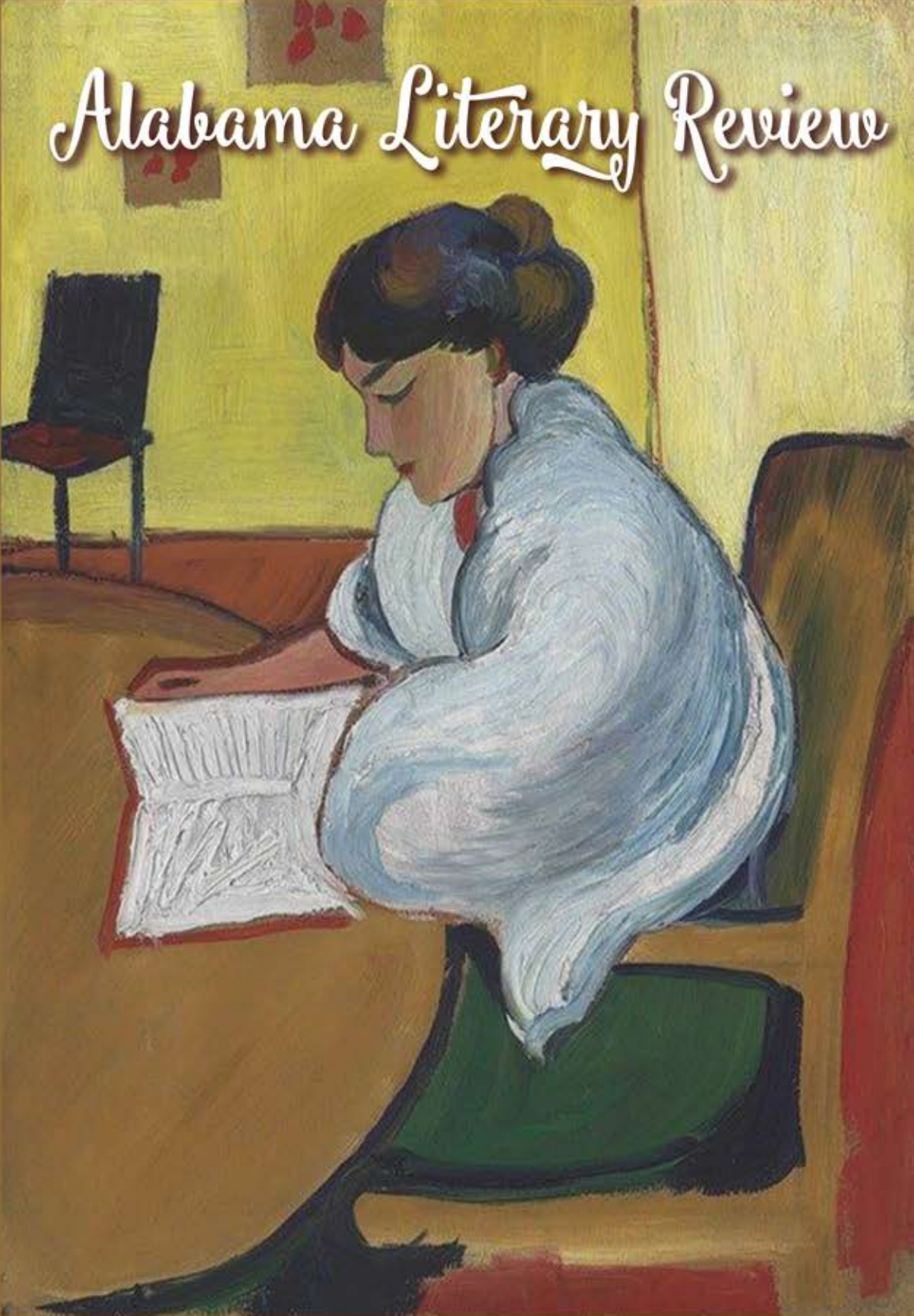
Alabama Literary Review



Alabama Literary Review

2018
volume 27
number 1

Cover
painting by August Macke,
Woman Reading (1913)

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

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

 ISSN 0890-1554. Alabama Literary Review is indexed in The American Humanities Index and The Index of American Periodic Verse.

CONTENTS

Claire Bateman

Grip

It's nearly impossible to
sketch all the way out
to the paper's edge;
the lines force their way
inward as though
compelled to seek
a gravitational center.

To break that field's hold,
you may poke holes
in the vellum using
a small device designed
for that purpose:

the gravity-defying,
line-releasing awl with its
delicate biomorphic prongs
which retract a nanosecond
after puncturing the surface
so as to not mar the next sheet,

and then release
a film of sealant
that hides but does not
saturate the wounds.

Now you can range;
now you can adorn,
rearrange, and ply
your space. Now
you can rampage.

Habitat

Though no doubt she can sense our presence, the solitary gown doesn't startle. Stitched of taffeta and crinoline, with pearl buttons down the back under the pinned-on veil, and six hoop mermaid petticoats to buttress her, she holds her ground atop a craze of asphalt crack lines and sprouting chicory, mustard grass, and thistle.

In the dusk, she looks as though she could generate her own microclimate — a swirl of snowflakes, perhaps, even in this unseasonable heat. And surely the neighborhood could use a tender, feathery mantle of white: the pavement's pitted and churned; hyenas lope across formerly fastidious lawns; wild pigs forage in rose gardens overrun by scrub.

Feral yet unafraid, she must have wandered away from her pack, though she won't be alone for long; the others can't be far off, and they move swiftly, not only when they're hunting, but just as often for the sheer sensation of wind through gauze. From the air they'd look like spun sugar dollhouse dresses (if planes were still flying, of course) but here on the ground their elegance is inextricable from their ferocity.

According to legend, it's lucky to catch a glimpse of them at full speed, but whether or not that's true, it does fill the heart with joy to behold them in the wild after all those centuries they spent trapped in wardrobes or pining behind plate glass.

Terese Coe

Sweep

The wind is full of faces
but unlike duller air
it sets itself on chases
and leaves its quarry bare.

Hurricanes have fought
their way to waste and death
and if they can be caught
it's only in our breath.

Stephen Cushman

Juicy Gossip

Avowedly the avocado's
partially autogamous

and would survive in solitude
playfully self-pollinating

its own receptive stigma
if only its small flowers,

pale-green, yellow-green
in racemes near the branch tips,

could open up concurrently
hermaphroditic organs,

rather than flip-flop hers today,
his tomorrow, but fruitfully the avocado

arrived from central Mexico
in two varieties, on different schedules,

so the trick, again, is simply to look
for one tree's mate at some remove

and there it stands, across the street,
orange-edged foliage of its peak

cresting the roof of another house,
beaming from another yard

its steady seed on wind or wing.

An Ether Purer

"*Whenever a man hears it, he is young.*" (Thoreau, *Journal*)

The singing intensifies just before sunrise

neither aubade — had he got laid,
he wouldn't be singing — nor serenade
because it's not evening,
                jet lag perhaps,
some other time zone calling his shots,
or maybe a loner late in the season
has to switch tactics,
                quit the high perches
away in safe woods to zero in low
up close to the window
                or end up a wallflower,
no genes transmitted, let alone lonely,
cicadas and dog days rubbing it in,

his failure to mate, despite the best song,
spun by this listener, solo and celibate,
into a triumph that refuses to please

a hard-to-get tease while singing deeper stuff
lasting all summer for sheer love of tune
designed to amuse
                the singer alone.
                That's quite a lot
to load on a wood thrush:
July '52 included two moons, respectively full
first day and last,
                5th fell on Monday
so Sunday was tough, both Sabbath and 4th
piling it on,
                small wonder he heard
in the notes of the bird — avian amateurs
don't quote this part —
                relief for the slave
in the house of his luxury,
                relief for the inmate
of one's lowest thoughts.

The Progress of Railroading
(Union Station, Washington, D.C.)

The one with bare boob and wheatsheaf in lieu
of her usual scales, that would be Themis
without modern blindfold but still with a sword
and eighteen feet tall, *FAIREST OF ALL*
O FREEDOM, oracular, mother of Horae
by gigolo Zeus and paired with Apollo
above central arch for triumph through loggia
to vaulted white hall in gold leaf and granite
where thirty-six centurions, rumored as naked
behind their big shields, keep watch on travelers
and those going nowhere, one with a hand out,
shuffling, mumbling, too thin to hold up
pants that emancipate woe-to-you moon.

Stephen Cushman

Mated for Life

As though a goose alone on the pond
or make it a gander passersby take
for solo rogue maverick afloat on composure,
detachment, free-standing, easy to hate
an avian Emerson whose celibate wake
of self-assured ripples ruffles our orgy,
our frenzy, promiscuous, of surface connections,
how dare he, really, pretend to transcend us
until the light dims on dusky discovery
up in the woods above the far bank
of goose down with feathers a little too
strewn for nesting or bedding and lying beside,
this part's not fun but what can you do,
coyote sign to honk at in goose tongue
for wailing and howling as Pink Moon appears
to sob on his vigil, his other lone wake.

Dark Social

Saturday morning daredevil foreplay,
red-shouldered courtship spiral display
by monogamous mates, first in wide loops
above the frayed trees, then into stunt dives
urge pulls them out of a few yards away
just before impact under leaf canopy
or where one would be if April this year
quit casting cold spells, frigid air layer
close to the ground refracting intenser
hush-threshing wing blades venting a need
for breeding again and nothing beyond
twin immolation without an apostle
to bear distant witness, nary a follower
clicking and liking.

Alice Friman

Lesson from Iceland

When icebergs calve from a glacier
they're born blue. Blue as the curse
of Odin's eye. For this is ice
country and silver-blue its mark.

What can I take away from this place
where every frost-stiffened forest
has been cut down, and all that's left
belongs to the wind?
I pocket a stone
from a black-sand beach where a raging
Atlantic spits and hammers at the land
as if it didn't want it — or me — anymore.

Let this stone be a rune stone
rich with telling. A black witness
worn smooth by its argument with the sea.
Let it speak in silence: stone speech
straight from the volcano's mouth
of a place where defiance means virtue,
and persistence beauty.
Where icepacks
overflow their stingy summer
to let down, like an old Rapunzel,
waterfalls of silver hair. Where gangs
of wild swan commandeer the coves,
and masses of wind-slapped buttercups
born to this thin soil, grip down, lift
their chins to the sun and hang on.

Stuck

Yesterday in traffic I watched
a woman's hand gesturing
out her car window to the lilt
of her conversation, the hand
turning this way and that,
inviting attention by the wink
of a gold ring, each finger
speaking not words but
the music beneath words,
the hand becoming a stand-in
for its owner, adorable and
expressive, the fingers short,
earnest as a child's, sometimes
punctuating the air or stopped
to cup the wind then starting again,
playing arpeggios on an invisible
keyboard, pinkie for a grace note,

and though there was no sound
I swore I heard, like the deaf,
a music to dance to, here
in the middle of this town,
the middle of the state, in the
middle of America, and I wanted
to poke my arm out the window
to finger the air, plunk out
my own tune if only to imagine
a connection — a duet, maybe
a fugue or a great oratorio
like the end of Beethoven's 9th
when all the voices come together
to rise in an blaze of glory
as if there were no such thing
as rush-hour traffic or talking
to myself in a blue, blue car.

Alice Friman

Postmarked Georgia

When you woke this morning
you were not beside me
for I've taken our embrace away,
we who have held on so tight
for twenty years. I have gone
to this strange house to be alone.

Outside my window, a magnolia —
not the Japanese kind that looks
like a fairy tree, but that leathery
green witness that takes root
here in the red soil of the south.
So big with history and thick
with thinking about itself,
it bristles around an interior,
hiding a past that worships
its own dark shadow. Sometimes
in the hours before twilight,
I think it mocks me — here,
there, a wink of white blossom,
shameless and blowsy in the heat.
But come morning, the message
is only twitter.
The experts
say bird song is territorial.
I don't believe it. I don't believe
in many things: that the old gods
have fled, walking away leaving
not a footprint to follow; that glory
isn't glory, here, under our every step;
that you don't love me anymore.

Heinrich Heine

translated by Terese Coe

Don't Mock the Devil

Mankind, don't mock the devil.
The road of life is short,
and an eternity of damnation
is no superstitious report.

Mankind, make good on your debts.
The road of life is long,
and you will be forced to borrow again
as you have so often done.

"Mensch, verspotte nicht den Teufel,"

Mensch, verspotte nicht den Teufel,
Kurz ist ja die Lebensbahn,
Und die ewige Verdammnis
Ist kein bloßer Pöbelwahn.

Mensch, bezahle deine Schulden,
Lang ist ja die Lebensbahn,
Und du mußt noch manchmal borgen,
Wie du es so oft getan.

Heinrich Heine

I Cannot Bear It

When I've been blessed by your kisses
and we're tranquil by and by,
you must never mention Germany then.
I have my reasons don't ask me why.

I'm not just asking — let Germany go!
Leave me in peace with your questions, forever.
Don't plague me with home or my next of kin.
I cannot bear it can't speak of it ever.

The oaks are green and the eyes are blue
on German women, who yearn and sigh
and talk about love and hope and belief.
I have my reasons don't ask me why.

Wenn ich, beseligt

Wenn ich, beseligt von schönen Küssen,
In deinen Armen mich wohl befinde,
Den mußt du mir nie von Deutschland reden;
Ich kanns nicht vertragen es hat seine Gründen.

Ich bitte nicht, laß mich mit Deutschland in Friede!
Du mußt nicht mich plagen mit ewigen Fragen
Nach Heimat, Sippschaft und Lebensverhältnis;
Es hat seine Gründen ich kanns nicht vertragen.

Die Eichen sind grün, and blau sind die Augen
Der deutschen Frauen; sie schmachten gelinde
Und seufzen von Liebe, Höffnung und Glauben;
Ich kanns nicht vertragen es hat seine Gründen.

Way of the World

He who has will soon have more,
much more than he has today.
What he with only a little has,
that little is taken away.

But you who have nothing whatever,
go dig yourself a grave —
for the right to live, you wretches,
is only for those who have.

Weltlauf

Hat man viel, so wird man bald
Noch viel mehr dazu bekommen.
Wer nur wenig hat, dem wird
Auch das Wenige genommen.

Wenn du aber gar nichts hast,
Ach, so lasse dich begraben —
Denn ein Recht zum Leben, Lump,
Haben nur, die etwas haben.

Heinrich Heine

Pain

So you cannot in the least remember
when I was obsessed, how you resisted;
your love so sweet, so false, so thin,
nothing more false could have ever existed.

So you have forgotten the love and pain
you branded me with, and both forever.
I do not know: was love sharper than pain?
I only know they were sharper together.

"So hast du ganz und gar vergessen"

So hast du ganz und gar vergessen,
Daß ich so lang dein Herz besessen,
Dein Herzchen so süß und so falsch und so klein,
Es kann nirgend was süßres und falscheres sein.

So hast du die Lieb und das Leid vergessen,
Die das Herz mir täten zusammenpressen.
Ich weiß nicht, war Liebe größer als Leid?
Ich weiß nur, sie waren groß alle beid!

Joel Hinman

An Unpredictable Disease

They're standing in the foyer, Ruth chanting in front of the little Eurasian statue, Arthur remembering the old testament prophets who condemned graven images, calling them "wind and confusion." But then what is the harm, Arthur thinks. If it reduces her anxiety, he's all for it, halacha be damned.

Arthur has spent in the morning in soon-to-be-nursery working the impasto into a fine chop that emulates his subject — the currents of the East River — until he adds one color too many and the painting tips browns out. What they call anal expressionism. Ruth has come for him then, inspecting his shoes, making him change because they've got paint on them, her face so tense the makeup has splintered: craquelure.

Then the dog gets escorted behind the kitchen gate, the lights turned off and they're off, down the elevator, out past the Albanian doorman, hurrying towards Park.

But the silence between them is so strained, Arthur's almost grateful when Ruth can't contain herself. She wheels on him.

"Just don't pick a fight!"

Arthur's stunned. Is she continuing an argument he can't remember starting? Picking at the stale leftovers of need, overpreparation and insomnia? Some repetitive thought loop to which he isn't privy?

"What?" he says, but she's waving her hands as if pointing to prior instances, scowling as she says, "I've seen you around people in authority."

He should let it pass. He knows she's three nights without sleep, knows how hard she's worked to get them this far, knows how much she wants the baby. But the accusation is unjust, not because of inaccuracy, but because her vehemence represents an opportunity to claim a future grievance.

Folding arms he regains his full height, towering over her because he is six four and she a mere five foot five. "I've been nothing but sweetness and light." His tone is preposterous.

