his life he had cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure, an enlarged prostate, and Bright's disease, a degenerative kidney disorder. I don't know what, if anything, can be ascribed to Karma, but Cobb seems to have died miserably after not living well and not enjoying his great career either. He certainly reaped what he had sown.

I drove into Royston assuming Cobb needed forgiveness. I'd been told and I'd read that he was mean, the meanest, dirtiest player baseball ever saw. After I left the Ty Cobb museum, for a few minutes I wanted to like Ty Cobb the baseball player. I wanted to separate him from the rest of his life and marvel at a player with his stats, at a base runner who stole home 54 times. I wanted to forgive him his sharp spikes and hard slides, but the more I thought about him, the more the life of Cobb that was not portrayed in the museum came to light, the harder it was to forgive him. I wanted to measure Ty Cobb by his statistics, contain him within his humble museum and whitewashed museum life, but I couldn't do it.

It appears that Cobb was forgiven in Royston. If he needed to forgive his father, his mother or himself, then I don't think he did. My first questions — did Cobb desire forgiveness? did he deserve to be forgiven? — probably can't be answered. The unasked question, unasked unless readers will ask it, or can read my mind, is why do I care so much whether Cobb's among the forgiven or the cursed. I'm not talking heaven or hell here, not wondering or worrying if Cobb got into, or will get into, heaven. Shit, no way. Let's be honest. It ought to be harder for Ty Cobb to get into heaven than it is for a fat, rich camel to pass through the eye of a needle. This isn't about that. I know less about heaven's admission standards than almost anything else in or out of this world. But I do think about forgiveness a whole lot. I never forgave my father for his transgressions. I am terribly, obsessive-

ly worried that I will not be forgiven for mine. I don't know. If Royston wants to forgive Cobb, let them. It won't hurt them too much because hardly anyone ever comes here to see the signs, to visit the museum. Few will think it's wrong for Royston to forgive Cobb his sins, few people will even know that it has. I can't forgive him, but what does that matter to Cobb, to Royston, to the Hall of Fame, to anyone? I don't think that my not forgiving him will hurt my chances of forgiveness. We have far different sins.

A Coda, of sorts.

Ruth could run ok, for a fat man.
— Cobb

A year later I was still revising this essay. I drove to Royston again, not to go to the Cobb Museum, just to get something to eat. But Cobb had been on my mind, of course. There's a sign, crudely drawn and painted, "Royston: Home of the Immortal Ty Cobb." I say to myself, having been alone for twelve days, I don't know about immortal. Sure, it's just a saying, a figure of speech that implies Cobb's immortal because we will never forget him. But though he's not forgotten, he's almost completely absent from the public's, and baseball's consciousness. When was the last time the baseball news mentioned Cobb? Probably when Pete Rose broke his record hits in a career. And then Rose, maybe cursed by being a part of the Cobb legacy, got caught gambling, kicked out of baseball, banned from the Hall of Fame, and has become a pathetic figure, a bit of a buffoon, in the story of baseball heroes.

Cobb's baseball story isn't as sad as Rose's. Cobb's in the Hall. His records, all but the one Rose broke, remain his. Cobb's personal life was sad, but his baseball story, if we leave out the murder, his estranged relationship with his mother, his drinking and drug addictions, the way he treated his wives, the ugly things he said about women and blacks in print, all of that "little" stuff, Cobb's legacy remains intact. Intact, as in he still holds all those records and he might be, arguably, the best baseball player ever. But immortal? Cobb's nemesis, the Babe, is far more legend, icon, and by those standards more immortal than Cobb. He hit home runs and we love home runs. He had great nick names: The Babe, The Bambino. There was the House that Ruth Built, and though that house has been demolished, it's still there in Yankee fans and

many fans' minds. It's immortal too.

Cobb was "the Georgia Peach." This just doesn't work. It's rural, regional, Southern. It's like local color Southern writers battling the New York crowd for attention and only coming away with the label Regionalists. It's a backhanded compliment. Today, when I drove to Royston, not particularly thinking of Ty Cobb, I accidentally ended up on Ty Cobb Street. I saw a boring little brick house for sale there, a hair salon and an auto detail shop. The Ty Cobb Museum, which I drove by again with my deli dinner in my seat (including a peach cobbler, further irony, maybe a further indignity for Ty Cobb) I noticed that the museum is in the Joe A. Adams Professional Building. Joe's name is three times as large as Cobb's. Cobb can't like this. Even his charity efforts seem to have fallen short.

Whether Cobb's being forgotten because he was a mean and despicable man or because time and baseball are just moving away from him, I don't know. If I were a sports writer doing some short spot on ESPN, I wouldn't pick Cobb because I'd either have to ignore his despicable behavior or dwell on them and never really get to the baseball story I was looking for.

If I am Major League Baseball, I've already been hit hard by scandal in the last few years: Pete Rose, Denny McClain, the steroid boys of summer — Canseco, McGuire, Sosa, Clemens, Bonds. I'm worried already about the debates and the news coverage when those guys are eligible for the Hall. Maybe the last thing I want is to dredge up Ty Cobb, a man who makes Pete Rose and Denny McClain look like saints. Maybe we'd even have to look closely at that lovable drunk, the Babe, who shared a mistress with Ty Cobb. Apparently, whoever's road schedule took them closest to Baltimore slept with her. (I can't believe Cobb knew, though: it does not seem his style to share.)

After all this research and speculation, after driving around this fading little town and following slow moving farm equipment through the countryside, I am tired of thinking about Cobb. It's 96 degrees this afternoon. I want to put Cobb on some back shelf, but because I do not drive the straight path, I find myself in Cairo, GA, on the next to last leg home. I turn on GA 93 and see that it's called the Jackie Robinson Memorial Highway. I tell my creative nonfiction students that they need to pay attention to the gifts that writers are given — that when we find this synchronicity, when this closure comes our way, we need to recognize the significance of our experience. If I had invented driving home

on the Jackie Robinson Highway, a memorial to a great player and a man who was morally everything that Cobb was not, if this were fiction it would be over the top, too easy. But this is nonfiction and I'm driving this road. And just to make sure that I know I'm getting some sort of writer's blessing, Bob Marley's "Redemption Song" is playing on my IPOD. I drove into Royston thinking about forgiveness, and I'm driving into my hometown singing of redemption. I will, based on all I know now, say that Cobb needed forgiveness and did not deserve redemption. I know too that I'm not the man to offer it.

Catherine Chandler

**On Reading the 40th Statewide Investigating
Grand Jury Report**

*And pray that I may forget
These matters that with myself I too much discuss
Too much explain
Because I do not hope to turn again
Let these words answer
For what is done, not to be done again*

—T.S. Eliot, from “Ash Wednesday”

i.

The lilac’s fallen heart-shaped leaves glissade
across the crusted snow, on days as thin
as twigs, and nights when time winds back to when
it ended. Still, its steadfast little bud,

defending future flowers, future seed,
in overlapping scales of mauve and green
and ancient symmetries of fixed design,
confronts the cold in armored certitude.

Yet next spring, should there come a late hard frost
or April ice storm, some will blacken, wither,
promised inflorescence unfulfilled.

I chant a litany of the erased,
of spirits deadened by a demon father;
a flock of children cut off from the fold.

ii.

A flock of children cut off from the fold,
the hijacked souls of Bloomsburg, Bethlehem,
Wilkes-Barre, Turtle Creek . . . the voiceless, some
with records of their testimonies called

“sticky situations.” Now unsealed:
one thousand pages plus of wanton crime
in basements, boiler rooms, at school, at home,
in rectories, confessionals . . . the failed

attempts to hold “bad actors” to account.
Betrayals. Reassignments. Thoughts and prayers.
Denials. “Little secrets.” Outright lies.

Suicidal trauma. Decades spent
in counseling. The hell of countless hours
remembering — unbidden — stolen days.

iii.

Remembering unbidden, stolen days,
are boys from Saegertown, who underwent
the “prostate checks” a parish priest from Saint
Bernadette’s would practice as a ruse.

Despite the broken laws of child abuse,
the predators, tenacious, nonchalant,
pursued their prey, rejoicing in the hunt,
cocksure of those benevolent pooh-poohs

by bishops who would let the clock run out
on legal action, or OK a “sick
leave” to restore, they hoped, a state of grace

to crafty pedophiles who’d penetrate
the first-grade girls at Sacred Heart and fuck
the altar boys who served at Holy Cross.

Catherine Chandler

iv.

The altar boys who served at Holy Cross,
Saint Anthony's, Saint Joseph's, and the ones
at Holy Guardian Angels School, Saint Ann's,
Saint Peter's and Our Lady Queen of Peace,

were groomed with flattery, perverse advice,
expensive gifts from so-called paragons
of holiness, who'd act as chaperones
at camps where sodomy was commonplace.

Is this too hard to read? Too hard to hear?
There's more. "Strawberry-flavored popsicles
and lollipops" the boys were forced lick;

photo sessions, hoarded pubic hair,
fondled breasts, vaginas, testicles.
The carefree childhood they cannot get back.

v.

The carefree childhood they cannot get back
haunts like an unholy Holy Ghost.
Some disassemble, burying the past,
while some dissemble balance, businesslike,

relations and relationships a wreck.
And so it is I sing of one I lost,
the first boy that I loved and loved the best,
and always shall. And though I choose to speak,

I will not name the faithless deviant
who leered as Sister spanked me on her lap
for chattering at Sunday Mass; the one

who, after multiple complaints, was sent
to shepherd yet another flock of sheep.
Among them was a boy not quite sixteen.

vi.

Among them was a boy not quite sixteen.
He never told me where or how the sad
assault — by one who'd consecrated bread
and wine — occurred. That summer's Thunder Moon,

the first of two that month, was rising when
he left me. What had caused him to decide
against our love? I felt confused, betrayed.
But now I know the truth. This sonnet crown

was destined to be written on a night
nineteen thousand thirty-seven days
ago. At last, I understand my loss

pales in comparison with his. Not sweet,
but bittersweet, this order, as it tries
to end, as it began, on notes of grace.

vii.

To end, as it began, on notes of grace,
I sing the beauty of December's bleak
perspective: Advent Sunday in a week,
Lake Wallenpaupack's frosted Irish lace,

the silver Cold Moon's old familiar face,
the Geminids' bright horizontal streak,
the *pui pui pui* of the pine grosbeak,
O Antiphons . . . the infinite embrace

of one who's never wavered in her search
for what was lost those many years ago.
There is a merciful and righteous God

whose emblem dwells in chapel and in church;
but also where, across the crusted snow,
the lilac's fallen heart-shaped leaves glissade.

Terese Coe

Apollo and Daphne

He shifts into an Attic hound —
Daphne will bend to his law —
and snaps and tears at her peplos,
her linen and blood in his jaw.

She runs again, shouts to her father,
The hound is Apollo, he'll take me!
Beauty is only a curse to me —
destroy me or unmake me!

Apollo leaps for her loosened hair,
her flesh becomes bark as she flies.
Her feet sink into the ground as roots —
the laurel he clutches has eyes.

Pounding the trunk, he hears the beat
of Daphne's sealed-in heart.
In a fury, the god rips out her leaves
for his wreath to war and art.

Former Settlement, New York Bay

Governor's Island

The narrowness of day
leans sideways with the light
across the bluish mosses,
the streaks in purple slate.

