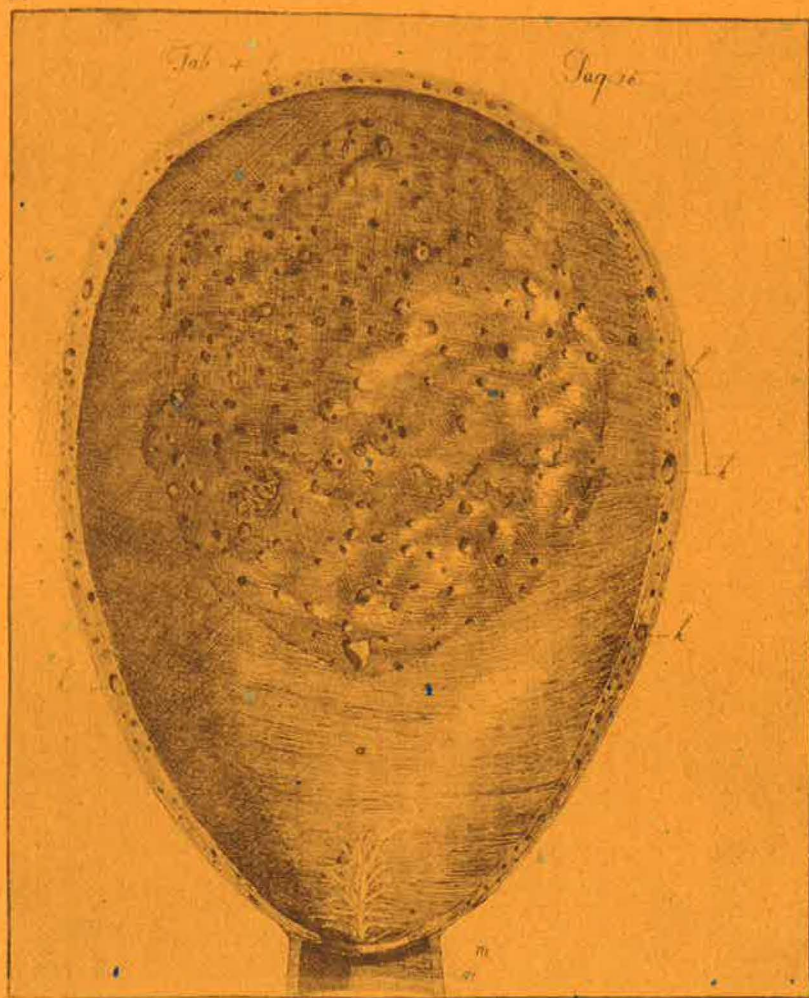


Pl. 4



Northridge Review

Special thanks to:

Nancy Thompson, Nancy Bernstein, Karen Castillo, Jennifer Elliot, Andrea Mascola, Josephine Kwok, Cousin Carol, John Nitch, Selve Tasci aka: Sas, mom, pop, saman, max, gilmore street kitty posse, odie, Alfonsín, Jason VanWinkle, Bob Meyer and for her knowldge, patience, dedication and inspiration, Dr. Katharine Haake.

editors' notes

artifact

This is an artifact of sorts. Found in the desert. Floating like a fossil in a bubble in a vacuum in the air under sand.

context

We value purity too much to look at process. We never look at sticky gears or bones that hold these veins together for this heart. We don't believe in wakes, destinations, the ocean we float on. We ignore weather-digested lighthouses and hoarse throat foghorns. A stork lands on our mast with a package and we sail on with one more product in our storage.

process

Doors were not unlocked and opened and closed and locked. A ship without a rudder. Magic. No permission was asked for, granted or denied. No one was treated like children and nobody acted like robots. Not a bureaucracy; a family. There were no orgasms. Water never broke. It was. The Stork flew down with presents flew back into the clouds aware of our faith in its return. Five hundred copies tired beak. Just like these buildings and the keys and the locks and the doors. Like the money. The ship will float until the hand that feeds us the salt-water bores.

option

Thank you for giving this. We climb the crow's nest and highdive into freedom, away from this half-dead ship. Process is rusty, product is diffused. Take the leash off our wrists. Heartbeats, bones, joints, arteries, tongues of our own. Something more alive than this. Something ours.

love,
alexis frixione
canan tasci

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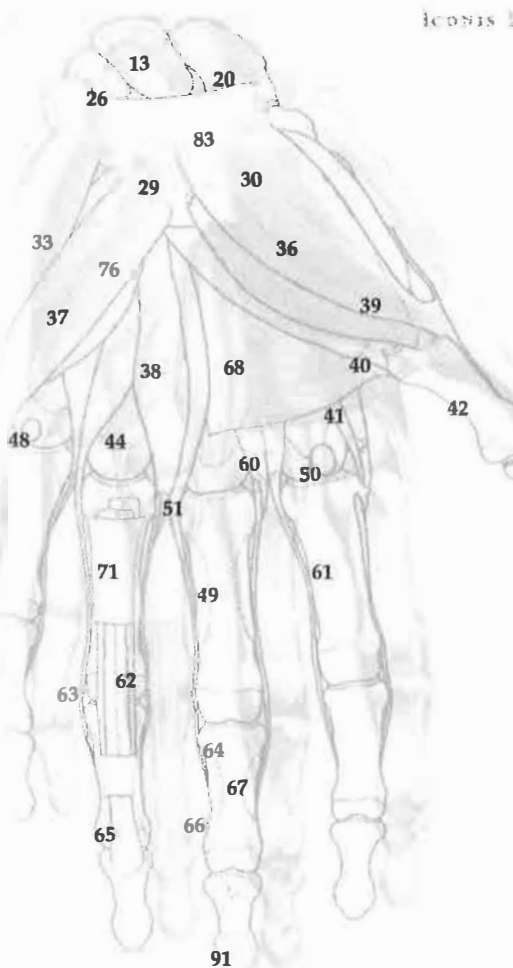


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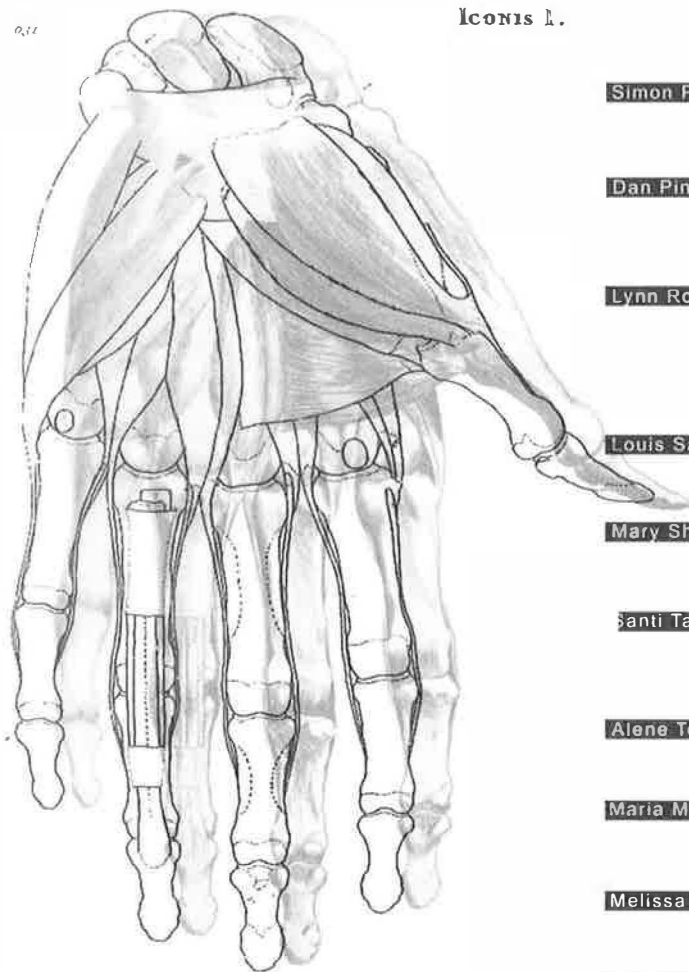
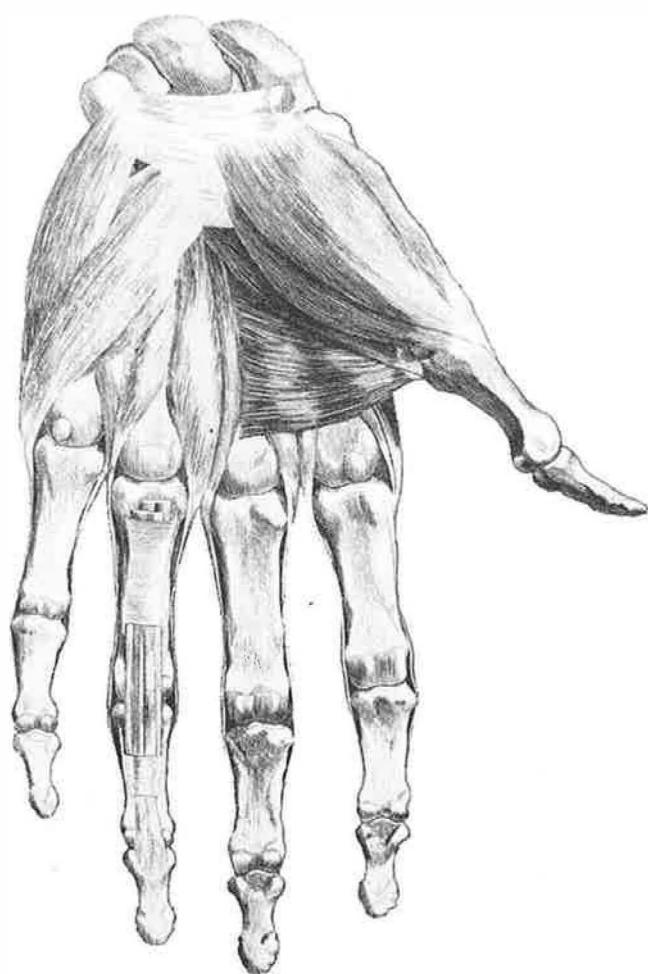
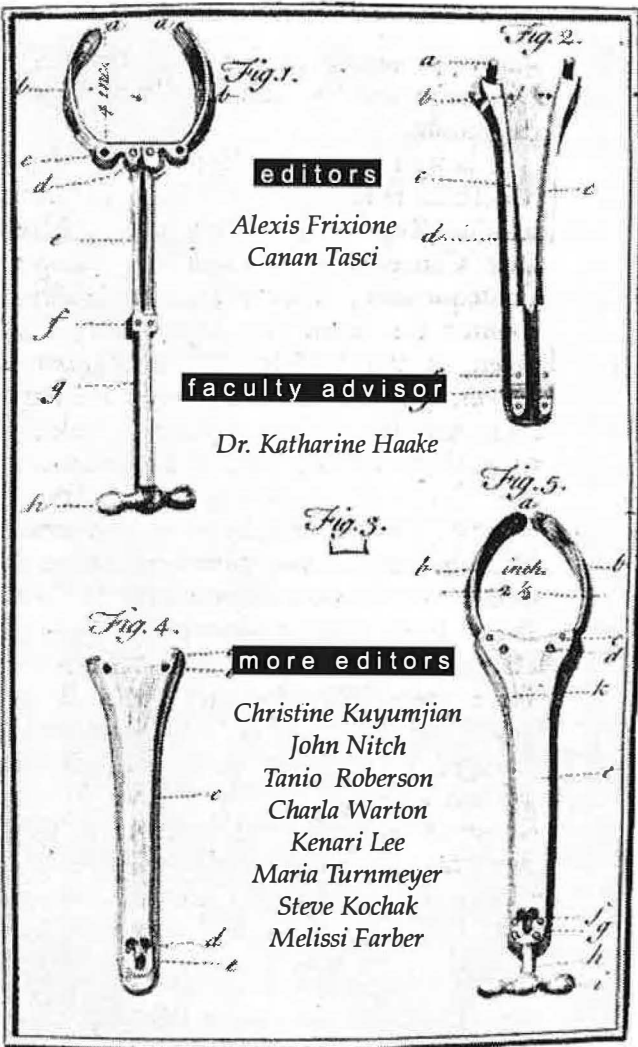


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"I'll be there with my black bag. I'll be listening carefully with my stethoscope, but I'm not really picking up on what I hear with my ears. I'm not 'getting it,' what I'm meant to learn"
—William Carlos Williams, physician and poet

A Premature Premarital Premise II:

*A response to
Joan Didion,
Why I Write*

Admission.

She admits she stole the title.

She admits.

Writers steal from each other.

He was able to say something *she* is saying to us.

They were able to say something *we* are trying to say.

Professor, Dr., she, they, this class is giving *us, you and I* the power to have

a dialogue, terms, words,

stuff *we* work with, stuff *we* know about or want to know about so that *we* can put these things down on paper to make *our* drama powerful in the world (,to make *narrative*, or the *study of narrative* legit [\$?]).

A story:

Uncle Junior

Uncle Junior sat there with his stiff jaw and tightened lips. I had done it this time. I had done it several times. I had violated the code. But it was time for someone to tell me. Someone had to tell me. Or else duty would not be served. And since Uncle Junior was the head of the family, though I only remembered him from a couple occasions, the two occasions I set foot in his country (though there were more I was too young to remember) he had to be the one to tell me.

He sat there, poised: Mafioso style, Muslim style, pope style, king style, Caesar style, but without the ring. His legs were crossed and he was leaned back and to the side. His left elbow was placed on the left arm of his chair with his left hand carrying a short glass filled with what was left of his left-wing whiskey (we had brought him his pasalubong, his gift from us from the US, a liter of Jack Daniels) and he started his speech: The Pilipino people are a proud people! He

spat as he pronounced the hard P's filipino style. I sat across from him, obediently (my mother had prepped me for my talk), respectfully (no eye contact, she advised), attentively (but face him, look at him, she added) sincerely (and just agree).

He went on with his lecture. I thought of what my mother meant, look at him but don't look at him. I looked at his shirt. There was an embroidered penguin on his breast pocket, over where his heart should be. Made in Japan, I thought. I looked down at his silver belt buckle with the intricate designs and the distorted reflection. Made in Mexico, I thought. There was a raging bull on it. Made in Spain? I questioned. Then he swung his left hand over to take a drink so I thought. But he checked his watch instead. Humm. Made in china, I thought. But it was a Swatch watch, plastic and colorful. I thought a moment more and was unsure. I hesitated in thought and then became sure. Definitely made in China, I thought. He placed his half-full glass down onto the wooden table, pulled up his shirt and rubbed his belly. And he stretched as he exposed his big belly on his skinny frame. My attention became focused on his dark, smooth, soft-hard belly as he rubbed it for whatever reason while he yawned. Maybe it was getting hot for him in the room too though it was always hot for me here. I caught myself staring at his belly so I quickly switched my attention to his jeans, his blue-blue jeans. New, I thought. Made in USA, I thought.