She shrugs him off and continues across Park with him chasing behind. At the corner, she turns back, "Half the time you don't know what you are saying." She's about to turn north but thinks better of it. "I take the lead," she says. "Is that clear?"

"Okay," Arthur says.

"Not good enough. I want you to promise."

And, of course, he does.

Outside Twitchell Loomis couples cluster on the sidewalk. It's a repurposed Episcopal Rectory with a brass plaque that reads, "Serving Families & Children since 1907." The front door is immense, made from ship-building oak.

Arthur and Ruth are greeted and escorted to a courtyard in back of the building where Elizabeth waits with Daniel Kwoo, who, according to Elizabeth, is way up there in something called the Korean Bureau of Child Services.

On the small wicker brick patio, teak lawn furniture. Stepping down into the courtyard, Arthur notices a playset tucked in the corner: two swings, a slide and a climbing rope. It looks forgotten. Protectively his reaches for Ruth, touching her back in case she's seen it, because recently, and not so recently, she has become undone at the sight of anything suggesting infancy. In the aisle of the supermarket, he has found her paralyzed by a stumbling toddler.

But it's Kwoo who surprises. In the preceding weeks, Arthur had conjured, if not counted on, Kwoo being this little Asian fellow with English that went off like firecrackers. This clumsy but sturdy imago, finding contemporary American culture bewildering and frightening, comes to depend upon Arthur as his guide (and savior). In the predictive logic of fantasy Kwoo, of course, finds Arthur to be the only truly suitable father for his Korean orphan. But the man gracefully draping his suit jacket on the chair back can't be this tall and handsome — a regular Cary Grant; he can't be sporting fancy French eyewear, or a double-vented merino; he can't speak with the clipped precision of someone who attended a New England prep school. Nor should he be more successfully American than Arthur.

The collision of reality and projection causes Arthur to bungle his rehearsed introduction. "I'm Art but you can call me Arthur."

With all the small talk and air kissing, no one seems to notice. Elizabeth, the host, bids them sit.

Because he's a big man — with a great round head like a finial — the loveseat groans and a gust of air rises in a column of heat from beneath his shirt. The patio on which they sit is surrounded by a screen of ailing rhododendrons. Tall glass apartment buildings — criminally tenanted high rises Arthurs calls them — loom above the courtyard so that the air is filled with shifting

gray shadows and the light has a hooded murky quality. Tilting his head back, the sky seems small and very far away.

Kwoo sits forward and says, in a voice that is surprisingly warm and open, "You know, I can't tell you how excited I was when Elizabeth told me you were interested in a special needs child."

The relief is so powerfully sweet Arthur forgets himself, "Yes! I hear you have our little girl."

Immediately Elizabeth jumps in. "That isn't what Daniel meant. We don't want to jump to conclusions. This is a long complicated process." The edges of her nostrils flare.

Ruth stiffens. Somehow Arthur maintains a poker face even as the tips of his ears burst into flames.

He had, at one time, liked Elizabeth. He'd even felt sorry for her. Homely, she compensated by adopting a kind of theatrical Mother Superior attitude. He overlooked the chandelier earrings, the horse blanket skirts, the Hermes scarves covering an age ravaged neck when she seemed to be on their side. Today, he senses she is the company's girl and sitting across from him she drums her fingers ominously on the thick manila folder perched on her lap. It is their invasively gathered dossier. And what Arthur fears more than anything is that it should slip and fall spilling its contents upon the ground.

"I'm not going to lie," Ruth had said during one of their arguments.

"No one is asking you to," Arthur had replied.

Now Ruth comes to the rescue, admitting with a little gust of air, how nervous they both are, and it's enough to remind Arthur of his great good fortune. She is his Mizrahi jewel. Beautiful always, but particularly in moments of vulnerability where her olive skin glows and her face, all angles and sharp features, calls up princesses of Central Asia or the Steppes.

Kwoo acknowledges her excuse. "I know," he says, "but it's always better to meet in person. Since I had to be here for an orientation, and you two are being fast-tracked, I thought it would be a great opportunity to get to know each other." He hesitates before saying, "I understand you went through IVF?"

Arthur shoots a glance at Ruth. Because of her he understands what has just transpired. If he has learned anything since they decided to have a child, it is that all aspects of conception, adoption and parenting are saturated with folklore. Superstition and myth swirl around in the background of every decision. One says that

if you are unable to conceive, try adopting because it reduces the pressure — and there is so much pressure — making it more likely you'll become pregnant. Knowing this, Twitchell Loomis insists, if you want their children, you must cease and desist all biological efforts to conceive.

Sadly, it's not an issue for Arthur and Ruth. They've already shot their wad — four treatments, fallopian timed sex, blastocysts, ultrasounds (Arthur likened it to some insanely expensive space program complete with the lunar docking of the eggs) — and they had emerged barren, humble and scarred and hardly ready for a new set of demands. Worse, in the wake of the failure, Ruth, for the first time in her life, had plunged into a deep depression that left her sleepless for months, ghosting around the apartment in a nightgown, unable to work, to eat, to walk the dog. Her depression was contagious, because Arthur, reduced to a powerless observer, thought he had failed the marriage. It took months to persuade Ruth to seek help. When she did, a mild anti-depressant was prescribed, a fact buried in the dossier.

Arthur turns to Ruth as she says, "Every woman thinks she'll have a baby." Her hand flutters over her womb. "It was a dark time when we realized it wasn't happening for us. For a long time we weren't ready to adopt." She stops speaking, leans forward and when she speaks again her voice is low and thick. "You aren't sure what you think. Part of you feels as if you're being disloyal to the baby you lost. Part feels unworthy."

As she is talking she seems to be gazing inward, but then her tone begins to shift. "I have been lucky," she says. "I have a good husband, I'm healthy, my practice is going well and I've been brought up to believe that if you've been fortunate, you should give back. Arthur and I talked about it, whatever the guiding principle of the universe is, we want to give our love to those who need it most."

Elizabeth and Kwoo exchange a look that Arthur can't decipher.

"Frankly, Ruth," Elizabeth says, "I'm relieved to hear you say that. If you hadn't been so honest, we'd have wondered had you guys really thought this through."

Kwoo nods. "It's funny, but in Korea they often want younger couples. But in my experience, when we're dealing with special needs, you want couples who are more mature, who've had more experience."

Kwoo, Arthur realizes, is talking about the clock. He's using the coded language of social services but referencing the almighty clock. Adoption, Arthur has painfully learned, is ruled, as are all things, by the clock. He had been oblivious sitting out there in the audience at the first orientation, his head sticking up well above the crowd, an easy target. Then Elizabeth, from the pulpit, had announced in a high fluffy voice that in virtually every single country around the world a couple's age couldn't average more than forty-six. At first this went right by him. But then, laboring, he had done the math and realized that only because Ruth was so much younger were they even in the running. And that this was their last year and no sooner had this fact taken up residence in his chest than his face began to beat with heated shame, discoloring so conspicuously that Elizabeth's gaze found him. Maybe he imagined it but he thought he heard younger couples around him snickering. What could he do but sit there helplessly while Elizabeth prattled on about exceptions and waivers and special circumstances?

Later, in the safety of their living room, he exploded. "You know those kids in Africa, Ruth? The flyblown ones sprawled in the dust clutching their puffed-up bellies? Guess what? Turns out they'd rather die a miserable death than have some old fart like me be their father!"

Ruth's elbow digs into his side. Kwoo's been talking and he hasn't heard a thing.

"What?"

"I was saying, Arthur, we haven't heard much from you. What was your reaction to this idea of a special needs baby?"

Despite all their preparation, Arthur suddenly finds himself speechless. "You know," he stalls, "I think Ruth said it best. I mean, call me old fashioned, but really, when you think of it, aren't all children special?" Out of the corner of his eye he watches Ruth's knee begin to vibrate. "Now, of course," he hurries to say, "my parents never used *that* word. We wouldn't say *special*; in those days, you were *different*, which, let's face it, is a euphemism for the fact that you have something wrong with you. Me? I was artistic, a poor student. All the other kids would be reading and writing, I'd be doodling. They sent me to a special school for doodlers, I guess. Which is to say, when you come right down to it, we're all special in our own way and therefore we need, every one of us, to appreciate people's unique qualities." He can feel himself deflating, like a tire that's been slashed.

Kwoo frowns and Elizabeth is giving Ruth a skeptical look. Seeming to shrug it off, Kwoo changes the subject asking how they met. Ruth launches into how she saw Arthur's work at the 2nd Avenue Art Fair. As a couple, it's a story they're used to telling. In fact, it's such a well-worn groove that there is a place where Arthur usually steps in to get a laugh, saying that it was only when Ruth appeared a second time without her husband that he allowed himself to hope. Today, however, he remains silent when Ruth pauses. Fresh off his disappointing commentary, he's isn't ready to risk screwing up again. Besides, she's making the right impression, maybe he should hang back, confine himself complaisancy.

"When you write your application, make sure you include that kind of thing," Kwoo says.

Arthur hears Ruth gasp. "Wait!" she says. "What do you mean? We *already* filed our application!" She's pointing to the dossier. It's as though the conversation has fallen through a trap-door. With the effort that went into assembling the dossier, it's unimaginable they should have to go through *that* again.

Elizabeth holds up her hands, addressing Kwoo. "They did file an application for the Ecuadorean program."

Kwoo wants to know whatever happened with the Ecuadoreans.

It was late the night Elizabeth called. Ruth shouted for Arthur to pick put the extension. Ruth's tone indicating something was wrong.

"Ecuador is dead," Elizabeth was saying. "Political machinations, nothing can be done."

Arthur remembers putting the phone down, curling up on the bed. The news hit him harder than expected. Gradually he'd come to accept the idea of an Ecuadorean child. He'd even begun daydreaming about the boy — it was always a boy. They'd go to the park when the weather turned, Arthur batting fungo, the kid shagging grounders.

After the call ended Ruth found him in the bedroom. He was staring out at the East River. "I didn't hear you hang up," she said, sitting next to him. She took his hand. "Elizabeth said if we were interested in a special needs child, she could fast track us with the Koreans."

Arthur heard the need in her voice. But an Ecuadorean kid could still be mistaken for your own. How could he tell her about hoping people might think the child was his biologically?

"They'd waive the age requirement," Ruth said. "They have a little girl, Arthur."

Sitting in the dark he couldn't find the words. She was asking him to do this for her. Later, he thought, there would be time for his misgivings.

Elizabeth finishes giving Kwoo the Ecuadorean low down. He nods and turns back to Ruth and Arthur. "Okay," he says. "Sounds like it's time for my little talk about Koreans. I assume you've already heard."

They have. In adoption circles, the Koreans are an urban legend. A woman at the dog run had said it was like being worked over by homicide detectives, starting with the presumption of guilt. No other country has both mental and physical health benchmarks. There are couples, they learned, on something called the "South Korean Beach Diet," trying to get their weight down so they could meet the requirements.

They'd fought over divulging Ruth's breakdown.

"I'm not going to lie," Ruth had said.

"Who said anything about lying?" Arthur said. "It's in the application."

"That's enough. Everybody's been depressed at one time or another."

But now watching Kwoo finesse it, Arthur has to give the Korean credit. Obviously, he's given this speech before, but he stays connected to the words, talking candidly mixing pride and embarrassment.

"We actually don't get to make many decisions, so yes, we tend to want to drill down," he says before turning to Elizabeth. Even without looking Arthur can tell how tense Ruth has become. If there is to be a point where Kwoo will ask about their health this would be it, but instead, he surprises Arthur by asking about their finances. Kwoo smiles sheepishly, "Special needs can require resources."

When Arthur glances at Ruth he can see she's been thinking the same thing. The worst is over.

"Daniel," Ruth says, "as Elizabeth might have told you, I have my own legal practice. I specialize in financial planning for families."

Elizabeth raps the dossier with a fingernail. "I know, Ruth, but they're always concerns with a single income family." Maybe it's unintentional but she glances at Arthur. In the exchange, a look that lasts less than a quarter of a second, Arthur knows she's

figured out that the galleries have stopped calling, that the invitations to group shows have dried up, that he's no longer asked to donate to school auctions nor requested to illustrate the local newsletter. Everything's there: every financial, academic, medical, historical record; they've even got letters and testimonials from family members, neighbors, first spouses and one of Arthur's old girlfriends. But Arthur is too late, just as he rouses himself to protest, Kwoo has a call coming in. At first Kwoo hopes not to avoid it, but when he glances at the screen, he's up like a shot.

"I'm sorry," he says, "but I *have* to answer this." Stepping away, Arthur hears him switch to Korean.

"I don't know how much detail to go into," Ruth whispers to Elizabeth.

"You're doing fine," Elizabeth says. "Just be yourself." Then Kwoo signals for Elizabeth. Now it's time for Arthur to whisper.

"Did you hear what she said? Single income!"

"Don't!"

"My salary is . . ."

". . . It's not important. *Lissen* to me," she hisses, "you *have* to sound like you mean it. You can't just mouth the words."

"Okay. I blew it. I'm sorry. But you wanted to take the lead." She rolls her eyes. "You can't take your ball and go home. We're a couple." She gives him the look, then shushes him when Elizabeth and Kwoo return.

"Again my apologies," Kwoo says.

"Was it about the little girl?" Ruth asks.

"Another case," he assures her, but when he and Elizabeth settle in, something has changed and suddenly Kwoo looks solemn. "The little girl we have in mind, we think she suffers from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome."

Arthur isn't quite sure what this means, but next to him Ruth quietly moans.

"If you're familiar with FAS," Kwoo continues, "it's unpredictable. Some children exhibit no symptoms, but for others, there can be years of costly care. For parents it can be draining both financially and emotionally. It can put enormous stress on a marriage."

Even while Elizabeth is saying that Twitchell Loomis would make counselors available, Arthur feels something gathering in the pit of his stomach. They had talked for hours about what might happen during this meeting. They had speculated. They had role-played how to handle different situations. Ruth prepared as

if for trial and Arthur had thought she was overdoing it. But now he sees why the meeting had to be in person; he understands her paranoia. They needed to see how Ruth and he would react. It's a double bind. If you question the enormity, if you let on how intimidated you are, how it ruins your fantasies of happy smiling babies, obviously you aren't up for the challenge and they cut you loose. But if you're too confident, they'll say you aren't committed because anyone in their right might would be scared. His eyes are stinging, his body temperature keeps fluctuating, while he wills himself to appear cool and calm.

Ruth grabs his hand and what surprises him is how fierce her grip is. "Daniel," he hears her say, "my husband and I would love that baby. We know you're talking about more than just emotional resources. My practice is thriving and better still, we both work from home so we could devote ourselves to her care."

"That's more than most families," Arthur interjects.

Ruth ignores him, beginning to describe their support network, how they have such an extraordinary community of friends and family. Arthur scans their faces. Something's wrong. He senses their earlier openness has vanished. Ruth has gone on to tell them how Arthur plays a big part in the east side art's community, how he's respected, how he did this famous mural on a handball court that is practically a landmark. Unable to hear himself praised, he leans his head back gazing up at the apartment buildings. Twenty floors up he sees light flash off a window. Is it an omen or something like smoke signal, someone warning him to get out of there? What do they see from up there? Some oversized guy slouched in a chair? This big galumph as his father would say? He reaches back to pinch his neck, spreads his palm bringing it forward to rub the seed hair scattered across his scalp. He does this a couple of times, back and forth, because it's comforting.

It isn't something he planned and he doesn't really have an intention, only he can't remain silent. Maybe it's because Ruth looks so miserable.

"You know," he says too loudly at first, "this is all beginning to sound familiar. Like something is missing. Something is not being said that needs to be."

He feels Ruth's hand on his arm but shakes it off.

"You know what it is?" he says as if the revelation has just come to him. "Nobody is talking about the whole child. Like the whole deal. We're talking about parts but we're leaving out the most important thing of all, which is the spirit. Do I mean spiritu-

al? No, not in the new age sense. That's not it."

He pauses to make eye contact. Elizabeth is frowning so he decides to concentrate on Kwoo who will make the decision anyway. The hell with Elizabeth.

"See, Daniel. I'm an artist and like I said, we see things a little differently. Now that doesn't mean I hate rich people. I don't. But I think the life they lead, many of them anyway, is pretty limited. And let's be honest, do you really think one of those guys from Goldman or Lazard Frere, if they even exist anymore, is going to have time to devote to that little girl? No, they're not. What they will have is money for the best specialists. Fair enough, except the specialist doesn't raise the kid. You know where I'm coming from, there's no replacement for a parent's love. It's the real deal, as they say."

