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At 9 a.m., the doorbell rang. I couldn’t see who it was because of the high security wall we have surrounding the house, lined along its top edge with metal spikes like spear points, let alone the kind of street we lived on, but after a moment’s debate whether I shouldn’t just ignore it, which we often did, I picked up the crowbar we’d been keeping beside the house door and started across the courtyard to the security door to see who it was. I’d talked with the girls about getting a gun off the blackmarket, but we hadn’t gone that far yet. “You’re a man, you can protect us,” Samantha had said, not bothering anymore with how far back a statement like that would set the women’s movement. “If you believe that,” I’d told her, “then consider yourself lost already.” Because while I didn’t like to think of myself as a coward, my first reaction on hearing gunfire was to drop to the floor and crawl under the couch, or one of the beds, or the legs of the person standing next to me. At the door, I raised the crowbar like a baseball bat. I’d never swung a weapon at anyone, didn’t know if I could in the end, but I held it like that anyway. “C’est qui?” I shouted, trying to sound larger and more menacing than I really was.

“Adama, restes tranquille,” a woman’s voice called to me. “C’est Méité Fanta, ta voisine.”

I quickly turned the lock and pushed open the door onto Ama Méité, a weathered old woman with a steel tub on her head, the heads of the fish she was carrying hanging over the lip of the tub like peeking down at us, like children eavesdropping on adults. She also had a stick poking out of the corner of her mouth, an extra large toothpick. Ama Méité was grandmother to the rabble of naked children who played dust-raising ragball on our street, hollering all day like they owned the place, which they did, and who had brought us water, bucket by bucket on their heads so the water spilled down like crystalline sheets in the sun as they came, their knees knocking from the weight, from their well during the last coup when the water and electricity had been cut in the city. Méité’s face did not change when she saw me with the crowbar. She went on chewing her stick, the local version of the toothbrush, like it was a carrot, or a tasty piece of licorice. But I knew from experience that it wasn’t tasty at all, that it was infused with a bitter oil as succulent as varnish. People were like that here.
We quickly went through the morning salutations in Worodougou, a cultural requirement you couldn't ignore even in the biggest of rushes, even if, say, you felt like the world was ending.

“Manisogoma,” I said, lowering my eyes in respect. ‘Good morning respected mother.’

“Say va! Ab see la,” Ama Méité said like shouting, which was how it was done. ‘Thank you respected sir. Did the night pass well?’

“Em’ba, Ama,” I said. ‘Thank you respected mother, yes.’

“Allah bis sonya!” ‘God bless your morning.’

“Amina, Ma.” ‘Amen, Mother.’

“Allah kenna abdi.” ‘God grant you beautiful health.’

“Amina, Ma,” I said, touching my hand to my forehead like bowing in deference and thanks to her benedictions.

“Allah ee balo,” she said. ‘God grant you a wonderful youth.’

“Amina, Ma.”

“Allah bato luma.” ‘God nourish your home and family.’

“Amina, Ma.”

“Allah bo numa.” ‘God bless all that you do.’

“Amina, Ma,” I said louder than before indicating in their way that I’d received all the benedictions I could bear. “Iniché, iniché. Allah ee braghee.” ‘Amen, Mother. Thank you, thank you. God bless you in thanks for your benedictions over me.’

“Amina, Vā!” ‘Amen, sir.’

“Allah den balo, Ma.” ‘God bless and protect your children, Mother.’

“Amina, Vā!”

“Allah kenna abdi.” ‘God grant you beautiful health.’

“Amina, Vā!”

“Allah sosay djanna.” ‘God grant you long life.’

“Amina, Vā!”

“Allah bis sonja.” ‘God bless your morning.’

“Amina, Vā! Iniché. Adama Diomandé.” ‘Amen and thank you, respected Adama Diomandé.’

Then we were done with that and Ama Méité said to me, “Bon,” flatly in French because now we could get on with our lives. I could already feel the sweat starting to stand out on my forehead, and the fish in the tub on Méité’s head seemed to me to be wilting in the sun now, hanging over the rim like those melting watches in the Dali painting. She rolled her eyes from the weight of the load and planted her hands hard on her hips which were wrapped in a wildly colored bolt of cloth depicting cellular phones. The cloth was pagne celebrating the arrival of Nokia to our stretch of West
Africa two weeks ago, and many women in Séguéla were wearing them, were tying their infants snugly onto their backs with them. Coups and Guinea Worm and Female Circumcision and HIV and mass graves in Abidjan full of the north’s political youth and the women had danced traditional dances all night around bonfires to celebrate the arrival of the cell phone. This was what West Africa was about: priorities. “So you already know about the coup,” Ama Méité chewed on her bitter stick and said.

“Know about the coup?” I said. “All I know is that I got up this morning and turned on the radio and there wasn’t any radio.”

“Oui,” she said, “so you know about the coup. But what are you going to do with that stick? When the bandits come, they will have guns. Therefore, you should buy a gun. A rich man like you, Adama, with so many wives—”

“They’re not my wives!” I started, like a thousand times before. “They’re the people I work with.”

“If they’re not your wives, oh, then why won’t you marry my daughter Fatumata, oh?” she sang in French to embarrass me. “She knows how to cook and likes to work in the fields. If you know how to do anything, she’ll give you many healthy children, maybe even twins. Like that you will be rich in America and then you will bring us health and happiness and, of course, many gifts, oh, when you come and visit. Anyway,” she said, spitting bits of pulverized wood on the ground between us like hay, “you should buy a gun. My son knows a man who can sell you a gun washed with good magic.”

“We are a peace mission, Ama,” I said lamely, “we don’t believe in guns,” and she said, “In all the movies from America, it’s all guns, so don’t tell me. What I’ve come to say is this: Don’t open the door today, Adama. There are many looters and bandits. They will come and rob you like the last time. Everybody knows that whites live in this house. So do not open the door. Now I have to go to market and sell these fish. They don’t care if there’s a coup or not. They’ll stink soon all the same.”

“Thank you, Ama Méité,” I said and as she turned to walk back to her compound where the children were kicking a soccer ball that was really a coconut shell, were playing hopscotch in the dirt and clapping and singing like it was the best day ever, just like always, she waved her hand back at me and said, “You whites are very bizarre. Going to chase away bandits with a stick, Allah!”
I could not remember if this was the third coup or the fourth since the summer, and anyway, talk of coups was a very complex thing because you had bloody coups and bloodless coups and attempted coups and aborted coups and averted coups and rumored coups and the coups that happen that nobody knows about except you go to the post office one day to mail a letter to your retired mother in Florida to say everything’s getting all blown out of proportion in the Western media and there’s some new general-president smiling at you from the stamp like somebody who’s gotten away with something, and also there were the couvre-feus which is pronounced somewhat like “coup” but means you can’t go out at night or you’ll be shot, which should not be confused with coups de grâce, which is how chickens are killed for dinner. All of this is to say that every three weeks the country was erupting into general mayhem from the capital to Korhogo, producing very little change except for a mounting body count and the ulcers growing in my stomach. Oh yes, there was also a matter of a few towns up north like Kong and Tengrela who had declared themselves independent states and were being deprived of all services by Abidjan in an apparent attempt to besiege them into submission. There was also the small matter of the new guns the traditional hunters and warriors were showing off in the villages, shiny AK’s that they said came from Mecca, and other small matters such as the military kicking in people’s doors like storm troopers and beating old women and the list could go on for a very long time, but after I locked the door behind Ama Méité, I went inside to call the office in Abidjan for an update and found that the line had been cut, which was an un-reassuring sign. Then I sat on the couch and fiddled with the short-wave's antenna. Just as I was able—with many strange maneuvers of my arms like sending messages in semaphore—to pull in the BBC where the female announcer was saying calmly, “...rebel forces in the Ivory Coast...” all the power was cut and then I was suddenly very alone in a dark and quiet house in what the US embassy security officer had referred to just weeks before as, “...the most unstable city in the country.” I switched the short-wave over to its batteries. Of course nothing happened. I turned the radio over. The cover to the battery compartment was missing, and so were the batteries that were supposed to be inside. One of the girls knew where they were, no doubt, as one of them was out in the bush right now, humming softly as she dug a new latrine, working to the music playing from her Walkman, a Walkman powered by a brand new pair of premium quality Duracell coppertops pillfered from the back of our radio.
To make a long story shorter, I had to go out. For one, I was hungry, and for two, I wanted to know what was going on. I got on my bike and pedaled out into the city, followed by the throng of my neighbors’ kids hurrying barefooted and barebodied over the piled trash and sewage rivulets of our street, shouting after me, “Everybody! Regards! Regards! It’s a white! Un blanc! Un blanc! Coutouboo! Crazy!”

The best thing about coups in this part of the world is the unusual opportunity the lawlessness affords the population to just have some unbridled fun. I turned onto one of the three paved roads in town and started down to the city center scattering sheep and goats and chickens and beat-up and hairless dogs and children and women carrying huge loads of firewood on their heads as I went. A long chorus of, “Regards le blanc! Coutouboo! Crazy!” shouted by adults and children alike followed me as I went and then I came onto a large gathering of young men watching a house burn down. They seemed very excited and happy to see me, and they blocked my way as I came, their chests glistening with the sweat of the heat of the fire. A leader stepped out from the crowd, set apart from the others, typically, by his massive size, and also by the rainbow colored clown wig he wore like some kind of insignia of rank, who knows where he got it.

“White man!” he said at me, as though I didn’t know it already.

“Oui, je suis blanc. Papa blanc, mama blanche. Donc, je suis blanc.”

“C’est ça. C’est toujours comme ça, n’est ce-pas? You are white and I am black. There is nothing we can do,” he said and I agreed and then we shook hands to seal the agreement.

“The fire is pretty, isn’t it?” he asked me and I had to agree because after all it was: a two story pillar of flames rising up from the gutted roof of a one-story house. It coughed up into the cloudless and startlingly beautiful blue bowl of a sky a long and billowy pillar of black smoke.

“Whose house was that?” I asked him.

“A fucking policeman’s,” the young man told me.

“Yes, it’s beautiful,” I said, kind of in awe.

The young man said to me, “You are French.”

“No, I’m American.”

“That’s really great,” he said smiling broadly. Then, after a moment’s hesitation, like he didn’t want to give away too much too soon, he said more darkly, “That’s okay.” In English, he said, “Are you fine?”

“Yes, I’m fine.”

“Eh? You say what?” he said, making a face. “Speak more slowly.”

“I said I am fine.”

“Yes, okay. Mama fine, daddy fine?”
“Yes, everybody’s fine.”
“Sister fine, brother fine?”
“Everybody’s fine.”
“I speaking English.”
“You speaking good English.”

The he puffed himself up and looked around the crowd to make sure they had seen and heard his linguistic display, and why not? None of them could do it. Then he was back in French again. “You know Michael Jordan?”

“Yes,” I said.

“You know Jean-Claude Van Damme?”

“Him too,” I said.

“Me, I want to go to America. You’ll take me when you go?”

“Yes,” I said.

Then he said, “Your bicycle is very pretty. Here in Africa, we don’t have bicycles like this. Give me your bicycle. A gift.”

“Unfortunately,” I said, feeling something like bravery at the prospect of having to walk through town like everyone else, “I have to go and see my friend. His house is far, so I need the bicycle. Please forgive me. Next time I’ll give it to you.”

“No problem,” the young man the size of a small mountain and wearing a clown wig and surrounded by a crowd of other young men standing outside of a house they’d set on fire said to me. “I’ll see you next time and then you’ll give me the bicycle. A gift.”

“I won’t forget,” I assured him. Then they let me through and I was riding among sheep again. Down by the big intersection where the meat vendors in their shacks lined the roadside, a canvas covered troop carrier full of soldiers holding rifles upright between their knees came barreling along, and I skidded out of the way with everyone else. I didn’t wait to see what would happen behind me when they’d meet that young man and his crowd, but pedaled away, as they say, rather fastly.

First, I went to the bank, the reason I had come into Séguela from the bush. Its heavy metal doors were shuttered and the long iron bar with the padlock and big as my chest was drawn down over them as though the bank would never open again. A very old man in rags was lying on the steps with his eyes open. First I thought he was dead, but then he turned his head and hacked and spit, something I saw he’d been doing for awhile because of the widening glob of spit like raw egg whites running down the steps beside
him. When he saw me looking at him, his bearded face brightened like something funny had happened, and he said, “Hey, a white!”

“Allah noya kay,” I said to him in benediction and, “Amina, Toubaboo-ché,” he said back. I could tell he was wildly insane. Still, insane people were treated with respect in this part of the world. If you bothered to ask them a question, sometimes you’d even get a useful answer. “Papa,” I said, “what’s going on with the bank?”

“The bank? Ha ha! It’s closed!”

“When’s it going to open again?”

“Don’t ask me crazy questions,” he said and laughed. “You whites. You walk on the moon before you can walk on the ground.”

“Did anybody come by and say anything about the bank opening?”

“Everybody came by and asked about the bank opening. Look at the bank. Ha ha! It’s closed.”

“Shit, Papa,” I said like saying it to myself, “I really need to get some money.”

“Money!” the old man said. “You need money! Ha ha! Why don’t you go find your money on the moon! Don’t you know what time it is? It’s time for the bank to be open and the bank is closed. So you tell me the time now. Les blancs! Hahahahaha...”

Next, I decided to go by my friend Diomandé Kané’s compound. He had recently gone from being my preferred Séguéla mechanic and itinerant drinking buddy to a Muslim insurgent. He’d even bought a boubous and started praying. So it was serious with him, and I knew I could find out the news chez lui. His compound was located just off the main market square, which was across from the towering and yellow painted Grand Mosque of Séguéla, its minarets capped in dark brown onion domes, its latticed windows painted a stark and glaring white and dominating everything, and as I rode toward the market which was like a sprawling shanty town of corrugated tin shacks, but which was a market you could get lost in like in a North African souq, a mixed mob of women and children came running out from it like a school of fish being chased by a shark, and the crowd was darting and changing course together suddenly just like a school of fish, and people were coughing and shouting “Lacrymogène!” which means “tear-gas,” and nobody stopped to call me “white,” so I knew they weren’t exaggerating. The crowd swept me down the hill past the mosque to Quartier Timité, the poor section of town, until I pulled myself free at a compound I knew there, and where I’d taken refuge once before, in August, while I’d been waiting for a bush taxi to take me out to the villages. Back then, a crowd of young men had come running down the road suddenly, stopping to pick up and hurl
stones at another crowd of young men who were chasing them, who were stopping in turn to snatch up the stones bouncing at them and throw them back again. I’d been carried along by the crowd of onlookers who’d picked up to run away from that, and they’d carried me down to hard-scrabble Timité where I’d found shelter in the first compound after the omelet and spaghetti kiosk with the big mango tree rising up beside it like a giant in a green coat of feathers and passed and afternoon in silence being stared at by an assembled family of four generations of Fulani just down from Mali who’d never seen a white this close up before. Now I was at their compound gate and banging on it again.

“C’est qui?” someone shouted, trying to sound larger and more menacing than they really were.

“Sidibé, restes tranquille. C’est Adama, ton blanc.”

The big gate door like a garage door was pulled back and it was the old patriarch of the family in his flowing blue boubous and wide-brimmed Peul hat with the circular designs tooled into the leather. His face was bright with welcome above his gray and stringy beard. He said in stumbling and accented Malien French, “Oh, Adama. How nice of you to come and pay us a visit again! Please come and sit with us. Tell us all of your news.”

I passed some hours there in Sidibé’s dirt floor parlor listening to the ticking of his wall clock after we’d run out of things to say. One of his grandsons made periodic forays into the city to assess the situation, and came back again and again breathless so that the old man folded his hands on his lap and sighed and said, “Well, Adama. How about we’ll drink some more tea.”

The one time I left the parlor to cross the courtyard to squat over the fly choked latrine hole, I saw the smoke from the fires rising up into the sky in columns from the different quarters of the city like trailings, vultures circling lazily around them high up like there was all the time in the world for what they had to do, and then there was the gunfire, automatic and small arms, staccato, right here, far away, patterned layers of sound, just like on the 4th of July in Chicago, where I was from. It was the smoke from the fires that did it, the way it curled into the sky like the black smoke of sacrifices of people invoking the ancient gods for help. It filled me with a stunned dumbness, a weight, a fatigue that spread through my body like exhaustion. Was this really happening? I mean to say, I did not know how to feel. Fear, exhilaration, it was all the same species of creature. Did they want this war or did they not want this war? Did I? I don’t believe anyone could truthfully tell. Yes, of course people would die, but not I, not I! And
didn't everything taste sweeter since the fighting: that cold, cold Coke, the last Dunhill of the day, sex with your girl, the joy of breathing because you were still alive! Everything heightened, everything refined. How much fun to be had by all!

And of course I couldn't help but pick a side. Forty years of neglect by the south, forty years of watching roads and electricity and schools and development traverse the south, while here it was all hunger and harmattan, military harassment and even your nationality stripped from you because of a new interpretation of the Constitution. There were good guys and bad guys and I could see them, and then over all there was that damned Basilica in the capital to spell it out as clear as its dome and crucifix on the horizon. How many hospitals could have been built with that money? How many doctors could have been trained? And Boigny had to go and install air-conditioned seats! Where was the mosque to stand up beside that church? Where was the tribute to this half of the country?

Lastly, there was reality. I was a white man, a stranger, no matter how well I spoke Worodougou or Peul or Dioula or that I had taken a Dioula name, no matter that some days I was ready to take up arms with my friends, ready to stand with them as though their families and grievances were my own, this was a place I did not belong, and more than that, a place where they would not let me belong. We were the last foreign aid group still in the field. The last round of rioting had seen even the missionaries driven out. It was only three weeks ago that that British woman, Laurie's friend, was sitting in our living room, laughing, fingering the cross on its rope around her neck, laughing nervously, too, I can see looking back now, saying, “Well, now that those Japanese people have left, you know, it looks like it’s you and us.”

Then it was only us because the churches were burned all over the north and they went to the British woman’s house in a mob where she lived behind where they weld bicycle frames at the shady intersection by the military post, thought she wasn’t home and proceeded to loot everything. It was only while they were dousing the walls with kerosene that someone—maybe my friend with his rainbow wig—noticed the bed that they forgotten to take in the back room, and lifted it up, and there she was like a dusty treasure found in the back of a closet, like an old dress your grandmother wore seventy years ago to the prom: a middle-aged British woman who had come to Africa to bring Jesus to Muslims, her skirt damp from her own urine, crying with her hands hiding her face like she was a child again, and did she curse them as black devils finally is what I want to know? But the crying and the piss struck a chord somewhere, because they helped her up,
helped her to gather herself together—to brush her hair from her eyes, to
wipe the tears away—helped her find her keys, helped her into her car so
she could drive away. Then they torched her house anyway. On the road
south, she was joined by a convoy of them, whites with their Bibles piled
around them in their Land Rovers like sandbags, their churches and minis-
tries burned, for some of them their life’s work burned, and nothing left
to do now but sift the remains from the ashes and turn the other cheek.
In Sidibé’s house then we could hear the singing of the muezzin, a long and
mournful wail, like an air raid siren in the noise and length of it. Sidibé
winked at me and tapped the side of his long nose. “If God says that it is all
right to go out now, Adama,” he said, smiling, “then I am sure that it must
be all right.”

And I did go out into the city again, and I did see many other things to
make myself feel very quiet inside myself in the memory of them, but here
now in the telling of this story, I’ve lost my direction somewhere. What I’d
like to tell you about now is a monkey.

Across from our house in Séguéla where I would go on to spend the
night under the bed with the gunfire and the shouts of angry men around
me in the city like the madness in a crazy man’s head, there lived a monkey
on a chain. This was in the courtyard of my old neighbor Mèité Fanta, the
grandmother of many, many happy children, a kind woman who sent us
water on that hot day when we didn’t have any. Anyway, they kept a young
monkey on a chain attached to a pole in the courtyard and the monkey was
really a baboon, but if you were to ask anyone what sort of animal it was,
they would simply say, “A monkey.”

This monkey’s name was Rita—I asked—and I grew fond of her. The
children spent many long hours teasing her with leafy tree branches, with
bananas she could not reach, and there was also a very famous game in that
neighborhood called, “Touch the Monkey,” by which each child brave
enough would venture forth when they felt Rita was not looking, cross into
her sandy area—the circumference of her chain, the chain being as long as
two or three paces, enough space for a monkey in a poor compound in West
Africa, if that can be accepted as a unit of measure—touch her like slapping
her, scream and flee, and often I was pleased to see her leap onto a child’s
back and sink her short-yet incisors into a neck. I harbored untold sympa-
thy for that tormented creature who somehow kept her spirits up. I got it
into my head that she could recognize me, that she could pick me out of the
crowd as the one person who did not want to amuse myself at her expense,
and she would break into a funny little half step dance on seeing me,
banging her fists against the sand and then leaping and turning as she
howled. Of course this was because I brought her a steady stream of
bananas and papayas and other things monkeys like to eat.

“Oh thank you, Adama Diomandé,” Méité Fanta came to me and said
one day with the sun beating down on our necks, the gritty harmattan wind
caking our pores with dust, chapping our lips and the insides of our nostrils.
“Thank you for feeding the monkey. When she is grown and fat we will call
you and you must come and share the meat of her with us.”

The is little sentimentality to be lost in a place where hunger is a real
thing, where meat is scarce and a small and personable baboon like Rita will
help the children grow. Still, I chased the children away from her when I
could, bribed them with cheap candies to leave her alone, trying to make
her short life more comfortable, chained as she was around her hips to an
immovable pole in a dusty courtyard where chickens scratched for ticks. I
honestly believe that she came to appreciate me. I honestly believe that she
came to recognize me, that she would say to herself on seeing me, “That is
the good one among them.”

Then one day when I was caught in Séguéla while Séguéla burned
around me, I opened my door in the late afternoon to a small gang of
bandits. They showed me knives, and then they hid them in their sleeves
again. I could not get past them or close the door on them and still I did
not let them in. In my hand was a crowbar, which in the end I was not able
to swing. “You will give us money,” the leader of the trio said and I tried to
see his face behind his mirrored sunglasses, but could only see my own
reflection. It startled me, how white I seemed, and then, how odd. What
was this white person doing in this place? I opened my wallet and gave
them the money that I had. It was a few US dollars in their money, perhaps
ten, not much by any standards, not much by theirs.

“This isn’t enough,” he said, holding the money on the flat of his hand
like offering it back to me, like giving me a second chance. “This is noth-
ing. You must give us more money.”

“Please,” I said. “The bank is closed today. This is all I have. Please.”
Some long moments passed. I do not know how many. In the silence I
heard myself say to them from a far away place, “Please. Please.”

They went away. I cannot remember what direction they took as they
left or what they looked like as they walked away. I could not pick them
out of a crowd. I cannot know how much time passed as I hung there in
my doorway, but then, like waking from a deep, deep sleep, I was in the
world again. And what a raucous world it was! In the distance, gunfire,
and here the explosion of goats and dogs and chickens and sheep and dust
and feathers and the many and barebodied grandchildren of my neighbor
screaming as they were chased through the street by Rita—a baboon mistaken for a monkey—her chain broken and free, chasing wildly now these children who for so long had tortured her. For an instant, I felt a wave of pleasure wash through me like love at the sight of the mayhem of her freedom, and for that one instant I can say this, I was happy, I was happy to my core. Then the monkey spotted me, and my happiness turned to white-knuckled fear as barreling toward my open door was an open-mouthed creature with fangs and shrieking and I don’t know what she planned on doing, on seeking asylum behind my legs, or on sinking her teeth into them, for suddenly I was face to face with what I wanted to know but couldn’t, Africa, Africa unchained, and there was no other recourse at that moment but to guard hearth and home, and slam shut the door.
BY THE NEW WATERS OF EUROPE

William Logan

i. England, That England

The poplars blackened, as if from rot,
against the gray of Constable’s sky,
graduating down toward dampened pinks,
like the flush of a woman’s parts.

They appeared, the trees, a pierced silhouette,
ghosts, revenants, the bemedaled, wounded reserves
long marching to the front that recedes, recedes,
like tide withdrawing from a flat-iron shore.

How terrifying to have lost our cowardice!
And still they could make nothing happen,
the dry leaves swirling like ash, the fallen
branches holding the ground. In the chimney,

new broods of swifts tested their wings
and whistled at dusk from the hunger.
We knew what awaited them, we who were
wise before our time and now were wise after.

ii. History Lesson

The moon is down. The distant sound of lead
takes nothing but the privacy of the slain,
the fretfulness of leaves, the reasoned rain,
the nothing that is nothing when it’s said.

iii. German Hours

I had been unconscious. The reflecting pool
rustled like a strip of cellophane,
and the uncertain sky shivered like a pail
of water in which God picked up his cell-phone.
Busy signal. Tufts of nimbus
looked stuck on with library paste,
and the young recruits waiting for an army bus
to take them away from their listening post

stood, uneasily, boys cut from cardboard.
How many had gone before us, how many
followed, scattered like bread
over the Black Forest, or the new money.

How beautiful you were, nevertheless,
leaning over me like a damaged angel,
knowing but not caring for the loss
of what we were, for which we fell.
THE BELIEF OF A BELIEF

William Logan

In the arch rears a shadow, like an oak dividing an innocent lawn. The moral prepares in shorthand, against the window of a rising century—the inconstant, pious, nihilistic almanac. There, wavering, the conjugations of love repair, ribbed like swarming buttresses of the church, its canticle of vocation and compromise, the sermons whispered at the stake.

When did we first savor the divine narrative? Pigeons flash in the sun, blank pages of pianissimo, as if there marked a place beyond devotion, there an empty heaven. I lost my belief, then bartered my will. There were masters of the word before the word, as days were named without noons. The cabinet lists open. The floorboard splinters, the roof betrays its beam.
A Guidebook to the Beautiful People

John Gallaher

I love to cuddle up with the white sandy beaches, Sadie said, there on the ladder. And I’m really good at quitting smoking, to boot. She knew more than she was saying, we could tell.

I get a kick out of guava and windward island settings, she replied. We’re really very curious is all. Maybe Jenny Hoyden can help? We’re into weddings here, where we can all be dressed as the other person. That would be something. Especially since we enjoy talking to people, all kinds of people, Sadie added. John was very attentive and I was watching the boats. The circus school’s another basic requirement, Albie said. We called it *The Mini-skirt Episode*, complete with flying trapeze, trampoline, and the locals. Jenny didn’t know what to do with it. I’m still a little jet-lagged, she told us. She was built with weather in mind, we knew, looking out on the patio where she was swimming with a philanthropist.

They were taking photos the way one might take a bath, Albie said. I also love to talk, Sadie replied, so let’s talk. The whole thing is why I love coffee with high quality introductions and end notes. And I love to tan and wear sunglasses as well. Other highlights include scuba diving, horseback riding, several mirrors, and little plaid skirts. Other school girls weren’t so lucky, and are subject to availability. They’ve their common interests, so the concierge told us not to worry too much. Enough’s enough, we shouted, and wrestled them
to the floor. As the name implies, Lover’s Leap didn’t let us down either. And that’s a place where you could stick your Thanksgiving or New Year. In fact, Sadie found Mexicans and Italians as well as a night out dancing. And I really enjoy showing off for hours, she said from the landing. Look at her there, Albie called, waving his flashlight. We were lost from the beginning, we knew. So we skipped the funeral entirely and concentrated on the cake. It was short of us, but life’s shorter. And dotting the horizon, as the signs say.
A Guidebook to the Eternal Verities

John Gallaher

Last Saturday on the Rim of the World Highway we were waiting in a parking lot which was blue. We tend to have good intentions. He was waiting there as well. Blue with a hint of white,

they opened all the doors of the visitor center. He’s the guy from the ad, we decided. Where’s my phrase book? Beth asked. No está olvidado, she informed us.

Her new confidence caught us all off guard. How many languages does she speak then? Spoke, have spoken, whichever. Or suppose that’s an event of which we want to calculate the probability. A hint of white. It was a terrible moment, though it’s good to be proved right. There are hundreds of places there. Casual, one adds, but space limitations pared our coverage down to a blue Chevette. How the pines are empty, she says. That can easily be explained. She hurries to close the door behind her. Which stood them in good stead as well with historic data, and the gray and purple barrier of the approaching mountain range, full of rotten granite and chaparral tangle and oak and critters. We were waiting and the day was blue hinting of white.

Maybe they’ll come. It’s all we’re trying to accomplish, the Ranger says. We were there together saying it’s good not to be alone. And all around come clattering in blue, houses and basketballs as though a bell must’ve rung.

When in doubt, boil water, the book says. Then the mail becomes more frequent, it continues. Things begin badly and quickly get worse. Say we weren’t waiting then, or really waiting, as the case may be,
in Terminal Flats. Or *Platas*. We all smiled at one another. Beth
turned at the mailboxes, failing to notice us while word of the good life spread
and another mile or ten of road was ground out. These

are generous mountains. Who’s right? What do I know? Either in distance
or from it, as he’s stepping from the blue Chevette. Which
was the better route would embroil travelers, surveyors,

and historians for years to come. We never would’ve thought that
of Beth and the Ranger. The long ridge out to the south
is called Cloudland. It’s always either not too late or it is.
After you climb the four hundred steps to Torre del Mangia
and peer down from the belltower onto the scallop-shaped
Il Campo where hundreds of tourists sprawl across the piazza
and hundreds more bend under green umbrellas to nibble biscotti
and sip caffè, and the air’s suffused with golden aureoles,
you’ll know why swallows double-loop the campanile and circle
the nearby duomo, circle all afternoon without coming
down through shafts of Tuscan sun like a knife
and intercession between light’s source and its deliverance
to the brick streets below. You’ll know why the Council of Nine,
a level-headed, merchant lot, launched their earthly plans:
commanded tones of raw and burnt sienna for their houses,
umber for the city walls, and quarried colored marble
from nearby hills for the various facades, flat bands
of pink and green that paralleled the world below.
And puzzle-pieced beneath the pilgrims’ feet black and white
inlays of marble, Sibyls and Allegories that spoke simply
for the divine mystery. Magnificence, yes. But earthly works —
to praise Him and to weight men’s passions for the sky with marble
edifices. Today, it’s all brilliant and dead as Jesus in his tomb
despite the Gothic arches, the golden stars of apse and dome,
the soaring nave, the pulpit carved of porphyry, the striking
bronze of Saint John, the famous Maesta with Mary serenely
poised between saints and angels — no, I tell you, up here,
four hundred steps to the belltower is as close as you come
to the light those ancient ones beheld, and still you must shield
your eyes from the milling ones below, vendors of gelato and vino,
crowds videocamming the hundred diversions of the square’s
halved-circle. Or else, go down to ground-level and pass through
the duomo’s bronzed doors and down her arching corridors
and slip into the Libreria Piccolomini where the books
of Pope Pius rest behind glass, and inhale the quiet
that companions books everywhere, like a body and shadow,
a hand and its gesture, an incarnation and its insubstantiation,
and press your palms against the case that keeps you from those illuminated words scrawled by monks whose faith was timeless and who therefore worked on a scale of time we no longer recognize. And witness next the margins of the page, eccentric figures half-man, half-horse riding with bow bent to the hunt, or monkeys cavorting with virgins, and know the original confusion of impulses, the first fires in the blood that lit a light too high and too charged for reverence or serenity. And know that even from these familiar desires you are cut off. Then, when you are ready, turn to the Three Graces in the room’s center, that Roman 3rd century copy of a copy, pining for the Hellenic original, the longing for pastness so strong it comes through each delicate, straining line of the Graces’ arms and legs, even the stumps, the severed, lost, smashed limbs that strove as far as they could for a prophecy, a fate, that reached backwards to a shared origin. Then return to the courtyard and stand among the hordes of schoolchildren with their frazzled, diligent teachers, among the shepherded tour-groups with their staff-wielding leaders, among the many and the few in need of instruction, and witness the uncompleted floor-plan of the duomo’s second phase, a few grand arches, a staircase leading skyward, a few bold walls, the plans for grand expansion cut short by the Plague of 1348 that cut short half the lives of Siena — 65,000 bodies struck from their souls and piled high in the Il Campo, stinking under the burnt sienese sun — and cut short their commerce and their fleet and standing army, and converted them to an annex of Visconti or Medici powers, and thenceforth, to a beautiful but inconsequential city on a hilltop, and thenceforward, to a walled museum whose every medieval scrap and stone was ordained to be left as is, so others might climb the four hundred steps of the campanile and behold the swallows slicing through these shafts of light that fall on the passions below and illuminate all that grand architecture framed in time.
How it’s done comes back to me when the women, one maybe twenty-two, the other, her mother, enter the coupe. Good evening, the well brought-up daughter says, and I reply, good evening. We hang our coats and as she turns I see a single braid reaching to the top of her thighs. She’s not five feet tall, sniffling—a cold, the flu or grip. Her mother, heavy-set, maybe forty-five, fifty, strokes her cheek and feeds her pills. It seems the daughter’s crying. They start putting bags away under the lower bunk, which lifts—yes, that’s why it’s preferred: no one can reach your things. They set out slippers. A man joins us, plumpish, in his twenties. The mother offers him room under the bunk, as I should have, but he’s content with the upper storage space, a sort of tunnel over the corridor. When the conductor comes for tickets, our late arrival offers his, pulls out a cigarette, uncaps a beer and leaves. We give ours, then the daughter reaches for one of the rolled, thin mattresses above, pillows, plastic bags with sheets, makes up her mother’s bed and then her own. I stand in the corridor until she’s done, then make up mine. The conductor’s back: to collect for sheets and the young guy with him, but briefly. I remember to step outside again to let the women undress. Please close the door, the girl asks from the upper berth. Minutes pass. Policemen start down the aisle, the pair knocking on compartment doors, peering in. The young guy and I reenter. He unrolls his mattress, not bothering with the sheets. Mother reads, daughter reads; the young guy leaves. When he comes back I’m still awake and the mother’s reading light is on. I hear him snoring, look up and see the girl reach over to shake or talk to him. He stops. The mother’s light goes out. I sleep in spurts, feel the train’s sway and stopping. I’ve only napped, I think, when the sharp knock comes to tell us it’s 45 minutes to Moscow. Then I’ve pulled on pants and shirt, stand outside the coupe again as the women dress. They’ve washed, are having breakfast, the young guy’s still asleep, as the train rolls into the station. Have a good day, I say to the women. The girl unbraids and rebraids her hair. Mother sweeps up crumbs with her hand. Both turn: safe trip.
MORNING IN THE SUK

Eileen Berry

The early day is alive with flies and smoke from charcoal fires
tasting the acrid tongue, perfume that women know,
gripping the senses as an ache and holding the smell of fresh
ovened bread, coffee, strong, black, poured through strawgrass
into tiny porcelain bowls on brass trays, spiced with ginger root
and sugared sweet.

Morning light, pale as sand, mottles shade trees and wooden stalls.

The air is dry and reeks of cumin spilling like grass seed from
open sacks; of leather from drying hides and skins, and pungent
animal odours of sweat and warm urine.

Donkeys are pissing in the dirt, goats tearing at rotting
refuse, chickens fluttering in basket cages scattering grains
and straw.

Camels sit apart, hunched on the ground, heads regal.

Mohammed leans his bike against a stall. Salaam Aleikum.
Bleached cotton robes sharply white against desert dust and sand.
Soon it will be HOT.

In this desert world, vast and bare, open and empty as the sky,
the insistent sun shapes everything.
There are no outsiders. There is no escape.

Our world is worlds away, a crackle of sound on a cheap radio.
Barry was everywhere and so easy to marry, full of springtime which is always hope and trust.

Mountains face our living room window, their unsolicitous peaks white and blue; the neighborhood is silent because it was made that way. Barry sits in his armchair, reviewing cases. I steal to him, tilt the brown drink in his mug, pinch the little string overhanging his pocket and tug, pulling more, then more, coiling the cord upon the floor. So much came out of Barry, it is hard to say—

Barry was always familiar, his thick, low, syrupy voice of Boston and mud; junior partners often exhibit great propulsion and charm; he barrels through the turreted streets downtown, smiling, punning, grabbing a drink, stopping to observe holidays, to pray. Our home is a flexible hinge between the ridge and the skyfull of dark matter, invisible forces that hibernate—

Barry often prefers the creamed chicken; our living room table is ruby granite and slate. He bought an oak mule chest — and end tables layered with mosaic; at night in the bed I grow down, down, backward into the cement basement floor of my parents’ home while Barry waits, still as a moth—

Like many people, I am expert at following the rules of my own design, biting back the urge to question or analyze; I tear past Barry’s office desk and to the elevators in a rage; why can’t he do better, stop laughing, read something beside torts, open his mind, pick up a raisin cake? I dash to the street where by chance my mother and father are driving past, waving gladly their four hands, throwing popcorn, wearing argyle sweater vests, happy in general about life as it is lived—

Such episodes cause me to feel strange every day.

