

the northridge review

spring

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volume xxv

number one

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silbert zabins
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Then I reflected that all things happen to one, precisely *now*. Century after century, and things happen only in the present. There are countless men in the air, on land and at sea, and all that really happens, happens to me.

—Jorge Luis Borges

the northridge review

volume xxv issue I

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Two awards are given annually in recognition of the finest works produced by CSUN students and are published in the Fall and Spring issues of *The Northridge Review*.

We are pleased to publish the winners of the Benjamin Saltman Award. This award honors the memory of Professor Benjamin Saltman, whose dedication, integrity, guiding vision and generosity of heart helped to shape the Creative Writing Option in the Department of English.

The Benjamin Saltman Award, inaugurated in 1999, is given each year to a graduate or undergraduate poet of exceptional promise. The competition, which takes place during the Fall semester, is open to all CSUN writing students. Two Honorable Mentions are also awarded.

The winner of the 1999 Saltman Award is Ellen Kelley with her poems: "Insufficient Postage," "Lawrence, Jr., Purifies His Space," and "Wedding Tape." The two Honorable Mention poets are Carl Bramblett with his poem "Cody's Bookstore, March 10, 1996, for Ben" and Kevin-John Mararchi.

The Northridge Review invites submissions between September and April. Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover page that includes the author's name, complete address, including email address if applicable, and telephone number. It should also include the title(s) of the work(s) submitted. *The author's name should NOT appear on the manuscript itself.* Manuscripts are read anonymously by the staff of the *Review*.

Manuscripts should be delivered to:

The Northridge Review
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special thanks

The Northridge Review gratefully acknowledges the help and expertise of Dr. Katharine Haake, Nancy Thompson, Nancy Bernstein, Jennifer Elliot, Karen Castillo, the members of the Instructionally Related Activities Board, Dorothy Barresi, Mandalyn Kuntz, Steve Kochak, Grant Marcus, Lorita O'Leary and Daniel de Sailles. The editors would also like to thank Jack and Mary and the members of their strange clan, especially Peanut and the Troll, as well as Aaron, Noodles, Daddy, Pedrito, Elvis, Barok, Mama, Rae, Rod, Christopher, Xico, Fishy, Lava and the Filipino-American Community for their unswerving support.

editors notes

never...never again will there be an issue like this one...never again...never...it would be cheesy to start out with something like things never come out the way you meant it to be because that is when art happens but for some reason we feel we have to acknowledge that in this issue, especially in regards to the painful process (*duh*) that we have been through for this issue, from picking out poetry and prose to sitting around doing nothing and picking our noses, from keeping our staff and keeping our stature (*and believe me, it's easy to lose both*)...so we had this ideal vision and it's funny (*ha, ha*) how things always start out strong and through the process feel like they are getting weak and just when you are about to lose it art happens and you get picked up again but it doesn't matter because all of a sudden everyone is down to support your sorry ass and then it becomes accepted, it becomes part of the conversation, then *they* (*this omniscient they*) want to beat you again to become bigger and better which is fine unless they're really not aware which doesn't really matter because no one really cares not even you because you are realizing that what the real problem is is that *you* have control issues, *you* want to be a part of *this conversation*, so that is the reason you are editor this time around (*that's what you have to tell yourself anyway since you think you are arty or innovative or cutting edge or considerate or fair or aware or you are simply not going with the regular flow of things—it's good not to go with the flow yeah? and you're too tired to start a revolution though that doesn't stop you*)...then you find out who your friends are or who's real and who's down for supporting art...yes, producing this issue we have discovered the many issues in publishing...and we have found out, as pointed out in the epigraph by Borges, it is all about *you*...the artist, the person interacting with art, the creator, the looker, the buyer, the publisher, the conversationalist, the critic, the kiss-ass, etc....issues...all writers, all artists have them...whether they are arty or personal...we think it is mostly personal and then once it lands in the hands of others, the lines get blurred and all of a sudden we are labeled traditional, political, psychoanalytical, structuralist, feminist, modernist, post-modern, post-colonial, etc., etc...unfortunately, it's safer for everyone this way...and it better be one of those things in one way or another or else why do it?...but who cares...we have an issue, not a very special issue...just another issue for the anticlimactic pre-turn-of-the-century spring 2000 season...the pieces in this book were picked between a staff of 15 and boy was it hard for us...no one wanted to get out of themselves or didn't know how to get out of themselves (*it's that traditional, political, psychoanalytical, structural, feminist, modern, post-modern, post-colonial, etc., etc. thing again*)...we had to defend and listen and geez what a pain-in-the-butt process it was...after much deliberation (*though most of the time we were figuring out how to deal with time since all of us were students who claimed to have some sort of other life besides poetry and art*) we finally decided on some stuff...of course we couldn't have done it without the help and guidance of our faculty advisor, dr. katharine haake, who led us in most of our conversations...we do have to admit that grant, our poetry editor and "poet laureate" (*for if he were not poetry editor his work would be on top of our to-be-published-list for this issue*) started a lot of conversations as well...and the thing with grant is that once he gets started it takes a lot for him to stop...he was the perfect poetry editor...our prose staff had a rocky start at first but once they got going and got it together (*thanks to the smooth moves of steve-the-stud and the willingness of ozden to learn new stuff*) they weeded through the fiction and came across a list of excellent work...canan & christine, our experienced NR veterans and business editors, took care of a little business here and there while our production editor, daniel, believed in brevity, straight did his work and got through things with as little drama as possible...our enthusiastic staff members, mitch (*who went above and beyond duty*), samvel (*full of poetic wisdom*), helga (*...prosaic wisdom*), carol (*our unofficial secretary when we needed one*), lorita (*our journalist, experienced desk-top publisher and fellow control freak*), scott (*with his silent presence and strong opinions*), and mandy (*our unofficial-turned-official art editor whose ideas inspired the creative flavor for this issue*), hung on and took charge when they felt the need and kept on going even though the editors were going through bouts of instability and near-nervous breakdowns...anyway...here it is, our baby...the northridge review spring 2000 issue...just a little piece of work that hopefully makes its mark and continues the conversation in all of our readerly and writerly lives...never again will you get an issue like this one...never again...never...

best,

rebecca s. e. baroma & susan caggiano

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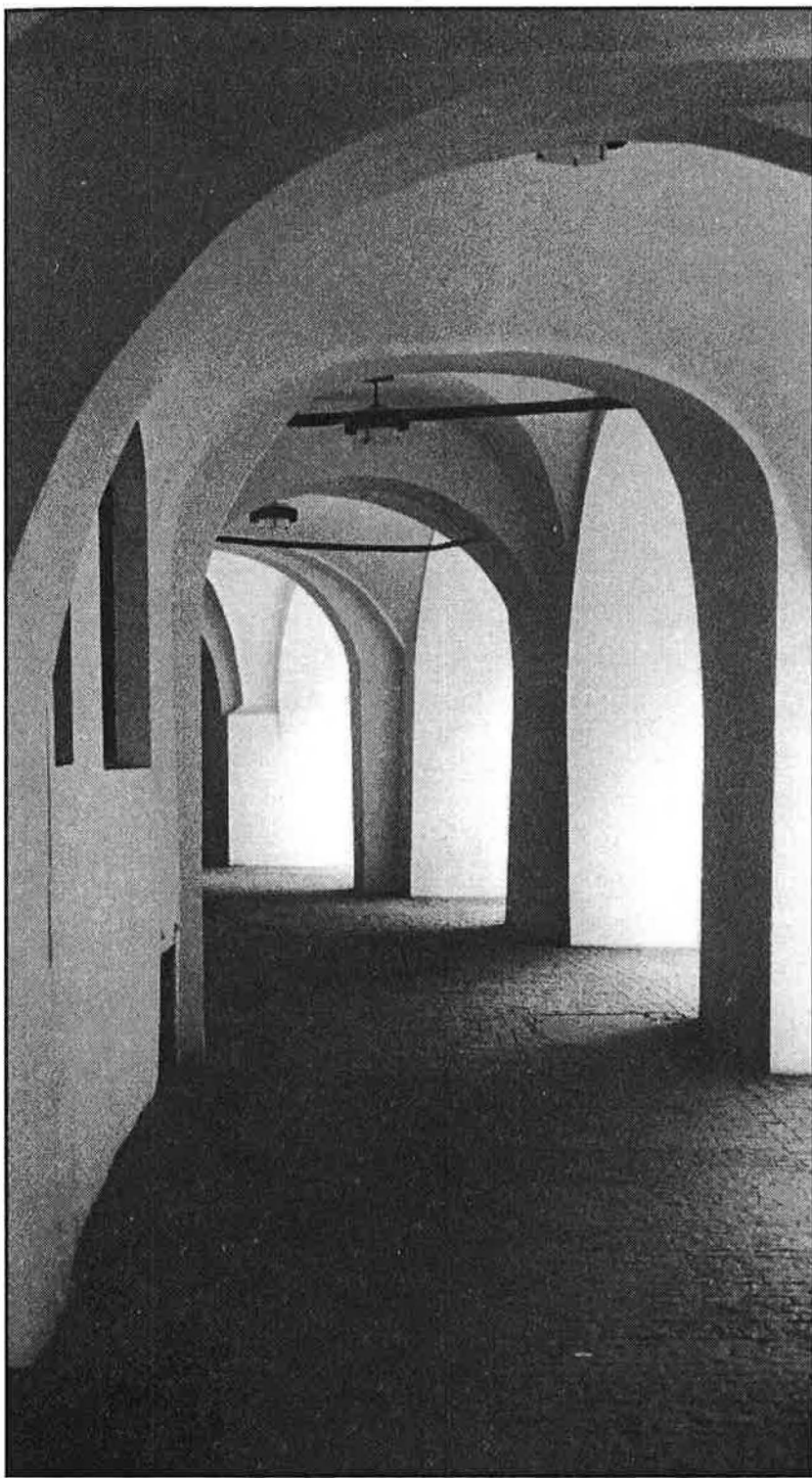
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Arches

-jeff kilpatrick

You Sound Like an Ethnic Studies Major

tony robles

The brown girl sitting
in front of me
is beautiful

the sun is showing its face
for both of us

lunchtime in the financial district

she eats a vegetable sandwich

...and nuts

we talk about our
brown ness
and she always insists
i'm darker than her

no use debating

she's smart
majored in psychology

and i tell her
how i learned more
cleaning toilets
than i did in school

and she smiles
between bites of
alfalfa sprouts and cheese
and says

"you're funny"

and i tell her

"don't patronize me"

and she continues to
take small bites:

"You're angry
...calm down
...you're overreacting"

and

"What's wrong with seeing an
Asian girl with a white
guy?"

and she's really
chewing
chewing
chewing

and i bite back
a little

and she says:
"You sound like an ethnic studies major"

i look down
thinking
how brown
i am

as she
eats
her
bag
of nuts

Hard Candy

tony robes

Driving to the cemetery with my uncle
listening to the
radio

Suckin' on hard candy

the kind that cuts the tongue
and reminds you
how hard
it was

hard like lockdown

when my uncle was sent away
for this crime
or
that crime

sitting across from
the old man
in the visiting room
of the jail

the old man
would bring him a bag
of hard candy

and say:

"You have to live your life right...you can't keep making
trouble"

i listen to my uncle

i taste the hard candy
cutting his tongue

bleeding poems

and i begin to understand how much that
hard candy meant to him

my uncle looks down
at the old man's grave

i gaze at the black and white
picture blended

in stone

"Right on, Pops"

he reaches into his pocket
and pulls out a glass
heart

"I give you my heart, pop"

places it on the
stone

springtime flower petals

scatter
in the
wind

the color
of

hard
candy

Take out the Yellow

tony robes

The guy's from Burma

came here
as a youngster
to attend school

a quirky guy

takes an hour to use the bathroom
flosses his teeth hard
like
broken guitar strings

drinks freshly squeezed juice
made of some sort of grass

eats only the whites of eggs

has a good job with
a major airline

criticizes the blacks in
the office for being lazy

does 1000 crunches
and 100 push ups a day

his mind clear
his body hard

drives a white chevy
pick up

does not eat the yolk
cause it's no good

has it completely separated
taken out
by
request

his friends only eat the
egg whites too

they come from interesting places
In the midwest
or from Europe

meets them on overseas flights
or cultural events

wonders why i eat
the yolk

and i smile
a half smile
and tell him
it's because i'm just
too goddamn
lazy
to take the
thing
out

What I Said

maria mami turnmeyer

I am trying to tell William a story.

I am saying:

"I saw a woman today while I shopped down on Eighth Street. She wore the most perfect red dress," I say.

Will turns around, spills black coffee, little tear driplets all over his tan slacks. He says, "Damn," brushing at the stain, making it grow. "Not another dress story, is it?" he asks.

Will thinks:

("Any sentence containing the word *dress* is a slant against me.")

I do not know why Will feels this way about dress stories. *Dress* stories are my favorite kinds of stories. Silky, smooth ironed, brand new, begging to be worn.

Will brushes at the stain with the back of his hairy hand. The air is beginning to smell like coffee. Smells hard like coffee and Will's skin.

I go on:

I make a mental note to comment on the color of the dress. To say the dress was red is passive. The red satin, alive, clinging, glowing, crashing with green trees and gray one-legged pigeons. The dress fails proper wording. I try to stumble from my tongue and it comes out, "The dress glowed the tone of sheepish smooth red." It does not come out the way I thought it might.

I am trying to find the right words. Words in a sentence like:

I suppose my thoughts are often sensitive about color. I was eating an apple at the time. But Will," and here I pause for effect, "it was redder than the lipstick I wore Friday night."

Will looks down at his slacks:

"Can you tell I've spilled?" he asks.

"Are you listening?" I ask back.

Will looks at me:

He cocks his head the way he did the day I told him I planned to crop off all my hair and shave my scalp. I wasn't kidding.

"Yeah," he says, "I heard you. Red dress, red lipstick," he mumbles, still looking at his slacks.

"So," I begin my story again, "I thought to ask the lady where she bought the dress."

Will stops looking down at his crotch. He stops looking at what he calls the animal in a cotton cave.

The dark wet stain seems to be growing.