Across the rocking waters
the tale is told once more
in masonry and musket
of settlement and war

and nature as men found it
in schist and sandy loam,
Atlantic fog engulfing
the forces and the stone.

On posts that have no torches,
on paths of odd-shaped slate,
on seekers and small children
walking to the gate,

the ghost town sows new seed
before the foghorn moans,
before the last departure,
before the ferry home.

Patricia Corbus

Along Glassy Creek

It shows up most in February,
 crisp as April never was, a mask
 of flattery in the snow. Don't ask

about what cannot march or bury
 itself in straw, crusted with rust
 and turpentine, darkly fussed

with rime. It never comes slowly,
 but pokes its head out of a burrow,
 a Private suddenly released on furlough,

and levels its lusterless eyes coolly
 on my tight face, as if to announce
 that it is oh-so-free to even accounts

whenever it chooses — though never in August,
 leaning sideways, one shucked stalk
 stuck in blown haze. It is a lock

of hair, whipped in the eyes, a rock tossed
 to the top of the spring, bubbling lace —
 the wavering palace of your face.

Morri Creech

The Road

1.

I met the past
on a country road

out where the poor
bury their dead

it was after dark
the house I sought

wore the mist
like an overcoat

where are you going
he said to me

the briar bush
the house the lea

the stars too all
are fugitive

the backward look
is how you live

2.

So I followed him
breath on the air

trailed behind
me like despair

and I could hear
those several winds

Morri Creech

that helped the means
achieve the ends

from the fool's oath
to the wise decree

to the proud tower
to the gallows tree

I asked him for
his name he said

I am the wormwood
the bitter bread

3.

The past grinned
to show me all

the raftered bones
that built the fall

the promises
that led to grief

like tent worms
on a locust leaf

those dividends
that drove the lash

and sunk the soldier's
boots in ash

the things I saw there
struck me dumb

my own town burned
his kingdom come

4.

He held midnight
in his hands

the dark was his
to give commands

he conjured up
the Spanish fleet

that bore abroad
the spirochete

Hiroshima
as it stood before

the blind breach
at the atom's core

plant your shovel
deep in lime

he said you'll prize
some founding crime

5.

His hand unlocked
the masks I'd worn

to hide myself
since I was born

the awkward kid
without a cent

at twenty-five
turned arrogant

the drunk who stared
in an empty cup

Morri Creech

and the rake who turned
his collar up

but when I asked
which one was me

no turn of phrase
would twist the key

6.

I said to him
I've had enough

he reached and grabbed
me by the scruff

boy he said
though you're still here

with every breath
you disappear

the future's just
a tightening noose

and no one
can snatch you loose

I am your compass
your north star

I am the nothing
that you are

7.

I looked ahead
and traveled on

three times a rooster
signaled dawn

the house I sought
was a few steps more

my shadow stretched
to the front door

the road behind
seemed like a spool

of thread unraveled
by a fool

then someone said
you've found the place

it was his voice
it was my face

Morri Creech

Twilight

The sun is a streak of peach across the lake,
moon a gown of gauze caught in the trees.
Between the spigot and the garden rake
the spider spins its tenuous trapeze.

*

Truth is on hold. Philosophers, take note:
a barn dissolves into the muffling mist.
The solid world slips off on Charon's boat
to vex the dreams of the materialist.

*

Though honeybees retreat into the hive
and lilies' throats constrict at close of day,
the best of fates is still to be alive
for all the honeyed words the ancients say.

*

Too late for work. Too early yet for bed.
The window's rinsed with gold but one can see
the consummation of what lies ahead
as, slowly, light revokes its sole decree.

*

At dawn and dusk the future meets the past.
The stars, for all they govern, irk the mind —
those glittering dice the universe has cast
on the empty baize by which they are defined.

*

No sound for miles. Not even a hint of wind.
The swing sets in the local park are still.
It's like the quiet calm at supper's end
shortly before the waiter brings the bill.

*

To make the morning is to unmake night,
whatever else one chooses to believe.
It's darkness that first said Let There Be Light —
the great creator with Nothing up its sleeve.

*

Have twilit meanings spun between the lines
not always been the subject of the text?
The maker gets snared in his own designs:
from word to world, one sentence to the next.

Morri Creech

Burning the Leaves

Dad wheelbarrows the leaves into the ditch.
November and the ground is tinged with frost,
air heavy with smoke, the autumn colors rich.
He squints at the camera looking vaguely lost.
Mom leans against the handle of her rake
next to the trailer thinking God knows what,
as though the day were just some big mistake.
A marriage and prim lawn are what she's got,
plus a kid who whizzes by on roller skates,
small at the road's edge but there all the same.
She looks at something far away and waits.
The years crowd in around the picture frame.
The dead leaves at her feet keep piling higher
and, in the background, you can see the fire.

Search Engine

I'm the new catalog of creation.
I'm the nexus of peace and jihad.
I'm the shrine of late night masturbation.
I'm the postmodern version of God.

For each dexterous click of the fingers
I'm a smart algorithm grown wise.
I appeal to both left and right wingers.
I can see behind every disguise.

I'm a cursor just waiting to tell you
the thing that you most want to know.
I can show you the blueprints to Bellevue.
I can help you make plenty of dough.

Do your night sweats mean you have cancer?
Are you worried that mole has changed shape?
For each question I have the right answer.
For each mousetrap I have an escape.

Here's a formula for nuclear fission
and directions for baking a cake.
Here's how to make a decision
when it's late and you're still wide awake.

I can help you sustain an erection.
I know all your secrets by heart.
I can influence a public election
and interpret your medical chart.

I'll soothe you when you feel defeated.
Believe me. Just pick up the phone.
I'll tell you all you've ever needed.
I'll tell you your life is your own.

Morri Creech

Cape Cod Evening

Edward Hopper, oil on canvas, 30 x 40 in.

The way she folds her arms across
her waist while evening closes in

as though she bears some private loss
she'll have to grieve alone again,

the way he reaches out to call
the dog that will not come, that stands

in deep grass at the edge of fall
and turns away from his commands —

even the way the house looks bare,
its windows giving on to no

bland views of couch or Frigidaire
or any comforts we might know,

or the way shadows pool around
those trees which seem to vanish fast,

burrowing root-hairs in the ground
like something buried in the past —

makes us believe they won't last long,
this couple painted years ago.

Autumn is one way things went wrong.
The fallow grass awaits the snow.

John Foy

Alan Kurdi

There is no interest at this time, no hope,
no place that isn't far away.
Please help me, if you can, to understand.
I don't know what to pray for now
that Alan Kurdi lies there on the sand.
It looks as though he's had enough.
There's nothing now that I can say to him,
a little boy upon the beach,
face-down. He lies there at the end of time.
His days upon the earth were few,
and water was the final thing he knew.
His shirt was red, his pants were blue.
Now let me go to him and pick him up
and take his body in my arms.

John Foy

Out of Body

My body died. I saw it from above.
I drifted out of it, and there it was
like something used. I looked at it
on the gurney, trying to be sure.
All was bright and very beautiful,
like when you see someone you haven't seen
in a long time, you want to go to them.
My mother was there in the energy and light,
and I saw the faces of my son and daughter
not wanting me to go, but not afraid.
And that was it. It happened years ago
and doesn't matter now. I have some friends,
a few who still come by to sit with me,
but it doesn't matter anymore.

The Wheelbarrow

(in Brazil)

This one's had its share of woe
if the chewed-up look of it
is anything to go by now.
It knows a little bit about
all the washed-out nights of rain
and summer days just standing there
in the sad, tropical sun.
Blue moons have come and gone
and hell has frozen over thrice,
and work, the sweat of big hands,
has educed, somehow, a shine
from this life that's mostly given
to dirt and dust and firewood.
The barrow's been relied upon
to take on stacks of cut-up wood
for the bonfires we often light
and sit by, talking for hours
in the soft Brazilian night.
It's been relied upon to hold
itself together, wheel and pin,
and not give in to grieving much.
It's known some better days, and worse,
like us — no mystery there.
It stands behind the house,
obedient and filled again
with wood that we will use tonight
to build, again, a bonfire
here under the Southern Cross.

Andrew Frisardi

Non-Noah and the Rainbow

Each day I need a refresher course
in living, something, a prayer maybe,
condensing in the air of me.

I rise, open the blinds half-mast,
fold up the night, unfold the news:
all shapes of light I can't refuse.

I'm shadow in the midst, at most
non-Noah, arkless in the flood
of absence that's my element.

Not completely though. Some shred
that I don't know is a tensile thread
in the blue, a rainbow filament.

After the storm I walk in mud
and look up at the motley crest
the disappearing moisture leaves,

and birds conveying branches from land
and the bow is bent to the Dyer's hand
and the eye is transparent that perceives.

Joseph Harrison

Stopping

Whose woods these are we all know well
Though, tight-lipped, most refuse to tell,
Reluctant to assume the cost
Of any silly, childish spell

To make such hidden things stay lost:
No wind no ice no snow no frost,
No solid winter six feet deep
Nor'easter-swirled and bluster-tossed

Now blanketing a world asleep
Beneath the dark sky's starless sweep,
None of that. Just my double-take
To find, at my age, I still keep

Making my typical mistake,
Stopping beside this frozen lake
When I have promises to break
And miles to go before I wake.

Hardy's Writing Trousers

Where are the hounds who ran the land,
The Chowders and the Bowers
Who bayed at everything,
Or rumbled in a dust-storm of a band
Swerving right or wrong as
Led by the zig-zag skitters of their prey?
They had their day.
They did not last as long as
The piece of raveled, triple-knotted string
That held up Thomas Hardy's writing trousers.

Where are the folk who owned the land,
The holiday carousers
Who played at the latest thing,
Swirling together as the village band
Wound up a final song as
Shalloon and sash and kerchief caught the sway?
They had their day.
They did not last as long as
The piece of raveled, triple-knotted string
That held up Thomas Hardy's writing trousers.

Where are the old ones knew the land,
The forkers, diggers, dowers
Who stayed at some hard thing
While fields closed in and pass-through routes were banned,
With wand and spade and prong as
Busy as if their way were the only way?
They had their day.
They did not last as long as
The piece of raveled, triple-knotted string
That held up Thomas Hardy's writing trousers.

The Forsaken Singer

When his music defined what the young folk wanted,
When to sing so purely was risky and brave,
And his drop-dead artistry, echo-haunted
By concatenations of wind and wave
Where the foam flower blooms and the sea mew hovers,
Made the high tide fill the most secretive nooks
With studied perfection, true poetry lovers
 Bought his books.

He sang as if there were no tomorrows,
As if past and present were one fluid tense
Full of tacit longings and private sorrows,
As if beauty were meaning and sound were sense.
And all those who heard him were certain they knew
Why he sang as he sang, for a darkling change
Swept over the seascape to render their view
 Rich and strange.

But fashion, as fashioned, falls victim to time.
The polished, percussive extremes of a style
Swirling in arabesque rhythm and rhyme
For a while seemed just right. But just for a while.
What the past most admired the future opposes.
When the sea winds rise and the sea pines sway
Some things get, like summer's most delicate roses,
 Blown away.