He tucked his right hand into his pants and he scratched a bit and left it there a bit while he talked. His Levi's, his Levi's, I sighed to myself. Then I looked closer. I squinted my eyes to make sure of what I saw. I knew it, I thought to myself hysterically. Those rivets! And that fake stitching! That fake stitching is falling apart! The jeans were still blue and it was all falling apart. The whiskey was getting to him and his slurring speech was falling apart. Aha! I squealed to myself. I had him. I did it; I dishonored the family and he had to be the one to tell me, I laughed to myself. Made in the Philippines! I wanted to yell. Made in the Philippines! I wanted to dance. Then I became sad: very, very sad.

So I sat there and listened obediently, respectfully, and attentively, while he talked and drank the rest of his whiskey.

Narrative.

She admits that
I imposes.

I imposes ideas, thoughts.

I wants you to see things the way I sees things even though
you may not see things the way I intended.

But that is life.

A poem:

Solving the Sweetest Science

*Daddy didn't like
To be bothered
solving the sweetest science*

*staring at the screen,
Muhammad Ali
Fly like a butterfly
Sting like a bee.*

*Back in the early stages of the day,
before he married my mother
and had me and the other two,
before Hanoi took Ho Chi Minh,
from across the sea,
it was his tatay's stomach aching
fantasy for his son to join the US Navy, be a Seabee,
because his tatay's feet hurt since the death
march of Bataan.*

*Because daddy passed some tests:
MacArthur or McCarthy
(he got them mixed up),
and stuff of History,
no TB,
pure blood and no flat feet,
he pulled outfits, rat-a-tat-tat and bang, bang, bang,
bang!*

*as if he were going back home
to La Union,
in the boyish slippers that bared
his dirty feet and spread-out
toes, when he ran
from stealing and sharing
a fat dog and his bones
for his tatay and family
to fulfill that stomach aching fantasy.*

*He marched, saluted, and restrained—the respect
of a soldier on and (mostly) off
duty, off guard:*

*Houseboy! Where're my dag gan shoes?
Didya shine 'em
reg-you-lay-shun style?
Sumva bitch, if I can't sees
my giddan reeeeflekshun in 'em*

yer doin' 50!
and you make sure ya tell yer yella friends
in that there galley
below ima cravin' filet mignon, rare! fer feed,
not too much seasonin'
mind you, y'all put too much salt.

'Tenshun!

*Though it was close to the last round
Daddy didn't like to be bothered*

*until the fight was over, he had his
orders, a special duty assigned
for his kind—a one-on-one
combat
sort-of-thing.*

Ahhhh. Life.

*She claims that we all know why I writes
and it has nothing to do with theory, no matter how hard
you try, how badly you want it to be theorized or how
important you think theory is.*

theory *n, pl -ries* [LL *theoria*, fr. Gk *theoria*, fr. *theorein*] (1592)
1: the analysis of a set of facts in their relation to one another **2:** abstract thought: SPECULATION **3:** the general or abstract principles of a body of fact, a science, or an art <music ~> **4 a:** a belief, policy or procedure proposed or followed as the basis of action <her method based on the ~ that all children want to learn> **b:** an ideal or hypothetical set of facts, principles, or circumstances — often used in the phrase *in theory* (in ~, we have always advocated freedom for all> **5:** a plausible or scientifically acceptable general principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena <wave ~ of light> **6 a:** a hypothesis assumed for the sake of argument or investigation **b:** an unproved assumption: CONJECTURE **c:** a body of theorems presenting a concise systematic view of a subject <~ of equations> **syn** see HYPOTHESIS—MERRIAM WEBSTER'S COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY, 10th Ed.

A thought:

Gee, when you think about it, theory isn't that bad. Theorists impose as well, but with bigger words and in a smaller world. They are just a step ahead of us but not really. They need us so they can have something to theorize. But we can't let them get to us though we do need to know what they are talking about when they are talking about us so that we can say, Bullkaka!

That's not what I was being or becoming! *This theorizing will get them a position in the system that they are in. But if there's enough theorists theorizing you, then you are a star. That's what I wants in a way, to be a star!*

I is freaky,
 a prima donna, a diva,
 always spying,
 taking notes,
 making a metaphor out of everything
 without knowing it...sometimes (the *knowing* part).
 In a way that is a theory...the theory
 of existence, survival...
 in this particular time, day, age...this particular
 second...
 in this big, wide, expanse-of-a-world I exists in.
 I takes the whole world at the moment (which can include
 all the tenses; past, present, future.)

I
 may be from the valley or the ghetto,
 went through WWII or Vietnam,
 grew up in the 50's, ate Einstein's cookies, divorced an
 alcoholic,
 is a tall, dark and handsome actor, a soon-to-be
 mother, gay, an introvert, a student who brings her
 dog to school, a professor, a war bride, a war child,
 here because of a war, a general's son, the president's
 daughter, a soon-to-be father, married, single
 or is simply just trying to be a regular girl.

I can take on the whole world.
 It is up to I to admit I's existence the way I sees it,
 what's in I's "periphery,"
 what's in the big picture,
 but with specifics, particulars, with the language I
 exists in.

Existence.

In order for I to exist I must survive in its existence. I must
 survive in *the system*.

A narrative:

One day, last spring, when the Northridge Review staff had to make its final decisions, we, the staff, were looking over the finals of the photography. For a very diverse group, we came to a consensus on most of the submissions. However, I was particularly in favor of a picture of a little boy or girl (the subject's ambiguity was one of its appeals to me) who had an innocent yet stoic and somber expression on his/her dark face. At the last moment during final decision time it is sometimes hard to justify

how one feels the way one feels. You just know how you feel. Though the photo made it to the last cuts it did not make the very final round. The advisor had us look again at the photo and questioned its placement and what it may represent. Then one of the editors quickly said, Feed the children! And it was decided then that the photo was not going to be in the NR, and the advisor added, I just don't want you guys to make fools of yourselves. I did not say anything. In my head, I went over that line, Feed the children. I saw something else when I saw that picture. I saw something else "shimmering." I saw me in that picture. I saw someone saying to me when I was little, Is that a boy or a girl? I saw a kid growing up in the barrio, or a child in a group home, a homeless shelter, on a naval base, in another country, in the deep south or in suburbia with a stable family in a stable home with regular furniture, a backyard with a crazy barking dog and a cat that pees all over the place. I saw an American in a mansion with a gun, a drug dealer, a hooker, a murderer, a murderess. I saw a future college student, a sex-crazed leader, a doctor, a professor, a writer. I saw someone trying to deal with the feed the children stereotype that is plastered all over late night TV. I saw everything when I saw the picture of myself seeing this picture. I saw a narrative and, for some crazy reason, I saw hope.

But that is only what I saw and what I chooses to impose on you now. I may later see that picture differently. But because I has embedded these words on this piece of paper I has left her mark.

Do you dare see that "shimmer" or do you only want to see what you think you want to see? I think you know more than what you want to bring to the surface. It is all there in this big expanse-of-a-world of ours. And it only takes a second.

A blurry quote from a blurry second:

"...being the thing that it is and knowing itself..."

"...acknowledging its self awareness by its own existence..."

—Dr. Katharine Haake

I am only trying to say what she is trying to tell me.
But I may not see what she is trying to tell me the way she wants me to see it.

But

I am writing my own version

And I think that *that* is the point.

Rebecca S. E. Baroma

November 11, 1998



Leticia Barreto

Theories for a New Millennium

Tired of reading a poem or novel and analyzing it with the thoughts of old men? Yes, the dead old men, the ghosts of philosophy and literary theory, they have been sitting behind us, looking over our shoulder, telling us how to read, highlighting Freudian slips, traces of nihilism, and paragraphs of class struggle. Thankfully, Critical Theory is opening up. Tributaries are stretching away from the old rivers. Feminist theory, queer theory, cultural theory, all of these are steps in the right direction... but they are slow steps. We are at the threshold of a new age; this calls for new ways of reading, new ways of understanding ourselves. This essay has found a small number of new theories, each with their own insight, their own unheard voice that deserves, finally, to be heard. To demonstrate each new school of thought, I have collected a variety of essays which critique one particular poem, Robert Frost's "Stopping By Woods On A Snowy Evening."

Whose woods these are, I think I know.
His house is in the village, though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it's queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there's some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Supra-Capitalism: Unlike Marxism, this theory, which has been on the rise since the fall of the Soviet Union, celebrates the joys of competition while studying the marvels of productivity, upward mobility, and consumer desires within the text. The Supra-Capitalist examines how conflicts can be resolved through proper marketing, and how most tragedies in literature happen because of a character's low trading

skills. Esteemed inventor/literature critic, James F. Samuels writes:

"In the poem, the speaker stops to examine the woods and contemplates one of the few dilemmas of the consumer: "Whose woods these are I think I know. His house is in the village, though." One may purchase a number of products, such as a house in the village or a patch of forest. Unfortunately, one cannot enjoy both products at the same time. Though we may consume many things, we must have the patience to experience each item one at a time, unless of course the item is multi-task friendly.

The little horse thinks it's a mistake to stop because, like a devoted worker, he's committed to delivering the top-notch trade goods which the carriage is loaded with. After all, the speaker has "promises to keep."

Despite the demands to meet, the poet pauses to dream (one of the capitalist's most important pastimes). Watching the snow, the speaker dreams of products he would like to purchase. "Frozen lake" and "shake" are subliminal images that make the poet long for ice cream goods. The "downy flake" mentioned is a reminder to the speaker that he needs to buy more soap detergent."

Arbor- Eroticism: This school of thought branches from sexual theory, though it also stems from psycho-analysis. However, Arbor-Eroticism Theory reads literature in a remarkably unique fashion: it focuses on the sexual desires humans have for trees and other plant life. Edgar Bush, retired botanist, explains his view of the poem...

"In the first stanza, the speaker presents himself as a Don Juan of the horticultural world. He has journeyed out to the woods to rendezvous with a harem of trees. The sexual excitement is heightened by the fact that the trees are taboo; they do not belong to him, but are instead owned by someone in town.

The horse morally opposes the speaker, believing that the narrator is "queer" or homosexual. The horse mislabels the poet because he sees the trees as competitive phallic symbols and he fails to understand the deep rooted love between a man and a maple. "The woods are lovely, dark and deep," these erotic whisperings are foreplay for the speaker and his darling trees. By the poem's end, an all-night arbor orgy is about to commence. With "miles to go" before he sleeps, the poet has a long hedonistic, sliver-ridden evening ahead of him."

Trailer-Trasholism: At long last, thanks to multi-culturalism, the unheard voices of White Trash America can now speak up and express their views on literary theory. Essentially, the

Trasholism pinpoints several traits which encompass the motivations of character and discourse within the text. These traits are: beer-desire, welfare-check-desire, and sibling-desire. These desires are rarely sated, and there is only one true way for the character to purge their griefs. They must confess their sins not in a church, but on a talk show, preferably Jerry Springer. Also, the Trailer-Trasholism does not classify poetry as true literature unless it contains the phrase "Honky Tonk." Jimmy Joe Bobby Lee Tyler Daniels expresses his point of view in this elegant passage:

"In "Stopping By Woods On a Snowy Evening," the poet pauses to inspect his surroundings because he has become helplessly lost. He doesn't know the way home. Pausing in the road, the poet watches the snow and contemplates mankind's largest dilemma: "Should I go back and ask for directions?" Invariably, the answer is always NO. Also, the narrator remains in denial about his consumption of alcohol. Although he never admits it outright, the rhymes in the beginning stanzas ('here, queer, near, year') hint that he must have been drinking 'beer.'

The horse impatiently gives his harness bells a shake because he is nervous, frightened perhaps that something is coming. This serves as a reminder to the deep rooted fear that lies within every text examined by Trailer-Trasholism Theory... it is not fear of loneliness, loss of love or identity; it is the nagging fear of Tornadoes.

The horse wants to continue their journey in order to avoid the dangers of an infamous Winter Twister. The speaker wants to return home as well, but his motivations are blurred by alcohol, buried away like the ground beneath the failing snow. However, to decipher the true meaning, one can simply apply the phrase "With my sister" to the ending lines of any poem. In Frost's poem the meaning would be explained thus: 'But I have promises to keep/And miles to go before I sleep with my sister. "'

Anti-Synchronic Cynicism: Some believe we are now living in the age of skepticism. I highly doubt that.

Still, there are a growing number of critics who use cynicism to read the text before them. Their first rule: the speaker is a filthy, distrustful liar. Every book, play, story or poem is handled with the firm knowledge that the reader is dealing with a very unreliable narrator. Also, this school of theory is anti-synchronic in the sense that the critic judges the writer and the manuscript with present day values, ignoring the author's time frame in which the text was written. Many Anti-Sync-Cyns do not write. Most are content giving lectures to fellow Starbucks customers. This theory is known for its bitter, bitter critics. Barton Kegelton, former mental patient and esteemed therapist writes:

"The poem succeeds at one level... insulting my intelligence! The speaker is annoying from the first line! "Whose woods these are I think I know." Does he know or not?! Frost, like most shallow poets, is playing the age-old game of 'Let's Search For A Rhyme.' He should give up writing and leave it to the people who know what they're doing: Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino and me. More bullshit continues when the speaker tries to convince us that his horse "thinks it's queer / to stop without a farmhouse near." First of all, this is Frost's attempt to throw queer theory at the reader, lamely hoping to win over the Politically Correct Crowd. Secondly, Frost is blatantly lying, trying to force personification on an innocent yet stupid horse who is freezing his equestrian ass off because the speaker wants to enjoy the view. These deceitful, sadistic tendencies draw the reader to one final conclusion: it's not even snowing at all! The bombs have dropped! The speaker is looking at fallout from a nuclear blast, but instead of freaking out, he finds the devastation tranquil! Of course, this world is so miserably screwed up, I guess you can't really blame him."

Scooby-Doo-Dooism: Once mistaken as merely a campy Saturday morning cartoon comedy-mystery, Scooby Doo has gradually been embraced by academia as a model for understanding the human condition within and without the text. The theory is as deceptively complex as the animated series which inspired it. The philosophy is too wide-spread to explicate all of its details but some of the fundamentals can be explained in brief. First of all, forget id, ego, and super-ego. Scooby-Doo-Dooism offers a deeper map to the human soul. It has been divided into six traits known from here on as "mental arenas."