"I don't know if you know this, Daniel, but I teach Life Drawing at Pratt and what I tell my students is don't be fooled by the skin, you have to draw what's underneath. Start with the bones. Be guided by what is happening at a deeper level. And that is what you want, isn't it? People who look for the essence, people who look for the spirit, the animating spark, if you will, that's often hidden from view. We artists are childlike. Everybody else is going around trying to make money, but we're like these shamans looking for the sacred. It's like a mission. Hey everybody," he says like it's a wake-up call, "where's that sense of wonder! Who else would be more suited to bring up a kid?"

He stops as if expecting someone to respond, but when no one does — Kwoo continues to stare at him impassively — he pushes on.

"So, you gotta have money. I get that. But one of the problems we face right now is that we focus on nothing but. We turn everything into a commodity. Stuff we can trade in. Kids aren't products, they're kids."

Elizabeth cuts in. "We *don't* treat kids like commodities."

"I didn't mean to imply *you* did, just that it's done. Look, you guys do great work. If anything you should be proud, finding parents for a sick kid. Who does that? I'm just trying to remind us what can get lost in the shuffle, that each of us is special and unique and human. And I promise you there is no one out there, I don't care who, that will approach raising a child with as much reverence and humility. In short, we will do a great job with your little girl."

Kwoo shakes his head. "Thank you," he says. "That was very eloquent."

Arthur's relieved. Later, they will think about what he's said and decide he's right.

There is a long awkward pause until Ruth asks, "Can you tell us anything more about the little girl?"
For the first time, Kwoo seems uncomfortable. He twists around to collect his suit jacket. Elizabeth hoists the dossier, stands, fusses her skirt.

"We have her in a good facility," Kwoo says, "outside a city called Busan. Her height and weight are where they need to be. She's in good hands." They've begun moving towards the door.

"What about her name? Can you tell us her name?" Ruth asks.

Elizabeth lays a hand on Ruth's sleeve. "She's called Hwa Young."

"What a lovely name."

"It means eternal beauty," Elizabeth says.

"When do you go back? "Arthur asks Kwoo.

And then they are in the corridor and Kwoo says something that Arthur doesn't quite catch and Elizabeth is telling Ruth she'll be in touch. Arthur feels Kwoo shaking his hand.

It's colder outside when they step onto the sidewalk. Couples still linger in small groups outside the entrance. Arthur reaches for Ruth's arm but she drifts away.

She stares up at him as if years have passed and they're strangers. "When were you going to tell me?"

Charles Hughes

For My Sons, Both Now In Their Thirties

Let's go out on the lake the way we used to.
Let's load the boat and head for Steamboat Bay.
We'll drift across the water in the breeze,
Casting our Beetle Spins, trying for bass.
Remember that sunny late afternoon
I had a muskie strike? The little island,
Serene and ageless, gliding past, submerged
Except for rocks the gulls would gather on;
I'd just replaced my lure with something larger —
Mepps number three, white bucktail — when he hit
And must have swirled and dived.
My reel quit reeling.
At first, I thought I'd snagged a sunken branch.
You were so young, still using worms and bobbers;
You didn't seem to notice right away.
Then came his jump, more like a missile launch,
Furiously crashing through the water's surface.
I never got him closer to the boat.
He swam — unslowed, unturned by me — toward shore,
Towing our boat and us along until
He snapped the line.
I dream about that fish,
Not that I think the dream is about that fish
Or coveting a future trophy catch.
Some dreams sculpt memories in high relief —
In this case, what I lost and all I've kept.

Richard Jarrette

from **It Is Never Finished**

> *what do you remember as you ride your one note*
> *on its dark sunbeam out into the daylight*
> — W.S. Merwin

Crawling Away From Home In My Diaper At Ten Months
I Was Found On A Street In Los Angeles By A Truck Driver
Who Began Knocking On Doors

A living weathercock crow studies the crossroads —
people heading in directions laid out for them.

Magnolia blossoms show the sky what they've made of root waters.

Mourning doves sparrows at their business wheeling
hawks and vultures test the borders of heaven.

I've been on the way to this flowering acacia all my life
hanging on to the reins of a cabbage butterfly.

(W.S. Merwin, "The Scarab Questions")

Feeling That My Rage Is Too Complicated I Visit Mei Yao-Ch'en Hoping to Pick Through the Artless Simplicity Of His Mind To Find The Profound Spiritual Insight He's Known For

He's annoyed with the shit-maggot stuffed crows
crying omens to the west wind from his treetops.

Calls me a broken-legged goose a sitting duck says
it's one thing to put your war weapons down another

to savor white garlic pan-fried in dew — *Look it's just*
a tired horse that knows his way home in the dark.

(Mei Yao-Ch'en, "8th Month, 9th Sun: Getting Up In The Morning, I Go Out To The Latrine And Find Crows Feeding On Maggots There" and "Farmers," translated by David Hinton)

105 Degrees Already This Morning I'm Startled
By A Phainopepla Never Seen This Far North
And Wonder Why I'm Still Alive

One bird or trillions more
I feel the reach of my life in them.

Some shoot into the skew-jawed barn
through lit dust to shadows.

By the time I was eight years old
I had a ground nest in Cats' Forest —

dropped out of a window to sleep there
no one ever knew no one to tell.

Something like an emperor penguin
guarding the egg on his feet.

Richard Jarrette

Old Friends Say They Would Stop And Visit But the Appointment The Meeting The Wife

You've got a foot in the land
of the dead and you're ghosting.

Invitations ceased long ago
people you've uplifted turn away.

So what do you do when you want
nothing from this human world?

Undertones of desire in this dear
asking an indifferent truth.

No matter the season I seem to
write nothing but autumn songs.

(Po Chü-I, "Off-Hand Chant," translated by David Hinton)

A Few Months After Finding My Father Dead At Home Edmund Kara Gives Me Lessons In Theology While Carving The Phoenix For The Nepenthe Courtyard In Big Sur

The master said he's all about hair and folding waves of cloth let
a shock-mute boy drift near who finally said the block the unfinished

hand of the outstretched left arm of Moses the right holding tablets the
ten commandments would be *a damning fist — No*, he said, *a blessing palm*

turned to the Phoenix with mallet and chisel to bite into ancient water
cells inside her redwood burl that spat at him — *She's mocking me.*

Studying Clouds Mixed With The Smoke Of Another Fifty Homes Burning In Fires South Of Here

Ravaged long ago my heart can still open
a little and sorrows all over the sky.

Some mosquitos fed on my blood last night
but it's not in my heart to blame them.

A Fifty Dollar Bill Flutters Out Of A Book I think Has The Poem In It I'm Looking For and Letters From William Stafford Robert Aitken And Baba Ram Dass

I made the monk's vow of poetry —
penniless anonymity.

Besides
money's had a phobia about me from the beginning.

Four or five people seem to enjoy my company
and a scrub jay who perches on the patio
chair afternoons.

My barista doesn't charge me.

Was it seven or eight dragonflies
on my son's shoulders that time he sunned himself
on a rock in the creek?

Ram Dass says that a particularly
contemplative one will say hello for him.

I don't drink much anymore — it's no painkiller.
I wash my face in crows.

I'll trade a book for a bottle of wine.

Stafford says he'll try all the harder.
Grandmotherly Aitken asks —

Do you have a teacher?

Richard Jarrette

After Reading Yang Wan-li's line
suddenly he's a lone goose balanced on a bent reed

A crow roots in the flower box with his beak
bees express sincere interest in my right ear —

maybe the tinnitus so loud they believe that's
a lush summer meadow in there singing.

I thought I'd row out on a lake of melancholy
but I always hear my daughter asking about

that melon collie howling in the graveyard
and why it made Huck and Tom so nervous.

The demon drilling like a devil in my spine
clocks out — the jay could find an emerald ring.

(Yang Wan-li, "Crossing Open-Anew Lake," translated by David Hinton)

To The Woman Who Made A Wide Detour To Avoid Me Just The Two Of Us Walking On Pfeiffer Beach Big Sur

Storm clouds opened one blue eye looking
at a lake of light on the charcoal grey sea.

Sea ducks struggled under monster waves
carving the coast — years later I realized

the birds fed on food stirred up by Aleutian
storms twenty four hundred miles northwest.

Not hard to imagine why you would avoid
a lone man so far off the highway in winter.

Richard Jarrette

After Idling On My Porch For Awhile Pondering Lines Of Tu Fu I Open A Used Copy Of Federico García Lorca Translations By Sarah Arvio

Tu Fu asks

How many times in one man's life
can he listen to heaven's music?

Neither sad nor happy the moon
makes its simple journey.

The bright stars and planets —
it all seems like a gesture to keep up.

I won't be late.

Then come dreams of forgetting
taking the fall
enemies.

In the morning
a yellow and black oriole in the pink myrtle
and bees.

Evils of the world draw their rasps.

I open a book —

Wind shapes the dust
into silver prows

underlined by someone else.

(Tu Fu, "Song For A Young General," translated by Sam Hamill; Federico García Lorca, "Bells for the Dead," translated by Sarah Arvio)

I Turn To My Grandmother's Things For Succor

My master said

On the last day of the world
I would want to plant a tree

and the roots touch deep water
the dead

leaves in the clouds.

And what would you do?
he asked.

Plant my grandmother I said
my mother's mother

though my youngest son touching
the casket said

She's with the smooth god.

I keep her things by my bed — her #12
thimble, Ibis scissors,

bone crochet hooks from before
the war

the Civil War —

when I wake in the dark hours
I touch them

secure as a tree
in your garden?

(W.S. Merwin, "Place")

Richard Jarrette

Mad Thug President Seeks To Roll Back Clean Emission Rules Even Against Industry Advice As Battle With Violent Thoughts Lurches On

A salmon-breasted hummingbird locks eyes
with Stevie-the-Calico-Kitten transfixed.

Smokey-the-Cat drifts by to confer nose to nose —
they settle on lying down on a cool path stone.

The sun takes its startling heat over rooftops
and then behind the withered western hills.

Timothy Murphy

Envoi

Steve told his wife "I think Tim's going to die,"
ten years ago last fall,
but answering a call
from the Spirit I staged another try,
a last grasp for the sky,
and so ensued a decade, far my best,
but now I must endure a cruel test

which I shall fail because my fate is sealed.
So here's my gratitude
for ten years' latitude
in which my crippled soul was slowly healed,
my wounds annealed
by mercies far beyond selfish intent.
Let this be my Last Will and Testament.

The Sentence

Stage IV cancer? Think of it as Cat V,
the wind howling one hundred eighty knots,
raking beloved islands, casting yachts
into the trees, the handful left alive.
This is the final storm that I must weather.
Into a palm trunk drill me like a feather.

After a hurricane islands recover,
approaching once again their earthly heaven.
I'm facing the great change at sixty-seven,
reuniting with Alan, long my lover,
taken from me nearly eight years ago,
leaving me to blizzards and blowing snow,

my last two years infinitely my best,
readying one servant for his long rest.

Return to the Olson Farm

Old AA slogan, "One day at a time,"
foot in front of another plodding on,
grateful each day to glimpse another dawn,
and on my finer days meter and rhyme
conjoin to do what Tim has done before,
to probe deeply capacious memories,
to hunt once more these rows of leafless trees
where an Alberta Clipper comes to roar
and rarely does a circling eagle soar.

Hard to believe this all comes to a close,
but I thought I'd be dead at twenty-five,
and I am amazed, finding me still alive,
the ghost of Feeney weaving through these rows
of ashes where last night's new snow drift blows.

Hopes for September

Stevie and I have made a plan for fall.
        We shall take little Pat
        sporting his blaze orange hat
to Section Seventeen, and there my tall

Norwegian friend will crush the birds I miss.
        Chucky and little Jet,
        best friends the day they met,
will flush our pheasants in their frenzied bliss.

First I must fix this hip that's killing me.
        Lesions on throat and spine
        must go, and a barbed tine
on Satan's fork must fling one victim free.

St. Jude, we who are hopeless call on thee.
Patron of lost causes, pray for me.

The Four H's Again

for Steve Bodio

Last night I dreamed I flew an eagle-owl,
her wing span just six feet,
the talons of her feet
clutching my fist, horned ears above her cowl.

We hunted high, hard scrabble Kazakhstan,
my barrel-chested horse
scrambling aloft in force
for wolf, the war bird's muffled glide our plan.

The peaks above still buried deep in snow,
we rode on broken ground,
hunter, *hawk*, *horse and hound*
as sheep and goats lay grazing far below.

A wolf flushed far under a *bergshrund's* rift.
Launched, and the stealthy strike was blinding swift.

Farm Boy

Places I'll never see? The list is long,
beginning with Jerusalem and Rome.
My grounding on the prairie was too strong,
too firmly fastened to our Beardon loam.
This challenging but goodly place to farm
where seven decades I have struggled now,
where long I skated close to grievous harm,
farrowed many a Large White Landrace sow,
rooted me to the windsweep of the Plains,
the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,
prey to the randomness of patchy rains,
never foreseeing how the balance tips,
a small Antaeus standing on his land
whose gravity I've grown to understand.

Next Year Jerusalem

It is the stabs of pain that wake me up,
my shoulder or right hip.
I take my drugs and slip
a snack of milk bone to my drowsy pup.

Sometimes I pray and just go back to sleep.
More often though I work,
delving the rhymes that lurk
in half-remembered dreams that run so deep.

Take pity on your lowly servant, Lord,
let this cup pass from me.
Though death will cut me free
from pain, my hand is clinging to a cord.

I've not yet sailed the Sea of Galilee
or climbed the cruel hill of Calvary.

Montane View

At every visit from a loving friend
"How many times will I see him again,"
I ask, "before my end?"
I've not been truly close to many men,

too many of those few are long since gone.
Now it becomes my time to follow them,
twig from the great tree sawn,
a sprig of scion wood, a slender stem.

Soon I shall leave behind my wealth, my verse,
sonnets drawn from the Rockies' snowy slopes
where I climbed to rehearse
my distant death, terminus of my hopes,

the earthly ones. We are immortal too,
and heaven surely dwarfs a montane view.

Terese Coe

In Memoriam, Timothy Murphy

1.

Porticoes

from the French of Pierre de Ronsard

I long to build you an ode
with lines recalling those
of your garlanded chateaux
whose wrought iron gates enclose
high marble pillars in rows
and gold-capped porticoes.

Je te veil bastir une ode
La maçonnant à la mode
De tes palais honnorés,
Qui volontiers ont l'entrée
De grands marbres acoustrée
Et de haus piliers dorés.

2.

Courage

from the French of Pierre de Ronsard

My soul, are you insensate, slack, alone?
The trumpet sounds, now grab your bag and pound
the same abandoned pathway Jesus found
when wet with blood, he knew us as his own.

The path is mean, a narrow bounded track —
few have traced its length of matted nettle.
The prickly thistle waits to try your mettle —
take courage on the way, and don't turn back.

When once you set your hand to what's undone
and guide the plow in furrows through the field,
do all you can, or leave it unbegun.
The year will turn, and fallow turn to yield.
To work, then drop the plow for something higher —
who quits his trade may not be worth the hire.

Quoy mon ame, dors tu engourdie en ta masse?
La trompette a sonné, serre bagage, et va
Le chemin deserté que Jesuchrist trouva,
Quand tout mouillé de sang racheta nostre race.

C'est un chemin facheux borné de peu d'espace,
Tracé de peu de gens que la ronce pava,
Où le chardon poignant ses testes esleva,
Pren courage pourtant, et ne quitte la place.

N'appose point la main à la mansine, après
Pour ficher ta charue au milieu des guerets,
Retournant coup sur coup en arriere ta vüe:
Il ne faut commencer, ou du tout s'emploier,
Il ne faut point mener, puis laisser la charue.
Qui laisse son mestier, n'est digne du loier.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Flannery & Cal, Take II

It is mighty unseemly of you to enshrine me in your memory falling up the steps with a bottle of gin. I recollect the incident. It was not gin but rum (unopened) and the steps were slick . . . In our house the liquor is kept in the bathroom closet between the Drano and the plunger, and you don't get any unless you are about dead. The last time I had any was when I dropped the side of the chicken brooder on my foot and broke my toe.
— Flannery O'Connor, Letter to Robert Lowell, December 25, 1958, The Habit of Being

Well hack my hands off and call me stumpy
that this is your fondest memory
of you and me. All our literary
talk, thoughts we shared on faith and the saintly
lives we're meant to lead but don't. We
were birds of a feather in every-
thing but drink, and when I tried to be
good at that I stumbled, my folly
clear as the rum in the bottle I broke. You see
me as a game girl, so differently
from how I see myself, the lonely
child in any crowd, aloof and faintly
desperate for the friend you'd turn out to be.
I don't half mind it's liquor made you love me.

