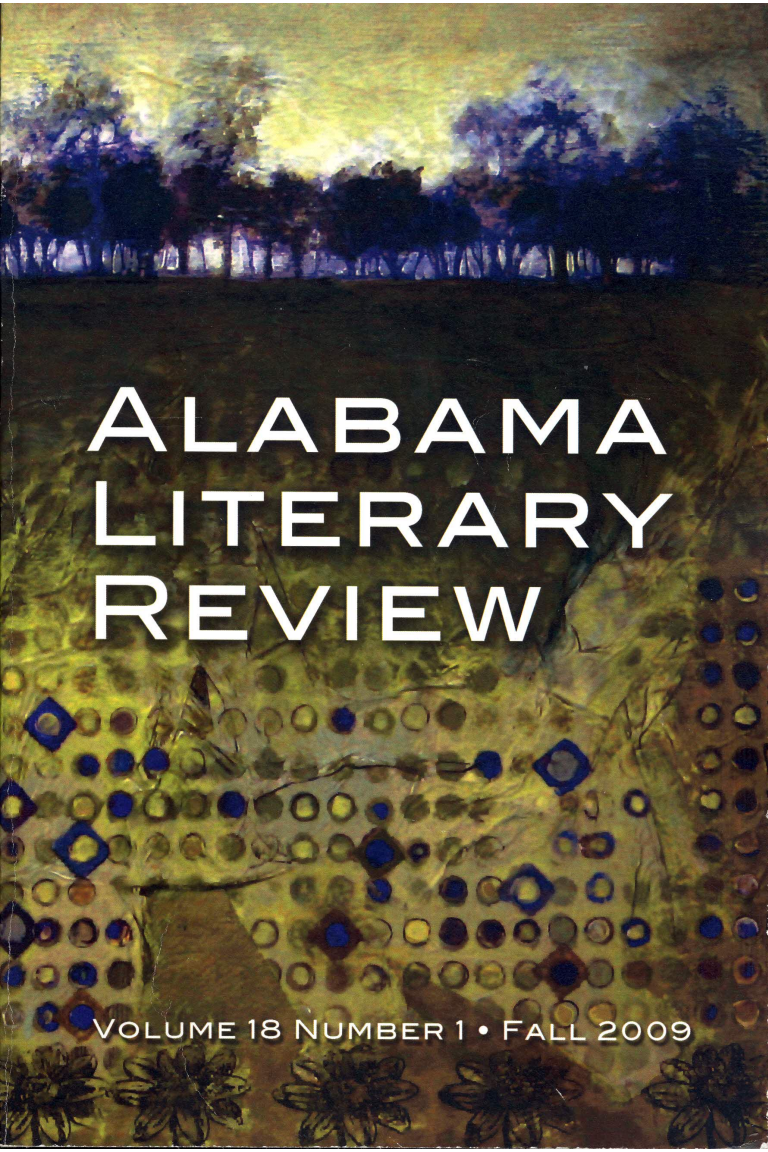

VOLUME 18 NUMBER 1 • FALL 2009

ALR

Alabama Literary Review

Fall 2009
volume 18
number 1

TROY UNIVERSITY

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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*, 166B 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.

 ISSN 0890-1554.

Alabama Literary Review is indexed in *The American Humanities Index* and *The Index of American Periodic Verse*.

Contents


ALR

Robert B. Shaw

Fountain Pen Poetry

The other day I went into an office supply store and asked where I might find a bottle of ink. The young woman at the register, glad to have an excuse for a walk, led me to a remote area and pointed me toward a bottle of India ink. She must have taken me for a calligrapher. No, I explained, that wasn't what I meant; and I scanned the shelves, finally locating a dusty bottle or two of the sort of black ink I use in my fountain pen. I purchased one of these with the sort of relief that differently retrograde people feel when they succeed in buying typewriter ribbons. The thought of changing a comfortable habit in response to necessity, always disquieting, could be put aside at least one more time.

Still, qualms persist. The bottles I have bought the last few times are not those I remember from childhood. The older design featured an interior ink well—a glass trough or pocket snug at the rim on one side of the bottle. One could tilt the bottle before uncapping it and have a convenient amount of ink to siphon up without needing to plumb the depths. Evidently whoever now makes ink bottles has decided that the extra bit of glass and the extra production step of each little annealing threaten the bottom line. Will the bottle itself, made of something as antique as glass, be streamlined before much longer out of existence?

A bottle of ink lasts me a long time. The main reason for this is that I use my fountain pen almost exclusively to write poems, and life being as it is, that is a fairly small portion of the writing I do. Correcting student papers, filling out forms, drafting reviews or an essay like this one—all these are ballpoint or felt-tip or roller-ball chores, capable of being done with a lesser degree of ceremony. While it is not literally true that I can write verse only with a fountain pen—I have, like most poets, now and then jotted some

lines with a Bic on the back of an envelope while riding a bus—it is far and away my preferred method. Only recently, perhaps because of the sort of shopping experience described above, have I begun to wonder why I got into this way of doing things.

When I tell my students that I write poems with a fountain pen, they look at me pretty much as though I had confessed to using a goose quill. And of course there is nothing that much amiss with their sense of chronology. Fountain pens were undoubtedly losing out to ballpoints in the years after World War II, when I was growing up. I suppose my father had a fountain pen, but I do not remember him writing with it. Much of the advertising copy he wrote for a living went straight from his head to the typewriter. When he drafted something in a slower way it was often with a mechanical pencil that as a child I found fascinating, though it was too closely tied to his work for me to covet it. It had leads of at least three colors: black, red, and green, and there may also have been a blue one. Its silvery shaft was studded with little ridged protuberances, each of which when slid down would click the desired color of lead into place. I never could understand—still don't—how it worked. It looked too narrow for the traffic inside it, and it seemed that any one of the leads would have to bend like a straw to get past the others. This beguiling instrument dropped out of sight after a few years. (Talk about obsolescence: how easy it could it have been, as the Fifties gave way to the Sixties, to find red or green pencil leads?) My father moved on to ballpoint.

It must have been my grandparents, then, who furnished me the model for fountain pen use. Analyzing this now, it seems to me that even early on I was attracted to old-fashioned ways of doing things—or at least to the placid authority with which my grandparents went about their business. Perhaps even then I was trying to hold on to a small corner of their world, which by now has almost entirely slipped away.

My grandfather, a minister, and his wife, a tireless letter writer, both filled and emptied pens at a great rate. These were my mother's parents: during the housing shortage after the war, we lived with them until I was four and just beginning to write (or, more likely, draw). The desk with its ink bottle, pens, and blotter, which I could work on if I knelt on the desk chair, was grownup territory, and somehow the siphoning up and letting go of ink in lines or letters seemed a thing of some moment. I suppose it was exactly that, since I was closely supervised. For all her copious use of it, my grandmother had a horror of what she called "loose ink." There must have been some catastrophe in the past—a cat jumping up at the wrong moment, or the like—that gave rise to this. The ink she bought was always labeled "washable," though this turned out to mean washable-in-a-manner-of-speaking. (As far as truth-in-labeling is concerned, the ink I now use to write poems is called "permanent," but often when I am refilling my pen I find myself thinking that the lines I have just been laboring over are anything but.) With someone stationed behind me and with the bottle safely capped, I drew my page of outsider art and shakily printed my name on it in lines of black excitingly so much darker than I could make with a pencil. There was power in the bottle. I don't recall exactly when I first heard the phrase "the genie in the bottle," but it was well before drinking age, and what I thought of was an ink bottle containing some impounded unruly spirit. It was probably just as well that I didn't share this fantasy with my grandmother.

My practice of bifurcation—the fountain pen for creative things, other writing tools for things more workaday—grew naturally, reinforced by a number of factors. Although at an early age I was given a fountain pen (or maybe commandeered an abandoned one I found in a drawer), I took pencils and, in due course, ballpoints with me to school—no loose ink there. In one of my schools the older desks had ink wells built in, and I liked to imagine the children of several decades back, dressed in their pathetic

clothes—pinafores for the girls, knickers for the boys—dutifully dipping their even more archaic, bladderless pens. But there was no way to emulate these predecessors: the wells were bone-dry. Much later, in graduate school, I tried for a while to break down the barrier by carrying a fountain pen and using it for tasks less rarefied than writing verse. But I gave this up after an occasion when it sprang a leak in my pocket. After that it stayed home, confirmed all the more as the implement of choice whenever I had time to work on poems.

Is it just a mild bit of ancestor worship to continue to use my grandparents' technology of writing? Certainly that must play a part, but there is more to it. For me, to pick up the fountain pen, to put aside the yellow legal pad and settle down to a sheet of lucent white bond of a decent weight—this is, in a modest way, to initiate a ritual. I intend nothing as imposing as charming myself into writing, as Yeats would say, as if I had a sword upstairs. But a tangible break from the more routine sorts of writing has come to seem helpful in getting started. Then, too, there is something about the tactile experience of writing in this way that seems right for what I am trying to set down. None of the alternatives is as appealing. Pencil is ugly whether crossed out or erased, and makes anything look like a grocery list. Even the smoothest ballpoint goes a bit grainily over the paper, and writing is slow enough without being dogged by additional friction. I dislike, too, the lack of variation in the thickness—or one might better say the thinness—of the ballpoint's lines. Not having been formed by a flexing nib, what is spelled out looks unspringy and anemic, and seems to sell words short.

What about typing, or as we say nowadays, "the keyboard"? The musical overtone in that is ironic. It is admittedly not as noisy as it used to be; but even the computer lets out, if not the machine-gun rat-tat-tat of my youth, its own sinister concerto of insectile clicks. And there is again the matter of pace. If ballpoints are too slow, then clearly and conversely, typing is too fast. The flittering of so many fingers seems to tug thought to move ahead, whereas

in writing poetry one wants thought to linger as need be and look around in whatever direction the case requires. Meditation moves at the pace of the pen—my pen, at any rate. Even if I should eventually choose to skim rapidly over a detail, the opportunity first to dwell on it can be valuable. The disadvantage of facile speed pertains not only to writing the poem but to revising it. I do, of course, eventually type a copy of what I am working on, but I continue to make corrections in ink until the manuscript is readied for sending somewhere. There is something bracingly cautionary for me in being able to look back at successive drafts and to see the bêtises I have managed to save myself from. I might feel less responsible for my lapses if they were expunged from the record before they ever hit paper. And I might eventually come to believe, with no visible evidence to the contrary, that my lines came fully formed and burnished the first time round: a dangerous illusion for any writer to entertain. A true manuscript, for me, is one that illustrates what Pope called "the last and greatest art, the art to blot."

Hence the allure of blottable ink. I like the faint hint of danger, in that the ink I use nowadays does not profess to be washable, and I like the flash the wet cursive segments give off before wedding themselves fully to the paper or yielding their more volatile components to the air. I like the thinning and thickening of the letters as the nib apportions ink in lines straight or curving. I like the balanced weight of the pen, and the illusion, when writing is going well, that it is following the flow of ink rather than meting it out. And I like the black-on-white definiteness of the poem on the page, which even in the first, most tentative draft shows itself for an act, a mark made on the void, a breaking of silence. Some of this language may sound erotic, or mystical, or both; but the writing of poetry provides intensities and satisfactions that are peculiarly its own. The balance of work and play that goes into it, as into any true art, is distinct from that which one obtains in sensual or spiritual activities. Line after black line, the poem sustains on the page an exacting equilibrium, not only of the work

and play that go into its making, but of the flesh and spirit that authorize the endeavor. Again, I go back, as if to an emblem, to the balance of the pen in the hand, to the finely adjusted weight of its purposeful inclination as it sets down a line of verse.

It is time (perhaps it was time some paragraphs back) to enter a disclaimer. What I am writing is an account of my personal predilections, not a prescription for other poets. I have no doubt that excellent poems can be written by a variety of implements. True, Randall Jarrell put his incisive finger on something when he complained of poems that appear to have been written "on a typewriter by a typewriter." Still, the poems of Cummings, Williams, and Moore would scarcely have come to pass with the typewriter, and I have known poets devoted to No. 2 pencils as well as numerous others who are just as happy to write with whatever is at hand. When interviewers for the late, lamented Paris Review queried authors about their scribal habits, no consensus was apparent. I could not hope to persuade a disinterested observer that my penchant for fountain pens is anything but a foible. And yet, what is the appeal in subjecting our behavior, or that of the world around us, to literalistic interpretations alone? My penchant may as well become a pen chant. My writing habits seem most meaningful to me as an enacted metaphor for the kind of poetry I persist in trying to write. I suppose some hint of Classicism hovers in the background here, as it tends to do whenever one speaks of "balance," but that seems too grand a label for what I am busy at making. Call it, if you like, fountain pen poetry. Whatever you might mean by that, I would take it to mean a poetry observant of certain traditional values of style and technique, that takes form on the page as something made by hand before my eyes. It takes a minute for the ink to dry and in its shimmer it seems at once separate and not separate from me. It is subject to correction, many times over. This certainly sounds highly controlled, and up to a point, it should be. But an element of risk, I would insist, comes into it as well. Every time I fill my

pen, or in a measured way discharge it on the page, I feel the pent presence of the genie in the bottle, and I know that some of what I write will surprise and disturb me as much as life does.

The Children

The children scream. It is hard to believe,
but you can hear them over the harsh racket
of that old wooden roller coaster sounding
ready to shake itself to splinters, shooting
carloads of children up, around, and down.
Or: From the back row of the movie house,
between gulps of Coke, they more than match
screams of the overpaid, defenseless starlet
coming face to face with the living dead.
Or: As they scoot through the pedestrian
tunnel's bottleneck to the raucous beach,
they let the shrillest lung-powered missiles loose
to ricochet off shadowy, dank walls—
echoes besting the road-roar overhead.
All this provides them practice. Now they scream
to juice up the backyard birthday party.
Sweating and itching in a polyester
clown suit, a high school boy blows up
balloons for them; his made-up funny face
has the usual look of a lipsticked skull.
A plane drops low, trailing its routine drumroll.
The children, sugar-saturated, scream
until the neighbors slam their windows down.
Bang! More bangs. Balloons become barrage.
The grass is soon covered with moist scraps
of rubbery pink, and even now the children
scream and if you close your eyes you might
forget the roller coaster's safety bar,
the celluloid contrivance of the film,
the happy family's covey of protection
moving unconcerned through the gray tunnel,
the plane aligned calm for a clear runway.
There, in your own darkness behind your eyes,
treble piercing the underpinning bass,
you might hear the mess of noise stripped bare

of reassuring context, hear the screams
as helpless commentary on what Mister
Chalky Face is ready to hand out
with a fixed grin to children of all ages.

Working Out: Ten Epigrams

Motivation

Mens sana in *corpore sano* might
be every bit as true as it is trite,
but what can spur the sedentary will
recurrently to gulp the bitter pill
of sane exertion? Doctor's orders. Fright.

Trainer

Hannah can see that I am too ethereal.
Her regimens are thoughtfully designed
to keep me focused on the raw material
that for so long had somehow slipped my mind.

*

Treadmill

A line from Hopkins trundles through my head:
"Generations have trod, have trod, have trod."
To keep alive I mime the trooping dead.
Ten minutes more must go to this sheer plod.

*

Rower

Charon, your moldy prow is faintly showing
on the horizon; in my dry-docked craft
I pull against an unseen current, knowing
there is no knowing just when you'll swing aft.

Pullups

My two arms dragging up the rest of me
are painfully apprised of gravity.

*

Situps

My brain says I should do five more now, but
a differing opinion fills my gut.

*

Bench Press

Peculiar, upward thrusting: like inverted
pushups, or attempting to get rid
of a blithe Saint Bernard. Or, disconcerted,
coaxing aloft a lowering coffin lid.

*

Attention-Getter

His clanking on of fifty extra pounds
is followed by a train of ardent sounds,
each beefy heave accompanied by grunts
which fail to charm us less ambitious runts.

*

Role Model

Past eighty-seven, at a queenly pace,
she gets her money's worth out of the place,
bestowing on each Nautilus machine,
to the mind's eye, an opalescent sheen.

Locker Room

So: am I still committed? All the more so;
what if each sinew creaks from recent strife?
A glance at this or that archaic torso
reminds me I had better change my life.

In The Picture

The M.D., as it says on his neat sign,
is neatly specialized. He treats The Hand.
Professionally caressing one of mine,
he doesn't hesitate to reach the point
in terms that even I can understand:
"You have arthritis in your left thumb joint."

He caught it on the X-ray. There it shows,
right where it shouldn't be, the site of pain
between two chalk-pegs, passing out the woes
just taking hold of things can leave me feeling.
What is it like? Annoying. Like a sprain
that re-emerges fresh from every healing.

For all of that, the pain's not often serious,
not halfway up his scale of one to ten,
I tell him, peering at the splayed, mysterious
image of my extremity fluoresced
against a field of darkness. (Now and then,
maybe, it hits a six.) Well, who'd have guessed

this would be where the first outbreak would come?
Never left-handed, I've demanded little
of this inflamed, opposable, sore thumb,
would even pay to have these flare-ups cease.
But any truce in such a spot is brittle.
Unfazed by film, aching to breach the peace,

this will persist. It could intensify,
exporting discontent to other zones.
The doctor of The Hand will have a try,
then hand me to a different specialist.