Oh yes he was king of the cats, whose fame
Seemed permanent, scripted by stars. And yet
How many, today, remember his name?
The world doesn't end, but we do forget.
A singer falls silent a hundred years.
Rare bookstores vanish. Small libraries close.
What happens to music when no one hears?
 No one knows.

Joseph Harrison

Late Autumnal

Peace. Mists. The sense of something near its end.
Last fruits have fallen, leaves have fallen, too.
Harvest was plumpness, sweetness, swell and bend,
Full-bodied. But that's done. The bees are through.
Winnowing, gleaning, reaping--all are past.
What could be saved has been saved. Now in store
Just coldness, hardness, frost. A light wind dies.
We had enough, and then some. We wanted more
From this, our perfect season which couldn't last.
The stubble darkens. Days are fading fast.
A final swallow, twittering. The skies.

Charles Hughes

Love Keeps the Evening Sky

Tie game, six-six. Indifferent dusk descending.
The umpire ruled they'd play another inning.
A sweetness from the river censed the air
They played in, and the sun contributed
What light it could through low, dissolving clouds:

Some pink, some purple, others indigo.
One boy, who in his four at-bats so far
Had struck out every time, singled to left
His fifth time up, then scored the winning run
On the next batter's double to the fence.

Time passed. He lived the way most people live.
As an old man, he turned a little silent,
Poking around dead jealousies and angers,
His permanently undone kindnesses.
That single of his, that dive across home plate;

He'd caught from them a certain confidence,
A sudden-onset faith in time itself —
In time's forbearance — which would go with him
To grown-up life, too comfortable to question.
"You fail, you can redeem yourself in time" —

Practical shorthand for this faith he'd lived by,
Not mourning much the moments as they vanished,
Until an evening sky came back to him:
Its darkening cloud-shards treading perfumed air,
The brave blood-redness of the laboring sun.

Charles Hughes

Late Bloomer

Forty-eight hours it took the trees
To go from black to green, the grass
To match, the tulips to amass —
In sunlit, patchwork congeries —

Reds, yellows, lavenders, and whites.
Finally, spring's up! — but slept so late —
Now pressing to accelerate
The pace at which its day ignites.

All of which calls to mind a man
Whose Ph.D. had been delayed
(Why? — I guess I was afraid
To ask) and who at last began

Teaching at fifty, no doubt aware
He might redeem — or he might not —
The time he'd lost for doing what
He once joked was his cross to bear.

His course on Christian thought was work:
Long books to read; two papers; three
Exams (one more than normal). He
Got dubbed the Human Question Mark,

Aptly, his posture signaling stress.
Stooped shoulders, tall (six-three?), rail-thin,
He'd stand sideways and lecture in
His tight-wound way, short on success.

One morning, May had jumped ahead,
From ur-July to faux November:
Cold, whipping rain I still remember.
And I remember how he said —

Just after letting the class know
He'd learned he'd soon be unemployed —
While senseless weather rendered void
Blossoms spring meant at least for show —

“With God, all things are possible.”
No faintest note of irony.
Evenly, unselfconsciously.
More eye contact than usual.

Julie Kane

Akhmatova

St. Petersburg, 2002

While Pushkin monuments were everywhere,
It took some time to find the right address
Where Stalin caged her like a lioness.
The courtyard trees (her only view) were bare.
Indoors: a shabby couch, a desk, a chair,
And two more images of Pushkin's face
Invading even her domestic space —
I guess it gave her hope to see him there.
Imagine thirty years of house arrest
Made somehow bearable by books and art,
The silver icon of the chilled dawn kiss.
Before my own home country fell apart —
It makes me so ashamed, admitting this —
I envied her that subject matter's heft.

The Scream

I used to have a scream stuck in my throat
No matter what I did to jam it down:
Unswallowed pill on which I used to choke

No matter how much alcohol or smoke
I flung at it to try to wash it down.
I used to have a scream stuck in my throat:

Teakettle steam about to sing its note
Or seam of lava barely pressured down.
In desperation, I would sometimes choke

On random cocks to give the thing a poke.
Like tamping pipe tobacco farther down —
But still I had a scream stuck in my throat.

Not like a scream in nightmares, where no mote
Of sound escapes though monsters hunt you down:
In dreams, you want to scream, but still you choke.

This monster was still there when I awoke;
No earthly weaponry could bring it down,
Those years I had a scream stuck in my throat
Until I spoke my truth and did not choke.

Julie Kane

Baby of the Family

It was the month the orca
Would not release her calf,
Nosing it to the surface
When it slid off her back.
“She carried it a thousand miles,”
Said the whale research staff.

J-Pod’s numbers were dwindling,
Live births a thing of the past.
But it swam for thirty minutes,
Unlike her stillborn calf.
“It’s almost like a parable,”
Said the whale research staff.

D. was our family’s baby,
Most probably the last.
All those in *vitro* treatments,
Those shots in the ass.
The mother made a “tour of grief,”
Said the whale research staff.

April Lindner

Giant River Otters

Out of zest or sheer showoffery
these pleasers romp all afternoon
the only animals awake
in August's acrid heat. They ping

against the bumpers of their pit
and tumble, clamber, undulant as eels.
Their work is sport, their element
this manmade reeking river.

A torrent of them spill over the waterfall.
Children scream with joy,
and they shriek back. At mealtime,
silver fish rain from the sky.

A brief frenzy of snarls and snapping jaws-
gets sorted out with one herring apiece.
One hugs his fish and gnaws it,
eyes closed to slits. Another finds a morsel

of sardine gut floating past
and fingers it before he laps it up.
Another hurls himself into a dive,
so much more graceful than his separate parts —

his stumpy flippers and sleek black skull,
thick hips and tiny ears, slippery pelt
and bristly whiskers, his flatly thwacking tail.

April Lindner

Operation Secure Streets

This summer they're stationed
on every street corner, guarding
churches, fountains, embassies,
young men and an occasional woman
in camo, combat boots, berets.
L'Operazione Strade Sicure.

When I take a wrong turn
one hurries up to warn me
I'm headed for trouble.
Voice gentle, he calls me
Signora, wants not to alarm me
but he cradles an automatic.

I grope for words and, flustered,
mime my innocence. Satisfied
that I can be no threat he says
I must *Fare un giro*,
and watches me comply.

Meanwhile back in the United States
a driver pulls to the curb,
and in the pulsing red and blue
reaches for license and registration.
He looks the part of a wanted man
and all his care is still not care enough.

It's Beautiful, Like Birth,

The hospice lady cooed
You'll see him growing purer, turning inward . . .
His flesh readying to be shed.

I pictured a white candle
liberated from its shape,
loosening to liquid
in service of a shuddering flame.

Beyond the picture window
Florida trembled, glistening
like shattered crystal.

A parade of women climbed the stairs
bearing washbasins and swabs,
salve for his lips, atropine,
a bed that breathed
like an accordion

and morphine in its amber vial,
blue drops from which he strained away,
that burned beneath his tongue.

Behind his back, I went to see the mortician,
slipped him folded bills
from Mother's careful stash.
Unbeautiful: the catheter
he fought against, urine
browning in its bag

and his accusation, unforeseen:
Are you going to leave me here to die?

April Lindner

Yes, you will die
here in this borrowed bed
in front of the t.v.
The Westminster dog show
Oh, that dog is beautiful.
A playoff game against the green field
Oh, that baseball player's beautiful.

Not beautiful, but not unbearable,
the work that kept us from imagining
so much blue future emptied of you,

thinking of the right response too late:

*No, Father, no, Daddy, no
we will never leave you.*

Richard Meyer

Self-Portrait

playing with photo effects on the computer

My ghostly disembodied face
(repeated two times two)
caught floating in a flattened space,

an apparition vaguely seen
immersed in red and blue
with brazen yellow, orange, and green.

It may be Pop, but is it Art?
For Dada it won't do.
Surrealistic à la carte?

Perhaps a post-post-modern piece,
a strange eclectic view
done in a moment's mad caprice.

Let others see what they will see,
for me it's me it's me it's me.

Richard Meyer

Exit Stage Left

*And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. ~ Shakespeare*

In life's performance, from the start,
he played a stock and minor part
to less than flattering reviews.

Abruptly in his seventh age
he got the cancellation news
that hooked him off this earthly stage

and cast him in oblivion —
no curtain call, no further run,
and no applause when he was done.

David Middleton

Calling Down the Birds

in memory of Louisiana naturalist Caroline Dormon (1888-1971)

You saw them just the way they really were,
Those flowers in your gardens and the wild,
Studied, preserved, in earth and paint and words,
The naturalist and artist of one mind.

The red woodbine and orange-yellow phlox,
Greenbriar, blue larkspur, nodding indigo,
The violet oxalis — rainbow names —
A covenant in pastoral catalogue.

You knew the birds as well, the goldfinch, wren,
The swallow, warbler, sparrow and the food
They loved to eat, calling them from the trees
To peck up at your feet the sprinkled seed.

And you would stay at Briarwood — birthplace, home —
Secluded in a wold's uplifted hills,
Your cabin, grounds, a modest green estate
By wisdom and solicitude maintained.

And there some April dawns a pineland quiet
Would draw you on toward spots in partial shade
Good for Celestials, common once, now rare
In north Louisiana's well-drained clays.

Their sky-blue petals graceful on the stem,
They open in midmorning, shrivel at noon,
Then die before their first and only day
Darkens toward far-off clusters of the stars.

And you remembered how their meadowlands
Once flowered around Old Shreveport to its edge,
Now ringed with plants and neighborhood escapes
Lying like slabs above the dusty bulbs.
I came from Shreveport often as a boy

David Middleton

To visit kin close by you, in Saline,
And I would ask to share your solitude
By following and watching for a day.

You taught me birds you named by sight and song
And let me smell new cuttings taking root,
Species at threat that you would propagate,
Their wildness spared and thriving in your care.

And once, when I brought down those early poems
You read and complimented, being kind,
Sensing how I was trying to say my way
Back home to that same place you never left,

You had me stand apart, yet almost near,
Then called the autumn birds from bough and sky
To come to earth and eat Celestial seeds,
This time from open hands you lifted up

Toward feathers cloudy-black and iris-bright,
A kingdom needing peace, a saving grace,
A mixed flock growing larger by your love,
Still trusting that first promise you had made.

Porches

*The Village of Saline, Bienville Parish, North Louisiana
At My Late Grandparents' House*

The sand and gravel road, smooth asphalt now,
Passes beside the church and sunken stones
Of kin both dead and living yet awhile
In memories of one who left and stayed.

I slow down for those fields recalled and seen —
The cultivated, fallow, undisturbed —
Shift my old standard into neutral gear,
Then quietly glide toward stillness and the drive.

Others have owned this house for sixty years,
And though my home is here in every sense,
Possessing and possessed I cannot step
At will upon a transferred property.

So rolling down the window I look out
Binding in mind what's gone with what remains,
Then walk up to a gatepost where I wait
For shades to gather thin in autumn air.

And there, in seasons blending without end —
The bloom and fruit, oxalis and pecan —
On that deep porch between the hall and yard
I see myself and listen, man and child,

To voices long conversant with a world
Made up of things that have their place and ways
In calendar and catalogue and rhyme,
The holy days of ordinary time:

Spring's golden corydalis, white-topped sedge,
The yellow evening primrose, yellow worts —
St. Peter's and St. John's — in summer dusk,
Wisteria in thickets by the streams,

David Middleton

The sprawling moss verbena — purple, rose —
By early August done, October's frost-
And chain-leaf asters, winter possum haw,
And dandelion puffballs at winter's end.