The Scooby Arena: This is the animalistic part of every mind, the area of our subconscious that desires the basic pleasures in life: food (scooby snacks), companionship (Shaggy), and mobility (the mystery-machine). These desires form a childish sort of hedonism void of sexual libido--that lurks in another arena, as we shall discuss.

The Shaggy Arena: This is the cowardly part of one's psyche devoted purely to self preservation, which is why the Scooby and Shaggy arenas mingle well with each other. Both sections of the psyche are firmly dedicated to avoiding conflict. Usually, the Shaggy arena must be kept in check by the Velma arena, but there is adaptability within the cowardice of the Shaggy traits. For example, in the series, when fleeing a vengeful Egyptian mummy, Shaggy and Scooby seem consumed by fear, and yet they have the

presence of mind to instantly change into formal waiter attire in a clever attempt to fool their pursuer. Thus, man's cowardly impulse to avoid aggressive confrontation may inspire a plethora of ingenious alternatives.

The Daffney Arena: This is our social consciousness. The Daffney arena is the part of the psyche that desires to go along with the flow of things. The Daffney arena longs to be a follower, but a follower with morals that meet societies approval; this arena doesn't want to appear cowardly or hedonistic. Often, the Daffney arena follows the majority and heeds the advice of rationality or common thought.

The Fred Arena: Resourceful, ambitious and brave. The Fred Arena has many idealized traits which many strive for-- but it's not all wonderful. Also within the Fred Arena of the mind lurks a highly competitive nature, a tendency to act before thinking things through, and a desire for sexual conquest, which is why Fred usually leads Daffney away from the others. Finally, the Fred Arena is the self-critical part of the mind, often deprecating the Shaggy and Scooby part of the psyche, and sometimes bargaining with it. If someone thinks to themselves: "I'll allow myself pleasure (scooby snacks) if I accomplish a necessary goal first (investigate a haunted house), then they have just negotiated with their Fred, Shaggy and Scooby arenas.

The Velma Arena: Nearly the entire psyche relies upon this arena because of its ability to mediate and see things through. This part of the mind is vastly intelligent, though low on emotions. The Velma arena's only desire is to process all of the mind's learned information and use it to solve problems and keep the rest of the arenas functioning properly and evenly. Sometimes the Velma arena is a fragile thing. When we lose sight of our Velma arena (when cartoon Velma drops her glasses and becomes blind) the rest of the arenas panic and chaos ensues until the vision of the Velma arena returns.

The Mask Arena: When we willingly commit moral wrongs, this arena comes into play. It is the mask humans psychologically wear to hide our sins against ourselves. Some wear this dark mask reluctantly with a justifiable end to sanction their vile means (as when Dr. Farnsworth dressed up as a glowing sea monster to frighten tourists away and protect a rare species of sea-turtle). Others wear the mask and revel in their own wicked endeavors (as when Mabel Simmons dressed up as a vampires hoping to steal a Louisiana mansion away from her very own sister). Everyone uses this arena and everyone tries to keep it hidden from society.

Here now, is a brief selection from noted Scooby-Doo-Dooist, Gary Lemon:

"This poem studies the opposing views of the poet's Velma and Mask arenas. Why does the speaker pause by the woods? It isn't to innocently admire the snow, but to contemplate the darker side of human nature. Obviously, the narrator stops his horse because, hidden in the woods, he has caught a glimpse of an old gold mine once owned by a long since dead prospector. According to local legend, that mine still contains an enormous vein of riches. As the narrator watches the snow fall he has a promise to keep to himself: He will disguise himself as the ghost of an angry Indian chief and scare away the locals. That way, he can illegally mine from someone else's property and keep all of the gold to himself.

The horse senses the dishonest thoughts floating through the speaker's mind, and much like a traditional Velma, urges the narrator to continue on the straight and narrow path. Unfortunately, the more the snow falls, the more the path of rightness is buried, symbolizing the speaker's fall from grace. The woods are the temptation of evil; they "are lovely, dark and deep." The narrator is drawn in beyond the point of no return and will not get any sleep until his plan has come to its fruition. "Surely," the speaker thinks, "I will get away with it." Perhaps, Robert Frost, if it weren't for those meddling kids..."

In closing, this sampling demonstrates that there are many new theories in which the pedagogically minded can now utilize thereby enhancing their analysis of the text. And of course, there are many more schools of thought lurking out there, waiting to be embraced by the academic community. What will be the next hot ticket? Trailer-Trasholism? Supra-Capitalism? Or one of the many others which are in development as we speak. There have been murmurs of a completely off the wall viewpoint known as the Theory of Irreverence, but as of yet, no writing has surfaced to explain, what promises to be, a new a fascinating form of literary criticism.

Write Hushed Without a Room

The leaves whisper
to me, "write," hushed, "write,"
when all I want to do is
sing or dissect a frog,
I think.
My father once told me that
he sees no purpose
in art. He finds
a purpose in making sure
people are cold in the
summer.

In the summer,
the sun burns my skin
red like ink because
it is telling me to, "write," fiery, "write,"
when all I want to do
is lie on sand or stone.

I don't want to write
anymore. I would rather
glissando from a to z
or spell out love (l-o-v-e)
or take my fragments
and scatter them like leaves
(whispering to me, "write," hushed,
"write.")

Did you hear me, the "e"?
Nothing is anything but
sound, hushed, voice,
fiery, write,
I can not write.

A girl tells me she likes
the sound of my letters.
A girl tells a girl she
should have a room -
my room is locked,
do I have a room
(sound, glissando, sound)
write?

A girl tells me this, that,
write, hushed, write,
but a man
 inside shades like leaves
(write, hushed, write)
and it is all about I, me,
 can you hear the "e"?

I am not expressing truth.
I can not show you the moon
 because I do not have
 a telescope.
Only a bit of scientific theory.

I have seen (me) the corroded
 eroded crumpled crust
of the side of a bright
 full moon and it was
 beautiful. It told me I
was empty and
 "write," wholely, "write."

I'm confined to a structure.
I am locked in a poetic mold
 with a voice whispering,
"write," hushed, "write"
 while outside of I
 music profounds, a man's
voice shades in fifths
 and glissando, an
ensemble of sorts.

I have never heard
 of a woman composer, ever,
ever, but a female choir assistant
 tells me to
 smile with my eyes
(Chloe likes Olivia)
to create a round sound.

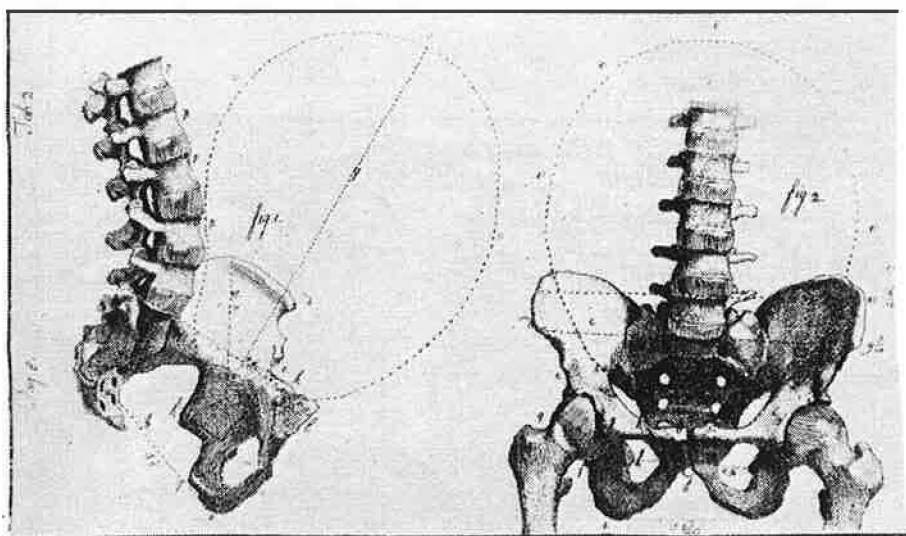
I try to create
 a round sound
 and my voice cracks in a
crackling sort of
 write, crack, write.

I thought I had a room
 but those walls don't
 whisper. Sounds don't
 profound and the sun still
inks fiery write burns

on my skin scattered with
write, hushed, write.

Am I useful by keeping cold?
By ignoring a whole moon
in the summer that whispers
"write without a room?"

From a to z I glissando
and spell out
l-o-v-e
for the beauty
for the girl
for the me that shades
the me.



Stealing Metaphors

I am guilty. I steal metaphors.
I dart my eyes over the beautiful things
greedily like a starving drool-drenched wolf.
When no one is looking,
I rip open flesh and slip them
into my voice.

Now they are mine and
I don't intend to give them
back. I have love, a polluted stream,
flowing back to its source.
I have friends, moths that circle
around my heart as if it were a dusty
lamp. I have power, language that
can disfigure like disease.

Turn me in, call the Poetic Police.
Don't let me walk the streets.
Please Please Please
find me before I leave the country.
I don't want to be one of those
pilfering thieves that get away,
contented and at ease.

I Create: My Own Meanings

We were sitting out on the porch and it started to rain. I didn't have anything to say. Well, I did, but I kept it to myself, for myself, for me me me (mine). Why won't I let my constructs, my sentences rip through me and soak you? You don't seem to mind the water dripping down your eyelids, slipping over your lips. Why do my thoughts travel faster than my voice and tell me, no no no, that is a horrible - vulnerable - horrible thing to say?

I wanted to tell you yesterday when we were smudged with rock and heat that all I wanted was to be covered / smothered by your hands and to feel your rock and heat. I'll let you create your own meanings.

In June we sat on my couch together (Should I tell you that we were high, so incredibly high? Maybe I shouldn't) and you let me draw your face.

"Beautiful. Beautiful. . .

You are so Beautiful."

I smudged the charcoal with my fingers and rubbed shadows on your paper cheeks because back then, I wasn't allowed to touch your skin. I created my own meanings. I imagined you singing to me, paper turned flesh turned voice turned heat.

"She gives me love, love, love, love,
Crazy Love"

Who sings that song? You
would know.

Usually coffee grinds in the morning or the collies bark because we have stayed awake all night.

The lady next door breeds collies.

Breeds them, we breed without breeding we hope, I hope, you hope, I hope

I am hoping one day I will be able to glue these fragments together (are these fragments?) and create a whole but when I try to imagine, write, sing, think of it all at once, it comes out in a big blob of cliché:

"Oh, let me rub leaves in your hair."

"Sure, why don't we rub leaves in the sun that we love.
We love."

-Who loves the sun?
who cares that it makes plants grow?
who cares what it does
Since you broke my heart?***

See what I mean?
See what I mean?
I mean?
Yeah, I know.

The first time I realized that I loved you was when the mountain we were standing on swooned and ran its fingers over my hair. The weeds were so tall that I was swimming with a lot more weight and lightness from the sudden thought of, "oh shit, I am in love with you."

How come yesterday when we were on the rocks we had a random fuck even though it was much better to just sit and stare at the weeds (were so tall I was drowning)?

add a revelation here.
insert meaning there.
mean now.
mean later.

We were smoking as the sky turned purple. No wait, we couldn't find a light. We didn't have a light. No light in the sky, in my pockets. I wished I could pull the sun down from the sky for a moment and light your Camel Light for you because I hate that look in your eye. It is like an incomplete sentence.

So where was I? What about me, you say, where do I, you, we, fall together and tumble dry, nice and fluffy and coherently soft? I don't know. I have no idea. I just didn't want you to think I was leaving you out. Just remember, I am always thinking about you (wink wink wink).

**Lou Reed - The Velvet Underground

So the mountain. And the rock and heat. Once the mountain ran its fingers in my hair and the weeds said, "float, float," and I thought, "finally, finally, I am awake." Awakened. (Drowned?)

It felt so good. Like the rock and heat and rain and sun (who loves the sun).

I understand.

I make my own meaning.

You got that?

I mean, I mean, I have to.

Your eyes are such beautiful, beautiful
incomplete sentences

The American Dream Castle

They told us that the evenings were innocent in the Dream
Castle.

But they didn't know that as
Mr. American Dream
reclined
in his oversized leather arm-chair,

smoking a cigar
and
languidly
Sipping
a cognac
or perhaps a light liqueur,

wearing
His bright red
smoking jacket
embroidered
in gold with
antelope
buffalo
passenger pigeons
philosophers
American communists
and other animals extinct or nearly so,

would read the newspaper
or watch the flames
lick
the cedar logs in his fireplace
(divine elemental Fellatio)
and silently wonder what his wife was thinking:

As she lay on the love seat
reading
The Ladie's Home Journal,
eating
Valium sandwiches and
Mourning
the buildup of cellulite
on her thighs,
and on her arms.

They didn't know that

the only salvation
She could find
was at the
bottom
of a bottle of wine.

They didn't know that
as Mrs. American Dream was
Considering
her plastic surgeons next project and
Contemplating
the inadequate canvas
that was her flesh,

She had no concern to spare for their Daughter:

Masturbating
In a warm bathtub,
flirting
with a cold razor blade
poised
and ready to kiss her ankles.

They didn't know that
as Little American Dream
would lay
in the hallway
naked
On the cold stone floor,
she was trying to find
something
Colder than she was.

They didn't know that
as we lay
shivering
outside in the snow,
my sister
gnawing at my mother's
empty,
emaciated
dry
breasts,
was trying

to slake her hunger with the
blood
she instinctively
knew was there,
and that my mother did not care
about her blood

because her little girl would die
before she grew teeth.

They didn't know that
the stories
about the Dream Castle
were not enough
nor could they ever be.

They didn't know that
the possibility of warmth
was not enough,
and was in fact a
grim
self torture
only a masochist
would bother entertaining.

They didn't know that
as we died of exposure
no one could justify our deaths.

Our lack did not add to their plenty.

They didn't know that
The American Dream
was nothing more than a
boogey man
that haunted dying children sleep.

Untitled

sweaty greyhound bus
two a.m. in morning
on the road to go there

no pot no cigarettes
half pint warm peppermint schnapps

restless in too-small seat
next to old drunk man
bitter in his whiskers snoring

baby crying somewhere up front
startled by light of new day

reminded of the inevitable sunset
sipping my secret booze
hounded by driver's spy mirror

visions of hidden tissue paper
of silent telephone

of last chance bingo
crumpled lottery tickets
good old days stories

as an old man restless reflecting
but unable to remember

missing goodbyes

I am going

to impose upon the shallow goodbye
more than it would have of me.
Below my breakwater smiles, opaque
and flat, there's an ocean. A sea rushing
to the shores of the world for fellowship.

Seeing the sun in its gradual salutation
lay in wait for the arms of dusk
to hammer him down, I'm envious. His
daily last spreads over the face of time
for more than an hour, embracing the
horizon in deep, fleeting purple.