Meanwhile, in that precinct between bones,
resentment churns each time I make a fist.

River and Road

Four days a week and sometimes five
I take my make-my-living drive
along a road I know too well.
For several miles, parallel
to mine, a river steers its course,
moving with unassuming force,
tugging its ripple-convoy south,
aiming to catch up with its mouth.
Till at a bridge we intersect
we each, in different ways, reflect:
I mull on all I need to do
while it absorbs the local view.
Absorbs? Well, no. Its surface proffers
back every sight each instant offers.
Leaves flutter from a lowdown limb
not only near but on the brim.
Glance up or down: the doubled sky
confounds a sense of low and high.
Each cloud flotilla setting sail
rates an escort in mirrored mail;
and, in the midst of all, the sun's
photons arouse rebounding ones.

If the road tended closer in
the water might display my twin,
but ferried on by asphalt, I'm
oblivious to it for the time.
Crossing from bank to bank, I go
my way and leave it to its flow.
What comes to pass upon its face
jars not a bit the river's pace.

And this goes on for days, for years.
As though through its own mist of tears

it gives the world back with a wink.
In me, though, such impressions sink
abeyant to a rambling grotto
(Room For It All might be its motto),
waiting spellbound or simply parked
for days or decades unremarked
till, surging from the silt to break
the placid surface with their wake
they win the notice I'd withheld
before. I let our currents meld,
returning buoyancy and sheen
to a long disregarded scene
now entertained in full and made
part of my conscious cavalcade—
with such a feeling, maybe, as
the steady-running river has
when it arrives to meet the sea
and finds a mightier harmony.
And, so it won't drop out of sight
once more, I take my pen and write.

Old Man of the Mountain

Charisma shaped his overhanging ledge,
made him iconic, heading him toward fame.
Eons on Cannon Mountain's windy edge
earned him his name.

After untold millennia, who counts?
That bare peak was his post. He stayed to man it,
staring at air and eagles, other mounts
made too of granite:

the constant sentinel who stole the scene.
His beetling brow, his massive lantern jaw,
his knife-edge nose protruding in between
indifferently cast awe

on the first scouts who pioneered the Notch,
tiptoeing past the shade of that profile.
Then followed tourist hordes to watch him watch,
with no hint of a smile,

the forests turn to farms, the straighter road
reform the ragged, snaking Indian trail.
None of these changes seemed much to forebode
a finis to his tale,

since none could change his vigil over change.
Then, one night, a vibration shook the spell.
Loosed from his lookout, leaving it vacant, strange,
his face fell.

Loss by a landslide made a sad enough
end to the reign of this New England sphinx;
sadder, to know his pose was one great bluff
riddled with chinks.

Single File

It is your destiny to stand in line:
some, as it happens, are ahead of you.
However you may question the design,

this is the way it has to be. Don't whine.
Don't bother cursing that bad hand you drew.
It is your destiny to stand in line,

barred from all decent pretexts to resign.
You're here, you're late. While itching to squeeze through,
however, you may question the design:

Will it be worth the wait? That glass of wine?
That corner table with an ocean view?
It is your destiny. To stand in line

to have your passport stamped, your blood drawn, dine
deluxe or at some diner, this you do
however you may question. The design

is snarled in the future's ball of twine,
trailing an end you catch at for a clue.
It is your destiny to stand in line—
how? Ever. (You may question the design.)

Robert B. Shaw teaches at Mount Holyoke College. His most recent books, both published by Ohio University Press, are a collection of poems, *Solving For X*, and a prose work, *Blank Verse: A Guide To Its History And Use.*

PAUL WATSKY

Hell Hath No Windows

no bird flight, no unfettered clouds,
but it compensates with fluorescent, steel-
trussed cathedral ceilings, aisle
upon aisle of hardware shelving: At 8:15,
Saturday's A.M., cubscoutmasters
badger boys of seven and eight toward
virtue and a mini-seminar in craftsmanship,
while parents trail after, few as disoriented
as I, who at nine wrestled miserably
with himself over his irritated, stooping
father's bald head, an all-thumbs boobchild
stuck holding the inventor's hammer
so Dad could fiddle, meticulously slow—*Give
him a whack and end it all,* counselled
my demon of despair—in that bad
memory of what might have been, now
just one more floater in my uninitiated
eye, among distortions triggered
by labels and the wiles packaging works
on ignorance—sex, violence, visions
as grabby as the grunge component
of a Medieval altar piece, some
merely weird—*plate joining biscuits, air
chisel, anti spatter, self-centering
brad set*—others twisted—*grinding
point tree, jitterbug sander, stud
finders* loitering beside *The Aggressor,
bastard files, deep-throat
c-clamp*—a witches' sabbath climaxed
by malpractice—*magnetic power
nut driver, Freud Circular Saw
Blades—50 teeth*—torment, not
temptation, not yummy, windowless

Las Vegas, where, nephew of a handsome
gambler I once locked my rare
winnings in a box till checkout, thereby
tying myself to the mast, action
singing glitzy in my ears and rubbing at my party-
animal crotch; no,
clipboard in hand, I'm in narrow aisles, taking
names on the home turf of busy
gnomes, my purpose, exorcism (hardly
the wish list several fellow dads imagine),
and serving out my time, till noon, when
I'll sweep past the registers empty-
handed, without even a telescoping-
pole bulb changer, every last
pomegranate seed, unconsumed.

Paul Watsky grew up in New York City and began writing poetry during high school. He now lives and works in San Francisco, where he earns his living as a Jungian analyst. He has published two chapbooks, "More Questions Than Answers" (tel-let 2001) and "Sea Side" (tel-let 2003), co-translated with Emiko Miyashita Santoka (Tokyo, PIE Books, 2006), and has poems in various journals, including *Poetry Flash*, *The Cream City Review*, *onthebus*, as well as forthcoming in *Confrontation*, *Fugue*, *Cadillac Cicatrix*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

RICHARD WILBUR

Out Here

Strangers might wonder why
That big snow shovel's leaning
Against the house in July.
Has it some secret meaning?

It means at least to say
That, here, we needn't be neat
About putting things away,
As on some suburban street.

What's more, by leaning there
The shovel seems to express
With its rough and ready air
A boast of ruggedness.

If a stranger said in sport
"I see you're prepared for snow,"
Our shovel might retort
"Out here you never know."

Born in 1921, **Richard Wilbur** is America's most-honored living poet. His translations of Moliere, Racine, Corneille, are the gold standard for French comedy on the stage. He has received the Bollingen Prize both for his translations and for his own poetry. Twice he has received the Putlitzer Prize. Twice, served as Poet Laureate or Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. He lives in Cummington, MA, where he plays tennis and teaches at Amherst.

Leslie Ullman

Mind in Spite of Itself

In January, an icicle loosens
30 floors over the sidewalk that has never
known the touch of skin or lingering sun
but sometimes the pads of small dogs
on leashes. Now, on a single
balcony, then another, a flash of color—
someone in red or violet or burnt orange
and jeans leaning out to test the sudden turn
of weather, disbelieving, released from
the season's recycled air that smells of steam heat
and curry. It's a large happiness, this scent
of nothing exactly recognizable
catching hold of everyone at once.
Soon it will move on, returning
the dwellers of vertical caves to their
habitual scarves and black capes, their ignorance
of jet streams and barometric pressure,
the tastefully-furnished interiors
of their shared and particular malaise.
Yet here it is, blatant, poised to leave, a moisture
something young and green wants to push through.
A mildness not quite spent, having traveled
from the equator. A scent that seems
never to have been touched by the pinched air
of solstice, the disappearance
of meadows, the imperceptible
diminishment of love.

At the End of Daylight Savings

sunlight still glares off the road like trumpet sound.
Birds still thicken the air with messages
at dawn, a telegraphy that fills the morning

too full for one pair of ears—
one might as well listen with the whole body.
And then take that listening

to the base of the mountain whose creases
are dusted with snow already sure
of its place before the months lengthen

and darken, each crystal soon to be fed by
clouds and swells of wind that will drive it
into deeper configurations.

Then the mountain will glow faintly
even at night—especially at night—sculpture,
perfection, apparition that will pour an is-ness

over each dormant bush and distracted eye. Even now,
even those who have never been on speaking terms
with God have no choice but to open

to something that sears and consoles
beneath jackets newly unpacked for the season: how clouds
and their leavings change the light on the mountain

but not the shape of its silence.

Leslie Ullman is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *Slow Work Through Sand* (U. of Iowa Press). Now Professor Emerita in the Creative Writing Program at University of Texas-El Paso, she still teaches for the low-residency MFA Program at Vermont College of the Fine Arts and, in the winters, teaches skiing at Taos Ski Valley.

Rachel Hadas

Seascape

Two hills waist-deep in water. Are they islands?
This scene yields up a burnished afternoon

gilding rocks and trees that, if you look
a second time, reveal themselves, as do

reflections of light upon the water.
The tapering sliver of the right-hand island

touches its counterpart
as two hands with extended fingers touch

at the moment of farewell.
No boats, no houses, no people.

A pearly mantle of cloud slants up and away.
Because I'm tired, this whole seascape looks wistful.

Its tranquil beauty quietly recalls
what I have lost, which is what I have had:

bustling back and forth, flights, ferry boats,
Peiraeus to Samos and the other islands

dipping themselves waist-deep in the Aegean.
Or maybe they were rooted there and grew,

swaying like underwater plants a strong
hand would be able to grasp and tug and pull

out of the wine-dark sea. Odysseus woke
and looked around. Which strange island was this?

This was one postcard from the basket whose
contents we dipped into every Thursday

evening all semester. The seminar room
had no windows. Each of us looked at

the image we had chosen, then at something
else, something invisible, and wrote.

The Trickle

Certain conversations take no space.
Almost no time, yet each
Comes with its buoyant freight of history.
On the future's threshold
A tiny figure waves. The door swings shut,
But still one sees a slender ray of light.
A crystal trickle
Tumbles down solid rock.

The Spill

Making her way along a cluttered surface,
The maple-golden cat upset a vase.
Water from yesterday's
Birthday roses ran
Down the lid of the desk
Inherited from your father
And leaked inside and dripped
Not only into pigeonholes
But onto cancelled checks;
Into an open box
Of Columbia Music Department stationery;
A jury duty summons; an old will;
An old New Jersey Transit timetable;
Tax records; and a warranty for some
Appliance we no longer own. Glass claws
Gleamed among puddles on the polished floor.
The cat, at a discreet
Distance from the spill,
Circled and sniffed and chose a spot to settle
Into with dignity and dry her paws.

1971; 2008

for Molly Peacock

Sympathy isn't listening to the tale
Only; it is also giving back
In other words what has been handed over,
Returning it with something added, as

Beeswax warm from two palms, from two times many,
Rolled into one long candle and then curled,
Was placed upon the chest of dead Nicolas
And the Ormos women keened all night.

I stood there poised on the threshold,
Half-in, half-out of the room, the ritual,
The rhythm. Even then I understood
We do not have to bear our pain alone.

So, Molly, when last week you said two words –
It's huge – you took my lump of cold hard wax
And before handing it back to me
Warmed it between your palms.

Rachel Hadas is Board of Governors professor of English at the Newark campus of Rutgers University. Her new book of poems, THE ACHE OF APPETITE, is forthcoming later this year from *Copper Beech Press*, and she is currently coediting *THE GREEK POETS: Homer to the PRESENT*, a book of Greek poetry in translation, due out from Norton in December 2009.

Leigh Holland

Trapnest

My half-house seals itself with bandage walls,
Relieves or blunts potential trauma in
A seamless narrowing, and when I close
My door, *I* close, because I know it's safe
To switch to autopilot, lag or idle
At the liminal of nothing—set apart,

Ambitionless. These stacks are called apart-
Ments, not togetherments, their run-on walls
Are honeycombed to spare me any idle
Interaction or communion. I inhale,
Exhale, without an audience, save
For the hollow cell itself, the room that's close

To perfect, built for one, with piles of clothes
I carpet-dropped. Shirts clot and spread apart
At intervals, still warm, detergent-softened,
Offhand ways to line the nest. The walls
Are too far out. I want to draw them in
Until they're wearable in some idyllic

Symbiosis where the hours of idle-
ness have fused me to the floor and closed
The ceiling over me. I've curled inside,
Untouched by night or morning, with a part
Of me already desperate for the walls,
Seeing them as self-extension, safety

In a square white shell. No urges left to sift,
They're trapped outside the door, forever idle,
While the god of hatchless things indwells the walls
And ladles my thoughts back to me, closed

Circuit, sans imperatives, a partner-
God whose voice is old, familiar—in

Fact, his voice is mine. Drawn blinds cradle in
The sluggish bulb-grown light to keep it safe,
Progressless, but intact, cocooned apart
From strain or terror. Turning idle
Hours to dust, I lose the name of action, close
My mouth, my mind: I'm only eyes and walls.

Leigh Holland is a poet from Moulton, AL. She is currently in the Creative Writing MFA program at Vanderbilt University.

Richard Foerster

A Tropic Wave

Old Miami, pastelled and insecure,
sprawls toward sawgrass, far

beyond these newly calcified
condos that rise bejeweled

from sand. Like houseflies
they copulate toward the heavens.

I count them pane by passive
pane. How sudden the near

horizon's swept from view
while palms endure their

ravishment. The future—drear
Lothario—surges undeterred.

Savasana

The corpse I am become
lives in pure counter-
poise, between weight and
weightless tidal flow, its breath
osmotic, its pulse subsumed. Here
is death beyond fear, without
want of resurrection, unyoked

from hate or any spur to forgive,
where all the masks of God
melt into irrelevant silences.
Here the body surrenders all
tethers to the past, its crowns
and cups of woe, and hope's
a stain absolved of any future,

where the only present is presence,
a nothing that is everything stillness
yearns to inhabit, that lights
no way to or fro. Dark bliss!
Give me back my staccato
heart, the stuttered air,
the buzzing lies of the world.

Niagara

Under Horseshoe Falls, the Maid of the Mist,
throttled at max amid thunder, churned
its engine headlong into the turbulence
to mimic a momentary repose, motionless
where all was furious motion.
Thus the red-robed
monk facing the masked phalanx in riot gear,
the student staring down the barrel
of destiny in Heaven's Square. Name them
if you can. One blink and history closes
the books we never read.
Yet the thrill, to stand within
the mists of nature's wonder, with the pounding
tonnage of time all around us, which, that day,
hadn't yet swept our awed faces toward more
settled waters.
That was our miraculous then.
But look, my broken love, the cormorant
that was diving there beside us all along, surfaces
here, again out of chaos, with a tiny radiance
thrashing, still poised in its bill.

Richard Foerster is the author of five collections of poetry, most recently *The Burning of Troy* (BOA Editions, 2006), which received a 2007 Maine Literary Award. Other work of his appears in *The Gettysburg Review*, *New Letters*, *Pleiades*, and *Southen California Review*.

Alan Sullivan

A Walk in the Rain

for Richard Wilbur

We walk through pattering rain
that spangles every frond
in a fine dendritic stand
of Hampshire County fern.

Our genial guide confides
the names of Berkshire trees.
Their fret of dripping baise
annoints our hatless heads

as the melismatic chatter
of rivulet on rock
announces Hamlen Brook
newly filled with water.

We cross, and just beyond
the trail begins to wind
up stony slants of land.
Minding the broken ground,

I spot an orange eft
no larger than the leaf
it bestrides on soggy duff
as though it rode a raft;

and having glimpsed the one,
I suddenly see the rest
my gaze has somehow missed.
Wafers of setting sun

glow on the forest floor.
These are a poet's gifts—
the sacramental efts
he brought us here to share.

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

DANIEL TOBIN

Airs For a Needle's Eye

All the stream that's roaring by
came out of a needle's eye.
W.B. Yeats

Hermeneutical

Riding out with the ship at dawn you saw
Yourself come back from everything that was
Going to be. Everything that was, was
Present then, but would not be what you saw.

Emmaus

Footsteps on the road.
Whispered light.

On the other side
the risen
walk beside you.

Eschatological

Hang
in with

me
I am

still
coming.

Parable

I believe, the blind man spoke,
and Jesus rubbed

earth mixed with spittle
into his eyes: a miracle—

He was blind again,
this time with light.

Omen

He woke in the last
evening light

to find a sparrow
dangling dead

from the feeder,
its feet still

gripping the perch
and alongside

another, its beak
a shuttle
going
at the seed.

The Great Day

Eyes seared by light,
I grope toward the switch that
flicks off the sun.

Lines to be Shuffled into a Ghazal

Words troop in black ink, file after file, each field
wound into the spine, their landscape snow or bone.

The Prophet's Vacation

After forty days
and forty nights the desert
feels like paradise.

Trace

He would breathe perfume
from the word rose,

its petals fallen, so many
eyelids and fine dust.