And where these thrive and die without a sound
Pine warblers nest unseen in tallest pines,
Their high-pitched trill forever coming down
While from the last few open longleaf groves

Now passing with the passing hillside farms
Lark-sparrows sing in elegy and leave
Stump fields of their unsettled breeding-place,
Searching in other woods for native ground.

Such things I take to heart and keep in mind,
Beholding and beholden, in their gift,
Each one a porch — a station and a way,
The inward and the outward reconciled,

The fathomed patterns matching, world and word,
Like mockingbirds whose mimicking in spring
Sweetens into a single autumn song
By Choctaws called "the bird of many tongues."

And so I leave the gatepost and the drive
In treetop light from afternoon's low sun
That blinds me in the rear-view mirror's glass,
The future now reflected in the past

Along this sand hill road where crest to crest
Pines rise sky-high in colonnades of fire.

Charts

Saline, Louisiana, 1957-59

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained,
What is man that thou art mindful of him?

— Psalm 8:3-4

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and
in the stars . . .

— Luke 21:25

*in memory of my maternal grandfather, Henderson
Edward Sudduth, 1892-1959*

1

You woke just as the stars and moon and sun,
Poised in their constant moving, blended lights,
A moment's single beam in dark and dawn
Spreading along the dense midwinter clouds,
Snow holding till it fell straight down like rain,
Dry shadow-drops in patterns on your bed.

Now sixty-five, finding it harder to rise
For one more day as village banker, mayor,
Church elder, still you did what must be done
Because your word, once given, was for good,
In oath and vow, in pledging the full tithe,
Plighting your troth in civic, private life,
And first to her beside you, dreaming on,
Mary your wife of nearly forty years.

You felt achy and stiff as you sat up,
Leaving the warmth of quilt and comforter,
Legs swinging till your feet touched cold wood floor,
That metal plate like weather in your head.

David Middleton

Unsteady, you shuffled along room to room,
Turning up each gas heater's pilot light
Or scratching kitchen matches till a flame
Spread port to port behind the radiant grates.

But as you leaned toward burners in the hall,
Your right side deadened, nerves blocked off from brain —
That path between the muscles and the will —
Then you collapsed, half-paralyzed by stroke,
Those sounds that come before and after speech
Rousing a wife from her long bridal sleep
To find you staring helpless past her eyes.

2

An ambulance soon there from Natchitoches,
Men pushed you on a gurney through the yard,
Immobilized by straps, your mind adrift,
Mixed flocks of birds and leaves on bough and ground,
Your body dotted with crystal hexagons.

And as red flashing sirens cleared the way
Past logging trucks loaded with sand-hill pine —
Their chain-links stressed and strained by dip and crest —
You slipped into another place and time
When medics with a stretcher reached your plane
Shot up by German gunners, limping back
With leaking gas aflame along the wings,
Gliding toward No Man's Land, topographies
Of ink and earth mapped out, their legends read,
The shock of sign and thing at odds and one.

You lived, but with a steel brace in your brow,
The hole in your right cheek a dimple-scar,
Those wounds the medals you would always wear.

Yet now, a harder fall, and you lay still,
Doctors scanning a clipboard by your bed,
Zigzagging needle peak and valley lines,
The heart's cartography, a brain surveyed.

In time you walked, foot-sliding on a cane,
Reason intact but speech a slur of words
Like a toddler's mangled language, though you strove,
Grappling back through babble toward a voice
Eluding you ever after, damage done.

3

To let you say what needed to be said
As statement, question, answer, or request,
Your son-in-law, my father, drew a chart
On plywood — a rectangle painted white
A straight row of numbers, zero to nine,
And two rows curving for the alphabet,
Then underneath YES, NO, HELLO, GOODBYE,
All taken from a talking board, and HELP,
Words ready if you grew too weak to spell.

And so you lived, in silent dignity,
Hobbling in pain and numbness on the porch,
Your cane-tip tapping out its open code
Between the swing and rocker where you watched
For hours seeing more deeply than before:
Split husks dropping pecans through torn cocoons,
Strung stars and wrens along the winter limbs,
Spring lizards on the warming summer walls,
Sunflowers climbing noons toward noonday sun,
The grains they came from shaken from their heads.

And though at last bedridden, you held on,
Your sleep a kind of waking, waking, sleep,
Mind all but done with measuring the world —
God's copybook of tablet-clay and light —
Prefiguring equations, slated sums,
The ABCs that count the telling names,
The ordinals and cardinals and primes,
Chapter and verse, the tally marks and logs,
Denominators, numerators, lined
And rhyming in the diagrams and schemes
Derived from an elemental paradigm,
Spellbound orthographies, broken ground maintained
Until the end of particle and star.

And just before you left us for a state
From which there is no waking, that last place
Of sleep and breath, you motioned for the chart
To be brought back once more. Then your good hand,
Guided by magic, science, or providence
Moved like a Ouija planchette, swivel-wheeled,
Fate's heart-shaped indicator prompted at will
Through grammar's fractions, lettered formulae.

And there, where axioms and syntax blend
Like lights above a clouded winter dawn,
You found your way along the road you came
From our first home and lasting habitude,
Those old geographies of soul and mind
Beyond the posted gates, your only toll
A solitary scansion of the land,
The layered tracings, ghostly palimpsests,
That chart and board a Ptolemaic map,
Four corners marked like heaven's windy zones,
A grinning sun, a smiling press-lipped moon,
Two matched pentangle circles, ringed by stars
In a galactic dance, the striking fires,
Bright ciphers of the Nothing and the All
Worded in night and silence, carried across,
Radiant declarations, pilots ablaze
Against a No Man's Land that no one knows,
Direct reflections, certainties unguessed,
One word just like a code-blue button — HELP —
HELLO that only others needed now,
And three for dying: GOODBYE, NO, and YES.

The Gust of Wind

*after the painting by Jean-François Millet (1814-75)
1871-73, oil on canvas*

We keep our heads down as we have to do
Because this picture does, for thus Millet
Has kept things in perspective, make us safe . . .
What dominates the painting is unseen.

A wind-throw oak half torn from a blasted crest
Sends pulled roots searching upward for the earth.
One clump, unpulled, is reaching toward its tree
Buffeted by the gusting northerlies.

The storm leaves frothy ruffles in a stream
That flows before and under dip and rise,
Its jutting rocks forever worn away
By currents of the water and the air.

The oak falls toward its shadow and a man
A snapped branch harries clutching with its twigs:
The shepherd falters on toward scattered sheep.
His dog and crook are nowhere to be found.

Near distant rippling swells of autumn wheat
The dawn-fires wash stone houses, pens, and barns.
A spreading light turns orange on the ground.
The earth and sky are clouded and aflame.

Wind-bent, the shepherd bows before the sun,
Planting his feet in fear — then driven on.
The tree, too, seems aware and terrified.
We hear the primal waters in its leaves.

And in that rushing sound our heads stay down
Here in this world whose roots have been exposed
By atoms blasted outward, gust on gust,
Prevailing winds no painter can compose.

David Middleton

First Steps

*after preliminary sketches, the finished drawing, and the
“pasteled” drawing by Jean-François Millet (1814-1875)*

*

1858-66

*with quotations translated from letters written by Millet
to his art dealer in Paris*

Washed linens draped along a picket fence
Running beside the garden, house, and yard
Dry white against the greens of shrub and tree
Whose shades are Conté gray on thread and board.

The garden has its own fence — like a toy —
A line of tiny sticks that barely stand,
A marker, not a barrier, a sign
For any who step over or around.

The autumn plants have wintered into spring —
Sprouts rising toward a light on melting snow —
Maturing, then dug up, a poor man’s food,
Potatoes, carrots, turnips, cabbage, beets.

Nearby, a mother, bending from behind,
Steadies a little daughter set to walk,
While almost too far off for her to reach
The father kneels, his rough soiled hands stretched out.

And there, upon the edge of letting go,
The toddler takes a first step on her own,
Uncertain . . . fall after fall to come,
Making her way toward strong uplifting arms.

*

How long Millet would take to get this right,
Sketch after sketch to shape and place, and then,
The finished drawing, monochrome, composed
In “calm” he sought “to stop the rush of time”

Until the scene would “concentrate itself”
On “real essentials” — “catch the intimate” —
In these our common lives . . . a trusting child
Who like us all must learn to walk alone.

But in the 1850s few would buy
Such drawings — peasant life too stark and hard
To hang on paneled walls, near port, cigars,
In Paris, Boston, London, or New York.

And so, to stave off poverty and please
His dealer, Sensier, Millet “enhanced”
A picture he thought done in neutral tones,
Coloring in the lines with soft pastels.

Yet “First Steps” as he sold it, heightened, bright,
Depends on the perspective coming down
Draft after draft — black chalk across white sheets —
The father, daughter, nearer, unenhanced,

Drawn closer to each other and their ground.

David Middleton

Fairgrounds

Louisiana State Fair, Shreveport, October 1961

after Philip Larkin's "Show Saturday"

Late morning and the first cars roll up,
Motioned into their parking spots by staff
Who point down a roped way toward ticket booths
Either side of the clicking turnstile bars.

The children go through first, racing ahead
Into a place where fantasies come true;
The parents listen for the rising pitch
Of barkers holding toys out from their stalls.

But it's too soon for that and carnies still
Stay busy picking up last night's debris:
Matted cotton candy, deflated balloons,
Popcorn scattered like seed, crushed Dixie cups.

And so, to start, the Ag-Show, on its own,
A harvest festival of crops and stock,
Now set apart from midway games and rides
Long since the main attractions of the fair.

The parish champions are on display,
A town of temporary tent-barns, pens,
Black Hereford and Angus — bull and cow —
State winners with blue ribbons garlanded.

Some city boys and girls in shorts and T's
Printed with Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck
Marvel at beasts both magical and real
Serenely chewing cud above the dung.

Off by themselves, under a bigger tent,
New tractors gleam, posed like showroom cars.
Pamphlets are given out by salesmen dressed
In Caterpillar yellow, John Deere green.

They nod toward a corner where an angled fence
Rails off a nineteenth century wooden plow,
Its iron blade dulled and rusted, handles, smooth,
Worn down to fit a single pair of hands.

The children, hungry, tug at their parents' arms.
They're restless, and it's getting well past noon.
Concession stands entice them with the smells
Of corndogs, burgers, onion rings, and fries.

And now they're ready for the carousel,
Holding tight to the ponies on their posts
Going up and down and round and round
And that's enough: they're ready to go home.

Soon afternoon and twilight bring the teens,
Older ones driving, younger ones dropped off
By fathers, who'll return for them at ten.
The carnival and night grow bright and loud.

And everywhere thrill after thrill draws crowds,
The Teacups spinning and the Tilt-A-Whirl,
Bumper Cars, the Wipeout, and the Whip,
The Wild Mouse with its unbanked hairpin curves,

Playing with gravity, jolting space and time,
The riders still dazed as they find their way
Down platform stairs onto the firm flat ground,
Some whooping, giddy, others, throwing up.