I am leaving

behind the demeanor that demands
of us those busy hellos, and the answers
we too often recognize. I miss being a boy
when the folds of summer hemmed me in
and innocence bathed our flights in tears.

Walking into a lemon orchard I hear
the hollow greetings of my day resonate up
and down each chartered lane of trees.

I pluck a lemon from a tree and watch as its juice
runs into a crevice between my fingers and then falls.
The smell hits me quick,
like opening the door to a cold, brisk wind.
The lemon is ferocious in greeting.
Later, its smell lingers like
wind that has missed me.
Like a wind that I have been walking in for hours.

what I'll say when we talk about marriage:

I don't want to get married.

because you'll have my last name
branded into a block of wood or painted

onto a house-shaped mailbox w/
a red wooden flag pretending

to be a chimney
or a welcome mat

that dogs wipe their asses w/.

from our last conversation

13
 a., asked,
 "when can I see
 you?"

standing in
 front of her
 I said, "you're
 looking at me
 right now."

4
 I'm generally
 a nice person, but
 , recently , a.
 told me otherwise.

I said, "it seems
 like everyone
 tightens when I enter
 a room . "

she said, "everyone
 thinks you're an asshole."

Commute

Margaret is back there
with the discarded newspaper,
the overflowing clothes hamper,
the dubious sex.

I love her still
but feel as if I am living
in the cramped quarters of my secret fist,
the one that squeezes my veins out of hiding,
saturates the air with punches.

I leave the house
to the unrousing chorus
of a peck on the dead parts of my cheek.
All the way to the station,
my past commiserates with the here and now.

Thank God for the order
of schedules, of working hours,
of the way the world is happy to pace itself
even when people aren't.

But I see a woman on the subway,
singing, biting her hand, singing.
The skin below her knuckles
is red with teeth marks.
The song is a kind of temporary restraint,
a barrier between her and further damage.

I try to avoid eye contact
in such circumstances,
dropping my gaze to my book,
madness better served by words,
by character and plot.

But these train weirdos
won't let my life be,
tell my story too.
Station after station after station,
there's no denying we're
going in the same direction.

All-Night Laundromats

Right before I fall asleep,
I tell her there's people even now
hauling their dirty clothes
down the street
into the one place open,
pouring them into the wide mouth
of the machines,
slipping coins in the socket,
pouring detergent down
the chute at the top.

Even now, I'm thinking
as she finally dozes off,
even as the theories of the night
demand my proofs
and my imagination works me
like a dog...
the clothes are spinning
like a fairground ride,
the late night people wait
on silent benches.

Even as I dream,
dream celestial and languageless
and beautiful and pure,
they're like the cookie I bite
into before sleep
that writes the script...
they think my subconscious needs cleaning up,
they're willing to spend the money,
froth up the waters,
they'll watch the process until not one
imperfect thing is left clinging to my life,
then they'll toss it in the dryer,
destroy all evidence of their work.

So first thing in the morning,
I tell her I love her.
But first thing in the morning,
I see strangers
burst out into the bright light
with their bags of clean clothes,
on their way to dirtying them again.

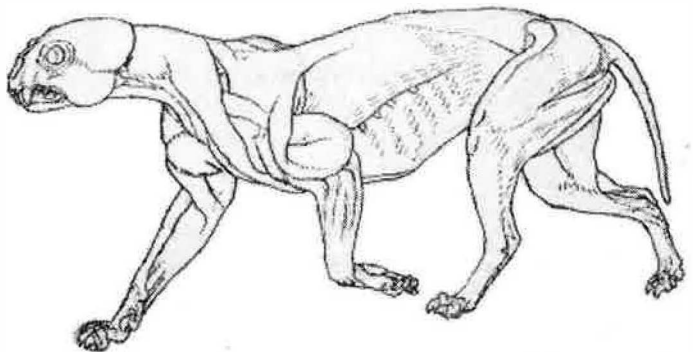
S a b o r

El reloj suena --
Me tengo que ir

Afuera está nevando
pues me pongo un guante áspero
en la mano izquierda

Tú vienes de atrás
y me besas la mejilla
Tu barba me rasca la piel --
Derribo mi taza de café
y dos gotas manchan el mantel

Todavía tengo el sabor de tu voz
en mis ojos



T a s t e

The clock chimes --
I must go

It's snowing outside
so I place a rough glove
on my left hand

You come from behind
and kiss my cheek
Your beard scratches my skin --
I knock over my coffee cup
and two drops stain the tablecloth

I still have the taste of your voice
in my eyes

Morada

Fuí por un paseo
 en la lluvia --
 Una mujer
 parada en el techo del vecino
 llevaba una mascara roja
 sobre sus ojos
 y su cuerpo estaba pintado blanco
 Ella estaba desnuda
 y tres pájaros azules
 le estaban picoteando
 el pezón derecho

Le pregunté:
 <<¿Qué te pasó?>>
 <<Así me hizo mi amante,>>
 me respondió
 y se fue volando

En el parque
 habían dos cabezas
 charlando:

<<No puedo oír sin mis guantes>>
 dijo la cabeza a la derecha

La otra cabeza respondió,
 <<No puedo morder sin mis dedos>>

Y las dos empezaron a llorar
 rizas profundas

A la orilla del mar
 te encontré
 fumando un cepillo negro
 y cargando una maleta harapienta
 que contenía todas tus pinturas

Me miraste

Y luego,
 tiraste tu maleta
 en las olas

Se desapareció
 debajo las corrientes
 suaves

Sojourn

I went for a walk
in the rain --
A woman
stood on the neighbor's roof
She was wearing a red mask
over her eyes
and her body was painted white
She was naked
and three bluebirds
were pecking
at her right nipple

I asked her:
"What happened to you?"
"This is how my lover made me,"
she answered
and she flew away

In the park
there were two heads
chatting:

"I can't hear without my gloves"
said the head on the right

The other head responded,
"I can't bite without my fingers"

And they both began to cry
profound laughs

At the seaside
I found you
smoking a black brush
and carrying a tattered suitcase
that contained all of your paintings

You looked at me

And then,
you threw your suitcase
into the waves

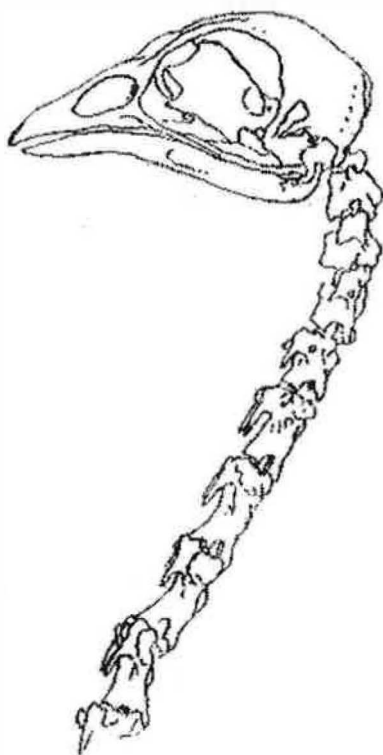
It vanished
under the gentle
currents

Mientras que me acercaba
me fije que tenías
lagrías azules
en cada ojo

<<¿Por qué?>> murmuré

<< Porque los ciegos no oyen.
Quizás los pescados aprenderán
algo>>

Y te escondiste la cara
en el bolsillo izquierdo
de tu chaqueta



As I got closer to you
I noticed that you had
blue tears
in each eye

"Why?" I whispered

"Because the blind don't hear.
Perhaps the fish will learn
something"

And you hid your face
in your left coat
pocket

Resort Town

A possum lies belly up on the solid yellow line.
His pink feet point cloudward, as if death's dream
he wanders heaven upside down.
Scavenging alone, the last thing he heard
was the keening of rubber on asphalt.

Hours later, the place glares with traffic and tourists.
They spill from crosswalk to outdoor market,
passing the possum with barely a glance.
One woman reports him—a visual blight.
She does not mention that the possum
reminds her of her husband:
nearsighted, no sense, less caution,
darting into darkness and losing.

Afternoon trudges toward dusk.
People buy art, ice cream. The dead animal
stays dead, his stillness remarkable in the busy street.
A little boy spies him and sees
a fallen, floppy puppet, dropped or lost.

Finally, animal control arrives
with shovel, bag, and match.
The market closes. Weekend trash
scatters like snowflakes and possum smoke
billows in the paper sky.

Destination: Ahhh...

Driving through the full moonlit desert
I informed Jacoby and instead
of pulling over
"Now,
How Badly?"

I was going to let it all out
right there. Then he'll complain
about wet spots and such
squeezing the steering wheel tight.

After 34 minutes of wiggle wobble
We were in the territory of
termite appetite an establishment
claiming chicken noodle as its specialty,
An entry casting terror

around. Drizzle drips drops
dribble from the faucet and
I fumble,

fumble with inverted knees
through that old loft interior to
Release and relax to
The relief of peeing.
Ahhh..

The Geometries of Sleep Are Soft

Small child, draped,
a collapsed polyhedron of trust
atop the sturdy circles
of her mother

whose heart
is a fractal of joy
that sings lullabies
more endless than pi.

9(the progression
of ladybugs x 42)
- the days it takes
for a tulip to bloom:

the calculation for
the shape of this love.

Pythagoras will
never guess
the angle,
the ever opening
angle, the vertices
of that bond.

Surprise Me With Flowers

It comes on mornings of grey clouds
that bleat softly as they cross the sky,
the pack of them hustled along
by the wind, who is no shepherd.

In these damp and sloping days of inwardness,
the flowering plum burns with plans for color,
and my blood sizzles as the barometer rises,
measuring the days, already years,
of irrefutable love wrapping warm
and heavy around our hearts.

It comes as a gap, a door, a ring.
It comes as a leap, a dodge, a sigh.

It comes today, and all the todays
when the sky and the earth are too busy
to take me in, and there is nothing to look at
but the tangle of my own attempted life.

Then, from under your skin,
where you hide your magnet heart,
it comes, the certain pull
of the problem of happiness,

and I, with my merciless ways,
wishing always to suspend,
to suspend the moment before.

March, 1998

Why the Ocean Doesn't Float Away

It Was A Terrible Mistake, All Those Years Ago, To Leave

At the end of it all there will be sand without wind.

And over the flat sand there will sometimes ride an army of ghosts, disturbing nothing but the sleeping mice who will twitch once and then dream on. I will go there to the end of it all: I will roll like an egg across the flat sand, and I will wait for my mother.

She will come across the sand like an orphan's dream, wearing soft clothing that floats around her, and singing in a language I think I remember. She will make wind with her songs, and it will no longer be the end of everything. In this way I will feel less foolish for having rolled there to wait.

She will scoop me up and put me in the pocket of her soft clothing, a curiosity, an essence, a traveling egg. And I will ride there for many years as she walks across the sand, singing and making wind with her breath, pulling apart the story of the end of all things.

The Army Of Ghosts

They have come from the corners of many different lives, and some might call them memories, but in my family, though we never say it, there is no difference: the past haunts. And the nature of memory is the nature of ghosts, always having to be appeased, acknowledged, given little presents.

When enough ghosts have come together they form a union, a body of complaint or protection, depending on their nature. When there are too many for a union, they form an army and go marauding, disturbing the sleeping mice and attracting my attention as I shiver in the night, waiting for my mother.

When they hear of her song, the ghosts hold a meeting. She is undoing the ending, they say, and a conflict is inevitable. I hear their plans and wait for her to come so that I can warn her. I wait and I wait, anticipating the praise I will receive, how good I will be in the eyes of my mother, the eyes of the whole world, when I save her from the ghosts with my clever egg espionage. I wait and I wait, and then, having rolled all that way and waited for longer than any egg has ever, ever waited, I fall asleep and fail to tell my mother about the army of ghosts.

The End Of It All

I awake to the anxiety of my own fate, hoping that I

am just in time or far too late to do anything, but I awake as it is happening: "This isn't about you or your brother. It is between your mother and me."

He didn't say that I was an adult now, twenty years a human girl and no longer an egg. I know that is what he thought, *She is an adult now.*

"This is not about you," he said.

I looked then. I looked at my mother to see what it was about.

That is how the world was crushed flat as sand and the wind was seduced away to another place. When it happened, I reached out to my mother but it was too late. I caught only a strand of her hair as she sank, disappearing beyond the horizon.

The Other Egg

My brother is handsome and quick. He is about to become a father. All things ordered and well kept are attracted to him, certain Catholic parishes for example. He is a handsome, tidy egg with a real bow tie and a smart, Catholic wife. And he came first.

I know that he holds a place of value in my mother's heart, but I cannot understand it. He would never journey across days and years of flat sand to wait for her. But he came first and was the egg that became a son. I suppose that other things are expected of him, things I don't understand, stories they didn't tell me. Stories about how to go and leave your mother to find your other selves. I didn't hear those stories except sometimes when I listened through the walls to the outside world. Inside, I heard stories about curlers and prize winning raspberry jam.

The Other Egg

My mother thought that she was supposed to have three children. I guess it is easy to become attached to ideas about numbers of children, to assume that we are owed our expectation. But her fallopian tubes were tied after I was born because the doctors told her that another child would kill her. But I have suspicions, and I wonder at the dangerous authority that doctors have, because I think it is rooted in a kind of merciless curiosity. It is just a sense of caution that I have; due in part I am sure, to my mother's insistence that she was meant to have three children.

I have always felt a bit guilty for not being two. As if I were the last one to get out. And I wonder if, in the spirit world, I didn't shove little Soren Thomas aside so that I could be born instead.

That would have been his name: Soren Thomas. She was convinced that it would have been a boy.

My Father, The Wind

He is gone, and he took his stories with him, but not his ghosts.

His departure is a huge stretch of sadness that has never been sailed across. Little carnivorous creatures grow in the water of that sadness, and these sentences wrap around their throats, killing them, and I have no remorse. But then the water is full of rotting bodies, and I have to find other ways to kill these creatures, because I do not like rot. I will have to write more advanced sentences that do not choke the creatures but zap them into oblivion. And then my sadness will be pure. The pure sadness of an egg.

A Strand Of Her Hair

When there was no moon in the sky, I went into the kitchen.

There are reasons not to share recipes. Reasons to block unscreened people from knowledge. But these are the days of the internet, and now we are looking at reasons to share. And if everybody knows, I cannot be accused of being a witch.

Five apples

Twelve rosehips

One and a half teaspoons *fresh* nutmeg

A strand of hair

Cook everything in a pot for six hours. Strain it through layers of cheesecloth. Roll it into a ball, and bake it for three hours. After it is done baking, set it on a cooling rack and sing five songs. Come back in the morning.

