



**NORTHRIDGE REVIEW**

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# NORTHRIDGE REVIEW

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## *Jeannette Svoboda*

after we sail into the garden  
plunge the spade into the hard rippled surface  
dive in and pitch out chunks of clay  
plane forward and furrow sideways,  
after the glimmer of blade, shimmer of sprout,  
wave of bloom and splash of first fruit,

it strikes with a crash of jawbone

broccoli tosses  
artichoke topples  
cauliflower crashes  
and strawberry sinks

a dried berry trembles above,  
savage teeth clamp, shake, and wrench it down,  
the wind tears at battered leaves and cleaved stems  
I hold onto a remnant of the wreck,  
try to remain afloat as I curse, and watch  
the mound of dirt trail in its wake

# Vegetable Garden in Autumn

*Sue Langland*

The corn stalks have gone haggard, becoming  
bony figures listing toward the open ground.  
The peppers are looking ominous, red and sharp as daggers.  
The lettuce has bloomed, the beans turned hard,  
and the tomatoes finally spilled their ripe, red guts.

Only the melons are left looking pompous.  
Water, manure, and 5-10-10 all summer long,  
and the vine borer kept gassed.  
How the melons swelled under such care!  
Fat cattle. Stick your fork in one, it bleeds sugar.

# A Taut River

*Richard Coleman*

we spoke of gales, torrents, the careening  
nature of romantic interests  
pine resin scents heavy and weighted above  
the sloped couch  
the hillside above the sea.  
in couples we exchanged  
how to love and win  
and win  
never losing one's grip on what was  
tactical, strategic  
adept at the hidden hand  
the sun  
one observer among others  
the jackal  
poised above the bared peak  
calling out to the maimed hunt  
and we  
eyeing one another through the brazier's  
spitting coal  
for wounds, rapid pulse  
faint heart.  
the mistress pulling the anemone close to her breast  
her whose hands were always open  
speaking in tongues  
with no mention of the sting  
its poisoned grasp  
the mindless feeding, she saying  
that it is only a flower  
harmless against flesh  
in which the river runs its course  
its white eyes chanting  
the racing thrust of water, the heave  
of water, the deep pool.



# Atlantic

*Richard Coleman*

She was explaining to me the finer points  
of agriculture, the sustaining of life  
on nutrients, fertilizers, and the  
moist feel of healthy sod.

Plucking the thin shoots of prairie  
grass, slipping them between her lips and whistling  
the wind in from the fields.

She stands, raises her arms to the expressionless  
sky, the turncoat mountains, the  
butte with 49er names carved  
deep in its layered sandstone;  
she says there's a heart beating out there,  
a frail touch of spirit in the cacti, in the scrub,  
in the speeding dance of lizard.

She says that when she had her first child it grew and wandered  
precariously across the rotted fences, and there was  
always that fear that someday it would fall into  
the newer barbed wire. And one day it  
did. Then she drops her laden arms, filled with  
specie of memory, and points again,  
east. Out there, she says, out there  
rides a scarred man on the atlantic.

# In The Bush

*Richard Coleman*

getting this funny feeling that here in the gondwanaland  
here in the BUSH  
the mayhem and crawl of urban soot  
here in the place of God  
the lively whines of live tunes, the love of simple women  
here in the place where I smoke my pipe and wait for the  
woman who will never show, the younger version of my dreams,  
who takes apart each phrase and twists it round the seditious  
cock of her chin, the lower bite of her lip, the pale thin  
palm and finger running through BLACK hair;  
the one I wait for and watch pass by in simple women  
blue boots and leather air, the crisp rough  
feel of her presence, the feel of calm  
Bushland about her, the tense-  
ness of her expression when she asks me to repeat  
the last phrase, and again, bites the Lover of her lip  
the thick bottom, the shaded  
and aghast body found here trapped in this young  
Flute, young Rub, here in the gondwanaland.



*David Blumenkrantz*

# “The Moment”

*Dave Louapre*

There's a little black mouse that lives beyond these walls, and every so often he appears through a crack near the floor, scurries over near the bunk, then stops and waits for me to notice him. The walls are cold and the air thick, almost foggy. They keep it that way, I suspect, so I'll stay calm, as if calm had anything to do with it. The mouse is back right now, staring through me. Each time he does the same thing; scurries, stops, stares, and when I meet his gaze, rises on his haunches and laughs. He laughs horribly. He's enormous when he laughs—bigger than me, but I'm not scared. He's just checking up on me for them, doesn't know I'm on to him. I move forward and, as always, he darts back through his crack. I'm alone.

They look at me with apprehension and try to figure me out so that everything will make sense to them and they can go home and eat their ground beef in peace, having picked the lock. They smirk as they walk by because they can't figure me out, why I don't talk or eat their food. Sometimes they'll call me names, or jingle their keys, but it doesn't bother me. I don't think anything bothers me.

No, that's not right. The keys jingling bother me. I hate it. The keys that open their doors. The keys, dammit, I hate them. But I won't let them know they bother me, though they already know.

The mouse is gone, and I'm going to sit here and wait for him to come back. I have no clock or watch, so I can't keep track of time. They took my watch away from me, my gold watch with the perfect crystal and split-second accuracy; the one she gave me for Christmas. What was her name? What difference does it make? They took it away with my money and wallet and keys. They took my keys, and you know what they did? They dangled them in front of me, the bastards. They shook my keys in my face and they laughed at me. I just tried to ignore them and melt into the wall. As far as I can tell, I've been incarcerated for crimes against humanity, Habeus Corpus, E. Pluribus Unum, with liberty and justice for all. Yeah, they got me, but I'm not sure why. I remember vaguely,

but I can't feel it. I'm not certain I want to. Maybe I do, otherwise I wouldn't be telling you.

My grey walls serve me as glass ones would another person. They're smoky and smooth, and when the fog is thick I can look right through them and see into things, like looking through a jar filled with liquid plastic, so thick, so safe. I like the walls, and they seem to understand me. I know I could dive into them and hide if I really wanted, but why bother? I'd know where I was and that's all that counts. That's how I got here in the first place—just dove through the wall. I'm not sure why I did, but knowing isn't important. Doing it is what mattered, and I did and they didn't and now I'm here and I probably should be.

There's the mouse again. He's not by the bunk this time, but just in front of his crack; doesn't want to be caught. But I don't want to catch him right now. Too much trouble. He rears up (he's enormous) and instead of laughing, he's imitating someone driving a car. The bastard. I throw my shoe at him and he laughs and he's gone. God I hate him. He mimicked a driver—me. It was me. It was me driving my car. Driving and driving. Driving and steering and braking and accelerating and accelerating . . . Rhode Island to Texas. Ha. The map is so small and the red lines of highway are so simple and your estimations are so pragmatic and you're a fool to believe it. Virginia, Kentucky, Arkansas and all the rest, sticking out the welcome mat and patting you on the back with a warm smile and straight highway, then turning and closing the gate tight and tearing up that highway and laughing at your back. And the signs and the diners and the gas stations. And the green-eyed girls behind countless counters whose images stay with you and force you to become unreasonable . . .

Oh, did I mention the priest? Yes, a priest came by to see me this morning, put his hand on my shoulder and went into his pitch. He wanted to sell me a confession or something. Or, he wanted me to confess something. I didn't speak, of course. I stared and waited for the mouse. He didn't come. What were his words? Let's see, something like, "My son, if you are sorry for what you have done, if you are truly sorry, tell God and he will forgive you."

Sorry. Sorry for what? Who was he talking about? I just sat. I don't know if I laughed or smiled outwardly, but I was laughing inside. I was laughing as he spoke, and I lost myself in the depths of the plastic walls until he left. He patted me on the back, giving me a concerned look of burden. When he left, I noticed his white collar had a grey smudge on it.

The keys. There's those wretched keys again, driving

through my head. I cover my ears and I still hear them. A deputy is standing through the bars saying something about a lawyer, but I don't respond. I don't even look at him. He'll be gone soon I know, and sure enough he is. Gone. I hate him and his keys. I sometimes wish I had my keys back, but they'd be no good to me now. Not even if I was outside; no good at all.

A tray of food is lying on the floor by the gate, and its aroma seems to linger in my eyes. I never pay much attention to what's on the tray, but there's something here, something that's trying to make me remember. I've felt this before, but never actually tried to remember. Whatever it is will come to me in time. The walls are deep and grey, and that's all I need. I read about something called osmosis once, absorbing through the tissue, and I think I understand it now. I can, absorb the wall, and it can absorb me. Being able to dilute myself and fade into the grey is luxury. I feel like I can . . .

That's it. That smell. It's the bread. The bread on that tray smells just like the bread she used to make. She made it for me for breakfast when I started the trip. It's the bread. My wife cooked the same things everyday, but the bread was special, good. I say my "wife", but I wasn't married really, she was. Marriage means two people loving and understanding one another, trying to help each other. That's how it was at first, until she replaced me with a credit card. The understanding was gone. I asked her once to listen to me, to try and feel what I felt. I just wanted to slow down. She said she was sick of hearing my bleeding heart complaining, that I cried too much for a man, and if I needed someone to listen, I could see the company shrink at the office, the one my boss wanted me to see. What does my boss know? His cure-all was sending me on business trips. Yeah, business trips are luxury he said, and I'll get to see the country and bring home the bacon and end up in Texas. In Texas for christsake. Texas Texas Texas. Goddamn that smell, that bread, and the dirt and that road worker...

He's back. I knew he'd be back—the mouse. I must've missed his move across to the bunk. I hate him. He won't leave me alone; and sometimes I feel like I'll never get rid of him. I stand up, and he stands with me, smiling, ready. He starts to raise his arms to the driver's position but I leap at him and sprawl on the floor, watching him laugh as he glances back at me before disappearing into his crack. The floor is cold and grey, and I want to stay here forever.

The guard at the gate is laughing, but I ignore him. He doesn't mean a thing to me. Neither did that cop at the Texas

border. God, anywhere but Texas, with the dust and the white center lines and the shot up signs. Not Texas. Not a highway patrolman. His boots glossy black, and his badge shining so bright, even from fifty yards out. The sun glaring through the splattered windshield and the dust and the static, and that girl behind the counter with those deep green eyes. The car swerved without warning. But I tried to warn him, I really did. I tried to make him understand but he couldn't, and my grip was sweaty when I left him broken in the road. It was Texas, and I left him in the hot Texas dust. The static went away, but my sweaty grip didn't.

But I never finished telling you about the road worker. He was the first. It was Arkansas, I think, the third day of the trip and no cars in sight. The radio hissed loud and mean, and it spat at me; spat with smiling voices and mock families and static—every other minute, static. There's just no getting rid of it. I turned off the radio and the static only got louder. I couldn't hear.

He was collecting garbage from the side of the road, alone. His day-glo vest stared me down, and I felt something I'd never felt before, something strong and unavoidable. That's when my grip tightened for the first time. My grip tightened as my foot pushed the pedal to the floor, and I think I screamed. My eyes shut tight, I know that, and I heard him tumble over the hood and scrape along the ground. I thought of my wife, that time I accidentally backed into her in the driveway, sending her sprawling into the hedge. She wasn't hurt, but she sure got mean when she saw me laughing to myself. She just looked so ridiculous in the hedge with that ugly orange dress on. She never forgave me for it. This was no different, I couldn't have done it on purpose. My heart was either beating fast or not at all, and I drove for miles before I realized his hat was caught on my wipers.