"You didn't ask her, did you?" Will asks.

Will comes alive when I speak of women. When I speak of speaking to women.

I think Will is intrigued:

Will's lips curl around the lip of his mug. A soft bit of flesh u-ed in interest. His nose top hugs.

"I did," I say.

I explain:

I wanted to tell Will a story about how I approached the lady (in red). From across the street I thought her taller than me. A good six inches taller. She had on black spoke spiked heels, completely inappropriate with a red dress, but somehow, appropriate. The black straps of her shoes snaked around her ankles and bit her mid-calf.

"You really didn't, did you?" Will asks, interrupting my story again.

I try to tell him the story:

"I did," I say. "Why would I lie to you?"

I tell him:

The lady smiled at me and nodded over her shoulder. She knew I couldn't help but look. I crossed the street against the traffic light, pretending to admire the clothes in the shop windows.

"What did she look like?" Will asks, "Up close, I mean. Did she look the same?"

"What do you care what she looked like up close? I'm talking about the dress," I say.

Will goes on to tell me:

Beautiful women from afar don't look the same close up. Distance filters the face. I think that is what he is trying to say. He wants to know about her lips.

"What color lipstick did I wear Friday night?" I ask Will.

"What you always wear," he answers.

"And what," I say, forgetting that I am trying to tell him the story of an afternoon, "is the color that I always wear?"

Will goes back to staring at his crotch:

The wet stain has stopped moving. He brushes at the stain again. Will does not want to answer my question partly because he doesn't want to have to think up an answer. I am guessing of course. I can never quite tell what answer he might give.

I tell Will:

After the lady and I exchanged nervous glances (mine more nervous than hers), I told her how much I admired her dress and that I wondered where she got it from.

Downtown buildings shine clean on Street Eight.

Will takes another sip of his coffee. The scent all escaped into the air.
"The lady had a deepest sea voice," I tell Will. "Her voice was distracting. It was that deep."

"Get to the end already," Will says, forgetting that it is my story I am telling.

"Anyway," I go on, "she tells me she made the dress herself. Isn't that interesting?"

Will lowers his coffee mug. He looks very disappointed.
"Is that *all*?" he asks.

I tried to tell Will the story:

- (1) It isn't very often I have something terribly interesting to say.
 - (2) I work ten hours a day at a downtown sandwiches and such place.
 - (3) I eat my lunch at two in the afternoon, every afternoon.
 - (4) I watch people, all sizes, like planets, walk by.
 - (5) I pay particular attention to what people are wearing.
- That's my life.

Today:

- (1) I saw the most beautiful red dress in the distance.
 - (2) I spoke to her.
 - (3) She smiled candy at me.
 - (4) I asked her where she got the red dress from.
 - (5) She told me she made it.
 - (6) I smelled a salty sea somewhere in the distance.
 - (7) She asked me for a bite of my apple.
 - (8) I let her take a bite.
 - (9) She bit down hard and wide and the juice of the apple dribbled down her chin like honey, leaving behind a sweet invisible trail.
 - (10) She thanked me.
 - (11) I took the bitten apple back.
-
- (12) She kissed me.
An apple kiss that left her behind long after she walked away.

Will misses the point of all dress stories I try to tell him.

Fire Island

b.z.niditz

pay dirt,
he said,
painting in the sunset
by the dark sand,
refusing to admit
to have spilled
any gossip from the soup can,
like Johnny Ray's escapades
at the last wedding
of Judy Garland,
preferring to talk
about the Jacob's Pillow dancer
in the next line,
of historical romantic fiction,
with Warhol's *Flesh*
tickled pink;
he laughed with James Schuyler
about his diaries
outside the tea room
on Fire Island,
sweating for a cruder joke
to match his and his,
anything to amuse;
from the gold body parts
which the god of the Borscht Belt
was generous to display
at the Easter egg roll,
screw the world,
he chuckled,
thinks he's an opera star
in *La Gioconda*
drowning in the breath
of a castratti,
prancing like Pavlova;
midnight clears away
the Bakstian apparition
from his eyes,
thinking about that scholar
and gypsy taxi boy
who rode up with him,
speaking Slav
here in these waterways
where deals are made
on Hollywood beds
and scavengers
come to find

their own brothers
next door,
only wanting to be seen
in those expressive paintings
on the auction block of Soho,
anything but a brush-off
for a Sunday of high art,
a drag show
is announced
with a discus thrower
from Mt.Olympus
thrown and flown in
for the remake
of a grade-B Hercules;
thinks he's Jesus revived
in a symbolist way
with his twelve band
of Apollo theater queens
breaking every record
of the past
for their own icons.

Frida's Favorite Aztec Hairless Dog, Se or X lotl

virgil suarez

when he moved in the middle of the night next to her bed,
in his eyes the lights from the outside shone, and she pondered
how death would finally come to her, in mirror image,

a woman with crow's wings for eyebrows, bruised like ripe
plums, scars from so many surgeries like muddy rivers,
swift, sea-bound, and when she ached with the pain

of forgiveness, Diego in her mind, *sapito hechisero*, hers,
and the dog yelped several times until it found its groove
on the piece of carpet on the floor. *Feo*, she whispered,

feito lindo, her attraction to exotic animals helped
her get used to the idea of an other-worldliness, X lotl
climbed over the edge of her bed to be petted, licked

her hands, and she thought of his tongue as one giant
brush with which she painted the canvas of her nights,
a world ablaze with crimson, purple, pulsing colors

like those she saw the first time she made love, so long
ago, when the world, lighter, lifted her skyward,
an angel's azure wingfeather-she sighs, the dog barks.

What We Took

virgil suarez

when we left Havana
in December of 1970:

nothing but coats
my father bartered

rabbits and chickens for,
my mother reinforced

their itchy wool linings,
the best shoes we owned,

scarves my mother knitted,
gloves which she cut

from patterns traced
by penciling the outline

of our hands, photos
of my grandparents,

uncles, aunts, cousins,
my mother's younger brother

Ovidio, who posed in military
uniform, the airport guard

confiscated the picture,
State property, he argued,

no jewelry, no other items
of clothes, personal possessions.

When we arrived in Madrid,
people looked at us, askance

stares, as uncomfortable as ours,
as though we were a trio



-tanya quin

The Lonely Old Drunken Fool

al robes

The *Sulu*¹ sea storms cannot keep him from
wandering up and down Natoma St. Treading
naked over *Badjou*² fish scales in his life.
Looking for a golden-brown *Benguet*³ Mountain
*asawa*⁴ to bear him a hundred children.
When he danced in the ricefields last
night, he caught a quick glimpse of her
stripped naked as *Cebuano*⁵ rice husks

tirit-rit ng maya
tirit-rit ng ibon
ibig mag asawa
wala ng ikakaya⁶

He lifted his arms toward her—only to find
His arms wrapped around an empty ricefield

tirit-rit ng maya
tirit-rit ng ibon
ibig mag asawa
wala ng ipalamon
tang-tang⁷

Wandered off again
Treading all day & night
Reached the Benguet Mountain village
of munbunong (medicinemen)
where they chant to rocks, trees, mountain & sky
This sacred mountain is known only to water buffaloes
that protect the path of the munbunong, leading to
the face of the moon.

Giant lizards guard the wooden gate
from unwanted evil spirits
they sweep down into the Benguet village
during the day
And they rise up in the dark

Swallowed ten gourds of coconut wine
The mountain spirits ran wild
When they saw Eloride's ugly face,
they all disappeared.
Leaped up high in the air, laughing.

The way to Benguet Mountain is rough
Nobody knows how Eloride made it to this place
Carrying his thin body over steep mountain trails
Soaring over sharp, jagged cliffs
Pounding his eighty-pound body into the fierce wind

He remembers nothing but the soft breasts of
His first wife brushing up against his face
Her long-lasting taste has not left
His brown flesh burns in *bagoong*⁸-sweat
Looking for a Benguet Mountain asawa
makes no sense
So he wails like the wind in his sleep.

A munbunong approached Eloride and asked:
"Why have you come on this long journey?"
Eloride laughed loudly in his face, and said,
"What do you think?...Looking for *puki-puki*⁹?
I come looking for a Benguet Mountain asawa
I could still have an erection."

The munbunong was furious and cried out,
"You're nothing but a stupid old man.
The Benguet Mountain women will kill
you with their beauty."

Again, Eloride laughed in his face.
Made faces at him. He even stuck his tongue out:

"You see, I'm no ordinary man
I live on Tokay wine and rice
I carry my eating utensils around with me
I like puki."

"How can you respect the Benguet women, said
the munbunong, "When you don't even respect these
sacred mountains? Even the wind could smell you out.
The grass dies under your feet."

Munbunong: "Your nothing but a whoremonger.
Your spirit collects nothing but dung
You live...you think...you swim in dung
And even when you try to wipe it clean
The stain and smell drags down your mind
deeper and deeper into the pit of your maggot-
Spirit breeding PANOLAY-PANOLAY-PANOLAY...

tirit-rit ng maya
tirit-rit ng ibon
ibig mag asawa
wala ng ikakaya

tirit-rit ng maya
tirit-rit ng ibon
ibig mag asawa
wala ng ipalamon

Eloride raised his fist at the munbunong and said,
"Don't waste time talking to me. Who in the fuck
are you? Piss off! Because you live in the Benguet
Mountains, you think you're a magic sonofabitch—
Besides, do you know what you are? Sonofabitch.
Bastard. Don't screw over me with those words.
I'm going to make you eat them. I'll knock your
head off with this wine bottle...cocksucker...
sonofabitch."

Munbunong: "Leave at once. There is no room for you
here in Benguet Mountain. Forget about finding a wife.
What would you feed her, anyway? Tokay wine?
Go back to the Henry Hotel on Fourth Street...you
drunken fool. You'll turn her insides purple like pickled
plums."

But this time Eloride was furious—nothing would
turn him back. He dug his feet deep into the ground.
He wasn't going to move one inch, not one inch.
"I'm not leaving this goddamn place.

I'll get that loincloth of yours
and wrap it around your thick, fat lips.
So don't give me any shit...and all this talk of
spirits and vision. How do you wipe your ass—
with fishheads? With coconut fiber? With banana
leaves? With thick bark? With wet grass?
I'll strangle you with this toilet paper.
Hang you on that tree with my abaca belt; so don't
bullshit me."

Eloride threw an empty wine bottle at the munbunong.
And he ducked just in time. The munbunong
pointed his finger toward the sky and brought down
rain and thunder. Then Eloride gave him the finger.
"Right up yours!...Right up yours! You fucking
sonofabitch." And then suddenly the munbunong
disappeared.

tirit-rit ng maya
tirit-rit ng ibon
ibig mag asawa
wala ng ikakaya

Heavy rains poured down on his hollow face
 Lightning scorched Eloride's whole body
 A thousand Benguet Mountain storms could
 not push him back. Life without a woman
 is like living without one's *titi*¹⁰.
 Empty dreams drag down the heart
 Memories pull down the mind

All of a sudden Eloride heard this sound
 Much greater than the thunder in the skies
 A giant Benguet Mountain woman rolled down
 the mountainside. She was big and round.
 she rolled down on her fat belly: Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!
 Ho! Ho! Ho! Ho!

She had eyes as big as *bayabas*¹¹
 and an ugly nose that twisted
 around her face like wild *kamote*¹².
 When she opened her mouth coconuts fell
 from the trees. She crashed down in
 front of Eloride's feet.
 "My name is Maglagidokaka. What is yours?"

Eloride did not know how to answer her.
 He was still in a state of shock.
 "My name is Eloride Benaga."
 Maglagidokaka said, "I'm yours—if you want me.
 First you must kiss my fat belly and then my breasts."
 Eloride fainted.

When he had come to he was mumbling to himself:
 "Maglagidokaka-Maglagidokaka-Maglagidokaka!
 Jesus Christ! Almighty! And blacked out again.
 Maglagidokaka smashed him on the head with her fist.
 When Maglagidokaka turned her back, Eloride got up
 And ran to the edge of the cliff
 Slid his ass all the way down without looking back.
 All you could hear in the far distance is

tirit-rit ng ibon
 tirit-rit ng maya
 ibig mag asawa
 wala ng ikakaya

1. *Sulu*: Sulu archipelago, southern region
 2. *Badjou*: Muslim tribe, Southern Philippines
 3. *Benguet*: mountain province, Northern Luzon
 4. *asawa*: wife
 5. *Cebuano*: native of Cebu

6. Song Translation:
(sound of) sparrow
(sound of) bird
want to get married
cannot afford
7. Song Translation:
(sound of) sparrow
(sound of) bird
no food to feed
the end (tang-tang)
8. *bagoong*: salty fish relish prepared from very small fish or shrimp
9. *puki-puki*: vagina
10. *titi*: penis
11. *bayabas*: guavas
12. *kamote*: sweet potatoes

Hangin on to the Carabao s Tail

al robes

Flaming navaho—arapaho fish rituals sing out of our ancestral bowels, from kalinga—igorot skins, from nigrity sky—river spirits, from the burning castration of magellan, from santa cruz cock fights, from tino's barbershop to international manongs, from a thousand dalits & ugsa & laman & Kabunian & bangan & lumawig & canaos & tumungaws & mang-mangk & tolivilbayan & an—antipakao & the pakde ceremony & to the ifugao medicineman & to the biko woman with a magdagaret basket of sweet coconut rice—history & tales of the manongs & the brown feet of children in the south of market street & to their spirit that swirls round a thousand ricefields & playgrounds of America & to the clapping of kayaomunggi hands & snapping ifugao-forest fingers & to the yellow—brown—black—red breaking loose in the kearny street wind & to the fishheads in the pilipino sky & to the tribal spirits waiting to return to the ancestral bellies & from sioux ghost chants & sun dances, from blazing kayaomunggi suns bursting into a basket of fishnets & to the nihonmachi issei & to the lo yun & to ifugao bells & gongs & from tibetan horns screaming khamandhu mountains to bend—we celebrate our poetry falling like a thousand tribal rains & singing a hundred thousand songs & thru la raza machetes & sapao bolos—cutting the moon of civilization in half: we come out of tule-manzanar concentration camps—my lai—golden chinatown mountains—watts—wounded knee-kearny street—mission street barrios—singing our poetry.

the long night
sitting alone
eating fish
listening to
mandolin strings
of the old manongs
they came only
to change their lives
where are they now?
international hotel
passing an empty hole
here on kearny street
on jackson street
where a whiteman
in the past
waited in his truck
to bring pilipinos
to salinas
here on kearny street
memories so deep
still can hear the cries
wailing inside of me
never leaving
cuts so deep
like a bolo
i see their faces
espíritu
felix
agnes
osorio

llamera
before
they carried so much rice
& pig head
in the rain
here now
on kearny street
a place
called manilatown
is still alive
with songs
echoing—
lives changing
like the wind
we move on to other things:
sit down with us
and eat; listen to
our poetry:

we rise
taller
than redwoods.