The Sleeping Mice

They dream the flat sand into forests without owls. They dream that the ghosts riding by are giant mice gods, coming to tell them stories about the first mice. They have fallen asleep and refuse to wake up until the ending is over. And this is because they are not very brave.

Lack

This is an old story. You can find it in the Bible, but it looks different there. In this version there is a mother. And she is a good mother. She is always a good mother, because if she weren't a good mother the story would be the same, and people would be confused as to the importance of excellence in motherhood. A bad mother would be a distraction, and so, here in this story, we always have a good mother.

It begins with a baby. The baby can be you if you like, because you were once a baby. You have a good mom here. She is always a good mom.

But the world is very big at first, and you are very small. And you must remember that nothing was then what

it is now. You were floating in a world of objects without words, experience without language. But this is not bliss. Bliss comes later. This is not bliss, because it is chaos. Later, you will enter bliss, and it is wonderful.

This is bliss: you see yourself in the mirror. You can see by now, and you see yourself in the mirror and it is you. Not a reflection, a something else, an other. The baby in the mirror is you. And the breast that feeds you is you, the arms that rock you, the voice that sings to you, the good mother are all you. And you are a good baby.

But you are growing. Growing so fast and in so many ways that, just as you grew into bliss, so must you grow out of it. That is the way things have been set up. From the beginning. Saints and yogis are the only ones that ever get back. You have to leave. Later, you can become a saint or a yogi, but not now. Now you are learning to speak.

In The Morning

She will be back. It is a miracle. But understand: she is not the same. Not even real. This is the mother made of apples and rosehips. She will be able to do many important things that the real mother can do. She can go to work. She can drive her car and steer it into the driveway. She can run the vacuum cleaner. She can pick up the phone and call the bank to find out how much money is left. She can even cry.

But somewhere beyond the horizon, where the sand is perfectly flat because there is no wind, your real mother is wandering.

It is a good thing to make a fake mother. It protects the real one from the consequences of her disappearance. It is something a friend would do, but cannot. Only a mother's child knows which five songs to sing. Only her child has enough hope.

Hope is not a secret ingredient. It is an assumption, like water and a stove.

But now you are alone. And the fake mother is spooky. If you want the real mother back, you must roll away across the horizon and look for her on the flat sand.

The Army Of Ghosts Redux

Over the flat sand they ride their ghost horses, all the years of their lives thundering in their ears, like wind. But nothing moves, and they leave no tracks. They ride because they do not know what else to do. Because it is a way to be full of fury without causing harm.

And they are full of fury.

It does not matter why. It is their nature. The way they are folded.

What matters is that they have a leader. She rides at the front of the pack, pushing harder than the other ghosts, tempting death to strike her again. She rides the bones of a

horse she calls Sweet Victory, the tatters of her burial dress whipping in the wind that is not wind, but fast memory.

During the day, when the other ghosts are sleeping, she plods slowly over the ground looking for the lost pieces of her dress.

But they are gone.

Responsibility

After you have been denied an extension, you leave Eden, and the gates are locked behind you. You have learned to say *I*, and those are the consequences.

Bliss has ended. You are two.

That is the end of the story. Now you are here with the rest of us, and when you are older we will explain what happened.

It was a mistake, of course. And you couldn't have known — none of us did — but there are consequences for everything. We know this from physics. You can pray for forgiveness if you like, but you can never go back. Even the saints and yogis never really get back. They have journeyed in the world and been changed by it. And after you travel, home is never the same.

Great Sadness

She has been gone for many days now, and I have not found her. My shell is getting sunburned, and I begin to feel anxious that she will not recognize me, "This brown egg is not mine." I am afraid that I have left the teakettle boiling as I rolled out the door and over the horizon to look for my mother. I am afraid that I did not leave a note and that she will come back to find me gone. And this is not sadness, but fear. Although, I can only seem to say that I am sad, not that I am afraid.

And so I roll and roll, searching the vast sand, seeing only ghosts and sleeping mice.

The Flat Sand

Thousands of grains of memory, and not one of them can name my father. Once, they had a naive belief that they created the shape of the world. They made hills. And in making hills they made valleys. It was a shifting balance. A grainy binary that anyone could love.

But not a single piece of sand understood that the world was really shaped by the invisible wind.

The Rest Of The Story

You are two, and you have said *I*, and the world has ended.

I am sorry. So truly sorry.

It goes like this: You are two and you have said *I* and

the world has ended because you have said *I* and the subtext of *I* is *not I* and what was whole is now split into *I* and *not I* and never again will you experience *we* as anything other than a bunch of *you's* stitched to your *I* and this — this is absolute loss.

Now you live within language. And if you are a girl you will have pain in childbearing, and if you are a boy you will have to work hard to earn money. If you are a boy, you will look at your good mother and say *I* and the whole world will end, and you will be horribly confused because you are a boy and will never be a mother: your *I* is different than her *I*.

If you are a girl, you will look at your good mother and say *I* and the whole world will end, but will not be as confused as your brother, because you are a girl and will someday be a mother: your *I* is the same as her *I*.

And this is the beginning of love.

Six Of One

If you are a boy, you will learn about your *I* by venturing out into the world to go find your father. You can live as a little *I* in the shadow of his big *I*, and know that at least you are in the right ballpark. It does not matter that you miss your mother with all your heart. This is where you belong, and you will be rewarded. This is how you learn about the benefits of going without that which you want. This is how you learn discipline.

If you are a girl, you will learn about your *I* by clinging to your mother and learning how to be a female *I*. You belong where it is warm and safe, in a world built around association, not difference. Where touch and tears are always allowed, and you can run your fingers through your sister's hair, just by offering to braid it. And this is how you learn about the world of pleasure.

It does not matter that you are curious about the world.

She Hears My Mother Singing

It will not be a confrontation, because that is not the nature a deeply sad ghost who is looking for pieces of her dress. And a mother wearing soft clothing, walking and singing away the ending of all things is not interested in conflict either. It has to do with being weary. It has to do with the kind of hope that would appear, if it could appear, as strings tied between two people. Little strings tied in many places to the bones near the heart. Or, if you are a ghost, where your heart used to be.

That is what happened when my mother and the leader of the ghosts met on the flat sand. They were instantly tied together by little strings of hope, and so it became important for them to sit down together and listen.

They started by listening to the soft breathing of the dreaming mice.

Why She Rides

She killed herself, and so she could be any number of people my family has known. She was so beautiful. And she spoke French. And she had a little boy that she killed also. She always stops there: *I was beautiful. I spoke French. I had a little boy.*

The rest is something so loud that we cannot understand. It is the ache that drives a small green shoot out of the seed as it seeks solutions to the fateful logic of appetite.

All we really need to know is that she was beautiful, she spoke French, and she had a little boy.

That is reason enough to ride.

To ride hard.

What We Can Hope For

After I woke up and realized that the world was ending again, I curled up inside my egg and braced myself for the slow compression of loss, knowing that the severe nature of these situations would toss me high up in the air, and I would land somewhere hard, and my shell would break.

We can hope for something soft to land on.

When my shell broke into many pieces, I wept. Great, bitter tears of confusion, and I hesitated to open my eyes for fear of seeing the world looking at me with indifference.

We can hope for love.

But the mice were sleeping and the ghosts were holding elections for a new leader because their old one had disappeared. My mother was nowhere to be seen. And that is how I left the flat sand without anybody ever knowing that I had tried.

We can hope to be heard.

As I left the end of all things, I sang songs about anything green. I walked and walked until I saw the moon go crazy and forsake its orbit. She fell silently out of the sky and rolled along with me. Poor, crazy moon.

We can hope for light.

The sun never woke up for his shift, because the moon never came home and told him it was time to go to work, because she had gone crazy and left her orbit. She was with me. Maybe there were strings of hope between us, although I don't know where the moon keeps her heart.

We can hope for good roads.

When we reached the mountains, the moon began to cry, because the paths were steep and narrow. She cried so hard that she broke into thousands of pieces, and suddenly I

was without my companion.

I do not know the recipe for false moons.

We can hope that no one will notice.

The world was dying. There was no moon, and the sun hadn't woken up in two days. I had been sitting with the moon, trying to coax her into one piece. I had made a little stack of moon rocks to give her the idea. But she was gone or dead or so tired that she couldn't say anything.

And so I left her there in pieces and walked up to the top of the mountains where I yelled so loudly and for so many hours that I do not know anymore if my voice belongs to me or the words I yelled then. I hollered at the sun to wake up and take the moon back to the sky. To pick up every last piece of her and kiss each one, and apologize for not having noticed her absence. I yelled until the sun woke up, and in that moment, when he began climbing into the sky, I sat down and wept.

There is no joy in saving the sun and moon and earth when you cannot save your own mother.

As the sun rose higher and higher, the ocean regained its vocabulary and many things were restored to the world. The fish came back to life, and the fishermen were called to work. Everyone put on their swim suits. They ran into the water and ran back out because it was still very cold, but they were happy. They loved their neighbor, and shared their picnic food. They played volleyball, and tag, and walked down the beach holding hands with someone they had loved for a very long time, thinking, "I have found you."

There should be wind.

But no one notices because they are happy and relieved that the sun has come back, but there should be wind. We know this from science. We know this from our hearts. Maybe, if we are very, very good, the ocean will stir, it will make currents. It will cough foam onto the sand. It will clear its vast throat that can swallow whales, and it will begin telling us a story, and maybe that story will be the story of the wind.

We can hope that the ocean doesn't float away.

Maybe It Was Different For You

Maybe you felt the soft skin of your mother's cheek. Maybe you felt the soft skin of your mother's cheek as she pressed her face to your tummy, and you tumbled happily through the fantastic world of physical senses, yelling *I* with so much enthusiasm that both you and your mother rolled on the floor, laughing. And then you played patty-cake, and you yelled *I* again, and your mother said, "Yes. I, too. Me and you. We." And maybe from that day on, you revelled in your *I*, because now you could perceive so many shapes and textures, and the spaces between gave you something to

explore.

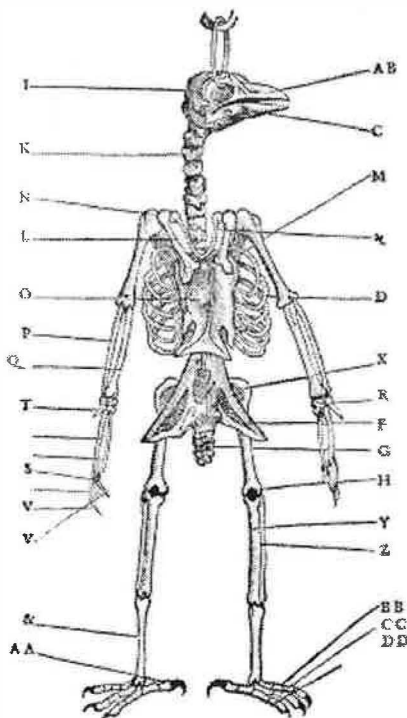
The Sleeping Mice Redux

Just underneath their soft fur and pink skin are the memories of everyone's childhood. Their quiet breathing and old, old dreams disguise the stories.

We are left to make art. To pretend. To practice our speeches in the mirror. We are left to stumble across pages of cold ocean and hot sand, looking for the story in ourselves.

But the mice are the only ones who really know how it goes, and they refuse to wake up.

Why the Ocean Doesn't Float Away





Your shirt too white, its buttons
side by side as fighter pilots
still pin flags along the fuselage
in cemetery rows

too tight. The vapor trails
come out blue--how could you know
a color would hold like a nail

--never worn before, its sleeve
streaked, already sharp, the air
afraid to move, your hand
seems smaller than when you left.

How many years is it since your arms
opened out to stir this room?
Even the rain seems thinner
and hardly makes it down.

It does no good to undress
tossed over a chair
as if it could bail out in time
the leaves still hanging from its legs.

You'd walk the same, always
to a window, the shade held close
fluttering, tries to fly
--don't cover yourself.

It never will get dark
with this shirt in the room.
No. Don't ask for any money back.

Besides, everyone in the store
will remember you and the receipt
lose its meaning again.

T e c t o n i c a

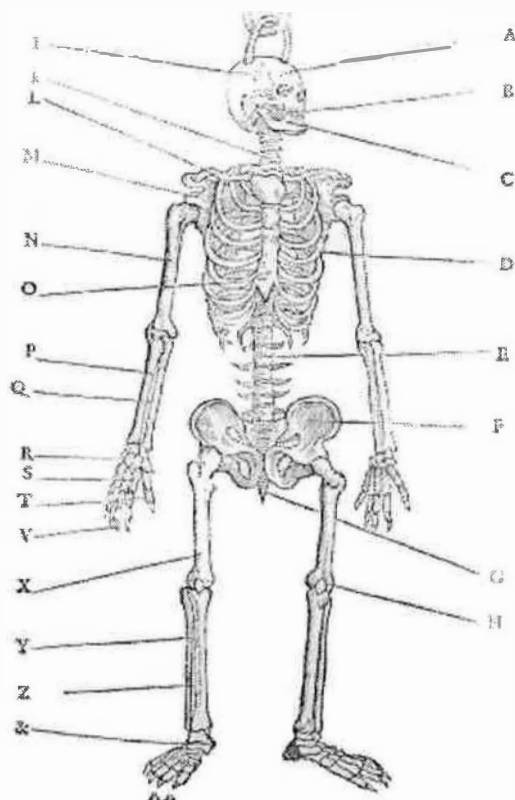
Upwelling, cracking a backbone low
 At the base of a brooding breeding sea,
 Oozing firemuck and shrieking so
 In the cold wet black like a panic-witch,
 New Earth is built of oldest earth.
 Ripping the world's great seam and stitch,
 Prying, pushing, subducting, bled
 Alive is the belching molt and fire;
 Alive, though all about be dead;
 Alive, as the millions of years required
 Pass before a single cloud
 Founders on a peak inspired,
 Upwelled and furnished by the glow
 So far away, so far below.

Like fallen trees in lowland stream,
 Continents jostle on fireides,
 Kill-colliding, penetrants extreme,
 Wrights of ranges, lowlayers of plains,
 Ash-bringers, height-bringers, horzoneers;
 While, riding on their backs like grains
 Of pollen, or mites on fleas' legs, we
 Creatures of an hour cling,
 Our wars and gods and slavery
 Beneath the conscious ridicule of plates
 As large and sheer as hemispheres
 (The blank conveyence of our fates),
 And we too small and they too slow,
 Too far away, too far below.

Dead Cat

(For Heather, 1981-1998)

Found on the floor this morning
 The old cat, dead,
 Arched like an empty wine skin
 Suspended,
 Clinging by a single claw
 To the soft
 furze of a swivel chair:
 A final essay in ascent:
 To climb out of the swirling sepsis,
 The verging blackness,
 And use the last fraction of life
 To reach
 Up



Sign Language

Laura's hands like wings
never still around her face,
signing to friends
that she is going
to take her dog for a walk

[sign: forward gesture + left index finger extended
together with two right fingers wiggling],

her animated face,
alight with articulation-
the truth is,
the dog walks her.