Barry’s vehicle is large as a small house, with lush, curving metal flanks of midnight green, exhaust pipe thick as a fireman’s hose, its mouth pouring white volumes of fog, and upon this mouth I must briefly affix my own
mouth, in order to best appreciate life, I think, though. Barry has never instructed me to do this, nor have tv broadcasts, either; still it is true as god or the atmosphere—

Barry orders the roasted chicken; we have little to discuss; the newspaper describes a man fitted for prosthetic face and arms—

Barry drives us home in silence; odors seem to fly from his body—lemon, vulture, brine, it is hard to say; the mingling of all our family’s sweat and the opposite of this odor: sense. And Barry is not a bad man, as the Dean of Law once said; Barry agreeably swims beside my false self, scanning the face of the sky, its mineral dark; at each day’s end we see our back door ajar, or lakes up high that we ignore—

All these complex mental processes to keep Barry out, and Barry is cheerful, needing no help from the journal club; and soon the neighborhood annexation will begin; on many evenings the chicken is luscious; afterward in town, the foolish cliches of the cinema help keep us thoughtless, separate and cold—

Barry was originally a chemist, as everyone has ever known; my father told me about Barry long ago when I was small, for I had never satisfied my parents’ bodies nor been satisfied by theirs, and screamed unusually, struggling against dependence and the shame rising through it; Barry rarely wants to punish me, though I found ways to make him do it—

Barry’s shape is different with me than when he sits and reads alone; Barry wrestles over the idea that god may be cruel, and implies I should consider this too. But my shape has grown defended and smooth, and I believe Barry’s choice in furniture is poor, too: the chest with laurel leaf motif, cherrywood bookcases reaching as if vaults to our roof; unbeknownst to Barry I set a bowl of milk in the rafters to feed a family of sick mice—

Barry and I are very thirsty these days; dust from the warring earth flies through our throats and perhaps we wait for the world to mature, to catch up with us; the back side of god is too strange, too vulnerable to contain all of life, Barry worries as he drives; I laugh at him, feigning anger in a spirit of play, though the danger of our games is what frightens Barry and me—
Barry is not poor or free. Our window holds the soft, alkaline mountain sky, the ribbony road to the old town; the house ticks in the animal dark; the kitchen knives are turned up; I keep the chicken warm in a soft white sauce, molding it for Barry. In a lapse of self I lure the mice to the floor, pulling aside the kitchen door with the softness of children or breasts, and there they run, a stream of fur through our home’s warmth, finally positioning themselves at the toilet to drink, and this begins to happen every night—

Barry prays for a way into the jumbled panels and panes of god while shifting lanes in his enormous car, and Barry’s doubt gives him pain in the mind, foot, and spinal cord; he cares too much what god thinks, which is especially comic at sporting events; soon he will take a new case to court, but tonight, there is Barry, standing in the mirror nude, post coital worry the flavor of our room; and Barry will make an appointment soon for his urinalysis; we have the council meeting too, and in general, there is too much to do; I scuff across the kitchen tile in the far middle of the night, looking through the skylight to mother and father in their part of the sky—

The peppercrust chicken is pretty as a young bride; the fund raiser will begin at 6:45; there is the annexation and the upcoming census, too, and my cotton dress like a swab, the Earth held in place by a concerted tie, the sun that will someday break; at night I hold Barry’s wrist in my fingers, feeling his absent-minded largesse, the heat of his vacant legs—

My parents hurried from Portage Bay, hoping not to miss the mountain view; still buried in the bedspread I see Barry’s face with its thoughts straddling duty, succor, ice; we enjoy food and popcorn with enormous oral greed, and Barry favors dark bread, in fact; he is far too tall and big and often makes me laugh, has a hearty appetite for slaw, large genitals, voluminous smile; Barry most frequently enjoys the cream mustard chicken, and all in all, Barry has too much inside, too many preferences—

While I am running, Barry thinks deeply about the case. We live on Sky Island Drive, overlooking the parcels of valley land; Barry and I must not alter these shapes; he loads his golf clubs into the cargo area, slamming the tail gate; in the front seat I wear microplastic sunglasses; and Barry must not know that, at night, our house is alive with mice; Barry’s shape makes my shape change, ballooning too far then coming back to me strange; so Barry and I are aimless in the dinosaur way and will not outlast the sky and stars. Well, what could you say.
**Official Habits**

*Peter Michelson*

In Anaradhapura

first world tourists may
get choice accommodations
but in this heat and these environs
they’re little more
than prime mosquito meat.

Sacred Body Types

All these old dagobas
are nothing more
than endomorph pagodas.

New World Order at the Nuwarawewa

The entrance notice says
American Express and VISA Welcome,
which explains why
we will always need the Gulf war—
as long as there’s oil
there’s plastic.

Deutschemark vs. Lingua Franca

It’s not so much that Lankans
keep asking if you’re German
it’s that they keep asking you in English.
Imagine how the French must feel.
Making Book

At the National Museum
rare palmyra leaf books
are kept in dim glass cases.
In Anuradhapura every other teenage kid
has one or more to sell.
This one's bird dogged me for half an hour.
Business is slow these days.
But his naive shamelessness
has a certain charm.
He says he's saving up for university
but those in Lanka won't admit him.
They're for the rich, he says,
maybe I could get him into M.I.T.
I smile, he grins and shrugs,
as if to say, You never know.
He brandishes another palm leaf book,
4,000 rupees. I raise my brow.
Maybe three would do.
The text is medical, he says.
They're always medical, I say.
He shrugs and opens to an illustration,
possibly a liver or esophagus.
Are they all the same, I say.
He shrugs, he hasn't read them all.
Isn't selling them illegal
or are all these fake, I say.
Not fake, he says, his finger on
the esophagus or liver.
Real palmyra leaf, he says, real calligraphy.
I mean are they forgeries, I say.
He doesn't know the word.
When I explain he says, Of course.
An authentic forgery, I say.

A real copy, he retorts and grins.
Just like the Buddha's statuary?
Just like the Buddhas, he replies.
Aybovan, I say.
He whips out a cloth of stones.
Perhaps I'd like to see some real gems.
Sri Lanka produces gems, and marketing is brisk at both high and low levels of commerce. Lankans seem to have a sophisticated eye and taste for jewelry. I wear a largish silver Navajo ring with an unusual turquoise stone. It drew comment from complete strangers, mostly men. For women a white man on the street seems to fall somewhere between a clown and a devil. Walking along I would usually smile and nod at women, which had about an even chance of being met with an amused chuckle or a sullen glare. Men would often grab my hand for closer inspection of the ring. It looks better from a distance, as the silver workmanship is a bit crude. Initial appreciation would usually devolve to a polite “Hmmm.” Nonetheless, though I felt like a defective representative of Navajo craftsmanship, they were frequently curious about the stone’s source. There are a surprising number of Lankan gold and silver smiths, at least some of whom, contrary to guidebook opinion, are quite good. My wife lost one of the three exquisite silver feathers on her Zuni fetish pendant. A Batticaloa smith made a meticulous replica in about an hour.

As for the kid, there’s a distinct difference between a hawker and a tout. A tout is always oblique, elusively trying to worm his way into your sympathy or confidence. Commerce is not usually mentioned because he’s not actually selling anything but leading you to the salesman. In some cases he’s selling himself, hoping your sympathy with his plight or ambition to better himself will lead to cash. A hawker is as direct as a beggar, except that his trade requires contact and conversation. He may con you about his merchandise, but then both parties are aware of caveat emptor. He may also nag you, but there comes a time when you either do or don’t want to buy. At this point his time is more a money calculus than yours is, and he moves on. Unless there are no other customers and he’s bored, which was the case with this kid. Luckily he was less single-minded and had a more interesting personality than most hawkers exhibit. He kept his eye on the ball, but he was really into the banter for such amusement as it had. Of course the rule of thumb is that the longer he can keep the mark talking the more likely a sale. And I suppose it’s possible he actually thought I could get him into MIT.
Mean Times Mean Demeanor

Cyril is a fisherman,
now an inland refugee from war.
Each night he's hip deep
in these ancient, desert tanks
casting out his net.
Each morning's take will be
20 rupees to the kilo more or less.
He's got four kids in school,
clean uniforms are daily de rigueur
plus the bus fare and a lunch.
By the time the day's begun
at least two kilos of his catch are gone,
if indeed the catch includes as much.
Schooled by Negombo priests,
he's proud his English is articulate.
He has an incisive Catholic's view
of Lanka's war between its sects.
Still, he's Sinhala after all.
He knows the local flora—
from margosa, for example, comes Khomba soap,
which he says discourages mosquitos.
We talk comparative astronomy, religion,
Lankan economics, education...
the war rides hard on working men,
they don't teach English like they did....
Three quarters of an hour's walk
and Cyril goes his way as we go ours.
We each agree we'll write.
Today his letter comes.
His writing style's more florid—
"May Almighty God Bless you Very Graciously
Honorable Dear Sir and Madame," it begins.
He recalls our walk, observes
that "Tamil terrorism" goes from bad to worse.
But the bottom line's the top of his agenda,
expenses more than his capacity to earn,
the credits and the debits itemized.
He hopes we don’t misunderstand. But, in sum, he needs a bicycle, would we send the cash for one. That God has blessed our life with peace is how he ends, and then the enterprising signature of a proud and straitened man whose wager with humiliation we don’t misunderstand.

Tanks are ancient artificial lakes built as reservoirs in the dry zones. Even today they would be rather impressive projects. Negombo is a commercial fishing center on the west coast with a substantial Roman Catholic population. Cyril is a pseudonym. His situation is characteristic of many working people. Their desperation is often masked by underemployment, working at part time and low paying jobs. Many shops barely larger than a closet, and there are a surprising number, will have two or three clerks in addition to the shop keeper. By such makework they support an extended family or circle of friends. It’s hardly a viable economy, but for those many more without work or in refugee camps conditions are of course yet worse.

Official Habits

Murder is a universal crime and habit. Execution is not a universal crime but is a widespread habit. When is official habit criminal?

Corpse and murder link like bread and butter. Here the girl or her corpse has disappeared, a custodial scenario that is familiar. Precedent permits proceedings in her absence.

Worse luck still for the defendant, who’s a cop, for if he’s innocent the government is guilty, and the government is judge and prosecution.
Luckily for it defendant Kandara’s
a Mexicano villain look-alike
from Central Casting—sullenly mustached,
a pouty, self-indulgent face, and shifty eyes.

He’s a prima facie instance
of a man to whom or from no good
is bound to come, a case from which
justice is unlikely to be wrung.

Still, that’s what the victim’s peasant family,
sadly lined along a courtroom bench,
so long and rigorously sought.
What do they see, so hopefully, so numb?

Kandara’s now a joker in the hand
that his employer didn’t want to play
but will, indeed it must. We’re here
to watch, the world’s eyes, the world’s ears.

The World Bank wants justice done.
The World Bank wants clean accounts.
We stand our watch for “human rights.”
We take the ironies that come.

In Kandara’s unit of the National Police
are fifty guys more or less like him
who are assigned on any given night
to missions more or less like this.

On this given night was Kandara there
or was he somewhere similar
and someone else was there
distinctly similar to him?

Perhaps the point is moot.
For each of many disappearances
more or less like this
there is an unindicted murderer.
The government has played its hand. Kandara is lying face up on the table. He has one hope justice doesn't have, that the victim, as he claims, was JVP and so de facto murder was de jure execution. Execution is not a universal crime but is a widespread habit. When is official habit criminal?

We all want justice done. We all want clean accounts. We stand our watch for “human rights.” We take the ironies that come.

Our arrival in the courtroom caused a stir. First the court clerk interrogated us. We explained our auspices and mission. Then proceedings were inexplicably deferred from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Journalists covering the trial for the Colombo papers took a shine to us. This proved to be useful; since the trial was conducted in Sinhalese, they volunteered to serve as interpreters. Meanwhile, they interviewed us and took our picture. They also opined that our presence caused the delay of proceedings. I suppose the dusty Anuradhapura beat was back page stuff, which is probably why the trial was set in that district. We were their ticket to the front page, and so it turned out. The story of the trial was later embedded in front page stories about international observers attending the trial, complete with picture. In retrospect it appears that the reporters used us as a hook to keep their editors from burying a politically sensitive story.

The victim’s family, villagers who’d come some distance by bus, also introduced themselves. The language barrier made this frustrating. The journalists could have interpreted, but the family clearly didn’t trust them, possibly with reason. Our parting at day’s end was yet more sad. They wanted to express their gratitude but couldn’t do so effectively. We wanted to
express our sympathy, but the best we could do was “Aybovan,” May God go with you.

In fact this was a pre-trial hearing to determine if there was sufficient evidence. A police officer was accused of abducting, raping, and murdering a woman whose corpse had never been found. But the defense claimed that the woman was a member of the Sinhalese terrorist Janata Vimukti Peramuna (JVP or People’s Liberation Front) and, under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA), if she had been killed it was a legal execution rather than a crime. This grim distinction reflects the vulnerability of human rights under Lanka’s emergency regulations. The case would have important ramifications.

The first question was whether a murder could be prosecuted without a corpse. The second was whether emergency regulations would continue to provide an umbrella of immunity for the plague of summary executions by police and the military.

Disappearances of police and military “detainees” have been a common problem in Sri Lanka for both Tamils and Sinhalese. For the latter, as in this case, they usually have been because of membership or suspected membership in the JVP, which the government now claims to have eliminated, although it revives the threat at its convenience. The national police obviously operate under orders from the government, and a great many cases of arrest and subsequently unexplained disappearances have been laid at its door. Except where the victim’s family or friends have relentlessly pursued prosecution, the government has tended to let such charges twist in the wind. Since the IMF and World Bank have recently put human rights on their agenda government prosecutions have increased somewhat, though government involvement on both sides compounds the ironies.

So it was actually the government’s human rights credibility that was in the dock. If the thousands of disappearances could not be prosecuted for lack of corpses that had long since become fish feed in the Indian Ocean, then they effectually had government sanction. And if perpetrators such as this defendant were exempt in the promiscuous application of the PTA, then government policy would be perceived to be as murderous as it in fact covertly is. It was to the government’s advantage to scapegoat the defendant and thereby dissociate itself from the
agency of its own policies. Still, the defendant had very capable lawyers. A high-powered young gunsel in a Wall Street suit, Harvard tie, and JFK hairdo was complemented by an older folksy partner who camouflaged incisive analysis with a humorous, homespun style. But in terms of a hearing, where there are no witnesses or cross-examination, they didn’t have many cards to play. The judge ruled for the prosecution that there was precedent for proceeding sans corpse, that the defense had no evidence the victim was a JVP member, and that there was sufficient evidence for the case to go to trial. The corpse question had been answered in full, the other partially: apparently if there had been evidence of the victim’s JVP membership that would have influenced the ruling, implying that the defendant’s error was not so much in murdering the woman as in not having adequate information about her before he did so. Having contributed this much to human rights, the judge made his dignified exit. Kandara (a pseudonym), looking sullenly baffled, was handcuffed and returned to his cell. The lawyers joked and shook hands. The victim’s family looked sad, grateful, and cautiously hopeful for something like justice. The journalists, not expecting much like justice, were mildly surprised. The government so far appeared to be covering its otherwise exposed backside with one hapless cop following orders. Whether that will come up at the trial is anybody’s guess. Meanwhile, the World Bank and IMF will presumably see this as progress toward human rights. It probably is.

If It Weren’t for Bad Luck
this Country Would Have No Luck At All

This is the height of the mango season.
They grow everywhere—
wild, cultivated, along the tracks.
Every intersection and railroad stop
kids have armloads to peddle cheap.
They are, as the poet said
of some other inferior fruit,
so delicious, juicy, and sweet.
Today’s news is
that five people have died
falling out of mango trees.

Regression’s Second Law

Between the Buddhists and the Hindus here
they make the Muslims look good,
not an easy thing to do.
And between the three of them
they make the Christians look good,
which they haven’t done for themselves
in nearly two thousand years.
But why be parochial.
The Serbs and Croats
make Marshall Tito
look like a harmonic convergence
of Albert Schweitzer and Mother Theresa.

While Christians are not ethnic players in the war, Muslims have a significant function. About 5% of the population, they live in Tamil areas and are Tamil speakers but maintain identity in their own neighboring towns and villages. The Tigers sometimes harass or assassinate uncooperative Tamils but largely direct their in-house atrocities at Muslims. Thus they are victims. But Muslim Homeguards, armed by the army although untrained and undisciplined, tend to retaliate on Tamil civilians, creating a Tamil-Muslim tension that fuels the conflagration and thereby serves Tiger purposes. Tamil and Muslim civilians, wild cards the primary combatants play at will, have formed cooperative peace committees, but their efforts fail in the face of bloody Tiger attacks.

Walking Softly

When it comes to the famous
Buddhas in repose
at Bellanwila, Polonnaruwa or Isurumuniya
Tamils say;
Let sleeping Buddhas lie.
Wesley found a small apartment, painted the walls white, moved in stray furniture, tried to settle. The swing shift, 3:00 to 11:30, gave himself and everyone else on the fourth floor where they worked, fifteen-and-a-half hours. Eight on (with a half slice for lunch), fifteen-and-a-half off. And you might try a hundred ways to juggle it, twist it so it came out a square or a triangle, think of a Jacaranda spilling its purplest flowers for a flock of desert parrots and it always, no matter the intricacy of the dance, sounded like an autopsy with the number fifteen transformed into seconds, and each of those eight hours into segments and cross-segments of time the wizards of the American tropical jungles thought might be too heartless even for their Gods. The freight elevator was rickety. Anything over ten bodies and that thing seized into an intrigue of earthquake simulations. The fourth floor opened up onto a time clock with a wall of punch cards - simple, direct, merciless which produced a snicker in everyone who saw it.

“Sumthin better sumthin worse, like a bad lover with an infection you couldn’t take yer eye off of” one of the women workin the presses called it as she looked over Wesley, him freshly arrived, she and a couple of other girls havin a friendly smoke and doin a study. Lucille, Betsy, Janine. Two from Tennessee, one from Kentucky, daughters of hard scrabble farms and mines who “Come up either alone or with sumbuddy, any way a girl cood,” Lucille from Tennessee told Wesley once on a coffee break.

Mon. In Out O
Tues.
Wed.
Thurs.
Fri.

The names of the week abbreviated as if to spell out the complete noun might bring on a money spill beginning at the mystical crossroads where the phantom letters struggled in the renunciation of their appearances and if there was “O”vertime that information was written in by hand with the floor manager’s initials “Travis P” who drove an impeccable show-room-
perfumed ’58 Edsel, from Windsor to a neighborhood where Edsels or Fairlanes or Grand Prixs or LeBarons or GTO’s or Impalas or Barracudas, Regal Turbos, Futuras, Mustangs, Chargers, Cameros, Pintos, Chevelles and Cutlass Supremes; if they didn’t have the proper reservation ended up lookin unwed and unled, sinners driven to final destination cause their owners forgot about the stop watch masters who come uninvited into the really impersonal night, unglue transmissions, engines inside six minutes, head for that garage in Conshohocken, Oshkosh, “Pahrump” in Nevada, and Arizona where at the end of all the darkest rides loaded with the smoothest contraband twentieth century steel had to offer, you end up in “Nothing” up a couple of valleys and mountain ranges from “Yarnell” and “Octave,” a little off as it always is and far away as you can get. Wesley and me’d take the change we’d accumulated hoeing weeds or digging ditches under the eye of his father’s Kiowa foreman and spend a Saturday afternoon in the “Grove Theatre” (because it was orange grove country) and watch juvenile delinquent Hot Rod films where we saw “Hot Rod Girl” and heard such phrases as “cool cats” “squares” “dig”—“Drag Strip Riot” where Fay Wray herself after being ravished by King Kong, ends up (along with a gestation period suitable to the primordial frenzy with her ardently doomed King of Kings) as the mother of a disturbed street racer—“Hot Rod Gang” where we heard Gene Vincent sing “Lovely Loretta” and “Baby Blue”. There was also “The Choppers” which starred Marianne Gaba “Miss September” Playboy Magazine, 1959—“Dragstrip Girl”—we went to it for the beautiful Fay Spain and “TV” Tommy Ivo who hooked up four blown, injected Buicks onto one thin rail, pointed it a quarter mile down an asphalt tube in Pomona, a gravity visit to see what velocity and torque would do to the muscles of his pretty star-boy face.

No one we ever knew had an Edsel, so when, once in a while, Travis P offered to give Wesley a ride home Wesley’d ride shotgun and wonder about chopped channelled pin-stripped customized Edsels, whether I’d want one—sent a picture to prove it existed, two-tone orange and white after my unit had poisoned a bunch of village wells.

After a tour of all the fourth floor processes; packing, punch pressing, assembling, inspecting, Wesley was taken to his “station.” Five other people there; they were responsible for the final stages of assembly and inspection, a last tuning of the measuring gauges for oil tanks and containers that’d find their way to practically every oil field in the world “that had to do” as Travis P told Wesley, “with America’s power.” The five people held their faces tight as the floor manager stepped in among their tables and chairs tools and lunches to introduce “the new hire.” Five Black faces and, this suddenly
among them, one, extending his White Man’s hand. And they paused for the moment to look it and him over. Wesley knew immediately it wasn’t for the exact shade of his blue eyes. It was quick, unlike any measure he’d ever experienced. Though there were two wars, the spasm where I was that made that painting by Goya called “Saturn Eating His Son” seem like a nostalgia for innocence, and the one on the streets of America’s towns and cities, those five faces were concentrating only on Wesley. What took no more than a second’s glance; he didn’t know anything else other than he’d find out. There was Darius (“Named after a King, and any King’ll do, baby”), Marvin, Bob, JT, and George. JT about 6’7” or 8” (and Wesley estimated two hundred sixty pounds) stood up, extended a palm, a set of fingers that looked like small bananas. He squeezed Wesley’s disappeared hand, not too hard, but enough to let anyone know it wasn’t a seance and be sure as shit to keep yer eyes square, neither friendly or unfriendly. Darius was next. Wore a “Do Rag” to keep his “process” in place, sweet cologne, front teeth were split about an eighth inch, finger nails polished and trimmed and he had a little red portable radio one of his girl friends gave him “a surprise Easter present, and along with it some fine pussy, fit for a King, my Man” followed by a show of easy laughter, and an “Uh Huh, Muthufuckuh” for a touch of emphasis. It was obvious Travis P was getting nervous when he got around to Marvin, thin, light enough to almost “pass” but wouldn’t ever consider it, eyed Wesley and rather than shake hands, pulled out a cigarette, lit up, doused his match, nodded down at Wesley’s boot encased feet said, “Jack here, look like he know some horse shit.” Bob, wore a red sweater turtle neck “dickey” under a long sleeved ironed blue shirt (“never gits dirty”), black slacks, Italian zipper boots, a gold left front incisor, pulled an apple from his lunch box, a business-ending knife from a pocket, began to cut the fruit into slices, handed one to Wesley, and then to the other four, didn’t say a word ignored Travis P as if he were worse than a ghost, a humble fart slipped out with no chance for restitution and too sneaky for any secondary complications. George wore a felt hat he never took off, a couple of diamond pinkies, had a honey smooth baritone and used it to say “Wesley. Now that sounds like a lucky number.”

Who’s to say a Shawnee or Wea up from raiding Tennessee wouldn’t along with scalps to be paraded for review of the British at Detroit bring Black slaves who’d escape into Canada and their offspring to attend the “quiet convention” in Chatham, Ontario May 1858 planning a provisional
government with John Brown and a slave uprising against every plantation master. Michigan provided the secret region where a Black escapee drowned in one world reappeared in another; the St. Clare River wide too as the South Atlantic there though it seemed no more than a string in the usual Earthly comparison and by those properties of immigrant glacial waters forged shackles into invisible “Railroads”:

1765/1840: Slave Population grew from 500,000 to 3,500,000. Each slave counted as 3/5 of a Person—They the great artisans of the South: carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, tanners, barbers, tailors -
The Fugitive Slave Law passed 1850 to stop the disasters of “Immigration” along with collateral legislations: Capital offense to teach a Slave to read and write.

Virginia: The Slave Breeding State.
Shipped its product: 1830 to 1860: 220,000
no clod of cotton-worn dirt left unturned

Weight of rain
upon the genitals

Rupture of snake’s breath
smeared from ear to ear

implant feathers grass
in body cavities

flight of souls

incinerated by Magpies
Travis P left Wesley to his introductory shift and Wesley picked up a “gauge,” examined the top-most red plastic cylinder-housing with its window of numbers indicating by the thousands or hundreds of thousands how many gallons a storage tank either held or didn’t hold as a shrill whistle blew for five seconds (like an exotic form of epilepsy he’d later come to think). Marvin pronounced directly, “Break Little Jack. Nine minutes fifty seconds cause company policy subtract whistle time too.” They pulled up a table, their lunches, took out some candy, some smokes, shuffled a deck of cards, laid down a short stack of ones, poured coffee.

“You kin watch,” Darius commented. “If you got cash to lose, join up brother. Ain’t the army here. And don’t fret over them pieces of Company plastic. Soon enough you’ll know, and then we git yer spare change.” George held his hand out, palm up, and Darius touched the almost white skin there, with his fingertips to seal the gesture and the words. They gave Wesley half a “Snickers,” dealt each other a hand of five card stud.

“Where you from, Wesley?” Bob asked sucking at his gold tooth.

March 6, 1863: Civil War Detroit Race Riot considered the only major “Midwest” conflict though there were similar epidemics in Buffalo, Boston, Brooklyn, Toledo. Cincinnati - One, William Faulkner (“col’d”) accused of molesting two 9 yr. old girls:

Ellen Hoover (“col’d”)
Mary Brown (“Wh”)

The accused, forty one years, sentenced to life in prison for rape.
The citizenry, driven to frenzy by the girls’ testimony and the local newspapers attempted to lynch the prisoner.
As the waves of the riot spread, the rioters, burning and pillaging Negro residences, began hunting women, children, old men focusing its hysteria on anyone it chanced to find. Frederick Douglass wrote in response to this episode and its implications for a return of Northern sympathies for slavery:

“The whole North will be but another Detroit where every white fiend may with impunity revel in unrestrained beastliness toward people of color; they may burn their
houses, insult their wives and daughters, and kill indiscriminately."

Summer: 1942: 35% of America’s World War II weapons came from 185 plants in the immediate geography of Detroit. 55 of the major factories had not one single black worker, while skilled black workers by the thousands were either replaced or refused positions on the line in favor of recently arrived southern whites. Every factory in this crucial War Year was swept up into walk-out, sit-down strike, fixations of hate flooding outward from the line into the City. Gerald L.K. Smith called Negroes “universally syphilitic” their diseased sweat dripping onto the machinery shared with white workers. The Packard Foundry: Three highly skilled black workers were upgraded according to their seniority and Federal Law as 25,000 white co-workers abandoned the line and a loud-speaker-aided voice bellowed that a victory of Hitler was preferable to spending a work day “next to a nigger.” "Life Magazine” August 1942 printed the headline: DETROIT IS DYNAMITE teetering on the two extremes: either blowing up Hitler or the “U.S.”

Sunday June 30, 1943: Detroit ravaged by a race riot, one of the most fearful in American history.

Post-Riot fact finding committee blames violence on Negro demands “for racial equality which played an important part in exciting the Negro People ...”

July 15, 1943: Attorney General Francis Biddle in his secret findings for President Roosevelt stated, “I believe that the riots in Detroit do not represent an isolated case but are typical of what may occur in other cities throughout the country. The situation in Los Angeles is extremely tense.” Biddle concluded that a possible limit be enforced on domestic “Negro migration” as a part of “post-war readjustments.”
“Now from the Death that holds you walk into growing life that grows
grows to be seen

Walk

Begin

Begin To Be Seen

Where you are a Ghost
make the wind that’ll
make you sick there
The wind that’ll starve you there”

“Around a little river called the Santa Ana,” Wesley answered.
“Can a man go fishin?” JT asked.
“Depends” said Wesley.
“Depends. On what?” JT wanted to know.
“On you and yo pick pocket assed Mama” Darius interrupted shuffling the
deck of cards like the original gaudy serpent causing everyone around that

table to take a moment and nearly fall out of their chairs.
Marvin glanced at his watch said “Whistle up and sure enough it blow
unsweet and loud as a shade in its Fourth Second After Death,” as he
gathered his hand and the couple of quick bills he’d won “To keep up with
the Fords and Kennedys.”
“Um huh,” Darius shook his head, “Muthu here think he a preacher or a
poet.”
“Discover what in those four seconds, my brother?” George pressed Marvin,
but not too hard, letting the question go houseless.
“Baby, Baby,” Darius clicked out the four syllables, “Why you bring up such
things. Give Santa Ana Man over there the wrong impression about how far
down the Tax Code seeps?”

These men. He understood they’d taken a pulse; his color, dress, voice,
body movement, general carriage as if he were either a mug shot or a
featherless nestling fallen before them. It was deliberate, an essential study. And it scared him a little. The remote contract coming forward as it did without insulation, contorted and contorting any identity it touched. We worked the potato harvests. The machinery churning spuds up, dewed soil stunk and crusted near to boiling at that unlocked afterpoint with snarled potatoes birthed out into the cruel blanknesses of the air, human hands pecking at it like flayed rooster heads; the mix of cut soil, sweat, tractor exhausts, bent bodies racing plow blades for their lives; a whole hundred acre field inside a day end up as Tom Green’d say, loading a last sack on to a sundown shrouded flatbed, “Tore as a broken grave.” Our fathers had us do that as children, and later, at seventeen eighteen we hit the warehouses and fields ourselves, the money being what it was, though you’d gear yourself up for twenty hour days potato dust swelling your throat and gums; a hive or two from heat, the repugnant filthy noise of a harvest warehouse stirring up a desperate reckoning for the boys and their girlfriends we’d known, to escape, sign up for a war “Fuck and die or come back to this shit, you choose ese” the vocabulary rolled out slick as lacquer, animal, mineral, barrio time-slipped for revenge. End of the day we’d see em, other exhausted laborers, black mostly with some white mixed in; a husband, wife fixed there too turning the piles of rotted throwaways they’d later boil for soup, a thin stew, mix it with runny pork, sleeping next to their thinned metal held with wire cars on the same ground they’d pick next morning, themselves and it shrunk mutually to a just before dying just after living hushed there, semi-blistered like everyone else sixth decade of the twentieth century in our California towns. It wasn’t the work. Wesley knew he could do that. Knew after the death in life of his father and the collapse of the farm and the dreams of a farm, the Jew distant from the soil once more as if he covered himself with the landless past of Russia and Poland. The Farmer and Tom Green taught’im to be silent in hard labor, taught its finality and fragility, the study, gentleness, the murderous belittling breath of the hours and never, never to be broken by it (it was the reason we wanted him in Asia, next to us).

“You like Jazz, Santa Ana Man?” Darius asked, turning up his red radio.

*Life of Black Detroit in the late nineteenth century was the subject of constant mockery by the City’s newspapers which portrayed the daily struggles of its “col’d population” as if it, the City, was itself a Plantation “they passed day after day, eating and sleeping, working and playing.*
apparently as happy and as jolly as though they were back on the plantation itself” the “half dressed pickaninnies” at once mannikins of the grotesque and pitiful—horror visions of miscegenation, nightmare subvertors of white force lying beyond estimation or the “to reduce” as the initial verb risen in American colonial speech—the symptom and diagnosis a cosmology of the punitive: fantastic, impervious, throat cut as the mouth regions in the fangs of water stranded in its Vulture Form to draw existence in:

PLUS THE WAR VERB DESIGNATING BIRTHLESSNESS AT THE CORE OF APPEARANCES

Wesley didn’t say anything for a moment as each man looked, un-moved, a little ugly, as if the “new hire” and themselves because of it were a kind of corpse; Black hollowing White to a distant summer haze (“An evil inscription, come to stunt the whole wishing well” as George later would tell it not as apology, but living fact).

“Suppose what?” JT flexed out the words like he and the other mourners were about not to honor the dead and line the grave with the best unconsoling trinkets ten days after the Moon was born and touched the Earth with that water lily light o’ hers knowing she was the only one ever who had six toes just enough distraction and deformation for everyone under her incandescence to want to sit on each other in the ways best suited to ardency, indecency, trembling, horsemanship, the laughter of heartless rabbits in far galaxies.

“My family had records so I listened. Just like I’m listening now to that bass in the background. I heard it before. Sounds like Paul Chambers. And yeah. I like Jazz.”

It was “Miles Davis at Carnegie Hall” riding the radio waves to the fourth floor of this factory. We’d listened to the recording and tried to imagine from our palm and walnut lined Southern California side streets what New York or Chicago’d be like and sometimes we’d drive, Wesley and me, to the “It Club” in LA, hear Roland Kirk, the blind player, serve up notes and experiments that’d cut at us kids, cause questions to come up outta’ nowhere; hear Sonny Rollins, Lee Morgan at the “Lighthouse” in Hermosa and then walk the beaches, discuss what we’d listened to and didn’t understand a thing but that it seemed irresistible and held us like nothing else ever had almost like a hurt around a corner we couldn’t see, one we wanted more than anything like the glow of some lake sliced into multiple shades of quarter moon light with sounds of our own voices gone aerodynamic as the other high strung bullets sunk and stirred and become instantly inaccessible to the beginnings of the night that brought us to this music. Then sneak back into the fields we worked, hear Tom Green cussing cause we hadn’t showed at sunrise like we were supposed to and haul our asses to sundown and like Wesley’d said maybe it was that Kiowa after all who was trying to help us see it was us who could arrive late to a death zone.

“Is Paul Chambers,” said Marvin who looked around at that moment at the others, and added “Uh Huh, Jack here might know some shit after all.”

“Be shallow or deep, Marvin?” George asked.
“You and that funny assed nose ’yers git to go fewst George, if you wanna know.”

They squared off long enough for Wesley to think over why exactly Travis P put him here, slapped a palms up “Brother” signal, each of them laughing, telling Darius to turn up his “Red Box” so everyone could go back to work. It was a picture he’d never expected. Poor Whites, mostly from the Ohio River Border States, and Blacks wound tight into the machinery that had to be shared. Some of the White women had the hands of their ancestresses, cracked and bled from overwork, corns erupted over knuckles, in some cases, as if those, the parts that told the silentest stories about where a woman goes to and gets from in her American Journey, were worn on their lips as tornadoes, deadening heat and cold, starvation, loved ones trampled by plough horses, whole countrysides during the seasons of brain fever so sick, no one able to bury the dead so up they crawled when the chance came to this factory or others with their memories of fathers or grandfathers, legs bowed a lifetime from stumbling over turned-up clod, either followed or not by husbands, sons; daughters, granddaughters sitting at a punch press waiting on the break whistle for a smoke. “A little lost nail” Janine called her, “two pack-a-day and more habit from bein’ nervous. Musta’ bin them Kaintucky Hills that did it,” she’d laugh, offering her Black women co-workers a country girl wink. If this American Corner was a dead-end no one on those four floor’d whisper such forlornest sorrow over the Space and Depths of the country with all its possible footsteps and places to go. The loneliest Bride and Groom of the color codes in their ceremonies sat before each other here; displaced rural Whites and urban Blacks trapped in the details of sameness changelessly arranged for each generation. “Exact ones,” Wesley wrote in his hundreds of letters, “we’d seen hacked by the mid-day sun working next to a Black man or woman, as if the Nation had suddenly deciphered itself.” No one on any of those four floors forgot though what was waiting outside. Viola Liuzzo, the woman from Detroit had had her brains blown out on a drive-by suddenly abandoned Southern country road coming home after registering Black voters in Mississippi. Someone drove past her, fired point blank, kept going into the kind of murder as easily found in the Delta of the Mekong or the Yalobusha. And the Detroit Press in honor of its former traditions as to the properties of the Question tried to defame the murdered woman as drug addicted, educated, and sexually promiscuous.

“Men git the habit early,” Lucille from Tennessee said about those who killed the civil rights worker one day. “Beat the women till they cin barely
tell anymore whether a woman’s alive, or alive enough to git beaten one more time because he knows she’ll find a lid for it. Couple bastards like that think no more of it than a lynchin’ cep they do’wanna in’dup in jayel and’d never figer on other women takin’ her place, scerd iver second as they might be. One woman, yeah maybe, cause she was alone. Beat a woman’s OK, but be a woman killer. Even’n Soddy Daisy, where I’m from, no man’d be allowed to live the night.”

Lucille was tall, 6’, 6’1” “Black Irish” with “a quarter tinge Choctaw” in her “thirties sumwhars” liked “to go dancin’, liked marijuana: put that on my gravestone too,” and was respected by both her White and Black female co-workers for her wit, “fer the whiff of style she brang to it.” The women who heard this comment on the murder of a courageous fellow woman cast a reluctant gaze on their Tennessee sister knowing their own morbid trials, and yet, though they reckoned, each of them, what had had to be abandoned personally in the face of this “vice” as it broke their worlds, they still had time to ask whether she considered herself “the Soddiest Daisy of Soddy Daisy” not to wrap any of it in disrespect, but to plumb the recesses of humor which might instantly radiate into necessity and extravagance for them to be as instantly undercut by glances at a watch, bitten fingernails, smears of mascara, a sudden shuffle through a purse to make sure everything (lipstick, powder, perfume, nail polish “in case a someone out there still likes to fondle female toes,” capsules of amphetamine), were properly inventoried for an afterwork date. The edges of an almost resentful beauty still hovered over Lucille’s jaw line and lips. Her face was cheekboned high with the strain and curvature of Southern Forest Indian and Runaway Slave blood. She wis wiry, had long strong fingers, an ass Marvin said was “gonna ha’ta wait before it got placed in a Museum” and a pair of washed out blue Irish eyes “that provoke” like Betsy (also from Tennessee) said, “late afternoon suspicions.”