Shibboleth

Our fingers share skin's hieroglyphic,
sussurant Braille, cryptography of touch.
With one word two caves open on shores
where breaths heave spellbound in an epic gloss.

Password, furtive code, tesserae—: Who needs
a lexicon to obscure the tongue's seal,
fluent as we are in body's lush ciphers.

Song

The cedar beams have fallen.
No myrrh. No lily. No rose.
Only your eyes can warm me,
Dark pools blooming in snow.

Beginning and End

Night. A faucet drips.
I curl closer to myself
like anyone's child.

Daniel

Where is my name
going, emptied

like any wind?

Hearth

Trapped
here inside

the ribcage
small light

chill wind
of it we make

a home—
sweet home.

Coal

Molten host,
ash made word.
Swallow me,
bitter rind
of the world,
follow me
chosen dust.

Sinai

It's been years since
I climbed this

ridge, distant
glow, the urgent

voice calling out—
Here I am, still

tugging at the knot
In my shoe.

Salt

Before desert wind
lifts this woman into sand
let us run our tongues along

her whispering hands,
those eyes that chose her longing,
to taste the unimagined.

Dawn, Reef Point

Light garbles on the tide's redundant tongue.

Archimedean

Morning at its fulcrum,
the mind a poised lever—
again the sun rises
under the horizon.

Major Interval

How many years had he waited
for the window to open in stone,
sky burning its blue in granite
in the place where a hawk had flown?

Now wind blows light on his forehead.
The moon is a still pond at night
from which the loon's departed.

The Egg Cup

The shape it makes in air
light playing off the lip
holds the morning
in its bowl—
little urn
little
chalice
adorned
with a spray
of cornflowers.

At Wind Point

Chill breeze off the lake:
I hold in my hand
a monarch's wing,
silk-soft, color of rust,
color of a tiger's pelt.

Spiritus

Window up.
Window down.
Wind....

Compass

Ruffle the pages
As if casting lots,

The sound of water
On a distant shore—

Anywhere whispers
In medias res.

Again, Basho's Frog

plops into his old
pond, still mirror, its ripples
untranslatable....

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

LOREN GRAHAM

selection from

The Ring Scar

Sonnets & Anti-sonnets

"It is our kind to wound"
—John Berryman
Dream Song 219

—1—

Imaginary Conversations

Don and Emmy six months after their separation

Estranged

Don

is such a word to use for this obsession
with all that is so entirely familiar—
and for the inadvertent ghosts that hover
on the few books, the lone CD, your stray possessions.
The bed, of course. Your empty closet. The succession
of old notes from you still taped to the refrigerator
half a year now after your departure.
I feel as if I should have drawn conclusions
by this time, poetic ones about love, passion,
and loss. Instead I picture the strand of your hair
I have not yet found, but will find in some
untouched, undusted nook—or in a drawer
long unopened—or wound around my shirt button
as though my heart's strange ghost had reeled it there.

The Past The Icicle

Emmy

I thought I could melt it in the right spring
thaw given a city that makes its own weather
the job new the phone my rings newly

in a matchbox the address new furniture clothes
new site of our history's shrinking dripping
running out downspouts down storm

drains down river ocean and goodbye
what water does what I wanted that icicle
of oil to do that mounted the air instead

in its defrosting rose evolved its own
cycle to come down in dribs and drabs on all
in my gaze on the crowds I brush through

thinking somehow you also have passed by
on the street where old cobblestones show through tar
in a tunnel far below where subway trains pass

a greasy flutter of light a film off the sprocket
a man in your coat and glasses standing silent
like a newspaper holding onto the rail

which bears the same grime that settles everywhere

A Language of Birds

O for a language of birds, to say
ourselves! To call us as the chickadee
calls itself—chik-a-dee-dee—and the phoebe
likewise, and the whipporwill, and the jay.

Or to summon ourselves in a subtler vein:
the towhee with his endless drink-your-teeee
or that low trembling whistle in which we
perceive the misnamed screech-owl's secret name.

Could we then meet ourselves in all of these
and form from them that one call of our own
that would lay claim to us? And would it shear

away the distance and the constant drone
of traffic and TV, and would we hear
again the flickers' laughter in the trees?

Admission

Ochre detritus under naked rose
stems sepals like crushed
insects clenching withered

blossom heads blasted whose
collapse I observed aloof
annoyed at first with this token

you presented for admission to shut
doors or was it a question
as to their opening dissolved

those blooms shadows those
petal remnants persisting
please no more questions no

more questions

Spring in Hell

A new outbreak of anger and desire
falls down with snow on limbs alive with green
sparks, on maples in red eruption, on fires
of hyacinth flaring up amid a sheen

of phlox and pussy willow, on the blaze
of tulip and azalea, on raging tongues
of new grass—flame descending into flame,
ignition spreading to poplars, fire flung

across jonquil and forsythia—over the strained
obscene logic of pistil and pollen,
unquenchable longing versus utter rage,
both uncontrollable, and both in blossom,

and both reminding me how easily
a tenderness can bloom inside a fury.

The Escapee

Spark on wings yellow flash that lights in tiny
park next door jauntily pecks ground
for seed sustenance among such dull

pigeons I would bring you bright budgie
inside to comfort to cage if in your eye
were not something like relief something winter

and alley cats could not dismay which stays
my hand with you who without plot of departure
have surprised even yourself in electric bolt

through door or window left open just enough
for something smoldering to flame out a flickering
wish for Bradford pear tree seen from tidy

confinement from contented drowsing before some
revealing glass so that I will say never to myself again
one thing causes another nor to world

you are just what I suppose

The Other Man

Listen: it's not so much the other man
himself, not the mere fact that he exists
and has a foreign accent and a wit
like broken glass, an elf's face, and a stand-
ing invitation to your bed, that lands
on me like a death.
It's more that tiny twist
of smile that lingers on your mouth, the wist-
fulness in your cheekbones, in your laugh lines:

the way that your demeanor echoes mine
on the few days when I can feel, the days
when I imagine my new love, when I'm
convinced that she is standing in the line
at the market or waiting in a dry doorway
during a storm, though I don't yet know her face.

Humanities Eumenides

Invitations engender paperless regrets
via daisies each like a pale enormous
eye via valentine with silly birds and photo

you in pine woods back of our house via seed
pearls in manila left taped to my door via
chrysanthemums thirteen sans card the first

day I went out with another silent dragon heads
accusing mums from my mom I assured words
that made me ill that forced me to recall

your love like a bee's for the hive the polite
messages my machine is full of offers
unstated full of silent Furies beckoning full

of the ominous quiet in your voice

Imaginary Conversations

You say whatever it was you ever said
that left me flat, that vandalized or burned
me. I say words I wish I had returned
but did not.
Then you recede, and I explain
in great detail, in words I never said,
how shame and anger are seldom long estranged,
how in a lyric from a country croon
I hear our diminution and am embarrassed,
enraged and appalled at the tidy vacuum,
the perfect lack that we made of marriage.

But always silence is your last reply,
silence presented as a negative quantity,
a nothing that can settle any score.

(You say the absence of your knocking at my door.)

The One-time Mrs. Van Winkle

To walk hand-in-hand with someone
else in the city and think of you on the other
side of the mountains was to be incognito

a thief safe from all surveillance
but unable to enjoy what I had stolen
Though I would wish to I cannot stop

this larceny so I fantasize about putting everyone
to sleep a year of sound and dreamless slumber
you among the sleepers only my friend

and I awake to wander empty streets and shops
unhurried unremarked to take what we wanted
needed and in that gap of time I could choose

whether to rouse you early with exquisite kisses
or steal away in that year-long night let you
awaken on your own puzzled at the length

of your hair the calendar's strange inaccuracies

The Ring Scar

It should have disappeared by now, this faint
line of pale skin where my ring used to ride,
but it persists. It faded overnight
from my palm, but on the back of my hand,
part of me most familiar, it has remained
for months: indented, obvious, a fine
shadow, a delicate burn never quite
healed. Nothing will erase that little brand:
I've stretched it, flexed it, held it in the sun,
but it will not be exorcised. It hangs
on like an old unwelcome ghost, a crank
spirit biding its time, making mortals wait
until the day when, for reasons unknown,
it leaves off haunting and suddenly is gone.

—2—

The Transformed

before the separation

The Match

Tennis days days in synch when we hit
in brisk rhythm return for return another
game another set a competition our co-creation

but late evening unnoticed the darkness
collected imperceptibly in our eye sockets
beneath our chins in the bends of our knees

a gauze hanging over the interstices
of the net a web over the faces of our racquets
over fences that enclosed us as we played

in decline cast long shadows that swelled
swallowed until the ball faded when I hit and I
felt myself grow dim though against the sky

I could make out outlines towers and floodlights
both of us now invisible the ball lost
why didn't why didn't we try

those lights

I Don't Love You

—your words. I would have preferred accusations.
If only you had spit in my face, struck
me, screamed in shrill and furious impatience
bastard! son-of-a-bitch!, claimed I was fucking

our pretty neighbor, set something on fire,
shattered a window, slammed a door at least,
thrown down a book or piece of silverware,
broken a glass: anything with the taste

of passion in it, anything with heat.
If you had said the same four words enraged,
bellicose, hissing, I could have made retreat

and waited for you: there would have been room.
But you were tender—tearful and engaged,
yet full of a cool and unruffled gloom.

Translation

Suddenly present in an unknown place
on foreign sheets your strangers' arms
around me I rose and dully dressed

in another woman's garments put on her leather
shoes molded long by such alien feet her tank
tops that let my bra strap show used her brushes

that pulled hair out in clumps off-brand
toothpaste mirrors that showed a face like mine
but never quite true the chin off somehow the eyes

just too far apart the hair longish not the correct color
Who was this stranger whose existence was the original
of my sudden and poor translation whose lip

gloss and eye liner I expropriated who had folded
her underwear neatly and placed it in the wrong drawer
who never returned whose husband I allowed to

hold me he didn't know I wasn't his wife

Actaeon At Acheron

on the ferry to the underworld

I have not been cold long enough to ponder
what could have motivated her to a rage
so powerful that she would make me wander
eternally obtuse among the shades—

but it must be the bathing, not the skin,
that deity dreads us to look upon.
The sudden apprehension of perfection
in need of being cleansed gives apprehension,

not so much to the watcher in his awe,
but to the goddess in the act of washing
what was presumed forever to be pristine.
To be seen naked this way makes for gall.

And this is why, perhaps, I was pursued
and torn apart by what I thought I knew.

The Transformed

When I was someone else how could you
remain the same not become my dead
father older brother who still treats me

as a child boy who was my high school
life who said I was pretty boss who paid me
well talked to my chest pursued me vehemently

bitterly young professor to whose class I wore my
shortest skirts whose gaze could mute me
anyone anyone I used to be used to be in love with

collection of fading images never fading away

strange faces on stamps on old letters saved not to answer

The Way You Said We Should Divorce

and I should let you go you unbuttoned
the last button on your blouse let it fall
We should I mean I should It isn't fair
you pulled the clip away so that your hair
cascaded onto your shoulders *I feel*
I'm in a stupid novel you unbuckled
your wide belt holding your skirt with one hand
the other on my arm *I shouldn't call*
myself I sliding between the sheets bare
beside me *Hold me Closer We're beyond*
repair.

Pained and Painful Words

spilled out of me decaying words with half-lives

words whose remnants mustered like ants gained
a potency unintended explanations that would accuse
answers to the wrong question words in a stoop

like a bird of prey's provisional utterances accepted
as permanent words like *mistress* words like *controlling*
expressions of regret misheard mistaken words like
oncoming traffic words that gathered force acquired

power until new words failed to oppose until your
brooding silence became perpetual until you sat
hours next to the cold woodstove stroking

the cat staring

Homeopathy

Your words were torture, but that was why my mind
rehearsed them endlessly, as though to find

and reproduce with full fidelity
the precise sound that caused the injury

could make the throbbing resonate and heal
me thereby. For that, my thought fixed on *I feel*

like a whore with you, trying to get the gait
of *whore* and *you* just right, to imitate

with skill the way you said the final "r"
in *You'll take a mistress—it's only fair*

or to match the pitch, the timbre, and the tone
of *I married you because being alone*

is so sad:
  solution of the millionth part
of a pain so pure it was a kind of art.

The New Woman in His Future

will not have to try will never look fat could be
anyone our attractive gray-eyed neighbor who lives alone
a college student waitress one day leaving

her phone number with his bill She might wear her hair
up might be immaculate in sundress her spine
forming a perfect row with the button at her nape

might walk so innocently toward him with the sun
through the blinds streaking his office with a picket
fence of light I know he is not out to leave me

but she will say something brilliant over a glass
of wine brush his arm at just the critical juncture
inadvertently set his world aflame and his unhappiness

alight make what is obvious obvious that I am not
her not the one who will inevitably prove
wondrous in bed appealing in conversation peerless

in all he must know he is without

The Trance

My life became a trance.
Even asleep,
when I could sleep, my body was aware
that I was lost, and every waking hour
was a broken wreck.
Inside I never breathed,
swallowed, or blinked: somehow I'd lost the need.

I came home from my job staring, prepared
each night to find the closet door ajar,
your dresser cleared, a note left to repeat
what I would never need repeated, words
that every ghost in every ruined house
recited, that the smallest spiders knew
and whispered incessantly, that the mouse
inside the wall and skulking catbird
repeated as a tale they said was true.

Isolation Abhorrent Presences Terrible

I learned it seeing a snake black with gold collar
on weedy field edge sight that made ripples in my
marrow my breath hold itself for awe of that cool

sinuous thing and the fellowship contact implied
even of my own shock at seeing one who didn't
know I was watching who was watching as well

small dark birds copulating on the ground one
perched repeatedly on the other flapping
twittering mad circular scurries in grass

Then came shushing in dry pine needles above
something moving toward us invisible though I glanced
around overcome with that common inexplicable sense

another looking squarely at me monitoring my steps

waiting knowing everywhere everyone was watching

—3—

Strange City

before the separation and after

Infidelity

Falling was not a matter of a fall.
There was no awful moment when my ledge
collapsed or when my step mistook the edge
and let me tumble down.
I did not fall:
my feet were slipping, so I jumped—and all
that followed followed not some tragic wedge
of circumstance or destiny, but the mad urge
to throw myself from a height.
Across the hall
at work, my sympathetic blue-eyed friend
and co-worker now tossed her hair and beckoned,
smiled and proffered until I did not care
that it was certain we would soon be found
out and vilified.
One day I simply reckoned
her a window and leaped into the air.

Connecting Flight

The door closed behind me we were already
moving as I found my window the man
with the aisle beside me enormous obese

rose to admit me nodded politely but overflowed
the small coach seat flesh draped over me hip
to chest I called the attendant pleaded fervently

indiscreetly for another assignment the flight
full she said sympathetically I stole a look
at the stranger the fellow traveler he with eyes

closed maybe asleep already maybe in pain
himself but perhaps to awaken find me staring
desperation and horror on my face so I settled

closed my eyes created the illusion if he chanced
a look that I too might be not awake so we two
flew perhaps in a feigned sleep a subterfuge

we undertook jointly to avoid one another
conspirators in an intimacy unintended
unfelt a discomfort that imposed

sleep as a decency a duty

The Contemplation of Divorce

In an old quarter of the night, I tried
to balance reasonable expectation
against the overwhelming force of grief,
as if the weighing out of guilt and passion,
the urge to remain and the will to go,
could somehow ensure rescue and relief,
or at least could make catastrophe recede.

What makes love fail? Really, I didn't know,
but I had my suspicions: maybe it fails
when Fates decree its failure, is dispatched
without forewarning and without appeal,
precisely as we ourselves are dispatched—
while we eat lunch, when we go to get the mail,
on a birthday, on Christmas Day perhaps.

The moment of collapse
arrives at its leisure and keeps to no clock
or calendar. It has been known to break
down doors—it does not knock
politely, does not wait for us to dress
or comb, and will not hear any request.

Washing Clothes

I threw my travel clothes in the washer you still
at work I said it out loud Why do I Why
do I not love you I could not weigh

or count it how your gaze wove me a close-fitting
collar embraces exhausted life transformed into
heavy robe I trudged through my days in garb

forever gapping to reveal clashing colors beneath
raiment turned to stone when the dryer buzzed
I replaced it all set the suitcase in its usual

place it looked perfectly normal

Evening In

The sky falls all night, it is nothing new
You gets hoarse earlier on you could never understand, don't say that you
I slump on the couch, hand on my head, wonder if there is beer
The cat hunkering on the floor
You turn to the kitchen to make words out of dirty dishes
Moments line up in rows, silent as eggs
I say I don't want you to think we couldn't if
You say why don't I just go ahead and if
I think you are passing over, as though my voice had expired
I say I don't like it when I've
A shadow moving quickly as a mouse
You go out with a suitcase, rattling glass
I sit quiet in the counsel of rain
You turn the engine over again and again in the cold driveway

Acknowledgments

Grateful acknowledgment is extended to the following publications, in which early versions of some of these poems previously appeared:

The Alabama Literary Review ("Translation," "The Transformed")

The Boston Review ("Evening In," "Strange City")

Clackamas Literary Review ("Homeopathy")

Cumberland Poetry Review ("Actaeon At Acheron," "A Language Of Birds,"

Iris ("Evening In")

The Iron Horse Literary Review ("The Other Man," "Infidelity)

Spoon River Poetry Review ("Estranged," "Imaginary Conversations" and "The Trance")

St. Luke's Review ("The Contemplation of Divorce")

Notes

"Estranged": The final two lines echo a Guy de Maupassant story, "The Spectre."