Flannery Among the Literati

"Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it."
That was all the defense I was capable of but I realize now that this is all I will ever be able to say about it [the Eucharist] . . . It is the center of existence for me; all the rest of life is expendable.
— Flannery O'Connor on her evening at Mary McCarthy's dinner party,
December 16, 1955, The Habit of Being

I'm sure I shocked them, dumb as I was
all night, listening to the smart folks talk.
A country and a Catholic girl, I'd come
to the Big City to learn to write,
not to lose the only faith I'd known
and could not live without. As if God was
an invention of their lickety-split minds.
Our hostess was smug, Cal high as a kite,
one guest so drunk he could barely walk.
I just waited them out, bided my time
hoping to get through dessert and then run
back to my flat and my book, my lone-
some life, full up with writing and Christ.
No damn symbol would ever suffice.

Flannery Gets a Present

"I had a letter from Elizabeth Bishop . . . saying that she was sending me a present . . . a crucifix, she said, in a bottle. It's not a crucifix at all, she just don't know what a crucifix is. It is an altar with a Bible, chalice, and two fat candles on it, a cross above this with a ladder and the instruments of the crucifixion hung on it, and on top of the cross a rooster. Anyway, it's very much to my taste." — Flannery O'Connor

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts,
the words out of my mouth before
I knew it. She took me by surprise.
Not just a crucifix,
the whole damn liturgy and more,
the tale of how Christ lives and dies
seen through a simple craftsman's eyes.
His art so much richer than mine,
faith made flesh in wood and paper
while mine hides dumb in strokes of ink,
a distant and a sorry savior
fit for only those who think.
The two faux candles fairly shone.
The mercy of that bird alone.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

Flannery's Folly

"I certainly am glad you like the stories because now I feel it's not bad I like them so much. The truth is I like them better than anybody and I read them over and over and laugh and laugh, then get embarrassed when I remember I was the one wrote them."
— Flannery O'Connor, Letter to Robie Macauley, May 18, 1955,
The Habit of Being

Once or twice I've been caught in the act,
shoulders shaking, mid-guffaw, cack-
ling like a prize chicken pecking at her
wayward brood, catching her hatchlings on the run.
Call it an occupational hazard,
having a taste for the wit I bring to
the world. I've long been fond of fools
and freaks in part because I am one.
I get to spend my days among my kind,
watch them fail spectacularly
at the business of being human and good.
We share a common destiny.
Sometimes I laugh till I nearly pee.
I don't know who's funnier, them or me.

Flannery Gives Writing Advice

Get that plot business out of your head and start simply with a character or anything that you can make come alive. When you have a character he will create his own situation and his situation will suggest some kind of resolution as you get into it. Wouldn't it be better for you to discover a meaning in what you write than to impose one? Nothing you write will lack meaning because the meaning is in you.
— *Flannery O'Connor*, *December 11*, *1956*, The Habit of Being

Start with a person, one that you've met.
That meeting can be in the mirror.
Give her a problem, an eye that don't work,
a dread disease, a temper that makes her mean.
Surround her with fools. Though she be an idiot,
it's a truth the fools much teach her to learn.
Strand her some place she doesn't deserve
to be, where she lords her superior
mind over hills and sunsets shaped by God.
Let her be wacky, but not so odd
the reader can't see himself in her
mismatched eyes, her heart that's good but flawed.
Don't be picky. Love the one who comes your way.
Show mercy. You might be her someday.

Flannery & Poe

I read the best Southern writers . . . read the Russians . . . have learned something from Hawthorne, Flaubert, Balzac and something from Kafka . . . I have read almost all of Henry James . . . But always the largest thing that looms up is The Humerous Tales of Edgar Allan Poe. I am sure he wrote them all while drunk too.
— *Flannery O'Connor, August 28, 1955,* The Habit of Being

My favorite one about the man too vain
to wear his glasses and married his granny
by mistake. That was good fiction to my
young mind. In what world other than Poe's
would the madmen take over and run
the asylum more sanely than the sane?
Misery that he was, he had an eye
for the ridiculous which suited me
just fine. We both shared a good nose
for the macabre which odors all our days.
I come not to bury but to praise
his dark art, this literary black rose
who perfumes my work with his strange scent
teaching me his sober merriment.

Flannery in Dixie

We have been undergoing big doings here on account of Secession was passed in M'ville 100 years ago. A pageant for 3 days and a big parade in 20 degree weather with young ladies on floats freezing in their drafty dresses, etc, etc. Long live the Wah Between the States.
— Flannery O'Connor

I'm not sure why we love that war,
but all my Southern brethren do.
Any excuse to dig out the musket,
the saber, the dinged-up canteen,
and bear them like the soldiers they aren't
but wish they'd been. Our writers
can't stop telling tales about those days
of guts and glory, the sundry ways
the men in gray outbraved the boys in blue.
They're more adept at maudlin scenes
of Southern belles and beaux than they are
at talking truth, the awful waste of war,
the tragic air of loss we live and breathe,
the lies we died for and still believe.

John Poch

Don't Mess

This Texas woman is a threat . . . or fun,
her little t-shirt tempting: COME AND TAKE IT.
The image of a cannon helps to make it,
black star between her breasts, her hair undone.
But is she packing heat, somewhere a gun?
Does she mean to mock you, make you see her naked?
She looks you in the eye and wouldn't fake it.
Her secret weapon isn't set to stun.

The both of you are married, so forsake it —
this independence — pluck out your eye and run,
remember Alamos or wars you've won.
The light that blinds undresses everyone.
Leave Texas lying; one misstep can wake it.
The diamond warns: you better (she can) shake it.

In Corpus Christi

The church has a different take
on the body
than the rest of the world.

And the gulf fixed between
the two is unbreachable,
though we try like lovers.

In the morning the children cry out
in mostly pleasure along
the miles-long beach,

interrupting love and rest.
And the rest is love
and relentless sun.

Beneath this beach umbrella,
in my head I'm making a map
of the month of June.

Kids out of school
and wild, dig the legend,
and X marks the spot.

By three, leisure's lethargy
spills rainbows like bilge water
from an aircraft carrier.

The trudge up to the condo
is a journey to a nap
and strange waking to drinks.

Evening along the pier and
the sun goes down while the moon
comes up. Gold and silver.

Few who built these miles of sea wall
ever measured moonlight.
And few measure it now,

though I get a little romantic
and also hope for a small hurricane
against the piles of seaweed

David Rock

Shooting Lesson
(ars poetica)

1. *Concentrate* on the front sight, don't *focus* on it.

2. The target should be blurry.

3. Don't compromise your peripheral vision —
   if something's out there, you want to see it coming.

4. Squint with your weak eye to eliminate the redundant image.

5. Stance is important; keep your feet on the ground.

6. To get to a good place you've got to drive in ruts.

7. Go easy on the crows.

8. Always show the new piece to your friends —
   the more sets of fingerprints on it the better.

9. Let the report surprise you. It's like Zen:
   the sound of one hand clapping.

10. You have the right to remain silent.

Robert B. Shaw

Postal Pieces

Stationery

How facilely the last of any band,
whether it's a Mohican or an ocher
maple leaf losing its grip on a twig,
taps a vein of spurious poignancy.
Although the only thing remarkable
in such outliers is their being extant,
they nudge us into sympathy: absurd.
Or so I say, annoyed to find myself
detained by a blank page of letter paper
carpeting a pasteboard box's bottom,
orphaned without a matching envelope.
Meant to be sent but clearly going nowhere,
it meets my eyes with its own eyeless gape.
Something is rivetingly cheerless here.
Ivory, deckle-edged, a bit austere,
it might have hosted a condolence note.
But now? It looks more like the cause of one:
impassively exhibiting its pallor,
laid out stationary in a box.

Envelopes

Idle when empty, when replete
they lend themselves to wanderlust,
shunting the freight that you entrust
from state to state, from street to street.

Keeping your tidings under wraps
until the designated slot
allows them entry — is there not
a quester's triumph here? Perhaps.

To send one trekking on its way,
unless you're partial to self-stick,
you need to give the flap a lick.
A smidgen of your DNA

rides shotgun with each billet-doux
(or with each check that pays a bill).
Not many think about this. Still,
to chauffeur round some bits of you

is something these do tidily.
You trust them, meanwhile, to confide
whatever else you placed inside
to no one but the addressee.

Addressed to him, addressed to her,
those lines might complicate a life.
Small wonder if a handy knife
should disembowel the messenger.

Hilary Sideris

Pane

I'm not myself when
I say *ciao bello*,

hello, goodbye, beau-
tiful — from medieval

Venetian *I'm your*
Slave — I serve pane

with every meal
in your language,

effuse as I never
do in mine.

Sack

Middle Dutch *sak*,
sakkos in Greek,

canvas, burlap,
Ziploc, Spanish wine,

loose gown, purse,
plunder, *saccheggiare* —

con te mi diverto un
sacco," says my *sposo*

with *sarcasmo*, then
falls asleep in the bean

bag chair — I have a sack
of fun with you, *amore*.

Hilary Sideris

Poor

This is not
your *bel paese*

where the dead
have earned

the rank of *povero*:
dad gave mom's

money to a church
she went to only

to appease him,
though she failed.

This is the country
where she's still

talking behind
his back, as if

death were just
a door he might

reopen out of
spite, take her

bottle to the sink
& pour.

Comma

Give us a break
from unsubtle

exclamations,
interrogatives:

Don't make me
hiss, *I'm not your*

ex! when you ask,
Can we talk?

Let us run on,
splice a story

together, more
and than *end*,

forego full
stop drama.

Hilary Sideris

Bank

In that frigid,
fluorescent-lit

office, conditioned
to the comfort of a thick-

necked, cuff-linked man
explaining in a wink

how my funds shrank —
the market goes up

& comes down — I think
what a lush green lawn

I spent my childhood
on, though when

I went back, it was
just a dusty lot.

Don Simonton

Explorers

We set out early that summer day in 1966, not because we were early risers, but because on the farm everybody got up early. Pickupdaddy rose before dawn to start a fire (even in summer), Pickupmama to start a skillet of biscuit. We would dress in front of that fire, even though we knew the morning chill would soon give way to the painful heat of a southern sun. Once dressed, we went out to the shelf on the back porch where were kept a bucket of water, a dip cup, and a tin bowl to wash up. Then, we had our biscuit, grabbed the lunch fixed for us — another biscuit with meat clamped inside — and headed out.

"Y'all be careful, that quicksand in that creek will swallow you whole," Pickupdaddy warned us in his gruff, unsympathetic voice. "And don't go no farther that the bridge." When we were past him and he couldn't see our faces, we smirked at one another.

We denizens of the fields headed down the wide back steps full of knotholes, around the back of the carhouse, across the patch where the jenny eyed us with suspicion (she must have known that soon she would again be hitched to a plow and Chess would shout "gee!" and "haw!" to guide that plow mule across the patch where peanuts and melons would grow, one for the blackbird one for the crow one for the nigger to chop and grow), grabbing apples off the June apple tree, out through the fence gap in the corner where the wire had pulled a little loose (so skinny we could shimmy through anything). Jimbo carried that stick worn smooth by water he had picked up the last time we were at the creek, Hank had the pocket knife he clicked open and closed, and Jack his BB gun. I, youngest and smaller and in awe of older brother and cousins who claimed to, seemed to, know everything, carried our meal bucket.

We headed across Mr. Priester's field, sometimes planted in cotton (we spent one afternoon once picking it until our hands were bloody and the old gyp only paid us two dollars), now in bahiagrass for his old cattle which always seemed to be skanky with the scours, towards the distant row of trees which marked the meanderings of the branch, that dry bed that had eaten a deep, narrow path through the fields, its row of lining trees a

telltale. It made its way across that back pasture down to where it met Sandy Creek (you shouldn't say "it flowed into," since it was more often dry than wet), the big creek that divided the western high-tone part of the county from the country folk and farmers to the east. We slid down its bank to the cool dark tunnel the overhanging trees made, like a secret highway leading beneath the few houses and shacks in that little crossroads community, under sagging creosote bridges and off to a mysterious world down the creek and across the countryside, as far away from adults and chores as pirates or spacemen, away from the sprawling old farmhouse and the forest of outbuildings of my grandfather's homeplace. We went out, we claimed, in search of a swimming hole.

The branch cut a world of its own — frogs, minnows, sometimes a snake, or the sharp little three-toed tracks of a coon in the sand, or the blunt two of deer. Puddles survived the dry summer heat behind root systems under the banks. We would pass evidence of human habitation up above, betrayed by the old Double Cola bottles and chicory coffee cans throwed down the banks overgrown with briers, the detritus of the vices of folks whose public lives were all we knew of. The branch had no source of water other than rain; in rainy season it was full and flowing, but in dry parts of the year, only pockets survived. We would sometimes follow a set of tracks until they disappeared up the bank or into the briers, then resume our trek down towards heavier water. Other times, we'd hear echoes of the world we were escaping — distant voices, the roar of a pickup on the gravel, people living out their lives, unaware of our mission below. As we came to the main creek, we passed the little house where the two old black ladies, Miz Kittering and Miz Letty *(Why do they live alone like that? Where are their men?)* Which sat on a shelf right at the water, and just past them and up on the bank proper the small house that Chess built on the place of Mr. Carter, the man he worked for cowboying, marked by evidence of his one bad habit, the discarded Four Roses bottles, just this side of the new concrete bridge and the remains of the old iron one now rusting away. He and the other black folk thereabouts, what was left of the slave families that had stayed behind after the War, had lived there longer than anybody. We were looking around for what we could disturb. We believed we were Davy Crocketts; we sought secret places undisturbed by adults in the upper world. We went exploring.

Sandy Creek had permanent water. In summer, it was a series of thin rivulets almost buried between the mounds of sand it was named after. Its base was gravel, from pea size up to large chunks of broken rock. We sought out the legendary quicksand, jumping to mire ourselves in the semi-liquid mixtures of soft sand, fine gravel, water. When we'd sunk deep enough, we'd holler, and pull one another out. Sometimes we'd find an Indian ball, big as a softball, made of gravel and inside wet clay. They used them, we were told, to make paints. When a rainstorm moved through upstream, it would turn into a proper torrent, strong enough to knock you off your feet. We always hoped to be lucky that such a storm would move through while we were there and that we would be drownded, or at least one of us, and it would be a tragedy. Or at least gouge out a good swimmin hole, one deep enough and broad enough that we could pretend we were like the city kids with their cement pools. Sometimes, it did. Not that summer. Game was more evident here — dog tracks we knew must be wolves, the scurry holes of the large flat turtles which were good eating (though in recent years they had been scarcer), larger, more plentiful deer tracks, all sizes from fawns up, even where a small herd must have come down to drink, and possum, birds, all kinds of creatures. Some tracks we had no earthly idea what it was. One said, *A bear. They ain't no bear here no more stupid*, said another. We shared with the varmints, below and beneath the human world, these secret highways. We hoped for, always expected to find, something worth exploring for.

That June day, we went farther down the Creek than ever before, than we were supposed to. We had already passed the legendary and mysterious community of Chinkypin, where a whole community of black folk lived where no road reached, where now only fallen down shacks and the remains of a massive plantation house, which been last owned by a black lady, was reputed to remain covered by kudzu and poison ivy. *Pickupdaddy gone kill us. Not if you keep your mouth shut.* Our disobedience thrilled. Where we usually got out, at the old iron bridge on the main road, today we kept on, we defied the warnings ("I want you boys to know," Pickupdaddy said, "past that bridge is nothing but quicksand") and kept on going. That lower part of the Creek, from the bridge down to where it emptied into the River, led through what almost seemed like wilderness, the peopleless expanse of the National Forest and around its borders the large tracts of those lands which decorated the backsides of

the riverine plantations. That had been that Spanish governor's lands that he took from the Indians before he slaughtered them. The blood turned that part of the creek red, we'd been told. The terrain descended gradually from rolling farmland and woods to swampier lands. Nobody lived out there. Any evidence we found of humans came in the form of artifacts dug up out of the sand, washed down in stormwaters — an old Dr. Tichenor bottle, a hubcap from a Terraplane, once a brass coin worn so smooth we couldn't read engraved on it what surely had once been the name of a Spanish king, or an Indian arrowhead half finished, still half sharp.

"Throw that old thing away," Jim said, "don't nobody want no ol' hubcap." I ignored him, washed it out and stowed it down in the lunch bucket.