“Girl, wha’d yu say yu wuz from?”
“Ain gon’ say, iver’gin.”
“Name didin start with an ‘S’ did it?”
“Yeah. ‘S’ fer ‘Stray Parrot’ who beats her wings outside the windez a’pretty men on theez Deetroit Jewly nights.”
“Say agin, honey. Have a boy tatoo a feather on yer ass or mine, black, white, purple anytime.”
“Wuz yew iver thar?”
“What’s that?”
“Why that little town this side a’ the Snow Bird Mountins.”
“Yew mean the one has an actual Daisy pinned to her good uz pink ‘ole White ass?”

“Why, Girl Bride, the very one.”

The women could almost set themselves free with talk like this. Let the language go for a ride among themselves defining an utterable, communal preservation and an obstinacy against the rushes of hollowness which stole them: replaced the natural trust they might have had with the shrewd amusements that come with watching so much broken male traffic.

And they could break themselves as easily too.

If a new woman came, set an overhigh production pace, got the attentions of the efficiency experts forever waiting to rephrase those details affixed to seconds and minutes which meant wrists, forearms caught and mangled in presses—one arm for every 150,000 to 200,000 hours production time as the statistics proposed and those women knew intimately in the exact type of morbidity applicable to their “machine” and the rare but nonetheless occasional transformation of one of them into a partial or whole amputee; her beauty, at least the one that gave her negotiation, and even if it was a transparent dignity, it was, dignity—that beauty was “gutted”—if a new woman “went past rate” and forced the rest of them up that notch, increased the grotesque statistic they knew attended them, why then, in an adjacent alley the “girl” was kicked and bit, brought to know (because she needed the job “and there could be no other whereelses”) the sisterly assault didn’t have really a limit. It was the initial, the only warning.

Dear Wesley,

A war, or a something, came to the mid-continent countrysides around 900 A.D. The archaeologists who uncovered the skeletons were unable even in their trained language to insulate a personal shock over the Late Woodland mortuary mounds and what lay there on those bottom plains between the Mississippi and Appalachians for a thousand years - a taste for ghoulish violence no one ever, them or us, wants, but steams up and catches whoever’s alive like they were a thing too under blood or whatever waiting to be dilated and dialed up and tainted and handed over -
Weapons of Preference:  
Bow and Arrow
Knife
Clubs insetted with flint spikes
(As if those forest stalkers up
and went club footed before their
own human flesh in what they got
to bear, their time helpless as ours
them and us bearing the same “Awful
Roaring” as Columbus while he was
still offshore?)

They were good at growing corn, the plant most like men and
women who cultivated it. The cereal grass of the Ancient
Americas wholly dependent on humans for survival as were
humans dependent on it and because it liked sex, had
similar appetites to its human progenitors, the thing least it
play too hard and fast needed constant watching. Free
genetic exchange between hybrids was allowed, even an
occasional visit to bordering weedy grasses OK too long as it
didn’t interfere in seed quality and maintenance of
healthy varieties. Every feature; firmness of cob whether
hard or long, size of shank, shape of ear, width of cupule
has something to do with replicas, reproduction, reincarna
tion, abandonment, hot mousepits, hand held hard penises
and women’s fingers, patient, inquisitive, alert, anticipant
for corn, for other females, for men always slippery in their
ass-worn ways and arriving like they’d only this morning
crawled out of an accident, uneasy, cold, with those fine
lines that go right to the rawest spot in a woman’s eye.

Their mounds overlooked a landscape shimmering
with what was immediately underfoot - contour of land and
its forms, smell of the living, the dead, movement of
humans, birds, animals, clouds, noises of life, path of blood
in the body, wind risen above the knees, above the breast,
no higher for the noon spread of air. The dead too are
halfway, half waterlily. Flayed human face, shell of the Sun’s
Light that crawls now as a monster over night’s claim upon
day's swelling the petals - the halflily's terror over the incomplete amnesia inverting the realm of death. There are fields of flowers, perfumes for the predatory ruler of petals in or out of death's adherences. Dwarfs pluck them, pluck the petals. Their ears twitch in fury.

They occupied the same ridges and bluffs for at least three thousand years. One generation to another wanting to recognize the unrelaxed incarnations they'd carry in them about having lived, about having walked the same graciously dangerous, unyieldingly exact, miraculously detailed meadows, creeks, turns of soil and air so the dead might hear the patter of children's feet and who'll take up the arduous studies, know the stinging winds that'll rob a breath in or out of this life.

A large population of small villages planted, hunted, fished, built tombs, "crematories," cord-marked conoid clay vessels indicating the depth and shape of the women's minds who crafted the every-day object, brought it to a firm, mournfully simple luxuriance. The attractive complex of mounds and natural bluffs had to wait for 1940 in the twentieth century for road graders and bull dozers to transform the ancient "occupation zones" into modern highway fill—"treasure hounds" timber crews "collectors" wanting skeletons grooved axes projectile points fragments of a portable anything laid the rest to rest as if the whole outfit wuzza race a' stainless werewolves cum'ta lick it slick.

The revelations of these mounds and the discovery of the figures at Etowah both took place in 1962, the mysterious ocean and its creatures let loose now to imperceptibly crush us, draw us toward its secret smoothness we can't or won't be able to avoid even if we want to with its beauty so breathless, so exhausted, so poisonous as if it were a Venus-lit wall making us pliable, luring us to devotions, portals, raptures of destiny the previous generations knew they could not let well up, knew that no generation must ever inherit.

The killings of children appear to be prevalent by digging out their brains with flint-spiked clubs, bashing their faces in. Village life overcome by a continuous state of
crushing evil enveloping even the youngest who were not spared beheadings and mutilations. We have no stories in these northern plains and forests that tell us the Lords of Death can be enraged and swindled into having to undergo their own darknesses. There were huge pyramids with plazas and cities but no one can say whether those landscapes were the sacred replicas of the earliest creations the Gods allowed to unfold.

Mandibles of gray wolves found among the skeletons; perhaps weir signs marking the days and nights of terror still untraversed by any story

Female skeletons with missing feet who walked into their trances one thing, and walked out another

It was found too that woodchucks in their generations had a taste for the skeletons, breaking and carrying away the bones to who could know, an anywhere, and remold the parts into some sort a bastard faeries to weigh down and cause a drift to the living so that no one ever again in those lost decades’d know the difference from land and the primordial ocean on which it floats

Evidence of teeth gone; someone pulling them out of the fresh, the about-to-be fresh dead

Crushed femurs; who or what took their time to think out the applications

Hasty burials; skeletons with projectile points lying under or near indicating fatal soft tissue wounds

Skeletons without hands or feet; taken for trophies

Projectile points embedded in vertebra, pelvises; scattered around immediate excavated sites indicating episodes of random fury

No one spared
Some fishhooks in the graves that didn't match any of the other objects because they were so foreign, had the signature of deep sea marine expertise imported all the way from what's geographically Southern California—gang war trinkets from the Funeral Mountains, Rancho Mirage, an expedition come up the Mississippi to trade, had a Jivaro warrior along? Stayed a season. Two seasons? Enough anyway to fully absorb the whispers about the ways of ancient murder and who or what gets to be the fingerprints incalculable in their hard parasitic evasions.

Traces of even earlier “prehistoric marauders” who came periodically through these landscapes of Pleistocene ravines, valleys, terraces, bluffs, limestone cliffs, as well as “emergency” shelters for hiding.

The investigators think it was an “in-between” world worn out by the void of overpopulation, the need for land and the living things on it that couldn’t be found unless one population decided to begin murdering another. Could’a been that, Wesley. Could’a been it was a one hundred year visit from the OtherWorld, the Death People breaking through, able this once, to reach across the rules of sentence which held them, held their appearances to disease, infection and its fear/shames, the swarms of rot conspiring to eat courage—their materializations allowing no further distance. Who’s to say they didn’t watch the ancient rules for billions of years, watching for the right thinness, the only one through all the galactic fractions of days and nights to arrive at the inconstant ZERO numbers can no longer affect as if the humans to come after are a boat of severed toes standing in the duplicate convulsions of the living?

The infection from Venus Light has seared her cunt.

It is reported she was made of shells.
and had normal eyes.

Sex was particularly beautiful with her

and brought forth the child
every one hundred thousand years
with the snake-headed foot

Throw the mind
back or forward uselessly

sky's blue today

leave hole in smallest utterance for lesions on the pre-breath formations of our words

Thinning water for study thinning water

and rocks

dry before it
tROUT listless

catch by hand
Dry lightning
Roar of Thunder

Leaf tip’s curled
seared
wind
to push
the nostrils wide
walk the meadow
find out if lightning eats humans

There are Kiowa and Sioux here too Wesley.
One of ‘em said as we went into battle

“Where no man’s word cut in stone
no liars”

What a Relief!            Love, Lupe

Once the lesson sunk in a “new hire” girl, Black or White, took up
“home.” She and her machine and the clock dividing themselves into a
seamless progression, the small and large as it dwelled in the shifts, the
weeks, the gearage of years a woman’d sit under, the packs of smokes sucked
down, tubes of lipstick popped up like some whiz-kid pecker to properly
 grease the expectant, righteous female anatomy; “maybelline” pencils in case
a young lady of fortune needs to do the arithmetic about how much money
a boyfriend borrowed, powder puffs, sanitary napkins, clandestine rubbers
at the desperate bottom of a purse for that elusive hoodlum any girl hopes
to see gliding by on a merry-go-round cheating at cards and waiting for his
nomination “to become the honest mayor of a one-night stand” as one of
the country girls from Tennessee arched up her eyes and said in range of
Wesley’s ears. A “Peach” fresh up from Georgia, soon as she got to know
about the production cycle and its combinations—the floor bosses, the
gloomy mosaic identified snitch—the one no matter how hard the workers
tried would never be teased into appearance—moon calendars,
numerologies, permutations of that Fourth Floor Civilization—she began to
sing. Not loud at first but the voice flexible, twangy with the soil of her
Chattahoochee origins (Bob said it was like his older cousin “Effie’s waffles;
needed some sugar to get a grip, but after the first swallow, felt like ole
friends."). It was one incomplete lyric from “High Noon” when Gary Cooper does his lonely impeccable ready-for-oblivion walk; Caty Jurado watching in the sexiest unconsolable anguish ever devised by any movie to humble eternity and its conjunction with everything inferior but this one mortal; Grace Kelly trembling in her distant science of virginity remove and this Georgia Peach when the noon time whistle blew though this “High Noon” was at 7:30pm sang:

“Do not forsake me
Oh my Darling ...”

as if she were Stephen Foster stumbled into the treasure vault of American melancholies spacious as the Heavens of Beulah as they mingle with the Starry Seas of Ruin. It kinda spooked the floor after a’while. She let the words ride the dolorous recesses of the syllables unraveling into sorrow, insomnia, alien murmurs of infuriated ancestors, or “the plain voice of a fine White woman” as George thought, who was checking over previous calculations about who’d she’d slept with and where, and whether this was another of those blunders that forced women to look at Paradise as a kind of enforced low-level gloom; didn’t spare anybody, didn’t necessarily either kill anyone of the millions of sisters out there getting through the successions of days impatient with the arcane innocence of male lovers who have been beautifully, extravagantly nurtured in all the right places.

The Song. It was passed down from an apparently “untameable aunt,” was straight gorgeous as a girl, poor too as a fountain of piss, a country faun whose mother got rolls of undyed used cotton and managed to re-do those actual sacks into dresses, blouses, the pictures cut out of magazines used as templates to give the one daughter/child a sense of pride and singleness, a sense she was something other than “poor” even though after school she had to pick cotton and clean pig pens to help her father and mama on an eight acre piece of North Georgia mother stone.

War came along with a munitions factory, hired the women from miles around, “Wuz, over a bunch of them back country roads, not a man. Least not a man with a real scent, even the ones to go cold and mean; the way you have to be a woman at those times to please yerself so’s ta know ya ain’t deyad.” They gave her the job of dipping the tips of 50 caliber machine gun tracers in red paint every twelve hour shift day. The job seemed to move from one war to another and after that bloodbath in Korea she watched the
movie and decided those’d be the only words to be said at work, dippin’
those bullets in a sea of preparatory blood and bein’ the Seven Word Singer,
slightly scaring anyone near her, humming, packing the tracers good n’ tight
for their “mured’up” destinations. Passed on the song and the movie as if
they were her children, to the niece. Kept at those 50 caliber ingredients till
one day, after twenty-some years, and “feelin’ like the fumes could be
crawlin with more than a couple ghosts” bought a trailer, a pick-up to haul
it and herself, (“Because bad girls gotta save too”) and lit our for “I don’t
know—Silver City; Wilcox down in Arizona sounds good. Wasn’t Rex Allen
from that? One a’his brothers. If he got brothers. Never know who’ll invite a
girl for a quiet breakfast.”

Darius, when he heard the lyrics start up decided he’d feel no bother
and since it only happened once a night, five nights a week minus overtime,
“What’s the difference. Other women tore a part’a her away after she made
grade. Thang may as well stop there.” The Seven Words started a kind of
work on Darius. “Done two tours. Don’t need no one singin’ in funny
corners.” He upped in ’64. “Seen sim shit. Done sim shit.” Second time,
“Walked into the Ia Drang Valley. Felt like I’d been eaten by a scorpion. Still
can feel that. Sitlin here, tuning the Red Radio; piece of that scorpion hair’ll
rub up against me. Sweat start fillin’ up my shoes.” Wesley asked me about
it. It was the kind of killing zone where the really heartless demons, the ones
holding the indexes about unmanifested diseases of the blood at the end of
this Creation, and in the Creation to come, went into a kind of reverence
over what human beings do. And if you were in places like that you know
you were only a tourist in your before “The Day” innocence, and after; an
owl who can’t get enough mice with those magnified eyes claimed by index
varnished sunsets that started without any of us ever knowing, in this, or
some other soon to be previous world. Darius, when she sang, rubbed his
Red Radio (like Bob said, “Rub that thang, muthufukuh, and one night, it
will turn into a ruby. Yes it will! And none a’ us’ll evah, evah hef ta’ come
back to this yer hole”), hold on to the channel playing Lester Young, Art
Tatum and his favorite, the guitarist sprung up from the same Detroit
streets as himself, Kenny Burrell, “Play the electricity so sweet man, you
wanna go shine the churchyard.” “Done sim jail too, after I cum back.”
Darius reckoned it was for the change. “A lid’a Maryjane here and there to
keep the ends from turnin to dog shit. Didn’t have enough evidence to ripen
up the real deal, but I did almost a year anyway. When the poleez found
out about my Silver Star they turned even nastier, sayin it was a miz-take
given such medals to a common nigger while not a one’a them went
anywheres further than their own assholes. Shackled me up once too, cause I wouldn’t talk. Wouldn’t say ‘Jack.’ Got to fill in the day somehow, and if you that kind of White Man the dazs muz really git long.” Darius finished such soliloquies with a sharp, short laugh, one, that as JT summed it up, “Caused the windiest rivers to go straight.” Darius became in-country expert with the formal handwork can only be compared to an overdose of chloroform and the inquisitions emerging from the flesh, the branches and summits of the refined exhaustions a knife, a fixed bayonet imposes on the fully encircled sleeper watching his aorta get pruned. “Poleeze lucky ‘The D’ wants to hear Lester Young,” Bob said. “Folks in that jail never slightly curious how the blind Art Tatum helped separate Darius from his rage with the keys to a simple piano. Yes indeed, those blue suits gits to walk and talk like they still be alive.” If Ray Charles came up Darius turned the radio loud for the girls, for Travis P, any traveling salesman, and “Wesley.” “Want you to git to know the Raylettes,” Darius said to the body surfer. “Take a dive into the sounds through them. No cure then, baby. Hear the Blind Man sing. Hear the Blind Man till the story,” even though, as JT said “The D” took to leaving notes on the bodies he made in those Asian Jungles:

Peck you clean, muthufukah
Till you pockets gleam.
Peel them bills
Till you ride the hills

“Wuz like a brand. Let’em know who’d been there. Who’d be back.”

JT was Darius’ cousin. “Fahthah’s brahthah’s son. Gits no closuh.” Thought Darius “Went ovah a man; come back a stunned sparrow. Sumpin hapin ovah deh. ‘D’ ain’t the only one dribble back like he been drained and ain’t discussin his blood neither. Like he went and climbed a big ole’ magnolia. Not de ones in Louisiana we wuz in, building them boy houses, hammerin, beggin uncles and aunts faw nails, extra boards. ‘D’ better now. But man, when he come back at the beginning, wuz like he climbed the branches a’ death. Got up there fer a good look.” JT upped but they sent him to Germany instead. Four years ridin a peculiar jeep up and down the border with the “Democratic Neighbor.” “Vehicle was a pop-up murder machine, Jack. Uh huh. Danube valley’s peaceful, quiet in spring with the rustle of them winds; eagles and thangs flyin. Sum Brahtah C.O.’s said birds up from Africa. Try git ovah that one, man! Africa! Since I was sorta like a bird handler muself  I’d take muh glasses, watch them muthuhfukuhs
fah awuhs. Baddest flyers I evah seen, and shrink from nawthin killuhs. Dive like dey wuz the devil's own impersonal bizness, watchin out fah de coin closest to the Night Man's balls. Like to fuck and fight elephants feh de scraps. Did that whenevah I got me the chance cause they wuz like Dolo-omite come straight out the egg with them words SUDDEN DEATH stamped middle o' they eyes. Yah dig it? Africa, man! Ain't dat sum sweet shit?”

JT'd look over, make sure Darius and his Red Radio were loud and clear in what he hoped at least was a temporary suspension. He'd put packing boxes together with their order sheets, set the destination stamps whether it was Arabia, Celestun, “Malang near the Java Trench. A geography lesson, plain and simple; if only the company give me sum ticket. Be gon. Yessuh, like sumone het the wrong button on the right toilet.”

George said, “JT paid a price too. A taller one than Darius. It's quieter in' im, thas it, quieter, but trouble cum out the same barrel. That jeep JT rode in, or whatever the fuck it was; it was shrunk. It was like he say “Ground Zero on Wheels” no one be able to sniff out. Him and a driver. Thas it, baby. Jeep nothin but a portable missile silo ridin through those meadows, carryin midget warheads. 'Bout the size he say of a saxophone case. Ridin those four years. On leave in Spain, Paris next, Amsterdam and Crete. See a life he never thought possible. Then back to that trigger again. Waitin. Fine tune the last minute of the last day of the last second till them dreams cum to'im, whole clouds of fish gulpin for air; a world running outta luck sign. JT, he cum to it too. Like the Lord sent'im to the farthest snowstorms.”

It seemed like weeks but outta' no place Janine and Lucille might happen around with hot grits or cinnamon rolls they baked; sit down for a chat, a smoke, a thermos full of home brewed coffee. “Two pretty White girls; all's I know,” Marvin'd say afterwards, “cook too, grits. Ain't good as Gramma's, but give it time. Time heals everythang.” Then he'd laugh shake his head a little with the others, take a toothpick, settle into a momentary quiet.

“How y'awl doin?” Janine'd say as she'd come around stacks of cardboard, Lucille after carrying a box. The ladies freshened; lipstick, eyeliner, hair ponytailed up. “Got to feel like it's Tennessee. They still do things like this at home; may as well be homefriendly here as there.” And with that dissipate any of the lingering suspicions which “could hang around and grow crust.” The two girls could appear anywhere on the fourth floor, going to the various groups, divided by their tasks, so that though only stacks of cardboard formed the unstated border, still, all the bodies in each division of
labor and production came to be marooned there, as if it were a country you’d hope someday to fly to, yet never bought a ticket, the procrastination ragged in the beginning, but turning into a kind of blade of light, glowing if not with a pinch of menace, then with a sip of the unyielding, not to be burned or melted away; procrastination; the poorest cousin of death escorting the convert to the funerals of curiosity and desire. So the Lady Tennesseans became world travelers.

Their visits. They'd jumped the codes and no tellin what transgressions there were to follow. Some of the White workers, “Didn’t matter whether female or male” Wesley wrote, said “start with sharin food; it won't end there; end with a tree and a rope if we wuz sumwhar’s else.” Plans were discussed about a beating or two to remind the unwary to be “Christian Daughters agin” but the two Tennesseans had already traveled too far. “Didn’t never live right. Not gonna die right, neither,” Janine answered to those whispers. As to the beatings. No body wanted to pay what they knew each “Daughter’d” hand out. It wasn't that they couldn't be beat and “beat good; fore it was over.” It was whod be missin an ear, part of a nose, get an eye ground out with a piece of glass. No one needed to say “leave it at talk” and no one wanted to see Darius turn off the “Red Radio.” Toughest “Southern Boy” on the floor wouldn't think to move once over that River no matter what war he'd drifted into.

It wasn't either these were the only visits. The “Girls” remembered birthdays, anniversaries, dates of children born, sick grandmothers, dying parents White or Black. Hardest bark of that ancient American meanness each carried for the other, though it wouldn't completely peel, they managed on those fourth floor nights to whittle it, as if they were just tired of the hatred, and found the simplest means no one'd been able to: “Pulled the plug,” Betsy said, “as if all them tiny centuries everyone'd been cross-eyed and never seen the outlet.”

The tops of the thin cake boxes often had gone partially soft from the steaming snacks, those aromas leaking into the smells of glue and dry-rotted wood the factory had become from its years hunched up in the droning noises; equipment and humans in their silent motions of work—necks, shoulders, arms, torsos tied to the repetitive arrestments collected invisibly as if, under the burdens of its uses, it had become a flatboat shimmering down the Erie, the Wabash with a full-moon crew waiting for the later centuries of diagnosis. On Friday and Saturday nights, especially when they looked forward to an after hours “Blind Pig,” the gossip fell to what the “Girls” had baked, which group was to receive the goods; who'd get to see post-cards, snatches of letters about the Kentucky and Tennessee springs,
the preparation of soil with manure (which aunts loved to drive a “shit-truck”), a sister sprouting into puberty; male cousins gone off to trade school; a female, the only one ever in the lines of women offspring to be accepted to college (“Wanted to be a baby doctor”); who’d took to the road in an eighteen wheeler (“Become a store-bought Benzedrine commercial”), who to the Marines (“Gotdamned if them Marine Blues didn’t make’im look all shined and shaved an’ manly as the mornin’ sun”), who to prison just cause that was a destiny and if you did fall into it, fell into TIME as the dull ugly ornament, go grim and sinister (“Cousins still came anyway; nieces and nephews watchin’ the shackled stranger reach a point in age where age stops in prison. Saw it myself. Kid brother taken over by a stare he had. Worse part a’it”).

Some men talked to the “Girls” about their wives; lunches they prepared with hot soups, sandwiches. “Sumbody mean means to spole yew, Jim. If it warn’t that Lady a’yers, I’d consider it,” Betsy’d say to a male White worker, the one raised in coal mines since boyhood and saw the factory where he sat at break with the preciously wrapped meals in his lunch box, as an escape to Eden (“Even with a slight swirl of Gomorra”)— (rub his hands while unwrapping each of the treasures, the simple gesture making those around him almost breathless before the perfection of bread soaked with meat-loaf and mayonnaise, a dessert “brownie,” a piece of crispy fried chicken for break).

Any young male, Black or White coming to the fourth floor out of those Southern woods was subject to being snatched up. The qualifications: being poor, being slow, being too smart, being hungover, being kicked out of town, being suspicious, being unsuspicious, (“Being in the back seat with a friend named ‘Easy’ and you cin guarantee each of the letters of the last name’ll amount to three months more a’hard steel”), being in the wrong place at the time when you can become one of those phantoms chained to a shovel, a pick, a cotton field; any season ripe for the pickin’ and you’re the one picked for vagrancy, the one passin’ through and got detoured around one of them unmentionable bends “Fur a seventeen-hour-a-day thrill workin’ plantations, county ditches and roads fur food made yur gums swell, water tasted like they’d let dead moccasins float there least till noon. Bet yew’d become ‘escape prone’ too, catch any trayne headed to a mill-town like Dee-troit. See me one more Sherff tryin’ ta git quota fur jayle season—sooner best starve here.” The details rendered, as Wesley told me, with a tender sort of bitterness, something foreshortened into completely chaste dread, like a crystal circus molded for the favorite son of a king, the one to die in childhood.
The King's control of all substance to be dispensed as reward but the story moves toward abandonment, holocaust, rupture, destruction of Kingship and its intricate emblems of need. The Beginning of a Beginning can be designated for the Beginner becomes instantly a dictionary of forces, surgeries, frantic defects which in themselves assume a counter-life beyond any attempted restitution by the progenitating Monster King—a counter-life in its velocities which outstrips and makes alien the life on which it feeds—

The rituals of termination to destroy, wipe from memory the previous order of poisoned rule—

The "literacy" before the mystical framework between the Monster and Attendant Populations in mutual dream formation erased in depths of mind itself so that no duplicate edifice could be, once created, "re-created" again—

The pathways of the invention burned out of the mind by the rituals of the shaman who nurtured it through birth and being and saw in its longevity the Ancestral Heroes turn themselves toward the ministries of blood, the glaciers of blood frozen, gaining the magical and ritual sinew in the counter-time, the counter-formula of mathematical delicacy erected as a summit of sexual organization—

The power of time thinning the abyses between the time of the body and the calculations of the Ancestors waiting repellently, foodlessly, leaflessly in their delusional winters

The Glyph Cities
and their flesh
Apparitions of the double rooted labyrinths
Zero Birds rearing their chains
their manifestations
of human headed Suns
Mother of Heads
Mothers of Pre-Existence
Mothers of the Creation

The Tennessee Girls listened, offered their usual baked things, and smoked bacon/ham when they either had time to do it themselves or bring back parts of a smoke-house from home, the preservations of the meat touched with the concentration and expertise of these mistresses of long, strong days in waiting for the glow of small pleasures wrought by labor and hand and close-up death. They had brothers too, uncles went to war, to Seattle, to California (“Got me a post-card, Wesley, from a place named Arbuckle, once. Yew cin tell me what it’s like one night if yew want”), come back to women who’d read their Bible, no men around to stop that arousal; stop the question Lucille said her mother asked, “On Sundays when she’d heal a little from them stretch-outs, workin sixty to eighty looms a day fer a fifteen dollar week and a string’a men ta’ drink it half away. What does this put us? Whar are we put as Goddamned Living Flesh? Asked them questions in the spring of ’29, became leader of an all women’s strike against a mill. Did sim jahl herself fer eight months.” The thing said with tightened lips and body along with the double price of sorrow and raw worship for a mother who’d gleamed with equally raw, uncommonly hot trouble (“Mamma like that, likely make a daughter brave. Don’t be fuckin with Lucille less you mean to,” Marvin said).

Recipes
the Tree-Girls bring

Red dust from their souls
surrounding the moon

What ocelots will come
and antelopes
to sniff cunts of the ones
released
Took’em a while, but they got around to Ginger, an older Black lady, kept mostly to herself, “Come up clear from Bigbee, in Alabama, followin’ a steel worker from Mobile with nice shoulders.” Wear a bone necklace once a month to remind herself she “was still half Seminole,” the name carrying a whiff of fear. Tom Green, when Wesley told him about her, said if he didn’t hate flyin he’d come see Wesley and combine it with a date with Ginger if she’d accept. He took out a couple of Apaches “and a fire-hearted Seminole woman bring a man the best kind of no rest before old age truly sets in; only thang required is that someone still has teeth.” Ginger was no more than five foot tall, thin, held the mix of runaway slave and Indian right to the bones in her face, the carriage of the forbidden Florida swamps, the misogyny between tribal Africa and tribal America; it was rumored she was a granddaughter of Oseola himself, the great designer of a resistance that lasted for a pile of nineteenth century years and left behind tall tales about Seminoles who were more like alligators and snapping turtles than humans and waged a reptile war that cost the People who wanted to wish them dead nineteenth century millions along with lives lost to violence, heat, to tropical disease, to plain being tired and sitting down to die in a patch of swamp orchids of spoiled food and fatigue and greed. Ginger talked about Andrew Jackson, President Van Buren as if the 1830s and ’40s was the closest yesterday breathing down the necks of President Johnson, “Secretary Rusk from Georgia, who got his feet wet in the same waters, and oughtta know what covers yer feet is nuf to drown.” “War in Asia. Think they’d figure out what folks can become when they’ll scratch all the way to hell with their finger fer dirt that’s theirs. Smart White Men had over a century. Wuz nothin compared to this. Till’ya till’ya deayd. They still don’t hear.”

Darius and JT’d go over and listen to “Miss Ginger” at dinner break. Ask her about how her tribe captured and married runaway slaves and set the children free to become chiefs and warriors, revered women and healers, hunters and Explainers of existence. “Listenin. Jees listenin,” Darius said, unplugging his Red Radio and walking over to not only “sit with a Lady” as he explained it, but to ask what she needed as to “small thangs without bargin in.” And it was always “Nawthin’ Mr. Darius. You best be careful not
to spoil an old woman." It was around Thanksgiving and Miss Ginger had taken sick, set Darius and JT and the women around her to "Plannin a house visit to make sure." Three days before the holiday Miss Ginger came up the elevator carrying an old battered suitcase. She was dressed in a multicolored waist-length coat with shoulder pads, the "mark of her tribe," as Tom Green told Wesley. "Seen'em at pow-wows as a boy; the women of the Kiowa, the Comanche touchin what looked to me like the most beautiful short coats in the world with a patch of colors that must'a took in what the first three Creations had to offer and then forgot. And those People proud in their mix of African and Indian—tough as the spindliest Chiricahua me and your father seen goin through Elfrida once, haulin roses to nurseries in New Mexico. Asked him if he wouldn't mind a detour to Pirtleville, see what the girls looked like there but the old man only smiled, shifted into tenth gear, as if him and that Peterbilt was runnin away to a wedding."

Wesley said Miss Ginger looked pretty mysterious that night; sat down next her machine, patted that suitcase as if it contained a horde of demons and went to work like it might be the kind of Monday followed by the kind of Tuesday and then the kind of Wednesday that shut down on mashed potatoes and gravy, apple pie, stuffin filled turkey, sweet rhubarb, ten gallons of ice cream, three hours with the Detroit Lions, and pass the whiskey, please. The Lady worked steady and patient as a tree snake sniffin for bird eggs the next four hours causing more than a little gossip (about whether "she wuz leavin'er whut?")", the kind that had to be squeezed as through a thin tube and can be likened to a common garden hose dropping its gifts over a spectacle of weeds and insect clouded summer afternoons. She hummed and Darius said later it sounded like "Nighttrain sendin down one more sweet lie." "Naw" JT interrupted, "sound like she mumble Where Money Is, Evil Is and ain't no one die right no mo'. Like she could put the snake up 'D' n' you gits one'a yer Black feets teuned White. Women think you'a really mixed up fool swallow da bones'a black cats and sum othah upstream shit."

"Look'a heah," Darius looked at JT "Y'awl sound like the barnyard rooster dream the preacher comin fah Sunday supper."

"Yeah, baby. Yew and yo' John Story."

"John an'hiz wife an da preacher and da chicken."

"One who fucked da chicken?"

"One who fucked da preacher."

"Well. Sumone got to reezpec sumbody."

"Who git to fuck di runaway ducks?"
“Thought you’d nevah axt, baby.”

And they’d tell stories that way, spread the good word, build up enough laughter to get through the weeks and months when no one said nothin, gripped by machinery and a pay check, as they were.

But what Miss Ginger did those days before Thanksgiving and the Thanksgivings to follow in the years until she died, no one ever forgot. It started with Betsy and her friend Lahtoya. They decided to “Let curiosity kill them.”

“Miss Ginger?” Betsy asked (“Cuz yew know. A Girl’s gotta keep up with thangs”), “Yew like sum fried chicken. Lahtoya an’ me’s figgered outta a recipe and we got us sim extras.”

“Yew teech her, Lahtoya?” Miss Ginger looked up.

“Betsy beyond teachin, Miss Ginger. Watch her lick a drumstick and you’ll know who stole the Kingdom.”

“Now Lahtoya, yew got to be careful. Old woman like me might yet still be too young. Specially to hear such thangs ‘bout Miss Betsy who’s tryin to be pure. That right?”

“Tryin, Miss Ginger.”

“How long yew say?”

“Last time it wuz fer three minnits.”

“Must’a hurt sumthin awful.”

“Hurt bad. Reel bad, Miss Ginger.”

And while they giggled Miss Ginger lifted up the battered suitcase, placed it on her worktable. Opened it.

“Looked at fewst like plain ole junk,” Lahtoya said. “Little scary cause it was the kind’a shit you’d see inna grave” (“Or one’a them vampire movies where yew hope that sun’bitch gonna do more than show up with false teeth,” Betsy added with her sweetest Southern Belle smile). Miss Ginger still had a cough (“But ain’t nawthin. Ain’ gone die”), and the two women well as the whole fourth floor was tryin to keep quiet, keep unseen, (“Did ‘bout good as a bear in’a apple tree” Lucille commented afterwards on the Fourth Floor expertise with camouflage).

Miss Ginger took a quiet moment for inspection. Touched what appeared to be a bruised, torn set of rags from another world, held them in her fingertips, became nearly moveless as a tree. Then she took out three bundles, one at a time, laid them out on the floor before her like they were bodies of long-dead birds. For a second Wesley thought they were “medicine objects” too powerful and private to bring to a factory. He said the only
thing he could do was suck in his breath like the others there and watch hopefully a defiant female outrider holding the living stories in her nights bent over a press as if she were the Last Survivor of Buffalo Bill’s Wild Show puttin in time and brought this cocoon of magical, unfinished business. Wesley knew he sounded like his mother. “Who the hell else?” he asked in one of those letters, knowing where he’d come from.

It wasn’t cocoons. Wasn’t birds. It was three stringed puppets she’d carved and sewn clothes for, each one with the raptures, patience, nightmare strangulations, cheerless contortions, miraculous survivals: the masterful, unfalsifying humors that gave both sides of her ancestral heritage the traction to remain human. Wesley knew, because he was his mother’s son, that the puppets were museum objects capable of bringing a heavy price (at auction or at private calling), and the combinations included the finest invention of African masks and American Tribal fetishes. (In one of his letters Wesley reminded me how his mother had read to us as young boys, the Harriet Beecher Stowe story about “Uncle Tom” and the Slave’s gifts: that passage about him and “Eva” and his abilities to make elaborate “baskets” out of cherrystones, fantastic faces on hickory nuts, to whittle graceful whistles pulling all these things out of his pockets as gifts to children wondering over the well of treasures that unknowingly devout initiator of Civil War’d reach into). He’d never seen anything like it, nor had he watched a puppeteer transform wood and clay, cloth and string into an imitation of the living the way this one did. Me and Wesley used to go to summer carnivals down near Balboa. Every year these puppeteers’d show up, recreate a fairy tale. “Hansel and Gretel” which scared Wesley so bad he nearly folded up in a fold-up chair watching those puppets dangle in their paint, their waxenly stiff, ugly-beautiful writhingly suspect motion.

“Rapunzel” the gorgeous Lettuce Child, the Prince and Lover with his thorn-pierced eyes wandering miserably for years in a curse of blindness like a rotting dog. “Bearskin” the warrior who ate too much of war, “Greencoat” his tempter; the beauty of the story’s compassionate monster, the mixture of gentlest chastity, devotion, rage, and suicide. I knew my friend dreamed about what he saw there as he dived for waves, glazed himself through ocean water and asked his sister to read him the “Juniper Tree” “The Goblins.” And there was “Howdy Doodie,” “Buffalo Bob,” “Dillie Dalley”: the freckle faced litter fucker we stared at on those Cold War Afternoons as children, wondering even then, where life stopped and death began as those images flounced and radiated, became the custodians of our stirless childhood nights under the Atomic Horizon of our frightened parents and uncles and aunts who never were able to tell us what they saw through the keyhole.
Miss Ginger unwrapped a first puppet, lifted the riggings she'd created of string and stick, let the thing's feet touch the wood floor, clatter for a second, do a warm-up, loosen legs and head. It was a “Gentleman” well dressed in suit, slacks, vest, fancy boots; wore a silk-like patterned turban, and hooped ear-rings with a diameter hovering slightly over his shoulders; the doll was two, two and a half feet tall. Miss Ginger called her “Gentleman Friend” “Joseph Brant” in honor of the Mohawk war and peace master (“He was the one given the Connecticut education by the British,” Miss Ginger told Lahtoya as well as a translator of European works into Iroquoian dialect). An Anglican with a beautiful sister, “Molly,” mistress to an English aristocrat. And eventually to be swallowed by the unremittingly violent misery having to defend himself against his own son's ugly drunkenness, was forced to stab “Isaac” fatally in the head. Before the great chiefain died in 1807 he penned a “reflection” on the differences between the life of the Indian and the Americans. His main example was the American penal system, the burden finally residing in the one most “dreadful contrast”:

“Liberty to a rational creature, as much exceeds property as the light of the sun does that of the most twinkling star. But you put them on a level—to the everlasting disgrace of civilization. I seriously declare I had rather die by the most severe tortures ever inflicted on this continent, than languish in one of your prisons for a single year ... Does then the religion of Him whom you call your Savior inspire this spirit and lead to such practices? Surely no. It is recorded of Him a bruised reed he never broke. Cease then to call yourselves Christians, lest you publish to the world your hypocrisy. Cease, too, to call other nations savage, when you are tenfold more the children of cruelty than they.” Miss Ginger quoted the passage “as a matter of fact” Wesley wrote, the ancient violation and brutality coming intact from her lips, the beloved in the dark recesses allowed only the blessings of shrewdest disintegration as she let the puppet say twice more:

“a bruised reed He never broke”
The syllables from the puppet's lifeless flesh fresh and intact and arriving without safe conduct. The facial paint was a varnished light brown, strings of hair hung from the corners of the upper lips, the stare of the eyes holding nothing idle after years of trying to manage the truths that were raining down on him in their regalia (“Turbaned Man of the American Forests with no palace vault but the sky”).