"Humanities, Eumenides": "The Eumenides" (the Merciful Ones) was a Greek euphemism for the Furies, goddesses who punished those whose crimes could not be punished by the justice system of the time.

"Actaeon at Acheron": Actaeon was a hunter in Greek mythology who inadvertently saw the goddess Artemis bathing in a stream. She turned him into a deer on the spot, and he was torn apart by his hunting dogs. Acheron is the river across which the dead are ferried to the underworld.

"The Contemplation of Divorce": The first line is borrowed from Robert Penn Warren.

Loren Graham teaches creative writing at Carroll College in Helena, Montana. His first book of poetry, Mose, was published in 1994 by Wesleyan University Press.

Charles Martin

On a Roman Perfume Bottle

The Romans were not meek,
And often the results
Of their inventive labors,
Towers and catapults,
Went rumbling off to wreak
Havoc on their neighbors;

This tiny, cooled-down state
Of a once ardent passion
Knows nothing of those wars;
But served, in its own fashion,
The imperious dictate
Of Venus's with Mars.

A Late Correction

The legend, built up over many years,
That told of how the spells the monsters cast
Reduced the hapless children to hot tears
And left the grown-ups they became aghast
And swaddled in unmanageable fears
Originating in the nightmare past---
That legend needs revising, it appears,
Now that we see the monsters plain at last:

How this one, with its repertoire of snarls,
And that one, rearing up, are both translated
Into these oldsters from the suburbs, clad
In gay synthetic leisurewear, elated
To be here for their child's sake.
Then, "Mom, Dad,
I'd like you both to meet my good friend Charles..."

Charles Martin is an acclaimed translator of Latin poetry. His verse translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (W. W. Norton, 2003) received the 2004 Harold Morton Landon Translation Award from the Academy of American Poets. He has also published translations of the complete poems of Catullus (Johns Hopkins, 1990) and a critical introduction to Catullus's work which is part of Yale University Press's Hermes Series. A professor at Queensborough Community College (CUNY), he also teaches poetry at Syracuse University.He lives in Manhattan and Syracuse with his wife, arts journalist Johanna Keller.

Charles Rose

Remembering Andrew Lytle

Andrew Nelson Lytle (December 26, 1902-December 12, 1995) was an American poet, novelist, dramatist, and professor of literature. He was born in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and early in his life planned to be an actor and playwright. He studied acting at Yale and performed on Broadway when he was in his 20s.

However, Lytle, unlike other Southerners intellectuals who left the South never to return, was brought home by the death of a kinsman, and he remained in the South, except for brief sojourns elsewhere, for the rest of his life.--from Wikipedia

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During my senior year at Vanderbilt University—that was in 1952—I went to see Donald Davidson after taking his creative writing course. Soft spoken in the classroom, in his office in Calhoun Hall always willing to converse with a student (professors entered his office with trepidation), he encouraged me to keep on writing. And it was Mr. Davidson who suggested I apply to the University of Florida. I could do a creative thesis, directed by Andrew Lytle. "Andrew may not follow all the rules but he can write like a fool," I recall Mr. Davidson saying, with a twinkle in his eyes, sunlight filtering through the venetian blinds. A few months later I got off a Greyhound Bus at Gainesville, groggy from riding all night.

I was nearly a thousand miles from my home town, Kokomo, Indiana. Gainesville was proving to be an unwelcome change from Nashville, and all that Vanderbilt meant to me. The English professors I'd been exposed to, unlike those at Vanderbilt, seemed aloof and excessively pedantic. The friends I'd made at Vanderbilt were elsewhere. Meeting Andrew Lytle in his office, I'd felt reassured, in touch with a common tradition. And he had been kind enough to ask me to his home.

The days went by slowly. Finally I was plodding down a sandy stretch of road departing from Sixth Avenue North, ending at a pale butternut brick ranch house. A Cadillac was parked in the carport. Andrew Lytle's wife, Edna, came to the door, ushered me through glass doors to the terrace out back, seated me in a wrought iron lawn chair. She was wearing a skirt and blouse, loafers, very casual. We sat out on the patio, Miss Edna, as we were to call her, smoking, sipping bourbon from a silver cup, and watched a man in his fifties vigorously swinging an ax, splitting firewood, his torso exposed, sweat running down his chest and back. Here was the author of "The Hind Tit" in *I'll Take My Stand*, of novels imbued with with violent action and trenchant detail, the man who directed Flannery O'Connor's thesis at the University of Iowa—here he was splitting firewood in Gainesville, Florida, oblivious to everything but hefting the ax, swinging through.

It wasn't long before Mr. Lytle propped the ax up against a shed, put his shirt back on, strode across the back yard to the patio, cordially greeted me. It was time for an afternoon bourbon and branch. He had Rebel Yell, a pretty good bourbon, he remarked, and reasonably priced. He left me with Miss Edna and soon reappeared with a silver cup for me, and his own silver cup, "the Lytle cup," as he was later to call it, for himself. Sitting next to me, he asked me how I happened to go to Vanderbilt, and I told him my father went there for one year, that my Uncle Kenneth taught violin at Ward Belmont. My father, I went on to say, had John Crowe Ransom for freshman English, that Mr. Ransom said of my father's writing, "you write well, Mr. Rose, but you don't know where to put the commas." Mr. Lytle smiled at that awkwardly delivered anecdote. We had a second drink, the afternoon went by. For the first time, he addressed me as *l'enfant terrible*, which he was to do many times. *L'enfant*, he would say. When it was time for me to leave, Mr. Lytle escorted me out the front door, chatting with me a few moments in the driveway, something he did with all of his visitors.

I walked down the sandy road, back to the bus stop on University Avenue, the shabby room, rented for twenty dollars

a month, the couple in the back bedroom, an impoverished mill worker and his wife, and picked up a book, once more alone, wishing I were back in Kokomo with my family, on the Vanderbilt campus where I felt at home.

In his preface to our literary publication, *Pursuit*, (what, I wonder now, were we pursuing?) Donald Davidson had linked us tyros to the Vanderbilt tradition, and more importantly, expressed what writing was all about: "Realization of the world, and along with it, in one indistinguishable act, realization of self—that is what it means to be a writer, or any true artist." Or so, at the time, I thought, without foreseeing the "self's" manifold contradictions, as they were to show themselves later on. "You must take the risk," Mr. Lytle used to say to me, "you must bring it up." And there was Conrad's Stein, in *Lord Jim*, counseling, "you must immerse yourself in the destructive element, and let the deep deep water bear you up." But Gainesville was no exotic Patuasan, and the water was far deeper than I foreseen.

I had ninety dollars a month to live on from a meager graduate assistantship. I rode the bus an ever lengthening University Avenue to Anderson Hall, attended stultifyingly boring seminars, missed classes, pecked out stories on a portable typewriter. I can't remember how many times I walked up the sandy road. I baby sat with the girls, Pamela, Katherine Anne, Lily Langdon, read them stories, absorbing a comforting quietude in Mr. Lytle's armchair. Over the Thanksgiving holidays I was to sit out in the hall of the rooming house, smoking cigarettes for the first time, rereading *War and Peace*, one of Mr. Lytle's more daunting assignments.

Gradually I felt less alone. For Mr. Lytle had taken others under his wing, encouraged them, opened up to them—Al Shumsky, a Hopwood Prize winner at the University of Michigan, Jerry Mason, an undergraduate, quiet but purposeful, Smith Kirkpatrick, a former Navy flyer, after serving in the Merchant Marine. I felt like we were an enclave in a foreign country, subtropical, hedonistic mid-century Florida.

Mr. Lytle had begun his latest and most complex novel, *The Velvet Horn*. Up at four AM, he had been working in his study on the other side of the carport. "I got one line today," he would tell us, ensconced in his armchair by the fireplace, cradling his goblet of bourbon and branch. Other times he'd say, "It just won't come, boys." (Were we boys? I think not.) He had spent most of the morning reading Eric Neumann's *The Origin and Function of Consciousness*. We gathered around the fireplace, the living room's glass doors infused with pale November light. Miss Edna would come in from time to time, most likely picking up a reference to the great mother, to the *pharmakos*, the sacrificial victim, to the hero's night sea journey. Or he might be tossing a salad in the covered patio off the living room "—this is a ceremonial part of having lunch, often with guests, the Lytle cup close at hand, expatiating on whatever came to mind, his childhood in north Alabama, Nathan Bedford Forrest's victory at Brice's Crossroads, D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*—Lawrence has it wrong. He sees the gamekeeper as virile, but he should have asked himself, how did the master get to be the master?" He would talk about his acting days in New York. He'd met an actor who'd become a movie star, he said once, in an offhand way, Humphrey Bogart. He'd relate anecdotes concerning Allen Tate, Hart Crane, Katherine Anne Porter. He said he had taken up smoking again. He would quit, find abstinence tedious, start in again.

There were the forays to Henry's across the Alachua county line for whisky, usually in Smith Kirkpatrick's Chevrolet. We'd have a few drinks in paper cups, Al Shumsky, Jerry Mason, "Kirk," myself, and in a floppy straw hat, a sport shirt, Mr. Lytle would talk country with the proprietor, the actor in him coming out, the writer adroitly hidden. Or he might be talking about Native Americans, for whom he had an abiding respect. Long before it became fashionable, he was saying we broke every treaty we made with them. He would describe suspending a youth over a slow fire, forbidding braves on the warpath to urinate, burning a captive at the stake. "It was a test of manhood," he'd say. I can visualize him in the classroom or seminar room wearing a Brooks Brothers sports jacket or a

navy blue blazer, khaki trousers. In the middle of talking about a point of view he would divagate from literary matters to expound on what once held sway in Western Europe, namely Christendom, the Anglo-Saxon God's wealth as opposed to the insidiously democratic commonwealth, for Mr. Lytle, a high point of western civilization, preserved in the pre-Civil War South. Nobility, clergy, peasantry, each knowing its place in the divine dispensation. The code duello, for ensuring manners and settling disputes. Once he spoke of an encounter he had had with a liberal sociologist. "If we were living in the twelfth century, I'd be in a monastery and you'd be dead." We listened, waited for him to read one of our stories, or incisively comment on technique. I'll never forget Mr. Lytle enlarging on the opening to Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" "None of them knew the color of the sky. But all of them knew the color of the sea."

He greatly admired Sigrid Undset's *Kristin Lavransdatter*, set in medieval Norway (his last book, *Kristin: A Reading*, was published in 1992, three years before his death). Although the novel remains cloudy for me, I do remember how well Undset rendered what he termed the enveloping action, what is there at the beginning of a novel or play and remains at the end, for instance, Flaubert's Yonville, broadly speaking bourgeois France, or Tolstoy's mother Russia, after the action has run its course. The term comes from Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction*, refined and elaborated on by Andrew Lytle in critical essays on Flaubert, Faulkner, Caroline Gordon, Malcolm Lowry, and James Joyce. The other side of the enveloping action involves the play of archetypes, the hero, the terrible father, the maiden/witch, the pharmakos or sacrificial victim—drawn from Carl Jung, Eric Neumann, and Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Some of these archetypes informed my own writing. I continue to believe they recur, as Jung maintains, in dreams, myths, and religions.

He used to tell us he was a slow writer. Certainly his books didn't spin out one after the other. Perhaps this was due to his appetite for life—he was to comment on this on occasion. Or did his ongoing vision need to gestate, be informed by age and

experience? The free and easy storytelling of *Bedford Forrest and his Critter Company*, and his first novel, *The Long Night*, gave way to the archetypal resonance of *The Velvet Horn*. In his memoir, *A Wake for the Living*, written late in life, he returns to his past, his family.

His book of criticism, The Hero with the Private Parts, centering on the archetypes fermenting within the text, continues to hold significance. Unlike most commentators, he saw Emma Bovary as admirable. Her religious longing, though misdirected and unrealized, stands out from the deadening bourgeois pettiness incarnate in the pharmacist, Homais. The essay on Faulkner's A Fable delineates Faulkner's mythic substructure, which, in various manifestations, we see in As I Lay Dying, The Sound and the Fury, Light in August. Like Quentin Compson or Darl in As I Lay Dying, the corporal in A Fable is a victim, sacrificed to perpetuate the nightmare of war. Here Faulkner's reach was beyond his grasp, for his rendition of the action was vitiated by pervasive allegory. There are also fine essays on Go Down Moses and The Unvanquished, on Malcolm Lowry's Under the Volcano.

*****

In telling a story you go forward, then back. Ford Madox Ford employs this method in his memoirs. So I will leap forward to the summer of 1992, near the end of my teaching career at Auburn University. In the intervening years I had read and taught and, when I had time and impetus, written and published short fiction. Mr. Lytle had left The University of Florida in 1961. He had become a professor at The University of the South and editor of *The Sewanee Review*. From time to time he gave a lecture or reading at Auburn University, and we would chat over drinks afterward, amid much conviviality.

In the summer of 1992 I attended the Sewanee Writers' Conference. Mr. Lytle was living in nearby Monteagle. Toward the end of ten days of intensive literary exposure I ventured to call his number and ask if I could come visit him. He remembered me, said that would be fine.

Early in the evening, on a Thursday, I believe, I drove into Monteagle, passing motels, convenience stores, countrified restaurants serving plate lunches, barbecued pork, collard greens, displaying all sorts of touristy items, quilts, baskets of walnuts, wicker chairs, droll ashtrays. I took a road to my left to the Monteagle Sunday School Assembly. Here Ford Madox Ford and his companion Baila, had visited the Tates; here Robert Lowell had camped out on the lawn in front of their cabin. Monteagle had become a gated community. I had to give my name at a kind of a checkpoint to a youth who regarded my second hand Honda as if it belonged in a junkyard, not here. Admitted, I drove on, passing various manifestations of genteel wealth—rustic homes, tennis courts. The road wounding upward, at last I reached the cabin. I got out of the car, moved to the porch, found the front door. From the other side of the cabin I heard voices. I wielded a heavy knocker. A middle aged, mild mannered man answered the door, Tam Carlson, a professor at Sewanee. He told me he had been looking after Mr. Lytle, now in his early nineties. And he had been to Auburn with Mr. Lytle years ago, gotten to know members of our congenial English Department. "You didn't know what you had," I remembered him saying.

Tam escorted me through the cabin. A photograph of Nathan Bedford Forrest hung on the wall by the front hall bookcase. The Hessian firedogs I had seen in the Lytles' home in Gainesville were stationed on either side of the fireplace. Coming out onto a sunlit porch, I was warmly greeted by my former mentor. He was wearing a floppy straw hat, a sports shirt hanging over his belt line. He looked wizened, but by no means decrepit. I remember him saying he had stocked a good bourbon, at a reasonable price. He got up to get me a drink, walked inside, clearly knowing where he was going and why. He came back with a familiar silver cup, and with a mannerly nod, handed it to me.

A Sewanee student, youthful and prepossessing, and a young woman doing an interview for the student newspaper were also sitting out on the porch. Twilight hazed into dusk as the conversation meandered along. We had a second round of

drinks. Mr. Lytle seemed attentive, yet I felt he was somewhere else, in the past, his own and the South's. The Civil War came up. Somehow we got around to Jay Gould, one of the robber barons. All of a sudden Mr. Lytle became his old, buoyant self as he excoriated Jay Gould, how Gould had crossed the Hudson River to New Jersey to escape prosecution after looting the New York treasury. Apropos Jay Gould's pusillanimity, he quoted Gould with gusto, "Nothing is lost save honor." Or did he say this another time, much earlier, in Gainesville? What I do remember is the motion, the vigor, the sweep of his left hand, ice rattling in his silver goblet.

Soon after, it was time for me to leave. We made our way to the steps off the porch. In the thickening darkness Mr. Lytle seemed wraithlike. His voice became wistful, for he was remembering a day in his childhood, imparting its poignancy to us. His parents had taken him to the circus. He had gotten lost, had become terrified at his abandonment.

There was a susurrus in the trees. Then I heard his voice for the last time. "Life is sad," he said quietly. He turned and walked along the porch. He would enter the cabin, resume his way of life, burdened by many years, yet still himself, indominable. I would drive back to Sewanee, out of one time, into another.

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

Armine Iknadossian

Father after Surgery

There are other amputations to speak of:
a televised beheading, a car bomb
at a wedding after the elections.
We nibble and chew the discomfort
with our polite words; the book I loaned you,
the mulberry tree outside your window.
All that wasted fruit, you say, as you pluck
a piece of chocolate from its foil wrapper,
a sweet little bon-bon for your palate.
What is to be of a father and a daughter
who face each other in this clean white box,
scratching and fidgeting, glancing at the clock
in this air-conditioned hospital room,
in this god-forsaken spring of ours?