She moves away,
blows a general kiss,
her rings flickering in the sun,
says she is leaving

[sign: right hand taps the left,
forward gesture,
touches her cheek twice, fingers bunched],
says, signing,
I will touch home.

Resistance to Reading Nine Literary Theory Essays

I careen down the lanes of this poem,
slamming doors against the lexicon;
nine essays, theoretical heavies,
set trip wires in the shadows.

They watch, behind
high curtained windows, gloating
as I hurtle toward rhetoric
kicking dust at the deadline, an impostor
sweating under the heavy black folds
of a scholar's robe.

Absurdity raps on my head,
grabs at the frail silk,
until I am finally still and clear
that this book is only a book
with no stake in being understood,
even as its letters scorch my hands,
embedding themselves in these lines,
they mean me no harm.

In my yellow-lit afternoon room
the frantic narrow alleys converge
sunfilled and quieting;
the open windows are empty,
muslin curtains billow whitely.
I curl onto the green velvet chaise,
easy-minded now, too foot-sore and
weary to resist *Falling into Theory*.

Somebody Lied About Silence

Silent night, holy night, even Jesus couldn't get quiet,
all those sick people and angels beating about,

though I think He heard things, in the wind, or in His fingers
Maybe it was God, or maybe it was the beautiful rush of blood,

the firing of synapses as He meditated. I wish He would tell me,
I keep meaning to listen, but I have to push these full garbage bins

out to the curb, neatly aligned for the big clamps that jerk them
up over the truck and shake them out, spilling a little on the lawn.

I glare at the stump of the tree the city cut down without mercy
in front of the neighbor's children, who only yesterday

tumbled under its wide dead reach.
Who cares if it had no leaves?

The red chain saw belted out its raw challenge,
terrifying everyone, and me, cowering behind a curtain.

Tonight it is L.A., and I cannot sleep. The night beat skims the streets,
hums over the roof and through stucco walls as thin as rice paper.

My pillow amplifies the distant growl of circling motorcycles,
just there, beyond the surf. I want to name this, so I can complain.

In New York I slept easily, coddled in the toneless melody
that swelled up the vertical canyons, a soft shoe in Central Park

accompanied by yellow cabs and nannies with big-wheeled prams,
and traffic lights changing red and green and red and green.

One balmy desert afternoon, I watched a hawk riding thermals.
It rose up in slow spirals, and after a while, I no longer heard the birds.

Natural History Museum

I must have been eight, maybe nine
when I first saw them
in the musty old room
with faded paint, threatening to peel
itself from the dank walls.
They were neatly arrayed
in rank and file
like graves spread out
across an Arlington hillside.
There were tiny flags
each unfurled in the still air
anchored to the straight pins
pressed into the dusty velvet.
The beetles stare fixedly ahead,
an army of soldiers in their armor,
some in khaki, some drab
and a few, the officers,
almost opalescent.
I stared at them for an hour,
some I had seen before
but never looked at, others
had gathered from distant places
about which I had only dreamed.
They marched before my awed eyes
in phylum and species
and I felt a pang for each
I had crushed under foot
held a match to one's back
to watch it crackle.
I am much older now
waiting to be mounted
on some dusty old velvet
a pin stuck neatly
through my neck
a flag unfurled over me
arrayed with my compatriots
like so many gravestones
on an Arlington hillside.

Sam At Nine

My son now wants to know
What happens when he dies:
Just gone, like so much garbage?
And where, he demands, do those
Who seem to know, think heaven
Really is? Up there? he points, but
He's looking straight at me.

He sits in piles of red and black and yellow Legos,
Like a god who's lost his glasses.
I know, he accuses, you don't think
Heaven is anywhere, . . .
Trailing off he hears me prattle on
About his essence, his spirit,
His whatever blather I muster to
Hold back his tide of disappointment in
My faithlessness. I have failed him.
I only gave him life--
And not eternity.

Rembrandt's Lover

I'm sitting on a couch in one of the gallery rooms in a Berlin museum. It's a weekday, it's winter, there are few visitors. It's my twenty-eighth birthday. In front of me, on the east wall, is a Rembrandt self-portrait. A woman in her forties has just come and stood between my line of sight and the Rembrandt. Her back is to me. She is looking at the Rembrandt and I am looking at her. My pen runs out of ink so I approach her. I ask to borrow a pen. She reaches into the pocket of her flannel shirt and hands one to me. The pen is warm. I think about how its warmth came from her breast. I sit down and write this in my journal. The warmth of her breast on my fingertips.

From the back she looks young. If I had not seen her face when she first walked up to the painting I would have guessed she was in her twenties. She wears blue jeans. She has thick hair without a trace of grey. Her hair cascades softly over the shoulders of her leather jacket, then falls straight, in an almost effortless gesture, to the lower arch of her back. Her hair is a dense curtain to her charms and I would part her, if she was a young woman.

Fifteen years ago, in the early 80s, this woman was in her twenties. If she had not turned around when I tapped her on the shoulder and asked her for a pen, you would not know it was 1999. It could be 1984. But she turned around and it was 1999. The dilated pores of her nose and the lines in her forehead announced it, like cathedral bells.

December 6, 1999. Almost the year 2000 and I'm spending it looking at a middle-aged woman looking at an old Rembrandt.

It's been an hour. She has the observational patience of Job. If I had not interrupted her for a pen her gaze would have been unbroken the whole time. She shifts her weight from one foot, then the other, stepping forward, then back. Looking. Always looking. By her long study of his portrait she seems to think she would know Rembrandt and find him in a crowd. In the self-portrait, Rembrandt is precocious. There is a hint of cynicism around his mouth, a young man newly wise to his world. He almost winks at you, like an unbelieving priest.

She was once young like the Rembrandt in the portrait. Perhaps he reminds her of a lover she had.

I have concluded while sitting here that I look like Rembrandt. The color of my eyes matches his. The facial hair (a weak beard about a grown out, but light, mustache) is similar. His ruddy appearance is also mine. Our age is even

the same. The plexiglas plaque next to the portrait reads:

REMBRANDT
Leiden 1606-1669 Amsterdam
SELBSTBILDNIS, 1634

That's my age exactly. Twenty-eight. 365 years ago Rembrandt was my age and painted this *selbstbildnis*, this self-portrait.

And I look just like him.

If she had looked at me with attention, rather than merely handing me her pen in a distracted fashion, she would have seen Rembrandt in my eyes. She would have seen Rembrandt in my lips. Indeed, she would have seen the portrait made Flesh, and be taken by me immediately.

I could be her lover.

Her concentration has started to break. Perhaps she senses that I am looking at her. She's looked back at me three times now. She must wonder what I am writing, why I have sat so long behind her. I pretend to study the Rembrandt self-portrait from over her shoulder as if I'm writing about the painting, when I'm really writing about her. And each time she turns her back to me I become agitated with desire and forget that she is a middle-aged woman with a middle-aged face.

And now she's looking back at me again. And now she's walking my way.

My hand is trembling.

I just had a conversation with the woman. Her name is Hanna. She's a professor of literature at the nearby university. She sat down next to me and casually, even a bit suspiciously, asked (first in German, then—sensing my sketchy comprehension—in English) what my interest was in the Rembrandt self-portrait. I told her I had little interest in that particular portrait, other than coming to realize, while sitting here, that I'm his geminate. To my astonishment she then asked in a very forward fashion what it was then, exactly, that I was writing.

"Are you a critic?" she asked.

She had knowing, accepting eyes. Perhaps this is why I became quite bold. "Actually," I said, "if you must know, I was writing about you."

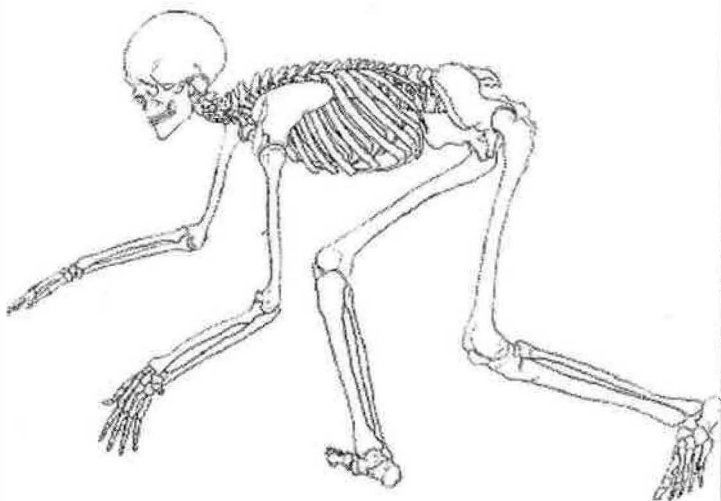
This shook her. I meant to say it in a flattering way, in a nonthreatening way, but it came out wrong. Before I said this her eyes were soft and she seemed relaxed and assertive. The way she sat on the couch was open. But now she folded her arms, furrowed her brow, and became dour. I regretted my indiscretion. I was deeply upset for her. Terrible emotions stirred in me. I wanted to comfort her, needed to comfort her.

"Please," I said, "allow me to read to you what I wrote."

The tone of my voice was innocent, as if to assure her what I'd written was unthreatening, playful. At the moment I'd said this I had actually persuaded myself that what I'd written was, in fact, this. Unthreatening. Playful. Of course it was not, and when she consented to listen I was astonished to go back and read just how intimate what I'd put down actually was. It was made doubly painful by reading the words outloud. She, however, listened intently without a hint of reaction. I felt her eyes studying me very carefully as I read. Studying me like she studied the Rembrandt painting.

When I finished I waited for her to stand and walk away, shaking her head in shame--both for her, at my statements about her age, and for me, at my presumptuousness. I was ashamed of myself, and judged what I'd written as unnecessarily cruel and stupid. But instead of walking away she asked me if she could see my journal and pen. I handed them to her and she wrote her address in the journal.

"Rembrandt," she said, "will you have dinner with me?"



The Goose Poem that Died

Ah, goose. I was going to write you a poem, shoot you right out of the air, unfeather you with buckshot and send you down, a flesh-fall limb-lash through this leafless tree.

Ah, goose. I was going to run you straight into the ground, make hamburger in the skid of you, your ground beef of Being beaktrowled to its root and shadow, your left eye undenned by a stick, your whole life slanted off its foundation, no longer occupied, condemned.

Ah, goose. I was going to have a hound carry you off, leaving a blood-trail for me to find, drops of red to read, oil-poetry of line, straight to the echo of you, straight to ground-zero, your imprint of shift and form, signs of impact and weight, snapped limbs and fall leaves pressed where bones and feathers should have been, where I stand, this spot beneath this tree.

Ah, goose, it was August then and a birder-friend of mine ruined you for me, said I could not rake you through this leafless tree and drop you to dry land, that a goose was hollow-boned and weighed in ounces, and would not go down with such a commotion.

Ah, goose. Your kind is hunted over marshland anyway, and would fall there, but I am attached to my idea of you, not really you, of a story imprinted in sand beneath this tree, so I'll give you weight and make you a man, and throw you from a plane, old goose.

Ah, goose! Pirate-ship-cannon-balled into an ocean of sky and raked through the crows' nests and limbs overhead, the angels stamped your carcass RECIEVED and kissed over the tattered stop of you.

Ah, goose! The small bones of mice from the crows' nests, uncupped from above, sprinkle you like ash, dust blinkering away, like your spirit, through tree shadow and sunbeam. Amen.

Ah, goose. I was going to make your stray eye a symbol of the I, the only thing still alive of you, like the I of you that was then also blinkering away, but awake now, unlidded, unblinking, but blinkering away, the eye divorced from your body, as your I had always been, Ovid of the "O" only, tonsured

in quotation marks.

Ah, goose, behold! Shimmering vertebrae of black assemble
a crooked spine--and they are ants!--your stray
eye their destination and delicacy, a frog's egg
out of season.

Ah, goose! I was going to have you remember Gregor
Samsa, the book you were reading on the plane,
and add irony here, but you're not a man
anymore, you're not even a goose anymore,

Poor goose, you're just an eye, being dung-balled to colony
and queen, Cyclops of the Ants, the end of
yourself and the end of your poem, because I
loved you, o goose, felt dizzy with love. Loved
you to death.



The opposite of stone

i.

i wrap myself around
clock ticks and stucco walls
(it is lonely).
There is a scent
on my pillowcase,
distinctly foreign.
i crease the bed sheets.
Fingers fold over
and into themselves
like chocolate pudding.
(It is cold in here).

ii.

i wrap my legs around
his macadamia-nut
chocolate mouth.
i am spread out,
territorial.
He says,
don't touch me
there or there or there
and i think:
(It is cold in here).

iii.

i wrap my head around
his heartbeats.
There are no feelings,
but these.
(exploited).
There are bruises
staining my thighs
where his chocolate mouth
sucked holes
and smells
and cold feet
as though a soft tongue
could make up for
the way his skin crawled
slivered, slithered,
silent.

iv.
He said words like
anxious and paranoid
and i felt safe.
There was something
violent
hidden behind
bent fingers and blue eyes.
i know:
he would hurt me
if he could.
if i pushed his
crawling skin,
metallic grin,
stretched across
a stucco mouth
to the breaking point.

v. Maybe the edges
accounted for
the silent phone--
fingers tapping
tap/tapping
seven digits, memorized.
i moved him inside me
and said:
(Is this how you want
to be fucked?)

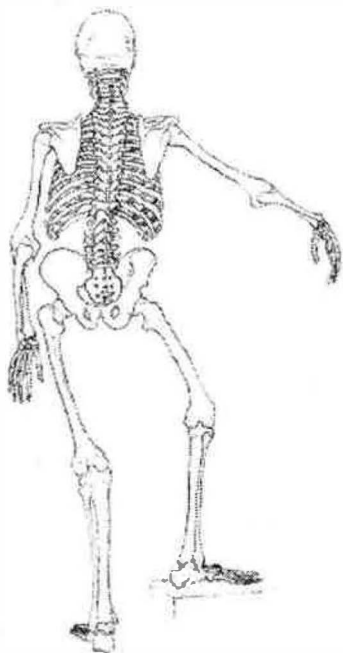
He said:
don't touch me
there or there or there.
It echoed off the walls.
The frequencies,
tied in knots.
His words
like electric-eel
power surges.
If he knew me at all,
he would say:
(She doesn't meet demands.
well).

vi.
i have soaked
my stained body
in Epsom salt,
tea bags, Kama Sutra oil.
i have opened the windows
and turned on the lights
120-watt bulbs
bruising his retinas

blue and red.
There was a moment,
purple desperation--
his hot voice
begged
please.
Stop.
Don't stop.
Make it stop.
Ticking so loud.

vvi.