Second Puppet: A Damsel: Form: A New Orleans or Biloxi whore no longer in distress but arrested in the allures of a mixed blood Seminole: A Lady in Waiting in her exile and the recesses of strict treason sending money back to the swamps, gold and silver coin. The tantalizing parasitic lilac. The
Hidden Queen of a People: her carved face marked by the introductory ravages of syphilis, devotion to a secret work. The previous caesura of facial and bodily attraction culminating in a womanhood of masquerades, earrings and necklaces steeped in pink-clawed pleasure, blood infested pharmacopoeia too fantastic and luxurious a misprint not to be tempted, risked by the multiple he and she lovers sealed in the libraries of her dread. Miss Ginger had dressed her “creature” so that it unlocked a threshold of doubt. Was it a transvestite sliding in the concurrences of arcane penetration unshakable in its trickery, its buttocks and stomach perfumed with cognac, perfect opium, the bemused failing of light? The dress was a rhubarb red silk with the white flowers of magnolia dyed into it, the shoulders inscribed with a small tattoo each, simple, dignified in the form of a square; one lime green with a thin orange outline, the other purple with blue outline (Wesley said it caused a desire to kiss the costumed mirage, and he thought it was an earlier Grandmother).

The third object wasn’t really a puppet at all but a crude bodiless face painted almost a cream colored pink with distortive faded ochre stained holes carved into it, in a way, Wesley reported, that it looked like some never before seen damage and no one’d had time yet to be afraid of this tyrant, the one to appear with the sapphire needs no one had seen or recognized like the Etowah Starers, resistless, dividing in the stupefied terror of their makers into the ovarium silk of mortal daughters. Height of the piece; also around eighteen inches. Wesley thought the “holes” could have also represented small pox (he reminded me of the workers we’d known hoeing his father’s fields who bore those scars, the face eating burrows drawing the pictures of bottomless night into the countenances of the victims and how scared we were and asked questions and wondered when we’d be next). Miss Ginger cleared the floor immediately at her feet, placed the “face” in the center, let it sit there of its own infuriated, subversive weight, took the “Gentleman” and the “Lady” once that was done and they did a dance around that “head” looked like Bo Jangles and the real Cinderella who’d fallen in love with sex and fury, music and disease; bedtime with feathered predators who could introduce the newest perspectives about incineration and desertion.

Sun’s thin this morning
skeletal its Light
Ribs bulged
with swollen
nearly exposed heart
Stomach distended
over no healing's
rebuke

Death's foot cannot turn
the ripeness of men

In whose dead armies
"HE WHO WEARS HUMAN HEADS AS EARRINGS"

THE
?
or
SHE
of
A
WANDERING VERB

MOTHER OF TONGUES

LETTING THE MOON END

STILLING ELONGATIONS

OF HEARTLESS NOUNS
Miss Ginger, when Darius and JT came over to her table after Thanksgiving, said she'd started making puppets, “Age nine, tin. Tha's near enough. It was a thang women did, an’ sim men too. Come from dreams sumtimes. Sumtimes from watchin peoples walk an’ danyce, sumtime from only jes’ watchin’. Cain’t count how many I carved and painted. Left sumwhars on the way to sumwhars else. These're the last. Don’t know why exactly. Sum really tuk sim time. Sum didn’t. ‘Pends on how I felt and if I had a moment. One’s you see here. Not the best. Not the worst. Only whas left.” Miss Ginger offered her explanation no ornament. The language was plain as the four sides of a square. She wasn’t abrupt with the two young men who came shyly to listen and talk nor was she gruff with the young women. She did mention, though, Alice Herz, the eighty-two-year-old woman who set herself on fire in despair over Vietnam on the streets of Detroit.

“Comes a time,” Miss Ginger said to the two young Black veterans, “when a lone woman can rise up outta her old age, cain’t stand one more betrayal in this world, and has a city breathe her ashes.”

“She was crazy, Miss Ginger.”

“Think so, JT?”

“Don’t know what to think, Miss Ginger. Torchin herself like that made me sad. Bein old and alone, havin no one. After I come back. I thought ovah thangs too.”

Miss Ginger looked up at the two uncomfortable young men, took some tea from her lunch container, rinds of lemon.

“Got no sugah, Darius. Got sum di-rek bee-hive honey, though, fer you an’ JT here.”

With that she set a honey pot between two cups and poured.
George and Marvin.

George: Wore a fedora, not to cover any baldness; white long-sleeved shirts with gold cuff-links, no tie, scuffed shoes worn thin. “Had one too many shines.”

Marvin: He had long fingers, elegant hands with a touch of nervous danger surrounding them. Was thin, 6’2” hundred sixty, seventy pounds, cold at first but got warmer especially after an after hours shot of pool and whiskey. “Play long enough there, My Man Wesley, you be good. Yup someday,” and clear the table patterns of nine ball. “You shoot like a small lion, Wesley. Marvin shoot like a big lion,” George said pulling out a handkerchief and wiping his forehead, sweaty from shots and shells of Johnnie Walker Red and Stroh’s Beer (the suds which’d breast fed Detroit’s generations of line workers and union members and didn’t matter if it was Poles, Czechs, Hungarians, Serbs, Blacks, Croats, Turks, Jews, Germans, French, Estonians, Latvians, Irish, Swedes, Mohawks, Cherokees, Greeks, a Mennominee trucker hauling a load of steel up from Pittsburgh; “some like it warm, some like it cold”).

Marvin moved in another kind of air. It wasn’t conspicuous but it looked like it’d had a diet. Rose up out of the trigger regions of DeQuindre and Riopelle Streets with garden-delicate footwork; a left jab that’d maim a someone’s pancreas. Thin-boned, vicious hand speed. “A gentleman killah of the canvas,” Bob reported sucking Scotch through a toothpick. “Give a righteous beating, baby. So sweet it almost break your heart. It was Marvin’s brother had the touch of greatness though. A light heavyweight who carried his body like an express bus dragonfly, cruelest ring concentration I evah saw. Had’im sim style and I don’t mean none’a that sneak-assed blow-job stuff neithah. Brothah rode the ring like it was a racehorse. Nevah saw a boxer do anything like it,” Bob added to his commentary, language firm, inviting the visitor in for an unwrapped look. “Was at the Olympic Trials, San Francisco, 1960. Took a hit to his right ear. Nevah woke up. Killed in the ring. Kind’a evil luck make you know we all up to our mouths in shit.”
Marvin's Mustang convertible was lime green. “Drove seventy-thousand miles starting from San Jose” where he thought of switching. “Too skinny for football but not for track.” Tried the one hundred yard dash, “and them girls, Wesley. From California. Felt like Fats Domino every time I woke up in the mornin’: Yes indeed I’m in love agin. Women seemed to pour out of an invisible mountain.” He stayed a couple of years till 1962/63, trying to recover from his brother's death, trying to help his mother by “goin to college. Good at the 100, the 220. Not always too good at bein the survivin’ son.” Handsome, meticulous, Marvin had a compelling tenor. “Went into the clubs of Albuquerque, Amarillo, Fort Worth, Indianapolis. Auditioned with a house pianist. Stay for six months here, ten months there. Move on. Brother’s dyin’, layin in the ring come back to me. Suppose I could’a recorded. Offers were there. But I’d load up. Drive to Utah, Wyoming. Stay out for weeks. Had a roll of money from singin’ but kept to a quiet. Met some people up there. Some of’em was good hearted, Wesley, but hadn’t seen a nigger in two hundred years.” Marvin too, let down the lime green Mustang’s top, as they drove up the great Huron coast. “Look like the Pacific, don’t it?” finishing one question with another, “Wanna square?” And he’d light up a cigarette full to head wind. “Learned how to do this on Route 59 in Wyoming headed through the Thunder Basin.”

They’d go straight north on the edge of the Thumb. “Lakeport” “Richmondville” “Harbor Beach,” and over the top hump of Michigan’s digit; “Grindstone City” “Pointe Aux Barques” Albert E. Sleeper's State Park, and down some into Saginaw Bay. Marvin liked to fish the “Pinnebog River,” a little stream that started near “Ubly” and wound its way to “Port Crescent.” The mid-day summer sun on this piece of the Thumb gave the trees a mottled haze of sumptuous aging greens. Leaves of oak, walnut, ironwood almost a mist in themselves from heat and humidity, washes of thunder driven rain dripping on the mid-July canopy welding heat to human skin, weight of water in its tropical correlations racing killing frosts that can come, even in hottest midsomer, to these fresh water coasts. (Some remnant crawling from an edge in the sky sniffing over the glacial departure).

Marvin bought some fishing poles, a tackle box, fresh worms, an ice-bin “fah suds’n weed. Sun comin’ up sweet’n shitty Mr. Pretty. Time tah fish” and he’d suck a joint down deep as herb could be sucked in human lung, hold the test for three or four seconds, and it can’t be described as an exhale cause it was too slow, too prodigious a thing to inhabit those negotiated regions where sleigh bells reach a melting point under a bouquet of leafless elms. “Gotta be careful here, Wesley. Thumb’s full’a white towns cep the
poleeze double as farmers and don’t want actual trouble. Let’s check the map.” They’d go over the local terrain, eat sandwiches Marvin’s mother made, devill’d egg with mayonnaise, “potata” chips, home-made peanut butter cookies, a thermos of coffee “nuff fer a day r two a bad luck” and he’d snap his fingers, whistle out the first passages of Marvin Gaye’s “Hitch Hike,” the road-map burst out of sex fevers and loneliness and the permanent smells of barbecued chicken drifting up from “Paradise Valley” into the “Lake Effect Winds” pausing over “White Pigeon” and “Dowagiac” for the big journey to L.A. He had Sam Cooke, Sarah Vaughn, Nina Simone, Nat King Cole, Dinah Washington: had ’em all down, the immensity of it ready to break cliffs and mountains to begin, to begin to breathe differently, and not ever depend even on that, on the distinctions of emotion recovered in these singers, the incidents they came to possess, the strict never squeamish dignities, never drifting toward the echoes of compulsive abolishment baiting their lives. Marvin’d sing into the wind, not succumb completely to his intention, lift anchor from these voices toward his own, keep it contained in reflex, striking his art “in the first necessity of theirs” and let himself, as he said “continue to hear.” He’d go through his “club” repertoire, laugh, smoke, stop for gas in gas stations that shut down at four in the afternoon and ask after the best streams and ponds. Some were stunned at first; a worldly, charming completely unafraid young, nearly White Black man standing at the station door asking, in his fashion, after fish ponds, sunsets, cafes that might specialize in strawberry pies and hot-fried okra. It didn’t usually take but four or five seconds for the fear to subside; Marvin’d watch for that, make his move knowing his and Wesley’s life could depend on it. “Go home talkin’ utherwise. Start worryin’. Surfer and a Nigger hangin from their rafters. We’d be the funkiest pair of the newly dead. You’an me lookin all spooky’an shit without our feet touchin’ nothin’” and he’d shake his head, close his eyes, whisper loud “a cryin’ shame”; light a cigarette, pat a container of fresh worms, pull out slow and careful into a deserted country road as if it were Paradise, the one lying unspoiled and that would remain “unspoiled” (“Gotta do a movie for’em, Wesley. Take time. Time away from livin. So much fuckin’ time”).

But there was never not a ripple of sadness, even a compassion mixed with rage as he took Wesley into the July woods of Michigan’s turned inside-out right hand swaying like the neck-hair of a dog, sky thick with an about-to-be-not-yet lightning pushing, down against some invisible strain which would let neither it nor its accompanying thunder loose on the world below.

Marvin stood over a pond, a quick or slow “rapid”; watched the surface of the water, clicked his tongue, took worm to hook, cast out with a solemn
smile. “Wyoming’s got some streams, north New Mexico, southern Idaho. But this my favorite, right here, Wesley. Look out from ‘Point Crescent’ into Lake Huron at sunset. Thought about it even in Montana where I’d never seen so much land. Could’a stayed, been some kind of reverse hick from the city. People were tolerant enough some of them places. But who the fuck needs tolerance?” So they’d fish. Some days all day and take the catch, whatever it ended up being, to Marvin’s mother. She’d gut, cut off heads, throw butter into a medium hot pan, let the meat and sweet fat mutually suck there and grow tender, doin the duty of being dead and ready to be eaten.

Marvin’s step-father’d be there sometimes too. Show up looking for change, a place to drink, throw dice with his friends, throw some abuse if Marvin wasn’t around, but reluctant with it. The diligent beatings from a long wandering step-son cured at least part of the temptation. The leftovers Marvin identified as his “Mama’s Sermon,” and his own, a sharp efficient sympathy as he watched these older men who he thought he could escape move into dialect, their speech hovering as some clump of snow the white world had yet been unable to make fleshless and not renounce the raw humanity—where they went for an hour, three hours in spite of the breakage it was for them and for him, his mother watching the rim of sound they were making—the vacant latticework of unbelief, how beautiful and fragile and sweltering: “Marvin you gottah five for me today. Only a five, boy. Git me tah tahmarrah?” Marvin’d reach into his wallet, pull out a bill, hand it to this man who loved and still loved his mother. That it was in this way mentionable, a forlorn augur spinning through the deposits, done with dignity, for dignity: the inflexible simplicity.

The Kitchen. Though the cafes of the Huron Coast might yield nothing in terms of menus sought for, here the charms of a mother whose shock over the savagery of one son’s death, and the heartbroken reluctance it had imposed on Marvin; to be pulled into these alleys, the bars trembling with music born of singers like himself; she could serve him the strawberries he and Wesley picked and bought from the road edges of a country field, the fruit red and runny sweet covered with a brown sugared wanna crumble crust itself enveloped in clouds of fresh whipped whipped cream and that to be eaten before or after or during plates of hot-fried okra and slow barbecued honied ribs.

She’d watch the final son, who, had he chosen to, passed for White, passed this all by including herself who was a light range of chocolate brown. And she might have bid even a form of forgiveness, stunned; proud
that he wouldn’t, distantly expecting he might still one day after handing this “step-father” the habitual five, the ten. End up in L.A., Tucson mailing her secret checks with no return address, a void worse than abandonment. She knew it woulda been easy. He knew. The White women he knew and loved knew. Especially the one named Wanda.

The son was good with women. A hard serious listener who actually heard (“Got to, Wesley. Without that couldn’t be any world”). Didn’t block the sound as if it were some molded sparrow to be cropped at the threshold of being real, and leaving women bereft. He saw the humor too when women were most unguarded, unafraid, knew to let them be at home there, and respected the nobility of its courage and despair. He also let himself be a fool, stand there in the full exposure without dishonor; peculiar, repulsive, tantalizing. The ornate dare at the edge of a palace garden planting tulips in the Mad Moon Month, the November time when Lake Superior produces shipwrecks and ghosts. If he joked with the women on the fourth floor, which he did occasionally, a screen was kept up, never as insult, but as weariness (“Go down the stream, place turn to dogshit. Keep it simple. Keep it strict.”). “Lucille, Janine, Betsy. Some fine chicks but ain’t gonna walk ovah the mountain.”

Wanda was from Galveston. Tall, thin, long haired, long fingered, manicured nails, arms and legs. A Belle come to visit her sister and ran into Marvin at a bar full of painters, poets, musicians, politicians, millwrights, girls on the hunt, male dancers back from Broadway lookin for a DownRiver millionaire lover (“Husband, bachelor in the closet, outta the closet. Doesn’t matter if it’s got scales or wears horseshoes. Tall in the Saddle, baby. All I ask!”).

And girls from Galveston. Wanda had an Afghan Hound. She and it on display walking the sidewalks of Cass and Woodward Avenues like she was a Cahokian Princess holding her Mississippian pyramids on each forget-me-not shoulder, and her dog of kings running down desert leopards in the far away gorges of the Hindu Kush except it was completely Texan in origin and the Ladies of the Gulf might be more dangerous than the wildest horses of Quandahar. There were visions of other naked Gulf of Mexico princesses on their Spanish balconies, the crumbling mansions below gone squat on their terminal foundations, window and door frames suffused with the care of destruction; the cohesion of matter (what was previously thought to be cohesion in its earliest rock-child forms) unraveling in the “Brazoria” of decaying wildlife, the management and descent of the infernal alchemy staying local in its sultry enmities, the rest of the Planet, not a ripened
enough seed. Girls with long hair, and long-haired dogs of the chase, running in the aura of inaccessible harvest at seventy miles per ancientest hour, impatient for battle with lions and gazelles, impervious to death as missiles.

One early spring afternoon there was a patriot parade. Car fulls of clean-shaven starchy boys with their starchy fathers who began the march with loudspeakers and full statements involving seas of “Commie Blood” and a bunch of other what Wesley called some “venomous shit” which scared him, the farmer’s son coming out of a family of pinkest hot Commu-nists with a capital goddamned “C” that’d ever roped a mesa and set out to convert whoever was on it or near its shadows to unionism, revolution, workers of the world, the melting of ownership and private property into free food, free love, free compassion, redistribution of wealth, the re-birth of Jesus into the original Two Creations of Inanimacy and here he was next to em, the son of all they hated and needed to hate not a tree to stand under a Woodward bus to come along in time to unbolt the castle ramp.

There weren’t many things which scared Wesley but “Patriots” in straw hats, every one of ’em lookin like the Sons of Calvin Coolidge with shiny noses, white shirts, red and white and blue ties stunk up to their ears in “Old Spice After Shave” for that perfumed afterglow of messy paranoiac homicide and Wesley hoped they’d be unable to recognize what he already understood from childhood was his Red Genetics and could they see his Red-Diaper Rashes; go into some sorta frenzy, try to boil and slurp down his Trotskiest, Stalinist, Wesleyest, Marxist, Rabbi infested Pecos Bill Ass as the centerfold of an Uncle Sam Picnic with their wives, girl friends, sisters, grandmothers scrubbed each of them secretly smiling knowing they spent the requisite twenty minutes of the Uncle Sam Manual they published in Fostoria or Festoria or wherever they were from scrubbing their anuses smooth as a Jew-Cut Diamond for a feast of Jew Boy Commie Farmer’s Son; menu price given only with reservations and birth certificate.

Right about then Wesley saw the female Galvestonian. She had on a skimpy “T” shirt type pullover, tight revelation orchid pedal pushers, a pair of fake leopard skin high heels which caused her feet to become sly truly bothersome pieces of exposed pornographic flesh and her Afghan Hound with an artificial jeweled collar bigger than a bank vault lock. Those boys from “Fostoria.” Appeared they almost forgot about patriotism and erotic communists, lascivious seas of blood, pudenda panic and phallic intrusion in country ditches recorded and unrecorded for over fifty Michigan centuries. They stopped, every one of ’em, gave Wanda their very best anti-Communist sex-starved, strangulation murderer, spelunker flashlight stares,
nearly forgot their parade. Flat-footed bed wetters with sprained dicks ready
to abandon patriotic ship if only for one eerie touch of the radiant Texas
flora which now stood in front of them, who realizing the moment covered
both herself and the Afghan in a long Mexican shawl she was also wearing
that afternoon becoming indescribably sensational for them as the faery tale
slipper, shrouding their seance in its unintended afterlife, its precise suffoca-
tions with so little precedent other than this woman standing, staring
equally back. She said later the stares of the young men reminded her of
hollow West Texas sunsets, the ones skimming off a part of the faces which
looked too long at the horizon of the Big Bend with its first twitches of
incurable emptiness invading the bodies of the invaders. Wanda saw them as
already the half remembered, boys who'd have their brain jellies dripping
from branches of nameless trees the world grown so small and tight for
them, their deaths, the production of the bulk, their death-weight re-
annealed, vibrating as loving astonishments obedient to death only and the
miracles of death and the management of pity and the digestion of fury into
the likenesses of sweetest, worshipful curse. She felt paralyzed by their stares,
and for days afterwards found herself suddenly trembling, subdued by their
moment and hers of a madly indignant creaturely innocence never to enfold
any of them again.
Whatever the weather, pages in time layers, there’s what’s seen from l’Estaque. Any book or geographic dictionary in the crudeness of a public library: cold magazines, maps of an east, books used. Grocery lists better left unread. Great places to go— where you already are, just without the same, swaying, trees.

Time in between rains, a melon wrapped in foil. We walk from one antique dealer to another with a box of dusty crucifixes to clean. Why the building buildings without them might crumble. Nothing to hold it down.

Birds of unknown origin. Castles were built, we think, so we could walk their ruins. In the mysterious hills, grapes grow free. Surprised by an accumulation of stones, we find a cemetery for two, the plot of every happy story.
The water is so far down
it is almost incidental. Biblical characters
from both Testaments mill
around the well, filling out
a prophecy or a parable. Their gowns
are still bright inside the dust. Couples
meet, marry, return as grandparents
surprised that everything
in the vicinity—pails, sand, babies,
eyes—was nothing more than a metaphor
for time all along. The camels
go on chewing something interesting
only to themselves. Horses wait,
dogs examine each other
like little doctors. Poets wish
the sky were reflected in the water,
are not above lying about it.
Anyone turns the lever. The rust
is so loud it freezes everyone
in mid-creak, in anticipation
so tense the figures all turn porcelain.
The slightest jarring would shatter them.
The lever stops. For the rest of history
artists will circle this scene.
Everything they paint will do it justice.
SANTORINI SABBATH

Linda Lancione Moyer

Gold Street jewelers open early
for cruise ships docked in the old port.
Sun-browned shoppers climb the steep street
up the lava-scourged cliff, where sugar cube houses
with lapis domes and chalky arches sprawl,
all built since 1956
when the volcano last tossed the island villages
into the Aegean.

The Greek word for newspaper is efimeridha.
Ephemeral, lasting a very short time.

All week Force 8 winds.
No boats today out of Piraeus.
No boats to Thirassia.
A long line at Olympic Airways,
planes to Mykonos, Athens, Jerusalem,
lift up your voice.
From the hollow cathedral, St. Spyridon,
loudspeakers blast the mass to Gold Street.
Inside, priests chant to four old congregants.

At Franco’s bar
tourists settle in deck chairs on the terrace.
As Handel’s Messiah sails over the water
along with Force 8 clouds,
they lean back with snifters of Metaxa,
watch the sky rush by.
SOLDIER, DALMATIAN COAST, 1992

Linda Lancione Moyer

Born in a hotel on Korcula
he slumps now, in fatigues,
on its vine-shrouded veranda.
Rain sluices the cobblestones.
Wind lashes the Adriatic,
harsh as his woodruff-bitten wine.
Beyond the open door,
his grandmother mutters over the dates
in the crumbling guest registry,
recalling the British commander who once
waltzed her under the stars by the new fountain,
then circled her waist with his hands
as they watched the moreska
while her cousins flailed their swords
in that ancient dance.
The soldier shuts his ears to the old woman’s rasp.
Thoughts of his Marika drift:
a small unmoored boat
out of the harbor at Vela Luka
whips away toward Lastovo,
toward Bari, radio Italia,
through dark marbled water
bloody as the flag.
Italy—I remember the clement afternoon we turned
into the Tomb of the Bulls,
remember its double-sloped ceiling and gaily-painted bands
of lozenges and circles.
Asleep in the Tuscan hills, now roused to life, we saw Iphigenia
being led to the sacrifice,
a woman on terracotta, armless, carried by a winged creature
to her apparent death.
That year, I turned to your face above all others, tracing
the long line of your brow,
dropping the cloak of desire over your head. It was Iphigenia
her father chose to sacrifice
for fair winds to pilot his ships to Troy; Iphigenia, with her
long painted brow and eye
looking up, with cryptic smile, at the man who holds her
without regard. Once filled
with amber, gold and ivory, here, in this tomb, the dead
led a slower life. Now
the walls of the chamber-tomb are flaked, their colors bleached out
as a white-tuniced Apollo
leads Iphigenia and her winged captor. Massive, with muscular legs,
the men are ruddy
while Iphigenia’s profile lies colorless on the light-toned ground.
Apollo is armed
with bow and arrow. That year, in love, I too submitted to my
vision, ready to
accompany archers, angels, gods. But the bright vision
of the beloved too soon
grows plain and dull. A god visits, wounds with his arrows,
departs. Still, beyond
the terracotta slab, Iphigenia is saved. Artemis, that virgin
huntress and goddess of the white moon,
rescues Iphigenia from the altar, leaving a stag,
than spirits her away to the Black Sea.
When we left the tomb, ascending steps into a blue sky with white moon,
my love launched toward your brow like an arrow that could not be held back.
I remember. In this life, only a few bring the dead to life, only a few pay real attention.
Ovid’s Grave

Tony Whedon

No one back in Rome’s heard a peep out of Ovid since his Art of Love, but he’s still here translating local fishing stories and making himself useful with his Latin cognates. Ovid’s eyes have gone bad under the smutty light of a single oil lamp; sometimes he talks to himself in Getic and sometimes he forgets he ever was in Rome. There is one who knows him better than the others — a young basket-seller from the marshes north of Tomis, not very pretty, but with beautiful breasts and hair the color of dried reeds. Yesterday Ovid fell down in the market — and he lay there beneath the girl’s stall until she found him. But he’s not buried yet, so don’t write elegies to Ovid. Don’t think of those friends in high places he’s left behind, and please forget those warm Roman nights when Ovid’s only request to the gods was for more wine. See him as he would like to be regarded, resigned but happy to lie in a warm bed and to wake with the gleaming Black Sea at his doorstep.
Nightwatch

Tony Whedon

1.

Old Galileo’s on watch tonight,
scanning the firmament.

But it’s so cold even the fieldmice shiver.
The sky’s afflicted.

The dogs sit outside watching
the stars explode.

Ice clots the Po, the Arno —
another hellish winter.

The old man brushes snow from his telescope.
Nothing can stop his feverish measurements.

2.

Someone’s at the door — or it’s the rap of a woodpecker
on the stovepipe, or ice sliding
from the roof, crunch, crunch

the shifting timbers:
and later the thud of a bird,

on his windowpane, and later, sleet tings the glass,
he could sit up all night listening to

the sky fill up with it,

wishing she were here, hearing
her comb out her noisy hair.

3.

The toot of a teapot, hiss of steam
as he fills his trembling cup.

Encamped in his brain, like bats
in the Castella Venezia belfry, crisp formulae:

each calculation spills from its antecedent,
roots onto the page like thought waves from God.

A letter from the Pope arrives
by midnight post. The messenger is breathless,

his horse bleeds at its hooves and shanks
from the impossible ride.

4.

The carriage is made ready.
Item upon item — maps, compasses, and his books —

stacked into boxes, strapped
to the roof; and the amazing lenses,

packed tenderly between layers of felt,

meticulously classified:
all this, he tells the coachman,

should be considered immeasurably precious:
regard this old man upon whom nothing is lost,

whose brain resembles a basket of ripe fruit,
whose spirit fills the coach

with the scent of warm bread.
5.

He who wakes and sleeps, to whom
dreams come through smoked glass,
is no more than a frail
old man, smitten by vanity.
Why else would his desire
take him each night to the tower,
why would his aqueous eye
squint and blink til dawn at
the moons of Jupiter?

How to describe the planets in ecclesiastical
language — their elegant motion,
their passionate glint in the Italian sky?
He wakes to the clop-clop of coach horses —

Rome breeds the worst kind of vanity.
Even now he feels it beneath
his iron-clad arguments: can he doubt
for a moment that the freshly minted sun
is the same sun
Joshua stopped in the desert sky?
On the cover of *The Lost World of the Aegean*, in a pile of reading on my kitchen table, a painting portrays two Minoan women in finely wrought jewelry feeding a monkey between the pillars of a stone bathhouse. Nearing the end of another relationship, I’m at the point where I don’t want anything to die anymore – the women, the monkey, the civilization, even the creator of the Marlboro Man, whose obituary photo in *Time* is lying next to the book, a man who lured millions to an early, miserable death. His childish grin is lit up in ’62, sucking air and cracking jokes just thirty-five years before being snuffed out, oblivious to the whole idea of misery, as I am on the refrigerator door at twenty-two, waving to the crowds of the future from my new pickup, pulling out of the driveway, going back to Portland where I will meet a woman I do not love who will, a year later, have a son I will never see. And why shouldn’t he be happy? Jack Kennedy is beaming far from Dallas, escorting his beautiful wife down perfect marble steps in *The Greatest Country on Earth*, and new machines are going to save us all from having to work, perhaps, someday, from having to die. Even the dry historian breaks down and refers to Crete as “a lost and golden land,”
though the rest of the story is like the others:
an awakening, a series of disasters,
a pile of tablets not yet deciphered.
THE PURPOSE OF JEWELRY

for Martha Osvat

Tina Barr

1.

I stared at the tapers of headscarves, the long-sleeves of their blouses, the white lengths that hid their waists and hips. Eyes followed over me, my skin, my hair's color. The subway car was filled only with women. I wondered about them, about their circumcisions.

In the silver shops drinking maya madenaya or mint tea I sifted piles of silver dowry, heavy Yemeni bangles sandcast with beaded patterns, three-inch Turkomen cuffs set with bees of carnelian, Nubian bracelets soldered with cut-outs and nuggets.

2.

I looked into a big bowl piled with Bedouin beads shaped like bird cages, oblongs, disks, balls incised with arabesques, inlaid with glass, filthy with tarnish. I thought I'd get sick inhaling the dust, my fingertips grey with it.

From the ceiling hung dozens of khul-khaal, thick hollow cuffs women wear on each ankle. On the floor by Mahmoud's feet in a basin, a stew of silver, earrings whose filigree spells Allah, bent Bedouin hoops, lozenge-shaped cylinders holding Koranic passages. Chains dripped from these hegabs, swinging gilgilla, small hollow balls.

Siwa brides, clinking gilgilla, dressed their heads in chains long as their hair. From huge yokes
around their throats sun disks the size of small plates hung over their chests. Rays of embroidery fanned from the bodice, radiated through draped black caftans, waves of triangles, hourglasses, stars in palm leaf, yellow and orange. Girls arched over in the dark; their families hung the stained sheets out. They were given necklaces of carnelian beads with five silver hands of Fatima, prongs clipped for each child born to the wearer. A husband gave a special bracelet if he beat her.

3.

The woman on the train tied her black headscarf so the beaded green edging framed her face; heavy ends dripped over her ear. She kept readjusting another sheer one, so it tapered down the back of her black overdress. She kept smiling, tilting her head so her hoops glinted, patting her temples while she fussed, adjusting her scarves. Leaning back into the seat, her coppery, soft hand, covered with rings, touched her husband’s white turban. They leaned towards each other, her face sixty maybe, her kohl smudged. Near Sohag they got off. Plump, shuffling in flipflops, her body shifted inside two dresses; on the station platform, she held her husband’s hand.

4.

I wonder about the women who wore the bracelets I wear. On a Coptic tombstone, in relief, stairs leading up or down. The sun lowers its rays, burning in water its yellow fire. I know each little girl was told to throw the skin of her clitoris into the Nile.
When I think of Cairo, I hear the sound of the arkasus seller, *dum dum tekka, dum tekka dum*. He clinks saucer-sized brass plates in his right hand as he walks the streets in the early morning, the foaming licorice deep brown, sloshing in the huge glass pitcher harnessed at his waist. He carries tea-sized glasses in a belt under his left arm. Walking in front of me is a man in a turban and a long robe, a galabeyya. He's hoisted a sheep over his shoulders, its belly against the back of his head. I want to put my fingers into its brown batting, but it's been taken rapidly ahead of me; some group of Khaleegy from the gulf states will eat lamb tonight.

Once I saw a man with two tethered sheep crossing the bridge at the foot of the corniche, the sun dropping across the Nile. Last year in that spot I encountered a herd of rushing camels, thundering across Manial island from the camel market in the northwest. The camels are brought across the desert from Libya, at some stages neither watered nor fed, their bones showing. Their brown is pale, as if someone took the sun and dried it into an earthy mineral mortared into dust. This is the raw yellowy earth of the desert, the sun's rays distilled into it, the sand that lies in the broken places where there is no sidewalk, the stuff that rubs from my back onto a towel after I've washed the sweat off.

I hear the recorded voices of muezzin from the loudspeakers attached to the mosque walls all over Cairo, that echo, sounding in one place and then another, calling people to prayer. The men will already have been washing their faces, arms, hands, feet. I have seen them wash even inside their mouths with their fingers. If I were to touch one's hand in the loose handshake that I am permitted as a woman, barely touching the ends of a man's fingers, he would have to wash again before prayer. After removing their shoes, they bow to Mecca on rugs all over the courtyards, or in the neighborhood mosques. I have seen men, all along the Avenue Talat Harb in Wista Belad, downtown Cairo, standing along the street like a massive strand of cut-out paper dolls, hundreds, shoulder to shoulder, as if attached, their arms crossed, facing Mecca. And on the television in the lobby, the courtyard around the black stone at Mecca is filled. Such a huge segment of the world believes in the god to which they pray. All these people in
turbans and skullcaps seem to have stepped from the pages of an illustrated Bible. Who made these stories? Whose version does one man in Tennessee believe? A man in Riyadh or Jerusalem believes another.

The fundamentalist movement in Egypt is gaining momentum, and of course there is a connection between economic insecurity and religious fundamentalism. The economy is precarious; there are so many people, such limited arable land and resources. Religious groups often provide social services through the mosques, so they have a strong grassroots basis for generating support. The visible contrasts between rich and poor, those who carry cellphones at the Sheraton and those who live in houses made of mudbrick beside their fields, only seem to be increasing. A prominent Egyptian acquaintance of mine, last time I was in Cairo, told me that she’d been advised to take her money out of the country. The economic crisis is worse than before. Money isn’t being circulated, so the government is printing more. That’s why it’s so easy, so cheap for the foreign traveler, whose dollars translate into so much more than the annual Egyptian income. The exchange rate on the dollar was increasingly favorable for me by the time I left. The people I know who teach at a private secondary school in Cairo all have cooks, on the same income I make teaching at a college in the States. When I see clusters of legless beggars in the streets I give them money, and to all the hotel people lots of baksheesh. I like them, they’ve been kind to me, and what I give to them, although it isn’t much in terms of dollars, makes a significant difference to them. When I am in Cairo, I have an entirely different sense of the margins between life and death, security and danger. I’m more aware of the junctures between sustenance and starvation, access to shelter or sleeping in the street. Even as a tourist, I have to make sure I’m carrying enough water, that I don’t get sunstroke, that I have medicines for lung and eye infections, dysentery, heat rash. The civilization itself seems a result of the alchemy of the Nile, the sunlight and the land. It’s a mirage: mysterious and volatile.

The volatility of Muslim fundamentalist reactions seems incomprehensible in a western context, but their power is present. As I understand it from what I’ve been told, a rather poor book of fiction, published in 1983 through the Ministry of Culture, was re-released and caught the attention of fundamentalists, because a communist character in this work of fiction doubts the existence of God. Someone wrote in the newspaper to condemn this blasphemous book, but of course the passage had been decontextualized. As a result, there’s been a call for increased censorship, pressure on the Minister of Culture, on the government, to allow Muslim officials from Al-Azhar, the oldest university in Cairo, to determine which
books should be published. Laws governing censorship may be repealed. All government branches and courts have been infiltrated by Muslim fundamentalists. And in Heliopolis, there was a riot, unpublicized and unreported, on the women's campus of Al-Azhar. A friend told me that women had been flown to Frankfurt, Germany, for treatment of their injuries, which must have been severe. The government won't release figures or information on whether people were killed. I could condemn censorship, except that the economic and political situation is so complex in Egypt. I'm told that one solution to the economic problem would be simply to raise the price of basic staples, like bread, but there would be riots. Egypt's economic problems are difficult to solve. They create an attractive situation for the fundamentalists, who, in addition, seek to undermine the government through acts of terrorism that reduce the significant economic contributions of tourism, as well as condemning the cultural influence of the west. And tourism is, of course, associated with western cultural imperialism. But at a personal level, as a lone tourist, living in a hotel on a residential island, in a city with little street crime, I feel safer than I do on the streets of Memphis, Tennessee, where I live. When I am downtown, many people on the street will say to me, and mean it, “Welcome to Egypt.”

Sometimes there will be a dosha, an argument, in the streets; two little tin can cars will have clipped each other and a crowd will gather. I saw a fire in Wista Belad and the next day, stopping to sit in Leila and Omar's shop, Senouhi, where they've sold silver, art, jewelry and small furniture and crafts for forty years, a man came in with shopping bags full of textiles. These materials were salvaged from this fire, which took place in an older artist's apartment. The artist, I was told, was mad before, but now he was entirely mad, since the fire. Leila picked through the pieces of fabrics, embroidered in layered gold thread, or silver, some old silks, some brocades, one embroidered in Turkey with pomegranates. She told me about a man she knows who is a magician. A woman brought Leila silk curtains with long rips, where the lengths of fabric had pulled apart, they were so old. The magician returned the curtains and you couldn't see where the repairs had been made.