The line is slow outside the House of Mirrors,
(An even flow so panic doesn't start),
A maze of see-through panes, reflecting glass,
And doorless frames that seem to lead nowhere

Then suddenly confront one with a form
Known, yet unfamiliar, bending out or in,
Frightening and laughable — the mixing tears —
Torso collapsed, a bulging wide-stretched mouth.

David Middleton

The carousels outgrown, not wanting to leave
Just yet the revelers head for the Ferris wheel,
Couples among them snuggling in the seats
Spoke rods lift north, each stopping at the top.

And when the gentle back-and-forth is stilled
They look down at the midway, up toward stars,
The wheeling lights and music, in their spheres,
The fairs of earth and heaven almost one.

But then a slow descent to the exit ramp,
The long way round to reach the parking lot,
To make it last, the couples hand in hand.
And as they pass the Ag-Show tents and pens

They see the cows asleep on hay and sand,
At home and whole where others once had been,
The winners with blue ribbons garlanded,
A childhood memory come back again.

Let all this be forever as it is.

James B. Nicola

Why I Write Daily

Perhaps I shouldn't talk about myself.
Who would be interested, or should be?
I've not lived long enough, or hard enough,
to warrant the concern of poetry.
I've loved but friends; my only lovers, been
manqués. I've only lived in this tired town
and had one job, secure as idle sin.
I've never met a soul of wide renown.

However, I recall, in the fifth grade,
one day, a workshop by a visiting
poet, with young eyes, who loved everything
we wrote. He'd find a poem in the most
mundane events, the dumbest thoughts. Like mine.

And suddenly my paltry life was

fine.

Because our scratchy fifth-grade poems made
him clap, and clap. And at the end he toast-
ed us, but smiled at me.

Since then,
I've wished that I could feel that way again.

James B. Nicola

John Gould Fletcher

I knew nobody read him anymore
although he had won a Pulitzer prize.
So in the stacks this morning, drooly for

some tome of guts and blood to taste, my eyes
lit on his name, I took down his *Selected
Poems*, where I suffered the surprise

of the lost soul on being resurrected:
blue-stamped in front, by some librarian,
news that he took his life. I reflected

and realized: Henceforth I never can
enjoy a verse of his not knowing this,
limited as I am, still but a man.

Plath, Sexton, Hart Crane — others — were famous
before those drastic days their lights went dim,
but had their work remained anonymous,

or had they worn at times a pseudonym,
I could have read them from a place more pure,
as, yesterday, unstained, I'd have read him.

Nicholas Pierce

In-Flight Entertainment

The screens fold down only after we've
begun to descend, blinking to life
with footage — live footage, it would seem —
of a plane's undercarriage — our plane's,

it would seem. Glancing at the window
to my left confirms this impression,
the mountains in one duplicated
in the other, a runway in both

taking shape. The landing gear folds down
next, which I can hear as usual
and for the first time see — in real time,
no less, though on a four-inch TV.

It occurs to me then how surreal
it would be were something to go wrong —
if, say, as in countless films, a flock
of migrating seagulls were vacuumed

into one of our jet engines, flames,
feathers, and viscera spewing out
the other end, all of it captured
on camera and played back for us

in what would almost certainly be
the most exciting, not to say fun,
documentary we'd ever watch,
we who would be dead in a matter

of seconds, who till the very end
would continue praying that the plane
would right itself, for some *deus ex*
machina, some Hollywood ending.

Nicholas Pierce

Isn't this the thought everyone has
at takeoff and touchdown, that their flight
will be the next tragedy to boost
the ratings of cable news stations;

that their loved ones will watch in horror
as images of flaming debris
flash across their screens *ad nauseum*,
till they've been sapped of all power to shock

or move? (I can't be the only one
who thinks that fearing the plane will crash
will prevent it from happening, since
if it did, I'd have predicted it.)

In all likelihood, I won't be killed
in a plane crash; won't — as I've for years
suspected, as my mother did — die
of colon cancer. It's more likely

that I'll change lanes into a semi
or have an aneurism before
my seventy-first birthday party
(if that age isn't wishful thinking) —

that something I've never even thought
to fear will get me. The same is true
of everyone on board, yet we all
keep our eyes on the screens, just in case.

Then the footage suddenly freezes,
pausing on a short strip of runway —
an image blurred into abstraction
by the speed at which we're descending.

The Invisible World

1.

A young Kerouac eyes the nude
who shares his perch on the top shelf
of Joe's bookcase. Both photographs
celebrate male beauty, the self,

though one is a reproduction.
Another Beat, two shelves below,
fills the gap between Bukowski
and Carver. Oddly apropos,

a port bottle props the row up.
Religion has its own section;
poetry too. The *Other Bible*
looms over posthumous Sexton,

whose *Awful Rowing Toward God*
lists to starboard — or, rather, Starbuck.
Joe's former protégés, students
like myself ("a strapping young buck"),

compose the heart of the bookcase.
Their portraits range in size, perhaps
in accordance with importance.
Six (I keep count) minutes elapse

after Joe calls out, "Almost ready!"
We're headed to the museum
to see a new retrospective
on Magritte, who amuses him.

*

Then Joe offers his perspective:
"Notice how — it's quite discreet —
light comes from the left foreground
rather than outside. Magritte

Nicholas Pierce

sought to replicate a stage.”
He traces with his pinky nail,
which extends a full inch beyond
his fingertip, a key detail —

the shadow shaped like a sickle
obscuring half the rock’s right side.
“Here we see in miniature
how the painter, petrified

though he was of such readings,
veils the very world he depicts —
yes, as with the rock. He is
both the light source and eclipse.”

2.

Unlike the eye, the mind’s eye apprehends
few differences between us: thrice my age,
Joe rarely acts it, even at this stage
of the night, when our conversation tends
to lose steam, and he — having cooked — pretends
not to mind cleaning up. Often, I’ll page
through his *New Yorkers*, see what’s all the rage
in poetry these days, or text old friends —

but not tonight. Tonight, I sit and think,
swirling my wine, watching the dregs go round,
a blizzard blotting out the lamplight drowned
in my half-empty glass, while at the sink
Joe scrubs our plates, using his pinky nail
to scratch off remnants poking out like Braille.

North of the Border

A hand pushing on my shoulder
rouses me. "Listen," Joe says,
and his tone conveys
for what, the air instantly colder
as the crackle of gunfire
starts again and then stops.
As we wait for Border Patrol or the cops
to shed light on our dire
situation, and for the hundred or so
other campers at El Cosmico

to react, we run through our choices,
running among them; though
with nowhere to go
but our car and the noises —
fainter now — coming from the direction
of the parking lot, we decide
it best to stay put, to hide
in our tent until protection
arrives, whatever and whenever
that may be, if ever.

"Could they be closer than we think,"
Joe asks, "or farther away?"
I wonder who he pictures "they"
to be, if that ink-
blot of a word conjures the same
murky images for us both,
of drug traffickers in a deal gone south
taking stock and then aim;
or if he sees, instead
(the thought passed through my head),
gunmen going tent to tent.

Nicholas Pierce

I wonder, too, if this is how
it feels to be an embryo,
as I cocoon myself — ignorant
and terrified of every sound —
in my sleeping bag
and pray that the night won't drag
on much longer, until finally, around
dawn, I fall back to sleep,
only to be awakened by the beep

of Joe's phone minutes later,
reminding me that our tour
through Chinati begins in an hour.
We unzip our incubator
and scramble out, in our rush
forgetting all about the nightmare
that was our night. Like a nightmare,
it comes back in flashes, a hush
descending over the car
after I bring up the bizarre

experience, less than relieved
when Joe confirms that it occurred —
or that he at least heard
what at the time he believed
to be a shootout, stressing "at the time."
I lean my head against my window
and count the fenceposts
into town, struggling to rhyme
how we felt mere hours ago
with how we feel now.

Yesterday, we listened to a docent
go on about Judd's "mastery
over the plastic arts," leaving no mystery
unsolved in his (admittedly cogent)
interpretations. We expect
that today's tour will go similarly,
but — perhaps because it's so early —
our guide keeps his intellect
mostly to himself, instructing us
only not to touch. Thus,
as we make our way through

the first artillery shed —
a long brick building that Judd
converted into a gallery — we forget (or I do)
that we're not alone with the boxes
and speak candidly
about valuing each other's company,
which must seem obnoxious
to our observer, who must feel,
whatever our feelings, like a third wheel.

The boxes are arranged in three
evenly spaced rows. Made
from mill aluminum — the highest grade —
and polished to near-transparency,
they transform as sunlight
strikes them from different angles,
at one instant glimmering like spangles
and at another appearing white
and depthless, as a lake will
when the sun is at its zenith. The mill

aluminum is so sensitive to oils
that it can carry a fingerprint
for years, as is painfully evident
when I kneel down and see all but spoils
my reflection. Then comes a *POP!*
POP! POP!, our guide stepping in
to explain that this can happen when
the warming metal expands. We get up
from the floor, laughing off our mistake,
though the fear is harder to shake.

Daniel Rattelle

from **Caledonian Postcards**

Hunterston Castle

Because we didn't think to call a cab
We had to walk
The four kilometers through streets of drab
Grey terraced houses. As block gave way to block,
So too the clouds gave way to sky, the stone
And asphalt turned to grass and sheep. But when
We got there was it worth it? Yes,
The house my fathers built but didn't own,
Where doubts about what was and might have been
Will follow sure as cider from the press.

A Bar in Stirling

It's breakfast time, a pint goes nicely down
For ten AM,
It's foggy like I like and russet brown.
The bacon, eggs, and, pudding too, I liked them.
But did it rain that day? I can't decide.
And neither can I say what dress you wore,
Nor yet the joke you told me on the train.
What odds that now as then we're side by side
In bed as barstool, asking nothing more?
On second thought, yes thanks, the same again.

Rainer Maria Rilke

translated by Susan McLean

Roman Sarcophagi

But what prevents us from believing that
(as we too are set down and put in place)
it isn't long that urgency and hate
and this confusion linger on in us,

as once in the ornate sarcophagus
with ribbons, rings, glass, images of gods,
there lay in slowly self-consuming dress
a thing that gradually dissolved —

till swallowed up by unknown mouths that never
say anything. (Where does a brain abide
and think, that someday will make use of them?)

And afterward, water that lasts forever
from ancient aqueducts was poured inside —
that now reflects and shines and moves in them.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Römische Sarkophage

Was aber hindert uns zu glauben, dass
(so wie wir hingestellt sind und verteilt)
nicht eine kleine Zeit nur Drang und Hass
und dies Verwirrende in uns verweilt,

wie einst in dem verzierten Sarkophag
bei Ringen, Götterbildern, Gläsern, Bändern,
in langsam sich verzehrenden Gewändern
ein langsam Aufgelöstes lag —

bis es die unbekanntenen Munde schluckten,
die niemals reden. (Wo besteht und denkt
ein Hirn, um ihrer einst sich zu bedienen?)

Da wurde von den alten Aquädukten
ewiges Wasser in sie eingelenkt —:
das spiegelt jetzt und geht und glänzt in ihnen.

The Death of the Poet

He lay. His propped-up countenance was wan
and unaccepting on the pillows' stack,
now that the world and knowledge of it, torn
out of his grasp, had fallen back
into the year's oblivious unconcern.

Those who saw him living didn't know
how thoroughly at one with all of this
he was, for these — these valleys lying low,
these meadows, and these waters were his face.