We walked on, around unfamiliar bends and into unexplored terrain, and came around a bend and look! A high bank loomed above us, and atop it, hanging 60 feet in the air over the precipice, was the end of another old iron bridge, wrenched off and left perched, pending ominously above. We'd never heard of a road way out there big enough to warrant such a structure. Where could it have gone? There were no towns, no houses, out that way, unless it had gone to the now disappeared hamlet of Palestine, was that out that way? And who had lived there? And where had they gone?And even more mysterious — the other side of the creek was 60 feet below, at our level. What could that leftover end of a bridge have connected to? What kind of catastrophe, how hard a storm must have raged to have carried away the bridge and half the countryside with it? This cliff face of sand begged a climb, and so we obliged, making holes for our feet and hands, the oldest of us, cousin Jack, out in front, me at the bottom, swallowing grit. Hot, sweaty, sandy work. We attacked the cliff face as if it were Everest, reaching for the top of the world.

"C'mon! Get your sorry asses up here!" I'd never heard anybody close to my age use that kind of cuss language. I had begun to understand more lately– one mark of growing up was that you were allowed to, and knew how to, cuss. I stored that one away to try out later.

At the top, I came over the lip last to see the others — Jimbo, Hank, Jack — exploring the remains of an old gas station, tall pumps towering over us, glass tanks on top, pump handles at their sides like the rifles of soldiers in formation. At first we had

no earthly idea what they were, but Jack said "Yea, I seen one of them before. That's a fillin station." There was little evidence of the road that must have once led past the station and over the bridge. Maybe Palestine was one of the places that had been swallowed by and abandoned to the National Forest a long time ago. The lands that greatgrandaddy Dougle had surveyed for the Federal government. The lands he had bought from the farmers for twenty-five cents an acre. And made enemies of his friends. Now, a track through the woods and these rusted towers gave sole testimony to a once busy road, to the lives of people now dispersed. We explored the ruins of that place of respite looking for lost coins among hulks of ancient automobiles, for some kind of treasure. We rested in the shade, eating our biscuit and meat and talking about what kind of people had once lived along and travelled that remaindered road.

Later, we roused up and then descended, down to the Creek's level flow, relieved to wash away the sand and sweat. We had made note from above that the water had scoured out a spot where the stream changed direction, just before it turned at the cliff. Too shallow for a swimming hole, but a good place to make one. In dry summer, the creek needed a little help. So, once down, we set out to engineer a dam, choosing the bigger rocks in the creekbed, piling them up across the narrowed channel there. There we were, all four of us, cutoffs and tennis shoes, way out in the country with no entertainment but what we made, determined to make a hole to swim in, down in the muddy sandy water hauling rocks. Our plan was in the doing. We scooped them up in our t-shirts, we pushed them downstream from the bed above, we used mud, which washed away as we worked, for mortar. I laid my Hudson hubcap out beside me, saving in it any odd colored rocks, or those worn smooth in strange shapes, one with a hole through it, and one Indian ball. Excited, arguing about construction methods and work loads *(You're as lazy as a nigger chap on Sunday, move it or lose it!)*, working mightily to resist the casual irresistibility of the creek's flow *(Should we put some sticks in it? Get some more clay from that bank over yonder!)* We challenged fiercely the casual inexorability of its flow and built our own respite from the heat. And, slowly, we made progress.

Until.

We heard no voices in the distance approaching, had no warning of oncoming trouble. And yet look there! around the

Creek's bend, striding purposefully forward, came three, from our perspective down in the mud looking up, giants. Three tall black boys, almost naked, two larger and older than us, strongly muscled, one smaller and younger, dancing as he walked. They kept on towards us without hesitation or uncertainty, predeterminant, but unless they had been spying on us, *could they have been?*, they couldn't have known they would find us there. Though we must have been a surprise to them they came on purposefully. Not only did our creation, spanning the stream down which they were wading, not deter them, they seemed to speed up a little, bearing down. The thick summer air around us was suddenly stiff with intention, now as tense as before it had been tranquil.

All the ugly things going on out in the world of the South in the 1960s came back to us, came on us down the creek. *What did they want?* The older and bigger boys that carried me also reassured me. They had always put on such a show of being tough, of knowing the world, of being able to handle things, that I was confident, ignorant. Besides, we hadn't done nothing to make them mad at us, had we? Yes, we had heard about all the civil rights, and we went to still segregated schools, and yes, we used the word nigger sometimes but not in front of them, at least we had that much sense, and yes, we too had hated Yankees and Kennedy and all the changes he promised to make to our lives and even, yes, we had cheered when he got shot. We'd seen men from our families going out late at night, but *they were probably just goin jukin*, right? We'd overheard whispers of cousins, of neighbors, in trouble for something they'd done. But we were kids. We hadn't done anything to these particular boys, we didn't even know them, although in that small country community everybody was known. *They'll pass us by*, I thought. *After all, we're white.*

But they didn't. No detour was evident, they kept coming, concertedly. Enraptured, we paused in our work to see their coming, even big brother Jimbo, his hands in the water nervously twitching the large rock he had been moving *(was he planning something? was he gettin ready to throw?)*, Jack still, expectant, glowering. When the boys got to the dam they kicked out! and the biggest one, the one in front, looked right straight at us and leered. The destruction was careful, intentional. I looked around, expecting our side to react violently, to let fear wreak return havoc — but all eyes were down, even Jack's and Jim's. No one moved. The two big boys had begun the kicking, the smaller one more hesitant, then joining in joyfully, systematically dismantling

our work so carefully constructed. The small reservoir that had gathered above our half-dam rushed over us so that we lost our seats, the gravel giving way beneath us, spinning the terraplane and its load of strange stones down into the stream, turning me half around, our footing unsure, difficult if we were to dare to stand up or stand up to them. Had anyone been so inclined. No one was. We watched as all our reward for all that hot, hard work washed away, along with our only chance to cool off. For the first time in my life, I saw the older boys I had known each summer when I visited from the new suburb where my family lived, those killers of possums and snakes, the horse riders, the braggarts about girls and titties, the lovers of guns and pickups and fighting, lose their swagger, stay down, look down. Cowed. And to a bunch of niggers. No one stood against the onslaught, we all just took it, I saw my brother, Jimbo, his head bowed , could that be fear? but also in shame that he wasn't standing up to them, wasn't defending our project, our territory, was just taking it. Once our dam was a shambles those boys kept right on walking, not looking back, confident in their triumph, clearly no longer afraid of retaliation from white boys. We sat quietly for a bit. Silence hung around our necks like shackles. We couldn't make head nor tail. We were of one mind, of one kind. Finally, we all got up, brushed off, wordlessly headed home, our adventure cut short even though the day was far from over, saying nothing all the way home.

"Well, what kinda trouble did you boys get into out there? Did y'all find any treasure?" As we filed into the yard, my young uncle snickered from his seat where he hammered on one of the porch steps that Pickupmama had said that morning she had near about fell on. Our hangdog expressions betrayed trouble. "Now what went and give y'all the sours?" he asked.

Because I hadn't yet understood that right now in such a moment the need for silence was desperate, I blurted, "We saw a buncha nigger boys in the Creek."

"Yea? I reckon y'all gone down there to that quicksand?" He frowned. "Don't know who that would be way down there." He slammed the hammer down again and cogitated."Less it was Chess' boys. I think they was visitin' at their mama's house cause of the news. What'd they say?"

"Nothin, didn say nothin," Jack shrugged. "Just some niggers is all."

"Well, it's a wonder, with all this commotion over Chess." He

vestigated us over some more. "Just as well they didn't, I reckon."

I had no earthly idea what commotion. Word of Chess' mysterious death in the Forest, of his mutilated body found in Pretty Creek by chaps gone there to wade in its icy, springfed waters, was just getting out. "What happened to Chess?" That was me, the little dummy. I seemed to be the only one too young or too simple to ask any old thing.

"Oh, you ain't heard? Chess is dead. They found him this mornin up in the woods."

"What happened to him?" Again, missing all the signals to shut, I pressed, missing all the cues of sharp looks and silences.

His voice hardened. "Never mind, he just died, that's all." He looked down and again the hammer slammed."And y'all probably shouldn't be askin no stupid questions."

I saw Jack's startled look. "Why?"

"You know why." He gestured up the steps."You chaps better go get cleaned up for supper. Y'all look like y'all washed up from a flood." As we circled him and headed up the steps, I suddenly realized that we had left the creek in such a daze that I had left my hubcap and my grandfather's tin bucket behind. *Not going back there*, I thought. *Never going back.*

No one spoke about this again, ever — not Jack, not Jimbo, not Hank, nor me. Our protection was our silence, a silence that would last for another thirty years before it would be broken. We had in that moment become painfully aware of new strains among us, of a separation into two communities, a poisonous divide that would seep into the life of that little crossroads and crack it wide, of tensions long suppressed emerging into the open between my kinfolk and the white and the black folk there, a cancer of distrust and dislike that would spread and later change how we felt about one another, one that would involve resentment and shame and a fear that would beget — no, had begot already! — violence. Feelings which would become actions too terrible even for explorers.

J.D. Smith

To the Departed

Goddammit, Dad, you had to go and die
Just when your lessons finally took with me —
Solvent and saving, married, largely dry
With plenty more on tap for you to see.
But no. Like Francis Albert sang, you went
And did it your way, turning chemo down
To let rogue cells command your lungs' descent
Into a fullness where you'd rather drown
Than clutch at further wasting, months made up
Of waiting room and ward and CT scan
In strangers' care. You took a different cup
And left me sooner on my own to plan
How I might answer when the Reaper calls.
We'll see if I've inherited your balls.

J.D. Smith

The New Normal

The telephone has never been our friend,
But now we merely dread a stranger's bid
To get our cash or votes or souls or, rarely, lend.
The call that comes just once already did.
The good donated, parceled out or trashed,
The house went off the market in five days.
Two cars changed title, life insurance cashed.
The rest was split in uncontested ways.
The question mark now scratched off future dates,
Our sentences don't trail off with *unless . . .*
A calm unknown for years illuminates
The routine hours afforded with largesse
To survey what we have, not what we lack.
In any case, Dad isn't coming back.

Features of a Late Style

Now shorn the ornaments and digressions, flags
Planted to claim new countries for the self,
And disappeared the filigrees that would elaborate
Unending tendrils into every vacant space.

Instead of them, and sparely, come wide arcs,
Discerned from distant mists and mountaintops,
Insinuating realms entire to chart
And occupy the minds of generations.

Suggestion stands in for totality
As there is time for this, and nothing else.

Andrew Szilvasy

The Dog in This is You

after a Grimm fairy tale

Out in the country skirts, a dove, a mouse
and a sausage lived together in one mess.
From dawn-lit hills steeped with Gondwanan stone,
Mouse fetched the waters of the Helicon.
Dove gathered tinder, clasped one in close claws —
beak fraying the dry skin of a twig to toss
into the heap soon hot under their pot.
Beside this, Sausage cut the veggies brought
in from their garden plot. They lived for years
like this, till one night Sausage disappeared.

They searched, our Mouse and Dove, in every birch
and every church. They wailed out a dirge,
and loud it shook some leaves. Then came down running —
Hair matted, teeth-hungry, sausage-mad, gums
bleeding for food — the dog that ate our friend.
O, to think poor young Sausage so condemned
to the bile! they scurried up and grabbed Dog's paws.
Some words were had. He spoke without remorse:
"Sausages aren't alive. Nor can mice nor birds
nor dogs speak." Indeed: there are no such woods.

At this retort old sock of a mouse lay damp
and our lovely Dove once more was damned
again (a trashed napkin), and Dog? A grime-
brown blanket draped on a ragged recliner.

Two Roads

Yesterday we spent at least an hour
scouring the internet for shawarma.
This place was closed, and that one had no beer.
Defeated, we found a Greek place with some charm.

I had a gyro like I always do.
For you, keftedes with a pita plate.
And then so quickly the sky went white, pursued
by whatever it is that makes the deep blue sweat.

Windows weeping, we hung inside. You reminded
me of skipping school, slinking down sidewalks
to the park then peeling off our rain-drenched rinds
and devising lies to excuse our soaking socks.

A different story might take the "two roads" moral,
noting that our day was likely as fun
as the wanted one. But maxims are a chore
to you, so you got to work right home from lunch.

I won't lie to you: the interruptions
drove me crazy. *How much turmeric is*
too much? I had no idea, I was trashing
my translation of *e scolorocci il viso.*

Morning you went off for tahini while I — poor cook
that I am — spent twice as much time chopping mint
as I should've, and took forever to find the smoked
paprika. I just wanted to read my Dante.

But now that cumin, cinnamon, and pepper
have colonized my nostrils, all I want to do
is taste this surprise afternoon of myrrh,
longed-for shawarma, some red wine, and you.

Epistle

To Brett, on the Death of his Mother

You know, old friend, this moment stands too large
for speech, plus I don't have the gear for dirge:
it's happiness or philosophical
reflections free from much emotional
heft always, and I'm many miles away,
at that, writing from a Jordaan café.
And there can be no real condolences
when one's mother walks among the shades:
it's ancient water smashing at chalk cliffs
that tear not just the rock but also rip
the very breath out of our throats. You sense
Poseidon has been slighted by offenses
you inadvertently made, and now he crafts
bronze cruelties, pours into their hollow casts—

But it's just silence. Leaves fall off the trees
even when the air is still. It feels
like only Everest stands unburied but
we know that too will be filed down to dust.
Our life is dew and this world's core is fire
coolly boiling off what we admire.

I wish that I could offer you my prayers
but they'd mean nothing to the man upstairs
  after all my years of benign negligence.
  But let me offer you these few words without the pretense
they carry with them metaphysical
comfort or anything too mystical.

So look, you never do get over it,
though after time forced smiles you counterfeit
for others morph into rough facsimiles
of happiness, and then eventually
you're back, more or less, as Hemingway
would say, stronger in these broken places.
You can't unsee your wasted mother lying
a monument to ephemerality
inside a box you didn't know she bought:
that sight will never really leave your thoughts,

but in this moment shines more brightly than
all other memories, as if the sun
exploded in your mind and littered it
with light down to your reptile brain's gill-slits:
so thoroughly death colors everything.
Yet when it dims
there's space for all those background stars to trim
the newly darkened sky, although their light
will always have a melancholy tint.
It's like how snow-topped mountains bring a coolness
despite their peaks residing in the distance.

Though I'm an atheist, Qohelet
brought me some solace: sun rising and sun setting,
all that. And Matthew, too: the Father "sendeth
rain on the just and on the unjust." Sound
sense, though that fatalism only works
in even hours. At odd hours I was sure
crickets deserved blame
whenever darkness came.

Regardless, I hope you find at least a spoonful
of what meager comfort's possible.
If you were over here as planned,
I'd buy you a drink. The offer stands
when I get back to your neck of town.
Drinks are all I'm good for, as you know.

Brent Taylor

All Cats Are Gray

She hadn't heard from him since the divorce, over six years ago, but when he called, it sounded important. She knew he was remarried, had seen on Facebook that he had a little girl almost two years old. Her boy was four, and she was recently engaged to a man she had been seeing for two years. Her son was at his father's that night, her fiancé out of town on business, so she agreed to see him. It was after work on a rainy Wednesday night, but she drove across town to meet him at a sushi place where they used to go when they were together. He was there waiting on her when she arrived, a glass of water in front of him. She immediately knew what it was about.

The sushi place was a chain, *The McDonald's of Sushi*, they used to joke, but it was always a lively fun place. A good place to drink. There was a creek that ran alongside the shopping center where the restaurant was located, and there used to be at least two dozen stray cats that lived there. They would always save part of their sushi and leave it for the cats. It had been ritual.

They hugged, a little awkwardly, and she sat down.

He looked good, dressed in a jacket and tie, and she wished she had changed out of her scrubs. The waiter came, and she asked for water as well.

She looked at his.

"How long?" she said.

"Two years in December."

"That's great," she told him.

"And you?" he asked. "You're still —"

"I just got five years . . . I was pregnant with Adam when it finally stuck."

He smiled, looked her briefly in the eye.

"What?" she said.

"You were right."

She laughed, couldn't help herself. He shrugged.

"Right?" she asked finally.

"There's life after," he said. "A lot of it. Almost too much sometimes, but y'know . . . there's ways to deal with that too."

"Well good," she said. "I'm glad you've come through it." The waiter came and they ordered. They sat silently for a little

while, then he looked away. When he looked back, he said: "So I guess you know why I asked you here . . ."

"You're on Nine?"

He nodded, smiled.

"Saki bomb! Saki bomb!" Across the room was a table of college kids, chanting. They had ordered beers and sakis to drop in them like boilermakers. It was the house drink, and the chant was a thing they did. The waiters would start it when they brought it to the table. The staff and the table joined in, then the rest of the restaurant.