In Asuit, further south, along the Nile, in a place now all the tourist books advise avoiding because there are cells of fundamentalists, women still make the dresses and tarhas for which they are famous. They take black cotton mesh and sew through it, like strips of tinsel that we used to hang on my childhood Christmas trees, flat threads of silver. Camels, urns, and geometric patterns appear through the mesh; some are Coptic, some Muslim, depending on what they've made in the design. In the old days,
the fabric was dyed in other colors, like pale celadon, or pink. I have an old one I must take to Leila when I return, a lapis fabric, a Tarha woven with patterns, that covers me completely when I wrap it over me, made probably in the 1920s.

Craftsmen still make inlaid tables of mother of pearl and tortoise shell or ivory. They make mirrors, the wood with tiny latticework panels of mashrabeyah and ivory, the tooled tiny pieces fitted and pegged into each other. Mashrabeyah were the latticework windows that hung a foot or so out over the street, like a huge screen, with tiny cupboards that opened outward. Women spent most of their time inside their houses, and didn’t go out into the street, except to visit relatives, and then their husbands took them. They could stand, unseen, inside these cupboards of windows and look from behind them down into the street, where the caravans would be brought through the streets, camels laden with goods from across the desert. Even now, from the cement balconies of the new apartments, women lower baskets down into the street on a rope to draw up vegetables sold from carts. The Fellaeen, the farmers who ride their wooden carts drawn by horses jingling bells, or donkeys, bring in apricots, oranges, watermelon and wilting greens from the country to sell. Burlap hammocks underneath the carts are stuffed with onions. Once I saw a pale horse whose tail and mane was yellowly with a reddish stain, henna maybe. I see things all the time that I don’t understand.

In Felfela, the outdoor restaurant across the street where I go most nights for dinner, there is a big pen for pigeons, who flock and purr behind the sextagonal windows of their chicken wire. They are on the menu for dinner.

In a shop that sold dried hibiscus for tea, chamomile, cinnamon, coriander, pepper, and dates, I asked about the dried pattern of a hand on the glass face of the white enameled scales. It was made in blood, for luck, to protect against the evil eye; someone had dipped his hand in blood and pressed it against the glass. On the houses, when a young girl has been circumcised, they will press that hand of blood. I know someone who works to educate the midwives, and tells me if they would learn to wash and disinfect their hands, the rate of infections associated with birth would be drastically reduced. When I ride the subway car, the first one, the one in front reserved only for women, I stare at everyone, and with the same undisguised curiosity, they stare back at me. When I was first in Cairo I thought about how many women in that car had been circumcised. In the villages the young girls are still circumcised, sometimes with scissors, a knife or a razor. They used to wear the pieces of clitoris or labia, whatever had
been taken off, in a white cloth bound on their wrists, and then after a certain number of days, they'd throw the pieces of their bodies into the Nile. Of course I think of Osiris, god of the afterlife, whose body in the resurrection myth was dismembered, then put back together by his wife, Isis. It's a question I would never ask my few women friends in Cairo. It's easy, when I am home in the States, to condemn this practice. I also understand that for those who practice such traditions, it is difficult to enact change regarding beliefs so entrenched that alternatives don't occur to people. Or to attempt to refuse such practices is to jeopardize a daughter's ability to marry, and thus ensure her economic and social survival. When I am in Cairo, I want to observe, to attempt to make sense of what I see, to try to understand it, and to acknowledge that in order to do so, I need to relinquish, temporarily, my own received ideas. Later, I find myself responding from a western point of view, but the gap between who I am as the product of one culture and the beliefs of many people in Cairo makes comprehension impossible. But I can both attempt it, and accept its fundamental mystery. I feel as if I am walking into time as spatial, where practices and routines centuries old continue. But the world there is far less materially developed. People don't put their children in strollers; they carry them in their arms or on their shoulders. Street vendors offer tea or juices in glasses, they don't use disposable cups. In my bathroom, the pipes aren't insulated, so I could easily burn myself. In the post office, the clerk has his whole family visiting, and they may be eating while he takes the time to put the stamps on all my letters. Most shopkeepers outside tourist areas are entirely honest, returning change that represents pennies, and, at the same time, some cab drivers try to rip me off and lose their tempers.

In the shops along Al Muez, near Al Azhar university, where people have gone to study for 1,000 years, there are tiny silver shops the size of closets. People there sell the old silver jewelry that used to be given as part of dowry, as engagement and wedding gifts. Khul khal, the hollow silver cuffs women wore on each ankle, hang, linked through each other in long chains from the ceiling. I'm learning to distinguish the Nubian, with its protruding nubs, from the sandcast Yemeni, with tiny grains of silver dotting its surfaces. The culture of the Siwa Oasis, which was isolated in the western desert near Libya until well into the twentieth century, adorned its young brides with dresses that reference the sun. Evidence of the old pharonic Ra, the sun god, permeates the decoration of the dresses and the jewelry. The dresses were made of either black or white cloth, big caftans, with pantaloons worn beneath, embroidered at the ankles. From the bodice in huge drifting tentacles that slide down and out like the sun's rays,
embroidered emblems, hourglasses, stars, and triangles, radiate, stitched in green, orange and yellow. The girl's hair was separated into tiny braids that hung down to her shoulders. She wore a headdress of chains from which were suspended balls that clinked together as she walked. Two separate groups of chains and bells were suspended from a leather headband on either side of her head and fell over her ears to her shoulders. A silver torque with a huge round silver disk, the size of a dessert plate, rested over her upper chest. Carnelians the size of small marbles were strung in a necklace, alternating with five silver hands of Fatma, the Prophet Mohammed's daughter. They would clip off one of the stylized fingers in the design, for each child the girl gave birth to.

I've also seen the thick wrist cuff a man gave to a wife if he beat her, and Yemeni rings with inch-high phallic posts set with carnelian. I wear a cuff jingling with tiny rounds that was worn on a child's ankle to ward off the eye of envy. When you sit in those shops, pawing through bowls of old silver, much of it twisted or broken, you hope to find pieces you'd want to keep or repair. And in some of the shops you'll find the treasures, the old bracelets you can buy as they are and bring back, knowing the tribal origin, the meaning for the wearer. But now the women want gold, and they gather in the gold shops in the evening, when it is cooler, and spend a long time, being served soft drinks or tea, looking at gold bangles, or rings. The shops with a gilt camel decorating the window means the jewelry is gold filled, or dipped.

Jewelry was all the women had of their own, all they possessed. The ankle cuffs the Baladi women—the women not westernized, less prosperous—still wear seem to bind them to their culture. I've heard of women burned for wearing short skirts in Cairo. People threw gasoline on them and set them on fire. I've known two women who lived in Saudi Arabia, one who never told me exactly how she got out, after marrying a fellow student from Georgetown in the late 70s; I just remember the fear that was still palpable, the way she didn't speak of it. A friend returned recently from a month there, living in a compound for the wealthy, and she said it wasn't worth going back, taking her life in her hands. It's hard to imagine the biblical in our own century, women being stoned to death, or killed for adultery by their own families. When I come back to the States, I notice that we live at the other end of a patriarchal spectrum; our punishments are more subtle. I see with new eyes women's bodies displayed on the covers of magazines, and it seems shocking, after Egyptian modesty. I think the way they do; what kind of culture would allow women to be used in such a way? In Egypt, it is the family's responsibility to protect women, if they adhere to
the social codes. But everywhere, of course, the breaking of social codes results in punishment, and it is women’s own fault if they are prostitutes in Las Vegas; we don’t look at the reasons women end up there. But I’ve been dragged down the stairs, my head beaten against the floor so it ached for a week. I know something about violence. I think that’s what’s made me feel so much, as I ride the subway cars in Cairo with Egyptian women. Still, I am frightened most by the veiled women, wearing black from head to foot, a headscarf with slits for the eyes; even their hands are gloved in black. Nothing shows but the eyes. One woman I saw on the Metro, in a group of six, veiled her face completely. I could tell that underneath it she wore eyeglasses. They frighten me, I don’t want to go back to Cairo and see more of these women. They become for me augurs, like crows, the black ghosts of all women on an earth ruled by men. But most of us are powerless against the received beliefs of our respective cultures, lucky if we, as individuals, have access to ways to open our own eyes to difference.

Egypt, called by the ancients the Red Land, the Black Land, for the land of the desert and the rich silt along the Nile, has a visible history so ancient I cannot fathom it. I come from a culture imposed on an ancient one that has been forgotten, and the imposed culture is only two hundred years old. Women are marketed in my country, only differently, in ways more familiar and thus more apparently understandable. Once, on a Friday afternoon, outside a mosque in old Cairo, a Bedouin woman with a tattooed chin looked at me as if I were her ancient enemy. I was covered up in a loose cotton shirt that was huge, a long skirt to my ankles; I was wearing sturdy leather walking shoes. My hair was a reddish-brown. I dyed it to darken it before I went the first time to Cairo, but my head was uncovered. My face skin wasn’t coppery, but pinky white. My eyes, blue. I’ll never forget the way she looked at me, with some strong emotion I could only guess at: hate, anger, distrust, I’m not sure. She looked at me because I was the infidel, and I suppose I am, from another part of the earth.
The train north passes poplar groves
stands of gray cypress and gnarled
olive trees, the ground whitened
by the vine from which Chianti flows
red in the Arno valley, until the fields
seem to shimmer red, white and green
like the tricolor flag of the countryside.
The train north passes Bologna,
Montagnana, Padova and Mestre,
rides over a narrow causeway and water
on both sides that erases the earth
in a dolphin gray sea, and gives view
to a small triangular flag nailed
to the sky, before it dumps us suddenly
in a world afloat on rumor and history.
There, in a Venetian palace
of fifth degree, nothing has changed
in the paintings displayed for centuries
except the shape of the hats
and no one has ever boarded a train
heading south.
I don’t wonder Titian placed his own face
on the satyr hung by his heels
and flayed by Apollo;
don’t wonder at all a small dog laps
the puddle of blood collecting
beneath Marsya’s body—he
was probably old and tired of pressing
his thoughts on those who could still
walk away, not bound as he was
upside down, listening to his brain
nattering on about the inconvenience
of lapsing into a coma brought on
by his rival’s god-like force and in-
consideration. He thought “they’ll still play
the flute after I’m gone and lick
the paint left behind like a pheromone
or whatever that little dog is used to
sniffing, not flesh shaved in strips
from bone and hanging like my sex did
when sex and music mattered more than life.”
My father’s death may well surround me
with inscrutable photographs,
cousins and aunts standing in rows,
their scarf-covered heads
sepia-toned,
and uncles lost forever to the gentiles—
some of the unlabeled dead
of Kosice and Bratislava.

Here’s my mother in a prewar pose—
in a pink and rose ballerina’s dress,
her chin en point on her fingers,
as much a coquette at twelve

as she will ever be.
And my father in uniform, already balding,
sometimes with mustache, sometimes not,
he who was also an engineer and a scholar,

who was almost a rabbi,
he who saved himself in the sewers of Prague,
and who rescued these photographs more fireproof than flesh;
may he never tell me their meaning.
FROM M2

John Peck

[Conclusion for a long poem in three sections. The sub-section CHORALE is built around lines from short poems by two Swiss writers, Erika Burkart’s “Sphere” and Robert Walser’s “Snow,” and the refusal of the Saint Louis at New York Harbor (see endnote*)]

The sanity of grasses has not abrogated the probity of stones. Wash me in my tears, logos, that I may water one and nudge the other towards meltdown in its own fine time. Neither has suffered harm from the other although spirit for spirit each cracks or crushes its opponent—neither my green nor my crystal wages enmity. From one to the other, couriers on lasers, pulp’s weave to feldspar and then back, an aeon’s transfers of accounts in the sun’s wink. Within the green, rock’s lattice—within the lattice, the beyond as first home, grainy as birth and its yowls. Protest! sustaining a tensional stretch ever between and between: was that on the ticket? Does the stub confirm it? Yet it grows plain, plain as a pine plank under a spokeshave, that such a shifting carry, tolerable wobble beneath yokes, if I shirk it, duck it, adds that much more to the load out there for the whole spread, snapping and buckling elsewhere. The moment the drama kindles elsewhere, a sick thrill but then relief! no need to sustain the barely tolerable carry—jettison that and crouch to retrieve a club for the good fight, communio longissima in a Precambrian dawn. For I’ll have stopped playing the game—the game will be playing me—and more than dear hide-and-seek softened by dusk-fall, sing-song allee allee infree! their soft forms loping in. And the dreamed-of confreres. The best sans irony. Those whom I’d hang on to in a blizzard. General Washington’s writ to General Sullivan was for erasure of their settlements, and the capture of as many prisoners of every age and sex as possible.... Parties should be detached to lay waste all settlements...
that the country may not be merely overrun, but destroyed.
This with respect to the slippery Seneca in 1779.
He elsewhere recommended, it being the era of
a continental outbreak, inoculations for his men
and his wife, while for those renegades blankets with bacilli.
He recommended. Commended again. Commendaverat—
to commit so as to preserve, intrust to a charge, and
implying physical delivery: to place on deposit,
as Caesar on children of the dying, in his Bellum Civile,
ex eo periculo fortuna. A verb’s forked usages,
wrap one that she not perish, another that she may.
Nothing that is not human issues from the human face.
Reverend John Chivington led at Sand Creek, Colorado,
against the unarmed Cheyenne and Arapaho under Black Kettle,
his departing troops wearing slung over their pommels
and the crowns of their hats the vulvas of women. I too
am the butcherer is no mea maxima from Whitman
but Dostoyevsky, set free once from before a firing squad
and Prince Gautama after how many incarnations.
Compassion grows fierce because it has welcomed ferocity
into its own house and granted it sup there, commending it
to the full hospitality of recognition.

The Haida-Canadian sculptor and goldsmith Bill Reid
refers to a Haida painted chest in Chicago’s Field Museum
bearing some creature’s face, with a smaller face beneath,
and within that smaller face fins, or wings, or ears.
He parks this handless mystery respectfully, letting
it rest simply as a visual innovation. However,
that smaller face seems to him indeed the thing’s body
supporting the upper, manifest face.

And although I have not
seen that chest, it continues to open on a second face
as the disrupter of my opiate privacies,
face below my face to outface it, which could it speak
might say: Your mug, sir, maps your fleshly meridians,
an index to organs in criss-cross. Your precious visage tops
the showings of those organs, a leafy capital thrusting
from my corporeal face, its column. And so
I recognize one face while another face cognizes me. With nothing in this body ever completing its birth down the long river of change, the small \textit{imago} works out a root, not blossom, engram of disappearance, smaller because it attempts a condensary of the interminably ungraspable—soberly, not grandly: small, for honoring; and in its own prudence, small, \textit{munuseulum}: nothing done and yet the whole performed.

The corporeal face, like Kayin’s, falls, then lifts again, but unlike Kayin retains its sanity and refrains from murdering Hevel. Lifts but does not speak, just as the break in the Hebrew has it—yet this time stays mum because this is the face that listens, swims, leaps, but is not generalissimo to the problematic hand and tongue. The Haida too killed smartly, but not every maker of a painted chest is simply going to go with the genes. That break in the text has been patched: \textit{Let us go into the field!} That seam across which Hebrew breath moved from the \textit{credo} of hunting and herdsmanship to the \textit{credo} of planting, from shaman realms of the animal and guilt to the renewed disclosures of seed.

Yet the lower face unlike Kayin’s is renewed as countenance, lifting because it knows that its offering, shepherd or hunter’s, no farmer’s, memorious of the spear, father to the spade, cannot be superceded. It’s not from history that we learn, but the kitchen at night.

More than one anthropology for the \textit{anthropos}—more than one \textit{archetupos} or mold-maker for father, poet, companion, solitary, and mainstay, for mother, mainstay, poetess, solitary, and companion. Lord of the Lair: Hailer from Headlands: grease monkey: \textit{entrepreneur}, Lady of the Black Changes: \textit{cwem}: cook: \textit{spiritus rector}, not roles merely but rather pegged settings for the weave.

Nor does this face below count on being seen by the over-face it carries and feeds. Thus it declares
its own knowing—through twinge and hint, fin tweak
ear twitch or mini-takeoff , hawk thermaling
from a perch cellular into the domed air of home.
As it does not count on being seen, so it will see
for itself. And as it does what it can to save
the situation without presuming to save face,
saving is not what it practices, it does not pray in that speech.
It will not be condemned by the dualist Perfecti,
nor will it take crowns from the orgiasts. Takes a longer view.
Unrolls ridges beneath goat villages, oozes
stench from marshes, meets the sun with wiry down.
Filters mitochondria through millennia. What
it makes of the chorus above and around it must be
another matter. No question that it listens—but waits
past the preoccupying questions, out-waits their
plainchant, their long song under the rafters which for it
passes as a quick tremor through some longer passage.

[C H O R A L E]

To gather them in and do it with hale art? Is it delusion
to gather them in, the dear ones, with hale art?

    Turn back their boat at the docks, under Liberty

(many, no one, whispered the no, a small voicing)

for we grew a great sphere around us—
with every snowfall it mounted.
So forty years later, I did not hike to Swiss Gyerbad
where the film actor and cantor was dispatched, so many roles
relinquished, to dig. Snow, snow, it roofed the earth
with white burdens. Roofed it so wide, so far.

Swing it around, turn them
So somewhere high lies Cantor Schmidt aus Deutschland, sent back off the ward by the Swiss, heart drifting, to spade in the cold. The sixty-year-olds outlived him. The snows of Saturn trickle through my outdated eyepiece when ten seconds of looking may seem too long—(but humankind is young, and time becomes the study of how to count while peering up through snowfall and not keep time with the shouted and whispered curses)—

Turn it around in the harbor, return them a straight gaze at Saturn through the blizz when ten seconds is too long, we grew it great around us.

The encompassing gaze goes for the condensed world, for the tremendum is what returns spaciously minute, whereas each black itness blinds, shocking into whiteout, which an art goes for and greatens. But smallest is the space relinquished to it, not the breeding sea between thoughts.

Joshua O. small at the rail acquired a narrowing part because the stern swivelled over rumble-froth: spinning of slip-smash, spume of reversals off out-of-sight bronzey screws. That whirl of whiteness flocking

So swing it, send it, back around, on out fast-motion cumulus yet no cinema, drumming it surges out of the basis where roles churn, they, they with the dictates too, there, bleachy foaming that mounts.

Nothing quite straightens
along sea ledge  *That whirl*
*reeling with woe from the sky, multitudinous snow*

As it swings the tremble celebrates, white mounts

One boy’s narrowing whiteness a treble line
over the engines’ bass, not Mozart’s skull, his,
for rumor has it they found it, a different they.  At the end
he was breaking even, perhaps they’d finally let him in! *Multitudinously from the sky reeling*

In single destinies there spreads a marker for manyness,
in Gilgamesh as in the early film duos, word has gotten around,
Chaplin blinking up at smeary black brows on the bruiser.
I have a pal who flaps ineffectual, or an antagonist as pal,
and then it comes out right, we are all on the same payroll

Twenty thousand tons, swung to a fare-thee-well

Half-breed three ways, Isamu Noguchi they let
stay out of camps for the Nisei, but he walked in—
framed his classes, plastic arts, landscaping,  *It gives you peace, ah gives you space.*  So they got him
out of there fast.  *Snowy world that leaves me powerless.*  And if I had gazed at Mars
that same evening, how many aspects would I have filtered and framed?  Sculpture’s lyric hand

* growing huge will thrust in.*  Turn it and send it

I shift aware of the late-stone-age hunter
ill at ease within the arrangements I manage
and that my regiment, its badge ripped off for primitivities,
stands baffled by the shovels it has been issued,
archaic, pan-shallow leaf surgeons to the mineral mother
for Osip, Yusuf, Joe, Maryam, Miriam, the whore Marias
yet not these only nor their tribes only
shrinking to puckers in the glory: jeweled
grooves on a date pit, whiteness fills them, it is not
that harm missed them or glozes us—snow yet, the snow—it
is the whole coming on dense and minuscule past our making
so how shall the storm wound us? It gives you peace,
the sphere sucked small, its rondure has furrows, they guide us
piling up whites. And there we shall stand, grateful.

So it turned, dwindled back out

For the dear slightness of it had been no comfort
in my unknowing, and I could not come to size—
hovering with Kokoschka along
the garden wall where he ogled the girl he adored
then fell in, both of us crashing, driving her
from the swing running: we splatted and failed
to grow tiny, she was not Alice, we were, yet it was not
working, nor could we think of singing, so what else
but the digger? For one knows, coming to the graves,
the point. From its hang the pick entering.

Clean line and endless

For shaken we push it traveling then travel with it,
Major Auden silent after the bombing survey, no chapters from him.
Such as we had not foreseen. The snow, the snow.

Had not foreseen coming into proportion, snuggling down
into joined destinies as the drift wobbled and lighted,
To the clean line, swing it

although Janet Lewis sent Yvor Winters’s syllabus
to those camps: *Give money mee, take friendship
whoso list.* Kiowa dawn songs, and Ralegh’s
*The Lie.* Noguchi, Googe, Ralegh, Nashe, Donne,
snug as the pit of a date and as hard,
*It roe’s the earth, it enfeebles me.* Where inside,
with them there, the duos can pair off
and jabber in good form and then halt and hear
everything, breath slow, companioned, hearing everything,

swing it on back, bend it out

for in us, you see, the sphere: the whole mounts up,
yes, as not even in the angels. *Tiny at first
then huge something enters,*
tunneling on, but shall we penetrate? Tamped
and tempted to explode frothing
through mounds. We have heard. And we are enfolded.

out and on bending smaller

Many are in there—when those doors swing,
we’ll see how blaze throngs ahead of them
and tunnels to tiny gardens and cataracts. Where is chastisement
when the white stature of accumulation
layer after layer forges the sword? Sharegroover
down shovogulley, shun speed
and all these blanchings coffered out of witness
will blink us off, in the wink filling past us, so

Let froth be their flag, turn them back
we are its thrust and lifting
of the met portion. Something silts the sills
smallest, building, making me weep.
When did it work in and seize, this happiness
in the compelled offering? Shines where shove
slewed it, our ground. Though I fell here I mount.

Let it thrust small on the scratch between water and air

May we many spading in cadence roofless
to flocking whiteness whirl through each other
our picks dingling the inclined
terraces none achieves alone They spread
the earth with their white burdens May we
mounded backs in a mesh of vocation It mounted
climb out on the turns
meant for us grew a great sphere so wide, so far
unheavy intended midgety bonded alone

out on that slash where water suspends air

as homecoming Greek sang to boar, which submitted, then offered
its blood to the new harmony in him.
The snowy world invades with comfort, spade tones
on ice shrill me, and the other Isamu,
Mr. Taniguchi, the Nisei camp long behind him
in Austin dug and gulleyed
three acres for eighteen months and bequeathed to us the garden
ten-wa-jin, 'the overarching attuning the human'
because a tree there urged him to dig thus
and
over chained work gangs
in the Delta the jets rise, little shovels in their wing pods
scooping at the air, ten-wa-jin
over the Bad Man songs,

Well-uh, de Judy

brought de jumpin’ HUNH

O Captain, to this whole round world,

O Lord, O Lordy Lord

and

the mandala for Chamunda

floats our flayed form minuscule in a lake of blood

and impales dolls on stakes at the inner gates. Bone drifts

and entrails, hairy slits over the pommels,

Raleigh’s rotten wood:

a great

sphere mounds around us at the round earth’s imagined

turnbacks and caves in on me with vast peace.

Thrusting into me, reaching. And I weep.

back into air and

Victor Hugo caved in once too, going back

to the weedy leaf-strewn courtyard of the convent

where he began, home of the Feuillantines. If he got small then anyone can. Tiny, then huge....

Spreading the earth with burdens, we grew a great sphere.

Those sisters issued him shovel and chanted him towards

a zeroing goal. Cantor who fell. Now slowly

into air

you go, that sense of who I was or might be,

wide, far!—though you are so hard to lose. But tell them

how snow falls, our dearest, that they too might come.
* One line paraphrases an immigration official in the Swiss Ministry of Justice and Police, Heinrich Rothmund: “Let them huddle on their straw as long as possible, so that of themselves they will be led to ask permission to leave; let them see for themselves that Switzerland is no paradise.” I must note that Jewish former refugees, beyond affirming that camp life was difficult, have declared in press interviews their gratitude for safe haven in Switzerland. It was otherwise with citizen Nisei, as well as Italian-Americans, many of whom once interned were stripped of their property by the U.S. government. The Saint Louis, loaded with Jewish refugees and turned back at New York Harbor by Roosevelt’s State department, arrived near the beginning of the Second World War.
Solitude

Arturo Vivante

He looked at the fireplace, about the only remarkable thing in the apartment. It was made of the local stone—peperino (pepper-like)—that the mason had told him was quarried nowhere else in the world. He admired its mantel and sides, the graceful curves they made. It was probably four hundred years old, like the rest of the building and most of the village. He wished he had a pair of andirons, and again he regretted not having taken the old ones from his family’s house, now sold. He had stupidly left them for the new owner. Antiques, too. Never mind, he would have the plumber, who also worked wrought iron, make him a pair. Start anew.

When, last year, he had bought this apartment (through a classified ad) and had it completely restored, he had looked forward to this moment, in which everything would be finally in place and he would be sitting where he was, in a red velvet armchair. All I want, he had thought, is to light a fire and watch the flames. But now, after spending all day unpacking and putting things away, he felt too tired to do anything, and besides, it wasn’t cold and he hadn’t bought any logs. So he just gazed at the empty fireplace and poured himself a glass of wine. Then he thought of a cheap picture frame that had fallen apart and of a few slats of wood he didn’t need, all of which he had piled up neatly under the sink. He picked them up, stacked them in the fireplace, put some paper under them, and lit them. The old wood caught fire easily. He watched them burn. Smoothly, without a crackle, the flames consumed them till they were a small, blackened little heap. It was hardly the fire he had envisaged, and if anything it made him sadder.

He looked around him and he thought: What folly, why am I here? What possessed me to buy this place? Why didn’t I just send everything to America, home? Why did I need this? Be done with this old country. Just come as a tourist, not to stay. I haven’t a friend in the whole village, not a friend within fifty miles. Yes, one, but this one had irritated him when—the place still unfinished—he had come to see it and all he had been able to say was that it was too noisy. Well, it was rather noisy, right in the center of the village, on the Piazza della Repubblica—as in many other Italian towns, the usual name for the main square—children playing outside the windows,
men standing around and talking, cars and motorscooters starting up, but then in that man's house, out in the country, when he had been to see him, he had to put up with worse noises—a tractor roaring, dogs barking, the television blaring; and, right here, now, in the middle of the night, it was very quiet. He couldn't hear a sound, except, once in a while, that of the nightingales down a steep slope, amid the olive trees, and who would object to them?

He went out on the balcony, at the top of the outside stone staircase, also of peperino—everything here was built of peperino—and looked at the stars. They were supposed to be a comfort to the sight—the one thing that, along with flowers, a blind man who recovered his sight said he wasn't disappointed with. Other worlds spun around them. And this world was a mere speck compared to them. But though a dot he was compared to the world, and though a dot the world was to them, his state of mind would not be belittled—nor would an ant's, for that matter.

The clock on the gateway to the castle, now the town hall, above the square, marked the wrong time, eleven o'clock, and it probably had for years. He re-entered the house, shut the door and went to his best window, the one that looked down into the steep valley and up again to the brow of a rocky cliff. It was all blackness, but to the left, in the distance, there was a cluster of lights, another cluster, beyond it, and another, and another—villages like this one, perched up high on the horizon.

Above them was the night sky with its haze of stars, not nearly so dark as the valley. In the daytime, looking in that direction, you could see the Apennines, still white with snow, some fifty miles off, and the cliff, less than a mile away, crowned by golden tufts of broom. He could hear the notes of the nightingales, some faint, some clear, depending on how far away they were. The whole valley seemed to be singing.

Well, what's so bad about that, he thought, and turned, more content, to the interior and went to bed.

One sixth of the way around the globe, in Massachusetts where it was still daylight, his wife and three children must have had supper and were perhaps watching television, a tight-knit little group. He had come from America to finish fixing this place up. It was much too small for the whole family, but it would do as a pied-a-terre. It was a good vantage point to view Central Italy from. Fifty miles north of Rome, in Etruscan country. A hundred miles south of Florence. Orvieto, Perugia, Viterbo within easy reach. Perhaps his children, when they grew up and got married, could use it for their honeymoon, he thought. Or he and his wife, who had never had
a proper honeymoon, could come. Or he might just come here by himself once in a while, to have a rest, to be alone, as now.

He listened to the nightingales and, the light still on, he looked at the well-scraped, dark-stained rafters and the clean bricks between them. The mason had done a good job. The apartment, with its outside staircase, its own roof, and no one below him, was almost as self-contained as a house. He might just stay on. Not return. But leave his wife and children, “those precious motives, those strong knots of love?”

The thought had crossed his mind before. He could continue his artwork here, or, since lately he had barely been able to support his family with it, he could turn this little studio into an office, a doctor’s office. Twenty years before, here in Italy, in Rome, he had been a doctor, a physician. He had given up his practice, left medicine for art, a passion that had haunted him all through his medical days, and before that. Perhaps he should resume practicing, take some refresher courses, renew his license, and begin again, here, in this village. God, the thought gave him a heavy sinking feeling. He was so free the way he was. And medicine—the horror of making a mistake, the anxiety that went with it, the social intercourse, the weight of other people’s troubles on his own. No, he could not go back to it. Something else maybe, but not that. There was a nice pottery in this village, buy some here and elsewhere in Italy, send a whole load of it to America, and sell it on the porch of his home on Main Street in Cape Cod—commerce, business. Easier to do that. No, again a sinking feeling. Pottery so heavy, baked clay, stone across the ocean. Stick to his present work, get up now and go to his desk, his pens, his pencils, the blank sheets of paper that became worthless at a touch, or sometimes—rarely, rarely—fairly valuable. It must be near dawn. He put the light out and looked at the window. No, it was still night. Bless the night. “Thou layest thy finger on the lips of Care, / And they complain no more.”

He woke up to the voices of children going to school and to the revving up of the motors of people going to work. Then a lull. Midmorning. The children were in their classrooms, the adults in workshops and in fields. He lay in bed. Why get up? Why face another day? Because. He hardly knew why. Just because. The wonderful answer in Italian, “Perché sì.”

He looked out his favorite window at the cliff wreathed in gold. Now there was a view. Not many views like that out of windows. He would explore the countryside. He liked to take walks, new walks, and here everything was new to him.

Outside, people looked at him—the stranger in town. He felt very self-conscious. Oh, to be in a big city, where no one knew, no one cared who
you were. Why did they stare so, and how long would he be able to stand it? He passed by a tiny girl, three or four years old, standing next to an old man, probably her grandfather, sitting on a doorstep. “Who is that little man?” he heard her say. “Is he ugly?” Now why would she’ve said that? His unfamiliar look, his uncombed hair might have displeased her, but he wasn’t small. On he went, down the main road. Very soon he was out of the village. Half a mile farther, he crossed the edge of the road into a field and felt safe from any glances. The open countryside had a universality about it that the village lacked. Like being on the sea or on a vast shore. Green all around him. A sea of green. And the song of the birds was universal, too. Or at least international. They sang just this way in America, and in Asia. The same calls. Suddenly he felt very happy. The terrain was fertile and had, till not long ago, been intensely cultivated. Recently, however, with many of the farmers working in factories, it had been more or less left to itself and it looked like a half-abandoned garden. Unkempt. The ground under the vines and olives trees was unhoed. The grass grew high. Here and there it seemed to overwhelm the vines. He came to a cherry tree loaded with ripe cherries. Was no one going to pick them? He savored one and another and another, and then a handful. They quenched his thirst. Stolen fruit—twice as delicious. Soon he came to another tree, also unpicked. Some of the cherries, overripe, had fallen on the ground. People must be fairly well off, he thought, to let this bounty go. In stores he had bought them for a dollar a pound. These were better. Of all fruit, cherries were best when eaten off the tree. His lips were red with juice. Lipstick after a stolen kiss. One had a healed gash on it. A beak did that, he thought—a trill of the wings between leaves, between branches to keep still for a moment while the bill cut cleanly, picked at the pulp, then off like a thief, with the juice fresh in the mouth, in the throat, in the gullet, in the breast, in the body, to keep strong the wings, live the song.

Taking a zigzag path down the slope he wandered on, trying to reach a cluster of broom he was sure he had seen from the road. He had lost sight of it, but now, still unseen, yet close, its blossoms, courtesan-wise, announced themselves to him with their perfume. A heady scent. He grazed the string of cool, yellow blossoms with his face. He came to a cave, exposed to the sun, dry and inviting, larger than his apartment. People had probably lived here in prehistoric times. There were some rectangular niches dug into the walls. For pots and pans? “No,” the mason, who knew quite a lot about the history of the place, told him later in a reverent tone of voice, “the Etruscans set urns there with the ashes of their dead.” It was better to think of pots and pans and little dishes, flasks of wine and olive oil,
and earthen jars of various jams and honey. Knowledge was so often sad. Once, in Rome, as a child, overjoyed to see four horses pulling a coach bedecked with flowers, he had asked his mother if he could ride on it. “But, darling,” she answered “that’s a hearse.” These lush slopes were of volcanic origin. Monte Cimino, the extinct volcano, dominated the landscape to the west. It was a wooded mountain with a growth of taller trees—colossal, ancestral beeches—on its peak. Ages ago, flames erupted from it, and now these cool trees soured in the wind. The village water also came from there. It in fact supplied the water of all the towns around it. Extinct volcanoes were apparently full of surprises. Not just water—ores, all kinds of things. In ancient days, until a Roman consul crossed it, the forest on the mountain was famed for being impassable, and though now a road led to the top, it still looked awesome.

Each day he went for longer walks, till it seemed to him he was regaining the vigor of his youth when mountain climbing had been one of his pleasures. Down ravines he went, across streams, up precipices made bare by torrential rains, from foothold to foothold, nook to nook, pausing to catch his breath on a ledge once in a while. Precariously balanced on a rock, he viewed the chasm below with wonder and the height above with such a sense of expectation that his body felt in turn molten and tense. Ready and poised for more, he would focus on the next step only. Sometimes—bridging a gap or skirting a passage where the ground crumbled at his feet—it was only speed, momentum that kept him from falling, and then there was no stopping. Soon he had reached the top, and there he took a rest that was the reward of the climb, worth all the effort, a rest full of satisfaction, especially when he considered the enormous detour he would have had to take had he not come by this shortcut, for the stream at the bottom of the narrow gorge went on for miles.

The wilderness had reclaimed some of the paths and they were hard to follow. Yet here and there he came to signs which told this was an ancient land, well tilled and tended. From a row of flat stones that bore the mark of rims he surmised that what was now a path might once have been a road. A colossal rock beneath a cliff had a still inhabitable lean-to, made of stone. On a ridge he came to a wall—large blocks of stone set one upon the other without mortar and at one end the stub of an arch, as he deduced from a few half-buried wedge-like stones. Farther on there was a slab, perhaps marking a grave. Etruscan? Their houses were of wood. All there was left of their towns were the walls around them, the paving stones, the sculpture and the tombs. Where he trod a city might have flourished.
Again and again he came to cherry trees with cherries ripe and lush and once, even more thirst-quenching, to a medlar. In one of his walks he took a trail that led to a field of hazels. The nuts were tiny in this season, for they ripened and were gathered in September. On and on he went, from one field to another, till he had covered three or four miles. The hazels were planted in rows on the slopes of hills, wherever the terrain would permit, down to the stream and up to the edge of the rocky cliffs. He got quite thirsty. There were no cherry trees or medlars here. High on a slope he heard a gurgling sound, and there, by the side of the track he followed, was a spring, clear and abundant. He knelt on the ground and stooped, stretched his neck down like a camel to reach the water and drank. It was very cold, coming as it did from the deep, dark, secret, underground veins of the tall, wooded hill. Fresh and very cold, testifying to its pureness, to its freshness. He drew the water in, and paused, and rose as drinking camels do, and then went down again for a second draft to slake all of his thirst.

And through his walks he got to know and love this land of cliffs and brows of hills and deep-set streams. Amid the luxuriant vegetation he didn't feel alone. Only, at times, he wished he could share the smells and sights and sounds with someone else. It seemed a shame, a waste that he should have all that beauty to himself. But in the studio he did feel very much alone, so alone he struck up imaginary conversations with his wife and younger daughter, Silvia, conversations such as he might have on his return home, to America. The dialogue ran like this:

Wife: But it was madness to buy it.
He: Silvia, outside you can hear clop-clop, cloppety-clop, and it’s a donkey with an old man sitting on it, bundles of grass on each side, and another donkey following close behind with just a load of grass.
Wife: How could you think of buying such a place? Too small for us. And noisy, you say. Under everyone’s eyes.
He: Once, Silvia, I was sitting in my armchair and who came to the window but a pigeon. And perched on a roof top, there’s an owl almost every night, in the same spot. So still that for a while I thought it was made of stone.

Indirect reply, he thought. A new technique. Avoids argument. But soon he came back to himself and to the present.