Beirut Blues

Remember the curtains Mother?
How they wrapped their arms
around the sofa on windy days,

how the blue-tongued ocean below our window
licked the painted toes of French tourists in bikinis?

Remember tea parties on the balcony,
the red dress you sewed for me
right out of the latest issue of *Burda* magazine?

And then the missile's cry,
how its whiny trajectory fooled us

as it lit up the summer sky during rooftop dinners.
They weren't for us, were they?

But that day we hid behind the sofa,
you and I, they were for us that day,
the day we ran down the stairs

to the damp and dim below,
down where death could not reach

and the breath of life was quick at our feet.
I remember more,
but let's talk instead about

the dancing curtains, the wide-mouthed sea,
porcelain tea cups and Father coming home.

Armine Iknadossian was born in Beirut, Lebanon and raised in Pasadena, California. A graduate of UCLA's creative writing program and Antioch University's MFA program, her first manuscript, Gnosis, explores mythology from different female personas. Publications include *Ararat, Arbutus, Armenian Poetry Project, Backwards City Review, Lit Parlor, Lounge Lit: An Anthology, Media Cake, Poetic Diversity, Poetry Super Highway, Spout, Writers at Work* and *Zaum.*

Catharine Savage Brosman

Winter Sunset, Pike's Peak

There's fire to the west, around the peak
and stretching northward; it's Old Sol again,
a-lolling on his daybed. He'd been weak
at noon, and let the clouds prevail, but then

aroused, as if ashamed. A scarlet streak
shoots upward from the embers in a glen,
and in an aureole of green—a freak—
two birds pass, dark—a crow, a canyon wren;

while remnants of the overcast disguise
themselves as smoke, and shadowed snow that lies
along the mountain's clefts and shelves looks ashen,

—deep cold transformed in the beholder's eyes
to everything a fire signifies:
hearts frozen, then awakening to passion.

On the North Side

—For Patric

On the north side, snow is obstinate, staying on, despite
recent sun and mild air during afternoon, in dense stands
of pines, behind boulders, shrubbery, and knolls—
rectangles, squares, curved patches, wedges, and half-moons—
white shadows, though themselves in shade.
The spruce wear open cloaks and hoods thrown back.
Snow lights the Rampart Range, of course, and also Zebulon's
great peak, both east and western face, the dimple

copiously powdered and its tracery of clefts and ridges outlined
well. The range and hillsides facing south
are barren, though—dry, colorless. Seen from the air,
on the flight northward yesterday, brown winter fields,
plowed last year in patterns, reminded me of Braque and Gris—
monochromatic canvases of circles fitted
among squares. Here too, the scene is almost cubist, with planes
of white in skewed arrangements. I'm on the north face

also—the darker slope, quicker of shadow, moving into night—
with snow in my hair, but a heart's fire, glowing.
I remember driving, in the year 2000, from Grand Junction
to Ouray, Durango, and Pagosa Springs, and then
into New Mexico, with snow banks nearly all
the way, the pavement covered, and new snow falling—
nature taking back the road—and scarcely any other
car; and how, in Taos finally, I thanked the spirit of the peaks,

and stood in awe beside the great blue spruce, where crystals
of a final shower—melting as they hit my face—
remained, each one set off, a jewel on a velvet mantle.

The great joy of my winter waited for me, still
ahead some years. And then we met after long patience, many
miles. We've missed the drop-offs and endured
the drought; we've squared the circle. In summer, we'll gaze
out along the slope, green from its snow bath, signaling.

Catharine Savage Brosman, who now lives in Houston, is Professor Emerita of French at Tulane University and Honorary Research Professor at the University of Sheffield (England). Her most recent collection of verse is *Range of Light* (LSU Press, 2007). Her new collection, *Breakwater*, will appear in 2009 at Mercer University Press, and another new volume, *Under the Pergola*, will be published by LSU Press in 2011. Her poems have appeared in the *Sewanee Review*, the *Southern Review*, *Critical Quarterly*, the *South Carolina Review*, the *Southwest Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *New England Review*, and many other magazines. French translations of her poems have been published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, *Europe*, and other French magazines.

DOROTHY HOWE BROOKS

The Thanksgiving Tree

Beneath the tulip poplars it waits,
a shy bit actor in the wings:
the tiny Japanese maple, leaves

green and firmly attached.
The dogwoods redden and shed,
maples glow brilliant gold,

overnight are gone. Sycamores
and hickories slip out, littering
the ground at their feet, while

in the shadows this tree,
that sprouts fall-red each April
like an unwanted wedding guest,

is discreetly transforming:
green to burnt orange to radiant red.
Each day it catches more sun, gleams,

lights the drive, reflects through windows—
a shimmering beacon, as if all of Autumn
has compressed to a tight focus,

and the tree has burst into flame.

Dorothy Howe Brooks writes poetry and fiction. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in numerous literary journals, including *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Poem*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, and *Cumberland Poetry Review*, as well as the anthology, If I Had My Life To Live Over I Would Pick More Daisies, published by Papier-Mache Press. She lives with her husband in Southwest Florida where they enjoy sailing in the coastal waters of the Gulf.

David Mason

How He Sleeps

My friend remembers his war—
the Germans, then Greek on Greek—
relives a mountain massacre
when he hid in the woods for a week.

At night when he's safe in his bed
he makes himself open his hands,
releasing the long-held dead
together, strangers and friends.

He flees to a sheltering sleep,
dropping what he can't carry.
In dreams he doesn't weep
and there is no hurry.

We

While Harold's men were twitching under William's arrows,
Byzantium and Rome beheld the Saracen,

but here, among the pock-marked faces of the cliffs
an interplanetary stillness, plumbed kivas

sending smoke at night to the penetrating stars
until this place became its own catastrophe.

And now we pitch our tents and tour the dusty ruins
and circle back into these hidden canyons, thirsting

as we all would in a desert, not for water only,
but markers of essential solitude, the cairns.

*

You'd think a desert sky would open to the truth—
out of the bowl of earth, into the basket of heaven.

Just there, and there, and there, the lights of jet planes cross,
dragging behind them gutturals of burning fuel.

A culture beamed to dishes in remotest yards
until the flare-out we cannot believe will come.

*

"Once the grandfathers touch us we will never be the same"—
a cemetery note I saw in North Dakota,

the offering on the grave a beer and cigarettes,
half whimsical and half in earnest love to those

who knew how small our lives have been, our best ambitions
nothing to the layered canyons, humanity

dominionless unless it comes to know itself.
But here the settlements of centuries leave stone

on stone, visible they say from space, impressive, left
to long conjecture of the bland acquisitors.

*

The campsite wakens, the canyon fills with human chatter,
new stirrings of mobility: tent sounds, car doors

slamming as the loading up takes place, caravans
of individual motive fanning out from roads

to highways, then to Interstates, the busy hubs.
What we have learned may never be a help to us

until reminded of it by the dome of stars,
the gimcrack kivas of our living rooms, our selves.

David Mason's books include The Buried Houses, The Country I Remember and Arrivals. He teaches at the Colorado College and lives in the mountains outside Colorado Springs.

JAMES B. NICOLA

Night Snow

He fell into my heart like snow at night,
a gentle storm. I didn't notice it
until I woke next morning. Snow is white
as love must be; but there's an illicit
aspect in loving him, I'll have you know,
as night snow would be black without the glow
from moonlight. That's him, light as he is dark—
his hair as jet as sin, eyes' deep-set spark
so imminent, so radiant—and as cold
as warm, for I lie here while he lives there:
The gap keeps one heart pure, the other bold,
too bold, dreaming of snowing everywhere
all night as I can't help remembering
how sudden snowfall changes everything.

James B. Nicola has been published in a score of journals—over fifty poems so far. A stage director by profession, his book Playing the Audience won a CHOICE Award.

John Poch

The Missing Child

Like token feathers plucked from a broken bird,
the parents are separated from their daughter.
The dresses slight on hangars don't say a word,
and slumping like a dirty shirt, the father
wears unaware his stains. What was labor
and what was a given? Breathing was a given.
The mother dreams she is her own neighbor
who has a living daughter. The father is driven
livid by men in suits and women in jewels.
The parents, when they put on their masks and walk
away from each other as those who pace in duels,
continue with their faith turned dumbest luck
and accordions for lungs. Her birthday chair
is light and heavy, like cake flour. Or air.

John Poch is director of the writing program at Texas Tech University. His most recent book is Two Men Fighting with a Knife (Story Line Press 2008).

MATTHEW SMITH

For the Highway Medians

I've known you only on the way to somewhere else.
Town of a girlfriend's parents. Airport. Mountain lake.
Often I picture my arrival, pleasing, false
as any plan, while I am driving on, and look
briefly across your scrub and scattered, threadbare trees,
deserted island in a narrow, man-made breeze.

Nobody's destination, you're inhabited
from time to time as something other than yourself:
a blind for idling state police, a watershed
for those who've turned back after getting only half-
way home, the windswept promise of an hourly wage
someday for orange-suited cons, a softer cage.

Human, these passing needs are never truly you,
you whom we cannot help but pass eventually
and in our passing make you what you are––a few
moments of peace. The brush, the field, the bright debris
of wildflowers strewn by wind and honeybee from aisle
to grassy aisle. You are the spell, the little while.

Tender and clear, you dart across my memories
of family trips in childhood. Droning hours went by
no sooner when I marked each branch than otherwise;
still I'd watch every leaf-tip skirt the reeling sky.
The nearest slipped away as quick as all my clever
dreams while the farthest simply did not pass. Not ever.

On Being Naked

The cemetery near the art school slept
a mossy, dreamless sleep, haunted by gnats;
blunt headstones listed down the hill and crept
further each moment from the world's regrets.
Not so for us, as friends and lovers of
the art school's rising stars. Long chilly nights
inside their studio, we stood for love,
or sat, or sprawled, beneath fluorescent lights.
Stripped of our pride, our reason, and our clothes
we giggled at ourselves and one another,
reduced to what we'd always been, but chose
to hide--frail sister, soft and pallid brother.
At dawn, we'd share last cigarettes and sigh
to watch the trees undress the blushing sky.

Matthew Smith was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia. He studied drama at the University of Georgia and poetry at the Johns Hopkins University. His poems have appeared (or will soon appear) in Measure, The Deronda Review, The Loch Raven Review, The Anthology of Appalachian Writers, Skein, and Churchyard. He lives in Baltimore, Maryland, where he's putting on a new play.

Rhina P. Espaillat

Little Red Hen

Yes, Hen, you're right: give no free pass
to members of the leisure class
who angle for your unpaid labor.
And yet, consider: there's the neighbor
who's elderly or unemployed,
or in bad health, or has enjoyed
few opportunities. Does merit
precisely weighed enlist the spirit,
or is it need, or social duty?
Is there not something much like beauty
in serving, with no compensation
but saintly joy—that odd elation—
precisely those who, least deserving,
will find the unearned good unnerving
until they've passed it on in kind?
So Heaven may work upon the mind
of man—and maybe dog and cat.
But, Hen, your guarded, tit-for-tat,
ethical but unsaintly rule
is learned in a much older school,
Where even bread from wheat you planted
is not at all taken for granted.

"Things That Go"

Hoop and arrow,
wheel and dart,
kite and rocket,
stream and heart;

fan and motor,
mill and train,
waterwheel,
remembered pain;

summer, autumn,
winter, spring;
desire and
desired thing;

suns that burn
and rains that weep;
children you once
rocked to sleep.

The Wolf

Across two pages of my grandson's book
he leaps, bristling with speed, toothed like a saw,
intent on Piggy, his mad yellow look
igniting cloudy fireworks of straw.
Ambrose is two years old, and can surmise
how this must end: clearly he does not need
the words he has not heard. He shuts his eyes—
now brimming—and the book—and pleads, "No read,"
and burrows in the safety of my lap,
where Piggy, too, would have been safe. No doubt
Ambrose believes as much; he takes his nap
without more thought of the fierce, hungry snout
possibly trapped in texts he need not know,
or boiling in the pot where bad things go.

Peacock

At the small local farm where toddlers walk
bravely with geese but circumspect with sheep,
behind a fence that neither wants to leap,
a ghostly clamor, an unearthly squawk
rings like a summons from some royal keep.

And there, far more than kingly, self-absorbed
as any god, and gorgeous as the night,
this barnyard apparition spreads his orbed
and iridescent plumes not meant for flight,
but for display and sacrificial rite.

What can these children make, with their two eyes
apiece, of countless staring pupils pinned,
unblinking, to his heavenly disguise,
which shudders when he struts through dung that lies
amid shred feathers puffed by a rank wind?

Eden the morning after comes to mind:
the maker strolls alone among the trees
heavy with unplucked fruit, all left behind
by his lost creatures in the void he sees,
in whose unpeopled light he is confined.

But here the metaphor, of course, breaks down—
as metaphors should know enough to do—
leaving the children safe in our small town,
under diaphanous September blue
innocent now of all it ever knew.

Dominican-born **Rhina P. Espaillat** writes poetry, essays and short stories, both in English and in her native Spanish, and translates between the two languages. She has published three chapbooks and seven books, most recently Playing at Stillness, a collection of poems in English, and Agua de dos rios/Water from Two Rivers, essays in both languages, and El olor de la memoria/The Scent of Memory, bilingual short stories. Her honors include the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry, the Wilbur Award, the Nemerov Award, and several prizes from the Poetry Society of America and the New England Poetry Club.

CONSTANTINE CONTOGENIS

At Nine

Twelve-thirty. It's gone quickly
since nine when I lit the lamp
and sat here. Just sitting here together, not reading,
not talking—who could I have talked to
by myself in this house?

The young image of the body I had
appeared to me at nine as I
lit the lamp, possessing my memories
of latched . . . scented rooms,
past pleasure—yes, taken pleasures!
He let me see in front of my eyes:
avenues become unrecognizable,
bars, filled with action, that have closed,
theaters and *kafenia* that were once there.

The image of the young body I had
came back to me, gave me my sad stories
—partings, family grief—
feelings of my own, feelings
of the dead, less and less in my awareness.

Twelve-thirty. The hours go.
Twelve-thirty. The years go.

Their Beginning

Auden says pity the second character.

The transaction of unlawful pleasure
was completed. They got off the mattress
and quickly dressed without talking.

He says Cavafy failed that unpoetical one.

They slipped from the building separately; and as
they ambled uneasily up the road, they seemed
to guess that something about them showed
the kind of bed they'd just spread out on.

But so far there is no second or first.

But for the artists how much life wins.
Tomorrow and tomorrow they will put it down
with strong lines. Here was their beginning.

To that non-artist they are still in it together.

Ithaka

Let's say you've finally set out for Ithaka;
you'll want to take the long way round,
stuffed with action and surprises.
The Lestrygonians and the Cyclopes . . .
angry Poseidon . . . . Well, don't be afraid,
you'll never find their like on the way
if your thoughts aim high, if the recommended
feelings of mind and body move you.
The Lestrygonians and the Cyclopes . . .
far-gone Poseidon . . . . You won't bump into them
if you haven't let them ride along with you,
if you don't set them up yourself before you.

You'll want to take the long way round.
Let there be a lot of summer mornings
with the particular pleasure, the particular joy
of entering an undiscovered harbor.
Stop at Phoenician trading ports,
all those fine things—go ahead—
mother-of-pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
and all kinds of voluptuous perfume
—more, as much as you can—such voluptuous perfume.
And visit Egyptian cities, lots of them,
go learn and keep learning from those who know so much.

All this time fix Ithaka in your mind.
To arrive there is your destiny.
But don't rush the getting there.
Let it last years and years;
dock at the island an old man,
rich with what you took along the way,
not expecting Ithaka to hand you riches.

It's Ithaka has given you the good voyage;
without her you never would have set out.
She doesn't have to give you more.

And if you find that she looks shabby, Ithaka won't have fooled you.
You'll have become such a wise man, with all that experience,
you'll already have figured out what this Ithaka means.

Constantine Contogenis: His poetry collection Ikaros (Word Press, 2004) won a First Prize "Open Voice Poetry Award" from the Writer's Voice. He co-translated Songs of the Kisaeng:Courtesan Poetry of the Last Korean Dynasty (BOA Editions,1997). His work has appeared in numerous magazines including Paris Review, Literary Imagination, New York Quarterly , New Orleans Review, Chicago Review, TriQuarterly, Zone 3, Pequod, Grand Street, Speakeasy, Meridian Anthology of Contemporary Poetry, and Cimarron Review. In 2000-2001, he was poet-in-residence at Purchase College, S.U.N.Y.

Claire Millikin

Rite

That winter, I wanted to stay cold.
You asked why
I would not buy a coat,
not seeing how

all summer shut in the hospital
of remembrance, like losing a language,
I'd sought a window back
to breath and nakedness.

That winter I shivered, too thin,
fearing substance almost
too much to put food to my mouth.
I'd eat by a doorway, next to sky.

The way a room is cleanest when empty,
I wanted to be emptied, to carry nothing
between the doorway of breathing
and my wrists.