Untitled

-s.a. murray

Among the Lonely Things of Night

susannah lebaron

The house without a roof was beginning to fill with stars. It sat in the northwest corner of the county like a lost sailor treading water on an ocean of grass. It hoped for rescue; it was beginning to drown.

The old woman who lived in the house was also perhaps beginning to drown. The stars were thick like love or syrup, and they were up to her bosom. It had become difficult to move from the kitchen to her bedroom to the living room or bathroom.

When the stars had first begun falling, the door to the cellar was closed. The old woman awoke to stars a foot high, so she opened the cellar door and swept the pool of them into the darkness that held the old magazines, her husband's clothes and a stolen library book about Alexandria. That night she wisely opened the cupboard doors anticipating that, were more stars to fall while she was asleep, they might weigh against the cupboard doors and make them difficult to open. This precaution allowed her to eat breakfast the next morning before sweeping the fresh stars into the cellar.

So it went until the cellar was full.

When the cellar became full of stars, the old woman sat in her rocking chair and thought about what she would do if there were more stars in the morning. She fell asleep in the rocker, a book open in her lap, her feet in pink slippers. By morning she was covered in stars and her slippers were hidden. She stood up and brushed the stars from her shoulders, then waded to the kitchen to make some toast. She scooped the stars out of the sink and shook them out of the toaster. Sighing, she made four phone calls, each time explaining to the woman at the other end that she would not be able to host this month's meeting, that she was not feeling well. All four ladies wished her a speedy recovery and offered to drive the seventy miles of dirt roads to bring her a casserole of great nourishment. She told them it was contagious, but thank you.

She swept all the stars into her bedroom, filling the closet and piling them on the bed. But the stars kept falling and finally the bedroom, too, was full.

When the bedroom was full and stars were still falling every night, the old woman became sad. Her house was filling with stars and she did not know what to do. She was beginning to miss her bed. And the stars were bright, making it necessary for her to wear sunglasses. The stars were heavy against the door and as a result her garden was beginning to die. The topiary giraffe was looking blurry. And her cat had disappeared. For the best, she thought.

She tried throwing the stars over the walls but was not strong enough.

She had filled grocery bags with stars and stacked them in the hallway and the corners of the living room, but more fell every night.

She did not want to ask for help; everyone she knew had already told her to get a roof. What would they say now? Then she thought that other people might be having the same problem with stars falling into their backyards or planters. So she called the four women of her club and asked if they were having any strange weather in their part of the county. They were not. This made the old woman even more sad, though the ladies still wanted to bring her warm and nourishing casseroles.

It was as if all the stars of the world were on a giant necklace that had come unstrung and were falling pearl by star-pearl into her house. Her husband had once given her a long pearl necklace and she had worn it constantly until one day it came unstrung and every pearl slipped free of the string, falling into her lap and looking round and clean against her green apron, reminding her of white crocuses. But of course she still cried. Her husband rushed into the room when he heard her sobs, but he found his wife so beautiful with her bright, tear-filled eyes and dark hair, holding a gaggle of pearls on her lap that all he could

do was carry her to the bedroom and make love to her until she smiled and laughed and, sighing against his shoulder, conceived their first child.

After calling all the people she knew and asking them about the weather, she brushed the stars off her rocking chair and sat down to cry. But she did not cry, for it seemed useless with no one to rush into the room and make love to her. Instead she got up and filled another grocery bag with stars. She cried as she did this, for tears will come.

At last the house without a roof could take no more. The walls built by the old woman's husband came undone and millions of stars flooded the garden and the driveway and the fourteen acres surrounding the house that had once floated on a sea of grass in the northwestern corner of the county. The old woman's body was carried by the tide of stars and came to rest in a meadow of sorrel where it sank into the ground as a child to the breast.

The next day the stars melted and the cat returned.

Greenhat Farm

susannah lebaron

The soft, green hat cost far too much. Angela put it back on the table and left the store, sad and a little bit ashamed for wanting things. Her grandmother met her at Mrs. Field's and bought her a cookie, but this didn't help, for the hat was soft and fleecy and just the color of green for her, but it was too expensive. A tear rolled onto her cookie.

Her grandmother had found lots of things at the mall and bought them all. But she had not seen the soft, green hat and Angela did not want to show it to her because her grandmother would buy it for her or tell her it cost too much. She wanted to buy it herself so that she could wear it to bed and in the bathtub and everyday to school even when it had pills all over it. And she already knew that it cost too much.

Her grandmother pulled a vase out of one of her shopping bags. "This is for your father. Now he will remember to bring your mother flowers. Men should each have a vase—it is a great reminder." Angela looked at the vase. It was green. But it was not soft and not the color of green for her. The vase made her sad because her father was dead and that was why he did not bring her mother flowers.

Everyone that her grandmother bought gifts for was dead, and every year at Christmas she would unwrap the dead person's present and smash it against the wall. Every present was breakable. One year she forgot this and had to cut up a scarf that she had bought for her sister. It was not nearly as satisfying as the smashing, she said.

"And this is for your auntie." Her grandmother held up a porcelain horse.

"And some crystal for my Jack." It sparkled in the sunlight that shone through the skylights.

The mall was nice. It had two developers who had gone all out and there were real trees everywhere in the mall. The floors were marble, and every fifteen feet was a drinking fountain with a paper cup dispenser for the fearful. During the holidays there would be carolers and Santa Claus and a Giant Menorah. Angela's school band had played there last year. She played the flute because that was what her mother had played and it was simpler to play her mother's flute than to ask her grandmother for another instrument like a saxophone or violin, neither of which her grandmother was used to.

Her grandmother had bought ceramic candlesticks for Angela's mother. There were little cherubs painted on the candlesticks and the cherubs were holding gauzy scarves that floated upward. The scarves reminded Angela of the un-smashable scarf that her grandmother had accidentally bought two years ago. Sometimes she wished that everything was made out of plastic.

Another tear rolled onto her cookie and her grandmother stopped showing her things to ask her what was wrong. Her grandmother re-wrapped everything and carefully put them back in their bags while she listened to Angela explain that she had found something she very much wanted—not just to have but to own. Not to have in the way you have school clothes in your closet. Her grandmother listened. When she asked what it was, Angela told her it was very expensive. Ten million dollars.

"That is expensive," said her grandmother, "but what color is it?"

Angela set the cookie on the bench and looked at her lap. It is green. She said it over and over to herself, but could not say it out loud to her grandmother. Great tears rolled down her face as she looked up at the trees that lived in giant planters and stretched up through cut-outs in the top floor of the mall. She looked at the trees and sighed. She had learned about photosynthesis last year and thought that maybe her hat could photosynthesize. It was perfect green.

"Is it green?" Her grandmother asked.

Angela leaned against her grandmother's soft shoulder and sobbed two great sobs.

"Yes," she said weakly. "It's green. It's the most perfect color of green ever and I just wanted to have it so that it would be mine, but really mine, and I could wear it to school everyday and to bed if I wanted and even in the tub."

"Is it a sweater?"

Angela shook her head.

Her grandmother guessed everything that a girl can wear, including a bra, and that almost made Angela laugh. But then she remembered how expensive the soft green hat was and she leaned against her grandmother again, sighing deeply and with pain.

"Is it a hat?"

Angela sighed again and nodded. "It *is* a hat. It is the most beautiful hat in the world and it is soft and cannot break."

Her grandmother stiffened. She was sensitive about her tradition of smashing things on Christmas morning. One year the neighbors had called the police and she had been required to see a counselor who did not understand and finally asked her to stop coming.

"A soft green hat that cannot break, you say. And it costs ten million dollars?"

Angela began to cry again, for that was it. That was exactly it.

Her grandmother rocked her back and forth saying, "There, there," and, "Don't cry now," and, "Everything will be fine. There, there."

"When I was pregnant with your dad," she told Angela, "I knit him a sweater and mittens and booties and a little cap. Your grandfather didn't want me to use blue or pink yarn because we didn't know then if your dad was your dad or your auntie. And neither of us cared for yellow, so one day Jack came home with the most beautiful skein of green lambswool and said, 'This is for the child in your belly' and then he kissed me and kissed me and I knew that the baby would be happy in its green lambswool yarn."

This made Angela cry harder because it made her think of her father when he was a baby and not dead. But she asked her grandmother to tell her more.

"Well, I made the most adorable little hat. I was looking at those patterns that have strings to tie under the chin, but I wanted something with more style, so I knit for days and there it was. A perfect green hat. Everyone deserves a perfect green hat."

"Do you think that we could bury the presents this year instead of smashing them? Or something?"

Angela had not meant to ask this. She had meant to ask something else. She sat very still and tried to have not asked that. She had meant to ask about layaways and allowance and mowing the lawn and anything else she could do to earn her own green hat.

After five minutes, she looked at her grandmother out of the corner of her eye. Her grandmother looked pale and the bags under her eyes stood out. She did not look understanding or cross or comfortable. She did not look familiar.

Angela stood and tried to pick up the bags full of breakables. "C'mon Grandma. Let's go. Let's just go. I'll carry the bags. Let's just go."

Her grandmother slowly rose to her feet. Looking straight ahead, she walked out of the mall and headed to the car. Angela struggled behind her, carrying the bags, tears streaming down her cheeks, trying not to sob because then she wouldn't be able to breathe; she needed to breathe in order to carry the heavy bags with the thin handles all the way to the car.

Halfway across the parking lot Angela began to sob. She set down the bags and yelled at her grandmother's distant back, "Hey! Hey! I didn't mean to hurt your feelings! I'm really sorry! Hey! I'm really sorry!"

Her grandmother just kept walking. The car was only four spots away from her.

"Hey!" Angela yelled, choking on her tears, "Hey!"

She reached into one of the bags and pulled out a white mug with "C-O-F-F-E-E,

printed on it. She threw it at her grandmother and screamed, "Hey!"

She threw a ceramic rose and a wine glass, "Just stop! Just turn around! I'm sorry! Just turn around!"

She threw a fruit bowl and the green vase. She threw her mother's candlesticks and the crystal ashtray for her Grandpa Jack. She threw her auntie's horse. She threw dinner plates and perfume bottles and a small glass cat. She threw everything that was in the bags and then she threw the bags.

Angela's grandmother had just reached the car when a white coffee mug smashed at her feet. Her granddaughter sounded far away. She reached into her purse for the keys when a ceramic rose flew past her and smashed against the S.U.V. on the other side of her car. She stopped. Pieces of a wine glass flew between her feet. What was going on? Slowly she turned around and there was her granddaughter hurling a fruit bowl at her. She looked at her granddaughter trying to figure out if this truly was her granddaughter or some crazy child who followed her out of the mall and was now throwing expensive breakables at her.

A green vase landed beside her and broke into many pieces. Angela's grandmother felt bad when she saw this and looked at the girl again.

She looked like Angela.

More things flew at her, each object beautiful, reflecting the afternoon sun as it arched toward her. Each thing lovely and unique.

She tried to make out what the girl that looked like Angela was saying to her. It sounded terrible. It sounded as if the Angela girl were going to jump into the air and fly across the parking lot and smash at the old woman's feet.

But the girl just threw the empty bags, and when that was done she sat down on the blacktop, crying with her head in her hands.

If it is Angela, she thought, something must have happened. She stepped over the glittering disaster at her feet and approached the sobbing heap that might be Angela. When she reached the heap, she addressed it, "Well, child?"

"I just wanted the green hat. I didn't mean to say that about Christmas. I just wanted the hat."

"You must be Angela."

Angela looked at her grandmother. There were slivers of glass and ceramics clinging to her skirt.

"I could learn to knit. I could knit a green hat. I'm sorry it costs ten million dollars."

"Ten million dollars is a great deal of money." This was obviously Angela. The old woman chided herself for her confusion. Only her granddaughter would want something that cost ten million dollars and couldn't break. "Thread is susceptible to scissors you know. And wear."

Angela nodded. "Maybe I should learn to crochet."

"You should learn both," she pulled Angela to her feet. "You should learn to spin."

They brushed off each other's clothes.

"I could learn to card the wool."

They picked up the empty bags and carried them to the car.

"We could learn how to shear the sheep," suggested her grandmother.

"Maybe we could even raise the sheep. On a farm," said Angela.

Her grandmother unlocked the car door and Angela climbed in. They crunched out of the parking lot and drove home.

"Yes," said her grandmother, "we could get a farm. A farm would cost less than ten million dollars."

That Christmas when there were no presents to smash, Angela's grandmother sheared all the sheep instead. It was not as satisfying to the ear she said, but it took a day

and a half and that made up for the sounds. Afterwards the sheep were so cold they almost froze to death. Never having intended to kill the sheep, Angela's grandmother let them spend the rest of the winter in the spare bedrooms of the farmhouse while she knit sweaters for them and explained how lucky they were not to be made out of glass or porcelain. Angela made them hats.

Dreaming of Mother

heather brittain bergstrom

before her death

I.

I am pregnant
and carrying her heavy body
through water, dark water
the color of the bruises on her legs.
At first I think the water is the sea,
but it's the lake with the seaweed-covered bottom
she took my sisters and me to as children.

Naked, we swim past people fully clothed,
people we once knew—an uncle,
my father's old boss, neighbors.
Even my sisters, who live states away
from the bed where she now lies dying,
are here, but do not offer help to shore.

I carry her bruised body
through the dark water.
Babies float like buoys around us.
I am exhausted.
 I can't go on...

II.