The guard has already taken the tray away, but the bread still smells sweet. The bread. Can't get it like that in roadside diners. Can't get anything from the road except tired and angry. Angry at people you've never seen before. A blue station wagon from Florida with a happy, singing family inside can set you off if the static is loud. The static makes you tingle and go numb at the same time. I wanted to warn them too, but I couldn't. I couldn't make them understand they shouldn't be there, to stop singing. They were just like a radio family, and their voices pulsed in the excruciating static. I pulled along side and stared through my dirty window at the driver, the father. He stared back, and stopped singing. Checking the road ahead, he looked back at me, then at the

yellow hat on my wipers. His expression went blank; his eyes were frightened. I wondered if he had a happy marriage. I wondered if his wife listened to him. I wondered if he too heard the static and the wheel drove me towards them. My grip was tight, and I noticed the sweat on my face in the mirror. I noticed how it made me look like wax. Ha, wax. Wax models belong in museums where it's cool and safe and soothing, not in the heat. Not on the road. It was very funny to me then, and a nervous grin twitched on and off my face. The sound of the crash drowned out the static and gradually subsided as I drove away from the broken guard rail, until all I could hear was the drone of my engine. The static had stopped, along with the singing, and my grip was steady as something like electricity surged through my body, charging me.

Oh yeah. After the priest left today, a man from the F.B.I. came. He asked a lot of questions and smirked a lot, as if to let me know he could get around my silence. He put one foot on the chair, leaning on his knee and stroking his moustache, then asked me something "off the record," something "just between us." I don't even remember what he asked, just that he kept repeating the words innocent and killed. I knew what he was talking about, but not what he meant, or what he wanted. The F.B.I. man kept staring at me, trying to figure me out like the rest. His shoes were shiny, but he didn't have a badge. Just a red tie, white shirt, and navy blue blazer. I dove into the walls until he left.

I figure it's probably late in the day now, if what they brought me before was lunch. The mouse hasn't been out for awhile, but it doesn't matter. The walls are cloudy and soft. I can't be seen because they absorb me, and I'm very still. I needed walls like these all my life, but I got wood paneling instead. I needed grey cement floors, but I got linoleum. I needed someone to absorb and understand me, but I got a wife. All I wanted was walls, but I didn't know it then. I do now. I have my walls—the ones I needed all along.

Yes, walls are safe, unlike the road. You know what you have with a wall, but a road keeps going and throws new twists at you. Like that electric feeling. I'd never felt that before, but the road made me feel it. It's something you have no choice in. The flesh on your scalp tingles and the hair on your neck freezes as your grip tightens and teeth clench and pores fill with sweat. Your entire nervous system seems to act on its own. Your breath gets short and your blood runs fast and your brain wants to reason but your soul wants to act, and



you lose all sense of time and surrender. That's how it happens, dammit, and that's what happened. Arkansas. Arkansas in the blazing afternoon. Hadn't had a rest since Kentucky and finally took one, to remove the yellow hat. Arkansas.

The mouse has been gone longer than ever, and I don't understand why. Is he done with me? Do they have enough to put me up for good? I was getting kind of used to him; gave me something to do, to think about. He'd just pop out of that crack and there would be the electricity and the dust and the bodies. I'm glad he hasn't come back, but I have this strange feeling he's still there, staring at me. It's hard to tell because the fog is thick, but I think I can see his two green eyes staring at me from the wall. It's got to be him, only he doesn't have green eyes. His eyes aren't green, dammit, they're red. He doesn't have green eyes at all, but there he is with green eyes and smooth hands and a soft Kentucky voice.

Kentucky. That's where I stopped first, in Kentucky. I was hot and tired and my radiator was hissing, so I pulled off into a dirt lot with an aluminum trailer and a broken neon sign that said "Eats." As I left the car and walked toward the trailer I could feel the drops peeling down my chest, streaking through the fine layer of dirt. I was hot; the diner was warm.

I don't know why this matters now, but I think it mattered a lot then. That girl behind the counter. I walked in and sat at that counter with my hands folded, never once taking my eyes off her. She brought ice water and smiled; one of those smiles that draws you in and melts your heart, like a magazine cover. Her dark hair swirled around her face and framed her perfect eyes. They were green eyes that never closed; eyes that held secrets.

Two men sat at the end of the counter, one in a white tee-shirt, and the other in a red, sleeveless Pendalton. I guess they knew the girl, because they mentioned something about her "daddy." I tried not to pay any attention, but I listened as hard as I could. They said something about someone named Joe, and how she'd be better off without him, but she just laughed and turned away. She came back to me and leaned on the counter like she wanted to talk, slowly polishing the stainless steel top. I could have watched her for hours, and she seemed to forget I was there. She just stared through the window with those big eyes, never blinking, seeing through everything, hypnotic. These were eyes that knew and understood. I didn't say a word, but they listened. They were eyes I'd never seen before and knew I'd never see again; wise and compassionate. They made me hate my wife without even thinking of her.

She stayed like that for awhile, until she accidentally knocked the salt shaker on the floor. The noise brought her back and she looked at me, startled, then relaxed, and she smiled.

We talked for about an hour. She asked where I was from, and why I'd stopped there and all the other questions someone who works in a trailer/restaurant will ask to kill time, and I asked the same of her, and we did, indeed, kill time. She was someone I felt strangely about; not that I loved, or even liked her, but just in that she made me feel different, like she was always part of me but never real. I'd ask her something, or tell her about myself, and she'd answer me in the most interested way, like I was someone. I remember how her eyes flashed when I told her I was going all the way to Texas.

"Texas," she sneered surprisingly, "there's nothing in Texas. Nothing but roads and dirt. A friend of mine went there a few years back, and I haven't heard from him since. Don't go to Texas."

She bit off this last sentence with a glowing intensity, and her eyes became enormous as she stared at me, as if she expected a change of mind. I smiled and looked at my water. She relaxed too and we talked some more. We talked about her home, and my home, and various other things. She asked me about my wife. My wife. Why did she do that? I wasn't thinking about anything but getting off the road. I came into that diner and found what I wanted: tables and chairs and water spotted knives rolled neatly in safe white napkins set on stainless steel counters. That's all I wanted, and that's what I found there. Then she had to mention my wife—my wife and my bills and my job and it was like choking on a piece of apple pie. I didn't answer her, and she turned away to talk to the two men as they were leaving. They said something about some place in town, then something about her "daddy" again, then something about her legs. Her legs, for christ-sake. They laughed hard about it and she smirked as the bells jingled when they went out. It was quiet, but the sound of those bells stayed in my head and got louder. They got louder and stronger, and I watched the two men get into their white pickup truck, still laughing. I felt as hot as the pavement outside, thinking of them talking like that to her. I paid my bill and stood by the register a moment. She stared through me. She stared for some time, then stated flatly "Don't go to Texas." I don't know why I said it, and I was surprised when I heard myself reply "Come with me." It was one of those moments when you act without thinking, and everything is natural. I didn't think twice about what I said, and she smiled

and looked at me with her green eyes, then turned and went into the kitchen. I threw a quarter on the counter and walked out into the heat with her gaze planted firmly in my mind. I drove to Arkansas.

That's it. I met her right before I drove through Arkansas, right before the road worker. The girl with the emerald eyes; sounds kind of like a song, or a movie. It makes things clearer though. I think I can remember everything now. I can't see the mouse anymore, but I don't think he was ever really there in the first place, just part of the fog. The walls are cool and thick and comfortable now. The green eyes aren't staring anymore. I think it's evening. There's a warm, orange glow to the plastic, like a sunset. I know what the sunset is. I know what happened during my last sunset. Very poetic: carried off into the sunset by green eyes and electricity. The hero, riding off into the sunset. A hero. Ha. But why not a hero? Why not? Dammit, because sunsets last less than five minutes and after that there's only dark.

I drove through the late afternoon Texas heat and could feel the dust on my face soak in. The radio was off, but the static was loud. I was numb, with the image of that highway patrolman fresh in my mind. Logic and reason meant nothing anymore. All I could feel was the road, with its heat and dust and static. I kept waiting for the road to open up and swallow me, unaware that it already had. All I knew was that my grip on the wheel was erratic and my foot wanted to accelerate. It's a feeling you can't even begin to comprehend until after you've stepped over that line of "rationality" and experienced it. Even if you want to, you can never go back.

Cars passed by now and then going in the opposite direction, and each time I watched my red hands to see if this was the time we'd slide over and end it, head on. But we didn't end it, my hands and I, and a sense of euphoric confidence replaced the sweaty grip as I headed for Austin.

I had a feeling I'd never make it to Austin, and I don't know what I'd have done if I did make it. I drove into the glaring orange horizon and pulled off almost instinctively into a vacant gas station. It was like stepping into a time warp, with the large, rounded pumps and white trimmed office. The place was desolate in the ocean of brush, and I waited in my car with the engine running, thinking about the sky in Rhode Island and the silverware in the safe white napkins and her green eyes and the cop. No one appeared for the longest spell, then an elderly woman in a pink and blue flowered dress came out of the office holding a Coca Cola. My grip was tight, but my mind waited. She glanced at me, then walked

right in front of the car, apparently looking for someone. Just to my right were the bathrooms, and she called toward them.

"Virgil, you in the john?"

Glancing back at me she waited, then started to walk towards the men's room, when the door opened and an elderly man with tiny round spectacles stepped out, wiping his hands on a white paper towel. For the first time my eyes filled with tears and everything became foggy. The sunset was just coming into brilliance when my foot hit the floor, she screamed, and Virgil was trapped between the bathroom wall and my bumper. Steam shot up from the hood as the woman tried to free the old man, who was slumping, bleeding from the mouth. I passed out with his image in my mind, aware of the hot tears all over my face, and aware of the bump on my forehead from when I hit the windshield. I hoped that bump was enough to kill me.

Well, the walls feel good now, and I feel safe. The mouse hasn't appeared for some time, and I don't think he will again. The guards are still here though. They walk by and jingle their keys and think they can see me, but, of course, they can't. One guard is there right now with my dinner tray. It has the same bread on it, but it's just ordinary bread now. He's saying something about my wife coming in the morning, but I'm lost in the wall, alone. I'm laughing at him. If he only knew how ridiculous he looks standing there talking to no one . . .

He's gone. My wife will be here in the morning and she'll try to talk to me and I'll stare at her from behind as she attempts to melt me with her glare. I'll laugh. Her world will never be the same. Neither will mine, but I realize it. It's going to the movies and discovering the world on the screen is real, and we're all characters watching life from a dark room with sticky floors. Perception is changed for good.

I opted for grey walls back in Kentucky. I'm at home in them now. I always will be.

# Sweaty Palms, Cal.

*Doug Lawrence*

The screen door stalls on its spring.  
Listless antennae wave  
from inside their room at Roach Motel.  
The door presses slowly closed  
but the latch doesn't catch.

She won't answer his call this time.  
She sips a pensive wine  
with a quiet bouquet.  
Under the lukewarm stars  
her bare feet steam  
in the cool sand.

There's a rose at the bottom  
of the phone booth.  
A voice with no brakes  
is out on the wire  
in a screaming wind.

Powerlines fry the radio.  
Music like hot popping sausage  
tangles in cigarette smoke,  
jumps through the wind-wing.

Long skins of asphalt  
slide under the hood ornament.  
Sweaty Palms, Cal.,  
balancing a black snake on the nose:  
The engine winds out,  
a fly under the lid,  
a buzz inside the ear.