Like the broken panorama of childhood,
I wanted to stop seeing all things
and see only one thing clearly:
sky pressing clavicle, shoulders, wrists,
washed by light's pressure as penance.

I didn't want to freeze
but to taste what freezing could bring—
the stilling of things,
water stilling
in the always fugitive body.

Half-House

We will inhabit a house half-sky,
half-ruined, at the edge
of a pinewood, the damaged rooms
opened to weather:
a bed, a window, a painted chair.

Doors with broken locks, windows tilted outwards
to catch our breath, we'll share
a pillow, a few books, our hands.

The way that memory breathes
and finds doorways in sleep,
when we've been released
we'll come and go like leaves.

Neighbors pretend not to see us;
we're squatters, our inheritance lost,
just our bodies drinking
the last light of fluent things,

astringent water carried
through pipes sealed in lead,
its taste of relict stars and bitter pines.

Plastic

Winters in Georgia, my aunt lined her windows with plastic.
Flushed and crinkled, like white poppies,
the windows glistened in numb light.
Winter never lasted long that far south, but her walls,
thin as a girl's arm, kept nothing out.

She survived by such tricks—
coating panes with film, drinking still
from the cold family well, that puncture
deep beneath red-clay bedrock.

From inside her windows,
plastic made the world look used-up,
like a sheet of paper balled and pressed.

She stopped every wind-eye, after her daughter's death,
encasing the house seamlessly, ceasing
to run the furnace, burning instead
any furniture she could spare
in the wanton fireplace.

Of the daughter, she'd left
just a small cedar chest, clothes inside
folded smooth, without wrinkle.

Claire Millikin currently teaches for the Studies in Women and Gender program at the University of Virginia, in Charlottesville. Originally from Georgia, she has lived and taught in New York City and in rural coastal Maine. Her poems have appeared in journals such as *Iris: A Journal About Women*, *The Recorder*, and the *North Carolina Literary Review*.

H. L. Hix

How would you change your life if you could?

As a kid my favorite food was shrimp.
Must have rubbed pencil lead in your eyes.
I liked what my dad liked; he liked shrimp.
The welts on my belly looked like eyes.

Must've rubbed pencil lead in your eyes.
Alcohol for turning twenty-one.
The welts on my belly looked like eyes.
She listed my symptoms to the phone.

Alcohol helped turn me twenty-one.
Thank god someone had stayed in the room.
So many symptoms into the phone.
Get her to the emergency room.

Thank god someone else was in the room.
Anaphylactic shock swells your throat.
Get her to the emergency room!
Sooner or later you suffocate.

Anaphylactic shock swelled my throat,
my lips went numb, I flowered with welts.
Sooner or later you suffocate.
They make interns work those weekend shifts.

My lips went numb. My skin bloomed with welts.
Sounds like allergies, take off your shirt.
Interns pinballed through those weekend shifts,
fistfight- and car-wreck-filled Friday nights.

Sounds like allergies, take off your shirt.
Shrimp, bloody mary, then lobster, beer.

Bar brawls and car wrecks for Friday night.
I thought first I could just take a shower.

Shrimp, bloody mary, lobster, and beer.
As a kid my favorite food was shrimp.
I thought if I could just take a shower.
What my dad liked, I liked; he liked shrimp.

Do you believe in ghosts?

He knows your name? You told him where you live and where you work?
A stranger confesses double murder,
lays out plans to kill his own wife, and you give him your card?
I could tell friends what happened, but not why.
I'd spent a Fulbright year pursuing Peru, wooing it,
learning how little I'd known about light,
believing weaving outstays stone, keeps more constant color,
thinking this place might make mortals mistake
themselves for gods, twenty thousand feet from snow to the sea.

I couldn't get my suitcase open. I'd sent some things on,
but this was a time of terrorists there,
the guards inspected everything, matched passenger to bag,
let nothing undefended on the plane.
When they asked how much I'd spent in my stay, I caused delay
by telling the truth (a mistake), and had
to explain I'd spent six hundred, yes, but been there a year.
So I'd been a long time in this office
before we got to the bag I'd had to sit on to close,
and now couldn't open, nor could the guard.
Even after a year there I was naïve, kept trying
to open the suitcase so long they had
to hold the plane for me before — at last — I realized
that all it took for the guard to see things
my way was a bottle of pisco from my carry-on.

They had to open the door again to let me on board.
They seated me beside an older man
(I was young then, all men were older) and we didn't speak.
The flight from Lima was how long? nine hours?
with a layover in Panama. I was tired. I slept.
At some point they handed out the customs
declaration form that asks how much you're bringing back.
I had seven thousand dollars on me,
all the savings of the woman from whom I had rented
my last months in Peru, trusted to me

on my promise to send her daughter in the states a check.
Not having asked then why the cash couldn't
go through a bank, I couldn't construct now a good guess what
to declare, and the man beside me saw
my hesitation. *Just declare a souvenir or two.*
If it had grounding, it wouldn't be trust.
I didn't say how much I had, but did ask him, *This line*
for cash, what's the best way to fill it out?
He showed me his form that said $25, then smiled
and opened his vest: wads and wads of bills,
like in the movies, with bands around them. *Don't sweat*, he said.
I'm a businessman, I carry twenty
or thirty thousand to Chicago all the time. No one
will ask. That started the conversation,
some Spanish, more English, even a little in German.

He hadn't learned how quick he was with languages until
the war — they had taught nothing so fancy
in school where he grew up, and then he was motivated,
it made him useful to the officers,
earned him details as safe as anything there at the front.
It helps now in business, he said, but then
it meant much more: a little distance from the line of fire.
North Pole, Siberia, Antarctica,
no place gets colder than Germany in January,
has wind so penetrating, snow so deep.
By then he'd forgotten me, focused his eyes somewhere else.
They were our allies — "they" were the Russians —
but rations were scarce, and their icons didn't make them saints,
read how many German women they raped
when they took Berlin. He and a buddy were transporting
two Russians on foot, he didn't say why.
Reunite them with their unit, maybe. Wasn't the point.
He and his buddy were scared and hungry,
afraid of frostbite, of getting lost, running out of food.
They decided to kill the two Russians.
It might have been exactly what they were supposed to do,
just orders that can't be given out loud.

By this time his chin was quivering, and tears streaked both cheeks.
The look on their faces. They'd trusted us.
All these years, I've tried to justify it, tried to forget.

But misery follows misery, and guilt follows guilt,
so he wasn't through. He had bodyguards
in Peru, everyone with money did, kidnapping had
become a common crime, though bodyguards
didn't always stop it, they could be corrupted, become
the kidnappers. He had a family
in Chicago, a daughter he loved, a wife he didn't.
He was in love now with someone younger.
Divorce would give his wife sole custody of their daughter.
His wife came with him to Peru sometimes,
he could have his bodyguards hand her off to someone else
to do her in. He had it all worked out.
Still teary-eyed, mind you, which is why my friends were worried.
All I could think to say was, *Anything*
that began that way couldn't end well, that's not how you want
to start a life with the woman you love.
He thought for a while, a long while, said *You're probably right.*

The layover in Panama ended his reverie.
Back on the plane, I showed him the molas
I'd bought, listened to him dismiss folk art, then tell about
his collection, prints and master drawings.
That's it. No other dangerous intimacies, shocking
disclosures. The import/export business
is dull, really. No later threat confirmed my friends' concerns.
He must be dead by now. He trusted me
with his story. He gave me his card, so I gave him mine.

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

JEFFREY TALMADGE

Nijmegen

I like that I'm in a small, clean room
in an old hotel;
that overlooking the Wall
where the river meets the hill,
what's left of what the Romans built
is standing still.

The castle didn't fall –
it was torn down and hauled
away, brick by brick
to build something else,
so that now its dispersed
through Nijmegen like smoke,
or better – like pieces
of the pyramids,
rewoven into the fabric
of the place.

Rain comes in nearly parallel
to the ground.
Wind whips through high trees
and around circular ruins,
carries the sounds of traffic
past what's left,
past what's coming.

Jeffrey Talmadge is a graduate of Duke University, The Warren Wilson College MFA Program for Writers, and the University of Texas School of Law. He is a full time musician and songwriter, recording for Corazong Records and touring in the United States and Europe.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson

Garden Truth

It is hot. Even with the hose spraying
Mists across the plants, leaves wilt, blossoms bend
On flagging stems, everything's displaying
Some sort of reaction. They say this trend
Of warm air fronts (that's what they call hot days)
Should abate ....but what does that really mean
To the pea whose tendril no longer waves
But falls, just like the pumpkin's, and the bean's?
Or to the ladybug who hides and waits
For the blasted sun to sink so it can eat
Hot aphids from warm broccoli? Ornate
Euphemisms don't shield us from the heat
Anymore than hoses, lightly training
Fine drops on stems, make us think it's raining.

Juleigh Howard-Hobson's poetry has appeared in Soundzine, The Raintown Review, The Barefoot Muse, Mobius and many other print and online journals. She has been awarded the Australian RSL Anzac Day Award for poetry.

MARYANN CORBETT

Paperboy

Snow, for sure, because it was late December
and central New York, that time he was talking about.
And he must have been ten or twelve, so that would put it
in the early Twenties. That helps me fill things in.

Would it have been his morning paper route?
Should I imagine the milkman, the iceman, in half light,
horses impatient there in the cold, their breath
fogging the gaslamps? (Yes, horses, because he told me
that only the rich had cars.) Should I picture him slouching
from porch to porch, landing papers with a toss,
getting the placement right, or at least as right
as he could with his gloveless hands, knuckles red now,
and shoved in his jacket pockets between throws?
The rest of the clothes are easy to conjure up:
The cap, the knickers, the stockings, those I know
from Bettman Archive photos. From him I know
that since he was the oldest boy, he at least
had clean, whole clothes. And galoshes, since there was snow.

Not morning, though. Too early to speak to people
sociably, and he did the evenings, too.
And there cannot have been any tossing of papers,
however careful. He'd have to go up the steps,
go to the doors, because—and this was the point—
it was Christmastime, and in that part of town,
that nice, respectable neighborhood of porches
on well-kept Edwardian houses, people might
give him a little something.

So evening. The rest
needs little change. I have to imagine him
stamping the snow off, pulling his jacket straight,

his bag straight, taking his cap off, ringing the bell,
wiping the fog from his hated glasses, trying
to smile, to look American, holding the paper.
He keeps doing this. Here I become unsure.
The only details on which I can depend
are the sky in its leaning down to a darker blue,
and the moon, and the threads of cirrus, and the snow.

I have to imagine him, at his route's end, stepping
from the last porch, standing still a moment,
shoving his red hands into his pockets,
and taking off at a dead run, toward home
to play the scene that I'll need to handle deftly,
lightly, the one where his mother takes his earnings
and cries, so happy at eighteen extra dollars.

(Most of these things I have to reconstruct.
What I remember is this: the green back yard,
the Fifties suburban night, the mimosa blossoms,
the pale pink lawn chairs, him sitting on one,
his feet propped on the other, him lighting his pipe,
the little flame flaring briefly as he draws,
the smoke encircling. Little creases at
his eye-corners when he smiles, just visible
despite his glasses, and the clean knife edge
of the moon as he tells this story in the dark.)

Maryann Corbett's poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Atlanta Review*, *Measure*, *The Evansville Review*, *Christianity and Literature*, and other journals in print and online. Her chapbook *Gardening in a Time of War* was published in 2007 by Pudding House. She works as a legal-writing adviser, editor, and indexer for the Minnesota Legislature.

Stephen Cushman

Some Harmless Heresy

It's all very well for Paul
to say he's finished the race,
exhorting us duffers to run
so we may obtain the prize,

but only a man who never
ran a race in his life
could think this a useful figure
for coaching somebody's stride,

since running a winning race
depends on keeping a pace,
and keeping a pace depends
on where the race will end

and knowing it well in advance,
so one doesn't try to sprint,
let's say, the whole round trip
to Marathon and back,

a heart attack inevitable
and guaranteed to come
with terminal force far short
of any finish line,

the whereabouts of which
only a suicide knows,
leaving the rest to guess
whether it stretches remote

in a distant, demented decade
or is the tape to break
this second amidst cicadas
and final, fricative crickets.

Home Maintenance

It could be so much worse,
of course. A little paint,
some warped boards replaced,

and suddenly this little house
doesn't stand a chance
of inscription on the list

of World Heritage ruins,
even with no new roof.
Wadis in the driveway,

after a recent deluge,
don't make a Machu Picchu,
nor does rot in the frame

around the kitchen door
spell Masada, Pompeii,
or Kilwa Kisiwani.

Look, the tiny rooms
remain intact right here,
which is more than one can say

for Baroña, Léon Viejo,
the Walled City of Baku,
or the Temple at Jerusalem;

yet, to be fair, at least
at Delphi there was breeze
providing background noise,

whereas the square feet taxed
at this address, Lonesome
Mountain Road, have seen

everybody leave
things silenter than they
could be at moonless Stonehenge

after tourists go.

Stephen Cushman's most recent book of poems is *Heart Island* (2006). He is serving as general editor of a new edition of the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, now in progress. He teaches at the University of Virginia.

Richard Freis

Patrick O'Brian and the Art of Fiction

The leaves of a tree delight us more than the roots.

Tolstoy

Lovers desire to praise the persons they love, and with a similar ardor, readers desire to praise the books that have enchanted them. Patrick O'Brian's sea novels have enchanted many. Critical assessment of O'Brian's work, however, has varied widely, from Gary Krist's characterization of the novels as "potboilers, plain and simple" (Krist 300) to John Bayley's judgment of O'Brian's narrative and descriptive power as at times comparable to Melville's (Bayley, 1991, 8). Some critics of O'Brian disagree because they see different things in the novels; some because they value differently the qualities they agree are present. In either case, the strongly felt yet radically different assessments of O'Brian's novels by intelligent critics raise the question: what are these novels doing as fictions and how good are they? I propose in this essay to articulate more fully than has been done the nature of O'Brian's practice of the art of fiction. Each of the essay's four sections takes up a traditional "topic" of poetics which is important for understanding O'Brian's achievement: (I) genre, (II) character, (III) style and structure, and (IV) stature. I hope to make clear why his achievement in these novels deserves and repays such attention.[1]

For clarity, I will focus my detailed analysis on a single novel which seems to me to reflect qualities common to them all, the fifth book in the series, *Desolation Island*, although I will refer on occasion to several others.[2]

I. The Poet as Historian

One way to illuminate the character of O'Brian's novels is to begin with a famous distinction from Aristotle's *Poetics*. This is

his distinction between the epic and tragic *poet*, who can compose his action as a universal pattern, and the *historian*, who must write at the level of particular, contingent fact.

> It will be clear from what I have said that it is not the poet's function to describe what has actually happened, but the kinds of things that might happen, that is, that could happen because they are, in the circumstances, either probable or necessary. The difference between the historian and the poet is not that one writes in prose and the other in verse ...The difference is that the one tells of what has happened, the other of the kinds of things that might happen. For this reason poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history; for *while poetry* is *concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts* (*Poetics* ch.9; italics added).[3]

The universality and particularity of any given narrative lies along a graduated range: most narratives mingle the universal and the particular in different degrees. It will help us grasp O'Brian's radical choice in this matter to compare how universality and particularity are reflected in the narratives of two great predecessors of O'Brian in writing fictions about the sea.

Moby-Dick contains an encyclopedic compilation of "particular facts" about the whale and whaling. But Melville does not leave these facts in their particularity. They are often narrative symbols, one might call them imaginative universals, reflecting a world which is itself symbolic, its visible appearances revealing and concealing invisible depths.

Thus for Ahab, *Moby-Dick* himself appears as a present embodiment, one might almost say, a perverse sacrament, of a transcendent agent of malice:

> All visible objects, man, [he explains to Starbuck] are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted deed - there, some unknown but

> still reasoning thing puts forth the moulding of its features from behind the unreasoning mask... That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him (Ch. 36).

While for Ishmael, the sea appears as a metaphor for the hidden depths of the human soul:

> Consider the subtleness of the sea; how its most dreaded creatures glide under water, unapparent for the most part, and treacherously hidden beneath the loveliest tints of azure . . . Consider, once more, the universal cannibalism of the sea; all whose creatures prey upon each other, carrying on eternal war since the world began.
>
> Consider all this; and then turn to this green, gentle, and most docile earth; consider them both, the sea and the land; and do you not find a strange analogy to something in yourself? For as this appalling ocean surrounds the verdant land, so in the soul of man there lies one insular Tahiti, full of peace and joy, but encompassed by all the horrors of the half known life. God keep thee! Push not off from that isle, thou canst never return (Ch.58)!

Whether the symbolic reference to a universalizing depth is inner or outer, Yvor Winters, one of Melville's most acute commentators, seems right:

> The book is less a novel than an epic poem. The plot is too immediately interpenetrated with idea to lend itself easily to the manner of the novelist (Winters 219).