Maybe there were feelings
lost in fingers,
playing simon says
on my cervix.
Or maybe
it could have been
the echoes
that turned my body
to stone that day,
the walled-in echoes--
that accounted for nothing
and made less sense
than his mouth spread
and teeth bared
and body plunged
into pounding.



Green Like Carpet

One day you wake up and find yourself full of leadened milk. Not the spoiled curdled kind, but the kind that sits undigested, unmolested, unrelenting along the walls of your stomach. On this day you feel change overdue. Not nickels and dimes, but real change, the kind of change that begs to transport your body out of your listless living room. You know you need a real home with bright green walls and deep maroon carpeting - the kind of carpeting the Ambassador of India treads upon. This is what you look for. It can not happen overnight.

●
Last night, someone you thought you loved, said good-bye.

●
You forget where you work, why your work.

●
One morning you find yourself standing on practical concrete looking into a window at your own tired brown reflection. The window belongs to Best Bakery. The best bakery in the city. The proprietress, a youngish Asian woman, leads you through the powdery bakery, up a dark hallway decorated with tissue thin red paper fans. She shows you a tiny room with a flimsy-filmy window that faces down onto the street below. A dog lifts a leg. The sounds of clattering spoons beating against mirrored stainless steel bowls, the smell of warm bread and hot sweet donuts, the soft sprinkling of flour on the tips of your black sneakers makes you feel as if it would be proper to live atop Best Bakery. The proprietress tells you, in perfect American you notice, "My name is Soo Yeon Bak and the place rents for three-hundred fifty a month and all the baked goods you can eat." You will roll the name Soo Yeon, Soo Yeon, Soo Yeon over your frosted tongue and wish it were your name because it sounds like it belongs to you. Everything else, you guess, does not really belong to you.

●
Loneliness doesn't sound half as bad as it feels.
You think you will survive.

●
The cable man has left a note on your door that informs you your apartment building is not cable-ready. It will cost an additional ninety five dollars. (The world can be yours for a measly ninety-five dollars) Call him back if you're still interested.

●
You think as you search four blocks down from Best Bakery

what it might be like to live above Ms. Soo Yeon Bak. You imagine she might appear early every morning with hot coffee and a warm croissant. It would be like home. You think. The white walls could be painted green, you think. The flat worn carpet could be replaced. You think. As you walk four blocks down the home above the bakery is forgotten because all that happened days ago and it is hard to remember back to yesterday.

What happened to all those fine people you used to know who happened long ago?

Byron stands waiting for you in front of Warehouse Ten. You have known Byron for years. Byron waves and smiles exposing his fine white teeth. You smile through pursed lips because you are ashamed of your nicotine stained incisors.

Byron says, "Howdy."

He says, "Howdy."

You say, "Doody."

It is an old greeting from the past and you feel like a foreigner in your own mouth.

The available warehouse is empty except for a large velvet wall hanging suspended from the ceiling. You ask Byron, "Was there a church here?" but Byron does not answer. You step up to the red softness and take a good look at the a star faded Jesus tending a flock of sheep. Real sheep. Byron walks around in heavy expensive shoes that clack and click.

Byron asks, "So what do you think?"

You answer, "How much?"

He returns, "Nine hundred."

Questions, answers, until you understand that the gold faucets in the makeshift bathroom will never compensate for the largeness of loneliness that echoes under your footsteps. As you pace the lizard long floors you think about your tired mother and tired father. The warehouse makes you tired. Tired of walking up and down the emptiness that echoes with each foot step. You know you must thank Byron for his time. His time is very precious being the busy young man that he is. A fine accountant he turned out to be. A practicing realtor, he hopes to be. A penny falls from a hole in your beige jacket pocket. It spins on its narrow body and the ringing lets you know it is time to go.

Promises are meant to be broken ... someone said that to you once.

Call the cable man. You no longer wish to be connected to the world.

The dangling folds of time keep you in bed late Monday

morning. Urgency rises as you wash your face with Ivory soap, 99.9% pure soap. Scrubbing the sleepy soot from your face you wonder if anything is pure and you have no certain answer. You feel lucky anyway. You feel like a sprinkled cake.

●

Soo Yeon stands smiling behind the bakery counter. This time you notice the sparkliness of the place. The whiteness of the halogen lights, the clarity of the sugar dispensers, the purity of the recycled paper napkins. You step up and place your order to a smart looking Latin girl with long black braided hair. Soo gives you the order and does not charge you and sits with you at a lopsided wrought iron table with tiny metal chairs. It is uncomfortable but you like Soo's brilliant face.

"What brings you here today?" Soo asks you.

"I'm still looking for a place. Thought I'd stop by for breakfast before I got started."

"Have you found anything interesting?"

"Not a thing, but I haven't given up hope."

You do not ask Soo the questions you want. Where she was born? Does she live with her family? Has she ever been married? Why a bakery? You do not ask the questions because you may be forced to tell her you are sure you know her from somewhere else. And so you talk on and on but nothing is said. Before you leave, thirty-six minutes later, you remember the braided girl and drop two dollars in a plastic jar that stands full of bills and quarters on top of a sheer glass counter. Soo Yeon smiles at this. You push the door open as gracefully as possible, detecting a fine odor of cabbage and onions.

●

The couple two doors down from you rage. They rage, tear, slam, and fling words and glass. They scream until you swear they are coming through the walls, ceilings and floors. You wonder why no one seems to notice but you.

●

A narrow silence penetrates the front of a peach stucco building. A man with a very dark complexion answers the door. You tell him, "I'd like to see one of your apartments, pleeze." He looks you over for a good forty-five seconds before grinning a toothless smile. The smile makes you nervous. The smile makes you curious.

"Sure, sure..." he says to you in a honey heavy accent.

You wait as he searches for the right keys on a wall rack full of jeweled colored rings. Four children look at you over the top of a beaten plaid sofa. They bob their little heads up and down. It is difficult to say how old they are. You smile. They duck. You laugh. They giggle. Keys jangle. "Right this way..." the man says as he leads you down a jungled, spiraled courtyard.

"This just for you?" the man asks.

"Just for me," you say.

"Alone, yes?"

You do not answer because you have already answered that and you are tired of answering the same questions over and over.

"I was alone once too," the man tells you, "I am Ahmad Shah, Man of the Sea, no longer alone for now."

You try to stay quiet because you sense this man, Shah, has given himself a license to speak.

"Yes ... many years ago," he says, and you feel it coming on, "in Pakistan I started. I sailed and sailed then stopped in Cuba."

"Why'd you stop in Cuba?" you ask.

"Because I fell in love. What other reason would anyone have to stop such a life?"

Shah leads you through a mouse maze of leaves and geraniums and Birds of Paradise, then past a muggy algae covered fountain with a masoned toad's head to a door too pink to believe.

Inside the room it is dark and smells of wet sponges. The carpet feels wavy and the ceiling looks like the bottom of a well used ashtray. You are polite and smile politely, ask a few standard questions about security deposits and key fees. As you walk away from the peachy, mossy building you feel eight brown eyes bearing down upon you. And you giggle because jealousy and love make you feel funny.

●

For the first time In your life, you think about adopting a small terrier.

●

Sunday, Monday, Friday... you do not know anymore. You wake feeling a vague sense of generic anxiety and you think you are going crazy. The alarm clock beeps. It beeps loudly. The refrigerator rumbles like a train as the freezer tries to kick in. Mr. Wilcond living in the apartment next to you sings a medley of country western songs... "I will alwaaaaaaaays looooooove yooooooo..." he sings not half as well as Whitney Houston or even close to Dolly Parton. You listen as the skinny woman who lives upstairs walks like an inchworm, slush, pomp, slush, pomp, across the floor. A squeak of hot water pipes and a soft plunk reminds you that you need ... must ... get up.

●

The one who said good-bye wished you well. At least you were given that.

●

The noise at the mall plays fortissimo in your ears. Window after widow displays things that you need, things that you don't need, things that you want but can't explain why. A woman pushing a sea-green stroller balances a cup of hot

mocha-cuppa-ice-coffee while her very young child sucks happily at the end of a hot-dog-on-a-stick. Everything looks like a potential gift for your friend whom you have not seen since her last birthday. Books seem too risky ... you can not remember what she likes to read. Kitchen appliances look to be a brutal choice. Perhaps, you think, she would like a new memo-keeper-address-notepad. Everyone needs one of those. Instead, you saunter into Kampells of New York and buy a sixty-five dollar ribbed-tee. Perfect for casual wear, easy to dress up. Or so you are told by a suspicious looking salesgirl. You pay the fee of forgotten and neglected friendship, ask for a golden gift box, and venture back out into a throngs of shoppers. That is when you see her for the first time. The really first time.

●

The hallway outside your door smells of pork and thick sauce and month old garbage. The stench of dog urine marks the air. You are sick of such homecomings.

●

Soo Yeon peers into an athletic shoe shop. You notice that she is staring intently and does not see you. Soo is not wearing her Best Bakery apron and looks somewhat foreign and unapproachable. There is a brief, but mad desire to run up to her and hug her like an acquaintance of auld. She carries a black shopping bag, wears loose white shorts, and a ribbed-blue-tee. It appears as if she shops alone. You decide to walk right up to her, see if she recognizes you first. She does. There is a mad chatter of excited language and she offers to buy lunch. An offer you can't give up. Hamburgers are fine. Fine and dandy. The mall no longer feels crowded. It feels suddenly personal enough to be private.

As you suck on a cold lemonade she pops the question, "Have you settled in a place yet?"

"It's pretty pathetic, but I haven't," you mumble.

"That's okay," she says biting into her burger, lettuce dragging out the bottom of her mouth, "these things take time."

"So," you dare, "where is your family from originally?"

"My family," she sounds puzzled for a moment, "...from Korea."

"Neat," you feel stupid at your answer.

"What about you?" she asks you fairly, "where are you from?"

"Here," you tell her, and she accepts with no questioning glance.

A lot is found out this afternoon. You learn that Soo studied piano, ballet, bread kneading. Her father died just before she graduated from high school. Her mother lives in a room above the bakery and Soo spends her evenings caring for her, cutting cabbage and onions and beef for dinner. You

discover that Soo loves the color green and sometimes wears green tinted contacts that change her into her favorite color. Her face is soft and ivory-white, eyes slanted at what seems to be a proper angle. Your face is browned and tight, porous, just like your eyes. Her hands are wrinkled from too much time spent in eggs and warm melted butter. Your hands are soft from pushing papers all day long. Soo leaves and it feels like a friend has said good-night.

●

Children roller blade up and down the street in the courtyard outside your bedroom window. Crippled pigeons fan out their crooked wings on cobblestones no ray of sun has ever hit. Tall forbidding pines shut out the light, shut out the warmth, keep in the pigeons and children escaping from the heat. Rental applications and lease applications rest on your chipped glass dining table. Squares and squares of purple post-it paper adhere randomly to abodes of popular choice. You know you will not complete even one tonight.

Mr. Boss speaks from the answering machine, "Why haven't you been into work? We are all concerned. Please give us a call. We need to know what to do."

All you needed was a few days off to find a new place to live. Who knew it would take so many days?

The machine speaks again, a friend says, "Why haven't you returned my calls? Thanks for the gift ... sorry I wasn't home to receive it personally ... Mike says to say hello...I hate machines...have you fallen off the face of...". the machine cuts her off.

You know you haven't fallen off the face of the earth and you are sure that she is not that good of a friend. If she were, wouldn't she be pounding on your door, demanding to be let in?

You are alone, frustrated about nothing and everything, terror stricken with the happy lives of others. You knew this day would come. Will you do it or not? This is the question.

●

"One more chaaaaaaance...I didn't know how much I loooooooved you...One more chaaaaaaance...I didn't know how much I huuuurt yoooooouoo..." Mr. Wilcond sings. You slam the front door behind you.

●

You decide it is the last place you will view. If it does not satisfy you, you decide you will stay where you are. You will go back to work. You will apologize to your disconnected friends and make the best of what is left of whatever remains of your life. This, you promise to yourself. "Act your age,"

you tell yourself.

The place is small, charming, blue like a psalm. It sits atop a nice little hill giving view to the congested city below. The landlord, an old man named Chang, bent over like a fruit heavy branch, opens the door to a tiny single room apartment. Chang looks half asleep, or half awake, it is hard to tell. The room smells of sweet jasmine and three large used candles line a short yellow kitchen counter. The carpet is medium and brown. The walls are Navajo white. It looks like it will have to do.

You turn to old Chang and ask, "Would you mind if I painted the walls?" Chang rubs his chin. It is as naked as his head. "Why not, eh," he says.

"I mean, I might paint it a really off color. Might be hard to cover up."

Chang rubs his left hip and you wonder if it bothers him. Hurts him.

"Okay, eh. Even black is okay."

You rub your neck, though it does not hurt you. "There is a pool," he adds.

"Where?"

"Just inside. It is very small, but nice on hot days, eh?"
"Have a laundry room?"

"No, eh ... no laundry room. There is a laundromat right down the hill, eh." Bingo. A nick in perfection.

●
Soo Yeon smiles behind the counter at the bakery. It is days before you go to see her. You want to be her friend.

Losing the Floor

Gwen woke up one morning and discovered the floor of her bedroom had disappeared. The bed was perched on some kind of pedestal but there was nothing except dark air where the carpet had been, a green plush carpet that her husband disliked for no real reason but that reminded Gwen of an impressionist's meadow.

She was surprised to find no floor as she dipped her foot down into the dark space. A hot draft blew up along her calf, and she yanked her leg back from the edge, scooting to the middle of the king-size bed to survey the room, unchanged except for the floor. She reached uncertainly across her pillow and took a Faulkner novel from the nightstand, which appeared to be balancing precariously on a pedestal of its own, and dropped it over the side. For a moment there was no sound at all, but at last she heard a distant clunk and then a hiss. A spot of red flared briefly at the bottom of a deep pit. Lava.

Gwen looked around unhappily. Her husband had left for work already. She'd overslept again and would be late for class. Now, without the floor, she was stuck on the bed.

"I'm stuck on the bed," she said aloud, and the whine of her voice made the situation seem that much worse.

The bedroom window was open a crack and she could hear the neighbor girl Katya playing outside. Katya's parents had erected a tent in their backyard over the weekend so Katya and her friends could pretend to have a clubhouse since it was too dangerous to run off into the hills and eat your lunch in the trees the way Gwen and her friends had done as children. Now Katya was singing as she zipped and unzipped the tent.