We are having dinner at my dead Uncle's house,
sitting up to a table green as the wet grass
outside his window. My mother is beside me.
And my father whom she divorced years ago
is across the table. She has cancer, but it hasn't yet
spread to her brain. As dinner goes on, her health gets worse.
An oxygen tube is in her nose. She starts asking
crazy questions like *Why are we eating the good towels?*
My dad says to me across the table, out loud,
so mother can hear him, that she should just kill herself
and get it over with like she tried to once before
when I was younger, when they were still married.
She can't hear him. He says it again and again.
I bang my plate on the table. She gets
more confused, talking about kids trying to pinch her.
Green hair is falling out of her mouth.
My father puts his hand up to his head like a gun.
She can't see him. He makes a clicking noise
with his tongue over and over.
He has never forgiven her.

After her death

III.

She is standing beside her car
without a walker, without her oxygen.
When I run to her, tell her I thought she was dead,
she says no, she has to drive to town
and do errands first: buy a new dress,
a set of matching towels for the bathroom...
In front of the bank people are standing around the ATM.
She asks me why they are all sleeping.
Her left eye begins to droop as it did from the Morphine,
her hands turn white as the day she died,
white as the envelopes she's stuffing into the machine.
We drive away. She starts nicking trees and buildings,
a telephone pole as she did in the snowstorm when I was seven.
I beg her to pull over, let me drive.
She can't understand why I am acting hysterical.
The seat belt singses my belly. I feel a weight
between my legs. Finally I see my uncle in the car behind us,
a patch of grass on his head. My mother pulls over.
A baby hangs between my knees.

IV.

It's the summer before she died.
She is lying in the bed she shared with my father,
her purple blanket folded down at the end,
her one breast hanging limp
as her catheter bag beneath the sheet.
The table beside her is crowded with crumpled tissues,
pill bottles, jars of spit up. She is crying.
I fluff her pillow, pull open the curtains father always
left closed so he could sleep late. I tell her my plan
to be with her every day *this time* until she dies.
I read to her from the book big as a dictionary,
the one the minister said would help her
live her last days in peace, the book we never opened.

Suddenly voices from the front room get so loud
I can't hear myself speak.
I walk up the hall. The room is filled
with my father's family. They become silent
when I enter. My father is in the center.
I tell them my plans to stay with her through it all.
No, they say. You can't possibly.
What about your children, the new baby?
She's just being selfish like when she left your father,

left you girls, took the pills. They are speaking
too loud. I run back to the bedroom.
Mother is screaming *Die! Die!*
punching herself on the legs, on the chest.
Her face is red. It gets larger and larger
until it becomes my own.

Writing Poems for Leah

heather brittain-bergstrom

Perched on the edge of the bed like a cat,
you wait, eyes looking past mine to the walls
and windows painted a dark green by an uncle
sent home too late from Vietnam. "In this one," you say,
"have Kenny driving here in his father's car to get me."
High school notebook in hand, I begin writing
as if everything below the attic room of our grandfather's house,
where you have again moved with your sisters and mother,
isn't there. As if the grandfather
who held both of us down in the fields behind his house
isn't sitting in the kitchen below us,
listening for the shuffle of our feet on the stairs.
"And make him be crying," you add, pulling the blanket
around your shoulders, "...sorry that he hasn't called me."
As if the words will bring him to you, cousin, take him
from the other girls I know he goes to on weekends
when you work late at McDonald's. As if the sound
of the pen on paper will help you sleep nights
I'm not here to stay beside you in the same bed our mothers
once slept in. Taping the finished poems on the wall
beside the others, you call them your windows.

Unsolicited Gifts

purvi shah

Baa bundles the girls to bed
like gifts tissue-wrapped after marriage.

In the dark, mothers dream
of granddaughters who rest in a distance.

In sleep granddaughters recall
the sound of suckling: a generation past.

Milk is a substitute for womb
fluid which escapes too early.

Stomachs bloom with dimpled seeds,
pulp mixed with succulence.

Fruit sellers say sweet pomegranates
must be gutted before eaten.

A careless hand can make a knife
wound look like an accident.

When the dawn breaks
unbidden, it is blood in color.

The rising son is always
hued purple with regalia.

Danger in its concealed conceptions
never threatens the chosen.

In the morning sickness is stilled;
Baa is glad the fragile survive the night.

Mowgli s Mother Confesses Her Abandonment

purvi shah

I did hear their lion snarls, the tigers
in their sublime purrs. I nearly retraced
my steps, back to this life

of inurement, but a twig snapped
under me; my resolution bent into place.
We came to a cave's clearing, you
and I little Mowgli, and I recall

how I stared, *You are so
beautiful.* I remember believing
how your body barely fit into the basket,
how in the mornings you liked to be massaged,
your sweet composition. *They will make you
strong. Mowgli.* Darkness steadied with its night

sounds and I eased you to the thicket, turning.

In the morning, the wolves would
take you as their own
or gnash you into bones.

Where We Go to Become

scott helfand

I may be a blue-eyed university student
standing on
a Pittsburgh street corner watching
orange dusk parachute towards;
laundrymat, bar, and supermarket alike,
waiting for the 71 A.

Perhaps, I have lived
through the eyes
delicately juxtaposed in
the old black face below,
the green Giant Eagle cap above,
the butcher's whites, rusty with work slaughter,
I wait
for the 81B.
I agree,
as we watch a wrinkle-skinned man
curse violently in the street,
with the blue-eyed university student.
Anger wastes time, time composes life,
life descends like dusk
parachutes
towards laundrymat, bar, and
supermarket alike; a gentle sound
ends our descent. Dusk returns me
to my apartment. I smell
black-bean soup, cooked by my wife.
Life is love, love is
black-bean soup; I eat them
slowly. Afterwards I feel
familiar curves;
this means I am washing
soup bowls and soup spoons
tenderly.

Will I accept
that mine are not
the only blue eyes, which
have watered graveyard grass
bowed before
the brown casket of,
a friend died young?

Above lavender sheets
my head sweaty on the pillow,
underneath which rested
her grandmother's
pale blue plastic rosary, I

made love to a green-eyed girl. Simultaneously
in how many
rowhomes and mansions,
did these earthly rhythms
crescend and
break?

Am I, perhaps, a moth gravitating
towards phosphorescent light, beyond
cloudy glass doors, before
darkness births dawn, outside
Pittsburgh's Greyhound terminal?

Inside the Greyhound terminal
I smile at
blond-haired girls, in
soft black dresses, and
old black cabbies, in rough
baseball hats. I listen
to their stories:
I'm on college break
For twenty years, I worked in the coalmines
alike.
I'll ride a bus
across Pennsylvania, making
a two-hour stop in Harrisburg. Here,
with my bare toe,
I carve my dead friend's name
into carnivorous dirt, under
a short green tree. And, when the
journey resumes, I drowse
through central Pennsylvania farmland
arriving, eventually, at land's end

Camden, New Jersey. I become
the waterfront. Above
my iron rails, dusk
parachute billowing
lands in
darkness. Below,
dark Atlantic waves
continuously lap
my stone body. I stand
patient. The saltwater and I;
old friends sitting
on the retirement home porch.
This has so little, to do with
accomplishment



-tanya quin

Center of His Own Attention

allan aquino

Of course, I've had my fill of narratives, that whole mishmash of bratty desires, Disney, and grunge with the overloaded choruses.

Often I find myself beginning each thought with What more? and eons change or die, and this questions holds still.

I can't help it: thinking so hard that the poetics burst beyond thinking, when all that's left sensible are masked clichés, weird and lovely images.

In the grand design of my corner I've noticed a pattern: all things unfurl with just a hint of spectacle, exactly the opposite of how I expect them.

Example: Drunk and speechless on a blistered evening, my best lyrics appeared in my journal the following dawn. And I have no idea

how this happened. Or else, how the unsayable finds its voice in a language I've never heard, like a dream.

Before, I was crazier, more daring. Typewriter keyboards were scenes of violent, infinite pirouettes. No stories,

just pictures and music, eerily dirge-like, implosive: the arc of platitudes so battered that they stretched beyond themselves. Moments like those

came in bottles and zigzags of clarity. Sometimes I long for those kinds of days, when I thought I was

devoid of love, when I wallowed in foolishness, sinking beneath the platforms of diaries and old movies.

When I was most nude, high, curious about death, heckled by the multi-colored arrows of hunger. What more is there? I ask this time,

and I don't hate myself for asking.

Dying souls, I've learned, cannot die if you don't repeat them too often.

Jean-Michel Basquiat Invents the Voice of the Gutter

allan aquino

PAY FOR SOUP

Samo knew much about the world's hypocrisy and wrote his truths on walls, pillars, canvases. It was a prophet's gift, to breathe always from the rightest corner of his crown, to see everything behind and beyond the city's molecules.

BUILD A FORT

Racists and the elitists of the dying art scene called him a primate, a joke-of-a-nigger-painter, his works childish, savage. But he stretched beyond their eyes and blessed the landscape with evolutions.

SET THAT ON FIRE

Even as drugs killed his blood his images were rich with lightning, motion, hip-hop lyricism, effluvium of angels and parasites. He knew, eventually, the dangers of fake plushiness: when fame called him, each painting was like a feather on Icarus' wing, stubborn yet visionary, defiant and high above the American skyline...

Late One Night

Lucie Kim

I hated running into Tara, so I always got to work early and set up my display counter before anyone set foot in the stock room. Ideally, I'd get up at 5:00 a.m., work on the re-write of my failed thesis on Female Resistance in the "Rape of Lucretia" Myth for an hour, take half an hour to brush, smear, puff and dress myself, dash to the mall in fifteen for the drive and then another fifteen to down my cappuccino and scone. So for an hour, I would sit on the floor of Barney's behind the cosmetics "bar," aligning the items neatly or else you get someone with a dead fox around her neck come back in with hemorrhoids on her face because you handed over what you thought was a nutrifying night complex, but actually turned out to be a skin buffer with milk acids.

That's how yesterday started, except, I sat at the counter to read a few pages of Camus before getting to work. Sisyphus always cheered me up. I opened to page 48, took the last sip of my cappuccino and eagerly hunted for the last familiar word I could recognize having read last night before blacking out. But I couldn't focus. Chemically, I'm very sensitive and the amphetamine-related caffeine rush might have been what made me energetic, even rambunctious, and all I could do was peruse the table of contents, devouring in one glance all that I anticipated understanding in the distant future. My imagination filled in the gaps between the chapter headings, between "Philosophical Suicide" and "Don Juanism." I didn't have to read it to know that Camus saw what I did.

It was already 7:40 by the time I put the book away, so I clip-clopped around to the storage cabinet near the shoe department and came back with fresh boxes of the best-selling products. I flipped on the radio to the local news and started stacking.

"World-renown poet, playwright, environmental activist Ken Sarawewa was executed by his government this morning, for his outspoken opposition to big oil exploitation in Kenya..."

Someone in the world just lost their life today, I thought. And it's only 7:53 a.m.

The radio fizzed out suddenly, and from the other side of the glass case, I saw Tara's velvety slacks.

"Hey there Alice. You know, it's quicker if you do that from the bottom shelf up.

"Thanks," I said in the warmest cold voice I could find.

"But anyway, could you come with me? Curt might need help at the Make-Over counter today."

I'd never had this problem before where I couldn't make eye contact with someone, but with Tara, the air just crackled with a challenge every time she addressed herself to me. But I couldn't take her up on any challenge, even though I hated her, and her fake English accent and "thank you, dears," and her extra-loud laugh when Curt was around because, according to Tara, "managers find that sexy."

I followed her to the second floor salon area, where make-over events happen far too often. Curt was not doing anything, as usual. He had on an apron over his double-breasted suit, and was guffawing into the phone in some mutual admiration ritual. When he saw Tara and me exit the escalator, he waved me over to the wall phone and lifted up two fingers: line 2 was for me.

"Barney's, Alice speaking."

"You have to come home right now Alice. Alice, he did it."

The ambulance came, and the police milled about, but they couldn't take his body down until the coroners did their report. There was a note in my father's mouth. All

personal possessions would be at the coroner's the next day.

Where did he go, is all I can say. He disappeared too quickly for me to ... dissuade him? I knew him, my own version but not a fraction of what he thought or felt himself. How could I or anyone? But I wanted to, and still do. I'm already bent over, heaving tears into a dinner napkin, but who really knows why, because I am not thinking of his face, his favorite spaghetti restaurant, his grin or his beat up van. I remember driving around town once, rushing and suddenly, he was at the same intersection that I was at, and seeing him there quite by accident, I wasn't going to signal to him, but he saw me, saw me among many and waved, both of us innocent of what was to come.

I needed to see that note.

I went into the coroner's the next morning, near the county jail. The inquiry desk was a confession booth almost, a three by three cubicle, with no ventilation, which exacerbated the sobs of the woman ahead of us. When she emerged and saw my mother and me waiting our turn, she immediately began to tell us about her 15-year-old daughter's suicide, but what a beautiful baby she had been, and how many boys had liked her. It doesn't matter, I thought. That never matters.

At our turn, my mother and I learned, his note had been addressed to my uncle, and was thus his property. We were not allowed to read it.

I remember once going to dinner with Dad, and making him cry. It was at Winfield's, a local Denny's-fare with chandeliers-type restaurant. He loved their overcooked and processed spaghetti, the only food that his liver-decrepit body would not reject, so we walked down their fiery plush carpet and cornered ourselves in a booth.

In silence, our food arrived, and I watched him.

Moods are an actual physiological event. They alter your serotonin and norepinephrine levels. Depression depletes it, but with help, after a year on serotonin re-uptake blocker medication, the body should be able to supply its own.

"Why don't you get out, instead of staying in all day," I suggested. "Do something, do *something* for yourself. At least so he won't have the satisfaction of knowing he took everything. And if not, just stop harassing Mom, it's not her fault it was her brother." My mother's younger brother had worked at Dad's auto shop, and forgot to put the day's earnings into the cash register, while my father lay limp and drunk at the back of the office, depressed and trusting.

"Don't worry. I'll take care of everything. I'm going to kill that son of a bitch. An evil, evil man."