"Saki bomb! Saki Bomb!"

When the kids had downed their drinks and the chanting had died away, they looked at each other. "I forgot about this place," he laughed.

She picked up her water, but there was only ice left in the glass.

"I heard you had finished school," he said. "That you were nursing. That's great."

"Yeah, the last three years. You caught me on my normal work-week rotation. A week later, we would have had to meet at Waffle House at four in the morning. I'm sorry I didn't have time to change, I'm a mess."

"No," he said. "You look good."

She laughed.

"What?"

"I feel gross and tired."

"Well, if that's the case, you're wearing it well. You've let your hair grow some, I like it." She was also her natural blonde again finally, wondered briefly if he remembered that it was her true hair color.

He picked up his water, but it had been empty longer then hers.

The waiter came by, filled the glasses. As soon as he was gone, they both took sips. She wished he would just get it over with. She knew him well enough to know that of all the ways he had been wrong, he still had no clue about the one that mattered. Yes, the nights she drove, drunk herself, around to his friends' houses looking for him; the emails and text messages she found from the other women; these things were insulting, embarrassing — but they were not what kept her lying awake staring at the ceiling.

"And you? What are you doing for work?"

"I'm doing some consulting," he said. "Working with a non-profit, actually."

"Well that sounds great."

"I like it. It feels right, y'know?"

The food came. She put her wasabi in the little dish on her plate, poured soy sauce over it, stirred it up. After a minute, she waved to the waiter, asked him for more of the wasabi.

"You still love spicy," he said.

"I'm a sucker for the pain."

He laughed, but hesitantly like he wasn't sure he should.

"I remember," he said. "You told me the first time we quit, you said: *We'll still have loud music . . . spicy food . . . and sex . . .*"

"Yes," she smiled. "And we lasted about five days."

"And the whole time, we stayed in bed. You were on break from school, I'd quit my job. It would have been easy if we could have just stayed there."

He looked at her, but she didn't look up.

They managed some more small talk as they worked their way through half their plates, then waited quietly as the server went for boxes. The whole time she was braced, waiting. There was more silence, and he smiled. "So, after a searching and fearless moral inventory, I would like to try and make direct amends."

"It's not necessary," she said, a little too quickly. "Really. I mean, I know it's part of the process, but we're okay. We're past it. We got married, at what? — 24 and 27? We were kids. I'm surprised we made it eight years. I mean, we must have loved each other — to not let it go for that long."

The waiter came with the boxes. He laid the check in the middle of the table. She reached for it, but he already had his wallet out. He pulled out a card, put it on the book.

"I'd like to think that we did," he said. "And I just wanted to say it: I'm sorry."

She smiled, cocked her head, a sort of half-shrug.

"I'm sorry," he said again. "That it didn't work out . . . That I became so mean. I'm sorry about the cheating, and —"

He paused.

"It's fine, really," she said. "Thank you."

She knew that he meant it. There were tears in his eyes. She was glad for him too, but at this point in the day, in the year, in her life, she wasn't sure she could feel it the way he did. She wasn't sure she wanted any more catharsis or closure than she already had.

"Thank you," she said again. "And I'm sorry . . . I could have been better too."

"Look," he said. "I'm not here to dig up the dead. And if I am, I'm sorry for that too. But I — I needed to tell you."

"I appreciate it."

"And the baby," he said, finally. "I'm sorry I wasn't there for you when you lost the baby. I know that was the thing that — I know I should have been there at that point, and I wasn't."

She nodded. This she hadn't expected.

"I know you felt it too," she said, but her voice sounded small, flat.

He paid the bill, and they left the restaurant.

Outside, it was already dark. It was November, wet and rainy, but unseasonably warm. They both carried their jackets. He walked her to her car, even though there didn't seem anything more to say.

"We forgot our leftovers," she told him.

"Yeah. Hey, what happened to the cats?"

"I don't know," she said. "Someone probably called animal control."

"Or maybe they're holed up because it's been raining so much."

She nodded.

That was when she remembered a Christmas Eve when they were first together that they had come here. He was Catholic, and she had known that he had gone to mass every year on Christmas, but that year he had skipped it to be with her. She was not religious and never understood his faith. She was always at the same time jealous of it and condescending to it. They had been happy leaving the restaurant that Christmas Eve: full, they had been drinking saki and beer, and it was snowing. Snowing lightly, maybe half an inch of coverage, but still — she had now lived in this city 37 years, and still, it was the only White Christmas she remembered.

And the cats came up around them in droves. Usually, a few would break off, while the others watched, but that night they all huddled towards the food like it was Midnight Mass. In her memory, they were all gray, the cats, against the stark white of the new snow. She knew that couldn't have been the case, but that was what she remembered. She felt like she had read that somewhere — wasn't it an old proverb — that strange cats are always gray in memory.

She was parked a long way out, back towards the road.

"The hardest part is finding something to do with your hands," he said. "You were right — you have to learn to be still."

"That's the hardest thing," she agreed.

She was crying, but he hadn't noticed. When they came to her car, he turned and saw her face, forced a smile.

"Thank you for meeting me. Again, I'm sorry for dredging it up."

She put out her arms, he pulled her to him.

"I hate it," she said, her voice muffled in his shirt. "I just hate it. For the longest time, I kept thinking: *If we had been able to keep the baby. . .*"

"No," he whispered, stopping her.

She shivered. He took her jacket from her, put it over her shoulders.

Then, she pulled him to her, kissed him.

He stopped her, looked her in the face, then took her head in his hands, and kissed her back. She pulled away.

"I'm sorry," he said.

"Stop saying that." She pulled him back to her.

They kissed for a long time under the lights of the parking lot. It was like a photograph in sepia, a fossil in amber. The sound of car tires on the wet pavement rushed by out on the street. Finally, she pulled back.

"You'll follow me to my place?" she said.

He nodded.

She got in her car, backed out of the space, waited for him to get to his and then pull up behind her. She could barely stand the stillness, couldn't wait for the car to be moving. Leaving the parking lot, she pulled out in front of a taxi. She knew he would have to wait, and it was two stoplights down and she was caught at a red light before she finally looked up, saw him in her rearview. She breathed from her abdomen, said to herself: *So this is happening . . .*

In the parking lot of her apartment, they kissed again, kissed as she was fumbling for her keys, as she was opening the door to her apartment. She was glad she didn't see any neighbors. Inside, she turned on the floor lamp near the door. She looked around briefly for Priscilla, the old black and white cat she'd that had been her mother's. She had stayed with her mother after the divorce, and in that time, the cat had taken to sleeping next to her. The cat was nervous around visitors though, especially men, and

she was nowhere to be seen.

He kissed her again, pulled her jacket off her shoulders, dropped it to the floor. He pulled her scrub shirt over her head, threw it on the sofa. She turned, went over, pushed play on the stereo. He kissed her shoulders, turned her facing him, kissed the tops of her breasts. He reached behind her to undo her bra. She put her hands over her belly shyly. He moved her hands, ran his fingers up and down her arms, started kissing her again.

A woman's voice came over the speakers, deep, sultry. She took his hand, led him down the hall to her bedroom. On the stereo, the voice sang about romantic love, of heartache — but of something else too. She had been hearing this song in her head all day. It was a song about love, the loss of it, but only because it had to sing about something. Beneath that, there was something emotionally benign, something transcendent, something that had experienced pain but managed to move beyond it.

"What is this?" he said, coming to the bed, stopping. "The music?"

She pushed him back on the bed, lay down on top of him. He rolled her over, lay her back on the comforter, and she was looking at the ceiling. The fan was off, but the room spinning. He ran his fingers through her hair, kissed her neck. She laughed, threw her head back, concentrated on the sensations and the music as she watched the room go round.

*

Naked, damp, they lay side-by-side. He was barely turned, facing her, running his hand along her hip. The comforter, wadded at the foot, was nearly off the bed. She was already thinking about washing the sheets, her clothes, about what it would take to erase his presence in her apartment. It was entirely practical though — she didn't feel guilty.

"You do," he said. "You look good."

She didn't answer him. The music had stopped a few minutes ago, and the silence seemed to echo. She wondered if he were not even thinking about going home.

He kissed her, got up out of bed, went to the bathroom. She listened to him pee, then walk down the hall to the kitchen. The cabinet, then the sink. He came back in the room with a glass of water, placed it on her bedside table.

He sat down next to her on the bed.

She looked at how his gut bulged when he sat, looked at her own belly, flat because she was lying on her back. His hair was dark, nearly black, and she saw a couple of loose threads of silver at his temples. She thought how they would both be old the next time they blinked their eyes.

"What do you think this means?" he asked her, finally.

"What do you think it means?" she said back.

But it was clear he had not heard her.

"I mean, when I quit, when I stopped — I did it for my marriage," he said. "I didn't want it to be the reason . . . y'know, another one."

She was staring at the ceiling again.

"Y'know? But here I am, two years down the road, and it's still not right. Obviously . . ."

There was a long silence. She heard the cat move under the bed.

"It wasn't a miscarriage," she said, finally.

There was a long time before it registered. A long time when things were still how they were before it had been said.

"I see," he said.

She had said it to hurt him, to make him get up and leave, to never come back. Never speak to her again. "I don't know if you remember, but a few weeks before . . . I asked you what you wanted to do. I said I was willing to make it work — even through the money stuff, even through the other women. Even the one you thought you were in love with . . ."

"I remember."

"I said we would try to get through it, right?"

"Right."

"And I asked you if you were happy about the baby."

He didn't answer.

"And you, do you remember what you said?"

"No," he answered, finally.

"You didn't say anything."

He nodded. He took her hand, started to raise it to his lips, stopped. He got up, started going around the room, picking up his clothes.

"I'm sorry," she said. "But you never even said what you wanted."

He was dressing, used it as an excuse not to look at her.

"I — I figured I didn't want to bring a baby into a loveless marriage . . . I honestly thought you hated me at that point. I didn't know."

He forced himself to look at her, smiled sadly.

"I'm sorry for it," she said. "You had a right to know."

"So —" he started.

And she knew the questions before he asked. Why lie to him about the miscarriage? Why not leave him immediately — did they really have to drag it out another year? Why was the second time she got pregnant — out of wedlock and with a friend whom she didn't love — so different?

But he didn't ask.

"So what was this?" he said.

"I —" she paused.

She had him. She knew she could finally make him feel how she wanted him to feel. The way she had felt for too many of those years they were together. And she was sick about it. This was not who she was. But the inertia of the thing was too much. It had been inside her so long, and she had thought just because there would never be a chance for it that she had grown past it.

She was wrong.

"I guess," she told him. "I guess . . . I just wanted to know what it felt like to be the other woman."

He nodded, picked up his coat.

"I'm sorry for what I did to you," he smiled, sadly. "I truly hope you believe that."

He forced another smile, walked out of the room.

She listened until he had let himself out, then reached over, turned out the light. In the dark, she was surprised how calm she was, how at peace. She heard a soft mewing. The cat had come on the bed. She reached out her hand, and it found her in the dark. She rubbed her two fingers between its ears, then pushed her hand down its length, giving a slight tug at the tail.

The cat purred.

She thought of her fiancé, still did not feel guilt. She felt like tonight was something that had already happened long ago. She thought of her boy, Adam, old enough now that his neediness was becoming a chore. But she also remembered holding him in her arms as a baby, and how, when she did, a love beyond understanding had flooded over her like music. She remembered having the little baby against her breast, and how she couldn't help but also remember the child that was lost — how, in that instant, she knew that no one else could hurt her ever again.

Daniel Tobin

from *This Broken Symmetry*

(Simone Weil, 1943-1909)

(Rio Ebro)

After turning away from the rearguard of Paris, the safe
House of her pacifism, with her parents following, afraid
She will do something silly, after descending with the militia

Through Lerida into Aragon to the banks of the Ebro
To take up her rifle there, her comrades at target practice
Fleeing anywhere near her line of fire *(Lord deliver us*

From mousey women); after crossing to the other side
Where Phalangists wait in this war without prisoners
"For if one is captured, one is dead," she hugs ground

Only to look up, stretched out on her back as the spitfire
Flies past on reconnaissance, thinking she will be caught,
And sees nothing other than the increase of blue sky,

This "infinity of perfect beauties, of all things that were
Or will be," and looks for an instant "beyond the veil
To the real presence," objectless, adoring the distance

(Though "all the horrors of this world are like the folds
Imposed on waves by gravity") between God and God,
Until the stooping man one thinks one sees on the road

At dusk reveals a tree, and the voices heard just leaves
Rustling on *Los Picos des Tres Maras* where the river begins —
Before the bivouacs resume and she burns herself with oil,

Before her comrades who will fight and die carry her out,
Before her parents who did not expect to see her again
See her again, arrived safely, smiling, radiant: "Here I am."

Brand

Brightly vested in their loose smocks, the ebullient troop sways rhythmically onto the floor, their gold drums strapped before them around their waists. The drummer's arms move in unison, felt mallets the size of tennis balls pound confidently, the great percussive rush amplifies to fill the arena with aplomb and applause. *Grooversity* is in the building. Now the troop splits in two to navigate the aisles separating hundreds of empty chairs where, just weeks earlier, the hockey rink would await its intrepid skaters. They align themselves in front of the raised dais with its microphones and teleprompters as the leader raises his arms to the cheering crowd of thousands. Along the digital rim below the rafters the College's name flashes and glows, white letters, a bright purple band. Four massive screens will simulcast the ceremony; will broadcast pre-recorded encouragement from a pithy alum array happy to urge the graduates onward to success, to developing and advancing their personal brands. Though if one closed one's eyes, all this could be the hoopla of some ancient ritual, the opening celebration of games held between city states, or, today, a long-promoted boxing match — Las Vegas, its neon dazzle and panache. From a channel under the stands the faculty process, all mortarboards and tams and medieval gowns, the occasional bare head — some grooving awkwardly to the drums, some in time, most marching dutifully — but for the one in the black baseball cap, no team insignia, taking in the scene. Let's call that one the heretic poet. There, with the platform party, is another poet, the commencement speaker, engaging, funny, self-deprecating, greatly popular. He will have the graduates and their families laughing and clapping, even the faculty nodding in appreciation for the light touch with its hint of profundity, the nods to the masters. One suspects even the student graduating with the self-designed major, "Performance Poetry Transforming the World," will find his remarks entertaining.

The scene I have sketched portrays accurately the commencement exercises held at a notable American college dedicated in its niche fashion to the study of communications and the arts, and means to highlight for the moment a broader perspective on the situation of poetry now relative to the roadless road of postmodernist practice. Perhaps like the split rows of chairs demarking separate areas within the student population it means to suggest pathways or an arrangement of crossroads (if not bridges) be-

tween and among approaches, sensibilities, disciplines. On the other hand, it might be best not to overwork the conceit. Let's say there are two principal figures here, ignoring for the time being our heretic poet with his incongruous hat amidst the sea of floating tams and mortarboards. Let's say the principal figure for the moment is our affably and ruefully articulate commencement speaker, and let's say that speaker is Billy Collins — "Literary Lion," winner of many noteworthy awards, former poet laureate of the United States and bestselling author of numerous poetry collections. Usually one might consider the phrase "popular poet" an oxymoron, but not in the case of Billy Collins. What Charles Bernstein ironically evokes in his poem "Thank You for Saying Thank You," Billy Collins embodies genuinely, for Collins really is 'committed / to poetry as a / popular form, like kite / flying and fly fishing." At the antipodes to postmodernist practice resides the work of popular poetry, the kind of poetry that looks at the world with a wry attentiveness and easefully literate intelligence, inviting the audience to sail with the poet around the room, to paraphrase the title of Collins' selected poems. Collins has become that most unlikely of oxymorons — a bestselling poet. He is effectively, by poetry standards, his own brand.

In the case of "Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes," one of his many widely known poems, Billy Collins' offers an affectionate take on one of the language's most formidably brilliant poets whose brand — if one can call her unlikely canonicity a brand — appeals perhaps to a somewhat different readership. Here is the opening:

> First, her tippet made of tulle,
> easily lifted off her shoulders and laid
> on the back of a wooden chair.
>
> And her bonnet,
> the bow undone with a light forward pull . . . .