He had been there three weeks and had got no mail, though he had written home twice. Then one day, returning from a long walk, he found a
letter slipped under his door, a letter from a female friend in New York. In three weeks she was coming to Italy, she said, and could they meet. She spoke tenderly, and he was touched, moved, and as expectant as he had been on the face of the cliff when his pulse quickened and he got a molten feeling in his midriff. His plane left in fifteen days, nor could he cancel his reservation and make a new one without losing a good deal of money. What's more, his wife was expecting him back on the set date, and, in three weeks, he was supposed to start teaching once a week at a summer school. Why, why had he got himself into that? He reread the letter, saw the girl—blonde, sleek, smiling, promising all the joys he had missed. The two of them here. Just right for two, this place. The villagers who looked at him rather pitifully would look at him in a very different way with her around—the women with surprise, the men with envy, especially those loud-mouthed boys on their hideous motorcycles. Damn it. He could send a telegram to the school, “Return delayed, sorry,” or make up an excuse, lie. “Sick.” No, that might worry his wife and induce her to fly over, turn up at the most awkward time. Just, “Return delayed,” to both—to wife and school—and to the girl, “Hurry, waiting,” or something of the sort, plus a long letter. He pictured her with him under the cherry trees, under the medlar tree, by the broom blossoms, by the spring, and here in bed. Best of all here in bed, in this studio or apartment that so much needed someone else, that was so sterile and stark without a woman, that smelled only of tobacco and books. A whiff of perfume, her perfume. He could sense it. Spend the whole summer here, never return, cancel the ticket back, stay on and on.

He did nothing. Slowly, as the days went by, the effect of the letter seemed to wane; like pain the delicious pleasure of her imagined presence waned. He wrote the girl to try and come sooner, but she didn't. He heard from her no more.

An old man, at least twenty years older than he was began to talk to him and treat him as if she were his age, nearly seventy. He even went as far as saying, “Stay on, two little old men, we'll keep each other company in the winter.” Good God, he felt a terrifying urge to leave, to flee, to fly. There was America, with his wife, his children, his house, the summer school, the women students whom he didn't know and two whom he knew, a whole lot of people waiting for him, life teeming, life to take and to hold, precious, strong, coming to him like a river. Not this trickle. He felt an urge to go out to the nearest phone and call TWA to change his reservation to tomorrow. But that urge, too, subsided. No, he would just wait for the set day. It would come soon now, in only another week.
All the way back at the beginning there was, at last, the plan.
And he was pleased that he had made it, at last, though it did just come.
When he wrote it out, it was only a few sentences on a tag-end of paper.
This not for the notebooks — pile on pile of them and thick — where, until then, he wrote only details of his experience, detail on detail on detail.
Details we could never understand.
Details without a plan.
But now it was the beginning and there was this plan.
He wrote it out and it was just a tag-end of paper and a few sentences on it.
He was finished.
He was sleepy and went upstairs.
He went into bed to nap, to dream.
To dream of the words into action as it would be when he awoke.

As he slept, the sky arched its back like an animal and the moon, like the animal’s eye rolled and passed from East to West.
It shone in the first window and lit the room and his sleep.
Then it was past.
The room was dark.
And it shone in the second window and there was that light again like a sheet on his sweet dreaming sleep.
The moon moved past the second window.
It was dark.
Soon the sun followed the moon and the dark was gone.
The sun shone in the first window and woke him in his bed where he slept.
And now the sky was not like an animal but like a sea — becalmed.
It was the beginning.  
Now for the words into action, he thought.  
He got up to get the paper with the plan.

He has come downstairs to get the plan he has made: for us  
and for himself.  
Wherever he looks, there the plan is not.  
He was tired.  
He mislaid it.  
He looks among the furniture, along the floors and at the  
window sills, in the cracks in the wall, the ceiling,  
through his notebooks and their pages.

Wherever he looks, there the plan is not.  
He mislaid it.  
We are because the plan was for us.  
Without it, we do all the plan ruled out.  
Without it, we overlook all we do that the plan provided for.  
The sky is not like an animal, like a sea or anything.

He is stumbling through his house.  
Wherever he looks, he has looked before.  
He lives his waking as though stumbling ahead to his  
dreaming that was before.  
We live our waking as though reading in the pages of his  
notebooks, the details.  
Details, it seems, we could never understand.  
Somewhere there is the eye of an animal —moving— and  
another and another and another.  
There is the sound of a chair being upset, overturned, falling  
to the floor.  
We cannot make anything of this or anything.
NO THEORY

Robert Stewart

Leave me here in the century
where I was born, the old century
of levers, knobs, vacuum tubes,
furnace stacks, scrubbers and lead
filling the sky, tons of lead,
through which I sail, like a bird
born with a mysterious cell
in its brain for the route home.
Who walks the hundred years?
Voice commands, retina twitches
turn and return from satellites, now,
without bones or muscles or clear
membranes that protect the eye;
I suppose getting lost no longer
will be possible, or to be helpless
and alone with only a prayer
or raft made of railroad ties,
which wobbles on a wave, like love.
Only now have I gotten the Ford truck
to start in the driveway, its white
cough appearing in the mirror,
hazing the air between my house
and the power pole, a pole soaked
with wires and cables—switches
to those who know but do not talk.
I love to sit in the cab and shudder
with moisture, while air and gasoline
heat up the engine block and radiate
energy into the hole that looks at God.
In the rivers I know, a boy would not
dare stick even a leg—alligator gar
gulping cattle carcasses, fertilizer,
uranium, Styrofoam packages, sulfites,
latex particles, unrecycled refrigerators.
Always we have been weighted down,
and in 1968 I stood at the back door
of Sheehan Plumbing Co. on Delmar
in St. Louis, the morning after the Memphis
shooting, that shooting, with young Joe,
the owner, and his big Irish-green trailer
and lengths of cast-iron and clay pipe,
and half bricks that had set off alarms
all night, piles of glass, copper fittings,
and lead rings—the metal of the century,
which yellowed the shop air when melted,
like gold breathing, and we breathed it.
It's in there, now, in our lungs, foiled
onto each aspiration of the century—
to stamp-press, to mold, caste and cart
the sky, itself, as the morning of my birth,
chalked with pigeon dung on the ledges
and shoulders burnished bronze, where
a white boy would not even be allowed
to get himself so dirty. I did apply
for work in the dung stables, the manholes
shining with the backs of bugs, and once,
my father stood on a chair at a construction site
to order three-hundred men back to work.
They were protesting new faces in the united
nations of the union, not far from the mines
of central Missouri, where blacks had died,
as well, my father knew, in the great strike
of '22, and heavy metals flowed with rainbows
and coal into the creeks. You could taste
what was silently offered from the ground,
the ground from which we pulled this lead.
I think I can still name my friends dead
of mortar fire, half a world and full century
away, barely able even now to keep quiet.
ECLIPSE, AGAIN,

Robert Stewart

and the moon, this time, gets
slipped into a distant pocket;
it’s the color of a penny, as light
bleeds through earth’s atmospheric
copper, zinc, lead, zirconium;

the meteorologist, half blind
with his own troubles, says
the deeper red, the more
beautiful the moon, the more
exhausted our atmosphere;

outside, the cold air dries
for our view, among branches
of the maple, ancient scene;

when only a cornea-width
edges still bright, how thin
and quiet we all become:

my neighbor the electrician,
and the curtain seamstress,

the bread-truck driver down
farther, the Sherwin-Williams

sales rep watching our houses
turn gray, turn black at last,

all here on their front lawns,
as if they have come to spend
their only hour.
To look
    and see nothing
    confirms its presence.
To rub and find
    only a dampness
    admits the impossible.
There where
    the arm ends,
    where the hand begins,
the pulse
    of its mechanisms
undermining the skin's
ability to forget,
    deferring the bone's
    longing for release.
It knows all about
    that construct
we like to call time,
those increments
    of increments
stacked so neatly
in the air.
    Like all ghosts
it haunts with a purpose,
and like all ghosts
    it must obey
certain prescribed laws.
There are no
    palpable murders
it seeks to revenge,
no ancestral curses
    it wishes to absolve;
    it is after something
much finer,
as subtle as
the almost invisible
colorless hairs
that retain its impression
like a memory.

Then it's gone.
And because
there is nothing remarkable
about its absence,
no residue,
no chill,
the light somehow
exactly the same,
we try to think,
to understand
that some things are
purely errands
performed
in the void,
then that's gone too.
The Alchemist

At the Frame Restorer’s

Rebecca Black

Here’s a frame for a mountain long since leveled, for three women dancing in a wash of green, a storm-frame, a white sea-frame, a double frame for the canvas finished on both sides, for the prairie as it never was again, and for the tenement streets.

Under the greenhouse ceiling, turpentine and too few fans, twenty Cambodian men repair plaster caked on wire grilles. With a horsehair wand, one man brushes gold leaf from a tissue’d book into filament on his wrist,

mends the dull stucco—all edges give way, the room gathers into a single plane. Outside, a kid beats a spray-can against the bricks til the nozzle splits, bright yellow exploding. He’s half of a dripping puzzle, the truant jigsaw piece, whereas inside, frames shutter and unfold—

the square of yellow on the wall is a window that won’t open, or shut. When the man walks into the darkening street after everyone else has gone, spray-paint pooling into another sun, his lungs burning from the solvents, skin flecked with gold, he is arrayed—reaching for enough fare to get home.
VOLterra with Two Lines from Campana

Rebecca Black

I know every swerve on the road
   to the citadel, how light hides in cedars,

that the wind in your hair was easterly,
   though I’ve never been there.

I can turn the sky into the sea, ultra-
   marine, or say you don’t love me.

Our old poet, the Tuscan pyromaniac,
   saw grasses burn in the graveyard with

_a pale red-ochre flame._ I can get it
   all wrong. And poor Rosso, suicidal as he painted

grief’s entourage in the Descent,
   Magdalene’s dress like a flame or gash.

I’m not into pain, but its after-
   math. In dreams I held the ladder against the cross,

rubbed oil into the body brought
   down, dried it with my hem, _my red and ancient heart._
ON CUMBERLAND

Rebecca Black

When we go to the island,
I’m an Indian salvaging ingots
and iron bells from the wreck,

kid Caliban in poncho and sandals.
We might have set driftwood
and weeds into a quick mosaic,

or buried my brother up to his eyes
in the sand, starfish hardening
into their own caskets at his feet,

so that he could be born again
from mud and sawgrass.
What I love is the idea

of a lost city, the battered coast-
line of memory, utopias sacked
for myth like the steel baron’s

fire-ruined manor, our refuge
from a storm even the wild
horses couldn’t weather.

The sailors hurricaned
on this risen Atlantis
covered native women in moss

woven into a delicate mail
for decency’s sake, bartered
deerskin for mirrors

which warriors wore
like medals or garlands
around their necks.
Imagine only seeing yourself
in the dark pupils of your mother
as she tethers your hair
in ragged linen,
then the hammered tin confusion
of a separate self.
August

Jill McDonough

Parties out of doors, guitars, laughter
so close you're invited.
Buckets of ice, beer. Upturned milkcrates. Orange
tips of borrowed cigarettes blurred
against these skies. Nights
of northern lights, expanse of visible stars:
not only supernovas, but even
your red dwarves, your cooled giants, betas,
chis between the alphas, each bright as yellow
light from your own kitchen. Each
one shining, present for the Perseid
viewed alone. Wake up again at four to meet
your falling star—Falling star or shooting,
either way it doesn't make it. Either way
the poor thing never hits the ground.
He mutters, laughs to himself in Russian.
He's crazy, cyrillic backward Ns
and Ps rising up like ironed
curtains. No, not like that
at all. More like smoke, blue smoke,
cheap vodka kind of blue
smoke, letters blown like smoke rings
from the mouth of Constantine. Mumbling,
muttering Marxist, Trotsky. You hold
very still. The whispers expand,
assured. You remember Lenin,
Stalin and the czars, the tsars. Lips
close together, teeth clenched
as Petersburg, his mouth a wide
Siberia and just as closed.
Bulky continents of bundled
wool and fur ear flaps. He doesn’t
have the beard he should but you
know it’s inside him, rustling in Russian,
letters you can’t understand.
THE OBJECT OF CROSS-COUNTRY DRIVING

Lisa M. Steinman

—on seeing an exhibit of work by Gail and Zachariah Reiche in the Santa Fe Museum of Fine Arts

“Found objects continue to have their own histories. Meanings multiply and shift constantly while the constituent parts retain particularity, showing the artists’ desire to be supple about context and association,” says the catalogue. It goes on about how objects are released to be themselves, here in the museum in Santa Fe. Suddenly, transported, I think of Brisco Stubblefield, who aids travelers at rest stops unsolicited, red suspenders over his sixty-something year old belly. His capacity for indecision is monumental. After he retired, he says, he ran for office, went into antiques, into junk, including used refrigerators, into glassware, into teaching, a Ph.D. program, into maligning all those different than he is. Although what or who he is is not clear. He does make clear he does not like change. He’s like a chameleon’s habitat, he makes us—

me and my husband—grow silent, faced with his talk of “them” and “things going downhill,” of urban crime, of skin color. An unattractive shape shifter, he’s trying to place us
though his sense of geography leaves something to be desired. Noticing our license plates were falling off, he offered help: wire and pliers and talk, in which he rearranges all the maps, transplanting the Pacific Northwest to somewhere near the Colorado Plateau. He gives us red cedars in Zion National Park's layers of limestone, mudstones, shale, sandstone uplifting, trading places with the pinyon, brush, and hoodoos. Brisco, then, is generous and all imagination, while we drive through his state seeing only square and round bales; we keep ourselves awake trading words that begin with 'v' until we have exhausted our store. I'd thought geography was secure, rock-solid, moving only in geology's sweet time. Yet for a second I'm translated by Brisco, almost as I am by what is in this show in Santa Fe. Translated, but not transplanted. “I like to cause trouble,” Brisco says, and he does. When we leave him, reattached to plates put back in place, the shadows of phone wires above trace thin connecting lines on the Ohio roads, of which we take him to be an atypical denizen. I had wanted him to have his own poem, his own unique say, but I've come to think it can't be done. He's become something else, like the Kronos Quartet on the radio in Kansas playing Hendrix, or the sea shells from the Atlantic on our dashboard growing more souvenir-like and exotic as we head home. Brisco is by now some installation I could call “Buckeye, Confused or Confusing,” “Frightening Person:
Ohio,” or “Solid Citizen.” Geography may be places and the people who talk and live in them. But then who is this man who’s moved into my museum in Santa Fe, where I can tell he doesn’t particularly like the exhibit. Our tastes differ. He’s really not taken with the art, although he has the grace to be embarrassed by this. As for me, I can’t seem to let him go, this buck-eyed collector of doodads, mythographer, gerrymanderer of people, even those whose license plates are not the right color. Everybody holds their ground, none of us giving an inch, each unwilling to be moved.
A radio tower rises like an oil rig from the heat, the ceiling fan wobbles, blonde-haired girls gather in a corner by the jukebox. I imagine we have been dancing. I reach across the table—

4:49 on a July afternoon.

The sun stalks me 12 blocks through the quarter. A woman ascends the coffeehouse stairs while her companion gestures to a ground-floor table. He could map the insides of her. He laid her carpet and trued her blades; she shelved his books and filtered his water.

At such a moment it is important to examine your feelings: a chess set, an aria, the bougainvillea insists, blue glass of tequila, clear glass of ice on the nightstand, a set of keys to remember.

To sleep on the rug, would you slide your foot under my ankle? Cast a breeze to skip the strap from my shoulder? Red peonies

on the table, iron roses on our balcony, filigree to double back on itself and push us forward. I have driven 2039 miles and brought you with me.

And if I rode to Cheyenne 2147 miles
and if I rode to Boston 1353 miles
and if I rode to Raleigh 805 miles

or Toronto or Wichita or Abilene (1655).

From all of this turning I wake with a rash on my knees.

A black dress flowers from the rail as wind chimes praise the fire escape. The rook pulls the pawn. Your voice winds through me: cornice, tracery, spire. A girl twists from a payphone, a spectrum coiled to wire, a wire with a ‘can’t’ in it.

It sounds like rain that car coming down St. Philip Street.
BUY ONE, GET THREE FREE: A MIDWESTERN POEM

Beth Ann Fennelly

I. Vision

When I was offered a job in this Illinois town, my husband and I drove here to look for an apartment. At noon, we ate in a Mexican restaurant on Main Street. We were the only ones there, seated in a booth by the enormous window. Later we learned that the place had been a car dealership. Slick salsa dripped from our chips to the red and white plastic tablecloth while we looked at the sparse traffic, either couples on Harleys or elderly men wearing hats driving ’71 Dodge Darts and other accidentally stylish cars. Dime-sized flies kept pinging against the glass.

By the time we moved here, the restaurant had closed. I’m glad, not only because it was terrible, but because I remember it clearly, and now I always will. No additional booths, additional views superimposed. Familiarity breeds forgetfulness. Practice makes imperfect. Picture for a moment—really picture—the face of the one you love best. Scary how hard that can be, no?

If we see something once, there’s a chance we’ll remember it. Or if we see it often and fail to understand, but keep trying. Not the punch drunk hunters on the opening day of the season who leave behind shot up cows though the farmer paints “COW” on their flanks. Not them, but the cold warriors who studied abstract paintings, convinced maps of forts were being revealed to the Reds within their mash of colors.

II. Identification

We say, “if memory serves,” but it’s we who serve memory. A boy, perhaps seven, is nearly running on his too-big rollerskates after the bigger boys on bicycles pedaling away. “Hey guys, wait up! Hey guys, wait up!” One of them, perhaps a brother, yells over his shoulder, “Later, dickwad,” and the bikes fishtail around the corner. Now, ten out of ten people identify with
the skating boy. No one recalls being the bully, though most of us had to be, number-wise. This is because movies present the underdog’s point of view.

Our memories are contaminated in proportion to the number of movies we’ve seen. So are our perceptions of the present. When my father died, I kept thinking of grieving scenes from movies and felt my own reaction—dry, very dry, calling calmly in to work—to be poorly acted. Nothing happened except the top layer of skin peeled off my face. This year I got pregnant and didn’t realize it because my symptoms were so unlike movie pregnancies. I didn’t puke at breakfast. My nose was running, I started sneezing. It seemed obvious: the flu. This went on for weeks. My baby’s first meal was Nyquil.

Picture this: you’re conspicuously alone in a restaurant, waiting for a friend. What do you do? You hold your wrist up to your ear and shake your watch. Movies taught you this. That way, those watching will know your friend is late. You’re not a loser, you’re not the kind of adult grown from the kind of kid who was ditched by the neighborhood boys when you got your birthday skates.

III. Nostalgia

Lately I’ve been thinking about my waitressing years, which proves one can be nostalgic for anything. There were seven of them, high school through college, and I don’t remember a single night clearly. They all began with the sea-lit calm at the start of the shift, me at the hostess station tying my long white apron around my waist while studying the chart of tables divided into sections. This was followed by several hours of pure adrenaline. Then a few hours on the bar stool at the local, in my trouser pocket a wad of dollars curled around my black bow tie. If I skipped the drinks and went home, I’d spin into nightmares where I’d wait on that night’s tables again, but the London Broil was eighty-sixed and me in the weeds with a new six-top, table 103 needing water but the bus boys in the walk-in snorting gas from the whip cream canister.

I think I thought God would saunter in one day and grab my ass, take me to his pad and play me bootleg B-sides, give me hickies, work my bra clasp with his ear against my chest like a safe cracker. You’re the man. Come and be my cupid, stupid, let me be your bitch du jour. I got a nice snack tray,
Lord, we’re talking serious tatas. I’m in the weeds for real now, Lord, come save me from my penguin suit, I’m here.

I got out of waitressing just in time, and while my job now is more fulfilling, I’m not half so good at it. And somewhere along the way, I stopped holding my watch to my ear. Anyone this late isn’t coming.

IV. Ars Poetica

I can’t stop writing these messy poems in prose. Not grandly messy, but the messiness of the recovering Catholic, the rebellion of the girl who checks her heels for toilet paper, the revolt of the princess when the father dies and the spell is broken. Or she thinks it’s broken. I want to flash you the back of my needlepoint. It’s unseemly. But as I told the woman at 31 Flavors, I’m developing a maximalist aesthetic.

I think one of my problems is that I’m Midwestern, so my carry-ons never fit in the overhead bins. It’s hard to remember to share the arm rest when all up and down Main Street the stores are unscrolling their paper eyelids, confessing availability. Apparently I’m conflicted about being Midwestern, however—every time I spell “prairie,” I leave an “i” out.

I have two options—write tidier poems myself, or make other writers messier. Poets could meet in my living room and give each other assignments—“Write a poem using Mas es menos, tatas, and Secret Santa” or “Write a poem praising the guy with mullet hair whose jeans have the faded badge of the Skoal can on the back pocket; use ‘Zounds!’ or ‘Yikes!’ at least once.” Rules? Oh, yes, we’d have rules, “Thou shalt not mention angels, names of flowers, Vermeer, or anything cerulean.” We could have a vision, if we only had a label. You know, The Prarie School. Zounds.
I doubt either of us remembers. There's probably nothing we really need to deny in such a public place, other than the usual regrets, we carry with us. Some days our pockets bulge to the notice of others and our embarrassment. Notebooks compounded by days of whining to any one who will listen. The missed opportunities are legendary. We have theories of parallel universes. We repeat ourselves backwards. We're not quick enough, or graceful enough, to duck and save ourselves. There we were, me sitting in a tasseled chair beside a fluted column, legs crossed, hands crossed, and you with your hand on my shoulder, pretending to stand firmly on the polished parquet flooring. We're smiling idiotically, famously, much as Han-Shan and his sidekick, Shih-te, in 10th century silk scrolls, laugh, outsiders on an inside job, wandering the mists of Cold Mountain. We too are hermit poets in the governor's mansion, the camera flash starring our eyes, dazzled by these parallel worlds.
Han-Shan left his poems
hanging from pine branches,
set them afloat on fast flowing,
snow-melt brimming creeks.
We leave our poems on gold-embossed
napkins of state under empty wine glasses.
Nights straight out of August.
Hoo-hoo-hoo, a white owl
in the woods back of the house.
The clarion in the valley crying
its heart out, hightailing the tracks
south, the river amplifying.
Air heavy with hints
there may be no coming back.
Maybe it’s a mistake
to think of distance, its long reach. The night sky always
reminding you, under its breath
why not come along for the ride?
Where are these orphaned places
sound motions to?
You think of those in the garden
entered through a burrow
under the apple tree.
Stars and childhood seem closer now. Mars and Venus. Cars
in traffic. Whips that flog
a life all your life.
Whatever it is at the end
of a cry, even as a child
you knew someday
when the wind blew
you’d get up and go.
I

Arms and fingers
a blur of blue silk
—Fauré in the notes
the measures premonitory

love's short time lavished
on vowels, hands, lips

fingers racing
to conclusions

flute music for a night
a dance at the edge
and Rimbaud
open beside your bed

II

the dune road tied to the sea
a finger reaching for your sleeve

after the pursed words of lovers
bodies mortice

between dunes and seagrass
the dropped note of a thrashing surf

a glance, the frown
an afternoon, Ravel finding its key
a grievance
out of the slipstream

like an infant’s lament
for life’s missing pieces

collected in a saxophone’s
muted wail from the night before

the dissonance
already of the serial places

bodies slipping apart
lives drift to

III

you enter this room
year after year, a whisper
of blue silk, sylph
or cipher

peer
through the acute
angle, doubts left open

slip
down less familiar
passages
this evening
in Orlando Gibbons’ music
for Lord Salisbury after long
absence

the rustle
of entrance, a segue
taking the measure
of memory, your blue
silk-sleeved arms
extended—fingers
at the keyboard.
HAZARDOUS INVASION

Kenneth Frost

Watching a Brownian movement create its self-erasing pattern, I realize I have thought what I say. It builds a bridge to nowhere and I walk on it. The retina is full of hazardous invasions.

What saint has disappeared into the body with his secret connection of events raised to the power of the loss of references?
Rikki Ducornet is the author of numerous books of poetry, essays, and short stories, as well as seven novels, including The Jade Cabinet, Phosphor in Dreamland, and The Fan-Maker’s Inquisition. Her most recent novel, Gazelle, is set in Egypt. After living in Egypt, Greece, Canada and France, she now resides in Colorado. She spoke with Shannon Doyne and Steve Tomasula of the Notre Dame Review.

NDR: The objects and descriptions in your novels often work like the seashells you sometimes draw, that is, as metaphor, or metonym, don't they?

RD: The most creative work I do is informed by potencies in the shapes of dreams, objects, landscapes, exemplary conversations, paintings, museums... and the memory of these, the reveries engendered by those memories and so on. For Bachelard, potencies are shells, a bird’s nest, an attic; for Borges the maze, the mirror and tiger; for Calvino the moon, the flame and the crystal; for Cortazar, ants on the march and the cry of the rooster.

Potencies are never static but in constant flux within our minds and what’s more, they fall in sympathy with one another. For example, I’d say that for Borges there is an evident sympathy between the tiger’s stripes, the world’s maze, language and the maze of the mind; for Calvino between moonlight and a longing for lightness—for a thoughtful lightness and the lucent
Black Isis by Rikki Ducornet. Lithograph, 13x20".
transparency of clear thinking; for Bachelard between attics and a love of solitude; for Cortazar between the cock's cry and the knowledge of mortality, of finitude.

NDR: Do you see the narrative then as a sort of cabinet that holds these potencies in a way? – sort of like the those 17th century wonder cabinets, those collections of curios, you've written about?

RD: Although I didn't plan them that way, I think that could be an interesting approach to my books. After all they are informed by what I've called potencies and sympathies and these form “collections” of resonating images and themes. But if such “collections” are intuitive, in the end they must be essential to the book. More like a collection in a museum of natural history and not like the jumbles of kayaks and lobsters and exotic stools so popular in Victorian parlors. I'm not talking about magical thinking but the powers of rigorous imagination. It's no accident that the development of the museum coincides with the exclusion of Christian orthodoxy from the process of scientific inquiry. So must the books we write be unencumbered of those restraints and superstitions that impede aesthetic invention—rigorous aesthetic invention.

NDR: We're talking about an author getting at the whole by asking how the parts relate?

RD: Well, just what are the sympathies between the monstrous, the marvelous and parody? For Aristotle, the monstrous was marvelous, something that caused one to wonder, to reflect. Science and philosophy owe everything to wonderment, an unfettered curiosity, a deep seeing of the world. Aberrations—whether people, ideas or natural anomalies—upset our expectations and habits of mind. By extending our understanding of the world—the world that is by its nature, full of exceptions—the monstrous and the marvelous extend our expectations. I like to think they serve as beacons on the path to truth. It is no accident that in the age of kings, a dwarf was not only the one allowed to parody the king but also the one who could be trusted to speak the truth.

But the monstrous and the marvelous have also provoked fear and religious awe. St. Augustine, for example, who had such a nefarious and long-lasting hold on “truth,” believed it was best not to investigate marvels, that to do so was heretical, even indiscrete, like prodding a hairy mole on the body of the
divine. Even Voltaire attempted to demonstrate that fossil fish and shells—so devastating to the scriptural interpretation of time—were simply luncheon refuse dropped by crusaders returning from the Holy Land!

NDR: We can then make some connection to what you say in your essay “Waking to Eden” [see Ducornet’s essay collection *The Monstrous and the Marvelous*] that the image is magic. That is something that means “bypass” in regard to Yahweh, to get to our own words, to get them back.

RD: Knowledge, the “lightness of thoughtfulness,” is our way of bypassing Yahweh! In an essential Gnostic myth, Yahweh is fooled into giving the little spark of light within him to Adam and so loses his own capacity for transcendence forever. This explains Yahweh’s jealous rage in Eden and later, Babel.

It is our capacity for moral understanding that enables us to interpret the world and to act thoughtfully and with autonomy. For the Manicheans, the universe is both a prison and a “pharmacy”—a place of healing. As psycho-analysis demonstrates, knowledge of ourselves and the world allows us to heal, to transcend the moral darkness that suffocates and blinds us. The process of writing a novel is similar as it reveals to the writer what is hidden within her. Writing is a *reading* of the self and of the world. It is a process of knowledge.

In the tradition of Islam, the first word that was revealed to Mohammed was *Igrā* (Read!). In other words, the world is a translation of the divine and its manifestation: the divine made sensible. To write a text is to propose a reading of the world and to reveal its potencies. Again: writing is reading and reading a way back to the initial impulse. Both are acts of revelation.

NDR: That seems so antithetical to how we most often use language. In fact, in “Waking to Eden” you write, “If fiction can be said to have a function, it is to release that primary fury of which language, even now, is miraculously capable—from the dry mud of daily use.” I was thinking, that when you refer to dry mud here, you mainly mean the pragmatic use of language. . .

RD: We live in a world in which a lethal herbicide, toxic to people and animals and fish, is called “Liberty.” Such cynicism is an insult and a threat to human intelligence. Corporations have taken our health and now *our*
words! And we must take them back. And if they have been sullied beyond repair, then we must invent new ones.

It is the work of the writer to move beyond the simple definitions or descriptions of things—which is of limited interest after all—and to bring a dream to life through the alchemy of language, to move from the language of the street—the place of received ideas—into the language of the forest—the place of the unknown.

NDR: So then is strangeness and non-pragmaticness a necessary part of your poetics?

RD: Within a writer’s life, words, just as memories and things acquire powers. For Borges tiger and red are such words. And if Beauty in the form of a red rose waits in ambush for us, beautiful words are the mind’s animating flame.

It is the shell that “tigers” Bachelard who says a fossil shell is not a dead thing but something “asleep in its form”—an idea very like Borges’ when he writes, a book is only a volume in space until it is read. I suppose if I intend to do anything as a writer, it is to engage, first myself, then the reader—in a reverie, a waking dream that arouses the sleeping forms within the memories of what is lost, but also what might be regained.

In 1968, during the student uprising in France, someone scrawled on a wall: Underneath the street lies the beach. I’d like to write books that reclaim the beach.

NDR: Your novel that is set in the time of the French Revolution, The Fan Maker’s Inquisition, is even more so about personal revolution, isn’t it? It contrasts the institutional values of a character like Bishop Landa who is trying to subdue the native population in the New World with a variety of characters who live to varying degrees outside of societal bounds, such as the Marquis de Sade.

RD: Sade and Bishop Landa are historical figures. The pain of those Bishop Landa had tortured to death could not have been more real. But if I put those two together in a book, The Fan Maker’s Inquisition, it is because they evoke the profound problems of censorship and the creative imagination, the immense problem of freedom and responsibility. In other words,
I’m writing about “real” issues although my “vehicle” may be eccentric. I’m not interested in going over well known territory—I have a horror of received ideas, of redundancies, of platitudes that serve to hide or blunt the truth—but instead I am interested in investigating new territory, aesthetically, philosophically, even politically. If I didn’t do that I’d be bored and I imagine, so would my readers. I’m the first person to be disquieted by my books!

I think ideas and language deserve our acute, our chronic attention. A book is a testing ground, a place of experiment, a pragmatic place, Calvino says: a battleground—where the orthodoxies—religious, political, erotic, neurotic—that interfere with clairvoyance, are dismantled and replaced by a new order.

Note: This conversation was extended into two lectures, one given at the University of Houston, the other one at the Institut Charles V in Paris.
Doors do not touch kings. They groan their complaints and desire wings instead of hinges. Some dream of being trap doors so that they can spring darkness on their tormentors. Others rarely feel the key's lash.

Doors can be floors, walls or even ceilings. Some look out onto sun-soaked lakes while others flush in rage from the heat of hospital incinerators. Crypts have doors, dogs too, but open doors do not always bring good neighbors. A few doors have smaller doors at eye level so that the meek can spy on those who seek to barge inside. A few doors remember being cut from roots and leaves, and these bang angrily from the wind in ghost towns and along war-torn streets. Some doors are wrapped in human clothes and they are mostly closed.
I WILL BE FINE IN FINLAND

Kathryn Rantala

Oh, to this extent I’m already fine:
butter, eggs, flowers, books,
and all the blues:
sky, vein, water;
and mufflings of tall tending trees

but when the pulsed, dark winter descends
and knots the closed-home canopy,
subtracting all without,
then there will be wine:
wine and a glass,
a glass like a purse;
a null-filled, waiting, hot summer glass purse.
The heart at the edge cannot break
though it aches.
No room inside and only weather out,
it turns from the interior to sea
and sits,
unaware if it is patient
or asleep.

Separated stone,
too far from source
and too close to tide water.

Even without weather it will change.
Depictions slide,
features find a plane and fall;
sight remains
fixed and unremitting
though uninstructed at the core.

It never has a choice.
It loves the things it sees,
it is unable
not to.
AERIALIST

—for T. S.

Kathleen Aponick

The lore of that place still holds you
and your quest to be airborne above the stifling streets,
holds that panther’s tensile moves you studied
as it grazed apartment sills.

We, your young neighbors, held our breath
while you spanned the telephone wires,
first with pole, then without,
as if air were scaleable.

Is it any wonder why we are still dizzy
from your handstand on the cross,
the church of our parents and their parents,
the monolith whose columns looked down on us,
on what seemed, before you, our predictable lives?
To you, newly-arrived with your brother
(his way with the girls its own legend)
and your mother in her red lipstick,

her coming-and-going dress,
tradition, sacred symbol, held no sway.
What mattered but those attendant moments
you could always shape.

Now in our fearful middle years,
we need to know your mind tricks:
what it was that kept you going,
the reassurances that brought the calm.
You could have died in front of us, crushed beneath illusion’s gauzy veil, its bright masks. What keeps you in the realm of heroes, forever challenging space-time?

And why are we still drawn into your tree-house dreaming, small missiles propelled from a trampoline into a backyard’s shallow sky?
From their shifting landscapes,  
the living call to ask  
of those gone before us,  
those who lived in alley-shaped flats  
with a wash stiffening in porch wind.

I tell them that the early ones are all around us  
with their tea and sweets,  
their politics of regret and longing,  
even the troubled ones whose scandals  
the departed tried to hide from us.

The living persist, wanting more—  
clues to the old ones’ comings and goings.  
Archives are raided, files  
where a life becomes a name, a date,  
the apparent cause of death.

Addresses and deeds lead us down  
into a Sargasso Sea where I lose my way  
until the early ones appear,  
inviting me into their pool halls,  
their soap- and boat-making factories,

into the dust of accounting offices,  
the neat ledgers of their scripted figures.  
And on to the capital’s grand parks,  
its city beaches with wooden shelters  
shading us from a scorching sun.

Sometimes the dead march into my brain  
with their teams of horses, stews, and puddings.  
I am inside their small gardens, the steaming  
kitchens of rockers and black iron stoves
where oatmeal cooks in double boilers.

Is it here the heat of argument
led to a memory of veiled hushes?
Had they gambled? Lost? With their lives?
The lives of others? In the memory,
it seems someone is barred, driven out,
dying unforgiven.

I switch on the lamp to see them clearer,
to speak of these matters.
But they vanish—fireflies dispersed
as from a dampened flame—
only to return again in their unsuspecting
guises and settings.
The season opened, the bees,
roused in their waxed cell. She told him
that in the dream the rose had unfolded petal
by petal and at its center, a song. He had forgotten.
The language they once spoke
bloomed in him again
and he smiled. Give me your hand, she said.
The fields were golden in the new light.
He bared his shy hand, willingly.
BLUE

Dale M. Kushner

Each room was blue
and windowless, and she walked through the door
as if into the sea
the air both resisting her
and holding her up. It was
a kind of blindness, all that blue,
and no one had told her. If there had been
a warning — lightning or a falling star —
she would have been distracted.
She would have turned her head
and followed the momentary
glimpse of fire.
He often returns to those moments
When he discovered something vital.

The time he realized his mother drank
Or that his teachers thought him slow.

Mere glimpses originally, they become
Discourse running hundreds of pages.

The question then is one of invention,
Did the child really steal a mantle clock
From a department store and then throw it
Into the woods because he was scared?

Or was this merely a way to introduce
The celebrated chapters on mutability?

At some point, enjoying a quiet renown,
A habit as deeply ingrained as opium,

He realizes precious little separates fact
From the lies that make it up, an idea

That allows him to travel down rivers
That have yet to be explored or named.

There is a woman who causes an anguish
Even the prophets might have admired,

And a coming to grips with immensity
Before the night sky and a bottle of gin.
But who would, in his perversity, insist
That such things have a life of their own?

They're like colors before striking the eye.
Or the people that Plutarch didn't mention.
Times coming now to resuscitate genius
or go sure and improvise
among souvenirs of dislocation,
or what’s left of buzzard’s luck,
or failing that,
wet any finger that beckons wind
to articulate direction. Ah,

that stillness of waiting, not yet of death—
as only unlikely turns make perfect sense.

You—amused by the randomness
of weather—will cling to home brews,
while a luminous snow cover
serves as rationale for the resistance

in this City of No Illusions,
carefully situated
ever next to nowhere,
where being proud
doesn’t matter
anymore.
Kinesthesia

Richard Spilman

My hand knows
its place in this dark

where warmth yields
to vertigo,

finds me behind
my back and you

as night steals
every familiar

shape. When our
words array

themselves between
us, glittering in

the sun, and passion
becomes a laying

of stone on stone
above the tomb

of a dead god,
I will trust this hand.

It knows dark
secrets and

speaks the language
of the deaf.
PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS

Elise Partridge

You are ushered expeditiously through the average down immaculate halls of a Roman austerity until you are guided into the presence of the Conclusion, enthroned.

Solid samples can be Bauhaus-predictable — you watch the next whereas being hauled into place like a hunk of prefabricated pyramid.

Sophisticals may awe the uninitiate like Piranesi carceri: pillared pomp and rhetorical balustrades flourishing upward to no landing.