Oh, his face was this entire domain,
which yearns still for him and would woo him in.
His mask, which now has perished full of fear,
is soft and open like the flesh within
a fruit, exposed and spoiling in the air.

Der Tod des Dichters

Er lag. Sein aufgestelltes Antlitz war
bleich und verweigernd in den steilen Kissen,
seitdem die Welt und dieses von-ihr-Wissen,
von seinen Sinnen abgerissen,
zurückfiel an das teilnahmslose Jahr.

Die, so ihn leben sahen, wußten nicht,
wie sehr er eines war mit allem diesen,
denn dieses: diese Tiefen, diese Wiesen
und diese Wasser waren sein Gesicht.

O sein Gesicht war diese ganze Weite,
die jetzt noch zu ihm will und um ihn wirbt;
und seine Maske, die nun bang verstirbt,
ist zart und offen wie die Innenseite
von einer Frucht, die an der Luft verdirbt.

San Marco

Venice

In this interior, like a hollow den
that turns and arches, sheathed in tiles of gold,
smooth, round-edged, oiled with preciousness within,
this nation kept its darkness in its hold,

heaped up in secret, as a counterweight
to the light that so increased and multiplied
in all its objects that they nearly died.
And suddenly you wonder: do they not?

You push back from the rigid gallery
that hangs there by the dome's resplendent gleam
like a catwalk in a mine, and, as you view

the whole bright scene, you somehow wistfully
compare its tired continuation to
the survival of the nearby four-horse team.

Rainer Maria Rilke

San Marco

Venedig

In diesem Innern, das wie ausgehöhlt
sich wölbt und wendet in den goldnen Smalten,
rundkantig, glatt, mit Köstlichkeit geölt,
ward dieses Staates Dunkelheit gehalten

und heimlich aufgehäuft, als Gleichgewicht
des Lichtes, das in allen seinen Dingen
sich so vermehrte, dass sie fast vergingen –.
Und plötzlich zweifelst du: vergehn sie nicht?

und drängst zurück die harte Galerie,
die, wie ein Gang im Bergwerk, nah am Glanz
der Wölbung hängt; und du erkennst die heile

Helle des Ausblicks aber irgendwie
wehmütig messend ihre müde Weile
am nahen Überstehn des Viergespanns.

Loneliness

Loneliness is like a rain.
Toward evening, it arises from the sea;
from plains that are remote and faraway,
it goes to the sky, where it has always been.
And only then from the sky it falls on the town.

It rains down in the halfway hours near dawn,
when all the alleys turn themselves around;
when bodies, which have searched but haven't found,
leave each other wretched and let down;
and when those people who detest each other
are forced to sleep in the same bed together:

then loneliness is flowing with the rivers . . .

Einsamkeit

Die Einsamkeit ist wie ein Regen.
Sie steigt vom Meer den Abenden entgegen;
von Ebenen, die fern sind und entlegen,
geht sie zum Himmel, der sie immer hat.
Und erst vom Himmel fällt sie auf die Stadt.

Regnet hernieder in den Zwitterstunden,
wenn sich nach Morgen wenden alle Gassen
und wenn die Leiber, welche nichts gefunden,
enttäuscht und traurig von einander lassen;
und wenn die Menschen, die einander hassen,
in einem Bett zusammen schlafen müssen:

dann geht die Einsamkeit mit den Flüssen . . .

The Courtesan

Venice's sun will kindle in my hair
a gold, the glorious goal of alchemy
of every kind. My eyebrows, as you see,
arch like her bridges, and they lead you there

over the silent danger of my eyes,
which have a secret correspondence to
the town's canals: the tides subside and rise
and change within them. Anybody who

has seen me once, envied my dog, because
often on him, in idle intervals,
my hand, that's never scorched by any hearth,

bejeweled and invulnerable, would rest.
And boys, the hopes of ancient lines, are lost,
dying as if by poison at my mouth.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Die Kurtisane

Venedigs Sonne wird in meinem Haar
ein Gold bereiten: aller Alchemie
erlauchten Ausgang. Meine Brauen, die
den Brücken gleichen, siehst du sie

hinführen ob der lautlosen Gefahr
der Augen, die ein heimlicher Verkehr
an die Kanäle schließt, so daß das Meer
in ihnen steigt und fällt und wechselt. Wer

mich einmal sah, beneidet meinen Hund,
weil sich auf ihm oft in zerstreuter Pause
die Hand, die nie an keiner Glut verkohlt,

die unverwundbare, geschmückt, erholt —.
Und Knaben, Hoffnungen aus altem Hause,
gehen wie an Gift an meinem Mund zugrund.

J.D. Smith

Golden Years

A few more trips around the sun
And done.
While working limbs and lucid brain
Remain,
A chance to make experience
Make sense,
Locate some kind of narrative
Or sieve
Whatever shines from years of dross
And loss:
Awards, degrees, connections made,
Bills paid,
A guilty rendering of alms
And psalms,
Feats few and notable as all
Quite small
When set beside a younger man's
Great plans.
For want of energy or nerve
To swerve
Off of long years' inertial course,
Then force
The self into a stiff new mold.
But old,
One comes to circumscribe the scope
Of hope
To looking for a trace of grace
In place
And working, if no wondrous charm,
No harm.

J.D. Smith

Memoir

The year without a summer jam
Unfolded mainly like the rest.
The days grew long, then shortened, fruit
Encumbered vine and prickly twig.
The gears of commerce meshed with force.
Talk cheap and dear suffused the air
And airwaves, but nowhere did there sound
A note that could take flight above
A death that muted every song.

Red-Letter Dates

A generation if not more would know
The way a question ended that began
Where were you when — when, that is, you learned
Of what would blot out Saint Cecilia's Day
From calendars of common recollection,
Make Dallas mean event as well as place
And reclaim grassy knolls from pastoral lore.

This blood-made bond did not encompass me,
Two months and four days old, and long from knowing
The television or my mother's sobs
As anything but noise. I'd make my own
Eventually in trying to extract
A joke from horror. Curling up a lip
Like some Chicago gangster I would snarl,
"I painted my first house that day." The next
Laugh that comes out of this will be the first.

My envy of what others shared was cured
By gathering a slender portion of it.
The news from which too many learned
About debris fields and O-rings reached me
On FM in a late-learned second language.
At 105.1, at not quite noon
A voice said something, something, *algo* about
El Challenger — but why? Space shuttles launched
The same as planes took off and buses left
Their stations without making any news.
Then came more words, among them *estalló*.
No way. That couldn't be. What did I miss?
I cringed to think my Spanish wasn't quite
As strong as I had let myself believe,
Except it was, and wishing otherwise
Would fail to make catastrophe not so.
Streets on the way to class were lined with snow
And silence as if everyone were shorn
Of their respective tongues and their discernment
By way of some inverted Pentecost.
On that day and that day alone, wit fell
Away from one professor whom I followed

And who could prove her wrong? We only knew
Our daily offices of plain accounts
Had magnified into a crisis center.
Most called and typed out reassurances —
A luxury afforded to the living —
And some who lingered would attempt to plan
Their trips to donate blood (as we would learn,
A gift that wanted for recipients).
Yet, clear and urgent work was set before us
And, in the clarity of hours between
Dead panic and dead drunk, I gathered how
I stood before a dread significance
That placed the solemn charge of memory
On even its most distant witnesses.

These scattered dates still buoy above the rest,
More present than the middle of last week
And clearer than the morning's route to work.
Each unique this called for our full attention
And elevated us into, if not
The rumored Oversoul, a team
That gave us at least the opportunity
To show more than our daily tangency,
To show the greater selves so rarely seen
And, looking through those days' heroic screen,
Were left to gather what the others mean.

Lisa Russ Spaar

Invention 1

Garden

Serried tassels gossip above, argue with sky,
Seussean mitres in bishopric rows,
crowded cornstalks through which I follow
the old man. He gives each plush husk

a hyphen-cut to check the cob, its readiness.
Kernels pearled, all? If so, a wrenched blur,
chop chop, with the knife of his father's father,
& like a fish lobbed into a basket on the Sea of Galilee

it goes. Bees, flies, blue dragonflies hover.
In truth, I'm thinking of my lover.
Lugging along behind my father, I'm this black snake,
dead & threaded in pieces through the fence's brake.

What's the tonic chord here? Him? Us? Me?
Small doses of death, meted out, so we can be?

Invention 6

Ballade

As a sparrow flits minefields,
wind the corpse's heels.

With hands fugitive,
confessions dative,

saying do you want, will you —
yes, I will. I will die without you.

Inside me, a prayer,
a whisper-urn of air,

light in my larynx,
dark in my autumn drink,

full-bodied & true. Don't move.
No one above you,

tremulo, torpedio, nuncio.
My tomorrow.

Lisa Russ Spaar

Invention 7

August

One long Sunday night,
kairos bleeding into dread
& the soon-to-be-resumed yoke
as field pixelates sonically.

Cicadas, peepers, staccato wire,
creakings, shrieks, grief
off-gassing summer's story.
No accusation in the din:

older, older, old giving away
change loose as air.
So few in dire times will care
for this pastoral cry,

which is no lie, despite its folly,
apolitical as earth, its doomed valise.

Invention 9

Breaststroke

In the yard, even the deer refuse to startle
at this hour, elegant skulls nosing
earth's perpetual weeping-holes
as first light erodes nightmare's pall.

With bare feet, rolled towel, I cross
lawn, wince of driveway scar,
blue broken gate already rusted ajar
& cross the concrete apron

to take steps — toes, soles, ankles —
down. Always, for me a threshold
to surrender gravity, ground.
This is a solo étude for two hands

pushed out, then back, a kind of prayer,
but palms not touching. As lungs once practiced air.

Daniel Tobin

**To the Gentleman Watching Television on His Phone
in the Bathroom Stall at Charlotte Airport**

Even among the briefly intermittent gashes of water
brought to sink-life by telepathic hands,
even among the perpetually evanescent ebb and flow
of hurried men harried to bursting

by the summoning throb of wastage inside them,
as if their inner barometers were plunging
all at once to the impending center and its pent release,
water-plouts, slashings, these sonic waves

of nether breakages, and still like an enthroned Buddha
you remain composed — even amidst
the clinks of belt-buckles fumbling, scatterings of coins,
the flimsy ever-diminishing rolls,

all shuttles for the shuttlers sure of this necessity,
you will remain a long time, unflinching,
un-distractable from the fictive pageant on your screen
loudly lifted above these pliant walls

that have hidden and beheld so many, the brash or shy,
with the patient porters, numbly, needful,
obligingly enduring all until the changing of the guard:
like now, each hand towel folded, stacked

for the newcomer, as inside you stay poised, steadfast,
at the plush point of a turning world,
the stubbled chubby candles of your legs planted, fixed,
your dropped pants melted to the floor.

In the Greencroft

For Rondell
Virginia, 1986

Under the pan where the order simmers
low flames lap to the rhythm of your hand,
short orders only, your only command,
and up front the clubroom posh with diners.

You know your place, lot, the lay of land
that shuts your face behind two swinging doors.
Under the pot where the order simmers
low flames lap to the rhythm of your hand

and would leap to strike whoever strays
into your torrid zone. At the stove you stand
deferred, while orders rote inside your pan
sizzle like cravings to settle old scores.
Under the pan where the order simmers
low flames lap to the rhythm of your hand.