Sweaty Palms, Cal.,  
she didn't think I'd come back  
and I spat  
like a fat bug  
on her windshield.

# Grandma's Purse

*Doug Lawrence*

Grandma's purse opens like an aged oyster.  
Barnacles crack, the silica huffs  
a heavy cloud from the crusty shell,  
settling on the night stand  
catching stray fingerprints in the sand.

The room lays awake with eyes closed.  
A hand glances quickly inside the purse,  
furtive little digits gather coins  
from the bottom. The furnace pops,  
Billy reels, the moon buzzes loud  
through the window. Curtains hiss,  
the cold hairs on his arm fall in  
line and bristle at attention.

Billy's grip loosens and the hand is lost  
among sharp pencils, safety pins,  
laughing photo faces. The mirrors loom  
and crowd the room like dark bubbles:  
fifty wide-eyed lenses showing  
a hundred gnawing jaws gulping two hundred  
fifty fingers that drop one shiny coin apiece.  
The throw rug slithers along the hardwood floor.

Billy slips to his knees with a thud.  
Grandma stirs, smacks her lips, turns over, snores.  
Billy's arm feels like a dry tongue.  
He yanks it free and skates away on his socks.  
The knob gives him a shock as he leaves.

# Last Visit Home

*Wes Hempel*

My parents are lying in their house  
Down this stretch of street now a sea  
of walnut leaves the sidewalk turns  
to dirt beneath my feet becoming bare  
some part of me eager and small

(did I imagine them falling  
out of planes  
crossing center dividers  
left slumped on the rug  
by a man in a stocking?)

When I look at the sky it parts  
above the corner lamps buzzing on  
and whole minutes like years  
over the reach of yellow grass  
strangling wild vines choking  
honeysuckle and ivy on these trees

When there is no train  
I hear its distant wail  
climb the gabled roof  
the small of my back  
flush against the chimney  
see its thin grey plume  
and houses in the neighborhood  
where it is always Autumn

The tangled roots beneath the trunk  
of that oak in the schoolyard where  
I hunched that remarkable Fall over  
blue paper sheets against my knees  
scribbling secret messages

Then left them  
stabbed through twigs  
astonishing blue leaves  
for you to find

Dear Frances  
tonight beside this broken sky  
I almost remember what they said



# The Night We Talk

for Marlene

*Wes Hempel*

When I leave you  
I look at everything  
the earth that is there  
with its blue snail  
and sticks

the pools of light on the walk  
as if it had just rained

You made a world out of clouds  
because that is what you found  
in your hands  
in the silent country  
where you were born

We do not go home  
you said our fathers lived before us  
their hands in the bread drawer  
What do they know of this hunger

The air moves where I am going  
past streetlamps on corners  
I no longer wait for a shoe  
to climb into  
slowly over grass  
my feet take me

I know where I have been  
We have names for variations  
in the thickness of mist  
the length of silences

We have come to love  
small steps  
the solid sticks  
our slow hands building

# After Reading Rexroth

*Robert Bailey*

A night of days has passed  
Stubbornly beyond our reach  
The conclusion: separation  
The vehicle: the sea  
    (in a boat which  
    leaves no tracks)

# A Divorce

*Robert Bailey*

The red light  
Of very late  
Afternoon fills  
The study  
No lamplight yet  
Just a young girl  
In an ancient chair  
Staring through  
One end  
Of her life

# The Woman

*Heidi R. Good*

She felt the earth under her feet cold as late night damp. Her pads were moist now. Her head held down close to the ground, breathing in the dankness. Alert to the noises of cricket and the cadence of the wind overhead in the cloud of interlocked branches—tapping, clicking a million sticks together.

Something frightening was following her, behind her coming the same way. She watched the pine-needed ground pass beneath and behind her. Out of her amble she broke into a lope kicking up small sprays of wet earth after each dig of her paw. The trees ran away in the opposite direction in the sides of her vision. And she wondered what they were going towards back there, afraid as if she were in their place.

Perspiring now she hung her tongue out over her teeth, feeling it go cool and cold, then dry as the wind wagged it. Her nose cutting through the puffs of thin fog she panted out at each footfall. It was cold.

The feeling of rawness that she felt now had begun early in the night when the moon had newly soaked through the forest and made silhouettes of the real things there. The sound had been close, vibrating air, and it had raised the hair along her neck as involuntarily as if it had been a strong, thin wind that had blown the fur up. It had moaned. Some big forbidding something with no control over its agony had leaked out over the rocks around, and passed over grub-laced logs and streamed into holes like blood, leaving the life it belonged to and making all the things it covered sticky with itself. She ran afraid, just ahead of it.

In front of her the woods broke into a meadow and then climbed into a higher place—a country where the trees stood lonelier and crooked, and stone ground only allowed small grasses through, and rocks were broken.

There it would be harder for something to catch her, and she instinctively knew this thing did not belong in unfenced areas. Approaching a stone ledge, her haunches bunched into muscle and unrolled launching her up onto the granite shelf. Her flanks gripped tight and pulled her over the next

one. Food sounds and smells were laying in the air reminding her of the time since she had last eaten. Yet now hunger was crowded by fear and hunting was bad on such a bright-lighted evening.

The cry came again just as she saw the bright ball loom into her eyes. She felt terror wrap her tight and screamed at it as her back legs suddenly and with violence flexed straight back together and pitched her forward. She collapsed, scraping pebbles as momentum pushed her a yard, and flinched, lips pulled in a snarl, eyes closed, her head scraped rock, tearing lichen and her own fur away, leaving raw flesh there.

Scrambling up, she flung her head around in an attempt to regain her balance, her shoulders cramping with exertion. She could not stand and fell again then and again, pounding the wind out of her lungs, and she was so scared she tried to die and could not, and then tried to deny it all, knowing finally what was happening. The moon was too big she remembered. Her legs could not move and were grotesquely bending out at the wrong angles and hurting so badly.

From the sky, moon turned her into a shadow and tried its best to hide what it was doing. She was stretched and changed back, the fur that blurred her outline tremored slightly, tautened as it faded. And as her body contorted and arched, she became a new profile against the night, leaving her naked and unaccustomably wet with dew and soggy moss.

The moan quavered again in the midair of night. It was not so poignant now as it had been earlier when her throat had tilted full back and swallowed all the sadness there, not even knowing it was her own. Now reduced in a shorter neck came a whimper just for quick ears that did not even care.

The woman lifted up on her elbows, her hair covering her face. She was muddy and shaking and was a dull color in the nearing dawn. The moon had gone away, forgetful and unfaithful of its own.

Her hand came up to clear her face. A long fingered hand came up to clear her face. A long fingered hand with scraped knuckles, sore looking, clumsily combed fingers through the tangled hair, and she turned to stare behind her. Back there were the fences.

She was perfect but for her eyes. They were left amber and almond tilted—all wrong and staring back into my own eyes. I do not like this, I am afraid, one mistake here. Round, and too many shadows through the pupil. The cold I am feeling now through my sweat is fear. I will slap water over my face and onto the mirror.

It resides tonight. The moon I mean, in its own cycle. First for me, I must find my dark glasses. Here they are. Okay, now I will paint my nails. Okay now, my hands are a little raw. It is just the detergent I washed the dinner dishes in before dusk last night.

# Brass Bars

Laura Webster

The sky was blue, and the sun an astigmatically fixated boiling steam iron behind my shoulder, and my wife was late. Ten minutes. So I read *The L.A. Times* and counted funerals classified while cars honked and women howled.

My coat hung heavy like hot gold chains, my wife's wedding band, wrapped across my chest and around my waist tight. So I took it off and laid it on my leather briefcase against the bench. I loosened the tie Carol bought, then took it off and put it inside my genuine leather briefcase.

A mountain of silver mirror broke down in curving beams of heat against the cement sidewalk. Big black letters blew up like a large warning "P.T. Colossus Structured Insurance Unincorporated." Light stabbed against my eyes to blind me. Sweat hung on the air. A box screamed.

"What's in the box?" I asked the old woman whose large cardboard box rocked in her arms.

"Why, it's Harold." Her softface twinkled a computerized smile. The lines went hard. "Come closer and I'll let you meet him." I moved along the bench trying to avoid red gum. She untied the twine bow and lifted a small corner of flap. I moved closer and caught yellow glint. The cat cried. The woman pushed back the flap and started tying the bow up again.

"I don't think he likes being caged up like that."

"Well, I have to. Can't leave him at home alone." She hugged the box tight.

"I think it's rather cruel to keep him in that box. Doesn't seem like he could breathe." She turned red.

"But I have to keep him in . . . I can't leave him at my apartment. You . . . understand?"

"Understand?"

"I live in Hollywood. If I leave him there they'll get him."

"Come now, the mice aren't that big a problem." My poor joke slipped by and the old woman showed confusion. She became disoriented and no longer looked in my eyes. Her delicate hands fumbled with the box. Her voice cracked high.

"They come out as soon as I leave. They want to get him."

"I'm sorry, but I just don't understand what you're talking



about lady."

"Why, the communists! who else?" Her eyes bulged overfed balloons. I wanted to laugh.

"There's no communists." She sat stunned. Blood shot through her eyes.

"I . . . know . . . I . . . don't try to lie to me. You can't tell me I don't know . . . You! You're a communist." Her body shook as she stood up and faced me. She couldn't turn her back, not on me. She picked up the box and hurried off screaming about communists. A blue scarf bobbing among human islands. The box heavy, pulling her closer to the ground.

"And when you grow up we'll get you a small monkey like that, right mom?" Mom had her hand in dad's.

"Just as long as he keeps it in its cage, and cleans up after it."

"Would you like that Stevie?" I watched the monkey pick off the fleas from its baby and soon became disgusted with the whole idea. The monkeys were no longer my favorite animal in the zoo. I wanted to leave.

"No, it smells bad here. I wanna go home." I whined and my parents gave in. Tigers purred in slow monotone, almost helpless, growls; elephants bathed under plastic trunks; the bear wore a circular path on his square of earth; and the bird laid his head lethargically on his wing. I approved and we left. From the rear window of my dad's big car I waved goodbye to the zoo.

I stood up and walked behind the bench to stretch, and laced fingers against the back of my head and felt a knot. Suddenly I was pushed against the bench. My back in pain.

"Hey watch where you're going." I turned and the woman's face was blank. The shopping cart held brown wrinkled bags and torn dirt rags that resembled clothing of some sort.

"Dunt da dunt da da."

"I beg your pardon."

"Da da da da."

"I don't understand. I'm sorry. If it's the time you want walk over to the other side of the building and you'll find a clock at the top." I was tired of dealing with morons. She looked through me with eyes crystal blank. Her face dried mud and her hair held leaves.

"You remember me," she said softly. "Mother."

"No. I'm sorry, I'm not your mother." I backed away from her and moved to the other end of the bench. Her face broke into a big smile.

"You look so pretty mother . . . I'm so glad to be home." She pulled her shopping cart back and turned it around as if nothing had been said, or as if it had been said years earlier and never now. She pulled her black shaggy shawl higher on her shoulders and started to walk. Her bare feet like clubs. She babbled a chant that went somewhat like loneliness, and was gone. I imagined her throwing out untied anchors and sat down and closed my eyes.

"You'll work your way from the ground up," commanded P.T. with grey suit and block face. The same face Carol had inherited. "I'm afraid we don't play favorites here."