Those words, "take care of everything," ignited me into vindictiveness. *You can't do anything at all, look at you. You're supposed to straighten-up. It's your fault he got away with this, not anyone else's.* Even as I was shouting at him, and people politely kept their heads turned away while their conversations quieted down, and even as I saw him put down his fork and wipe his eyes, I heard in the back of my head a patient, loving and kind voice, the one I knew I should be using. But even as I noticed his darkened skin, with spattered liver spots, I only heard myself say, "Look at yourself, what about you?"

We drove back to our apartment. The anonymous cardboard boxes, the scattered shoe pairs near the front door, TV, thermos, flashlight, pressure cooker, ladder and tool box: there was so much in disuse, without a proper place to belong. It had been two weeks since we left our four-bedroom, one-and-a-half bath with fireplace house, and arrived that apartment. There, where my mother and I shared the one room, and my father was out on the couch. No one tried to put plates in the cupboard, or clothes in the dressers. The furniture faced the wall, and my father had his janitorial equipment in the center of the living

room, reminding us how we paid for that house, reminding him of what he used to have.

Everything in that apartment repulsed me. With no room or space to put things away, everything was exposed. I couldn't hide from anything, the way you can when you have a two-car garage and everyone has closets in their rooms. My passion is for category, organization, control, but I had no will power to enforce it, because I had no internal order to impose. In that apartment, I couldn't grow apart from what disgusted me and reminded me of the unalterable in me: the sloppy, slipshod upbringing. I was neglected, untended, unpresentable, and had flunked college.

Later that night, after trying to unpack the mounds of boxes and trash bags full of clothes, books, and dinnerware, I went into the storage closet, the only closet in the whole apartment, digging for a book I suddenly wanted to read again. Schopenhauer or Albert Camus, perhaps. I was standing in my mu-mu, looking down at the pile of clothes slithering out of some bags, when a smell of moth balls lifted to my nostrils.

"Alice," my father called out.

I became bitter, and everything seemed despicable to me, especially my father's voice, who was drunk with Smirnoff and sentimental flushes from old photographs. How long we had been living like this, I couldn't tell.

"What are you doing?"

I hated his childishness, because in an aged man, it appears as imbecility, not goodness or vulnerability.

"Where are you, Alice?"

I didn't want to clean up the next day, or the day after that, and even if I did, I knew it would be undone. I didn't have the time, energy, words, illusions, dreams, or humor. I was a third world intellect, and that apartment was filled with reminders of my failures, my aborted intentions, greasy fingerprints on white matte wall paint. I hated him then, because I could only have half dreams, absurd nightmares where I feared everything. I must have been ashamed of something.

But I've wavered from the construction of the present before it becomes the past. These aren't pictures, though they involve sight. I may not remember colors or shapes, but they seem more real than my body right now. The tears have stopped and I no longer seem to care about such grandiose concepts as past and present.

Words have become like cold stones me, precariously balanced one atop another, making sentences that threaten to topple over and let some emotion through. X-rays show us only bones. Even flesh disintegrates. Yearning for anything would be too absurd. Zealousness only hurts, and disappoints.

Restaurants, markets, pawn shops and the like pass me by and seem filled with meaning. Sudden brakes from some distant truck fill my hearing as if a howl for help from a ghost beyond. When will I be able to crack the code?

The Harsh Light Bends Spoons

james doyle

and believers come tumbling out
of all the drawers to wish the dusk
well. The desperate sun, barely
keeping its head above the waters

in the west, trying for a hand-hold
as it sinks, rips layer after layer
of color from the sky, like a strip
miner clawing for the ultimate nugget.

Then the commotion is over. Everyone
looks around unbelievably at the night.
Everyone trudges home to crawling
beds, dishes, pets, wages, and clocks.

The Platitudes and Parables

james doyle

build up, build up,
until you can wheel them around
in carts, until they outnumber
the bricks in your house, the boards
in your barn, until

there is a small mountain
of them in your backyard
and you realize you finally
have a life of Christ
to live by

literally as well as figuratively,
to stare at every morning
through your kitchen
window, coffee in one hand,
vapors in the other,

and at last you can make plans
for the past, re-arrange
it at will, perhaps move
the bedroom furniture into the dining
room, or the car into the horse stalls,

and you keep looking back on the new
life you have just led, every day
of it sanctified by a truth,
until the mountain is gone and there
is the future, flat, tongue-tied.

Las manos/The Hands

steve iglesias-provost

Por el espejo
los ojos de Borges
me miraban –
La nariz me sangraba
y el argentino viejo se reía

Through the mirror
the eyes of Borges
watched me –
I had a bloody nose
and the old Argentine simply laughed

Allí
en el rincón de mi pieza
estaba Neruda
sentado
a la mesa
bebiendo *cabernet sauvignon*
y hablando
de Chile

There
in the corner of my room
was Neruda
seated
at the table
drinking *cabernet sauvignon*
and talking to himself
about Chile

Oí a alguien en el baño
que se estaba duchando
y que estaba cantando
una canción
de los Sugarcubes:
<<Eat, eat, eat the menu>>

I heard someone in the bathroom
taking a shower
and singing
a song
from the Sugarcubes:
"Eat, eat, eat the menu"

Fui
pero sólo vi a Buñuel
cubierto con mariposas
que estaban bailando un waltz
y él estaba mirando una foto
de Dalí

I went
but I only saw Buñuel
covered with butterflies
that were dancing a waltz
and he was staring at a photograph
of Dalí

Por la puerta
miraba las velas
halagando
la tumba de Khalo
y tres niñas
arrodilladas
y rezando en latín

Through the door
I watched the candles
tickling
Khalo's tomb
and three girls
kneeling
and praying in Latin

Hosanna in excelsis
Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini

Hosanna in excelsis
Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini

El agua bendita
me mojaba el pelo
¿Todavía era niño?

The holy water
drenched my hair
Was I still a child?

Podía oír
a mi mamá

I could hear
my mother

leyendome los versos de Mistral:
<<Donde estaba su casa sigue
como si no hubiera ardido>>

Aquí
en esta pieza
sin paredes
y puertas
Rivera era reino
firmando su nombre
en todo

Pero entre todos
sólo García Márquez
estaba callado

Me mostró la mano
y vi un ojo
toziendo

Me quería ir
pero las voces
me detenían
diciendome:

<<¡Tu has visto
que no se debe ver!>>

reading me Mistral's verses:
<<Where her house stood, she goes on living
as if it had never burned>>

Here
in this room
with neither walls
nor doors
Rivera was king
signing his name
on everything

But amongst them all
only García Márquez
was silent

He showed me his hand
and I saw a single eye
coughing

I wanted to leave
but the voices
held me back
telling me:

"You have seen
what should not be seen!"



Then I Hear the Guards Call My Name -tori amos

—marguerite k. hill

All in Favor of Free Labor

gabriel antonio paez

One nation under a white hood
One nation crushing our sunburned brown neck

Take it back Take it back Take it back

One nation under a white buck
A gold coin weighing our callused hands

Eight men on a corner, the sojourner
Bracero—arms and hands and pick axes and shovels
You ever count the ribs on a pot-bellied *Mexicano*?

Up early in the morning, I see 'em on my way to get a Spudnut
Half dozen glazed and two coffees, I walk home in my slippers
Look at these poor mugs, I say, Look at these poor mugs
Look at the sixteen hands and eight backs between 'em
You know what? You know what?
I could give these guys honest work, twenty bucks apiece and have 'em
Shovel and dig me a pool
I deserve a pool, don't I? My neighbors got pools

It's not like that; maybe I need to qualify this
I got Mexican blood, don't I? My mother's named *Maria*
My sisters have *Maria* middle names
I eat at authentic hole-in-the-wall Mexican restaurants

Bracero Bracero Bracero

I speak Spanish
I got brown skin
I need a pool for summer
How 'bout it? Twenty bucks apiece and let's call it square

One nation under a white hood
One nation ruled by a gold coin

I shouldn't be, but along the way I am lost
We need labor
Before me I see hungry sunburns, I think
A Spudnut is mighty tasty early in the morning; it must be the potato flour

Bracero—arms and pickaxes
Trucked in by the Underground Railroad
Mexican Nationalist Harriet Tubman pushing *la gente* to a free North?
Free Labor! Globalized Economy Underground Railroad!

Underground Railroad Underground Railroad

Carved in silk-cotton trees
Harriet Tubman stands against oppressive winds and metal chains
Conducting, a rifle clutched between callused hands
Her eyes burn when she remembers Free Labor

Underground Railroad Underground Railroad

Stinging like the skin ripped off a new blister
Pete Wilson holds in their minds, a rifle and bullwhip between green and gold stained hands

Carved in the Peach tree
Carved in the Orange tree
A smiling Ronald Reagan in a cowboy hat, Bonzo on his shoulder
He keeps a straight face when he speaks
It's an evil sin, this labor movement
And whispers
We need labor, we ship in *Braceros*

The Underground Railroad you never saw
But you bought the gears and tears and fears and calluses
At the Supermarket, I went with you
Hey Mama, look, Strawberries ninety-nine cents a basket!

I heard an angry man say
You know what the problem is? The problem is these monkeys want me to pay
For their medical insurance—pay for your own damned medicines; Well goddamnit,
Get your own country straight, and stop ruining mine; get off welfare, stop making babies,
Learn English, get educated and start working for a buck instead of leaching off the system,
Learn the American way to work, stop being so lazy and go home, that's right go home,
We got too many of you all people and you ain't wanted with your *Challupa* eating,
Mexican Bell Grande Sour Cream Tejano style, Tres Flores in the hair—you ain't wanted!
Go Home Go Home Go Home
Applause Applause

Reagan smiles as Bonzo slaps his back

Underground Railroad Underground Railroad

We ship in the free arms and backs
We throw them out like rotting lettuce

Bracero Bracero Bracero

I need a pool

Bracero Bracero Bracero

One nation under a Bonzo shirt and smiling cowboy hat

Underground Railroad

Aching backs and hungry sunburns
Soft bruises and reduced sojourned souls

I walk up to the poor eight mugs on my corner
Awkward, two coffees, Spudnuts in hand, slippers on feet
Hermano, Bracero, Labor
Do you want a sunburned Spudnut?
I need a pool

It must all be considered as if spoken by a character in a novel.—Roland Barthes and then "if you die, live." —Helene Cixous

Heemq

I had a father that, as he was making a toast with a shot of vodka at a party, (pulling me closer), would say into my ear, in a few days I might be gone so take a look from here (the head of the table) and learn to look at these people from my eyes. Overwhelmed by the abundance of signs, I learned to look at life from the head of the table and my father became a ghost of a ghost and he sat on our apricot tree and with a piece of it's branch, (broken they are 'wood'), he carved himself a little flute (a duduk) and played it into my ears. I sat there and realized that all that the notes touched would be sadness. The sound was sadness and my father's breath was that of a ghost and it smelled like vodka. Now I come to writing, holding a gift in my pocket but it's for no one. It is brought here to destroy or be destroyed.

It does not matter what country I come from. Not that I am not proud. But because pride needs a home and heart. And my heart is so filled and my country has broken under it's (image)-myths. All that I am certain of is that if the gift is not destroyed, I myself will become a ghost and the song played by the wooden flute will never stop from haunting me. I am a man from no country, heart filled, or failed, going into an image that I'm not sure of and I will tell you this, because even though I have no country to return to, I still have the remnants of a language. And in that language I will show you a word that you can read and say out loud, 'heemq. It means 'base.' It gives a noun structure. Noun to noun structure, and it is disappearing. I have given you a dead definition because my father's song has no more place in my heart, it is just 'that' that torments. 'heemq.

The Plot Was Every Time, The Scene Was Anywhere.

ONE *"Listen, I don't want you to play these games around me anymore."*

"I used to think that I'd die for a kiss but obviously..."

"I'm waiting, you are locked in here. You look confident. I want to remember you strong."

"what's changed is that it doesn't mean that I have to be weak. Binaries are commissioned for the powerless."

"I am not..."

TWO *Something essential, un-describable and simple has always been...every time a kiss anywhere a tangle. A man puts down his shot glass and a woman is too far away to hear the sound it makes on the table. The space between them is the reason. Is the million reason.*

An image is of a man, who could be anyone's father strangling me. My saliva is choked and won't come out. They rub alcohol on my forehead to cool me off to get the hot-red to cool-pale. Nourishment comes in many forms the most desirable is the matter-less. I become fat and fat and explode or thin and thin and invisible my scent is still haunting nostrils.

Anywhere, any time, a father makes a wooden flute to enchant a kingdom. Grapevines grow around his castle crumbling the bricks no the bricks are plastic the grapevines are plastic the father, having created a sun for a lamp is plastic and everything melts from the inside.

THREE *"The image cannot be dispossessed of a primordial freshness which ideas can never claim (Cy Twombly).*

"In my stomach the words were built and I, being choked, sacrificed them for air. They came out of my ass. Everywhere I go I am known as that she who talks out of her ass. So if you want to understand me, get ready to feel your way through shit."

"I don't know the meaning of life or life has no meaning."

"It has never maybe occurred to you of an over-abundance of it..."

"...; meaning. When you talk about what you mean. It is your 'talk' that I don't understand."

"[or] Your 'meaning' and your 'talk' are two different languages."

FOUR or out of the melting plastic which is this kingdom out of the melting hands of the king we can steal the wooden flute and forget his melting songs that plastic 'us. What is it in 'us' that means 'unity' 'together?' The new notes of the flute not mattering how dry or dull or sour can give 'we' the connection between 'us' and 'together.' The goal is to steal the masters instrument which isn't stealing you can't steal from the dead or a theft of that kind is justified.

On top of that mountain reigns the grandmother whose legs are permanently broken and she is unable to come to us, she can speak but the distance between us is as good as silence and even if my grandma who can be your grandma could walk down the king's k/nights would crush and cut her flesh and turn her words into fertilizer not knowing what they were doing. But. Their swords were also plastic you have to believe me and now have melted from the inside. So much confusion in the king's men from the inside and so they melted from the inside and our grandma who can play the flute if we can climb the mountain will show us the meaning of 'us. Will show us that walking is less important than visitors and ears and words and she will take her long needles and she will make you and I a sweater of 'us.