One can see more or less immediately where the poem is going and how the poet means to bring us there. If we attune ourselves to the clever first line, we know the poem invites us into its fantasy of unclothing the Maid of Amherst through a series of allusions to her own poems and the Spartan circumstances of her life, riffs lightly touched and re-touched as Collins' lines advance easefully down the page. The goal is not to disrupt or jar — certainly

not to shock with the sophomoric glee of Matthew Dickman's "Emily Dickinson to the Rescue." Nor is it to be "wallpaper." Nor, however, does it seek to challenge the reader the way Dickinson inevitably does by encountering the nakedness of being at its psychic core through metaphorical richness and conscious probity of her hymn-like stanzas. The goal is to orchestrate a narrative of pleasantly surprising incongruity so entertainingly that the reader hardly realizes the poet is deftly demythologizing his formidable subject and simultaneously seducing the reader to join him in his affectionate voyeurism. The poem is fancifully engaging, and many a reader would be bound to fancy it.

Not to be outdone, Collins has his own flair for metaphor and simile — his hands part the fabric of Dickinson's white dress "like a swimmer's dividing water," until in the poem's fourth stanza the dress puddles at her feet and he finally sails "toward the iceberg of her nakedness." There are effortless tonal modulations as well: "The complexity of women's undergarments / in nineteenth century America / is not to be waved off . . . ." Thus, the poet proceeds "like a polar explorer" through the clips and clasps and moorings and whalebone stays, until the poem turns "postmodernly" self-reflexive:

> Later, I wrote in a notebook
> it was like riding a swan into the night,
> but, of course, I cannot tell you everything . . . .

What the poet does tells us is a series of further riffs on Dickinson's own poems, "how there were sudden dashes whenever we spoke," allusions to Death's carriage that stopped for her, the fly buzzing at the windowpane, the plank in reason that breaks before she drops down and down, hitting a world at every plunge before she finishes knowing.

From the vantage of inventive conception, witty playfulness, and an engagingly accessible tone, "Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes" sails appealing through the wry turns of its witty tryst, whether kite-like in Bernstein's ironic formula or merely around the rooms of its stanzas. Even the un-Dickensian allusion to Yeats' "Leda and the Swan" — "like riding a swan into the night" — offers a sly inversion of the Irish poet's mythological critique. From another vantage, the poem could be seen as something artfully akin to mellow jazz. The poem puts one at ease, but does it nudge the reader by indirection or subliminally into Dickinson's

own spiritual urgency, the spiritual nakedness at the core of her poems? One must say no. To push a bit harder, what does it do to our appreciation of Emily Dickinson to portray her as a sexually frigid spinster? One does not need to read very deeply into the vast Dickinson oeuvre to feel the spiritual passion that lets itself loose physically with a vital urgency — "Wild Nights, Wild Nights" — as well as the most passionate sadness. Such poems are as far from frigid as anything could be: "I cannot live with you / It would be Life / And Life is over there / Upon the Shelf . . . ." In contrast, this fancifully frigid Emily Dickinson is something other than the demythologized figure of immense genius. For all his wit and ingenuity, the poem feels something closer to pastel portrait, the popularly branded idea of Emily Dickinson, and not the extraordinary mind and heart we discover in the poems.

Another kind of contemporary popular poem, related in formal ease to "Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes," offers less by way of wit and ingenuity and more by way of plangent affirmations. At the upper echelon of this brand of populist poetry one finds the work of Mary Oliver. Oliver won the Pulitzer Prize for *American Primitive* some thirty-five years ago, which was the height of her accomplishment in the art. Like Billy Collins, she is one of the most popular of American poets and as such a staple on Poetry in Motion, that most concerted, celebrated, and civic-minded effort to bring poetry to the widest possible audience. Mary Oliver, within the limited frame of late capitalist American poetry, has become a brand. Among people who find themselves drawn to "accessible poetry," her work has the quality called "being relatable." By way of example, Oliver's "An Old Story" appeared recently on the Boston T. It begins with the convergence of sleep and spring along with the poet waking "in the valley of midnight" to a quietly momentous revelation:

> My heart says, what you thought you had you do not have.
> My body says, will this pounding ever stop?
>
> My heart says, there, there, be a good student.
> My body says, let me up and out, I want to fondle
> Those soft white flowers, open in the night.

Oliver's poem aims to appeal to some common, one might say generic emotional core, and it does so by trading on stock figures — "valley of midnight" — and the consolations of an

easy transcendentalism. This nighttime dialogue of heart and body has little of the necessary urgency of a dialogue of self and soul, of the kind Yeats demanded of himself and his readership, or Oliver's own best early work. The poem "fondles" the reader with a soft universalism, a silken blurrily focused univocal portrait the poet presumes we all must share. It is after all an Old Story, rendered now without any drama of consciousness. We are not all that terribly far from Rupi Kaur, the most popular of contemporary poets, a veritable Instagram phenomenon. Here is one of her faux Rumi verities:

he isn't coming back
whispered my head
he has to
sobbed my heart

To paraphrase Dorothy upon her arrival in Oz, I think we're not in poetry anymore; though to say as much is to be considered elitist or condescending in the current milieu. Others have parlayed celebrity into the moniker of poet — Art Garfunkle, Suzanne Somers, Richard Thomas, Leonard Nimoy — but other than Rod McKuen it is hard to recollect a "poet" parlaying their "art" into celebrity of this magnitude. Her brand extends to millions. Such is the leveling effect of the postmodern in its popular form — and the shrewdness of this "artist" to ride with aesthetic abandon the flood-tide of social media. Against such effluvia there are the likes, again, of Yeats, and Yeats' riveting dialogue between Self and Soul, of which Self has the final say:

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything
Everything we look upon is blest.

With his characteristic lighter touch, Billy Collins' work can approach this level of urgency, as at the beginning of his poem "The Afterlife": "While you are preparing for sleep, brushing your teeth, / or riffling through a magazine in bed, / the dead of the

day are setting out on their journey." The remainder of the poem marvelously introduces the reader to the life of the dead and their final longing to return to the living, and ends with a brilliant image for poetry itself — "the winter trees, / every branch traced with the ghost writing of snow." Likewise, Mary Oliver's work at its best as in "Hawk" captures nature and the mind's encounter with an indelible vitality, as when the hawk rising out the meadow settles "on the small black dome / of a dead pine / alert as an admiral / its profile / distinguished with sideburns / the color of smoke" and it compels the poet to an overwhelming recognition: "remember / this is not something / of the red fire, this is / heaven's fistful / of death and destruction." Neither of these poems, "The Afterlife" and "Hawk," gravitates to aesthetic populism for all their accessibility, though each achieves in its own idiom the gravitas of genuine poetry.

Once, riding the Dublin Area Rapid Transit train — the DART — from City Center to Howth to visit Balscadden Cottage where Yeats lived for a time as a young poet I caught sight of the indelible lines of "Sailing to Byzantium" next to an ad for Tayto Crisps. Seamus Heaney's sonnet about peeling potatoes with his mother was recently voted Ireland's favorite poem. Whatever goes by the name of "popular poetry" appears always to be a local phenomenon. On the other hand, the spoken word poet Holly McNish has surged in popularity across the United Kingdom and all of Europe. Such news would certainly hearten one of the other figures in the Commencement arena, our graduating student with the self-designed major animated by genuine commitment and idealism. Can performance poetry save the world, as they believe, or was Auden right when he said poetry makes nothing happen? Then again, is performance poetry an entirely new phenomenon in the age of social media and the Internet? As one of my best students one told me in passing, "All of the poets I most respect have twitter accounts." Many poets do, now, have twitter accounts, though it is hopefully if not probably true that the brand of a twitter handle will not bring one's work to posterity, but the achievement of the work itself.

One of the real powers of performance and spoken word poetry as a type of popular poetry lies in community building — something sorely needed if Yuval Noah Harari is right, and "the local intimate community" for which we are evolutionarily wired has collapsed since the onward march of our technologically advancing postmodernity.[i] From another vantage, performance

poetry turns the art of poetry back to its roots in ritual, or in theatre, or the mead hall. A poet such as Patricia Smith, to choose the most obvious example, means that performance for the stage need not preclude performance on the page. Yeats himself advanced in his art by writing for the stage, by grounding his fluent lyricism in dramatic speech.

Concurrent with performance poetry, what has come to be called in some circles "identity poetry" — the kind of poetry that foregrounds identification with a social or cultural group as a defining characteristic of the subject matter — has not only gained in popularity but has gained, also, an academic foothold. There are many very fine contemporary poets who might well be named — many fine young poets who inspire the likes of our idealistic graduate — and who communicate considerable political urgency. They form, perhaps, a different avant garde than Hoover's rather academically entrenched postmodernists, as though their own brand were somehow suddenly fading from the limelight despite protestations to the contrary.

Yet, so called "identity poetry" also is not new. In aligning his work with the Irish Literary Renaissance and in fueling that Renaissance as vanguard, Yeats' poems pushed the matter of Irish identity on a recalcitrant British Empire to substantial political effect. Similarly, a poem like Adrienne Rich's "Diving into the Wreck" continues to be an aesthetic and political landmark in the advancement of women's and LGBTQ voices, and a measure for all serious practitioners of the art. Perhaps for our own socially urgent moment the great example is Gwendolyn Brooks. Her mastery of the masters in every sense, aesthetically and politically, manifests itself everywhere in her work. When she explores the virulently flawed mentality of racism and racial violence in such poems as "The Lovers of the Poor" and "A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi, Meanwhile, a Mississippi Burns Bacon," she exposes the mind-set of that virulence with consummate artistry. When at the it is end of "The Boy Died in my Alley" she writes "The red floor of my alley / is a special speech to me" she at once gives voice to the voiceless and calls out those authorities who remain blind to, if not complicit with the system. Her importance, as Elizabeth Alexander affirms, is incontestable. She has been "one of the most influential poets of the twentieth century" even as "her poems distill the very best aspects of the Modernist style with the sounds and shapes of various African-American forms and idioms."[ii] Her sustaining influence and mastery is perhaps

best exemplified in "The Sermon on the Warpland." With extraordinary prescience, her ars poetica affirms the ultimate significance of her identity and the identity of her people:

> Build now your Church, my brothers, sisters. Build
> never with brick nor Corten not with granite.
> Build with lithe love. With love like lion eyes.
> With love like morningrise.
> With love like black, our black —
> luminously indiscreet;
> complete; continuous.

Devoted to her community, and to a vision of love that must inevitably transcend the limits of social, historical, and cultural boundaries, Gwendolyn Brooks' work is beyond branding. As her work emerged into its late maturity she chose, in fact, the smaller community press rather than the "major" press that published her early Pultizer Prize-winning work. In our era of poetry branding that would be a counterintuitive decision. From the standpoint of canon, evidenced in the entire body of her work, the legacy of Gwendolyn Brooks' poetry is that she refuses to collapse standards into the obliquities of taste, to invoke Agha Shaid Ali's important distinction.[iii] Rather, she expands the standards of tradition and canon without lessening them, without relegating the poet's art to the very real and at times perceived tout corps oppressions of a static, monolithic tradition. She was well-aware early on, as Elizabeth Alexander again reflects, of the "pressure" for black writers "to prove their literacy . . . through the mastery of European forms."[iv] The well documented change heralded in her late poetry was a turning toward and an embrace of her community, though it is not a repudiation of the mainline European tradition. Rather, it signals an enlargement and revitalization not only of the canon but of the traditions of poetry in English that continues today in the work of a wide variety of voices from many cultural, ethnic, and gendered vantage grounds.

At the same time, to again heed Agha Shahid Ali's observation, not all "identity" poems are necessarily good poems, and there are standards that mark true greatness. Here, by way of a contemporary counter example, is the opening of "The Death of Robert Lowell":

O, I don't give a shit.
He was an old white-haired man
Insensate beyond belief and
Filled with much anxiety about his imagined
Pain. Not that I know.
I hate fucking wasps.

From here Eileen Myles goes on to lampoon "the old white-haired loon's" time at McLean Hospital, dismissing a poet who has written demonstrably great poems and who, like Ray Charles and James Taylor the poet reminds us, "once rested there." "The famous, as we know, are nuts." More curse poem than elegy, Myles' "The Death of Robert Lowell" has nothing to say about making with "lithe love.' It has everything to say, however inadvertently, about how blind ideology undermines the art that a poet presumes to practice with the utmost seriousness and ambition: "Take Robert Lowell. / The old white haired coot. / Fucking dead."

It might be argued that I have gravitated with this example to the lowest uncommon denominator, though Eileen Myles' work has assumed considerable branding over the last few years and is not at a loss for critical attention and ample consideration for awards. Branding can be power, of a certain kind, and that includes the power to demean, condemn, and trivialize. Perhaps "The Death of Robert Lowell" might best be called an "anti-identity" poem fueled by an anti-poetic animus —to unmake rather than make, to place another's unmaking at the forefront of one's own writerly ambitions. It does not seem to be the most constructive motivation or the most exemplary of accomplishments. In any case, Myles' poem is also about branding, in this case the branding of Robert Lowell — old coot, loon, wasp, famous poet of undeniable social and historical privilege — for post-mortem trivialization, execution, erasure: fucking dead. The poet who wrote "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" and more than a few other poems worthy of the utmost admiration, deserves better, regardless of how one might feel personally about his privilege, family history, social status, and personal failures.

The problem with what goes by the shorthand "identity poetry" is that those who employ the phrase whether critically or descriptively often lose sight of the fact that subject matter does not become content until it has been brought under the shaping jurisdiction of form. Form, in this sense, maybe realized "formal-

ly openly or brokenly" and does not involve any "mechanical fidelity to inherited rules."[v] From this perspective, Myles' "The Death of Robert Lowell" lacks more than good taste; it lacks the artistic realization even of its passionate, political urgency. When I encounter this kind of flippant contempt for genuine artistry in the face of some personal or social animus, I find myself resisting the phrase "identity poetry." From one perspective, it appears to empower — I have heard students and other poets use the phrase or some variation appreciatively — while from another it instantiates anew the very marginalization it claims to redress. In masterful hands, however, a poem achieves the kind of intendedness and complexity that places the reader or listener genuinely in the nexus of intractable emotions, ideas, cultural and personal inheritances. Such is Natasha Trethewey's "Pastoral":

> In the dream, I am with the Fugitive
> Poets. We're gathered for a photograph.
> Behind us, the skyline of Atlanta
> hidden by the photographer's backdrop —
> a lush pasture, green full of soft-eyed cows
> lowing, a chant that sounds like *no*, *no. Yes*
> I say to the glass of bourbon I'm offered.
> We're lining up now — Robert Penn Warren,
> his voice just audible above the drone
> of bulldozers, telling us where to stand.
> Say "*race*," the photographer croons. I'm in
> blackface again when the flash freezes us.
> *My father's white*, I tell them, and *rural*.
> *You don't hate the south?* They ask. *You don't hate it?*

Trethewey's blank sonnet, her use of the form as much a nod to Robert Lowell as to the Fugitives at once evokes and interrogates, and refuses to stoop to vitriolic condemnation and lampoon. The ironic "pastoral" of her title at once conjures the complexity and injustices of that tradition — European and the American south — and contests that tradition. If Yeats is right in saying that out of the quarrel with others one makes rhetoric and out of the quarrel with self, poetry, then Eileen Myles' "The Death of Robert Lowell" is nothing more than an empty rhetorical contrivance. By contrast, Trethewey's "Pastoral" is a brilliantly achieved manifestation of the argument with self that has broad positive repercussions aesthetically, socially, and politically. The wonderful sleight

of that "no, no Yes" at the end of line four embodies all of the dynamics of the poem's raw contraries. Just outside the poem, the bulldozers are paving the Fugitives' traditionalist paradise. Inside the poem, as it moves to its end, and with the most erudite and incisive irony, all of the most vexing and painful aspects of the American experience and American poetry gain purchase in the poem and are given not an answer but the clarity of artistic form — the specter of hatred raised, confronted, and left un-indulged.

Natasha Trethewey's "Pastoral" ends unsettlingly, intentionally so, and leaves its reader in an unsettled state. Good poems and certainly great poems always do just that. They leave us there in the experience of a quandary — the quandary of the poet's being that has transcended itself into the poem. The specific quandary, the specific quarrel with self, may not be our own, but we come to share its life in the life of the poem through the transformation of mere subject matter into genuine content. To brand something, conversely, is to seek to settle the matter, is to stipulate an orientation that ultimately precludes art's fullest amplitude. That is because great art refuses labels, brands, even the label "Emily Dickinson," just by way of example. One must go to the poems, one aftermath of the poet's life, and become unsettled. That is why in our own milieu there is something restrictive and potentially condescending (depending on the source offering the label) about the branding of poets. The Fugitives identified themselves as much to define what they intended artistically and ethically, but even such self-branding must eventually give way to the poem performed and received in the mind of the reader, the listener. Poetry at its most achieved eludes the brand, even in this late overly commodified moment when poets feel the pressure to be media marketers of their work. The best poems remind us that to be human, to be on serious earth, is to be unequivocally unsettled. They remind us that no univocal label can finally accommodate the fullness and richness of human experience. What is needed, contrarily, is the insight of identity discovered in and through difference — that is the analogical necessity. In an essay happily titled "The Transcendent Poem," Laura Kasischke quotes Laura (Riding) Jackson on Jackson's renunciation of poetry. "Corruption of the reason for poetry sets in," Jackson writes, "when too much emphasis is laid on assisting the reader, when the reader goes to poetry with no notion whatever of the faculties required, the poet is more concerned with stirring up the required faculties than presenting

occasions for exercising them."[vi] Whatever comes to be popular in poetry for a time must inevitably find life beyond the brand or settle into some manner of corruption, so Jackson's reflections imply. And where is our third figure now at the hoopla of commencement, the poet heretic in the baseball cap among the sea of rippling gowns, chevrons loosening, the hood draped behind like an un-spread plumage? Our poet heretic moves, *e pluribus unum*, among the crowd filing out of the arena, in hand a book of poems.