"Of course sir. Don't be afraid." That slipped past him and my nervousness remained in tact. He sat at his desk with thick glasses and stern calculation. The photographs of Judy and Carol stared at him from the corner of the desk.

"Why didn't she listen to me?" He bent his head and began to rub what must have been a horn.

"I am willing to accept any position you can offer me. You realize this involves your daughter." Somehow it felt like blackmail. His face set to stone and his eyes shot out like metal bars.

"Of course Steve, I must give you a chance. I love my daughter deeply." He studied my face hard then loudly said, "O.K. my boy you've got a job. I'm sticking you with the sales crew." He later took me out to buy some work clothes and my genuine leather briefcase. Carol was happy and her dad was happy. They both wore amused smiles.

"You'd look better without that beard. You don't really need it." I opened my eyes to shadow, then focused on the old man dressed in brown imitation leather pants and green shirt. His hair white, he beamed fluorescent computer terminal lights. No! he beamed sunlight. "Men with beards look like apes." His eyes sparked like an ignition . . . no, like diamonds deep within the earth.

"Listen old man, I really don't care what you think." His smile dripped mud. There was really no structure, just broken face.

"No wait . . . I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you. I just want to talk. My name's Jack." He held out a pale claw and I automatically handed him smooth perfect plastic. We shook. Me with precision, yet a gap was filled. "When I was a boy I worked on the farm my parents owned. We grew fields of turnips and when the season turned, it was my job to bring them up from the ground." He looked at me with eyes warm

like popcorn in a pan and smile buttery. His hair like salt. I was hungry.

"Damn my wife, she was supposed to pick me up over thirty minutes ago." The old man moved closer on my comment. He reminded me of the child who wanted to break all the locks.

"I used to be married but my wife died. I've got three kids. Now far away. Don't ever get old. Don't ever know." Eyes like yolk orbs slid on me. "You should be on billboards or something. You're perfect."

"Dad, do you think any of the girls will dance with me?"

"Of course. All of them will want to dance with you. That's the game of it, you just have to be careful." I looked in the mirror and cringed at the zit on my chin.

"But dad, I don't understand."

"Slowly one slides the neck of the bar in place and next thing you know it's locked."

"But dad, I don't understand."

No, regardless of my hunger. His face was still cracked like earth drying up after a storm. His smile dried wide.

"No, really, you should, I'm sure you're very popular. Women must have said things." I was amused. His smile cracked at the corners, bits of earth flying. "When I was young I was handsome."

"She's late. Very late this time." I said, while looking at my watch.

"Women," he snarled, "good for nothing." I wanted to cement his muddy face. Make it fit into place. Logical. "I'm now alone . . . I live in a cardboard box where they feed me sawdust." He paused for the cars revving their engines. Moving fast forward . . . fast. "I was once like you." I didn't move. Only listened. Recording information . . . the tape moved forward.

He came forward. "You're very handsome. I would like to be friends with you . . . good friends." He came closer. The tape ran out. I breathed alive and moved away with instrumental precision. Stepping out of the mud on a rainy day. "You're going to be like me, don't look at me like that, you're going to be just like me. You are me . . . I hope you like sawdust." I ignored him by looking at my watch. I thought about the small coiled springs, miniature levers, and the perfect metal workings. "You don't know yet. How can you." He put his claws on my arm. I shook, my walls too thin, wondering if I'd hold. I'd forgive her possibly, but now she

was an hour late.

"My wife will be here soon." Mud crumbled to dust, which thickened upon cement. I could only see cement. I wouldn't know any more.

"Yes," he sighed. "She will. I know she will." I stared at his shoes they were imitation leather. Raw imitation. Real? I lost my sense of structure for a moment. The images changed and wouldn't sit still, but only briefly. The old man patted my knee. I was calm. He moved away from me and sat back against the bench.

"Hey, doesn't anyone know when the bus is supposed to come?" His question was followed with a round of moos. He lit a cigarette then picked up *The L.A. Times* and turned to the funeral section. Carol drove up and unlocked the passenger side door. I smiled and jumped in my cage.

# Beautiful Men I've Known

*Laura Webster*

I play  
with the shrunken  
apple heads that  
slither from the drain  
across the bottom  
bleeding  
on the ceramic  
of my sink

They've sat in the sun  
too long  
they've stared at their leaves  
all their tiny lives  
watching sun beams crawl  
across their skin

I hold my mother's kitchen  
knife  
across dried out skins  
folded over from severance  
of the womb

They slither slowly sensing  
I may turn on the water  
blow their heads down a hole  
turn the disposal on  
mash around their shrunken  
brains.

# Dishes

*Murray Harreschou*

I push away from the dinner table,  
pushing away from you.  
Our argument lies around us,  
leftovers on dirty plates.

I turn on the tap, wasting impotent  
cold water. I squeeze oily brown water  
from the sponge and lace it with Joy.  
Its thin whiteness looks like your come.

Now the sink is a pool with too-green lettuce  
floating and a chili can lid stuck to the side.  
I grind the disposal but it clanks  
from that part you didn't fix.

Steaming water eats away grease,  
finishing the tomato slice you didn't.  
I scrub the plate and rinse it, front,  
back, and front again. You always leave bubbles.

Glasses line up along the drain pan edge.  
I slide them next to the positioned  
plates. Could we be this neat?  
I finish rinsing in water  
that hurts my hands.



*Greg Boyd*

# Supper's Ready

*Marlene Pearson*

Spoon: Ageless, I am round as the moon,  
a silver breast, coming to you in mystery  
pushing my metal into your soft infant mouth.

Fork: I am the stiff fingers of a thumbless hand,  
nails all pointing the same direction.  
I seem dogmatic, but have often bent  
to the will of a hot fist.

Knife: Hard phallic symbol, I am the real power.  
My grated edge will cut whatever  
it is you love to devour.



# Twenty years after

*Marlene Pearson*

the ball where she won the prince's heart,  
her feet still small as a china doll's,  
things were no longer a children's tale  
with pumpkin coach and miraculous  
mice transformed to white mares.  
Twenty years after, she walked the shadowed halls  
sipping white wine

while the prince—that eternal romantic, that spoiled son,  
ran back to daddy's place at the palace  
carrying his catalogue, begging daddy  
to order him another glass slipper.  
Surely it would bring him a new lovely young lady,  
one without saggy breasts, as Cindy had once been.

But Cinderella had grown up in ashes  
and knew love's burn,  
how dreams shatter like dropped crystal.  
Even fairy godmother had died years ago.  
And though she sweep and clean  
and sing like a swallow,  
old prince charming would not be wise as myth.

He was not content with her pure heart  
and mortal love. He was no wizard.  
He could not wipe the crow's feet from his own eyes  
and his feet ached after a day at the courtyard.  
Yet he clutched his dreams  
like the drink she poured him when he came home,  
gulping it down.

He would have 3 or 4 more before he could face sleep.  
She knew he had no more power than a mouse.  
He was only a middle-aged man.

# Divorce

*Marlene Pearson*

He knocked on my door with iron knuckles and a plaster smile,  
explaining:

"I'm leaving/ marriage ruining my job/ you never do what I/  
can't keep my bushes trimmed in the yard/ and you know  
how I need sex/ got to divorce."

I shook my head. It turned bruise green realizing something.  
It fell off and landed on the desk near my typewriter.  
My right arm flew out the window in rage.

"sell houses/ you half/ we'll split dishesheetstv couch—  
grubby anyway/ stuff you never would replace."

My stomach became stone, dropped to the floor,  
rolled down the hall and out into the street, resting  
in the cool trickle of the gutter.  
An ear left my severed head and began typing poetry.

"I'm keeping/ investments important to me/ don't touch  
my profits/ But Anna is—"

The other ear joined and they typed louder.

"my main concern/ lovely child/ support  
one year/ that's all."

Spiders poured from my vagina down to the floor  
weaving secrets in red, then crawled away  
and hid among the books in the case.

"I can't stay/ so you go—final decision/  
I speak calmly/ expect you to do the same."

My feet stood there, just toes stiffening  
like I'd been standing on ice for a long time.

The newly typed page began chanting sounds  
he had never heard before. He listened.  
Smoke rose from his ears, mouth, privates.  
He fell in a heap of ashes.  
His head rested like a dull marbie on top,  
glazed eyes looking up.

My left arm slammed the door. My head yelled:  
feed the cats when you get up,  
they're scratching at the window.  
They've knocked over your geranium.  
I went to gather up the parts of me.

# Ernestine's Insomnia or If Wrinkles were Her Greatest Worry

*Marlene Pearson*

"Don't sleep on your face," Ernestine's mother always said,  
"You'll get wrinkles."

Ernestine buried her face deep in the soft percale  
comforting, imagining gravedirt.

People said, "Think of something pleasant  
when you can't sleep—a meadow, count sheep."

Ernestine saw worms, counted them as they laced her eyelids  
leaving grit from wherever it was they came  
upon the red of her eyeballs.

A list of should's kept repeating like a taped recording  
in her head: Buy a black skirt, look "appropriate"  
for the divorce hearing. Call the lawyer,  
or was it the baker, the candlestickmaker, la, la, la—

Her doctor jumped the fence into her mind.  
She mumbled: I don't want to see you tomorrow either.  
I quit your army. Too much marching  
wrinkles my feet.

Instead of sheep, Ernestine heard her mother's worn-out words,  
"Don't talk to strangers" (but she does),  
"Lock your doors" (she doesn't),  
"Bar your windows before you go to sleep."  
Ernestine breaks bars with bare dreams  
if she ever gets there.

She remembered being small, the preacher warning,  
"Ask forgiveness nightly, all have sinned.  
You don't know what you did wrong? Your ignorance,  
refusal to admit, is sin enough to get you into the fires of hell."  
She stammered out his prayer and swallowed his communion—  
stale cracker and juice that stuck in her throat  
like the dried, hairy skin of an old man.  
She thought: Preachers' shoes always bend up at the toes.  
Wrinkled leather. Too much prayer.

Tonight, Ernestine tried sincerity:  
Pray for this sinner, oh lord—  
so I won't get wrinkles. She rolled over scrunching her face  
like a prune into the pillow and thanked the goose feathers  
for so much comfort.



*Nancy Rosenblum*

ELOISE KLEIN HEALY has published three books of poetry—*Building Some Changes* (Beyond Baroque Foundation), *A Packet Beating Like a Heart* (Books of a Feather Press) and *Ordinary Wisdom* (Paradise Press). She is a frequent contributor to the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* section, and the *New Woman Times and Feminist Review*, and her work appears in *Women Writers & Artists* (Books of a Feather Press, 1984). Her radio program on KPFK (90.7 FM) features interviews with women writers and publishers.

"The Retreat Master Talked About Guilt and I Listened" is reprinted from *A Packet Beating Like a Heart* and "You Must Change Your Life," which won honorable mention in the Alice Jackson Memorial Competition, is reprinted from *Electrum Magazine*.

Ms. Healy has taught at Immaculate Heart College, California School of Professional Psychology and The Woman's building in Los Angeles where she has also been an organizer of the Women's Writers Series. Currently, Ms. Healy teaches at CSUN and conducts private writing workshops.