Gwen turned back to the nightstand and reached for the phone. She'd finally taken that graduate class in linguistics last semester, and, if she recalled correctly, there had been some brief discussion about floors. The relinquishment and regaining of floors.

Prof. Z was not in his office. Gwen got his voice mail and a list of options: "Press 1 for matters of phonetics. Press 2 for morphology and other ways of extending vocabulary. Press 3 for syntax. Press 4 for language universals and speech acts. For all other linguistic references, press the pound sign and leave a message."

Gwen thought for a moment, peeked over the edge of the bed, and pressed 4. Language universals. A new menu

offered advice on speech acts: the acquisition, processing and social explanations of them.

Sweating now (the heat was really billowing up from the pit) Gwen punched several more numbers until, sometime after the explanations of cooperative principle and adjacency pairs, there was this:

"An important difference between speech and writing is in the amount of planning that is possible. During a conversation, pausing to find just the right word risks losing the floor. In this case, a repair will be necessary before continuing. Repairs can be initiated and resolved by the person who uttered the words that need to be repaired or by another conversationalist. There are several ways to initiate a repair and regain the floor. For convenience sake, one can even do it by telephone. Press 1 to repeat part of the utterance to be repaired. Press 2 to abruptly stop speaking. Press 3 to use expressions such as *uh, I mean, or that is*. To return to the previous menu, press the star sign."

Gwen ran her fingers through her damp hair and tried to recall the conversation she'd had before falling asleep the night before. She and her husband had been arguing in bed, arguing mildly to avoid losing an hour's sleep. But what had they been saying?

She tried to remember the words as she plucked the television remote off the nightstand and dropped it absently into the pit. She peered down after it and instantly regretted the pop of red that appeared several seconds later at the bottom. What if she was stuck on the bed all day without television?

Gwen punched the number 3 into the phone. Repairing the floor with expressions such as *uh, I mean* and *that is* seemed the safest bet under the circumstances.

But apparently the line had already disconnected because a mild siren sounded in her ear, and a woman said, "We're sorry, your call did not go through. Will you please try your call again."

Gwen hung up. She thought about calling her husband, but he would be irritated at having to come home and deal with this. He might not even believe her at first, might think it was another excuse for not getting out of bed.

She'd only done that once last semester, stayed in bed for an entire day, with the curtains drawn, so that when he'd finally come home the room was just as dark as when he'd left before dawn. *What's the matter with you?* he had asked with genuine concern in his voice. But she couldn't say. And it had taken her a while to regain his respect, about a week, she guessed. He was a kind person, a humble man, but it had still taken a while. She could not call him about the floor.

Outside in the tent, Katya was reciting a poem. It drifted in through the open window:

*Oh what a day! What a day!
My little brother ran away.
Now my tuba will not play.
I'm eight years old and turning gray.
Oh what a day! What a day!*

Gwen decided to call to her. She would tell her to bring her mother over. Perhaps they would have a plank of some sort.

"Katya!" she yelled.

The poem ceased.

"Katya! In here! Can you hear me?"

"Mrs. Osuna? Is that you calling?"

Katya was in third grade and, unlike the other children in the neighborhood, was not permitted to call adults by their first names.

"Yes, it's me. I need your help. Can you get your mother, Katya? Quickly?"

Gwen heard the tent unzip and Katya's voice came nearer the window.

"I'm coming Mrs. Osuna."

She was climbing the fence. Gwen heard her shoes slap and scrape at the wood boards. Katya was a gymnast, a wiry thing who practiced cartwheels and round-offs on the grass in front of her house. Gwen wanted to yell at her to get off the fence and find her mother, but it was too late. Katya was already over. Her shadowy face approached the window.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Osuna?"

Gwen looked around the bedroom. How to explain?

"It seems I've lost the floor, Katya. I'll need some help getting out of bed. Can you bring your mother over? Do you know if she has a plank?"

Gwen heard the girl run over the grass and across the cement patio. The sliding glass door opened and shut carefully.

"Here I am," Katya called from the kitchen.

"Don't open the door!" Gwen cried. "You'll fall in."

But the girl wasn't listening or she didn't hear, because the door opened a few inches and Gwen could see a pair of eyes, a mass of brown ringlets and a blue veil. The door swung open over the pit and Katya stood at the very edge, dressed in a genie outfit, gold lamé and blue netting.

"What's wrong, Mrs. Osuna?" she said gently.

"I don't know," Gwen said. "But don't come any farther."

"What's happened to the floor?" she asked, peering down into the blackness.

"I woke up and it was like this," Gwen replied. "I need to make a repair."

"I can see all the way to the core," Katya said.
The girl dipped a grass-stained tennis shoe off the edge of the pit.

"It must be very hot down there," she added.

"Katya, go get your mother," Gwen ordered.

The little girl stared at Gwen sitting in the center of the disheveled bed.

"We don't keep planks at our house, Mrs. Osuna. Anyway, the easiest thing to do is just jump."

Gwen sighed and picked up the phone.

"Katya, what's your number?"

The girl recited it and Gwen punched in the numbers. Busy signal. She put the phone down.

"Really, Mrs. Osuna. You can make it if you stand on the corner and bounce off."

Katya bent her knees to demonstrate.

Gwen shook her head, "It's farther than you think."

"It seems far if you look down. But crossways, it's not. Watch."

Katya fixed her eyes on the bed, and Gwen cried out as the child sprang forward, sailing over the dark void and landing on her stomach on the corner. Gwen snatched her up and pulled her to the bed's center.

"See?" Katya said. "I told you. It's not so hard. Going back the other way would be even easier. It's downhill."

Gwen pressed the re-dial button on the telephone but Katya's mother was still talking.

"Will your mother be on the phone long?" she asked.

"It's Grandma," the girl said. "So yes."

Katya looked around happily and leaned back on one of the pillows.

"This would be a nice clubhouse, Mrs. Osuna," she said. "We could really keep the boys out."

Gwen remembered suddenly the conversation she'd had with her husband before falling asleep. He'd accused her of being tentative. She'd argued that she was merely open-minded. He'd said a little decisiveness would go along way. She had thought for a minute about that and decided she didn't know what he meant. She rolled over to ask him. *Along way toward what?* But he'd fallen asleep.

And now the floor was gone. She looked over the edge of the bed again and it occurred to her that perhaps her husband had fallen into the pit earlier this morning as he got up to shower. Perhaps he was down there now, calling for her, trapped on some rock, surrounded by lava. She scanned the blackness for any sign of life but she could not see him.

Katya was jumping on the bed now.

"Uh," Gwen said.

Katya stopped jumping and looked at her

expectantly.

"I mean..."

Katya crossed her arms patiently. Gwen looked down at the sheets.

"That is..." she said, starting to cry.

"Come on, Mrs. Osuna," said Katya, beginning to jump again. "It's fun."

The girl held out her hand.

Gwen stared for a moment at the child's boney knees and bruised shins and finally took her hand, allowing Katya to pull her up. The little girl plucked up Gwen's other hand as she jumped up and down in the middle of the big bed, crushing the sheets and bedspread beneath her grass-stained tennis shoes.

Gwen jiggled reluctantly, gritting her teeth and listening to the bedsprings squeal beneath her weight.

Katya tugged at her arms.

"Bend your knees!" she cried. "Like this."

Gwen bent her knees.

"Get your feet into the air!"

Gwen lifted her heels. She was bouncing on the balls of her feet, her long nightgown fluttering out around her.

Katya pulled her harder, and so Gwen bent her knees some more and allowed her feet to come off the bed as she bumped upwards.

"Wee!" cried the girl. And, "Fly!"

Gwen bounced higher, launching herself into the air with her feet, until her head was nearly brushing the ceiling. They were soaring now and the child was laughing.

Finally Katya let go and bounced a wobbling circle around Gwen. Slapping her hands onto her thighs as she jumped, Gwen rotated in a sloppy pirouette.

Katya completed the circle and moved to the corner nearest the door.

"I'll go first, Mrs. Osuna," she said, studying the doorway. "I know all about hot lava."

"Careful!" Gwen cried.

But the girl was already flying through the air, a blur of gold and blue. She landed a foot beyond the edge of the hall and spun around, eyes lit up, breathing hard.

"Now you!" she laughed, hands on her hips.

Gwen approached the corner of the bed but did not stop to think, just crouched down and leaped out over the hot abyss where her husband might or might not be, along with the Faulkner book and the remote control.

The little girl was right. It was a long way down but not so far across.

###

Gets Along, Plays Well With Others

I transfer at sixth and Mitchell.
The wind chill is twelve below
or something, and
 I wait for the number 90
from
the doorway of Kletzka's Meats.

My Eight O'clock class has come
and gone;
a winter sun skids across
the dome of St. Josephat's Basilica
Its wide gray shadow masks my face
This is the loneliest place.
My brain is a tomb
My heart is a tundra.

Two skinny men in fake leather coats,
green polyester and blue ankle boots
smoke cigarettes at the curb.
I shrink further into Kletzka's doorway,
but they find me.

Through corn kernel teeth
and Old Thunderbird
The one with the ravaged face
asks the time,
wants to know my name,
where I'm going,

and right then I know
I should have gone to real college.

I go to the technical school
because I'm afraid of real college.
I take the bus
because I'm afraid to drive,
I wear my hair long to hide my face,
I carry an empty handbag to look
 like a grown-up,

Kletzka's doorway smells
like the tannery under the
27th Street viaduct.

When the bus comes,
Polyester Man in Blue Boots
sits right next to me
in a fog of human body odor...

and I hate my life.

and the
man making bird calls
who thinks he's a train conductor,
the woman in black satin
held together with safety pins,
and the man with the Kandy Korn
necklace singing "My Girl,"
well,

they look me in the eye
on the number 90.

They shove me toward the door
In caustic whispers,
they say,
you'll end up like us
if you don't just
get
out.



Contributors:

Rebecca S.E. Baroma

is still angry about the misspelling of *Pilipino* to *Philipino* in her last publication in the Spring 1998 Northridge Review. But she loves her country anyway.

Dan Pine

A native of the San Fernando Valley, Daniel Pine graduates from Cal State Northridge this semester with a B.A. in English, and will be entering the Credential Program next fall with the goal of becoming a high school English teacher. He is a life-long lover of classic English literature and verse, and hopes to infuse his future students with the same missionary zeal.

Wade Bradford

esteemed cartoon cartographer, Wade Bradford spends most of his spare time playing the kazoo in the world's most unsuccessful jazz band. He enjoys long walks, long books, and long looks at himself in the mirror.

Santi Tafarella

is a public school teacher by day and an English graduate student by night. Any flaws in his two pieces he would like attributed to his being a vegetarian. He lives in Lancaster, Ca.

Alene Terzian

is eating apples and harvesting mint leaves. She has yet to find the cure for insomnia although valerian root seems to induce vivid bondage dreams. for fear of saying anything, Alene is refraining from societal interaction and has spent her entire vacation blessedly mute, selling beach front property in the Sahara Desert.

Simon Perchik

is married and has 3 children. He has been published in 12 magazines among many others and has 2 books out.

Daniel de Soilles

is a recovering poet and a member of several 12 step programs. Currently he has admitted having a problem, and is starting to watch more television. He is human however, and suffers relapses as evidence by the two poems included in this semesters anthology. His long term goal is to become the happy cosumer he has always wanted to be.

Christine Kuyumjian

meditates to tribal beats and the Angelic Realm. Her poetry is inspired by nothing, anything and everything.

Rebecca Brown

is.

Mary Shannon

lives with her two wonderful boys, an exceptional husband, and a sweet yellow Lab in a secluded canyon home. Along with her beloved bike and 1,799 close personal friends she rode 547 miles in AIDS Ride II from San Francisco to Los Angeles. She is a fourth generation native of Los Angeles.

Alex Field

lives vicariously through memories and novels and poetry and by grabbing at the big sky... farmers wife turns hubby into scarecrow... swooping around the room while the choir sings and the drum beat hightens; diving in and out... sing, sing, sing... you don't need to know how to dance to do it...

Maria Mami Turnmeyer

The myth of Maria. She was not pleased with the silver spoon the gods offered before birth. She traded it in for a pen instead.

Susannah LeBaron

is afraid of sharks, but she can sing in public with little trepidation. She likes being married. It's great.

Steven Iglesias

is a first generation American whose parents came from Chile—theland of wine and poetry. As a shild, Steve's mother would read both Latin American and Spanish poetry to him. This is when Steve's interest and fascination with surrealism and poetry began.

Lynn Root

When I was an undergrad umpteen years ago I couldn't wait to graduate and become a grown up. Now the thought of graduation produces acute separation anxiety and the stunning realization that I will probably never grow up. After various careers ranging from computer programmer (disaster) to flying (more my style) I have finally emerged, thanks to my CSUN cohorts and professors, from a lifetime of denial into a strenuous love affair with writing. I know now that independent wealth and the life of indolence I once coveted would most likely turn me into a dried up old prune, so I am hoping to find a teaching position in the company of others of our peculiar ilk that will keep me too forever young and blooming.

Josh Filan

dear nr,
godblessyoufor[thebeautifulradio]iwonatyourrecentseniorcitizen's luncheon.iam84yearsold&liveatalongbeachhome[fortheactiveretired].
allofmyfamilyaregone.it'snicetoknowthatsomeone[thinksofme].god
blessyouforyourkindnesstoanoldforgottenman.myroommateis95&aal
wayshadhisownradio[,butwouldneverletmelistentoit.]theotherday
hisradiofell&b
rokeintoalotofpiece
s.[itwasawful].heaskedifhecouldlistentomine,[&isaid fuckyou.]
jos h filan

Melissa Eastman Wantz

received her MA in English Literature-Creative Writing at CSUN in December and recently completed her first novel. She lives with her husband, son and daughter in Ventura and believes that pits of hot lava are not necessarily a terrible thing but that voice mail probably is.

Debra Zednik

is a graduate student at CSUN (English, Creative Writing option). She grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin (minus several formative years in the small town of Hudson, New Hampshire) and moved to California in 1984. She resumed her education in 1992 and recently accepted an adjunct faculty position at College of the Canyons in Valencia, CA.

Leticia Barreto

My name is Leticia Barreto and I am a first generation American. Even though my parents never got past an elementary school education, they always encouraged me to go to college and follow my dreams. Surprisingly, my parents didn't think that I was crazy for becoming an art major.

Photography has always come naturally to me. When I was seven I remember taking my mother's camera without her permission and using up all her film on photographing my stuffed animals and my pets. I don't photograph stuffed animals anymore. As an art major, I am planning on getting my MFA, teaching University level courses, and exhibiting my work at galleries and/or museums.