---

[i] Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper –Collins, 2015). 356.

[ii] Elizabeth Alexander, "Introduction" in *The Essential Gwendolyn Brooks* (Washington D.C.: Library of America, 2005) xiii.

[iii] Shahid Ali, *Poet's Work*, *Poet's Play*, p. 144.

[iv] Alexander, xiii.

[v] Shahid Ali, 134.

[vi] Laura Kasischke, *Poet's Work*, *Poet's Play*, 57-58.

Gail White

Communion of Saints

The things that living brains forget,
the dead keep neatly filed.
My grandmother remembered yet
the death of Oscar Wilde,

the Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk,
and from the time before
her own, her mother's fervid talk
about the Civil War.

Now I remember for her sake
the small years as they pass,
the years that like a hatchling snake
run underneath the grass,

that sometimes crawl and sometimes climb
as to their goals they tend
until the quick-eared cat of time
pounces, and there an end.

Ambition and Early Love

I was a teenage bottom feeder,
in all my studies very slack,
when Jean, our high school's head cheerleader,
eloped with Kay, our quarterback.

This was a secret from their parents
and school, but not from us, their friends,
who marveled at their perseverance
and all that lawful sex portends.

Kay took a scholarship to college.
Jean bore a daughter (also Kay).
I, in pursuit of hipper knowledge,
loafed for a while in Uruguay.

Kay'd be a banker, while delicious
Jean would grace the social list.
And I, belatedly ambitious,
would be a famous novelist.

I raged at agents like a tempest
of talent, but they all cried "No."
Today Kay sells used cars in Memphis,
and Jean divorced him long ago.

Wild Turkeys

I'm losing short-term memory (by short-term
I mean 5 minutes, as in "Where's that book
I just laid down?" "Behind you." "So it is!"
"Where are my glasses?" "On your head" and so on…)
Memory like a witch, mounting the air,
taking the last five minutes up the chimney.
Not like my father yet, who at the end
forgot his wife of 60 years, my mother
who predeceased him, although we could still
show him old photographs of their courting days
and he would say reflexively "There's Jeannie."

Now I should consciously begin to save
the memories I want. The brain, of course
selects the most humiliating ones
to garner in an Easy Access File,
especially the ones from middle school.
I'd like to forget everything before
about age 30: start with my first trip
abroad, first look at Belgium, England, France.
The time that we sang "Dixie" in Red Square
just days before the Soviet Union fell.
The peacock that jumped down and spread its tail
in a rajah's garden. But if I could choose
a memory for my deathbed, I believe
I'd choose the day we drove the Natchez Trace
and three wild turkeys walked across the road.
"What's THAT?" we said — because wild turkeys don't
look anything the way you think they'd look —
and then we laughed, and ever afterward
Wild Turkey was our drink. I half believe
that if I keep that memory intact,
when I raise up for my last look at things,
I'll see wild turkeys spread their silly wings.

James Matthew Wilson

On a Cocktail Umbrella

He didn't know the place and sat alone,
Braced between stool and bar, and drank his beer,
A crowd of lilting voices just behind him.
Five men, theatrical with their fay gestures,
He watched them through the bottle-crowded mirror
And knew the show that they were putting on.
A game played on a set above his head,
Its mass of muted faces crying out
A warning he should leave. He had no place
To go, and concentrated on his glass,
The Bass Ale logo scratched away with washing,
As if it were a thing of seriousness.
Headlights from cars on 9th flashed in
And turned its shadow clockwise over and over.
The bar man's shadow called him back, and, plunk,
There, on the wood, before him now, a goblet
Whose big-mouthed bowl was facetted and held
A liquid, ruby dark with grenadine.
The lip was loaded down with chunks of fruit,
Orange slices twisted to a kind of writhing,
Pineapple floating in a sea of ice cubes.
And primly propped, surmounting all, a red
Cocktail umbrella, fragile ribs outspread,
And marked in gold with Chinese characters.
"This one's on your admirer," he said.
"My what?" he asked the barman, who had turned
Away and pushed his towel down the rail
To sop what this gargantuan mess had spattered.
The room was long and narrow, hot with bodies,
But open to the street so traffic sounds
Passed over bunched up voices in the booths,
Those bright and fawning laughs behind his back.
He smelled the sweetness and the bite of liquor
Fuming up from beneath the red umbrella.
He knew who'd done this, one of them behind,
And pushed the drink away. A joke no doubt,
Or maybe some half-serious proposition,

As if to test and probe for what he was,
What kind of thing it was that he desired.
    When still a boy, his cousins came at Christmas,
And brought with them umbrellas just like that one.
Where did they get them, he had asked, and listened
As they told of a Chinese restaurant, draped
In sequined panels, dragons on the wall,
Brown tea set steaming on their calendar placemats
And into which they stirred whole packs of sugar.
And these, they smiled, came with the Shirley Temples.
    The food, it was no good, they said. By then,
However, he had watched their fingers spinning
The small umbrellas, close and open them,
And did not care if food or tea were nothing
A boy like him could stomach. Didn't care,
But secreted away that he would beg
His parents take him to that place, and beg
Them order him, just once, that lithe red drink,
So he could have himself a small umbrella
Spiked in a bobbing maraschino cherry,
And raise its gentle sprigs, then fold them tight,
And watch its turning letters blur then still.
He thought of nothing else, till the thought faded.
    That's how it was, he knew, with all desire,
No matter how it crown itself with sugar
Or draw away attention with high laughter,
It warms itself with the blood's heat, blood's pulse,
Which knows nothing but its own serious rhythm.

High Seriousness

Having emerged, at last, from the hot train,
Its silence broken only by newspapers
And the conductor, shifting down the aisle
    To take each fare

Pinched on its perch atop the canvas seats,
We come out where the evening brightness opens,
The row of maples by the station woven
    With cool, clear air.

And even now, across the road, old couples
Follow the hostess to an early seating
On the trattoria's stone patio
    With white draped tables.

If you should pass, you'll see a waitress lift
The pinot grigio from its tub of ice
And pour. But I recall, two decades back,
    The cloistral classroom,

Those arguments we had about the art
Of poetry — its craft, what lasts, what fades —
And that mute glare of anger toward those who
    Sat there indifferent.

How could they not see our lives staked on rhyme,
A civilization's rise in Sidney's meter?
And passing, after, still in muffled rage,
    By the frat houses,

I'd see the boys out idle in their yard,
Shirtless, a football arcing back and forth
Between them, as if just there to remind me
    I had no time.

No time for that loose spread of fingers, no,
But only for the hard pinch and strict grip
Of pen and book, when darkness closed down hard
    On autumn study.

Among Americans, Tocqueville had noticed,
Every idea was softened by the chuff

Of humor, as if they drew back from faith
    Like Abram's knife;

Convinced himself, through unbelief and anguish,
They'd lost thereby the last high seriousness,
Which faded, now, away, with the old order,
    Her sabers trampled.

Some decades on, that stern schoolmaster, Arnold,
Felt stung straight through the heart and blushed to read
Of Palemon lusting over a silly girl
    Spied in the garden;

Or of the Miller's man who came in darkness
To his beloved's sill and kissed her ass.
What kind of sober lesson could that give
    To all the vulgar?

The rioters who forced the gates of Hyde Park?
The liberals from the mills of Birmingham?
We need an image higher, more austere,
    To summon us.

We need, in fact, to be thrown down, horse bolting,
And blinded by the gravid flash of truth,
Which suffers no glib smiling, if we're ever
    To heed our calling.

We need to sense that our first intuition
Of truth is something worth descent through darkness,
Though it demand our solitary parting
    From all we've known.

But, when we rise, we come to a spread table,
Where laughter, light as music on the air,
Weaves through our argument. We sit at leisure,
    And lift our glasses

To one another, their rims radiant
And bringing a cool sweetness to our lips,
Till all we'd guarded with astringent strictness
    Returns as joy.

CONTRIBUTORS

Claire Bateman is the author of eight poetry collections, most recently *Scape* (New Issues), *Coronology and Other Poems* (Etruscan), and *Locals* (Serving House). She lives in Greenville, South Carolina.

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

Stephen Cushman's most recent book is *Hothead: A Poem* (LSU Press, 2018). He teaches at the University of Virginia.

Alice Friman's seventh collection, *Blood Weather*, is due out from LSU Press in 2019. Her last two books are *The View from Saturn and Vinculum*, for which she won the 2012 Georgia Author of the Year Award in Poetry. She is a recipient of a Pushcart Prize, is included in *Best American Poetry*, and is the winner of the 2016 Paumanok Award. New work is forthcoming in *The Georgia Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, and others. Friman lives in Milledgeville, Georgia, where she was Poet-in-Residence at Georgia College.

Heinrich Heine was born in Düsseldorf, Germany in either 1797 or 1799. In 1831 he took exile in France, where he often struggled financially despite irregular patronage from a millionaire uncle. With freedom of speech he developed an international reputation for the lyricism, wordplay, irony, and excoriating satire of his poems, and was called the last of the Romantics. In 1841 he married Crescence Eugénie Mirat ("Mathilde"), who cared for him in Paris during eight years of paralysis; he wrote from bed until his death in 1856. His books would eventually be burned by the Nazis, creating prophecy out of his statement, "Where they have burned books, they will end in burning human beings." His tomb is in Montmartre Cemetery in Paris.

Joel Hinman is Director of the NY program at The Writers Studio where he teaches fiction, poetry & memoir. His fiction has appeared in *Epiphany*, *The Brooklyn Review*, *Fiction Now* and is forthcoming in the *North Atlantic Review*. He lives in Manhattan with his wife and son.

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

Richard Jarrette is author of *Beso the Donkey* (MSU Press 2010) Gold Medal Midwest Independent Publishers Association for Poetry 2011, and which has been translated into Chinese by Prof. Yun Wang; *A Hundred Million Years of Nectar Dances* (Green Writers Press 2015), *The Beatitudes of Ekaterina* (Green Writers Press 2017), and *The Pond* with paintings by Susan Solomon (Green Writers Press March 2019 — AWP Portland launch). He lives reclusively in the Central Coast region of California after a forty year career as a psychotherapist.

Timothy Murphy, the author of *Very Far North*, *The Deed of Gift*, *Set the Ploughshare Deep: A Prairie Memoir*,*Mortal Stakes / Faint Thunder*, and, most recently, *Devotions*, died of cancer in June 2018.

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell, Ph.D teaches English at Fordham University in New York City and serves as Associate Director of Fordham's Curran Center for American Catholic Studies. Her publications include two chapbooks and five collections of poems, *Saint Sinatra* (2011), *Moving House* (2009), *Waking My Mother* (2013), *Lovers' Almanac* (2015), and *Still Pilgrim* (2017). Her work has appeared in many journals, including *Alabama Literary Review*, *America*, *Christian Century*, *First Things*, *Hawaii Pacific Review*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, among others, and has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, the Best of the Web Award, and the Arlin G. Meyer Prize in Imaginative Writing. O'Donnell also writes essays on contemporary literature and is a regular Books & Culture contributor at AMERICA mag-

azine. Her memoir, *Mortal Blessings*, was published in 2014, and her biography *Flannery O'Connor: Fiction Fired by Faith* (2015) was awarded first prize for excellence in publishing from the Association of Catholic Publishers. O'Donnell has just completed a critical book on Flannery O'Connor, *Radical Ambivalence: Race in Flannery O'Connor*. The poems featured in this issue of Alabama Literary Review are part of a collection she is completing of 99 poems that channel the voice of O'Connor, *Andalusian Hours: Poems from the Porch of Flannery O'Connor*.

John Poch's fifth collection of poems, *Texases*, will be published in early 2019 by WordFarm Press. He teaches in the creative writing program at Texas Tech University.

David Rock holds a Ph.D. in Latin American literature from Penn State University and currently teaches Spanish at Brigham Young University-Idaho in Rexburg. His recent creative work is published or forthcoming in *Carolina Quarterly*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *West Texas Literary Review*, *Posit*, *The Fiddlehead*, and various other magazines.

Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585) was attached to both the French and Scottish courts in his youth; he was later named royal poet for the House of Valois. He led the group of poets called the Pleiades, who looked to classical poetry for paradigms but wrote in French rather than Latin to encourage the development of French literature. In *An Introduction to the French Poets*, Geoffrey Brereton writes "He projected . . . an image of his own century . . . . It was precisely Ronsard's inability to either assimilate his models or to forget them which gave his work its character."

Robert B. Shaw's most recent book of poems is *A Late Spring, and After* (Pinyon Publishing). After thirty-three years of teaching at Mount Holyoke College, he retired in 2016 as the Emily Dickinson Professor of English Emeritus.

Hilary Sideris has recently published poems in *Flock*, *The Lake*, *Rhino*, *and Bellevue Literary Review*. She is the author of *Most Likely to Die* (Poets Wear Prada 2014) and *The Inclination to Make Waves* (Big Wonderful 2016). *Un Amore Veloce* is forthcoming from Kelsay Books in 2019. She has a B.A. in English literature from Indiana University and an MFA from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop.

Don Simonton is an itinerant, independent, eclectic scholar, a native of the First Southwest and student of its history. "Explorers" is excerpted from *Let the Devil Out*, forthcoming from the University of Mississippi press.

J.D. Smith's fourth collection, *The Killing Tree*, was published in 2016. He is currently at work on two further poetry collections and both literary and crime fiction. Smith works as an editor in Washington, DC, where he lives with his wife, Paula Van Lare, and their rescue animals Roo, Pantera and Mr. Clean.

Andrew Szilvasy teaches British Literature outside of Boston, and has poems appearing or forthcoming in *CutBank*, *Barrow Street*, *Smartish Pace*, and *Permafrost*, among others. He lives in Boston with his wife. Aside from writing, reading and teaching, Andrew spends his time hiking, running, and brewing beer.

Brent Taylor lives in Atlanta. His work has previously appeared in *Phoebe*, *Harpur Palate*, and *The Crab Orchard Review.* He blogs at brenttaylorfiction.com.

Daniel Tobin is the author of eight books of poems, most recently *Blood Labors*, the book-length poem *From Nothing*, winner of the 2016 Julia Ward Howe Award, and *The Stone in the Air*, his version of poems from Paul Celan, as well as critical studies and edited volumes. His poems have appeared nationally and internationally in journals such as *Poetry*, the *Paris Review*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Image* and the *New Republic*, among others. He is a recipient of awards including the Massachusetts Book Award in Poetry and creative writing fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation.

Gail White is a Formalist poet whose work appears regularly in such journals as *Measure*, *Raintown Review*, *Rotary Dial*, and *First Things*. She is a contributing editor of *Light* (www.lightpoetrymagazine.com) whose most recent collections are *Asperity Street* and *Catechism* (both on Amazon). She lives in Breaux Bridge, Louisiana, with her husband and cats.

James Matthew Wilson has published eight books, most recently, *The Hanging God* (Angelico Press). He received the 2017

Hiett Prize from the Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture for his contributions to humane letters and his poetry was included in *Best American Poetry 2018*. Associate Professor of religion and literature at Villanova University, he serves as poetry editor for *Modern Age* magazine and as series editor for Colosseum Books, published by Franciscan University at Steubenville Press.

CONTRIBUTORS

Claire Bateman

Terese Coe

Stephen Cushman

Alice Friman

Heinrich Heine

Joel Hinman

Charles Hughes

Richard Jarrette

Timothy Murphy

Angela Alaimo O'Donnell

John Poch

David Rock

Pierre de Ronsard

Robert B. Shaw

Hilary Sideris

Don Simonton

J.D. Smith

Andrew Szilvasy

Brent Taylor

Daniel Tobin

Gail White

James Matthew Wilson