# The Retreat Master Talked About Purity and I Listened

*Eloise Klein Healy*

I could not let myself know and the priest said  
well, yes, it is a sin but more than that  
it's a cheap imitation of something else  
but I could not let myself know  
the hot swelling was not guilt since by then  
remembering mouths and blind tongues in their dark touching  
made my whole body order itself to sit  
up very calmly and straight ahead  
look at the priest and not look  
right or left or it would seem to the others  
that I knew in a way I shouldn't know  
what he was talking about  
and knew more about guilt than I could say  
and could not say no to what I did.

Tongues, how kissing began standing then sitting  
with the top down and sea air and the kisses  
moving to the throat, the deep spot on the neck,  
the tongue there, and the priest in my mind  
with his tongue saying,  
we know what it's a cheap imitation of  
and the hand sliding from the wheel to my blouse,  
brushing my breast, touching my shoulder,  
I could not let myself know it or stop it,  
my breast where Jesus would have lain as a baby,  
the priest saying Jesus wanted us pure as a baby,  
that kissing a boy shouldn't make a girl feel different  
than kissing a telephone pole  
and I thought of the Blessed Mother  
and if her lips would chastely press that wood

but how a tongue could send words along wires  
connecting straight to that spot in my lap,  
felt it start with the tongue  
and scared as the bra slipped over my nipples,  
while under my hand, my hand under his hand  
pressing my hand, I could not get away,  
closed my eyes tighter, opened, my hand on hard cloth  
then curling hairs and what I had not seen,  
and him touching my leg and the priest saying  
it was my fault  
that this might happen if I kissed  
or held or let those feelings for a boy fool me.

So I could not let myself know I knew  
the warmth started first, then the wet he rubbed  
in the wet and I felt my body pressing me  
and the priest said this kind of touching  
was for married people only and I felt a married feeling  
as fingers moved in and out of me  
while I thought no all the time and could not let myself know  
in my body's hot lurch under a boy's fingers  
that I wanted that married feeling in my tongue,  
on my tongue a heavy flesh my mouth knew  
was no substitute for something else  
like the feeling I was not supposed to know spurting into a kleenex  
and because it was wrong never into me.



# You Must Change Your Life

from "The Torso of Apollo"  
-Rilke

*Eloise Klein Healy*

The stories say your animal  
will tell you what you must do.  
The tale from Nicaragua adds this:  
that life in the city is cleaned of the animal  
and you must go to the trees  
so your animal can tell you what to change.

When I write about trees  
I know I'm talking about love.

My animal is a tree  
and my trees are birds  
and my birds are animals  
who burst from their walking  
into a sky waiting for this transformation  
as if it had nothing else to do  
but receive.

Whenever I change my life  
I ask myself have I listened  
to the right breezes.  
They are the tongues of all tongues  
and the laughing enemies of all borders.

Have I listened enough  
beyond my first knowledge  
that my animal  
is the largest of plants?

# Eloise Klein Healy: An Interview

*Marlene Pearson*

**Northridge Review:** In your poem, "A Mile Out of Town" you said that as a child you were:

Gene Autry and Roy Rogers,  
A football player in white sandals, . . .  
A running bedraggled Pygmy in loose curls, . . .  
All of it beginning to be a poet.

When and how did the poet begin?

**Eloise Klein Healy:** Well I don't know that it happened all of a sudden in one day. But I was just talking to a friend of mine about this yesterday, another writer friend, and what we both came up with was that we really like words and that's why we are involved with writing in some way because basically, even beyond stories or even beyond poems, we like the fact that there are words, and with words you make up reality. When I was very small, my mother read to me all of the time. I think that it became a fact of my life that I knew that there was another reality that words dealt with. That has always been part of my existence, the fact that there is what you live and there is what you say about it, and then there is how you say it which then makes it another reality all together. Not that it isn't true. I'm not saying that it changes the reality, but I mean that when you start to make those decisions about what you will say and how you will say it, that transforms reality in certain ways, and makes it another kind of reality. I think that has always been developing in me since I was little, since I learned that words do that. Now some people learn that drawing does that, or painting does that or singing or playing a musical instrument. But for a poet it's definitely that words do that.

**NR:** What did your mother read to you when you were a child?

**EH:** Robert Louis Stevenson's, *A Child's Garden of Verses*. That's primarily what I remember. This was all before I was two years old. As soon as I could learn to read, I was off on my own reading. It was to me the greatest experience in life—

learning to read and learning to write. It was absolutely wonderful. I died to learn handwriting. That was my goal in life. It seemed like the most thrilling thing to be able to do, to do what was in those books. I was very disappointed when I went into the first grade and I found out that you didn't do handwriting until the second grade. I could see no reason to stay. I knew printing. Why sit there for a whole year while they did printing?

**NR:** You mentioned going through an experience then transforming it into words. How successful are you in changing words into a new reality?

**EH:** I think what I find happening is that even the best poem is not exactly what happened. And that's alright because I think there is no "exactly the way it happens" in the world. Just to remember an event alters it in some way because you don't have the whole thing going on. Your memory and your predisposition tend to want to know certain things more than others. You start to shape that experience in unique ways. I think that a poem is successful when there is some kind of a balance struck between what I thought I wanted to talk about and what I eventually talked about. I think that every poem is a compromise. There is nothing that is really pure rendering of an experience. It's not that way. It's always a little bit shaped. Sometimes it's even better. It's possible that the way I would say it gives another dimension to it. It makes it more understandable to another person. It puts a coloring on it that maybe wasn't apparent in the first place.

**NR:** How does the visual affect your writing, such as artwork or paintings?

**EH:** I have a lot of friends who are visual artists. I printed a couple of broad sheets of my poems, and involved in that is design, color choice of inks, the illustration. I've done a lot of photography, so I think that the visual element is really there all of the time. And I've worked with a lot of visual artists who wanted to put writing into their work so I think that there is quite a lot of crossover between the art forms. And maybe the way that we study them in school causes our arbitrary divisions to occur. But if you look at the lives of painters and writers, often painters write things and writers draw. James Thurber, for example, illustrated lots of things. Also, William Blake spent his whole life as a working artist. So it isn't that these art forms are really ever separate. It's the way that we deal with them that's separate. It separates us in a way that is totally unnecessary. In fact I think we see in our own time very

interesting resynthesizing in something like performance art in which people who are interested in theatre and in visual presentation and in writing take all those parts and put them back together and say "why can't one person make all of those things?" Why not? What's the big deal about it. You are visioning something, you are seeing something. Why can't you also deal with all of the forms that it might appear in? I would like to do that a lot more myself.

**NR:** How do you initiate a poem?

**EH:** I think that I just try and cause something. Then I see where it will go. That's one way of doing it. For example, the Artemis poems that I'm writing, I had an idea. But I didn't know what it was going to turn out to be. I only knew that I was interested in that goddess figure as she appeared in a lot of different cultures. Actually, I didn't start out with Artemis. I started out with Diana because her name and even the linguistic elements of her name come from an older time than the Roman time. As I started to research that, I thought well, instead of Diana what I really want to do is take a look at Artemis because I was interested in the huntress aspect—the solitary hunter. And then I started to do research on her and I began to understand why I had gone that way. It was because in my own life I was trying to find out what solitude meant. So there was something in there that was drawing me and making me be interested. So I caused myself to have something happen. I've done that a lot of times with certain projects where I have started and then I followed it. It's like you throw a path out in front of yourself and you don't quite know where you put it. Does that make sense?

**NR:** In order to accomplish that you must need time and space. Virginia Woolf said that a woman needs a room of her own in order to find this solitude you seem to be talking about. Once you mentioned that some women find the solitude to create in their cars. A lot of your poems make references to driving. Where is your room? Is it, sometimes, in your car?

**EH:** Going in between things has been often where I am. There is a lot of time spent in between. I think that is a time that a lot of poems in *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* tend to explore. I'll be thinking about something and the actual physical circumstances of my life are in an automobile. So the pressure of those two things together makes one be the metaphorical vehicle for the other one. I think that is proven then by what happens in *Ordinary Wisdom* because I'm out in a place where I'm totally in the country and I'm isolated from every body. I don't have electricity. The poems all sound like

they come out of a place like that. They're contemplative. They aren't fast. The language is very steady and smooth. Nothing is being piled up. There aren't a lot of consonants popping up against each other. The form is much more traditional. I really think that poets are very much creatures of place. Look at someone like Richard Hugo who was up in Montana writing. The whole story of his life is being worked out in country bars and places that have burned down and old towns and fish that he's caught and streams that he has waded in and long highways that he's driven on. Those places become what carry the message. I think that working in Los Angeles, you are going to have a lot of that in there. You can't help but have some cars in your life.

**NR:** When do you do most of your writing?

**EH:** Whenever I can. Sometimes I can get a day a week now, but that's pretty hard—to get a whole day. I took last summer off and wrote and that was great. I just had six or seven weeks of uninterrupted time in which all I had to do was wander around my house and do whatever I wanted. I didn't have to be anywhere. I didn't have to call anybody back because I turned on the answering machine and said I'm not really available much at all to anybody. And it was wonderful. Because I find out that when I have time, I do write. It's not that I have a writing block at the moment. It's that I have a work block. I have a lot of things that I have to do and I can't write as much as I want.

**NR:** What kind of influence has teaching had on your writing?

**EH:** Well, I think that I tend to want to be very clear. I've been teaching for twenty years as of next year. I understand how people understand things because I've taught lots of different kinds of brains. When I write a poem, it's really important to me that people understand me. I know that in some theoretical circles that is a kind of stupid notion—being understood in that way is not an important critical test to some people. I think it's not only because I have taught a lot, I think it is because when I was a kid I grew up in a restaurant. I learned that you deal with whoever comes in. Life is dealing with lots of different kinds of people—not just people who have had poetry classes, or not just people who have college educations, but just people. I don't think it's bad that my poetry is pretty much understood by people who don't know anything about poetry. In fact I kind of like the fact that if somebody reads my poetry he or she gets a notion that maybe they can understand it or maybe that even they could write something. There's a lot of elitism in what kind of audience you want to

aim for. I think that this is one of the things, particularly in America, that we should look at a little more in terms of the way we deal with art. We make art very far removed from most people's experience. I think that is an important experience for human beings to have— not just that they look at something, but that they would like to do it too. I think that the Olympics proved that on the level of sport. If you look at all of these wonderful, well-trained athletes then maybe the next time you go to the gym you have a feeling about why you do it.

**NR:** Did the Olympics have anything to do with your choice of Artemis?

**EH:** No, but I think that it did do something about the way I looked at the female athletes because I'm really interested with the Artemis figure in dealing with someone who is muscular, physical, solitary, a hunter who basically owns the woods. You know the Robert Frost poem asking whose woods are these? Those woods are Artemis' woods. There's no doubt about it.

**NR:** Did you work with Judy Grahn in the idea of myth?

**EH:** She used to be my neighbor. She lived down the street from me for about a year. Now, she is my friend although she lives in the Bay area. We don't see each other as much but we talk on the phone pretty regularly. I have a very good relationship with her, not only as a friend but as a poet. We do talk about things that relate to poetry—how we find things out or what we think is important to be doing. It's funny, it's not like some snazzy salon talk. It's like going down the road or going to the airport, or going to the grocery store. It's just normal talk about what is it that you do or what did you read. She's a very generous person. In fact, most of the people that I know who are poets are extremely generous. She knows that I'm working on Artemis so she gave me some references in a book that she has just written. She said I should look into these two people; they are probably Artemis figures. I'm looking for a certain thing for her that she wants to know. My job is to try to find a certain book for her because Judy needs that footnote. Those kinds of connections are regular daily life connections and they are also quite marvelous.