Daniel Tobin

The Calls

All the dead on the answering machine
live on in old technology, the now before
what called them culled them as it goes.

From where the blinking numbers shine
they speak, as from some taped eternity
where the past repeats, like sea whispers

out of an empty shell, their trace a hush.
You'd have them conjure each lost face.
A cousin from cancer's bottomless well

forever calls to say she's fine, that friend,
car crash, jokes from his unbroken sleep
until the gone are raised inerasable.

So the pinwheel makes its timely round
while the handset hangs on silently.
Replay, again, that lover's voice: *It's just me.*

Little Hallows

Door to door the costumed children come
to sweetly demonize the block
with their one demand, before they flock
en masse to the next, then head for home

where, later, the TV news will rage
with untrue believers, their latest prey
soaked alive in gas and set aflame.
They watched him flail and writhe inside his cage

until the flesh charred crisply into ash
and the bones crackled through. Eyes clear,
they filmed the screaming one, and cheered,
then carried out the body with the trash.

Above, the sky appears another skin,
pure blue, unmasked, where like a screen
closing over, the mackerel clouds descend
to bar us here where all souls are shut in

and a beech's coffer of fake doubloons,
blazing in declining sun,
showers its coinage one by one
to litter the pure effacement of the wind.

Daniel Tobin

From Below

Oklahoma, 1934

We watch him walk along the wing
who just before had caterwauled.
One thinks he might do anything —
Pirouette, barrel roll. He'll fall,

I'm sure, though he looks assured,
like an insect on its tipping leaf.
Down here, everything is hard.
Banks shut. Dustbowl. Just plain life

that sells panache and ends in pain,
ends squatting in some plot of earth.
Is he dazed, or desperate, to train
for such a dizzying, dire art —

to step out into air and dance,
or seem to dance? Below, the hive
gawks upward. I add my glance,
my glare. This weightless will to rise.

Death

After Rilke

Of this last going away we know nothing,
for it shares nothing across the vast divide,
and we are groundless in our love and hate
as in our shuddering. There is no revealing

death, not even this mask, tragic, lamentable,
with its disfiguring maw. Always the world
is full of players playing their roles — death too —
we are certain of it, but we say it's not for us.

Though when you went, a vein of all that is
broke across this stage through the very rent
where you disappeared: green, absolute green,
absolute sunlight, absolute bewilderment.

Still we keep playing, bearing up, all the time
repeating the hard things learned in dread.
But sometimes, from the farthest remove,
its quickening enshrouds our little theater

with its reality, as if something now known
had lowered itself to us. For a while then,
just being here, we begin to act our lives
rapturously, with no desire for applause.

Patricia Waters

Bathsheba

Rembrandt, The Louvre

She is holding David's letter,
having read it,
the sad knowledge, there
on her face, how it will all play out.
And her stillness, her foot
in the maidservant's hands,
what she knows about this flesh, this body,
the blindness it creates,
we are called to her inward seeing,
so we behold her as David may have —
the sumptuous bed looming, all background
— intimate, ordinary, carnal,
we reading her as she has read David's letter
for as your hand gives her soul-suffused flesh to us,
we are there with this Bathsheba,
seeing with her eyes
while they are looking at nothing,
not even at the words written to her,
the letter irrelevant now —
She is become a study in pity, in resignation,
in forgiveness,
fixed by those words that will define her,
we become her
in the moment she dies to herself,
in the moment she drowns in her history.

James Matthew Wilson

At Season's End

for Cecilia Rae

Take down the ornaments and let them drop
Atop each other in the crate,
Amid loose rifts of glitter and bent hooks
Where, for another year, they'll wait.

And, turn the tree, unwinding the dimmed lights,
Then wrap them in a tighter spool,
Before the heap of branches is dragged out
To bridge the gutter's icy pool.

The soft matte warmth of the poinsettia's blooms
Dries in one corner to sick green,
And even Ceci, lost in her dolls' world,
Knows what her father's motions mean.

The room grows bare, the floor is swept of needles,
But her new dollhouse full of voices
Raised up in imitation of those carols
We sang last week. Each doll rejoices.

Yes, every moment is piled up and stored
In attic, basement, or in mind,
As if time, fled upon its fading note,
Left something of itself behind.

James Matthew Wilson

In The Fullness Of Rhyme

Some say that it's okay to slant,
While other poets swear one can't.
The former conjure some excuse
For every assonant abuse,
The latter, rather, want good order:
A well-kept path and guarded border.
While one can't write by guide or chart,
The artist gives the law to art.

Thus, he must know enough of rhyme
To tell the caviar from the slime,
The well-coifed head from the rough mullet,
The silver from the leaden bullet.
And though the bad he would not shoot,
What's good he'll pluck for his own fruit,
And every line will weigh with those
Sweet rhymes that our first poets chose.

The Love of God

The love of God is earlier than man,
Present to us before we were to it.
The love of God sustains and nourishes
And puts in being what had never been
Save that it was first loved, and being loved

Had being at all. The love of God comes down,
And walks among his creatures as their friend,
And dies among his children in their rage.
The love of God has journeyed into hell
And all once closed is opened by that love.

The love of God stands fearsome over our heads.
The love of God has entered in our breasts;
And there, the love of God will dwell, where he
Was from the first the center of ourselves,
For all things turn about the love of God.

James Matthew Wilson

The Wisdom of Old Men

Up north, in winter, at the snowy deer camp,
The old men circled always near the fire,
Kept company with the crack of burning logs,
Their backs leaned in and smooth beneath plaid flannel.

And what they were about, I do not know,
Who darted in and out with skis or sled,
Or tramped knee-deep through silent, buried woods
To follow deer tracks miles from the cabin.

Their slowing bodies cool and stiff, they may,
With nothing left to do, have only sought
The heat that sweated from the barrel stove,
Its blackened sides and flickering mouth ajar.

But, even in my youth, I saw them there,
As those charged with remembering days past,
With pondering the clockworks of the world,
As gear on gear ground through their ordered circles;

Those who descended to a place of freedom,
Where we may wonder at what has been made,
As Nestor, old, among the furious Greeks,
Sat by and spoke above his warming hands.

Melanie Almeder

Texases, John Poch. WordFarm Press, 2019.

John Poch's fifth collection of poetry, *Texases*, is a stunning and important book. While the poems sing in Texas images, violent and tender, there's nothing simply provincial here: this is a book about what it means to inhabit America now. The poems, hewn in artistic integrity, are full of reckoning and fierce beauty.

As the prefatory prose poem of the book, "Texas," makes clear, what we and the poet must reckon with in this landscape is individual *and* collective. The poem, an anti-pastoral, begins with a declamation that a "they" made us "come out to the country to this ranch." The speaker makes it clear that individuals on this trip are expected to express wonder at the rising of the moon, whose light is so monopolizing the very stars disappear. But the speaker reporting the event to us is as wary of easy admiration as he is of metaphor untethered from context: the moon, the speaker first declares, "was a wheel of cheese, more moldy as it aged to its great height." The metaphor is deft in its humor. However, in the next stanza the speaker pivots and revises as he reports his story to us: the moon was an "old god"; it was a "nonchalant white nightmare"— and then "this awful silver coin hanging itself."

"Texas" makes a few promises about the book to come: there'll be no misplaced metaphor unless it's there to be toppled for something truer or in service of some tender mockery. There'll be no reckless, untethered beauty, separate from coyote's "ache of hunger" that howls about the periphery of our consciousness (or the bullets that recur in these poems, the problematic whiteness and nationalisms that surround us, or the very knife that ends the book). There'll be no poetry separate from the binaries gone quotidian we find ourselves inhabiting. This book resists summarizing collective experience without (thank God) the wary, *listening*, ruminating poet-as-witness offering counterpoint, invoking a better world.

Texases delivers and delivers on the promises the first poem makes. The poems of the book are about the "old gods" of land, nation, love, and the imagination itself. However, it is not until the second poem that the sense of the formal range and dizzying virtuosity arrives. "God in the Shape of Texas" is as great a poem as any lyric poem anywhere. Furthermore, Poch proves to be as much a brilliant formalist as he is a narrative and lyric poet within this one poem and those to come. "God in the Shape of Texas"

Melanie Almeder

risers into a virtuosic crescendo when “*Texas*” repeated becomes a line of trochaic pentameter. Poem after poem that follows in *Texas* are an argument for what poetry can do. In “A River,” Poch intones:

God knows the law of life is death
and you can feel it in your warbler neck,
your river-quick high-stick wrist,
at the end of the day
But the trophies:
a goldfinch tearing up a pink thistle.”

And, in “Psalm in a Desert Place”:

My voice would move a mountain
to where there are no mountains
and would not cast it into the sea.

“The distillate music of “Good Year” wills the evolution of images in the poem, insisting that even a “feather” is muse enough:

January. I pluck it,
this feather flapping
in the bare mesquite
only head-high, caught
by the down. Iridescent,
turkey. Another feather
in the bleached Texas
grama and another. . .

Texas is unflinching in its vision but it is neither relentless nor hopeless. It hits as many emotional registers as brilliantly crafted moments, finally insisting that there is more to this world than that ‘nonchalant whiteness,’ that “old coin” hanging itself all night that began the book. Praise poems keep company with the elegies and absurdities. The praise poems themselves are kinds of *Ars Poeticae*: in “Lark Sparrow,” an ode, the poet intones, “Let me be drawn to you”; in “Hill County Drought,” the speaker asks of the “reluctant cuckoo who brings / his three big gulps of water” to “Please pour it in my ear.” In “Punctuation on the Devils River,” the speaker declares, finally, “And like a psalm God

swallows, I know / what light knows the Devil doesn't." Other poems are equally defiant in their formal joy. In the brilliantly end-rhymed "Crush Texas," the poet woos his wife:

Come here. Perplex us
with swallows, voracious with your reflexes,
with the crush of you in the terrible state of Texas
that like a staged train wreck (in a good way) wrecks us."

Compellingly, while *Texas* argues for love, for faith, and for a joy as against absurdity and violence, it offers no easy resolutions. Even the final poems of the book maintain the sense that, as we are faced with old gods, urgent and crucial, the truths *must* be sung, must be, to lift a phrase from one of the poems, "prophesied good."

CONTRIBUTORS

Melanie Almeder is the John P. Fishwick Professor of Literature at Roanoke College. Her first book of poems, *On Dream Street*, won the editor's award at Tupelo Press, and her individual poems have been published in a range of journals, including *Poetry*, *The Seneca Review*, *The American Literary Review*, and *The Hollins Critic*, among others. Her most recent book of poems, *Terra Infirma*, is under submission. She is a community arts organizer and divides her time between Virginia and Maine.

Neil Arditi teaches literature at Sarah Lawrence College.

Ace Boggess is author of four books of poetry, most recently *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So* (Unsolicited Press, 2018) and *Ultra Deep Field* (Brick Road, 2017), and the novel *A Song Without a Melody* (Hyperborea, 2016). His writing appears in *Notre Dame Review*, *River Styx*, *Rattle*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and many other journals. He lives in Charleston, West Virginia.