Conrad is closer to Aristotle's historian, with his brilliantly realized particular surfaces that are meant to be appreciated for their own sake. The purpose of the novelist, in his famous phrase, is "to render the highest kind of justice to the visible

universe ... to make us see," and he means "see" in its ordinary as well as extended sense (Conrad 162).[4] But many readers, asked what *Lord Jim* is about, would speak first of the themes that open it onto the universal: Jim's hunger for honor, his infidelity, disgrace and redemption. Only then might they recount the details of the plot or point to the brilliantly particularized descriptions of the Arabian and South China Seas. And in *Heart of Darkness* the independent integrity of the surface is blurred both by the ramified algebraic network of thematic leitmotifs and the symbolist suggestiveness which depends precisely on leaving the narrative partly indefinite in order to create a space in which readers are invited to add their own imagination of horror.[5]

When we try to apply Aristotle's distinction to O'Brian, however, we discover a revealing paradox. O'Brian is a *poet* who radically imitates the particularity of the Aristotelian *historian*. Melville and Conrad offer a particular experience together with an intended interpretation of it, an interpretation that universalizes it, even if the means of universalizing are not Aristotelian. O'Brian offers the particular experience and the pleasure of participating in it as autonomous, as valuable for its own sake; his imagination rests in the well-seen appearances without asking "why?". Eva Brann catches this quality of O'Brian's imagination in commenting on his description of a pair of praying mantises mating: "In this romance the incident is *a metaphor for nothing at all* - just a well-observed piece of natural history" (Brann [1993] 108; italics added). To quote John Bayley, O'Brian's narrative world is "almost entirely ... a world of enchanting [particular] surfaces" (Bayley, 1991, 8).

O'Brian also writes as a historian in a more conventional sense. For one of his driving impulses is to show about the period of his interest "the way things really were." Given the manner in which his imagination embraces the world, this means for him exhibiting as many particular surfaces as possible; hence his delight in showing every aspect of his characters' activity in all its settings. This also explains the

apparent paradox of his writing fiction rather than formal history. For fiction has this superiority. It allows a fuller representation, more differentiated and continuous for the reader's imagination, than history. The novelist need not stop for the gaps in the record of an event, but can narrate something like an actual event in great particular detail.

If O'Brian writes as a historian, what is this nineteen-volume series a history of? The most telling answer is the name of an institution. These books celebrate the British Navy in the first two decades of the nineteenth century.

It would be hard to find a period in which this great navy played a role of more scope, weight, and interest. For in these years the British Navy was an agent of the three seaborne movements - military, scientific, and, in a supportive role, commercial that globalized the framework of human life.

Militarily, these years coincide with the first maturity of global war. The two wars initiated in Europe in the middle of the eighteenth century, the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48) and the Seven Years War (1756-63), were fought in India, Africa, the Caribbean, Canada, and what became the United States as well as in Europe. The Napoleonic wars which form the scene of so many of O'Brian's novels were yet larger in scope and more fateful. The variety of locales which O'Brian brings to life in their double aspect for his characters of engaged matter-of-factness and reflective wondrousness has the fascination of such classics of adventurous travel as Kinglake's *Eöthen* and Francis Chichester's *The Lonely Sea and the Sky*.

Scientifically, in turn, these decades pointed toward the closure of the European voyages of discovery. The series almost touches the year of Darwin's departure on *H.M.S. Beagle* (1831). The following century saw the final European movement into the interiors of Africa, Asia, and South America, and with it the plenitude of observations in biology and geology which so enlarged the time scale of these sciences and supported the developing theory of evolution. By the time Conan Doyle published *The Lost World* in 1912,

it was hard to imagine a place so unknown that Professor Challenger could convincingly find there survivals of the age of the dinosaurs.

The Navy was the instrument of these great movements, as well as of the growth of international trade of which we catch glimpses, in the great square-rigged ships that appeal to our love of romance and visual nobility and to our love of skill. No less than Homer or the Native American narrator of Peter Nabokov's *Two Leggings*, O'Brian makes us feel the importance and enchantment of the technical mastery that is a part of heroic achievement, whether it is handling a ship or a horse, a cutlass or a bow.

It is this world in all its multifariousness that O'Brian is bent on showing us.

II. Aubrey-Maturin

To spread his narrative net wide enough to capture this range of experience, O'Brian frames his novels around two main characters. These are Jack Aubrey, who over the course of the books climbs the ranks of naval command, and his friend Stephen Maturin, a physician, ship's surgeon, and ardent naturalist. Maturin also reflects another important aspect of the period's military activity as a fiercely anti-Napoleonic intelligence agent.

Thus Jack Aubrey embodies in vividly individualized and historically exact form every aspect of a naval commander's life. So we see Aubrey handling internal naval politics of all kinds, the support and frustration that arise from the hierarchical command structure; see the mixture of practical intelligence and imagination that are necessary in rightly outfitting a ship and finding, training, and skillfully using the language and forms of authority to win the best from his crew;[6] see him handling a ship in different waters and weathers and planning and executing the most effective strategy and tactics, often in the immediate press of danger. O'Brian frequently describes a kind of knowing

that accompanies such skilled performance. For example, responding in *Master and Commander* to a storm:

> Jack did not hear it: he was quite unconscious of the tension around him, far away in his calculations of the opposing forces - not mathematical calculations by any means, but rather sympathetic; the calculations of a rider with a new horse between his knees and a dark hedge coming (76).

This is the nineteenth century, European version of the kind of immediate, connatural knowing that weds spatial, kinesthetic and conceptual cues which the Puluwat navigators practice as Howard Gardner describes them:

> To navigate among the many islands in their vicinity, the Puluwats must recall the points or directions where certain stars rise and set around the horizon. This knowledge is first committed to memory by rote, but then becomes absorbed into the intuition of the sailor as he spends many months traveling back and forth. Ultimately, the knowledge must be integrated with a variety of factors including the location of the sun; the feeling one experiences in passing over the waves; the alteration of waves with changes in course, wind, and weather; skills in steering and handling the sheet; ability to detect reefs many fathoms down by sudden changes in the color of the water; and the appearance of the waves on the surface (Gardner 202).

Being enabled to share such knowing in detail outside the particular regions of one's own skilled performance is one of the great pleasures of reading these books.

We also see Aubrey's life on land, his brief periods with his family, his gambling and investing (the two are almost one: early in his career he almost spends time in a debtor's prison), his building his house, all detailed with the same narrative vividness and historical exactness.

Stephen Maturin, in turn, introduces the world of early nineteenth century science. "Dr. Maturin was much caressed in the physical world: his *Suggestions for the Amelioration of Sick Bays*; his *Thoughts on the Prevention of the Diseases most usual among Seamen*; his *New Operation for Suprapubic Cystotomy*; and his *Tractatus de Novae Febris Ingressu* were read throughout the thinking part of the Navy ..." (Island 85). In *Treason's Harbor* we hear about *Remarks* on *Pezohaps Solitarious* (26), in *Master and Commander* about his little work on the phanerogams of Upper Ossory (36). One wonders when he found time to practice. Yet (cast, again, as vivid narrative) one follows him performing a variety of operations, sharing cadavers with his colleagues for research, and observing fauna and flora around the globe.

Maturin's work as a naturalist reflects O'Brian's own love of the particular for its own sake. "I have already found fifty-three kinds of moss on this island alone," he remarks in *Desolation Island*, "and no doubt there are more" (288-9). This is the voice of the young Darwin in the Galapagos:

> I have not yet noticed by far the most remarkable feature in the natural history of this archipelago; it is, that the different islands to a considerable extent are inhabited by a different set of beings. My attention was first called to this fact by the Vice-Governor, Mr. Lawson, declaring that the tortoises differed from the different islands, and that he could with certainty tell from which island any-one was brought (Beagle Ch.17).

So far Maturin reflects Darwin's joy in observing the natural world; but he is rarely drawn to probe beyond toward the kind of universal explanation that Darwin was already seeking and defending in his first notebook on the transmutation of species, written within the first couple of years of his return:

> Before Attract of Gravity [was] discovered, it might have been said it was as great a difficulty to account for the movement of all by one law, as to account for each separate one: so to say that all Mammals were born from one stock, & since distributed by such means as we can recognize, may [falsely] be thought to explain nothing (*Notebook* B 196; punctuation normalized).

Beyond embodying the many-sided activities of the Royal Navy, Aubrey and Maturin are clearly stamped individuals who participate in one of the best realized friendships in this century's literature. As in many great literary friendships, the partners in this one are complementary figures.

In appearance, Jack Aubrey is a fair Englishman, his complexion pink-and-white beneath his seaman's tan, blue-eyed, yellow-haired. He is massively built - "an ox of a man" one of his enemies calls him. His father, General Aubrey, is a Tory member of Parliament whose radical leanings are sometimes an embarrassment to his son. Aubrey is active, strong in a world where his subordinates admire physical strength, a man of spontaneous sensuality tempered by decency. He is open and generous: he hates the lies that sometimes attend Maturin's intelligence work. Some of the qualities which are virtues in the context of the sea - his love of action, his large imagination of success, his confident strategizing, and, in contest, a sort of manic immediacy - become flaws on land, where he cannot read the signs of a situation. At sea since the age of twelve, he has an extraordinary knowledge of this world.

Stephen Maturin, by contrast, is dark: the child of an Irish father and Catalan mother, he can pass for Spanish or French. He is small and plain-looking; unagile, though very active intellectually and physically in his scientific pursuits; reflective and somewhat melancholy. It is to address his inclination to live at the edge of his physical energy and emotions that he investigates and suffers in withdrawing from laudanum and the consoling leaves of the tobacco and

coca plants. His intelligence work springs from a hatred of tyranny both by temperament and on principle.

Such a literary use of contrast can be simply a rhetorical device for making characters set each other off. But in this case the friendship is alive and, beyond the individual partners in it, itself one. Thus it shares, in its degree, in the mystery of the relationships between Achilles and Patroclus, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, perhaps Prince Andrew Bolkonsky and Pierre Bezukhov: all of these friendships, as if in accord with Aristophanes' myth about human nature in the *Symposium*, seem to form on some level a single soul whose complementary characteristics are distributed between two human beings, so it becomes difficult to think of one without the other. Each implies and completes the other and our imagination seizes on the whole they complete together.

Although the contrast between Aubrey and Maturin is more in evidence, their friendship also depends on qualities they share. Thus both wholeheartedly, even helplessly, love what they do; both are excellent at it; both appreciate such excellence in others; and both are men of active decency of character, willing to spend themselves unto death for the goods they recognize and hold in common.

The most telling narrative image for their friendship in its interplay of likeness and contrast are the recurrent scenes in which the two play music together, Aubrey on his violin, Maturin his cello. It is an image of the way their friendship is *practiced*. In order to play together, each must enter into – anticipate, will and advance – the performance of the other. This spontaneous, often tender, appreciation and will by each man of the good of the other occurs again and again in the novels, in matters large and small. Jack may not himself delight in a wombat, but he delights in Stephen's delight in it, and will inconvenience himself to further Stephen's scientific pleasure. And, in the manner of friendship, each is allowed to live more fully through glimpsing the experience of the other: each is enlarged as the good of the other becomes his own. This foretaste in

friendship of charity is a major pleasure of these books.

O'Brian does not represent his two leading characters as developing, through education or the play of transforming psychological dynamics, although in the last books they feel the encroachment of the shifting perspectives and diminishments of age. They are psychologically and morally formed when we meet them and remain consistent. Their trueness-to-character is not only the result of a formula element which does at times limit the literary stature of the books, but also marks them as comic characters, in accord with the general spirit of the novels, which is comic and active (though with grim moments) rather than tragic and contemplative. This trueness-to-character is also a source of our affection for Jack and Stephen. It resembles the habitual behavior of family members, which (when it does not madden us) elicits a similar upwelling of affectionate delight.

III. Style and Story

O'Brian's prose resembles Prokofiev's *Classical Symphony* in its playful wedding of a classical form with a modern surface. In its syntactic lucidity and parallelism, it resembles the softened Johnsonianism of turn-of-the-nineteenth-century English prose, the prose, for example, of Jane Austen. But in its representation of sensuous surfaces with almost hallucinatory clarity, it follows twentieth-century canons for fictional prose. In fact, in its fidelity to the appearances of things, O'Brian's prose "edits" the reader's visual attention cinematically, in a precise analogue of film processes.[7] Hence, its dignity, vividness, and beautifully varied movement; its air of being contemporary with the events it describes and at the same time its immediacy.

It is worth giving attention to O'Brian's narrative prose in detail, for it is one of his greatest achievements.

According to a rhetorical tradition that antedates Aristotle, the most fundamental way of describing a prose

style is by distinguishing the way the clauses of a sentence are related to one another.[8]

If some clauses are *subordinated* to others by conditional, causal, temporal or other subordinating conjunctions, or by such other mutually implicative relationships as purpose or result ("He ran so fast *that* he won the race."), the style is *periodic*. Since an "if" clause syntactically demands an answering "then" clause, or an "although" clause an answering "nevertheless" clause, a periodic sentence has a *climactic* quality. The enunciation of the answering main clause is like the musical return to the tonic or the statement of the conclusion to a syllogism, for it provides an anticipated completion, making the sentence an intrinsic whole.

Clauses can also be laid side by side and *coordinated* with one another by such coordinating conjunctions as "and" or "but" or by commas or semicolons without any stated conjunctions; such a style is *paratactic*. In a paratactic sentence, one clause opens out of the preceding clause *without any necessary connection*; any number of clauses can be added to a paratactic sentence just by tacking on another "and" or "but"; in this sense, each new clause arises as a surprise.

For the sake of example, I have framed my description of the periodic style as periodic and my description of the paratactic as paratactic.

Where does O'Brian stand in this scheme?

The answer is: everywhere, depending on what is narratively appropriate. There seems to me no substitute here for technical analysis, even if it be only of two representative sentences.

First, a primarily periodic sentence, the sentence which opens *Desolation Island*:

> The breakfast-parlour was the most cheerful room in Ashgrove Cottage and, although the builders had ruined the garden with heaps of sand and unslaked lime and bricks, and although the damp walls of the new wing in

> which the parlour stood still smelt of plaster, the sun poured in, blazing on the covered silver dishes, and lighting the face of Sophie Aubrey as she sat there waiting for her husband (5).

After an initial scene-establishing clause, the sentence brings us into the book in a single, long movement, a visual progress. In doing so, it performs a large number of tasks: it implies the temporal and geographical setting and social and economic circumstances of the participants, sets a mood, and creates a dramatic focus. It can perform so many tasks without confusion because the visual data are laid into the balanced and subordinated clauses in such a way that we perceive them and their relationships with perfect clarity. The disorder from building described in the parallel concessive clauses provides a contrasting foil to accentuate the cheerfulness of the pouring sun described in the main clause; and even these two concessive clauses are logically ordered, for the first focuses on the *outside*, the second brings us to the *inside* of the house. The two participial phrases which conclude the sentence follow the track of the sunlight as the more interior parts of the scene become visible to us; the second and longer of these phrases brings us to Sophie's face in what is simultaneously the climax of visual, syntactic, and dramatic movements. The movement of the period is like a cinematic crane-and-track shot, descending without a break from an external, comprehensive view of the grounds and cottage to a close-up on Sophie's face.

By contrast, a primarily paratactic sentence occurs a few lines later:

> The anxiety changed to unmixed pleasure as she heard his step: the door opened; a ray of sun fell on Captain Aubrey's beaming face, a ruddy face with bright blue eyes; and she knew as certainly as though it had been written on his forehead that he had bought the horse he coveted (5).

Here the narrative has shifted to Sophie's point of view. Perhaps the simplest way to see the effect of the parataxis is to recast the framework of the sentence as periodic: "*When* the door opened, a ray of sun fell on Captain Aubrey's beaming face, and *because* of this illumination, she knew ..." Here, as above, the periodic version emphasizes continuity and relationship. The paratactic sentence brings the structure of Sophie's process of perception to our attention: the perceptions are discrete, discontinuous stages of ever deeper realization; and each stage is realized in relative independence, with a vividness hard to achieve if the clauses had been subordinated to a whole. Nevertheless, there is a latent sense of sequence and wholeness: the discontinuity is a *broken continuity*. The arrangement of the last three clauses is an ascending tricolon, in which the increase in clause length, coinciding with the increase in Sophie's perception, creates a rhetorical, if not syntactical, climactic pattern. There is an abruptness caused by the lack of connectives between the first three clauses and this abruptness creates an effect of energy that a periodic structure does not possess. Again, the "edit" is cinematic: an establishing shot of the doorway with steps heard on the soundtrack, then a sequence of cuts: a medium or long shot of Captain Aubrey entering; a medium close-up of his face in the sunlight; and perhaps an extreme close-up registering Sophie's response. The classical prose articulations become the framework for sequences of sensuous images in ways that would be hard to parallel before the nineteen thirties and forties, for example in some of the early fiction of Graham Greene.

O'Brian's prose can rest at either stylistic extreme. Most typically, it has a loosened periodicity, in which the individual member is vivid, but always part of an articulated flow: a flexible prose, which can become more periodic or more paratactic, longer or shorter in its members, more continuous or more abrupt, depending on the immediate narrative needs.