**NR:** Judy Grahn has been influenced by Adrienne Rich. Has the "common language" theme influenced your writing?

**EH:** Oh yes. I don't think that there is any way that if you are a woman writing these days that you can avoid the issue. And if you do avoid the issue, I think it is probably bad for you

because it is an issue in the world. It's as real as saying that we have problems with nuclear war. It's something that's here, that's been raised, the power ratio between men and women is, and has been, terribly inequitable, and that has done something to form the way both men and women are. It hasn't been good for either side. If you don't address that as an issue in your work in some way, I don't know what world you are in. I think that I have often felt the pressure of some of the topics that other women poets have written about when I have had nothing to say about those topics, or I haven't known what I thought and I would start to explore it. In a bad way I would feel that I had a responsibility to deal with that topic along similar lines. That can be pretty restrictive. I know that I've said that you have to deal with these issues, but I want to make a fine distinction. It gets to be restrictive when I think that I have to deal with the issue in the same way they all did. What if I even have a different attitude? Because there is such a thing in the movement as being politically correct. You say "PC" to a practicing feminist and she's going to know what you're talking about. There have been lots of politically correct things to do and lots of politically incorrect things to do—things to say, things to think, things to wear, places to be. It's like any other movement, it's no different. So for a while there were lots of poems about moons. I thought what in hell do I know about the moon? So I started, quite fortuitously, living according to the moon instead of the calendar. I did that for a while. I lived from full moon to full moon, and I tried not to think of whether it was the first week of the month or the second week of the month. In fact I just got a moon calendar as a present for next year. So I think maybe I'll go back on the "moon calendar" and see what that's about. It's a very different way of structuring your time. It has an actual, physical affect on the way you think or feel.

**NR:** Do you feel a pressure to deal with feminist topics?

**EH:** Just like anybody else there have been things that I haven't particularly wanted to think about, and then there is that added thing of well, maybe I'm going to have to write about this. I don't think a consciousness change ever stops, and once you learn something it gradually leads you to understand that you have to learn something else as well. There have been so many wonderful books that have come out by women poets in the last ten years that it has just been a barrage of things to deal with. There are people who are standing up and saying "Think about this!" It's not always easy to then respond and say, okay I'll think about that and I'll

try to give you something back about that. It's tough. But I feel that I had to do a tremendous amount of reaching and stripping stuff away just to respond. Whether or not I have been successful in my poems, I don't know. I can't always say that, but just to even have that stuff working, it may not even show up in a poem yet. I don't know. I really believe in an archeology of poetry. So many things are in layers and even to get to where you want to go, you might have to write thirty layers down to the thing that you really want to talk about. So I think that these topics have pushed me through some layers that I had to go into.

**NR:** I noticed in *Ordinary Wisdom* that you picked Oriental characters which then initiated a poem for you. Do you still look for things to initiate your writing?

**EH:** With the project that I'm working on, the Artemis poems, I haven't had to worry too much about what I'm going to write about. I've had things that have caused me to write about certain subjects. Now I have a backlog of topics that I have started for myself that I have never gotten a chance to finish. I think that I said at my last reading that I was doing an exploration of my family, where they had come from, what kind of cultural heritage I had being raised as a white person in America. And it opened up to me after starting to do it, actually going to my parent's house with a tape recorder and asking about things and talking about people who I remembered but, being a child, not knowing much about those people. So I had my impressions and my parents knew things. I was also trying to find out a lot about my grandparents and my great grandparents. I didn't have a lot of familiarity with some of them. So I have all of that other stuff yet that I haven't even gotten finished. I don't know if I'll ever get to even work on it a lot. But I'm not feeling lost for topics currently.

**NR:** There is a broad divergence of form and content in your two latest books, *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* and *Ordinary Wisdom*. How do you account for this?

**EH:** In the first place, *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* was written largely in Los Angeles, a major urban area. At that time in my life I was streaking around everywhere. I had a lot of turmoil going on. And I think that is very apparent. It's a book about a lot of disappointments in a way. It was also a book that was put together as a collection of poems. It was not written according to a plan. It came out of sixty some pages and the script was originally about twice that large. So these



poems came together because the publishers and I decided that these poems had some relationship with each other in that way. They represented a person in an urban situation doing certain things, and dealing with certain issues.

**NR:** And not according to chronology.

**EH:** No, they are not chronological. It's how they each sit with each other. The other book, *Ordinary Wisdom* was written in a six week period of time. I was in a totally rural situation. I had a plan that I wanted to follow. I had definite boundaries of what was going to be in there. Also, my life was very different although I don't think that the turmoil I was going through in my life when that book was written is evident. I think, instead, that sounds like it's coming from a person who has really got a lot of things settled, though I didn't feel that. I was almost on the way to having some stuff settled, but probably I knew that it was settled unconsciously. That's why those two books are so different. They were made out of totally different cloth.

**NR:** You have near the center of *Ordinary Wisdom*, a poem, "Making a Sacrifice." This was a disquieting poem to me.

**EH:** Yes. When I was down there, one of the things on my mind was prayer. I don't know why. I was thinking about the way people pray and why they do it. And that's a poem that is supposed to encapsulate everything. But it's a big job for one little poem. I don't even know if it gets anywhere near it, but I was thinking more about the wilder, primitive aspects of prayer in which you take something that is real important to you and you kill it for somebody else. That's very far removed from the kind of namby-pamby prayers that we now have in most of our religions. Like that poem says, "Prayers are easier/ they don't splurt blood all over the bushes/ and the stone steps." I was reading a lot about religions that used animal sacrifice. I was thinking about how some forms of prayer are so violent and immediate. You can look at them and you can see what they're about. I think that the prayers we have are unclear. You don't know what they are about. They don't say anything.

**NR:** In your poem, "Dear Friend, My Priest," the speaker says, "You belong to a small god." What part does religion play in your poetry?

**EH:** It plays a big part. I think it's one of those pressures in one's life to behave in certain ways. I went to Catholic school every year of my life but one. I went to grammar school, high school, college, and graduate school. I have a theology

minor. I know a lot about religion. I even, in my senior year, considered going into a religious order. I also suffered a great disappointment in the whole set-up. I found that there's a big difference between what the church says and what it does. And I, for one, am not going to believe it anymore. So my involvement with institutional religion ended at that point. Now, this is not to say that I don't have a lot of spiritual interests. I do have a lot of those kinds of interests, but I have felt that the religion from my childhood was very repressive, very much directed toward building a complacency and a rote religious feeling. I just think that's not what I want to do with any kind of spirituality that I have.

**NR:** I see a meditative quality in *Ordinary Wisdom*. Does Eastern religion play a role in your thinking?

**EH:** Yes, I have read a lot of stuff about Eastern religion. I have had many friends who have been involved in various meditative mediums. I have some other friends who have been involved in Buddhist practices. I have taken Aikido which is a martial art that's very spiritual and a totally non-violent martial art. It has a lot to do with getting things in the universe into a proper relationship. You put forces into balance. I think that's a lot more interesting way to talk about religion. I've read a lot of Chinese poetry, Japanese poetry, and I'm sure that has had an influence.

**NR:** Was that part of your plan in *Ordinary Wisdom* since you were using the Chinese ideograms.

**EH:** I made a plan to do it, then I had to figure out how to do it. Actually I kind of did it backwards. I went to China after I wrote that book. I don't always do things sequentially.

**NR:** Do the poems make their own form?

**EH:** Yes. For example, in *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* the lines are really long, the poetry is really dense. If you look at it on the page it almost looks like it's prose. At that point I was just trying to run real long lines out because I had a lot to say and it was rushing out even though it wasn't being written in a rush. A couple of those poems in there took almost a year, but they look like someone just went "bam, bam, bam, bam." But it's not true. Those lines got constructed word by word by word. But when I read them what I wanted them to sound like was this big rush of emotion, energy or craziness. Then there have been times when I really wanted to write little tiny skinny poems. But for me that's the rarest thing of all. I basically don't like little skinny things.

**NR:** So it's very important to you how a poem looks?

**EH:** Yes. And I also don't like to indent much. I always want to go right over to that left margin for some reason. I don't know why it is but I find that very few of my poems have anything that's kind of in the middle, then over at the edge, then back in the middle.

**NR:** Do you feel that poetry is a verbal art form or a written art form?

**EH:** Well, I really tend to think of poetry as verbal most of the time. I tend to think of the sound effect of poems. That's what I think of first. Then what it looks like on the page is second. That's another distinguishing factor between *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* and *Ordinary Wisdom*. I have always had a feeling that *Ordinary Wisdom* is a book that's meant to be read by the reader and not necessarily heard. Even when the book first came out, I didn't like to read it aloud at readings. I felt that they were quieter and tinier and more vulnerable and it was almost as though they shouldn't be so loud. But I really believe in my own life as a poet that I like to go out and read poems. I always find that I do want to go out and I do want to take things to where people are. I do want people to hear. I think that is another factor in why I like to write things that are fairly clear. I would like people to be able to understand it when they hear it. That will set me up for judgement because many people don't feel that way. That might make a poem much too easy and therefore it's kind of like a throw away poem. My answer to that is that any poem I take out to a reading, I also know that if someone reads it and starts to look into it they are going to find more than just that top level.

**NR:** Do you consciously strive for understatement?

**EH:** No. I just consciously strive to tell the truth about a situation.

**NR:** Do you work at the typewriter?

**EH:** Very rarely. But with these Artemis pieces, they've all been done on a typewriter. I wrote the first one in pencil. I was exercising and this idea came into my head and I thought, Oh God, I've got to stop exercising and write this thing down. I really didn't want to. I wanted to finish my exercising, then I wanted to go work. But then I thought oh no, I'd better go do it. So I got up and wrote some of it down, then went back to do some more sit ups. Finally I thought, no more exercising for today. I went downstairs and put some paper in the typewriter

and I did five pages. I just stayed there for the next three hours. Sometimes I'd just sit around, look out the window, then write some more. Finally, after four hours I decided that I just had to stop. But I very rarely do that; so that too is a new feeling and I don't know where that comes from.

**NR:** Virginia Woolf said she needed quiet during periods of writing so the character could live. Does a fictional character live with you through the day? How does she assume herself?

**EH:** Sometimes I try and say to myself what's going on right now to get a feeling for it. I'm trying to let myself know that I really don't know what's happening but that I like it. I try to leave it alone to the degree that I don't think I have to start making it be something. I pay attention to the fact that I have an idea, that I know what it's about and I don't push it. At the same time I tell myself to work on it, which is different. Don't push it, but work on it.

**NR:** Do things happen in you that change your poetry or are you changed from looking at your poetry?

**EH:** Both of those things have happened. I have written stuff that I didn't know what in the world it was about, then after I read it I thought, my goodness, look what I have said, look what I have been thinking about and working on in myself. What's this? And other times it has been the opposite way. I think that I've experienced both ways. I don't necessarily prefer one over the other. I'm willing to take whatever I can get.

**NR:** In your Artemis poems, did you do extensive research, and if so, where?

**EH:** There are certain dictionaries of gods and goddesses. Also, I pay attention to art. I really want to look at Greek vases and statuary and get a sense of what Artemis was wearing, who was with her. Beside dogs; what other animals are associated with Artemis? These kinds of things are what concern me. I talk to people and ask, "What do you know about Artemis?" I interview people. I ask, "What do you think about hunting? What do you think you are hunting?" Things like that. It doesn't really matter where I get my information. Often one book will lead to another. It's kind of like doing a term paper only I don't have to keep myself within any boundaries. There's as much fortuitous getting off the path as there is staying on it. I just try to go.