FIVE *"I want really badly for that kiss to come from the grandma she alone can tell me why her legs are broken and who it was that left her on the mountain who it was that was strong enough to break her legs but too weak to touch her memory who was thief enough to take her song.*

"I will stunt you, grow stunt dead."

"If you die, live."

"gna meri, ari seerem."

"Baleek jan, sit near me, come let me kiss your forehead. Prominent as it is, like the land, it too will soon fold under the weight of guilt. A story—come and settle on that skin give it new life and make home there. Come sit, baleek jan. Have I told you about the trains?"

SIX so it takes you thousands of miles away and it's different there it's white they want you to disappear there in the whiteness. One has to first be seen to second disappear. But they don't think of that. Stories now come like scratches on an old artifact. You look at it, having been lost all those years and the scratches mean more than the object. In the road there are many holes. The snow is soft white untouched and you will sink. You and I there will wear our 'us' sweater. The trains brought cattle to plant in the cold snow. Sentence is seven years no ten years nine years long.

SEVEN *"I am trying to find she who is hiding. It's a trick I learned from my line. Which is your line the leader of the family is a (), god is a (), the king is a (). But there is no more king and god has melted from the sun. We will go through many a dark k/nights before we*

reach our fruits. If you like apples you will become apples and shine with color from the tree. Listen, move but listen. Or you can sit but always listen. You don't have to follow as long as you listen."

EIGHT or we, now, unified in, light *our* pipes and wander down from the mountain. A song that follows *us* is new. It be heard over everywhere anytime. "*Listen, I say, now it is possible to talk and describe at the same time. What have we done?*" s/he asks. "*Something big, I think,*" I answer. Waking from a dream still in a dream, "*Have we?*" s/he asks. "yes." I answer. "*So the king is finally...*" she asks. "*I believe that, that much is true, I saw it happen.*"

'Us'. 'we' went to sit on the lap of the apricot tree where it all started in the first place and she thought me to kiss, "*I used to think I'd die from a kiss, then that I'd die for a kiss but I...*" and I remembered a book: "*if you die, live.*" (and it made sense for the first time like no other time) and I took this to my previous king, who with previous hands would choke me in my sleep. "*if you die, live.*" I said to him. He cried and saying, "*I don't want to live.*" turned into the ghost I always knew him as...

..."*if you die, then I will live,*" I said. "*You go die, then I'll love you,*" I said.

You can still, on a day when the wind doesn't move things, smell the father's weight pushing you around.

Nearly Remembered Glad

ellen kelley

You wonder how she chose the tree
whose seed her mother later cursed.
This one? or that? its branches
outstretched arms. First she would have

tested its strength, grabbed and jerked,
thought, *no snap, this'll do*, but being
thorough, shinnied up the trunk
and crawled out, stood

poised like a ship's maiden
on the fat branch
and woodmother held, lifting her
toward an arrow of birds
trickling across the insomniac sky.

oh, she might have been
a child at play as her dog,
shut in the garage, worried
the slit of light beneath the door

that dawn, when she nearly remembered glad
came close to making the morning
mere adventure, or the preface
to another jagged hour

but being intent
and so full of sad promises
instead she dropped
through the leaves

to the silken, patient rope.

Insufficient Postage

ellen kelley

Autumn splices with Winter,
color dissolving into frigid stalks.
The line at the post office
shivers beneath a video
of gray-faced, Missing Children.

They gaze out over stamp shoppers,
packages, envelopes.
Their names (Jess, Camilla,
Willam, Heather, Rose)
blip across the screen's
barren garden, last hope
for stolen children
whose long flight has finally arrived

in the zipcode palace. You want
to enfold them, tell them it will be all right
but stampbooks of twenty rainbows,
great composers, athletes, dinosaurs
are insufficient postage
for a letter to a child underground
who, like Persephone, has slipped
into a darker world, beyond address.

Lawrence, Jr. Purifies His Space

ellen kelley

He was a sloppy-shoed duck
in scuffed loafers and shiny
insurance-salesman pants
You think anybody in high school
walked with him?
No one did.
No one ever did.

Mostly he kept his head down, eyes lowered
but they noticed him, one sneaking behind,
shoving his face into the lockers
 First time, he said, I bled
 but after that I just kept practicing
 arpeggios and jazz chords. You can live
 inside these notes, he said, they'll
 keep you alive for years—

I wanted to tell everyone about his music
more exquisite than sex or football
but they saw only a scuttle
in the school's dark corners
so I said nothing but he said
 They need me,
 their very own cockroach
 for kicks, but hey you ever heard
 their boots click
 down these halls? It's quick,
 quick as this song I know,

and off they'd go, his fingers, I mean,
trembling over the keys
slow bass blueswalking to smoky bars
crazy little women and Kansas City
so fine, he could see
that it hurt my heart the same way
it pleased me

He didn't bother graduating,
his father never sober, mother spent
with seven younger sons. Later I heard
him decompose a space between low C
and a half-step out on the Mojave
whereupon holy augmented sevenths
poured out that piano's mouth
rocking my mind like Jordan's
deep water, transposing
his processional
and mine

Wedding Tape

ellen kelley

I slip the video in and listen
to the machine whirr back five decades.
The screen's snow swirls into focus.
I see my parents, one hour married,
standing together next to a Santa Monica
palm. It is August, 1944, and my mother's
black hair tumbles loose over
her mauve linen suit, on which is pinned
a single, white gardenia.
She's a doe gazing at her mate

with liquid animal eyes. He's joking
with his best man. They dangle
cigarettes out the sides of their mouths,
cocky in their air force uniforms.
The camera pans to a wider shot,

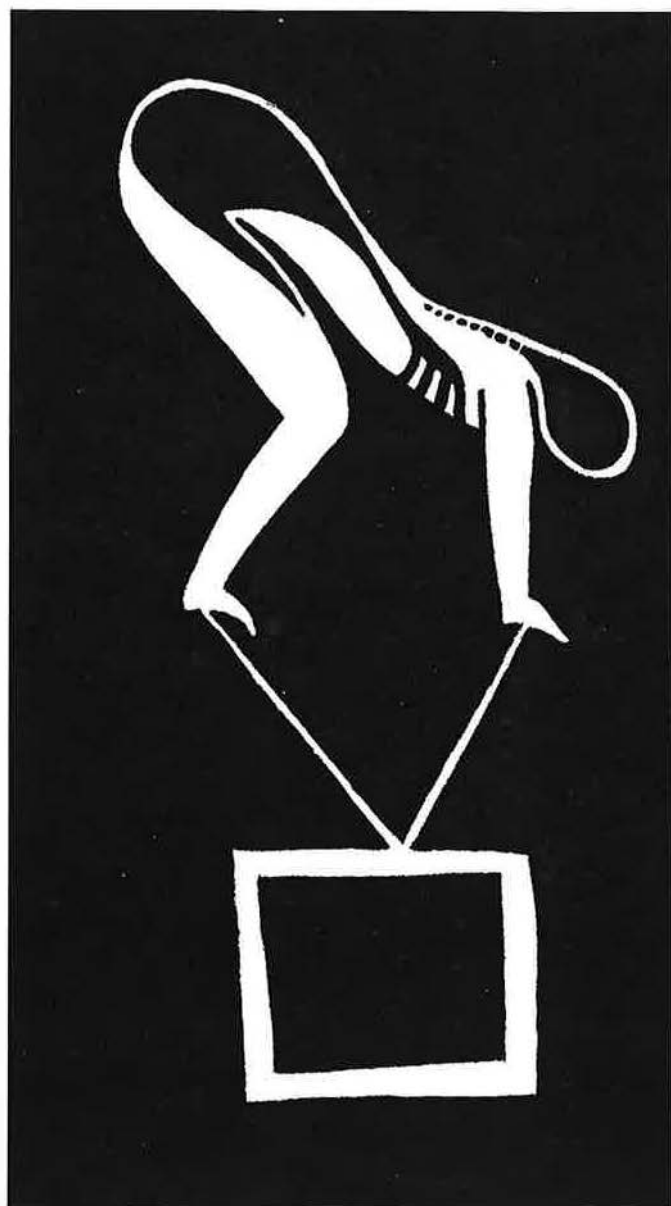
brings the mother of the bride
into view. She stands
beside her daughter, watching
as if she'd only just realized
what the day had ended,
what it had begun. Her hand
rests on her daughter's arm in farewell,
surrendering perhaps, a dream
of life she could not hold and so gives
to the person she loves best. This gesture
happens in the flicker of a moth's wing

then the tape ticks forward to the wedding party
parading toward a car. I pause them,
wish I could enter their hazy summer,
splice the plot and tell them to dance,
run, spill into landscapes, memorize passion
for the long years ahead. But my parents
won't listen. So I hit play

and they laugh and wave.
There is nothing the world won't offer them,
nothing out of reach.
Life is a sheet of still water,
awaiting their first cleaving touch.

for Ben

Hands fastening onto dull mahogany,
Cody's podium, our eyes fasten
onto you, searching for evidence of malignancy.
Your voice, raspy, dignified, is still comforting.
We enter your language—among birds, leaves,
old bones of your Northridge house:
"the next century will abandon you," you say.
I can only guess how obvious we are,
cartoon thought bubbles rising above us,
large bold type: don't go.
I especially remember poems read about moths,
termites. I imagine your body filled
with luminous flying insects, their
proud populations falling, becoming silent;
wings collecting like down in your feet.



-tanya quin

Spoiled Suede Shoes

eileen tabios

A different bout of passion has uprooted
a red, telephone booth now angled across

the steps to an emptied tenement building. I ignore
singed bricks and charred holes as I lean back

against its corpse gutted of phone and stray coins
to look across the potholes of an aging boulevard.

I have memorized the yellow light, flickering, from your
window. It pleases me to see again the crack widening

with time, that allows in the bellowing of drunken winds.
Beggars begin to shove forward empty palms

but their eyes cannot hide the linger of future sins.
A boy with white blonde hair and green pants

(his parents must have forced up his thighs) disappears
when he runs beyond where the block ends. Yes, he is

an extra out of place in this Hollywood scenario where
my longing dribbles onto the dirty pavement. Who lies

on your bed tonight, reveling in your greasy-haired musk
perfuming unmatched bed sheets longing for the relief

of a washing machine's unrelenting spin—that glorious
whirlwind of a ride? As when your breath

raises the hair in hidden places where I refuse
to shave my hide. An orange bird with a violet wing

notices the crack of your window and inquires
its beak into the opening. Its tufted head rears suddenly

from the gash of jagged glass. *Et tu, Brute,*
I try to snicker but produce a lame cough, failing to find

consolation at blood mottling those lovely feathers
that must be as soft and fragile as the pale skin

stretched across your blue-veined ass. I should have
returned to the familiar guarantee of obviating self-pity

whenever I stumble across betrayal by recalling the poet
I never was: one slammed by bullets from a dictator's

barefoot army compelled to shoot to feed their brood:
silent children huddled in metal shanties corrugated by lees,

beset, too, by brown water and black flies. And the children
learned to trawl tourist-ridden streets with anguished eyes

never mastered by the beggars afflicting me tonight.
One beggar has become belligerent, his breath his humiliation

accompanied by a beard layered with the flesh of old eggs.
Who is intertwined with your filthy sheets whose tears

my fingers have stroked lovingly, then widened as you
compelled my guttural screams? Thunder

begins as I swipe away at the beggar's aggressive hand
reaching for "the mole between my breasts." Once,

you lingered there, your 'favorite nest." The beggar's gaze
snags on the cocked gun within my stare. Awkwardly,

he shuffles away while the rain hardens its pellets
against my frozen stance. I lock once more

onto your yellow light, flickering from the clichetic play
of two strangers, including one I once thought I knew.

The shadow of your lips linger on the shadow
of an elongated throat. It is a movement that threatens

to fell me to my knees—never mind the bottles lolling about
with broken necks or the plastic litter of ladies in mini-skirts

offering a false surcease. As I repel my eyes' desire to close,
focusing on the light resembling brass not gold, tiny black holes

begin to float within the war-like perimeter of my sight.
Is not the entire universe rushing towards an unforgiving

implosion, yet containable in a space the size of a human
heart? The neighborhood's debris overflowing from a dented

wire basket nearby begins to sour as rain soaks through.
It begins to fart cinnamon, vanilla and McDonald's

beaten meat. I am appalled by the city's sanitation engineers
who are derelict in their duty, and vow to write a congressman

in lucid protest over this breach. I will fool the politician
into believing I am a blue-haired lady with powdered cheeks,

folded into Chanel knit suits and current beauty queen at a senior
citizens center containing many, many votes. And the most senile

of these citizens still would muster a respectful note, unlike those
trapped in lands pillaged by a dictator and his wife stringing

together rosaries from diamonds perfectly cut and flawless
in clarity. Black water, replete with the grime of this city, laps

my ankles as you cancel your light. Yet while the darkness
of your window repels my need to witness your abuse, a fallen

bird continues to bleed. I know this storm will render
my suede shoes unfit for future use—a grievous matter

for which I will lack hesitation in making you pay.
I will be the orphan exacting revenge for a parent's

bullet-ridden death. I will make you pay. I will make you:
Pray for your last breath.

Plums

rebecca brown

Today I ate a plum. It was half sweet, half bitter, mostly sweet, soft, not bitter. The skin had tiny brown spots speckled over its tight purple exterior. It reminded me of paint. It made me want to paint. To spread purple over my walls, over grass, to paint flowers, paint plum trees. Paint purple paint everywhere. It was the first day of spring and plums were in season.

I was eating and walking at the same time. It is difficult to eat a plum while walking. Chewing rhythms and walking rhythms are always inevitably off because you must chew slowly, especially when plums are in season—chew chew chew step step chew step chew chew chew chew step step swallow chew swallow step—and so on and so forth so on so so on and so forth forth in that manner. It is important to chew in-season plums slowly and maybe a bit seductively because when they are in season and when the sun is shining, the juice is that much sweeter and the meat is that much smoother. Chew slowly, slowly, in spring when the sun is shining, slowly, slowly.