The spurious quiver, particleboard amalgams, reproduction facades lit by ersatz lampposts a challenger could dismantle with a snort.

But then there are those with thousands of years of graffiti curlicing their porticoes —

discipular additions dot their domains like huts,

paragraphs are balconies; pages, plazas;

at the fountain court in the center, pilgrims — the student shoehorned into the required course, the mother at night-school, the seeker, the browser, the plumber logging on from Alaska —
cup their hands and taste
and see their dwelling-place for the first time.
Kings shall rule kingdoms. Winter cold is keenest,
summer sun the most searing,
fall freest with her hand. Fate is almighty;
the old are wisest. Jewels must stand upright
in winking bezels, blades break on helmets,
hawks hunch on the glove, the huffing boar
wander the woods with the wretched wolf.
Salmon spawn in northernmost streams,
the king in his castle gives his cronies rings;
bears haunt the heath, the hastening water
floods the rolling fields of the downs.
Lovers meet in secret, monsters skulk
in the swamp, stars seed the sky.
The troop stands together, a glorious band.
Light lunges at dark, life parries death,
good clashes with evil, the old with the young,
army against army battles for the land;
all of us wait in the Lord’s arms
for the decree he ordains, darkly, in secret.
Only God knows where our souls will go.
The Puzzle

—for Gordon and Nancy

John J. Ronan

Eyes sparkle in the gray-backed slurry
of puzzle pieces, puzzle dust. Or fire,
still linked to sky, bits of knowledge
surviving like debt or DNA
the puzzle’s last incarnation and collapse.
The painting’s unknown, courtesy of an obscure
museum in Slovenia, and anyway not on the box,
so the difficulty’s Dali, Chagall, a crazy quilt
you can’t possibly combine in time - guilt
and lips, the moon, fear, a leg, loneliness...
Knowing of course you’re a few pieces short
because someone before played haphazardly.
Knowing sky’s the same shade as fire.
Start with what you’ve got, eye or fire,
mixing pieces that give and take, the gray
base ignoring borders. Really, it’s one
work that fits together somehow, it must.
Sandy says a centurion worked
this farm, *fundus*, booty-bought
after Actium. And Michelangelo
when the Buonarroti’s owned it.
Sandy, and the two boys no longer
boys, our friends Mitch and Kate.
The chianti grown and aged on site
by Signor Buondonno, whose vines
climb the darkening hill, hedged
by fence from Bacchus-minded boars.
Mitchell says, ‘*in veritas*, wine.’
Lightning! By Jove, or Jupiter!
Big *bocce* of Tuscan thunder!
The farmhouse terrace, thatched
over, opens on groves of holly,
olive and cypress, wind-worried
shapes in the rain. We’re dry
for the time being. A cuckoo counts
to some impossible o’clock.
The first labyrinth is the mind before dawn unraveling the consciousness disposed of by fragments of dreams already crumbs of stale bread for the mold and the raven.

What is a mystery in the end will suspend an old man’s disbelief long enough for him to die; one, Mississippi, two... it doesn’t matter without the proper end(s).

The shimmer of one gold bug will reveal only the mercies of Edisto... trees line the paths, the sun glows with Southern ease always the misdirection that will steal

The truth from under the cedar. Oh, books, masters and mastered: voices come from chambers beyond the heart, making dubious claims for the dead fisherman’s bloodworms and hooks.
Words hide from his Lola in places she’d
Forgotten, crown like shoots nursed only
In shade: a garden of albino narcissus,
Overturned rock, the watering can caked with rust.
When she closes her eyes, beach umbrellas open,
Heartbreak’s waterfall rolls from her shoulders,
Verbs for marathon swimming, frustrating
Unbuttoning, snap their tails across her tongue.

His greatest grandfather’s an aging superman
With faith like a lightning rod held up
To sunshine. They’ve bulldozed all his phone booths,
But he’s learned how to cross his own wires,
Extracting Charlie from Calogero
Despite the gob full of dentures. We take Kay
For Carmella, catch enough to pass coffee
And biscuits, turn the lights off when we leave.

But who will be his friend Dennis Rivera, translating
A summons, tap-dancing shut-offs, turning “F”
To “Fantastic” on his brother’s report card?
Who will teach impudence like Chetti Martinetti,
Whose grandmother spun her weeds from foreign curses,
Stirred Friday’s bean soup, animated as stone?
Who knows where he’ll find a mouthful of turf-smoke,
Which words he’ll bury in coal-dusted basements.
Imagine distance: the space between
What you had longed for and the thing acquired.

Imagine brushstrokes gentle as moss, shadows blended into ochre trunks,
The grass green on the swell of a hill like young breath.

You see it at the moment of transition,
Even at its ending not having quite begun.

As most of the party’s arriving, the first comers turn towards home.
The pink-clad lover takes his lady’s hand as if inviting her to waltz;

She glances over her shoulder. The other couples, too,
Will soon be rising, startled by the sound of a sparrow,

Reaching to pluck the near sweet william, distracted by love’s emblems—
The palpable overwhelming the anticipated: Grass stains

On the satin cloak! Buttons! Laces! Garters!
As the moment comes closer, the fingers retract, suddenly clumsy.

She sees herself in the woman behind her, sees the finite
Stretch indefinitely. Could the hills beyond give onto meadows,

Granite peaked mountains, streams flirting in and out of sunlight?
Desire is an island bordered on all sides by palisades.

Below lies the danger of undertow, above the occasional screech of a gull.
Imagine—but this is a painting.

All the sighs and joys are signs.
Love lies in the interstices, floats, easy on the wind, like Watteau’s pink,

Pasty cupids, either just above the head or right beneath you,
Underfoot.
What the Traveler Said

Marcela Sulak

Before I leave you I clean:
put the sliced tomatoes away
and the butter in a cool place.
I am not thinking of your return to decay
but of the wet seeds on the wooden board,
and linden drying on the shelf

and how you and I went to take it
from bees on that hill and how
like a flower confused by the wind
my dress lifted, your hands slid.

Before I leave you I make the bed.
I think of the quiet your money could rent,
myself in the homes of other people,
poppies in leased fields of grain.
I think of the things I do not own and will not have.

I wear your house shoes as I pack.
Maybe you love me as you said.
Maybe I love you and it is a terrible mistake.
But I am tired of calculating
how much I can take. How many days
till the linden flowers dry for tea.
When I buy vegetables I prefer to be in my country rather than yours—
though in my country, they are not so juicy and fancifully shaped—
crescent moon carrots, radish hearts.

I prefer to find you in a place your vocabulary carves
a secret door through which I can enter or escape.
Where syntax is not a floodlight on my blinded tongue.

I prefer to be here, where I do not have to lie, to say I’m married and my man
is the jealous type. He’s with the police, and my father is the ambassador.
Here I am not a bare field in need of a flag.

In my country I am just like all the others and it is you who are different.
In my country, you don’t recognize me or know where I live.
I can stare back. And when I smile, it means whatever I want it to.
The title of this hefty book is challenging, rather than, as at first sight it seems, simply factual. It is not immediately apparent that the volume contains several categories of “Poems in English”. First, poems translated by the author from his own Russian into his own English; second, poems translated by the author in collaboration with another translator; third, poems independently (presumably) translated by other translators; fourth, poems written by the author in English. Increasingly, Brodsky, if with reluctance, was taking charge of the translation process, as I noted in a review of So Forth (1996) (“His own Translator: Joseph Brodsky”, Translation & Literature, Vol. 7, Part 1, 1998). When he worked through or alongside another translator, he exerted strict control, which sometimes led to tense situations. Whether his auto-translations were much influenced by feedback from others is not known to me, but it is unlikely that they were entirely free of such influences.

Translators’ names are not to be found under each poem. Consequently it is not immediately apparent whether the poem was written in English rather than translated into it. Many of the poems are translations in the traditional sense. The collaborations in varying degrees, and, to a greater extent, the self-translations are also translations, but in a special sense, which I shall attempt to characterize. In fact, the authorial status of these poems is indicated, and additional information provided at the back of the volume. In a brief “Editor’s Note”, Ann Kjellberg, Brodsky’s former assistant, now his literary executor, explains that the volume contains “all the poems by Joseph Brodsky that appeared in book form in English under his supervision during the author’s lifetime, in their last known versions, as well as several poems he was enthusiastic about but unable to accommodate in his books.” This accounts for approximately a third of his oeuvre, but does not include the first collection, Joseph Brodsky: Selected Poems (Penguin 1973) translated by George Kline. Professor Kline, it should be said, also often worked closely with the author and has written in detail about these collaborations [e.g. “Revising Brodsky”, Translating Poetry: The Double
Labyrinth, ed. Weissbort, 1989). Evidently a new expanded version of the Selected Poems is due, as is a further collection of poems, not supervised by the author. Ms. Kjellberg points out that in identifying the translators and collaborators in the notes rather than in the body of the text, “we are following the author’s decision, in So Forth [his last collection, published posthumously], to acknowledge translators separately from the poems, which we understood as an invitation to the reader to consider the poems as if they were original texts in English […]”. She was concerned – quite understandably – that these translations, either by Brodsky or supervised by him, should get a hearing first. The volume is not only of importance, containing a sizeable proportion of the work of one of the greatest Russian poets of our time or any time, but also, I think, something of a landmark volume in the history of poetry translation in English. By not highlighting the translators’ names, Brodsky was not seeking to denigrate their role, but rather to raise the status of translation itself, as it were. (This of course, is no great comfort to individual translators!) He was also, characteristically, putting himself in the firing line, by displaying himself in (often problematical) English. There were two Brodskys, but even if the Russian one was immeasurably greater, the English one was and is a force in its own right.

Brodsky’s translation criteria were, to say the least, not the prevailing ones. He insisted religiously on retention of the form (rhyme and especially metre). To many translators this seemed a simplistic, even naïve approach, and he was taken to task by, among others, Yves Bonnefoy, W.S. Merwin, and Donald Davie. I tended towards this view myself and it still seems to me somewhat surprising that there were also those who defended his use of English, particularly in the States: Peter Viereck, Mark Strand, Derek Walcott, for instance. Brodsky was not always the most tactful or diplomatic of men, although he was a man of great kindness and compassion; he was also a man of formidable intelligence. But he was impatient, literally not having much time at his disposal, since he could not expect to have a long life, and certainly not enough time to soothe the wounded egos of those who worked with him on his translations. He was 55 at the time of his death.

It has to be said that Brodsky did not explain himself sufficiently either, though he gave innumerable interviews and readings and wrote superb essays. He hardly addressed the question of his own work in English, beyond a few remarks here and there (see V. Polukhina, “Brodsky’s Views on Translation”, Modern Poetry in Translation 10, Winter 1996), in his interviews for instance, and attempts in his reviews (notoriously, in his politically
ill-considered assault on the Merwin/Brown translations of Mandelstam (New York Review of Books, Feb 17, 1974) to assert the primacy of form. In general, he asserted rather than argued and had little inclination to put these assertions into a historical or translational perspective, let alone give due consideration to the counter-arguments. Well, all the more work for the Brodskyists, of whom there is an increasing number: I personally know of several investigating his work as a translator into and out of Russian.

When Brodsky died, I began a kind of journal (From Russian with Love, Anvil 2002), in which I continued, as it were, various conversations I had had with him about translation and other matters. In particular I looked at one of his birthday poems to himself, “May 24, 1980”, which opened the collection To Urania (1988). This poem was alluded to several times by Craig Raine in an iconoclastic review of So Forth and On Grief and Reason: Essays (Financial Times, 16, 17 November 1996). The same poem had been criticised (somewhat less vitriocially) by Christopher Reid in a Review of To Urania. Raine apparently detests Brodsky’s essays as much as he does his poems in English, which he accuses of “ineptness,” “garrulous lack of clarity”, “prodigal padding”, etc. “As a thinker”, he adds, “Brodsky is fatuous and banal”, “as a critic [he is] barely competent” (this of a man whose lectures on poetry inspired two or three generations of his students in America). But potentially even more damaging is Raine’s contention that Brodsky simply had no “ear” for English. “Good knockabout fun”, Lachlan Mackinnon comments, in a brief exchange of letter in the TLS, following Mackinon’s review of the Collected Poems in English (“A break from dullness: the virtues of Brodsky’s English verse”, TLS, June 22 2001). “Good knockabout fun” about describes Raine’s FT piece as well. But of course it is meant seriously. In the end Raine falls back on his ear! “With Brodsky, it is all a question of ear”, he concludes triumphantly.

A more substantial critique is by the late Donald Davie, in a review of To Urania (“The saturated line”, TLS, Dec 25-9, 1988). Davie does accept that Brodsky is a “greatly gifted poet, very serious about his vocation”, but he warns that: “We have made of him a monument and an icon...” Davie’s main point is that Brodsky overloads his verse, whether writing in English or translating into it: “[His] heaping of trope on trope, a hyperactivity of metaphors seems to have come into being not by design, but somewhere in the gulf between Russian and English.” Familiar with Russian as a translator [Pasternak], Davie argues plausibly in support of this contention. For instance, the strong accent has as consequence that “the pounding Russian line can master and carry along with itself a clutter of exuberant tropes and ‘physical detail’, under the weight of which the lighter English line stumbles

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and hesitates and is snarled.” Yes, but I would suggest that the implied negative conclusion is not necessarily the last word on this subject. Brodsky was not unaware of the problem, but he still tried to overcome it. I think the question is at the very least an open one, although there is not the room to argue this here, since it would require a line by line analysis of several poems.

Davie also refers to Brodsky’s habit of enjambment in Russian, not directly transferable into English, “precisely”, he contends, “because it is potentially more disruptive”, since “our [English] rhythms are far more wavering and variable […]” Not only does Brodsky attempt to affect this transfer into English, but he enjamb non-grammatically in his own English verse. With regard to “Belfast Tune”, for instance, Davie maintains that “in none of these cases (of enjambment) does the whirl across the line-end, with the consequent jar or thud at the first pause in the next line, mirror a corresponding violence in feeling, in what is said. Accordingly, the verse-lines have a metrical and typographic but not a musical integrity.” It seems to me that it is precisely a musical integrity that they do possess, although the music is not a familiar one. (I would refer readers to an excellent essay on this poem by Robert Reid, in Lev Loseff and Valentina Polukhina, Eds. Joseph Brodsky, The Art of a Poem, which contains also analyses of a number of poems written by Brodsky in English; in the same volume is Polukhina’s exhaustive essay on “May 24, 1980”.) But Brodsky’s use of enjambment has distressed even sympathetic readers of his English poetry, like Seamus Heaney, whose poem in memory of Joseph, “Audenesque”, contains the following lines: “Jammed enjambments piling up / As you went above the top.”

In this connection, the counterweight of rhyme is extraordinarily helpful. Accordingly, Brodsky seeks to enrich the English rhyme stock, especially with regard to feminine rhymes. In the process he makes numerous discoveries and, it has to be said, not a few times falls flat on his face. The point is, though, that he dares, in spite of all the objections and in spite of being endlessly lectured to on the dangers of polysyllabic rhyming in English. Incidentally Heaney, in his witty and affectionate poem-tribute, deploys a very Brodskyan rhyme, viz. “Pepper vodka you produced / Once in Western Massachusetts” (pronounced “choosts”). Just as one hears this in Heaney’s pronunciation, one also hears Brodsky’s, a curious blend of American, Russian and rather old-fashioned British English. I am sure that American English encouraged Brodsky in his exploitation of the rhyming potential of our common language.
I have suggested elsewhere that rather than being part of an embattled minority, heroically defending good English, Raine was rather a “member of the chorus”. And I have quoted Michael Hofmann in his review of Brodsky’s last poems and essays (TLS, January 10, 1997). I should like to quote him again, since he begins to get to the root of the matter, the negative attitude to Brodsky, which has more to do with cultural history than with “ear”: “Brodsky isn’t an empirical English type of poet. Perhaps that’s why Christopher Reid and, following him, Craig Raine, didn’t get on with him. His metaphors tend not to be visually accurate – or visually exhaustible. Unlikeness and exaggeration are more important to the image than resemblance and plausibility, […] Martianism affects to enrich the world adding a clever self to whatever’s in view. Brodsky does the opposite: he subtracts himself.” What Craig Raine, in the birthday poem referred to above, calls “self-heroising”, Hofmann sees as “part of the ‘tall’, clownish idiom… – the stoic’s refusal to flinch or blink, or so much as to dignify the affliction with its proper, emotive name…”

If I seem to be engaging in a kind of polemic with Raine, this is only because his remarks typify, in a way, the English response to Brodsky’s incursions into the language. For instance, Raine is scornful of Brodsky’s apology for revising translations by others in an effort to bring them “closer to the original, though perhaps at the expense of smoothness”. He fails to see that this proves his point, only if one equates smoothness with excellence. In fact, to produce a text which seems to have been written in English, which in that sense “reads smoothly”, is no longer the sine qua non of good translation. At this time, there appears to be more interest in somehow capturing the foreignness of the foreign. Of course, it is all a matter of judgment, and of course the extent to which change can be tolerated itself changes. It is quite likely that many of Brodsky’s linguistic moves, to which Raine and others object, will be less rebarbative to the average reader in the not so distant future.

Not that Brodsky was necessarily concerned with such theoretical matters. What he was concerned with was conveying, as directly as possible, aspects of his Russian text (one might also say aspects of Russian itself) in English. In so doing, even if he may often have gone too far for our present discriminations, he did pioneer certain approaches that are probably worth exploring further and probably will be explored. What he was after was no less than a translation of the poem as a physical, a living entity, its feel, shape, movement. His procedure was literalistic. But, somewhat paradoxically, he was also prepared to do a fair amount of rewriting, although what he was rewriting was his own poetry. That his mastery of English was
sometimes inadequate to the task is hardly surprising. But he had to have a
go, since it was asking too much of his translators to expect them to, as it
were, violate the norms of English. Some were more willing than others to
try, but I do not think that any fully appreciated what he was up to. I
certainly didn't. Peter France, though, who translated the “Twenty Sonnets
to Mary Queen of Scots” (see “Notes on the Sonnets to Mary Queen of
Scots”, Brodsky's Poetics & Aesthetics, Eds. Lev Loseff and Valentina
Polukhina, 1990) had more of an inkling than most. The original France
version is to be found in this book, but Brodsky later revised it, in an
attempt, as France reported with admirable equanimity (see “Translating
Brodsky”, Modern Poetry in Translation, No. 10, Winter 1996) to remedy
“an almost chronic metric arhythmia” and to strengthen the rhyming. With
regard to Sonnet 5, radically revised by Brodsky, France comments: “[I]n
this sonnet, using his freedom as original author, Brodsky goes way beyond
the rhyme scheme of the Russian text. Even so, his translation—rara avis
as it is—might inspire reticent English-language translators to a greater
formal daring.”

What is surprising, perhaps, is how often Brodsky's competence was
sufficient or how often he was able to fashion a self-consistent, if non-
standard English text to match the Russian original. This highly intellectual
poet was also working at a level almost of pure sound and movement. I was
made more keenly aware of this when I tried, experimentally, to “correct”
one or two of his self-translations. Since his command of English grammar
and idiom was not always what one would have wished, I wondered if it
might not be possible discreetly to “fix” his versions. I discovered that they
couldn't be altered without seriously damaging the sound structure. It is
arguable that far from not having an “ear” in English, Brodsky, in fact, had
too much ear! Too much, at least, for his own good, or for the good of his
reputation. But then, as I’ve suggested, he didn’t have time to answer the
predictable objections, nor to make his meaning clear, which would have
necessitated committing himself fully to the debate.

I have written and tried to demonstrate elsewhere how Brodsky ap-
peared to be working between English and Russian. As earlier on he had, in
a sense, Anglicised Russian, by translating into his native language the
poetry of the English Metaphysicals, especially Donne, bringing into
Russian poetry a rationality, logic that as a rule it lacked—Baratynsky,
Pushkin's contemporary, and a favourite of Brodsky's, was a lone exception,
as Pushkin himself acknowledged—so he Russianised English when
translating his own Russian poems into his adopted language. Questioned
about his co-translation with Brodsky of “Letters from the Ming Dynasty”,
Derek Walcott (see “A Merciless Judge”, Brodsky through the eyes of his Contemporaries, Ed. Valentina Polukhina, 1992) said: “Joseph’s poetry has enriched English twentieth-century poetry because most poets in the twentieth century that I can think of don’t see intelligence as being a quality of poetry. I think one of the things I learned from Joseph is that thinking was part of poetry.” It has to said that Russian, if one may personify it, welcomed the process far more than did English, perhaps because relatively recently the Russian language had, in any case, been subjected to Germanisation as well as Frenchification. The bringing of Russian into English, on the other hand, was greeted by howls of dismay and indignation. But English, for better or worse, being the world language, is less and less exposed to other languages: translation into English, as against translation into other languages, is quite limited. Arguably Brodsky was a remedial poet for English in the twenty-first century.

However, it is a little more complicated even than that. Devoted as he was to English and to the English literary tradition, Brodsky, as I have just noted, to a certain extent Anglicised Russian. When these already Anglicised Russian poems are translated back, as it were, into English, what we have, perhaps, is a symbiosis of two languages and literary cultures.

Ann Kjellberg concludes her “Editor’s Note”: “Although Brodsky remained a Russian poet first, his unique relationship to his adoptive language, filled with vigour and affection, brought forth a body of work resting somewhere between translation and original creation, internally coherent, rich in linguistic and prosodic invention, and quickened by the spirit that had made him a great poet in his native Russian. If as Brodsky wrote, a writer’s biography is in his twists of language, an important chapter of his own story resides in these poems, exactly rendered into his beloved second tongue.” This about sums it up. It is hard, perhaps impossible, to add anything without quoting chapter and verse, but were I to attempt this, the present piece would turn into a small book: three or four examples would not suffice.

So, to conclude. In the translations done or supervised by him, Brodsky, it seems to me, attempts to resurrect his Russian poems bodily. He tries to reproduce the structure of the original, its weight, and the physical place it makes for itself. Of course there is more that could be said on the subject, but, although such bodily translation remains a dream, most translators eventually settle for compromise, taking advantage of opportunities to compensate for the inevitable losses. The benefits that accrue to individual poet/translators and, more important, to the language itself are or can be momentous, but there appears to be no such thing as absolute
translation. Brodsky, of course, knew this too, but so drastic were the losses when translating from Russian into English that he was compelled, given his situation and for even more existential reasons, to attempt to redress the balance. As usual, he went for broke. Sven Birkets ends his review of the Collected Poems in English (New York Times Book Review, 17 Sept, 2000): “Brodsky charged at the world with full intensity and wrestled his perceptions into lines that fairly vibrate with what they are asked to hold.”

Like many others I had a problem with the results. Often Brodsky seemed to be ignoring idiomatic usage, either unwittingly or because adhering to it would make his task utterly impossible. The Russian tonalities he tried to assimilate into English resulted sometimes in the ugliness that Raine complains of. To quote in full his author’s note to A Part of Speech (1980): “I have taken the liberty of reworking some of the translations to bring them closer to the original, though perhaps at the expense of their smoothness. I am doubly grateful to the translators for their indulgence.” I was one translator who did not willingly indulge him, and I was convinced that his radical intervention was a fatal error. Donald Davie thought so too, as did Christopher Reid later. The problem is complicated by the fact that Brodsky’s early reputation in English was boosted not only by Anna Akhmatova’s imprimatur and W.H. Auden’s preface to the first collection (in George Kline’s translation, published in the year of Auden’s death, 1973), but also by the fact that some of his poems were translated by such virtuosi as Richard Wilbur, Anthony Hecht and Howard Moss. The resulting English pieces were eminently acceptable as American poems.

But, as Peter Porter put it, in a review of To Urania: “In...A Part of Speech, Brodsky worked with a number of American poets who are natural dandies... This gave the volume an Ivy League slickness which was plainly wrong...” I don’t know about “Ivy League slickness”, but clearly Brodsky, flattered though he may have been, was after something else. While he might be able to work more closely with his friend Derek Walcott, he presumably had little direct control over Wilbur or Hecht. He did, though, over such lesser luminaries like Alan Myers or myself. In a letter to me, Myers remarked: “My own versions were too smooth, light and regular (‘cute’) for his taste, and often prompted him to set about actually rewriting his verse, working back from a bolder, more jaggedly energetic English rhyme. The line-length, (my) rhythm, even the meaning might all undergo change. Indeed, on one occasion, he went so far as to say that everything should be sacrificed to the rhyme! For a sharp increase in energy level, ‘smoothness’ was well lost.” The conclusion drawn by some commentators was that Brodsky’s approach was simplistic: poetry equals rhyme and
metre, which, then, must be preserved at all costs in the translation. And this, notwithstanding the fact that, for instance, Russian as an inflected language had many more rhymes, including feminine ones, resulting from its polysyllabic nature, as against monosyllabic English. And notwithstanding that the Russian poetic tradition is at least two hundred years younger than the English. The contrast, say, between Wilbur’s Brodsky and Brodsky’s own was, for many, simply too much.

As a reader of poetry in translation and as a poetry translator myself, what I often found far more interesting than formal translations, however skilful, were more or less ad-verbum versions. Brodsky, although he sometimes seemed to be demanding formally mimetic translation, was after something more. In his way, he, too, was a kind of literalist, and his own versions of his poems are as semantically literal as he could make them, while also being more literal formally than English could often manage. But they do, I believe, create audible links between the two languages, and only time will tell what affect they have had on English poetry and on English usage itself. So, the volume, just published here by Farrar Straus, and Giroux may be a kind of time bomb. But it also provides a rare opportunity for non-Russian speakers to read one of the greatest Russian poets in something like his own language.
WITH A GREAT WEALTH ON MY TONGUE

John Gery


While Ezra Pound has inspired a variety of poetic traditions, including now generations of post-Imagist poets, post-Sinologist poets, post-Vorticists, and so on, few of his successors have committed themselves to a work approaching the scale of The Cantos. Louis Zukofsky is one. Another is British poet Peter Russell, who, living mostly in exile, has followed Pound's example in scope, if not quite in subject, structure or style. In the energetic spirit of Pound's early “translations” of the Latin poet Sextus Propertius, for half a century Russell has been developing and expanding the persona of one, Cittinus Aurelianus Quintilius Stultus, a fabricated fifth-century “Grecified” Latin poet “we know nothing about,” who, anachronistically, is only mentioned in passing in Horace's odes yet who, for Russell, has grown into a vast, diverse, multilingual, prolific, and iconoclastic, if not notorious, figure, an unforgettable character whose voice scintillates with a mad mix of lyricism, social satire, arcane scholarship, philosophic speculation, and spirituality.

As Russell himself tells the story of Quintilius's origins (as quoted in Glyn Pursglove's introduction to this book), in 1948 one morning after he had visited the aging George Santayana in a convent in Rome, Russell found himself composing an imitation of an elegy by Tibullus (whom Santayana was in the midst of translating). The poem, apparently spawned by a troubled love affair Russell was embroiled in at the time, and written during a “terrible hangover,” also took on elements of Virgil's eclogues, with echoes of Catullus, Propertius and other Latin poets thrown in for good measure, creating a kind of “pseudotranslation,” or as Pursglove calls it, a “pseudoeupigraphical translation.” And so Quintilius was born.

Over the next several years, Russell produced a half-dozen elegies in this same voice, attributing them to Quintilius and publishing them in small journals (such as his own Nine), as well as in limited editions. Eventually, they were gathered in The Elegies of Quintilius (1975) and still later reissued...
in an “enlarged” edition (1996) that included a brief “biography” of Quintilius, a preface, further poems on the madness attributed to him, and no less than six appendices. This more recent collection some fifteen years in the making, From The Apocalypse of Quintilius, now adds to The Elegies Pursglove’s compilation of 142 poems “selected” from Quintilius’s life’s work, together with her introduction, detailed notes, “Three Statements on Quintilius” by the “translator” Russell himself, and four further “glosses.” In this highly self conscious, pseudo-scholarly edition, Russell has constructed not only an elaborate, varied, sometimes harrowing, and utterly fantastic biography for his persona from the “Lower Empire” (including, for instance, references to his lifelong correspondence with his “classmate” Augustine debating Plato and Aristotle), but an equally esoteric body of medieval scholarship surrounding his activities and poetry. More than a supreme fiction—although surely it is that!—Russell’s detailed insinuations of Quintilius’s travels throughout Europe, Africa, the Near East, and even China, of his experiences ranging from military heroism to enslavement, of his correspondence, of his historical encounters, and of fragments of his writings sometimes recoverable only from translations of them into a host of other languages, inevitably raises the specter of the fiction of all non-fiction, of the questionable nature of whatever scholars may assert as authentic in history or literature. Indeed, Russell’s whole grand scheme is so unbelievable, so rambunctious, so ambitious, we are sorely tempted to believe it, all of it, since the human folly, estrangement, sexual longing, sacrifices to beauty, plunges into despair, and frailty of the spirit Quintilius expresses in poem after poem are so evocative, so damnable, so cogent, why shouldn’t all of it be true? As Quintilius himself points out in Poem 38,

Nothing is real until it is transformed.
The unrealities acquire a copula. All things
As we know them, are something else
In this world,

and once we are conjoined to Quintilius’s world, his world, like ours, becomes paradoxically familiar and peculiar at the same time. As Russell justifies his persona in one of his statements, “Instead of the Poundian technique of a modern consciousness penetrating into the past I use the device of a consciousness from the distant past penetrating ‘unconsciously’ into the future!” Unlike for his Aristotelian rival Augustine, whom he mocks as a hypocritical “master/ Of tall stories” who “can’t even read Greek. . . sits up
worrying all night/ About his career” (“Gnostical Animadversion”), thus perpetrating “a brainless concept like 'survival/ Of the best adapted’” (“Probabilia Nihil Est Tam Incredible. . .”), Quintilius's metaphysics are doggedly Platonic. From his early embrace of “Air my bread” in “The Prelude to The Apocalypse” (where he adds, “You will hear me muttering to myself/ But it will be the silences/ That speak of worlds”), to his later rant against his contemporaries who, like the figures in the cave, “gather in little groups and watch these images/ Creeping like beetles or flashing like swallows or swifts/ Against a smooth plaster wall. . . .these fond fatheads/ [who] Sit gazing solemnly at walls,—what they fondly call their 'screen',/And swear to themselves it's reality” (“Animae Nox Obscura”), Quintilius is devoted to the preeminence of the ideal, despite recurring bouts of despair. “Reality's so different from what they choose to imagine,” he insists, and a page later, “The shadows are only shadows/ Of the shadows of reality, things we perceive with the senses. /—You have too [sic] look through the shadows, not at them, to see/ The realities that lie beyond.” As though refuting both modernist credos such as “No ideas but in things” and the postmodernist propensity for image-based poetry drenched in sensual, private experience, Russell's Quintilius remains staunchly outward-looking, reminding us again and again, “The poet's true task is divine song. Do not despise it” (“Non Enses at Ex Norico Carmen”).

Yet the nexus of voices uttered in The Apocalypse, in poems that range from a few fragmented lines to nearly twenty pages in length, compositely offers more than sustained philosophical musings or spiritual supplication. In fact, nothing in Quintilius's own era (which is of course ours, too) extends beyond the reach of his wrath, and though more accessible, and finally less cryptic, than The Cantos, his poems shift mood as abruptly, as dramatically, and sometimes as comically and unexpectedly, as Pound’s. Longer poems tend to roam across Quintilius's obsessions with avarice, cultural and material poverty, academicians, lust, and greed, reading as though translated from Greek or Latin hexameters:

I myself after a lifetime of unrewarded servitude
Inanely sing on, on a far shore to desert halcyons,—
The Muse is unkinder to me than ever Cynthia to
Propertius,
Yet I have loved her more than Propertius himself.
Of all men's products good verses alone
Are never superseded. I write good verses.
Be that my epitaph (though who will pay for the stone,
Let alone a chiseller?  

(“We Need a Censor”)

Yet such poems are interspersed by hymns, epistles, allegories (such as “The Key” and “The Yellow Bird,” two of the best poems in the book), songs, and epigrammatic fragments resembling early Greek poems, such as “Dicunt Mihi Puellae,”

Dicunt mihi puellae
anacreon senex es
PD I, pp. 122-23

The young girls all say to me now: “Quintilius,
You’re an old man,—what would you want with us?”

This is another occasion when it is better to keep silence, of extended word-play and lyrical ascent:

Miniatures or minotaurs
I care not which
Ichors and acres, landscapes of the mind

Hoary old life is nearly dead
But death is something we don't talk about
In decent circles
Our days revolve
Around the roundabouts and swings
It is
The gladiator not the swan
Today who sings  

(“The Metaphysics of the Muse”)

Reading through such a rich variety of voices is not always easy to sustain in large doses, especially because some poems are angry rants which, we are told in a footnote, “transcend even respectable antiquarianism by reflecting 20th century insanity in quite transparent spirit.” When disguises wear thin (see “Fiddlesticks,” for instance), the topical nature of a poem can become taxing. And the physical presentation of the book itself, with its workmanlike cover and ringed binder not liable to wear well, is rudimentary, at best. Yet the line drawings inside are engaging enough, and most significantly, the underlying effect of the poetry itself is that, even though we may not always “get” Russell's layered allusions, we do get we his intima-
tions, or “inside” story, of just how difficult it is to survive the world in any age with one’s spiritual and intellectual integrity in tact.

Despite the use of a persona, the obscure variety of “sources,” the mix of languages, and the dissembling of histories, *The Apocalypse of Quintilius* pays homage to the art of self-expression. While Russell’s Quintilius makes it clear that he despises the self-aggrandizing sophistries of postmodernism, his apocalypse, or as he calls it, his “chrestomatheia,/ A manual for use, a guide for the perplexed to unique emotions, authentic/ Evocations of the Good and the True” (“Quintillii Ricardo Epistola”), stands poised on the cusp of Poundian modernism as a truly “post-modern” text, “indeed a legacy/ To the Gods who are coming. . . the Gods that will be/ Not our fathers, but our children. . .” Thanks to Pursglove’s admirable arrangement of Russell’s considerable body of work to its best advantage, we leave Quintilius not so disturbed by his vitriol sometimes verging on misanthropy as we are moved by his allegiance to the divine, his writing his “Solitudes” to remake the world into a place of wonder, thereby earning him the right to “sink into the carrion earth serene/ With a great wealth on my tongue” (“Vitam Reddere ad Asses”). And as a poet who has stubbornly gone his own way, refusing to compromise his vision, no matter what the personal cost, “so that the mystery vanish not” (“Last Judgements”), Peter Russell has promulgated a poetry that, while it may not have actually been celebrated sixteen centuries ago, may well be sixteen centuries from now.
GRASSES STANDING: SELECTED POEMS


Catherine Kasper

The virtue of any "selected" volume of a poet's work is paradoxical: it promises to reveal both the changing nature of the poet and his/her consistent poetic style, so that quality is affirmed as well as growth. This paradox is implicit in the very title of Mills' newest book Grasses Standing where both the ephemeral, delicate nature of prairie grass is embodied in the title, along with the idea of its rooted permanence and echo of Whitman's Leaves of Grass. In a clear lineage from Whitman and Thoreau, Dickinson and Frost, Mills' poetry is particularly American through its development of the poet's specific relationship with nature.

The exceptional quality and significance of Mills' scholarship has perhaps distracted critical attention from his stunning poetry. He is the author of numerous critical monologues and two volumes of essays. He is the editor of Theodore Roethke's prose and letters, and of The Notebooks of David Ignatow. However, Mills is also the author of twelve books of poetry, including A Window in Air (1993) and In Wind's Edge (1997). His collection Living with Distance (1979) received the Society of Midland Authors prize for poetry, and March Light was awarded the Carl Sandburg Award. Each Branch, published by Spoon River Poetry Press in 1986, contained poems from 1976 to 1985. Grasses Standing includes poems from eleven of his books as well as new work.

The mastery of Mills' poetry has escaped strict affiliation with contemporary movements and categories. Although he is not directly linked to The New York School, his poems maintain an appreciation for and make integral use of the visual space of the page. The line lengths and placement often serve to emphasize the subject matter, or to add a tangible or visceral quality to the observations. For example, in "Skeins,/twists," lines capture the floating property of its subject matter:

skeins,
    twists of
cottony cirrus,
    such textures
under so much
blue—

The lines stretch and hang on the page like an image of the clouds themselves, as the use of consonance reinforces the visual image and its implicit texture. Mills’ poems appear to be small musical scores, fragments of city life: leaves and debris scattered across the page, “the bell call/of seeping drains,” “snow loosening. . .slips down the roof gables,” “wood smoke or vapor,” “drizzle.” The poems themselves “shimmer,” “swizzle,” "whirl" on the page. In “Evening Song,”:

clouds billow
    shred to
take new
shapes
    faces forms
dislocate
    yellowy
leaf dust
    circles
circling down

The world in its motion is captured by the poet’s careful eye and evoked in the language/fragments. Mills’ style captures the inherent “dislocation” of all things, the perpetually mutable quality of our lives. Images set in Millsian juxtaposition are balanced by the forward slash, a sight marker of two observations put in a dynamic parallel (see many of his titles also). He is able to apprehend and appreciate even the most minute motion, from “the long, smoothened/buds one at a/time/fall open to dark” (“7/94); to “pressed together/match yellow-patched sepals/with slant light // sinking/ down past grass & the/fine grains—” (“There”) to his message in “First/Sun”: “you’ll not get/beyond the/fluttering/of this smallest/leaf.” The “silver maples,” the feathers of birds, the petals of flowers, a breeze delicate as breath, exposed roots, the wet edges of a porch floor are subject to his Emersonian eye. In each poem, Mills reminds us of the impact of microscopic details. Like Roethke, he makes “Nature” new again by exposing its intricate workings, this time, in the gray light of a Midwestern, urban landscape. Unlike Roethke, (or T.S. Eliot or William Carlos Williams),
Mills does not infuse the natural world with his own ego, nor does he impose a master plan upon it. Rather, he appears to let the world work through him in glimpses, moments, in poems simply titled “Lights,” “Brief Thaw,” “Porch Steps,” or “14 January,” “2/5,” “10/93.” *Grasses Standing* can be read as a long poetic sequence in epistolary form, an intimate journal of life and death. The poet becomes pure observer, a natural historian. In this way, Mills’ work is, perhaps, most in sympathy with the Objectivist poets, like Louis Zukofsky who wrote:

> In sincerity shapes appear concomitants of word combinations, precursors of. . .completed sound or structure, melody or form. Writing occurs which is the details, not mirage, of seeing, of thinking with the things as they exist, and of directing them along a line of melody. Shapes suggest themselves, and the mind senses and receives awareness. 