**NR:** You mention dogs in several of your poems as in "A Mile

Out of Town": "There was always a half-breed dog/ to follow me home." Was there really a mongrel that followed you home when you were a child as you write about in your poems?

**EH:** I always had dogs that were made out of who knows what because I lived in a farming community, and people did not have dogs as pets as much as they had dogs that worked on the farm either to help bring the cows in or to guard the property. Cats were not pets. They were there to deal with the rodent population in the corn bins. Where I come from the animals worked. A purebred dog wouldn't have a place in this kind of community because it couldn't work. You have to have animals that are sturdy and hefty and can be out in the cold weather. That is where I learned about dogs. I just like the way dogs approach life. They tend to be kind of relaxed in most instances. They do their job as dogs, but they like to hang around a lot. They also have an interesting approach to going places. They go right where their noses go. I think that maybe that's what I try to do when I get myself loose enough to write poetry. What's interesting to me is to just put my nose down to where the scent is and just go.

**NR:** Do you write fiction at all?

**EH:** I'm starting to. I didn't think I was old enough to write fiction for a long time. And now, I think that I am old enough.

**NR:** Why didn't you think that you were old enough?

**EH:** I hadn't lived enough. I hadn't lived enough ways. I had been a good Catholic girl for such a long time, and I had to find other ways. I had to be able to look at other people and really look at them. I couldn't look at them with my ideas of what they were doing but just look at them. So, in learning to do that, I'm going to be writing some fiction. I did a little bit this summer. I made a commitment to myself that I was going to at least start and finish one story. So I did that this summer and I sent it out to a couple of friends of mine and I'm waiting to get it back, and they are going to tell me what they think. Then I'll probably make revisions on it. I have another story in mind, but I think I haven't learned enough about it yet. In order to write about stories I have to learn about them from writing them and not from what I know about them and how they are *supposed* to be. The first story that I wrote this summer was in a very traditional format. There were people and they do something and then they do other things and then there is a change in them. They do something else. And then it's over. But the next thing that I would like to write is not like that at all.

In fact I think it's probably much more like a long prose poem. It's going to be called "Kissing." I was inspired at the Everly Brothers concert that I went to this summer when I realized that tons of their songs are about that.

**NR:** You wrote another poem with a humorous tone involving another level of religion with kissing, "The Retreat Master Talked about Purity and I Listened." Could you tell us about that?

**EH:** That is a deadly serious poem. I mean, I know it's funny. I meant it to be funny. But at the same time it's really, to me, one of the most serious poems I've done in terms of really female experience, and also, the other issue that's in there that's always an important issue to me is what do I know that I know I'm not supposed to? I think that's a real issue for women. What do I know that I'm not supposed to know? And I know that I know it when I'm not supposed to know it.

**NR:** Don't those kind of things awaken from poem to poem?

**EH:** Yes, and slugging it out through your life, really. I think it comes in there first. It's just hard to tell one's self the truth. There are so many things that we are trained to believe that we are not supposed to see. We know we are not supposed to know them. We see them, we know them, we feel them, but they aren't supposed to fit into our frameworks, so we make them not fit into our framework. And then, I think, when you get your consciousness raised about something, suddenly all of those old things that you have stuck somewhere, jump out. And then comes the price of paying for putting them away where they didn't belong. Everything in my religious training was aimed at convincing me and all of my contemporaries that women were to be held responsible for any sexual transgressions that men committed. That's what that poem was about, that no matter what happened, because I was the girl, I was going to be responsible, and the second part of that was I was not supposed to feel anything that I was feeling, and if I did feel it, I was supposed to pretend that I didn't know it. And it seems to me, that with that kind of thinking, how can you be responsible for anything because it is a double bind. You're not supposed to do something, but in order not to do it, you've got to know it, but you're not supposed to know it. So how in the hell are you supposed to figure out what you're going to do? That's like taking somebody by the throat and literally choking them to death. It doesn't pay any respect to feelings—only to some line that gets drawn somewhere, and you aren't supposed to even know that there is a line drawn.

At the same time you're more responsible for where the line is. So that's why I think that poem is to me a very serious one in its intent.

**NR:** In an artistic sense, do you find the female experience different from the male experience?

**EH:** I think that it's different, very different. I think there's even a difference in female experiences from woman to woman. I think that if you look at the kind of writing that women have been doing in the last ten years, one thing that's going to pop up immediately is that there is a difference in female experience between lesbian poets and straight women poets in terms of what kinds of topics each group may feel important to deal with, such as differences in language usage, in relation to the topics which are covered, different attitudes toward any number of things. Take a look at Adrienne Rich's poetry in the development of her work and in the way her topics are moved around. Then compare her with somebody like Denise Levertov. Those two women are having very different experiences of the world as women. And, in that case, it has to do with sexual orientation in some ways. You can't ignore that fact. Or look at Judy Grahn's work. She is bringing up a different set of topics. So I think that those experiences are different. I don't feel that it is a bad thing that men and women have different experiences. I think that it is a bad thing if we try to say all writers have the same experiences and that there's no difference.

**NR:** How do you feel about literary criticism? Do you write literary criticism yourself?

**EH:** Well, I do some book reviewing which I don't necessarily call literary criticism, because the things I write for the *L.A. Times* are really just book reviewing. It's not going into very much depth about where this book fits in the world of literature. It's mainly a synopsis of the book and a way of telling the reader whether he or she should buy it. I have done some writing for the newspaper that comes out of New York called *The New Women's Times and Feminist Review*, and in that instance I had an opportunity to do a little bit more in depth study. And last year I did something for a program at Cal State Long Beach which was about feminist imagery in the last ten years in relation to spatial dimensions. It's another one of those areas that I'd like to do more of, but when?

**NR:** You mentioned that in *A Packet Beating Like A Heart* you included about half of the poems that you originally intended.

Where's the other half, and have they been published?

**EH:** You know that's a real question that I've been thinking about lately. Where are those poems? I actually have a pretty good idea of where they are. There's one poem that didn't get published which was totally accidental. We sent it out to be reset because the typesetter had set it wrong. The typesetter never sent it back and we didn't notice it until the book was already published. But I know that it had already been published in a magazine. Some of those poems were published in other places, but I don't have much energy to get them together because it seems to me that that's over. That period of time is over. The energy that I have, and the time that I have are not enough to do that kind of project. Maybe if I'm good enough, someone can do that when I'm dead. It's not something that is on my mind, thinking about what will happen after I'm dead. I'm mainly thinking about when I'm awake. That's my biggest concern.

**NR:** When you write a poem that you like, do you usually hold it for a collection or do you send it out to be published.

**EH:** I send them out. I try to look around and find someplace that might like it. I've got some stuff out in the mail right now, and I've just had some poems accepted for an anthology that will be published soon. In fact, I'm now revising some of those pieces. I don't send out as much as I should. It takes time, so there's the factor of not having time enough. Sometimes, if I have a day in the week to write, I will take the day to write rather than type up copies of poems and package them up and make a submission. That's one of the reasons that I just bought a computer. I want to get all of my poems on a computer so that when it comes time to make a submission I can cut down the steps of typing up the poem new or go to the xerox shop to get it done. It will take me some time to get the poems on the computer, but I think that in the long run it's going to make me feel better about submitting poems. We'll see. That's my plan.

**NR:** Barbara Walters once asked in one of her interviews, "If you were a tree, what kind of tree would you be?" How would you respond to that question?

**EH:** It's interesting that you asked me that because my poems are filled with trees. One of my poems says that when I write about trees I know that I'm talking about love. To me, trees and forests and branches and leaves are somehow what love is metaphorically. I think that trees are the greatest



things in the world. I, at one time, had an extremely close relationship with an Italian Cypress at Immaculate Heart College. It was near the library steps. That tree and I were friends. And even now, on my way to school, I take a certain way to come here because I can drive through a little tree farm and I think that it is just an amazing feeling to be able to drive through the tree farm. There are a lot of little trees and they are all going to be planted someplace, and I like that a lot. In fact, they were planting different trees on campus this year; I wish I would have been able to go and see that. I plan to plant some trees this winter. Trees are as much above as below, and I really like that idea. Poems are like that too. Love is like that. If I were going to be any tree right now, I think I'm still interested in Cypress trees.



*Greg Boyd*

# Beans

*Michael Craig*

Jack dreamed  
that at the marketplace  
he traded in his cow  
for a briefcase and  
business suit,  
and that he climbed a  
stalk of steel and concrete  
and fought with a giant that  
would have ground him into  
dust if he had slipped  
a step climbing.  
He dreamed of getting  
his ultimate goose and  
of being disillusioned  
when he found that it  
was just a nervous stomach  
and Tums.

Jack awoke drenched  
in a cold sweat.  
And at daybreak he took his  
cow to the marketplace and  
traded it for  
some beans.

# Janene Sixteen

*Cathy Comenas*

The two of us off  
the side of the road  
marina del rays rocky coastline

The first minutes of silence  
then crashing of champagne  
against our brains

We talk about our lives  
Janene sixteen wanting to be  
twenty five  
eyes meet, lips linger tasting  
of ocean and champagne

I like men too  
she tells me  
my hand barely holds me up  
men are fleas that bite me  
when I lie on the sand

We giggle as we leave love in mid air  
The bottle of champagne comfortable  
in her hand  
I watch the rippling waves beneath  
Janene sixteen

Falling in my lap  
she says lets go someplace warm

# Home

for gary

*Cathy Comenas*

I

When night enters  
the Cable Car Hotel  
he goes to some club  
where the smell of  
whiskey, sex in the bathroom  
hits him in a black leather glove  
the music beats him up

II

Red spiked hair dusted with sand, salt  
a cross hangs from his ear  
cold night eats through black leather  
blue thin skin shakes

He waits for slow death  
in a baggie of white powder  
his arms empty holes

Waves pop below pier 31  
faint music cuts thick air  
as fog locks him in the parking lot

III

Dirty clothes piled in the closet,  
a sack of rotten potatoes

Music from live nudes acting out bondage  
on stage nextdoor

He sits in the middle of the room  
poking a bent needle into a blue, black hole

The sun creeps up over the city  
he throws up in the sink  
then lays down

# Womb Thirst

*Virginia Webster*

They come here in afternoons dangling children  
gathering on benches, watching the swift arch of swings  
and the circle of merri-go-rounds (and around).

I wonder at the sadness of playground geometry  
calculating the diameter of circles like

One of them, round with a child  
pushing from her center to soft edges:  
Complacent mothers smiling on park benches.

When I come here to watch,  
broodmares, sure-footed dumbness, I think.  
Usually I sit alone.

None playing out there is mine.

Like me, an empty swing seems out of place  
wishing to push from its steep angle  
sky to ground, jealous of the rhythms  
from legs pumping on either side.

So I saddle myself into the vacant space  
while collecting the curious gaze of mothers  
unsure of the communion: playground swing and woman.

Then I kick my legs until I've locked rhythm  
with the children on either side.  
A rush of air marks the radius of my arc

A child asks, "Will you play with us today?"