My friend does not like fruit, even if it is spring. He does not eat plums or peaches, cherries, apples—green or red. He does not like the way fruit feels in his mouth. I try to tell him that it is his mouth that feels the fruit, the plum, not the fruit, the plum, that feels his mouth. He has nothing against the rhythm of chewing. He is a musician and he likes to walk slowly, slowly. He also likes to paint. I tell him that he must, he must, let his mouth feel the plum's smooth meat while he is walking slowly, slowly in the sun because it is the first day of spring and everything is so beautiful that it begs to be painted. He tells me that he will just have to settle for painting purple plums and walking slowly, slowly because even if the fruit is sweet, half bitter, mostly sweet, soft, not bitter he will not eat it, he will not, even though it is the first day of spring and we were in season.

Old Complainer

rebecca brown

for Harriet Margaret Lebens

My body wants to die
of old age, otherwise
it would be hit by a train,
smashed into a windshield, set

on fire, eaten by cancer cells
or sharks. Sometimes I can feel it
settle into itself, shift into

position. Sometimes I can hear it
creaking and croaking with pain, old
complainer. My grandma told me
that whenever she feels pain

she believes souls from purgatory
get sent to heaven. Seeing those wisps
leave their fire for new

fluffy cloud lives makes
her pain go away.
I don't know if I believe her.
She believes

that half of Minnesota once fell in a hole
that frozen frogs will croak when thawed
that licorice cures colds and that she once

turned black from swimming in a river.
She says she was named after Harriet
Beecher Stowe and that she is allergic to
onions, chamomile, dandelions, fabric

softener and liars. Even though
my grandma's body is a heavy sack
filling, she will not hesitate to

jump rope, hacky sack, or teach me the
Charleston. She believes that the older
you get, the more you should move.
She told me once her throat

is shaped like a "z" and that is why
she could only eat ice cream when she
was sixteen. She told me that it is a gift

to learn how to ignore things
like alcoholic fathers, goiters, boys
that tell girls they shouldn't play football,
dead sisters, weeds, varicose veins

and loneliness. She said that when she was
a girl, she loved to pray in empty churches,
that she enjoyed the sound of the wind

or silence. I can almost see her, kneeling
on the cold floor, her knees red from a
stony pressure, shifting, watching red souls
fly to a comfortable blue heaven.

He Said

rosa arjelia javier

He said at each finger's end was a clean white smile,
kept pure by the mandated right of God.
Never had I seen hands so soft and delicate.
Never—not even on a woman.

I remember as a school child
longing to be that creamy shade of pale—
following the veins that trailed across the arms of those that sat beside me
maybe if I bathe in milk.
But my skin was still too brown to show the rivers,
blue like the earth's,
that ran inside me.

I wonder now how it is that a man can have such hands.
Can palms so soft climb branches high to twist the fruit off a pear tree?
Would fingers so clean
poke holes in the moist softness of my earth
to plant a seed in me?
And can hands so delicate contain the forces of nature and rage?
Flourish in the flood
and yet survive and work the land when it is dry?

Perhaps it was not a smile but a frown that he did see.



-tanya quin

There's something else to say before I split; I left a note written with your lipstick on the bathroom mirror after I took a shower. I've seen it done in movies a lot, so I thought that it would be a romantic gesture. It seems that they know something that I don't, and it only works in Hollywood because the lipstick wouldn't stay where I wrote it. It mixed with the steam and ran off onto the bassinet. My name is written in the pinkish puddle by your toothbrush, and my phone number in the slightly darker one nearest the sink.

Her Hair

daniel de sailles

I was digging through the papers that fill up one and a half milk crates under my bed, and as I dug through the hundreds of stories half began and long forgotten, poems that were all rough edged and awkward, vague ideas written at midnight on napkins or the back of class notes, and pages from twenty journals almost started, I tried to divine what was worth something and what was better off being thrown away.

And then, while sorting, I found a single black hair of moderate length, obviously dyed, hidden between an angst-filled teenage suicide letter and a poem to my dead grandmother.

I wondered whose it was, not remembering the last time I had a girl in my room, much less a girl with black hair.

Then, I was reminded of a woman that I only knew in daydreams, and I realized that it would be just like her to shuffle through my milk crates when I wasn't home.

I wasn't angry. I knew that she wanted to know me as perfectly as I wanted to know her, and there was no better insight into me than this shoddy collection of yellowing note-book paper.

It would be just like her to leave a token of herself without realizing it, and that told me more of how much she loved me than words ever could.

From Chicago to Hell

tanya quin

Introduction

Metal tinkering noises in a Chicago apartment. The clink-clinks rise through a strange apparatus like a giant toaster turned inside out. It fills the entire room. Weaving through its network of gizmos, the origin of the metal noises is found, the main character fastening bolts. Her skin under the work-lamp has the glow of beeswax. She speaks,

"Um, yeah, becoming a masochist was just a series of small changes like the earth's rotation; I didn't feel it, but I'd turned across thousands of miles. And on the other side was all leather."

Strange, how she ended up among the gizmos of a metal apparatus. It stems, really, from the various spores riding through Chicago's air because the spores were the cause of Eugene's chronic hay fever, and Eugene's chronic hay fever was the cause of her loneliness.

On The Nature Of Things

It should be noted that people into S&M identify other people into S&M by way of winks. There's the wink wink across those smoky rooms or say walking under the pull of skyscrapers, a wink wink to the kinky looking man across the street, or waiting in line for doughnuts wink wink and coffee. It does seem a bit peculiar, all this winking, but that's just the nature of things. Particularly with Chicagoans. They are a people of butchers and bakers and masons (and masochists). In Chicago everyone has their place the way tools have their jobs. The places and the tools aren't questioned. They are just bare fact like windy Novembers. As such, masochists and sadists wink at each other; it's their way. And this is how she found Eugene, a sly wink wink shot to where he sat abutted by a wall of round pastries at the Happy Doughnut.

Unlikely Tryst

"Masochism is the next step for me. Buddha's always talking about all that suffering, or there's Jesus up there. Why not put pain to work? You know. All this blah blah blah, but it's easy. Pleasure is pleasure pain is pleasure. Masochism as a philosophy is sensible, everything is solace. Everywhere pleasure."

"I can see that," Eugene says not listening really but biting into his jelly doughnut. A vein of raspberry bleeds open. He just thought she was pretty, but wouldn't bother telling her so. Anyhow, this pretty girl is sitting across from him behind a sigh of coffee steam, the cars making passes and advances outside the window. She talks a lot for a masochist. But he doesn't give it much consideration.

"Wull meet at your abartment then. [Sneeze...] Haf your leather in proper order." Eugene wipes his nose along his forearm.

"Yeah, okay," she replies and looks through the window. The sky is gray as if the air molecules themselves might be sleepy. Chicago winters are unconscious and profound. At a nearby gas station tiny green pinkies emerge from tulip bulbs still buried. She imagines sped up film of roots growing, then watches Eugene leave and thinks, "nice butt."

Not Quite Getting It On

Ironic. A masochist that doesn't want to be bossed around. But Eugene, he couldn't pinch and slap in a pinchy and slappy kind of way. She didn't mind his congested accent so much as the sneezing. During his last visit he sneezed on the floor and slipped across his own saliva.

Eugene falling was momentarily poetic. The slow motion, the way his brown hair

swayed beyond gravity as if under water. And upon microscopic viewing, a halo of spores swaddled his head. Inside, his neurons were so still, connected there by stiff fires. He thought about the way oak is the color of weird pee before he hit the wood floor and ended the poem.

Although Eugene wasn't laughing, she was, and they lost the scene, and suddenly two people in leather seemed just like two people in leather, a little sweaty and alone. The minutes dangled. Then Eugene finally left. His distant sneeze filtered through the door followed by a deep silence. She felt especially attached to the earth, heavy, fat. Loneliness is a kind of fatness. This apartment was fat, her breathing fat, existence itself fat. There she was among the small things becoming big things. Like the clock tick-TOCKing, and next door a Bing Crosby record amplified through the wall. Her head was a galaxy full of noise. And then silence again. And then noise. Blinking in and out.

A Short Digression In The Next Door Apartment

Bing Crosby, he's the kind of man that would weep given a situation of sentimental caliber, Marla thought. He has a meowing kind heart. This is why she listens to Bing while jogging in place. The idea of a sensitive man motivates fat burning. Should she happen to meet him, her toned thighs would lure the kitten in. Well, it's a small hope anyhow.

Marla had only seen her neighbor once, climbing the opposite direction on the stairs and in a black leather unitard; Marla chalked it up to some kind of private pathos. She didn't usually pay attention to the goings-on of her neighbors, but today she heard something strange through the wall, laughter. Strange because her neighbor in all these months had never laughed as far as Marla knew and because pathos kind of people have no comedy receptors in Chicago. A person is either one thing or the other, tragic people don't laugh if they are faithful to their tragedy. The proverbial star-crossed Chicago gangster never grins while napping at the bottom of Lake Michigan. And so forth. Though it isn't that Marla doesn't like the sound of laughing, it just interrupted her jog.

She walked to the kitchen and started her blender, which is mentionable only because of the power surge it created. If this were the movies, the power surge would be depicted as a radiant blue light traveling from the base of the blender through the walls and out across air to the main character's head, which would twinkle like a meteoroid entering the earth's atmosphere. Although, in reality the energy transfer was unobservable. (The phenomena of electrical outlet energy converting to brain energy across air will be explained some day.)

Getting It On Too Much

Blinking in and out and then ssszzzzzzzzzzt. There is a brief eternity accompanied by strange blue visions that appear to her as beautiful as aluminum shivering at the bottom of a tidepool. A machine, a metal apparatus.

"This is, um, the idea. To build a torture machine, one which doesn't sneeze, which I control to control me. Because it's hard for other people to carry out an individual's best hell, my own personalized hell."

The story is almost to its introduction. There are a few scenes in between now and then—the main character squatting over a thick nest of blue prints, the main character pushing a cart of gizmos at the hardware store, the main character welding metal-whatevers, etc. At any rate, once the machine is erected, things really start to happen. For example, the main character dies.

The movement of form from paper to 3 dimensions is satisfying. She stands before her creation and it is good. Albeit graceless. Finally the trial period has arrived. She straps herself in and sets the knob to 19. On the left is a heating mechanism and on the right a

wheel of sharpened prongs. The room, filled with machine, stirs and becomes breezy. A blue print flaps a wing in the corner. On it is written the corresponding pain scale for the knob settings,...17--->ow, that's good; 18--->getting it on; 19--->getting it on too much i.e. Death. Next door Marla hears a scream and the lights go out.

The Gruesome Yet Charming Landscape Of Hell

Death is a tunnel wired with speakers. Through it loops the sound of film clicking at the end of its reel. Just before her arrival, a passage from the *Inferno* is voiced-over,

*[The soul] falls to this wooded place—
No chosen spot, but where fortune flings it in—
And there it sprouts like a grain of spelt, to shoot
Up as a sapling, then a wild plant: and then
The Harpies, feeding on the foliage, create
Pain, and an outlet for the pain as well.*¹

Then a puff of smoke and she emerges as a tree. This region of Hell is partitioned to those who've committed acts of violence against themselves, namely suicides. Although, admittedly the main character is a peculiar case. Here is a forest of trees that were once people, where every trunk splintered or twig snapped is torture. A dry wind wheezes through their boughs and the harpies peck relentlessly. Everywhere is the threat of pain.

The clouds in the sky are like paper bags floating across a basin of rum. Brown, very brown. Once Dante poked his head through these clouds and snickered as if to say, "I told you so," but no one got it.

Her first impressions on being wood include, "thinking is like strumming brittle threads," "my heart hums with a hive of bees," and "thirst is felt in the fingers." Hell is a thirsty place, but entertaining. The flying harpies are funny looking birds. She thought at first they were busts plummeting to the earth. Indeed, the harpies are top-heavy, weighted by their skulls and thick stomachs. The sight of one trying to perch is laughable.

Since Hell is eternal this could be a long story. For practicality's sake it will end with the meeting between her and Satan. Not a remarkable meeting, but nonetheless it happened.

Satan journeyed to her region of Hell. On haunches, strolling, his inner thighs rubbed together. The fur there is frayed. When he entered into the forest, he whistled to the harpies as one would to pet finches. His breath escaped the puckered lips in cold white Os. He has the mannerisms of a 1920s gentleman caller only is too ugly to kiss. He turned a face towards her, staring awhile. She could feel something between them, like static electricity. The moment sizzled on its edges. Then he wink winked. Then left. As if to say, "here is your most personal Hell, your most personal pleasure." A fog of ice crystals softly followed him. She smiled inward, somewhere down in the xylem. She got it.

1. Dante's *Inferno*, translated by Robert Pinsky

Siren

tanya quin

My father forgot to name me.
Sucked into the ocean's blue syringe,
I fell asleep among seaweed.

It's expected I sneer at my feathers and fin
and covet the blonde thighs of Aphrodite.
A fish's love is, afterall, clammy in comparison.

And when my tongue looses upon men its singing,
their cochleas quiver to the root,
not with affection, oh no, with insanity.

One's lot is a sort of thumbscrew.
Born to be a drowned sailor's bride,
prophecy rides my tail heavy and absolute.

I have no particular name. I'm just a kind,
Siren, the sound of cascading metal,
an anchor fallen over and cut from its line.

As sailors pass by in their crown of seagulls,
they stuff each ear with candle wax.
And still I continue this stubborn musical.

The words, on entering the hollow of me, echo meaningless clacks.

Turtles

jenni rosenhaft

Lots of things look like turtles.

(Sentences often get stuck in my head that mean nothing in context but they sound good—somehow satisfying. They bounce to the right rhythm.)

"Lots of things look like turtles," I wanted to say. We were walking down a trail in the Trinities, packing out from the camp we'd set up the night before. The night before, when we slept alone by a fork in the river I'd noticed, for the first time, how many trees and stumps and rocks and piles of fallen leaves look like bears. Things don't look like turtles when there are bears to worry about. We tied our food high into a tree before we fell asleep.