As a narrative instrument, the prose has two faces, one turned toward the world which it represents, one turned toward the audience as the story-teller's voice, working to engage.

Some of what has already been said bears on the prose of the novels as a world-representing instrument. The world of O'Brian's novels is dense with things, with historical and anthropological data, with "facts." In representing this world, the distinct articulation of the individual members of his long sentences allows each thing to appear vividly as itself, while the graduated continuities within and between sentences keep the imagined world from falling apart and the explicit or latent periodicity suggests the underlying relationships. The loosened periodicity provides a tolerant orderliness. While retaining its civil shapeliness, it opens onto the ongoing flow; it also embraces the sharp juxtapositions of these concrete things and events in pathos or comic incongruity or wonder-provoking surprise.

This density of things and flexible orderliness of the prose support the representation of the world as fundamentally comic. Although O'Brian admits into the flow of delineated experience moments of appalling loss, they are never the final horizon. O'Brian's novels are, as Wye Allanbrook describes Mozart's operas, "a celebration of the social man, of reconciliation, and accommodation to the way things are" (Allanbrook 44). Even more apt to O'Brian are her words about Mozart's instrumental music: "it mirrors in the *chiaroscuro* of its surface the orderly diversity of humankind and completes that motion out of adversity toward the happy ending that should grace the universal comic narrative" (Allanbrook 44). This *chiaroscuro*, this orderly diversity of O'Brian's represented world, is reflected in and in part created for the reader by the structure of his prose.

The same structural features inform the narrator's voice. The long sentences, finely orchestrated within by commas, semicolons, and colons, whose graduated pauses allow degrees of separation between members without losing

continuity, permit a rhetoric of punctuational gesture that gives the narrator's voice an amazing variety of tempi, emphases, and pointings. The storyteller, unobtrusive while one is wrapped up in his tale, successively takes on the roles of confidence man, stand-up comic, salesman, sharer of secrets, confederate in an all-absorbing game, retailer of wonders, and seeing and sober assessor of misfortune - trustworthy, worldly, knowledgeable, urbane. The sheer narrative flexibility and power of this prose may be O'Brian's finest achievement.

The shape of the prose is reflected in the larger narrative structures, scene, sequence, and book.[9] The Aristotelian plot with its beginning, middle, and end, the parts articulated in proper proportion to the whole and connected by necessary or probable relationships, is comparable, to the periodic sentence. O'Brian's loosened periods with their large accommodation of parataxis, blown up into narrative size, suggest a looser, more episodic structure. It is probably exact to say that this is an adaptation of the earliest structure of written history, the chronicle or annals, elaborated by the episodic adventures and wonders of the picaresque tale. What gives the books their shape as stories is an undertaken mission. The interplay of intention with fortune, purpose with circumstance, in any long naval mission will lend a random element to the narrative progress: unprefigured episodes arise as a surprise like the unforeseeable clauses added onto a paratactic sentence. If the picture on the tapestry unfolds in enchanting variety, however, there is always an impression of the orderly weave of warp and woof which underlies. O'Brian's is a world marked by a vivid *thereness* and a shaping (if sometimes unpredictable in detail) way things are.

IV. Surfaces and Depths

How good, finally, are these novels?

In addressing this question, I would like to look briefly at sea stories in general. What features of sea stories make

them so compelling? What aspects of life do they bring especially to the fore?

Without attempting to be systematic or complete, let me list three.

1) *The shipboard world is a closed world.* Like a country house in an English mystery story, it is cut off; self-contained, if not self-sufficient; persons of diverse types are forced together in interdependence and interaction, in circumstances that screw tight emotional intensity. This raises questions of right order, indeed of the claims of order and freedom, public and private goods, of authority.

2) *The shipboard world is a vulnerable world.* The separation from the resources of land and frailty before the instability of wind and waves highlights the element of precarity and the response to precarity that is a feature of all our lives. Ordinarily we close our eyes against this essential precarity, but at sea it is always to the fore; so, too, therefore, are the human technical skill and endurance that attempt to overcome it and their limits.

3) *The shipboard world is a world of passage.* Hence, it provides a patent example of the larger experience of passage through life. The connotations of destination, progress sustained or thwarted, the interplay of intention and luck, the experience of test and transformation, of new sights in pleasure, wonder, fear, or danger, all support the analogy of shipboard passage to life in general.

In all these ways, a sea story can hardly help having deep overtones, universal resonances, archetypal suggestions, a sense of myth, no matter how matter-of-factly told. Sea stories offer a primary opening in our literary experience onto fundamental questions.

O'Brian uses the enclosed and vulnerable character of shipboard life for the sake of narrative intensity; but he steadfastly resists pursuing such openings - at least, if the pursuit of fundamental questions means abandoning the surface for presumed depths. If I may borrow Jungian language here, O'Brian's narrative consciousness shows a

radical preference for sensation over the significance-seeking depths of intuition.

What does this mean for his stature?

John Bayley, a great critic of the novel, is emphatic about what he takes it to mean for the caliber of O'Brian's fictions:

> The reader today has become conditioned, partly by academic critics, to look in Melville and Conrad for the larger issues and deeper significances, rather than enjoying the play of life, the humor and detail of the performance. Yet surface is what matters in good fiction, and Melville on the whale and on the *Pequod's* crew is more absorbing to his readers in the long run than is the parabolic significance of Captain Ahab. Patrick O'Brian has contrived to invent a new world that is almost entirely in this sense a world of enchanting surfaces, and all the better for it (Bayley, 1991, 8).[10]

My quarrel with this standard of merit in fiction is with Bayley's phrase "rather than," which pits the fictional surfaces *against* the deeper significances, preferring the former and discounting the latter.

Let me intimate an alternative vision of the novel which embraces a surface *informed* by depths. Such a novel invites the reader to experience the represented surfaces of things in two ways.

First, it invites the reader to experience them naively and for their own sake; paradisially, as with the freshness of the first morning; with the *story-teller's wonder*, which holds one in the appearances in love and amazement.

Second, it invites the reader to something akin to the *philosopher's wonder*, which looks beyond the immediacy of the appearances to what they may bespeak; to see the surfaces also as arising from or in accordance with deeper sources or patterns, cognized, tasted, or felt.

Such a fiction, whose surfaces are simultaneously revelatory of themselves and (sometimes enigmatically) of

their significance, is intrinsically *sopbianic*, exercising, nourishing, expanding and providing a resting place for the fullness of the reader's powers of appreciation and knowing.

The kinds of depths and the ways they are represented can take many forms. The notion of depth need not be tied, for example, as Isaiah Berlin tends to do in the context of his argument in "The Hedgehog and the Fox," with the notion of an "unchanging, all-embracing ... unitary inner vision" (Berlin 22). But there must be some degree of universalization. Thus Tolstoy intends to represent a *typical* aspect of human experience in his relentless, detailed, penetrating exposure of egoism and illusion and the slow shaping by experience which gives some human beings the wisdom to orient themselves by an obscure awareness of the meaning of life.[11] Every imaginative act that builds *War and Peace* simultaneously represents the surface texture of experience and its significance. If one could imagine (it is impossible) the amazing precisions of Tolstoy emptied of his continuous moral and psychological interpretation of private and public life, *War and Peace* would drop for all experienced readers to the second rank.

It is the natural experience of the fully alive reader, not the bias of academic critics, that raises fictions which are simultaneously enchanting on the surface and significant in their depths to the highest rank.

O'Brian's books are a wonderful achievement. They embody amazing erudition in recreating the many faces of a particular historical world. The sheer abundance of invention in this richly elaborated secondary world is a sign of power and vitality and is a source of joy for the reader. O'Brian is a master of narrative, as fine a narrator as Stevenson. One could write a book-length rhetoric of narrative on every level from phrase to sentence to sequence to scene to book which would draw examples of excellence from his novels. The brilliant and varied surfaces of the novels have rightly been praised by every reader. The characters and friendship of Aubrey and Maturin become as real to us in reading as our friendships with our own

friends, and a huge cast of secondary characters possesses well-differentiated life. The secondary characters include dozens of animals, domestic and wild, lovingly observed and rendered each with a convincing individual personality; this is a feat for which I cannot think of a parallel in the literature I know and is characteristic of O'Brian's particular generosity. It is probably true that quantity becomes quality in O'Brian's work, because it allows for the full manifestation of the exuberance and variety of his represented world. It finds room for candid portrayals of loss and even tragedy, but in its amplitude, *chiaroscuro*, and orderly diversity this is finally a comic world: a world of secular comedy; there is no hint in the world's structure of the divine comedy of the resurrection.

Nevertheless, the commitment of these wonderful novels to a non-universalized, unthematized representation of the world makes them *truncated* fictions, *in principle* incomplete. This is so because, for most readers, a world so exclusively wed to the particular surfaces of things is itself an abstraction. For in most ordinary experience the world does not appear to us merely as sensory surfaces, but as sensory surfaces weighted with intrinsic, sometimes more and sometimes less evident, significance. On rare occasions O'Brian allows this glimpse of a depth in things to his characters, but does not organize the experience of his books in this way for the reader.

O'Brian's rightly celebrated novels brilliantly embody primary aspects of the art of fiction. In what Bayley calls their play of life, in their model narrative skill, in the characters of Aubrey and Maturin and the other realizations I have tallied above, they carry on into our own time a measure of the robustly present and subtly differentiated life that marks, for example, the great, popular novels of Dickens (although their specific flavor is not especially like Dickens). In fact, it is the stature of O'Brian's novels that make them open onto the question: What constitutes greatness in fiction? Once this question is asked, it illumines their central limitation. This is precisely, *contra* Bayley, that the

brilliantly achieved play of life, the enchanting, particular surfaces, are not complemented by a commensurately achieved rendering of the depths revealed and concealed in our experience. For the greatest fictions are those which render the contours of their worlds visible both to the outer and the inner eye.

NOTES

1. The epigraph is cited from Tolstoy's early diaries by Berlin (30). Citations from standard works are not by particular edition, but by chapter or other standard forms of reference; for other works, I have referred to the page number of the edition in the list of works cited. I would like to thank Rowan Taylor and John Person for deepening my understanding of O'Brian's works. I dedicate the essay to Eva Brann.

2. The later works have a somewhat less elaborated texture than the early and middle novels; in this respect, their fictional world is less fully realized. With this qualification, my analysis refers to the complete Aubrey-Maturin cycle.

3. My immediate concern is Aristotle's distinction between universality and particularity *as aspects of narrative*. For a discussion of the fuller distinction between history and epic or tragic poetry and the different character of what they imitate in the world, see Frede. In note 28 (218), she comments: "On the contrast between history and tragedy, cf. *Poetics* 9, 1451 b 1-11, where Aristotle stresses the particularity of history, and 23, 1459a21-29, where he focuses on *the accidental character of historical events* (italics added) (*synebe ... hos etucbe*'). The question raised by Halliwell ..., why Aristotle does not treat tragedy as feigned history, finds its explanation exactly at this point: history can *by definition* not exclude the accidental or coincidental. This should also settle Nussbaum's query about philosophically minded historians like Thucydides ...: even he could not treat historical coincidences as if they had a *telos* (59b27; 29)." I agree

with all this. However, Nussbaum's query can be more generally framed. Are Thucydides and, for example, Plutarch, and other historical writers who consider their works to capture recurrent human types and events (Thucydides 1.22.4) simply deceiving themselves and falsifying what they write about? Or can one find a formulation that does justice to the ways the apparently universal is present in Thucydides and other writers whom the conceptual scheme of the *Poetics* cannot explain? Some such understanding seems implicit in any appeal to learning from experience.

4. This "seeing" is not only for its own sake, but also for its effect, since the "high desire [of the writer's art] is to reach the secret spring of responsive emotion" (162). It is by rendering a moment of life so as to make us see, that the artist can "awaken in the hearts of the beholders that feeling of unavoidable solidarity in mysterious origin, in toil, in joy, in hope, in uncertain fate, which binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world" (163). Conrad's focus is not on the *cognitive universal*, but on our *felt experience of universal solidarity with humankind*. It is hard not to see in this a transposition of religious into literary experience: the writer as prophet and priest offers the mutely speaking image as a sacrament to the readers, drawing them to feel their solidarity with humankind within the given world. Nothing illustrates this better than Conrad's original glimpse of the man who became Lord Jim. "One sunny morning in the commonplace surroundings of an Eastern roadstead, I saw his form pass by - appealing - significant - under a cloud - perfectly silent. Which is as it should be. It was for me, with all the sympathy of which I was capable, to seek fit words for his meaning. He was 'one of us'" (166).

5. In her illuminating appreciation of Paul Scott's *Raj Quartet*, Eva Brann writes, "But great treatments of human evil do not take refuge in indeterminate demonisms. They have the courage of their moral revulsion: definite crimes are

committed. Take for example that dark evil which preoccupies Marlowe in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, surely the greatest novelette of our century. For all its ineffable horror, there are also nameable misdeeds: Kurtz has allowed himself to be worshiped as a god, with human sacrifices" (Brann [1997] 359). I agree fully with the principle. However, Conrad's treatment of the worship and human sacrifices is so brief and the transformation of Kurtz's soul which allows it is so little portrayed (in contrast to Scott's extended and subtle portrayal of Ronald Merrick) that it does not acquire the status of a genuine human deed, but seems to me to remain part of the apparatus of suggestiveness.

6. *Desolation Island* is framed as a mission by Jack Aubrey to sail to Australia and bring back to England Edward Bligh, who is caught up in his post-*Bounty* troubles. For a detailed study of Bligh's incapacity to handle the language and forms of authority, see Dening.

7. I am not claiming that O'Brian was intentionally appropriating the techniques of cinema, but it is hard to believe he did not learn something from cinema and writers who were influenced by cinema in their manner of visualization.

8. Conceptual instruments for the analysis of prose have been preserved, elaborated, and sometimes radically reformed in the 2,500 year tradition since Aristotle. I will use a simplified but fruitful version of the classical scheme which is indebted to Barish (41-89). For Aristotle's seminal remarks, see *On Rhetoric*, 3.2-12, especially 8-9 on prose rhythm and periodic and paratactic structure.

9. O'Brian is master of an integral narrative unit intermediate between scene and book, which might be called a "sequence." In *Desolation Island*, see, for example, O'Brian's magisterial handling of the chase of Aubrey's ship, the Leopard, by the *Dutch Waakzamheit* (203-36), which Bayley calls "weird and grisly ... , like something out of *Moby-Dick*"

(Bayley, 8).

10. Bayley's point of view toward fiction is more fully developed in *The Characters of Love*, especially in the epilogue (263-291). It might be described as a fresh branch from the trunk of Schiller's discrimination of the naïve and sentimental poet, with a strong appreciation of the powers of the naïve.

11. Berlin praises Tolstoy for perceiving and representing each thing he writes of "in its absolute uniqueness" (51). However, *Tolstoy understood himself as capturing the typical.* This is indicated by a characteristic mode of phrase, some examples of which I will quote almost arbitrarily from the first chapter of *War and Peace.* "He spoke *in that* refined French *in which our grandfathers not only spoke but thought*, and with the gentle, patronizing intonation *natural to* a man of importance who had grown old in society and at the court" (3). "Prince Vasili did not reply though, with the quickness of memory and perception *befitting a man of the world ...* "(7). "*As is always the case with a thoroughly attractive woman*, her defect - the shortness of her upper lip and her half-open mouth - seemed to be her own special and peculiar form of beauty" (8). "Here the conversation seemed interesting and he stood waiting for an opportunity to express his own views, *as young people are fond of doing*" (8). The "fullest individual essence" of each thing, in Berlin's phrase (51), is in large part conveyed rhetorically by appealing to the reader's recognition of its truth to a common type. This repeated rhetorical gesture also presumes that the reader is as knowledgeable and discriminating as Tolstoy about the typical features of a vast variety of human characters and situations; in this respect, it is an element of the working alliance Tolstoy sets up with his readers.

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Robert Schechter

Thank-You Note

"Thanks for the gift. It didn't fit.
It had a hole and smelled like shit.
In lousy taste and poorly made,
a waste of every cent you paid,
unworthy of its box and wrap,
the ultimate in flimsy crap,
and yet I prize it like no other
gift I've gotten.
Love,
Your Mother."

from Proverbs and Songs
Antonio Machado

Not once did I pursue my fame.
That people might recall my name,
and song, was not my hope;
I am in love with subtle worlds,
weightless globes of gentle swirls,
like bubbles made of soap.
I like to see their painted art
of sun and scarlet, watch them fly
beneath the blue and trembling sky
before they break apart.

Blind Man
after Jorge Luis Borges

I do not know what face returns my stare
as I lean toward the face inside the mirror,
nor do I know the old man lurking there,
reflected back in silent, weary anger.
Slowly, in my darkness, with my hand,
I trace my unseen wrinkles. Then a flash
of light breaks through; I almost glimpse a strand
of hair, tinged with gold yet dull as ash.
I tell myself again that I have lost
no more than merely superficial shows,
the same brave consolation Milton glossed;
but then I think of letters, or a rose.
I think if I could only see my face,
I'd know myself on this rare day of grace.

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