# A Death at Sea

*Virginia Webster*

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

God perhaps.  
I'm whispering to you  
as I tread the edge  
of a wind chiseled face,  
enclosed in what seems the  
crescent frown of your mouth  
disguised as the ocean horizon.  
And I ask, quite simply, why?

Waiting for reply  
I listen to a dead sea gull  
black and grey  
embedded in beach sand,  
laced with the heavy breath  
of wind tossing a white  
pinion feather jarred loose  
no doubt from its death rattle.

I hold the bird to my ear  
like a sea shell,  
wondering if the answer will  
echo over the cardboard matter,  
stiff with the black odor of decay.  
A long ray of sunlight  
is trapped in the shriveled orb of eye  
and I wait in dumb wonder.  
Nothing echoes except the dull pulse of waves  
in tired repetition of beginning to end.



Another gull hovers above me  
circling in the trap of flight  
calling out a sound, a bird caw  
that seems nothing more  
than the question I have asked.  
The answer spirals from earth to sky  
from the gull I hold  
to the one who flies.

So I decide the better tomb  
walking step over step to  
the edge of sea madness.  
I drop the bird into the white fringe of ocean  
rolling with the ebb of water stroking earth.  
The pinion feather secure  
now in my desperate grasp,  
salvaged from what the grave has swallowed  
is a smooth finger  
with which I stroke my breast  
as I open my legs to the  
lapping tongue of tide.  
A tempered kiss  
which will close the stars around me  
is wet upon my thigh.

# Boston Graveyard

*Virginia Webster*

The dead nest here, earth shadowed  
stirring only for the chatter of squirrels  
visiting from the Common.  
It's the first thing you feel  
along Beacon Street: graveyard stillness.  
Silence is a cap over city concrete,  
sky long buildings evaporate into tombstones  
etched with skulls and faces.  
Sitting among them I stare;  
a progression of grey markers laced with shadows  
of black spires from the graveyard gate;  
onward to the moving outline of cars  
beneath a rough edged horizon.  
Squirrels come here to burrow  
in wrinkled leaves. Pigeons coo.  
A girl traces the face of an angel  
from a tilted stone.  
Later we walk out together.  
She shows me the charcoal rubbing.  
"He seemed so sad to be looking away" she said.  
"Maybe now he can see outside."  
She turns the angel to the city  
holding him into grey light.  
I tell her out there is our world,  
Here we can only visit death.  
"Let him visit life," she says. Letting go  
Thin paper catches wind  
a tombstone rising in light.



*David Blumenkrantz*

# Saxophone

*Brian Skinner*

In a dry season  
In a dry city  
Under the silence  
    of dry  
whitewashed skies,  
    we listen  
for the bubbling  
    of the saxophone.

In a soundless place  
In a desert  
    that glares  
In a desert  
    that waits,  
its mouth is a cool  
fountain gushing;  
we close our eyes  
    and wash  
our ears in the soft  
swirling waters  
of its song.

On a dead night  
Under dead stars  
we lie in the sand  
    and dream  
of underwater worlds  
wild and symphonic  
beneath us, and listen  
for the bubbling  
    of the saxophone.

# Casting Stones

*Ron Kolodney*

if he should wait until the water almost reached his toes or wait until it was sucked back into a hollow wave, far away, but still, if he could throw that far he would have a greater surface to throw on. He stuck a hand in his pocket and the objects clacked within. Clickety-clack, like skeleton teeth and then a wave boomed . . . then the hiss over sand, the impending hiss; clickety-clack, boom, hiss, if, his bloodless hand clenched the smooth round moist stone, hot with friction. The stone is anger. No—the arm about to throw the stone is anger. No—the object receiving the action of the arm throwing the stone is anger. Ahhh . . . the face in the ocean, foam-born, mutil . . . mutated seaweed hair changed with the ebb, the face of the wave poised in the clickety-clack and boom, gone, then the hiss, slithering deception.

He gazed at the pier to the left. The half pier. He gazed at the half pier. It had been a whole. Not it was a half, less than half. How far it had penetrated the ocean before he could not remember. But now it sticks out here. Maybe it had always stuck out there. If he couldn't remember. Maybe it's still whole. Ahhh, but the cliff. It retreats. Part of the path had slid into the ravine. He had seen that. There was a definite boundary of space now empty which had been occupied, where there had been a contiguous black top path between the now jagged edges of the two black top paths sundered by the receding cliff. Ahhh, he thought, then I don't always deceive myself.

The bottom of his trousers were rolled even though he avoided the cold and dirty water. But just in case. Clickety-clack, he dropped the first stone back into his pocket. He felt through the lint and loose threads and chose another. The other didn't feel right. The weight and the way it sat between the crook of his two first fingers. It didn't feel right. It couldn't feel right. The feeling was good for a moment, but then it was gone, and he couldn't take any chances. Not when casting stones. He hefted the other one, round and smooth also, but a little flatter. Less weight. It would skip more, but he would have to keep it low. Under any drafts. He wouldn't throw it

directly into the water, but at an angle to obtain more surface area.

He slid a moist hand over the greasy bald spot on his head. Boom. Twenty years and not to know. All of a sudden and then hissssss . . . to have the feeling, and then gone.

An old man scuffled along the ridge of the sand, his metal detector swaying back and forth like a blind man's cane. His trousers were rolled up too. The bald man turned, hoping he would not be noticed. The old man stopped parallel to the bald man, between the cliff and the bald man who was between the ocean and the old man. Then it was the cliff, the old man, the bald man, and the ocean respectively from east to west, suspended in a mute line. The old man laid his metal contraption down and carefully slid down the bank to the fading line marking sea and sand.

"Cast a stone with me." The old man's voice rang hard and brittle. Demanding.

The bald man restrained the "what?" that automatically sprang to his tongue. Instead he waved a deprecatory hand. The old man stood adamant. "Goddammit, I saw you weighing the damn thing in your hand. Now cast one damn stone with me."

The bald man cowered as the old man's acumen stabbed him. He jerked his hand out of his pocket. Clickety-clack, like the sound they had made shooting marbles over the cold kitchen tiles. "I don't want to. Leave me alone," but his voice was hesitant. Indecisive.

"You can't go around casting stones by yourself. It's not right, especially at your age. People will think you're crazy." The old man circled the area scavenger like, stooping to inspect stones, discarding some and placing others in his pockets. A jogger approached along the edges of the strand, sweat pants and a white shirt. The bald man noticed that her breasts bounced erratically. Long young hair was blown back by the gentle ocean breeze. Her gait was strained and rhythmic, one foot placed precisely in front of the other, equally distanced. Premeditated. He watched as she passed by.

"Jail bait." The old man shuffled back, clickety-clack scrape went the stones in his hand and pocket. The bald man felt assaulted. Damn old man, he thought. Get out of my head, out of my sight. Don't want to see you, don't want to see . . . the old man tested a stone. It slapped into the face of a small wave, there was a sucking sound and nothing. The old man sat down reflectively on a mound of sand. "Need more wrist. Gotta get lower too." Pause. "The back doesn't bend like it used to, though, hell no." He heaved himself up with a groan

and ambled closer to the water for a better throw. The splayed foam flowed over his toes, just one good throw before . . . a wave broke which spread a smooth green and white-veined carpet; the old man, tensed and stooped, waited with his arm cocked back and his wrist curled, waiting for the moment when the moving water was at its apex, that point in time when it doesn't move forward or backward, when the line running unimpeded from past to future to beyond is held in abeyance. Then like a coiled snake his arm flicked out. There were two long skips and then three intervals of shorter skips before the stone vanished. The old man shouted, "Goddammit! Must have skipped ten times! Can you beat that boy? Eh?"

The bald man was perturbed by the old man's petulance. Grey bristles stood out as his flushed face wrinkled contemptuously. "Five times."

"Speak up boy."

"It only skipped five times. I was counting. I saw it."

"What skipped five times?"

"The damn stone. You know what I'm talking about."

The old man returned to his mound. "You're blind. You didn't see those five little skips at the end." But he gave a conciliatory grunt. "Go ahead, it's your turn." Imbued in his placid tone was a nuance of fatalism.

The bald man still grasped the smooth round stone in his hand. This one felt good. He thought it would do the trick, if he could only, boom . . . twenty years, he thought, till death did us part, the feeling there and gone, the face in the wave born of foam and fecundated by the great emasculation now boom. For what, for who did I linger and stretch it out so thinly? Why the masquerade? Was it because of that solitary vision of emptiness, deathly emptiness. Fear of being alone, until something better would come along . . .

The jogger returned after turning back at the pier. He stared again while his muscles rippled in expectation of the throw. He waited as the erratic bounce moved closer, he crouched, one eye on the water's fluctuations, one on the grey sweat pants and shirt, arm cocked back . . .

"Hold on boy." The old man waddled toward him, his eyebrows furrowed and his throat bringing up phlegm. "Let me have a look at that stone."

The bald man's face flushed again, but the stone was perched obsequiously on his moist palm. The old man snatched it and inspected it like it was a relic.

"Damn lake stone."

"What?"

"Throwing a damn lake stone. Look at it. You didn't find it here," he accused. "You can't use it."

"I never said I found it here. Now what the hell—"

"Use another stone."

It's futile thought the bald man. "Screw it. I don't want to play anymore." He suddenly remembered the jogger and scanned the crooked shoreline earnestly, but she was gone, damn it, gone she was.

The old man still held the stone, turning it over. "Where'd you get this from?"

The bald man squatted on the old man's mound of sand and placed his hands in his pockets, clickety-clack. His head was bowed reflectively. "The pond."

"The what?"

"The damn pond! I have—had a pond in the backyard, and a jacuzzi, and a piano, and three bathrooms. Now go away old man."

The old man grumbled and spat. "Can't play with lake stones anyway. Not if that's all you have, or had," he added emphatically while ascending the bank. He pouted and abjectly scooped up his metal contraption.

The bald man stared at the curved, receding figure. He felt a tightness in his throat which wanted to express itself in desperation. He had a question lingering on his mind's edge that he didn't want the old man to misinterpret as being sarcastic or contemptuous, so he called placatingly to the stooped figure, the metal disc waving back and forth like a pendulum. "Have you found it yet, old man?"

The old man whipped around with greater celerity than his ancient, shrivelled body should have had the potential for. His cheeks were drawn in, his eyes sunken. He pointed down to the sand. "It's under there, waiting, boy."

Clickety-clack, boom, hiss, he gazed at the setting sun as the breeze picked up and white caps decorated the wave crests. Clickety-clack. He realized now the old man had kept one of the stones. Boom, he wondered if he should wait until the water almost reached hissssssss . . .



Northridge Review is the literary magazine of California State University, Northridge. Published each semester, it contains poems, short fiction, essays, drama, and reviews by students and alumni. This issue includes the works of:

Robert Bailey	Sue Langland
Richard Coleman	Doug Lawrence
Cathy Comenas	Dave Louapre
Michael Craig	Marlene Pearson
Heidi R. Good	Brian Skinner
Murray Harreschou	Jeannette Svoboda
Wes Hempel	Laura Webster
Ron Kolodney	Virginia Webster

The Northridge Review is also pleased to present an interview with poet, Eloise Klein Healy, author of *Building Some Changes*, *A Packet Beating Like a Heart*, and *Ordinary Wisdom*. Ms. Healy teaches at CSUN and has been and organizer of the Women's Writers Series and private writing workshops. She also reviews books for the *L.A. Times Book Review* section and is a frequent contributor in the *New Woman Times and Feminist Review*.