> This rested totality might be called objectification—the apprehension satisfied completely as to the appearance of the art form as an object. . . [Its] character may be simply described as the arrangement, into one apprehended unit, of minor units of sincerity—in other words, the resolving of words and their ideation into structure. (“Sincerity and Objectification” 273-74)

While critics of Objectivism worry that this method may reduce “poetic craft to the merely descriptive function of making perceptual images—thus trapping poetic energies within scientistic reductions of the psyche,” (Charles Altieri, “The Objectivist Tradition” *The Objectivist Nexus* 30), Mills walks at the edge of this precipice and avoids this downfall. He does so through sparse, uninflated diction and the appearance of the poet, not in a position of superiority, but as another alterable shape sincerely scrutinized:

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1/18

:such faint
  early sky
& the last
quarter moon
  still pearl
drops into
clouds—
```
someone else has left with
no notice: doors in his
sleep widened /
“you can think you
think how
it
was”

Here, the doors “someone” must leave through are also the “doors in
his/sleep,” so that both the poet and the reader enter and travel unfettered
through the poem; the poet’s thoughts are fragments in air. The molecules
of the reader’s thoughts also, (through the use of second person), become
part of the composition and the “line of melody.” Like the telescopic image
of the moon become “still pearl,” the poetic necessity “drops into/clouds,”
into the “sleep widened” area between waking and sleeping, between control
and relinquishment of authority. Mills is not mentioned in The Objectivist
Nexus (an excellent book about the movement edited by Rachel Blau De
Plessis and Peter Quartermain) perhaps because of his willingness to waive
authority, relinquish the “I” who “sings of myself” and instead, let the
poems emerge from the gaps and silences, from the “melody” and the
“structure.” In Grasses Standing, the presence of the “I” diminishes and
eventually dissolves into a collective consciousness of a transient world.

In trying to categorize poetry, it’s common to seek out ego/authority in
its obvious plumage, often because it’s simply difficult to miss. As a result,
some of the most interesting and complex poetry gets less attention (and
less readership) than it deserves, reminding us that it’s essential to
remember to examine the periphery of major literary movements for
excellent work. Beloved by savvy poets and scholars, but also by botanists
and visual artists, Mills’ poetry resides here, in the instant

in-

between

chips, splinters

of ice:

pallid

blades & the frail

wavering strands—

these

grasses standing
James Lasdun’s third book of poems, *Landscape with Chainsaw*, ends with an envoi called ‘Happy the Man’. The title is a Horatian tag, taken perhaps from Dryden’s rendering of Ode III, 29: ‘Happy the Man, and happy he alone, / He, who can call his day his own’, though it could equally come from the first words of Pope’s ‘Ode on Solitude’ (as Stephen Burt suggested in his *TLS* review). Lasdun’s verses begin on a not so happy note: ‘Goodbye words; / my faltering muse’s / unevenly burning flame / has sputtered out, and now like Diocletian / I’m taking early retirement.’ The classical theme is maintained both with the allusion to the Roman emperor, and to the echo of an earlier pastoral version of ‘retirement’ in the contemporary idiom for a sometimes lucrative compromise with company shrinkage; and Lasdun’s landscape in the second part of ‘American Mountain’ includes residua from just such business fortunes:

abandoned houses — middle-income,
cathedral-ceilinged, faux post-and-beam
‘Woodstock Contemporaries’
dotted along the creeks for IBM

before they downsized; abandoned grist-mills; graveyards...

These lines, fretted with an irony about his retirement to where white-collar workers no longer retire, reveal much of the Lasdun flavour: there is some delicately inventive rhyming going on (‘beam’ and ‘IBM’); there are internal assonances (‘ceilinged’ and ‘along’); there’s a deflationary enjambment (‘IBM/ before they downsized’); there’s emphatic repetition (‘abandoned houses...abandoned grist-mills’; alliteration (‘grist-mills; graveyards’) — all worked together with an off-hand, accumulative syntax and flexed rhythm. The *ubi sunt* theme is presented with a leavening of verbal pleasure; and while there are thoughts prompted here about how entrepreneurial economies work, this passage doesn’t have the one thought too many which elbows the reader into lines of attitude-mongering— the blight of much contemporary poetry.
So, reaching ‘Happy the Man’ at the close of the book, readers have already encountered a number of strains which complicate any simple contrast between city and country. ‘Either you clear your woods or they’ll clear you—’ as the chainsaw salesman puts it in ‘Returning the Gift’. In Lasdun’s book, nature appears not merely as it might be on an idealized Horatian farm, but red in tooth and claw as well. *Landscape with Chainsaw* closes its account like this:

> The dirt road
dead-ends on wilderness;
sometimes at night you can hear
unearthly gabblings: Bear Mountain’s coyotes
closing in on a kill. Pure poetry.

The last two words of this final verse of ‘Happy the Man’ find a suggestive near-rhyme in ‘coyotes’ and ‘poetry’, but, looping back to the modest disclosure of the poem’s opening (‘Goodbye words; / my faltering muse’s / unevenly burning flame’) start an anxiety or two. The central three verses describe how as the writer is ‘Homesteading’ in the Catskill Mountains near Woodstock, Upstate New York, he’ll remember how words were all he ‘needed or anyway / wanted of the crack and grain/ of real things’. Here he describes a taste for words which calls up an aspiration to the verbal self-sustenance associated with *poésie pure*: ‘how in your loam they’d swell, split / and banner out into themselves...’ But now, ‘if I write, it’ll be with a seed-drill’. There’s a Heaneyesque flavour to this talk of seed-drills or ‘the crack and grain / of’ something or other. But is this a genuine retirement from poetry? Do we take him at his word and note the ‘faltering’, or do we brush it aside as a politely ingratiating goodbye for now?

Though somewhat concealed by the lavish design and generous space per poem that Norton have granted their author, *Landscape with Chainsaw* is a slimmer volume than *Woman Police Officer in Elevator* (1997), reviewed in *NDR* 4. The book contains just twenty-four poems, one of which, ‘The Backhoe’, is reprinted from the previous collection. The legitimacy of this is that the new volume is not a collection so much as a coherent book thematically centred on the poet’s life in ‘retirement’ with his wife and children, a theme foreshadowed in that earlier poem. As befits such a group of poems, there are a number of difficult matters interwoven and echoing from piece to piece. The one pointed up by the title is the conflict of man and nature symbolized by the chainsaw, but in ‘Returning the Gift’ this chainsaw becomes the occasion for an exploration of the poet’s various
identities-in-difference. Taking back the tool his wife has given him, the English poet encounters an Iron John of a backwoodsman who offers him some lessons in he-man-hood. The author’s accent has given him away:

*British, right?* I nod. That question here
puts my guard up, like *are you Jewish?* did
in England where it meant *so you’re a yid,*
at least to my hypersensitive ear,

as *British* here means—but I’m being paranoid...

Paranoid or not, the central conflict that Lasdun’s book explores is how he has come to feel at home, to feel the pleasures of retirement, in a place where he of all people should be in a perpetual state of non-belonging. The poet, as described in this book, seems an ideal candidate for Nicolas Jenkins’ new tradition of post-national, cosmopolitan writers (and Jenkins is the dedicatee of ‘Returning the Gift’). This is plainly articulated in one of the book’s most accomplished poems, the opening ‘Locals’:

I envied them. To be local was to know
which team to support: the local team;
where to drop in for a pint with mates: the local;
best of all to feel by birthright welcome
anywhere; be everywhere a local...

Thus ‘Locals’ addresses the true theme of finding yourself temperamentally and socially likely to be always on the outside looking in. But just as the last two lines of this stanza reach towards an unlikely sort of at-home-ness, so too the idea of a primary authenticity is made to look faintly foolish — as in ‘the original prior claim’ of those who were ‘There, doubtless, in Eden before Adam / wiped them out and settled in with Eve.’ But not according to the Old Testament or Milton’s *Paradise Lost,* of course.

Lasdun’s way with this dilemma is to dramatize the underlying paranoias, if that’s what they are, in a lightly parodic and faintly ingratiating manner. This approach may itself be an aspect of the theme in modeling the behaviour of people who can’t help feeling they are likely to be ostracised if they don’t make themselves amenable. If they then feel at home, despite everything, there’s a sudden mismatch between the ingrained ‘outsider’ psychology, the amenability, and the genial scene in which it’s set. This too is likely to produce comedy, as in Lasdun’s memorable encounter with the
woman police officer in the elevator; his poetic persona is perfectly lucid and rational enough to see that the feelings which are putting him in a sweat don’t have a leg to stand on, but his character’s psychopathology of everyday life makes it impossible for him to disarm them and their being occasioned. Lasdun successfully revisits the title poem of his previous collection in ‘Patrol Car: Bear Mountain’ where this time it is the male authority figure of a policeman waiting in a parked vehicle that produces a ‘whiff of the old id-slum’.

_Landscape with Chainsaw_ even stretches to a Freudian joke and its relation to the unconscious: ‘Later I invented my family’s psychology: / Anglo, Super-Anglo and Yid.’ This is witty about his inherited inner conflicts, but it’s also somehow slightly sad, like something that Woody Allen would have already used if he’d been British. And just as in the ever more unlikely exchanges with the man from the mall in ‘Returning the Gift’, so too you can suspect that the poetic persona’s conflicts of reason and psychological panic are just slightly over-staged, which is what makes it feel faintly ingratiating. Other poems return to his Jewish identity theme in ways that make it far from a matter of simplistic identity politics. In the first place, Lasdun describes himself as from a comfortable, middle-class, assimilated background:

> ‘We’re not English’ went the family saying.  
> What were we then? We’d lopped our branch off the family tree: anglophone Russian-German apostate Jews mouthing Anglican hymns at church till we renounced that too...

Being told this about the poet makes it all the more difficult to feel that ‘Deathmeadow Mountain’, a poem about ‘Celan’s / meeting with Heidegger’, manages more than to gloss (with the acknowledged aid of John Felstiner’s book on the poet) Paul Celan’s ‘Todtnauberg’ from _Lichtzwang_ (1970) on that painfully indecisive encounter. ‘Deathmeadow Mountain’ renders the name of Heidegger’s retreat which gave Celan’s work its title, but in Lasdun’s poem the two curiously linked kinds of identification (with a persecuted people, and with an authenticizing philosophy of race and place) are related, but only by contrasting with, his evolving theme in the book — what it feels like to be at home somewhere when you don’t have (and most likely don’t want) the agonized relation to his chosen people that Celan
explored, or the profoundly suspect philosophy of the woodland ways that Heidegger disastrously associated with Nazi views on Volk and Raum. This is the hinterland of deep conflict and damage against which Lasdun’s retirement stages itself — as ‘Woodstock’ begins by underlining:

*Wudestoc*: a clearing in the woods.
Forty miles from the town itself;
the name, as in Herzl’s *Judenstaat*,
less about place than disclosure —
of a people, or an idea.

And it’s as if Lasdun, a likely candidate for Jenkins’ new cosmopolitan school of poets, can’t quite shake off the less than useful notions of an authentic relation to a locality and a people, while knowing perfectly well that the ways in which local folk anywhere claim a primordial right so as to keep newcomers at bay has little to ground it in Europe if you go back far enough, and even less in America, where you don’t have to go back very far at all. Lasdun’s approach relies on a contrastive relation with these incompatible ideas so as to make his unusual at-home-ness feel distinctive. In ‘Apostasy’, for example, he revisits the sense of ‘standing off’ from cultures while being about to apply the book’s thematic tool to one of his maples. *Landscape with Chainsaw* discloses a structural state of contradiction in its poems’ outlook, but one which is almost nostalgically regarded, like a problem that has only just passed its sell-by date — some bitter-sweet food you were better not eating, but can’t yet bring yourself to throw away.

Among Lasdun’s other recurrent themes is the meeting of his European sensibility with an American milieu. The appealing ‘A Tie-Dye T-Shirt’, which first appeared in *The New Yorker*, opens: ‘Home from prep school / in my short-trousered herringbone suit, / I counted hippies on the streets of Notting Hill.’ This is audibly close to the opening syntactical gambit of Lowell’s ‘Memories of West Street and Lepke’ (there’s even the detail of the clothes the poet is wearing before the first person singular verb at the start of line three). Lasdun’s schoolboy encounter with the hippies is of course a meeting with American counter-culture, as the contrast with the herringbone suit implies, and this occasions a memory of an earlier cultural encounter: ‘I felt myself / in the presence of superior beings, / as Major Wynkoop said of the Cheyennes.’ In the second and last verse, it’s thirty years later on his property near Woodstock and the poet’s daughter has made him such a T-shirt ‘from one of the kits they sell/ in the kitschy Tinker Street head-shops.’ Here, a faintly Lowell-esque note creeps in with
the leap from ‘kits’ to ‘kitschy’— like the summer millionaire from his L. L. Bean catalogue in ‘Skunk Hour’, or the ‘Atlantic seaboard antique shop/pewter and plunder’ in ‘The Old Flame’. And, speaking of ‘Skunk Hour’, the appearance of the bear ‘peering in for the trash / he’s caught a whiff of’ in the last verse of ‘Property: The Bear’ can’t but recall that mother skunk and her children at ‘the garbage pail’. In ‘A Tie-Dye T-Shirt’, though, when the poet puts on his daughter’s present ‘a strange/ tremor of happiness goes through me’ and, borrowing a bit of knights-move grammar from Paul Muldoon, ‘I’ve half a mind to crack open / one of the spiked pods on this Jimson Weed’, and ‘hallucinate a week or two / in the psychedelic spring meadow’. Here, then, is a poem about achieving a certain present happiness and contentment by trading in the confessional ‘herringbone’ for the T-shirt’s imaginative freedoms via that ‘half a mind’ colloquialism — a colloquialism with its discreet put-down for the ‘stoned’ generation as well. ‘Woodstock’, occasioned by the place and the rock festival, completes this move in a sustained stanzaic poem of Muldoonian autobiographical associativeness.

‘A Tie-Dye T-Shirt’ is appealing in its locating the author somewhat uneasily between the troubled but assured late-modern ‘belonging’ of a New Englander from a founding family and the post-modern cosmopolitanism of the most influential poet from the British Isles born in the 1950s. Though Lasdun as audibly learned from both these writers, in Landscape with Chainsaw he has his own style fully deployed:

After the glassworks failed and the dairy farms, battened onto the shrapnel tracts clear cut for the furnace, failed in turn, and the last resort gave up its empty rooms to chipmunks and rattlesnakes, the facts dampened all but the simplest dreams: scraping a living; tending a bit of garden.

I didn’t think I’d like it but I did...

Here, once more, he skillfully builds up a syntactically-taut texture of description with associations of consonants and vowels, with unobtrusive rhymes and apt metres. What’s more, he combines the rising curve of descriptive intensity with a natural drop into plain-talking assertion — one that avoids any trace of hapless bathos. ‘Bluestone’, of which this is the
opening, is among a number of near perfect pieces to add to a personal selection of favourites.

In his TLS piece, Stephen Burt praises the longer poems like ‘Returning the Gift’ at the expense of others in the book: ‘To compare these nicely balanced, seriocomic works to the brief, emblematic lyric poems Lasdun writes on the same subject (“Chainsaw I”, “Chainsaw II”) is to see how thoroughly Lasdun’s talents depend on his having a story to tell.’ While it may be true that Lasdun can skillfully manage a narrative poem in stanzas, and evidently one or two of the book’s shortest pieces reward with the minutiae of their technique in ways that Burt appears to have no taste for, I would contest his assumption that Lasdun needs a story so as to go about his work. Some of his best pieces, both here and in his earlier books, are mid-length lyrics of circumstance and occasion that certainly sketch a situation, but stop short of a fully-fledged narrative. Take, for example, ‘The Revenant’, ‘Curator’, or ‘The Recovery’ from Woman Police Officer in Elevator and ‘Locals’, ‘Van Maanan’s Star’, ‘The Tie-Dye T-Shirt’, or ‘Blue-stone’ from Landscape with Chainsaw. Which is why it comes as a bit of a surprise to find Lasdun seeming to have given this sort of thing up for the pure poetry of ‘Blue Mountain’s coyotes closing in for the kill.’ If he isn’t joking (and a new poem called ‘The Skaters’ in the LRB suggests that he might have been) then it will certainly mean a loss for poetry. Still, James Lasdun is a writer with more than one string to his bow — a fact which Burt wants to minimize by denigrating other claims of his to our attention. But then if it’s a story you want, his first novel, The Horned Man, is out this year from Norton. Poetry’s loss, if ‘Happy the Man’ must to be accepted as a true swan song, will more than likely be fiction’s gain.
**Delbanco’s Re/collecting**

*What Remains*. Nicholas Delbanco.  

*Michael G. Richards*

Writers are forever exploring the boundary between fiction and memoir, asking questions of truth and meaning in the act of recovering the past as narrative. In his latest novel, *What Remains*, Nicholas Delbanco makes the exploration central. A fictionalized history, the novel traces the Delbanco family from its origins in Italy, through Germany and England, to its endpoint in America. The family fled inquisitions and Nazis, continually forced to abandon the past. Such history has been written, but Delbanco has re/collected it in the form of personal myth.

In the first chapter, Karl, the father of main character Benjamin (Delbanco himself), contemplates ways that he can see the world as premodern artists could not. He can see it from above, as from an airplane, taking in the entire landscape at once. Or he can see it from a spaceship, the entire globe within the frame of his mind. This global perspective informs Delbanco’s re/collecting, which is an attempt at seeing one’s self, past and present, in the Greek sense of *Kairos*: a nonsequential sense of time, where past and present unite in the moment of perception.

Karl further reflects on his project of self-portraiture, remarking on the prevalence of the form in the history of painting. But Karl is not concerned with verisimilitude:

> What troubled Karl was not the face, its arrangement and proportion and knowledgeable innocence, but rather where it sits on the canvas and how it belongs to the larger idea, the change in the nature of space after Sputnik: what relation we bare to the world.

Similarly, Delbanco is unconcerned with accurately reporting the times, places, and events of his past, believing the task to be impossible. In the “Prologue” to the novel, the middle-age Benjamin recounts a trip he made in 1984 to his family’s former home in London. After reacquainting himself with the artifacts of his past, he is shocked to find that he had been sorely mistaken about each and every detail:
So all that Proustian recall was false, a misremembered past. My madeleine was chocolate cake, my gooseberry bush belonged to a neighbor, where we lived was three doors down. And though it seems funny and just a touch sad that history should prove so subject to revision, I’ve come to feel grateful for inexactness: the gift, as it were, of invention.

By referring to the inexactness of the past as “the gift … of invention,” Delbanco suggests that re/collecting is of particular importance to the artist. Delbanco’s re/collecting, then, is a distinctly personal project that has informed his own art from its earliest days. When his mother claims the obsolescence of the *il naquit* form of the verb *naitre*, the youthful Benjamin defends himself thus: “But anyhow . . . we have to learn how to use it; it’s called the historical past. There is perfect and imperfect and also the pluperfect and the *passée simple* and the historic past.” In a wonderful moment of irony, Benjamin’s mother says, “All right . . . but tell your teacher that your mother thinks this is excessive and will serve no useful purpose … ” Prior to *What Remains*, Delbanco published fourteen novels and four works of non-fiction, many of which explore the process of re/collecting personal myth from various perspectives. *What Remains*, then, is in more than one way the culmination of a project extending from his childhood into the present.
Debora Greger, *God*, Penguin Poets, 2001. Debora Greger’s collage, typical of art work sometimes found on the jackets of her books, is on the cover of this issue of *NDR*. *God*, however, features a rather beautiful blue wampum snake from a 1771 *Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahamas*. Like the snake, God has become a Floridian in a sequence of five “books” and twenty poems. Two of the books, and the volume as a whole, have epigraphs from E.M. Cioran, who says in one of them that “the poor maidservant who used to say that she only believed in God when she had a toothache puts all theologians to shame.” Greger sounds like nobody else writing in America. She writes with formal mastery, wit, and a vision of the world all her own.

John Engels, *House and Garden*, University of Notre Dame Press, 2001. Like Debora Greger’s book, *House and Garden* deals with a post-Edenic Eden, all of the poems about Adam or Eve—picking herbs, thinking back, sleepless, at the edge of winter, pruning lilacs, at the looking glass, etc. The tutelary spirit of this book may be the old “Guardian of the Lakes at Notre Dame,” a once hated Brother in an earlier poem that Engels reprints as an extended epigraph. He shouted at kids and waved an old gun to insist “that turtles be troubled merely to feed, / herons to fly, snakes to dream of toads... There is perhaps something to say / in favor of old men who raise / the guardian arm and voice against / the hunting children—who, but lately come / to Paradise, pursue the precedent beast / unto its dumb destruction, and persist.”

Jeffrey Roessner, editor, *The Possibility of Language: Seven New Poets*, Samizdat Editions, 2001. The seven poets are Robert Archambeau, Mike Barrett, Joe Francis Doerr, Beth Ann Fennelly, Jere Odell, Mike Smith, and Kymberly Taylor. All have had some association with Notre Dame, whether as undergraduates, graduate students, or faculty. All have also been associated with *NDR* as contributors or, in two cases, managing editors. This does not mean the book is parochial or only of local interest; far from it. These seven poets, all very different from one another in style and subject matter, are well worth any reader’s attention. Only now beginning to publish first volumes of their own, they have given Roessner the best of their early work for this fine anthology.
Heather McHugh, editor, *New Voices: University & College Poetry Prizes*. This is the eighth edition of the Academy of American Poets’ anthology and represents the years 1989 to 1998. The Academy sponsors annual contests at many American universities and from time to time gathers together what a particular editor takes to be the best of the winning poems. Although many of these poems were written by undergraduates, one is constantly surprised by how good they are. The judges are a who’s who of contemporary poetry—Heaney, Howard, Strand, Pinsky, Hollander, Shapiro, et. al., and the universities range from east to west, from Harvard to Berkeley. McHugh’s introduction is witty and smart and patient—she must have read a lot of bad poems while picking out these good ones. Like the Roessner anthology, this book promises excellent things for the future. In fact the contributors’ notes suggest that, since 1989, many of these poets have already begun to realize the promise implicit in their student work.

Jeremy Hooker, *Welsh Journal*, Seren, 2001. *NDR* contributor Jeremy Hooker has published a fascinating journal of his years spent in rural Llangwyryfon during the 1970s. This period saw the birth of his two children, the composition of his early poetry, and the beginnings of his critical work on Anglo-Welsh literature. Along the way he deals movingly with his periods of severe depression and his isolation from the Welsh-speaking community. This is the perfect companion volume to Hooker’s *Imaging Wales: A View of Modern Welsh Writing in English*, published by the University of Wales Press. Hooker has long been one of the best critics of writers like David Jones, John Cowper Powys, R.S. Thomas, and others taken up in this useful book.

Geoffrey Hill, *The Orchards of Syon*, Counterpoint, 2002. This remarkable volume completes a trilogy of long poems begun with *The Triumph of Love* (1998) and continued in *Speech! Speech!* (2000). One of the most fastidious and least prolific of modern British masters has rapidly produced during his decade in America a trilogy of Dantesque scope and ambition. It is difficult, thinking of the three books together, to name poets from either side of the Atlantic who are doing work of equal stature. *NDR* 12 promised a review of *Speech! Speech!* The now-prolific Hill has moved faster than we have, but we project a review of both *Speech! Speech!* and the new volume in *NDR* 15.

Craig Nova, *Wetware*, Shaye Areheart Books, 2002. Nova’s tenth novel, unlike the previous nine, takes a step forward into the future, the year 2026. Nova has always been a risk-taker in his fictions and in *Wetware* contemporary life will have to hurry to keep up. In a rare happenstance, the jacket description of this novel is accurate: “a thrilling tale of the ethics of desire, the metaphysics of technology, and the dangerous mystery of manufactured beauty.” A novel to be reckoned with by one of the most formidable writers of the post-WWII generation.
Kathleen Aponick has published poetry in *Seneca Review, The Worcester Review, Karamu,* and other publications. She also published a chapbook of poems, *Near the River’s Edge* (Pudding House Press). Walter Bargen has published eight books of poetry. The most recent book, *Harmonic Balance,* from Timberline Press was published in March 2001. He was the winner of the winner of the Chester H. Jones Foundation poetry prize in 1997. Tina Barr’s on Cairo have appeared in *Boudary 2, Chelsea, Crab Orchard Review,* and *The Southern Review.* A chapbook, *The Fugitive Eye,* was selected by Yusef Komunyakaa as the winner of the Painted Bride Quarterly contest and published in 1997. She directs the Creative Writing Program at Rhodes College in Memphis. Christian Barter’s poems have appeared in *The Georgia Review, Tar River Poetry, The Louisville Review,* and others. He is a crew leader for Arcadia National Parks’s trail crews. Robert Bense has poems forthcoming in *Poetry, Seneca Review,* and *Salmagundi,* among other journals. Eileen Berry was born in England and lived in Africa before coming to America. She holds a Ph.D. in Geography from Clark University. Her poetry has been published in a number of journals and includes a Pushcart nomination. She was an associate at the Atlantic Center for the Arts in 1992 with Amy Clampitt and in 1997 with David Lehman. Rebecca Black is a Stegner Fellow at Stanford and is finishing an MFA from Indiana University. She lives in the Mission District in San Francisco. Susan Briante is a part-time translator living in Austin, Texas. Her work has appeared in *New American Writing, Indiana Review,* and *The Marlboro Review,* among other magazines. Nadia Herman Colburn is a graduate student at Columbia University where she is writing a dissertation on Auden, Ashbery and Merrill. She lives with her husband and son in Boston. James Doyle and his wife Sharon, who is also a poet, are retired. James has poetry in forthcoming issues of the *Midwest Quarterly, The Iowa Review, Cimarron Review,* and *West Branch* and other journals. Shannon Doyne lives in Dayton, Ohio, where she is at work on a novel. She will launch *Our Time Is Now,* a new literary journal in January 2003. Tony D’Souza is a 2000 graduate of the ND Writing Program. His stories have appeared and received awards in the US, UK, Australia and New Zealand, in such journals as *Stand, Black Warrior Review, Imago, Takahē, Dark Horse, Barbaric Yawp* and others. He is currently a Peace Corps Volunteer in
the Ivory Coast. Beth Ann Fennelly is an Assistant Professor at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. Her poems have been published in TriQuarterly, Poetry Ireland Review, and The Kenyon Review. They have been republished in Best American Poetry, The 2001 Pushcart Prize, and Poets of the New Century. Charles Freeland teaches creative writing at Sinclair Community College in Dayton, OH. His work has appeared in The Carolina Quarterly, Free Lunch, The Midwest Quarterly, New Orleans Review and many others. Kenneth Frost’s poems have appeared in Salmagundi, Southwest Review, Confrontation, Chattahoochee Review and others. He lives in Maine. John Gallaher’s book of poetry, Gentlemen in Turbans, Ladies in Cauls is forthcoming in 2001. Other guidebooks can be found in the Boston Review, Colorado Review, Iowa Review, The Ohio Review, Fence, and others. Geoffrey Gardner’s poems, essays and translations of poetry have been published widely for many years. Most recently, he has translated and introduced Presence; Poems of Jean Follain, published by Grace Paley and Robert Nichols’s Glad Day Books. With Taylor Stoehr he has edited and introduced An Existing Better World; Notes on the Bread & Puppet Theater by George Dennison, published by Autonomedia, and he has edited and introduced Swords That Shall Not Strike; Poems of Protest and Rebellion by Kenneth Rexroth, also from Glad Day Books. John Gery’s forthcoming books include Gallery of Ghosts, a collection of poems from Story Line Press, and Davenport’s Version, a narrative poem of the Civil War in New Orleans, from Portals Press. He is a Research Professor of English at the University of New Orleans and Director of the Ezra Pound Center for Literature, Brunnenburg Castle, Italy. Mark Halperin teaches at Central Washington University. His latest book, Time As Distance, New Issues Press (University of Western Michigan), as well as a chapbook, Now and Then, (March Street Press) and a Greatest Hits (Pudding House Publications) appeared in 2001. John Hennessy’s poems appear or are forthcoming in The Sewanee Review, Ontario Review, Washington Square, Massachusetts Review, and Third Coast. He attended Princeton on a scholarship and received his MFA from the University of Arkansas. Catherine Kasper is an assistant professor at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Her poetry and fiction is forthcoming in such journals as Timothy McSweeney’s, American Letters & Commentary, and The Charter Oak Review. Philip Koby larz has had work appear in Connecticut Review, Scrivener, Pleiades, Witness and Best American Poetry 1997. His book of creative nonfiction, la france: A Speculative Journey, is forthcoming from Upney Editions (Canada). He also writes book reviews for Memphis’ Daily The Commercial Appeal and teaches literature and writing at the University of Memphis. Dale Kushner is a recipient of a Wisconsin.
Arts Board Grant in the Literary Arts. Her poetry has been widely published in journals including Crazyhorse, Salmagundi, Poetry, Hayden’s Ferry and elsewhere. She has been studying myth and archetypal psychology at the CG Jung Institute in Switzerland and is currently at work on a novel. Stacey Levine is the author the novel Dra——. Her short story collection, My Horse and Other Stories, won the 1994 PEN/West fiction award. ‘The World of Barry’ will be published in the forthcoming anthology The Clear Cut Future (Clear Cut Press, 2002). William Logan’s most recent books of poems are Vain Empires and Night Battle (Penguin). His book of essays and reviews, Reputations of the Tongue (Florida), was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award in Criticism. He teaches at the University of Florida. Jill McDonough’s work has appeared in Poetry, The Massachusetts Review, and Harvard Review. She was a writing fellow at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. David Matlin is a novelist, poet, and essayist. He lives in San Diego and teaches in the MFA Creative Writing Program at San Diego State University. Peter Michelson just returned from a year in Finland, where he went to escape the heat of Sri Lanka. He teaches in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Colorado in Boulder. His most recent book is his edition of The Extant Poetry and Prose of Max Michelson, Imagist. Patrick Moran’s poems have appeared in many magazines including The New Republic, The Iowa Review, The Northwest Review and Hayden’s Ferry. He currently teaches in the English Department at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Linda Lancione Moyer’s poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Amherst Review, Crazyhorse, Poet Lore, Italian American, The MacGuffin and elsewhere. She lives in Berkeley, California. G.E. Murray is the author of seven collections of poetry, including Arts of a Cold Sun (University of Illinois Press, 2003); the Devins Award-winning Repairs…Walking the Blind Dog… and a book-length ‘mystery poem’ Oils of Evening: Journeys in the Art Trade. Murry is co-editor (with Kevin Stein) of Illinois Voices: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Poetry. He occasionally teaches creative writing at the University of Illinois-Chicago, and has served as a board director of the Poetry Society of America and PEN/American Center. Martin Ott’s poetry, fiction and essays have appeared in numerous magazines, including Connecticut Review, Hawaii Review, The Midwest Quarterly, National Forum, New Letters, Quality Paperback Literary Review, Rattle, Seattle Review, Soundings East, The Southern California Anthology, Spoon River Poetry Review, The Wisconsin Review, and Yearbook of American Poetry and Magazine Verse. Robert Parham’s work has appeared in The Georgia Review, Connecticut Review, America, Christian Science Monitor, Southern Poetry Review, and many other journals. Poems are forthcoming.
in *Hawaii Pacific Review, Maryland Review* and others. His chapbook, *What Part Motion Plays in the Equation of Love*, appeared last year from Palanquin Press and his collection, *The Ghosts of Montparnasse*, was a finalist for the Marianne Moore Poetry Prize. **Elise Partridge**'s poems have been published or are forthcoming in *Poetry, The New Republic, The Southern Review, Boulevard, AGNI, Poetry Ireland Review* and elsewhere. She is editing a series of lectures by Robert Lowell. **John Peck**'s *Collected Shorter Poems 1966-1996* is slated to appear sometime in 2002 from Northwestern U.P. **Allan Peterson**'s poetry has appeared in the *Bellingham Review, Green Mountains Review,* and the *Mid-American Review.* Work is forthcoming from *Pleiades,* and the *Marlboro Review.* Last year he received a fellowship in poetry from the state of Florida. **Kathryn Rantala** is the founder and co-editor of the Seattle print journal *Snow Monkey.* Her poetry and prose have appeared widely. Her collection *Missing Pieces* follows a chapbook, *The Dark Man,* by some years. **Michael G. Richards** is the Creative Writing Program Fellow at the University of Notre Dame and the Managing Editor of the *Notre Dame Review.* His fiction and reviews have appeared in various journals. **Peter Robinson**'s recent publications include a volume of poems, *About Time Too* (Carcanet Press) and a collection of essays, *The Thing About Roy Fisher* (Liverpool University Press) co-edited with John Kerrigan. In 2002 he will publish *The Great Friend and Other Translated Poems* (Worple Press), and *Poetry, Poets, Readers: Making Things Happen* (Oxford University Press). **John Ronan** is a poet, teacher and journalist. His work has appeared in *Threepenny Review, New York Quarterly, New England Review* and in other journals. He has published three chapbooks, including *The Curable Corpse* (1999). In 1999 he was named a National Endowment for the Arts Fellow in Poetry. He lives in Gloucester, MA. **Michael Salcman** is a physician, neuroscientist, and occasional essayist on the visual arts. He served as chairman of the Department of Neurosurgery at the University of Maryland and is vice-president of the Board of the Contemporary Museum in Baltimore. Recent poems have appeared or are forthcoming in the *Harvard Review, The Comstock Review, Poem, The Cape Rock, Whiskey Island Magazine,* and the first issue of *Stray Dog.* His first book of poems, *Plow Into Winter,* is in need of a publisher. **Neil Shepard** has published two books of poetry: *I'm Here Because I Lost My Way* (1998) and *Scavenging the Country for a Heartbeat* (1992), both from Mid-List Press. Recent poems appear in *The Paris Review, Ploughshares, Boulevard,* and *Ontario Review.* Shepard teaches in the BFA Writing Program at Johnson State College in Vermont and edits the *Green Mountain Review.* **Richard Spilman** has published poetry and fiction in numerous magazines over the past twenty years. Most
recently, his poems have appeared in *New Letters, Poetry* and *Hayden's Ferry Review*. His collection of short fiction, *Hot Fudge*, was a New York Times Notable Book in 1990. **Lisa M. Steinman**, who teaches at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, has been awarded fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation, and has published three volumes of poetry: *Lost Poems* (Ithaca House); *All That Comes To Light* (Arrowood Books); and *A Book Of Other Days* (Arrowood Books). Her recent magazine publications include poems in *Prairie Schooner, Chariton Review*, and *The Women's Review of Books*. She also edits the poetry magazine, *Hubbub*. **Donna Baier Stein** has received prizes from the Poetry Society of Virginia, a Bread Loaf Scholarship, and a Fellowship from the John Hopkins University Writing Seminars. Her novel *Fortune* won the PEN New England Discovery Award for Fiction. Her story collection has been a Finalist in the Iowa Fiction Awards. Her work has appeared in *New York Stories, Kansas Quarterly, Prairie Schooner, Florida Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. She is Poetry Editor of *Bellevue Literary Review*. **Robert Stewart**'s books include *Plumbers* (BkMk Press) and *Letters from the Living* (Borderline). He is Managing Editor for *New Letters Magazine* at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. **Marcela Sulak**’s poetry has appeared in such journals as *Kalliope, Borderlands, X-connect, and Greenfuse*. She has translated poetry from the French, Czech, and Spanish, and is currently completing a 500-year history of the Sephardic Jews of Venezuela. **Arturo Vivante** is best known for his short stories. His latest collection is *The Tales of Arturo Vivante*, and his latest book is *Italian Poetry, an Anthology*, (a translation). Lately he has been writing plays. He lives in Cape Cod. **Daniel Weissbort**’s latest translation was *Selected Poems of Nikolay Zabolotsky* (Carcanet). Forthcoming from Anvil Press, in Spring 2002, is a poetry collection, *Letters to Ted and From Russian with Love: A Memoir of Joseph Brodsky*. **Tony Whedon**’s poetry and essays have appeared in *American Poetry Review, Crazyhorse, Ploughshares, Shenandoah*, and many other magazines. He teaches at Johnson State College and co-edits *The Green Mountain Review*. 
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