Catharine Savage Brosman's latest poetry collection is *A Memory of Manaus: Poems* (2017). Two other creative volumes appeared recently: *Music from the Lake and Other Essays* (2017) and *An Aesthetic Education and Other Stories* (2019). *Southwestern Women Writers and the Vision of Goodness* and *Louisiana Poets: A Literary Guide* (with Olivia McNeely Pass) came out in 2016 and 2019, respectively. Two new books are in press for 2020: *Mississippi Poets: A Literary Guide*, and a new collection of poetry, *Chained Tree, Chained Owls: Quintains*.

Richard Brostoff's poems and essays have appeared in *Rattle*, *North American Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Poetry East*, *Verse Daily*, and many other journals. His chapbook, *Momentum*, was published by La Vita Poetica (2007). A second chapbook, *A Few Forms Of Love*, was published by Finishing Line Press (2012). "Slow Light," a full-length manuscript, has been a three time award finalist.

Rick Campbell is a poet and essayist who lives on Alligator Point, Florida.

Catherine Chandler is the author of four full-length trade poetry collections, including *Lines of Flight* (shortlisted for the Poets' Prize), *Glad and Sorry Seasons*, *The Frangible Hour* (winner of the Richard Wilbur Award), and her new book, *Pointing Home*. For additional biographical information, a list of awards and nominations, reviews of her poetry collections, sample poems, audio recordings, and podcasts, please visit *The Wonderful Boat* at cathychandler.blogspot.com

Terese Coe's poems and translations have appeared in *Able Muse*, *Agenda*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *The Formalist*, *Leviathan Quarterly*, *Measure*, *The Moth*, *New American Writing*, *New Scottish Writing*, *New Walk*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Review*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Threepenny Review*, and the *TLS*, among numerous other journals and anthologies. Her collection, *Shot Silk*, was listed for the 2017 Poets Prize, and one of her poems, "More," was heli-dropped across London in multiples as part of the 2012 London Olympics Rain of Poems. She was awarded two grants by Giorno Poetry Systems.

Patricia Corbus holds a Master's degree from UNC/Chapel Hill and an MFA from Warren Wilson program for writers. Her second book of poetry won the 2015 Grid poetry prize. She lives in Sarasota, Florida.

Morri Creech is the author of four collections of poetry, including *Field Knowledge*, *The Sleep of Reason*, and *Blue Rooms*, all from Waywiser Press. He lives in Charlotte, NC with the novelist Sarah Creech and their two children.

John Foy's most recent book, *Night Vision*, was selected by Adam Kirsch as winner of the New Criterion Poetry Prize and was published in 2016 by St. Augustine's Press. It was also a finalist for the 2018 Poets' Prize. His first book is *Techne's Clearinghouse*. His poems have been included in the *Swallow Anthology of New American Poets*, *The Raintown Review Anthology*, and *Rabbit Ears*, an anthology of poems about TV, and they have appeared widely in journals and online. He lives and works in New York.

Majô L. Foy began drawing and painting in the 1980s when she lived in Paris. Since 1991, she has been affiliated with The Art Students League of New York, where she has studied sculpture,

Contributors

drawing and painting. She currently works as a monitor for Henry Finkelstein's class in painting the human figure. She has numerous paintings in private collections and has displayed her work in New York City at Café Mocias, The Carter Burden Center of New York, Bettolona and, most recently, at the Arco Cafe. Visit her at www.mjlanarifoy.com.

Andrew Frisardi's poems have appeared lately or are forthcoming in *Able Muse*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *First Things*, *Measure*, *The Modern Age*, *New Verse News*, *The Orchards*, and *Think*; and in a collection, *Death of a Dissembler* (White Violet Press). As a translator, editor, and independent scholar, his most recent book is a dual-language critical edition of Dante's *Convivio* (Cambridge University Press); he is also the author of a forthcoming book on Dante (Angelico Press).

Joseph Harrison is the author of five books of poetry, including *Someone Else's Name* (2003), *Identity Theft* (2008), and *Shakespeare's Horse* (2015). His sixth book of poems, *Sometimes I Dream that I Am Not Walt Whitman*, will be published by Waywiser in 2020. Poems from it have appeared in *The American Scholar*, *The New Criterion*, *The New York Review of Books*, *Parnassus*, *Raritan*, *The Yale Review*, and elsewhere. He lives in Baltimore.

Charles Hughes is the author of the poetry collection *Cave Art* (Wiseblood Books 2014) and was a Walter E. Dakin Fellow at the 2016 Sewanee Writers' Conference. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *Alabama Literary Review*, *The Christian Century*, *the Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Literary Matters*, *Measure*, *the Saint Katherine Review*, *the Sewanee Theological Review*, *Think Journal*, and elsewhere. He worked as a lawyer for thirty-three years before his retirement and lives with his wife in the Chicago area.

Julie Kane's fifth collection of poems, *Mothers of Ireland*, is forthcoming from LSU Press in Spring 2020. Professor Emeritus at Northwestern State University and a former Louisiana Poet Laureate, she currently teaches in the low-residency MFA program at Western Colorado University.

April Lindner is the author of two poetry collections, *Skin* (Texas Tech University Press) and *This Bed Our Bodies Shaped* (Able Muse Press). With R. S. Gwynn, she co-edited *Contemporary American Poetry*, an anthology for Penguin Academics. She is also the author of three Young Adult novels, *Jane*, *Catherine*, and *Love, Lucy*, (Poppy), and a digital-exclusive YA novella, *Far From Over* (NOVL). She teaches writing at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia and lives in Lambertville, New Jersey.

Susan McLean has published translations of Latin, French, and German poetry — especially by Catullus, Martial, Sir Thomas More, Rilke, and Baudelaire — in *Arion*, *Transference*, *Literary Imagination*, *Subtropics*, *First Things*, and elsewhere. Her book of translations of the Latin poet Martial, *Selected Epigrams* (U. of Wisconsin P, 2014), was a finalist for the PEN Center USA Translation Award. Her own books of poetry include *The Best Disguise*, winner of the Richard Wilbur Award, and *The Whetstone Misses the Knife*, winner of the Donald Justice Poetry Prize. She is a professor emerita of English at Southwest Minnesota State University and lives in Iowa City, Iowa.

Richard Meyer, a former English and humanities teacher, lives in Mankato, MN. He was awarded the 2012 Robert Frost Farm Prize for his poem “Fieldstone” and was the recipient of the 2014 String Poet Prize for his poem “The Autumn Way.” His poetry has also received top honors several times in the Great River Shakespeare Festival sonnet contest. A book of his collected poems, *Orbital Paths*, was a silver medalist winner in the 2016 IBPA Benjamin Franklin Awards.

David Middleton is Professor Emeritus of English and Poet in Residence Emeritus at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, Louisiana. Middleton's books of verse include *The Burning Fields* (LSU Press, 1991), *As Far as Light Remains* (The Cummington Press [Harry Duncan], 1993), *Beyond the Chandeleurs* (LSU Press, 1999), *The Habitual Peacefulness of Gruchy: Poems After Pictures by Jean-François Millet* (LSU Press, 2005), and *The Fiddler of Driskill Hill* (LSU Press, 2013). Middleton's new collection of verse, *Outside the Gates of Eden*, will appear in 2020 from Measure Press.

James B. Nicola's poems have appeared in the *Antioch*, *Southwest and Atlanta Reviews*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *Rattle*, and *Poetry East*. His four poetry collections are *Manhattan Plaza* (2014), *Stage to Page* (2016), *Wind in the Cave* (2017), and *Out of Nothing: Poems of Art and Artists* (2018). Forthcoming: *Quickening: Poems from Before and Beyond* (Cyberwit, India, 2019) and *Natural Tendencies* (Cervena Barva, Boston). James's nonfiction book *Playing the Audience* won a Choice award. His poetry has won two *Willow Review* awards, a Dana Literary Award, and six Pushcart nominations. sites.google.com/site/jamesnicola.

Nicholas Pierce has published poems in *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *The Hopkins Review*, and *Subtropics*, among other journals. A graduate of the University of Florida's MFA program, he now lives in Bakersfield, California.

Daniel Rattelle is the author of the chapbook *The Sleeping House* (Eyewear, 2019) and is currently a graduate student at the University of St Andrews. These "postcards" were originally composed for his wife on the occasion of their seventh anniversary.

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926) was born in Prague, but lived all over Europe, especially in Austria, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland. His German poems are known for their lyricism and modernist sensibility.

J.D. Smith's fourth collection of poetry, *The Killing Tree*, was published in 2016. He is currently seeking publishers for two additional poetry collections, two short fiction collections and a children's picture book. Smith lives in Washington, DC with his wife Paula Van Lare and their rescue animals.

Lisa Russ Spaar is the author and editor of over ten books of poetry and criticism, most recently *Orexia: Poems* (2017) and the forthcoming *More Truly and More Strange: 100 Contemporary American Self-Portrait Poems* (2020). Her honors include a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Library of Virginia Award for Poetry, a Pushcart Prize, a Rona Jaffe Award, and a Horace W. Goldsmith National Endowment for the Humanities Distinguished Professorship. Her essays have appeared in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *the Washington Post*, *the New York Times*, *the Los Angeles Review of Books*, and elsewhere. She is professor and director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Virginia.

Daniel Tobin is the author of nine books of poems, including *From Nothing*, winner of the Julia Ward Howe Award, *The Stone in the Air*, his suite of versions from the German of Paul Celan, and most recently *Blood Labors*, named one of the Best Poetry Books of the Year for 2018 by the *New York Times*. His poetry has won many awards, among them the Massachusetts Book Award and fellowships from the NEA and the Guggenheim Foundation. His most recent book is *On Serious Earth: Poetry and Transcendence* from Orison Books. He teaches at Emerson College in Boston.

Patricia Waters was born and reared in Nashville, took her undergraduate degree at what was then Memphis State, her M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Tennessee Knoxville. An Associate Professor, she retired from the English Department of Troy University where she oversaw the English Language Arts program for secondary certification. She lives in Athens, Tennessee and has two books of poetry published by Anhinga Press, *The Ordinary Sublime* and *Fallen Attitudes*.

James Matthew Wilson has published nine books, including most recently, *The River of the Immaculate Conception* (Wiseblood Books, 2019). He received the 2017 Hiatt Prize from the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture for his contributions to humane letters, and his poetry was included in *Best American Poetry 2018*. Associate Professor of religion and literature at Villanova University, he serves as poetry editor for *Modern Age* magazine, as series editor for Colosseum Books, published by Franciscan University at Steubenville Press, and is director of the Colosseum Institute for writers.



MELANIE ALMEDER
NEIL ARDITI
ACE BOGGESS
CATHARINE SAVAGE BROSMAN
RICHARD BROSTOFF
RICK CAMPBELL
CATHERINE CHANDLER
TERESE COE
PATRICIA CORBUS
MORRI CREECH
JOHN FOY
MAJÔ L. FOY
ANDREW FRISARDI
JOSEPH HARRISON
CHARLES HUGHES
JULIE KANE
APRIL LINDNER
SUSAN MCLEAN
RICHARD MEYER
DAVID MIDDLETON
JAMES B. NICOLA
NICHOLAS PIERCE
DANIEL RATTELLE
RAINER MARIA RILKE
J.D. SMITH
LISA RUSS SPAAR
DANIEL TOBIN
PATRICIA WATERS
JAMES MATTHEW WILSON