I wanted to tell him that lots of things look like turtles because we walked past one moss-covered granite boulder that resembled a turtle's head. It wasn't lots of things, only one rock. But the down-the-mountain rhythm of my feet, my heart beat, my musically firing synapses made the sentence, "Lots of things look like turtles," and then danced to it like a Samba. I repeated it over and over in my head, drowning out "Good-bye Ruby Tuesday" which I'd been humming for two miles. (Come to think of it, that's a song full of sentences that sound good and mean nothing...) I wanted to tell the backpack in front of me (the one that held our tent and most of our supplies so I didn't have to carry much), "Hey Nolan, lots of things look like turtles." But instead I asked, "Do you ever get a sentence stuck in your head that is completely out of context but you like the sound of it?"

"No. "

I wondered if maybe lots of things did look like turtles after all and perhaps the sentence would proclaim some valid observation if I said it out loud. I looked around.

The scenery was breathtaking, but there were no subliminal turtle-icons hiding in the forest. "Sometimes I get these rhythms in my head and... I scrambled for an explanation.

Is that why you're constantly changing radio stations in the car?" he asked.

I know that drives him nuts. I really wanted to tell him about the satisfaction of finding sounds that match the pace of my brainwaves, that the wheels in my head crank at ever-changing speeds and I try to accommodate them with proper accompaniment—be it a song or a poem or a single sentence.

But all I could say was, "Lots of things look like turtles."

He stopped to scan the alpine scenery and in a tone reserved for appeasing me he replied, "Yeah, I guess they do."

I hiked along with a new thought in my head...

No they don't you dummy.

No they don't you dummy.

No they don't you dummy.



Inside Looking Out

-daryl glinn-tanner

The Last Good Time

michael stephans

for a daughter

An old yellow sickle moon
tipped into the Bluehill range,
and the choir there on the southern shore
wooed *la bella luna* down behind the ridge,

leaving only a scrim of stars floating
like a wayward Andromeda on Lake Casitas;
and the choir there on the southern shore
lulled you and me down to the stillness of sleep

in our little canvas tent, your dream of fishing,
mine of a daughter I would no longer know;
and the choir there on the southern shore
yipped and yowled into the night sky as you and I

drifted apart, our last good time—
a mountain range and lifetime away.

And the choir there on the southern shore
sings *now* for other fathers, other
daughters dreaming of fish at the end
of the line, where I too howl at moonset,

as the choir *here* on the southern shore,
lost in time, reprises its dark adagio.

What Know

michael stephans

in memory of Lee Morgan

Out on 125th Street at dusk, his burry
sound echoes, ping-ponged
house-party strut: brassy, sassy trumpet
cut down in a blaze of blind faithless-
ness, hanging forever between B flat & C.

And for an instant on that fateful
night of the cookers, no one moved
& no one knew for sure whether
it was a rim-shot exploding snare drum
or something far worse, until Lee

Morgan toppled forward & hit
the floor with a finality louder
than a hundred gunshots ending
a hundred other lives, breathing
electricity & cordite as bullet

meets flesh, as now & then collide,
& the ultimate dues are paid.

And if you listen carefully,
you can hear your own flesh
breaking into a thousand hot notes,
as Lee Morgan summons Brownie &
Fats & Dizzy in the fourth chorus of

What Know, as Blakey explodes, rolling
thunder & lightning like a runaway freight
train rushing headlong into dark vinyl grooves,
as Jymie Merritt and Timmons dig in-
to the gospel shuffle, & Lee wails

& screams the blues for every-
one who has ever been left behind,
everyone who has ever had a score
to settle, everyone who has ever aimed
& pulled the trigger.

His blues, his requiem;
his requiem, our blues.

Black is the Color

michael stephans

of my true love's eye, as I take another swing,
try to pop her good in the chops while

Downtown Brown James Black & the Meters
play that loosey-goosey sissy strut on K-BOP.

We blacken some catfish for dinner, black-eyed
peas, collard greens, dirty rice (so very nice),

Johnnie Walker Black—straight, no chaser;
this time, she lands a good whack: WHAM!

BAM! THANKYOU MA'AM!
Right on my ass, black-bagged & half-mast;

the black keys on the piano play pentatonic
polkas & the room spins miles below.

Somewhere above, Mingus heats up
the Half-Note—*Black Saint and the Sinner Lady*:

trombones yowl, trumpets screech as I rise wobbly-
bobbly & make my way into the kitchen where

she dances the Black Bottom naked to the Mound
City Blue Blowers' version of *Some Sweet Day*.

I gather her up like a little clutch of winter wheat,
cool whip & dip us down like a teapot until

we hit the linoleum, the thud delicious, our bodies
smoosh with purpose, legs akimbo, buns a' bobbin';

No blues, she says as she bops my noggin,
as we pull the shade, as we fade to black.

Dissatisfaction at 3 a.m.

margo mccall

The air is thick, glutenous with moisture and illuminated an unnatural pink from the lights of the car dealership. I sit on the front steps, looking at all the closed up houses. It is night. People are still sleeping. In the living room of the house across the street a blue light flares up and fades, flickering wildly. Television light, voices coming from a box at 3 a.m. I wonder if the person inside the house can't sleep, or has fallen asleep in front of the TV. I don't really know who lives inside the house, which has peeling paint and a dead front lawn, only that they are people.

I don't know who lives inside the other houses, the ones that are dark—more people I don't know. I know their cars, the vague shape of them as they walk into their houses and close the doors behind them. Not their features, their faces, their lives—as closed off as their houses are during the hot afternoons when the smog butts up against the San Gabriels, so thick it's like breathing glue, and all is quiet on the lawns turning brown under relentless sun.

Shadows move through the darkness. I can't make out their shapes, but know they're the wild cats who live in the neighborhood. Scrawny kittens who have not yet learned to catch mice in the bushes or eat from the trash cans. Bigger ones who have learned how to survive, who don't trust human beings, who go into heat and yowl at night, breed, have their kittens in the bushes, eat the afterbirths. The cats are like rats, scurrying around furtively, hiding in the shadows, living without a human touch.

He asks what's wrong.

I just feel empty," she says.

Is it me?" he asks.

"No it's me."

The Santa Anas are blowing. There are fires burning in the mountains, and when I get in my car to go to work, I notice it is covered with a fine film of ash. The haze burns my eyes, and when I get off work I stand in the yard and watch the water-dropping helicopters whack-whacking through the sky to pick up their next load.

The news calls it the biggest fire in sixty years. I imagine deer bounding through the trees, bouncing like they are on springs; and the rabbits following, and the mice and lizards behind. I must imagine, for it has been a long while since I have seen a deer or a rabbit, anything wild, except the cats.

I let my imagination run wild. In the forest, there is a man with a soot-stained face, red water-soaked rag stretched tight across his nose and mouth, yellow turnout coat into which he sweats. He walks around the edges, lighting backfires with his blowtorch, watching them burn, moving toward the heat, the orange flames, black smoke, crack of fire moving up trunks of trees, consuming them. He will do that all day, lighting fires, standing back to watch their advance, until he, too, is consumed.

"Are you tired?"

"No, I'm just being weird."

"Anything I can do?"

"No, I'll be alright."

Every morning, with the bleep-bleep-bleep of the alarm, I get up, make coffee, have a shower. In the half-light of dawn, it is difficult to figure out what to wear, how to get the clothes onto my body. But somehow, I stumble out the door in some semblance of work-day-wear and into the stream of traffic, all heading downtown, to the towers, the citadels, the cubicles and offices with windows, the maze of computer terminals that they all will hook into for eight hours or so before turning around and getting on the freeway to return home.

On some days, I am happy to get up and have somewhere to go. And I am always glad for the paycheck that means paid rent, car payment, utility bills, maybe a new book or

CD or outfit that I will turn around and wear to work, thus completing the cycle. It is the monotony of it that gets to me. Every day, the getting up, dressing, leaving the house at the same time.

A mountain of days piling up.

Will I wake up one day and find I have grown old, my life been consumed by this succession of days, the back and forth of freeway driving, the direct deposit of paychecks, accrual of money in the retirement account? Already, my desk has begun to feel like a home, my pink bromeliads slowly turning toward the morning light streaming in the window. Sitting at my desk, I can watch the advance of the sun, shining, at first, on the towers of downtown—the monuments to progress, success, excess—and later in the day, on the historic buildings along Broadway. But my eyes are mostly on the terminal, the endless stream of meaningless information scrolling upward and downward, reaching to the edges of the monitor. Blue background, yellow type.

I am lucky to have a window that opens and allows me to breathe outside air, although sometimes the air is so bad I have to close it. I feel lucky to have a comfortable chair, a computer that works, a cubicle with a window. Yet this luck cannot be transformed into satisfaction at all times of day. There will always be the dissatisfaction at 3 a.m.—always that time, and what is it about that time of night that breeds dissatisfaction, only that I have been pulled from sleep by some nagging thought, some feeling that there should be more, that I have lost my moorings and is only floating through the dawns, the mornings that breed monotony with gray clouds that stretch inland from the ocean, a net of bleak wetness.

"So you've been at your job five years now?" she asks her lunch companion.

"I'm paid an obscene amount and don't have to work too hard, and Leslie and I are thinking of starting a family, so I guess I'll stick with it awhile," he says.

"Hmm." She bites into her corned beef sandwich. Outside the deli, Central Americans are selling drugs in McArthur Park.

"But Leslie's having a career crisis. She wants to do something different."

"Doesn't everybody?"

Traffic has been bad ever since school started. Or at least that's what everyone says, showing up late to work, frazzled at the edges, creases in their brows. And they're doing construction downtown, working on that goddamn new cathedral, big trucks dropping off loads of wood and steel rebar, lines of cement mixers stretching around the block as far south as the Hall of Justice. They're tearing up miles of Broadway, the pock-marked asphalt strip of wedding chapels and movie palaces and people. Whoever they are.

And now there are people directing traffic, men and women in white gloves, and now I have to watch their hands flitting about, telling me when it is my turn to go.

If I can get to Avenue 60 on the 110 without traffic backing up, I will consider it a good day. But always there is that sitting in traffic, the helplessness of not being able to forge ahead, of being stuck. I know the faces of all the houses on the route, and they are as closed as the faces of houses in my neighborhood. Somebody lives inside them, but who?

There's NPR on the radio, Monica Lewinsky giving way to Kosovo and now, East Timor, all the time. The events in far-off places, even as far off as Washington, mean nothing to her. I try to care, but cannot summon that much feeling to care about much. But now and again, there will be a piece about the environmental effects of releasing butterflies at weddings or something from that cowboy poet that will make me smile or feel remotely human.

It is worse on the gray days or when it rains. People in L.A. seem to drive faster in the sunshine, the air around them full of clean, pure light—something ahead to get to the sun edging up over the horizon. But on the gray days, there are only the shadowy figures of those towers, looking ominous as prisons into which people stream and stream, wave of humanity. Good bye.

I have been sending out resum s, getting dressed up and going on interviews. I have been looking for something else. What?

"And why did you leave that job?"

"I felt it was time to move on."

"And why are you leaving your present job?"

"Same reason."

It is the weekend. I sit in a chair at the mall beauty salon, surrounded by the whir of blow dryers. Tight-lipped models march across video screens. Up the runway, haughty and dripping with image, skinny and big-eyed as starving children, replaced by the next one and the next, all younger, prettier, or with facial anomalies like saucer eyes or lips like plastic balloons. An assembly line of models. I wonder if they walk off the end of the runway like lemmings, if there is a big pile of mangled faces, leg bones jutting up from pooling satin and velvet to amuse the audience.

My hair is being pulled and brushed, its natural curl forced into shining flatness by a round brush and diffuser. My stylist, Susan, sprays on Sexy Straight Hair, acting as though she is doing something important. Susan doesn't know I will go home immediately and wash out all her efforts, let my hair dry naturally.

The other women at the salon look bored as their tresses are sprayed and ironed out by round brushes, tucked behind their ears. They wear Chinese laundry shoes, spaghetti straps and capris that are cut off at their knees. They all look the same. Who they once were has been erased.

I imagine an army of them chasing me through the mall, forcing me to look just like them. Lately, I have been trying to resist fashion, but nonetheless find myself pulling out my credit card, signing up for a new card to get ten percent off, powerless against the zippered jackets, sweaters with fur collars and leather boots that reach the knees.

Last night, we went to freebie night at the Norton Simon. I thought perhaps looking at art would make me feel better. The Chardonnay was flowing. The pretentiousness level was high. But there was a white acrylic circle I could stare into and out of, watching its edges blend into the wall.

Afterward, we ate dinner at Akbar, and had the misfortune of being seated next to four MBAs. Two men, two women, all wore expensive black suits and talked loudly about subscribers and stock swaps, Goldman Sachs, e-tailers and visitors to their site. "You surf?" the man with the shaved head and rat face asked the waitress, handing her his card. The waitress nodded. "Visit this site and give me a call."

Sitting so close to the profit-mongers was upsetting. It was like looking at the guts of a computer, all circuit-board ugliness, the relays that make the system work. Their faces were ugly. Their expensive suits were ugly. They looked like vultures ripping innards from dead prey.

"I've decided to do something meaningful with my life," she said.

"What is that?"

"I'm going to become a teacher. Forget the money."

"Do you think you can live on thirty thousand a year?"

"I can try."

Every week it is something new. Work for an online company. Write for a business publication. Maybe even go to business school. I am flailing around, on some kind of treadmill, can't find my footing. It is hard having options. Life gets more complicated when one has to consider where each option will lead. Although I know it's impossible to know where a path will lead, what branches she will crawl out on, what limb I'll end up on, whether the tree will be cut down.

This morning when I walk my dog there is a dead cat on the lawn of the old man I

sometimes talk to. Its guts are discarded like spaghetti on the grass. All that remains is its head and front paws. I imagine a coyote slinking through the dark streets, its jaws clamping down, crunching through the vertebrae, cutting the cat in half, slathered blood on its muzzle.

It's somehow reassuring to know that predators still come down from the hills, brave the roar of freeway traffic and the blare of street lights to restore balance. There are too many cats, breeding out of control, slipping in and out of the shadows. The other day there was a kitten run over in front of the house. Only a few weeks old, and already dead. Two kittens were recently eaten by the dog next door, who is locked up in a cramped kennel for fourteen hours a day while his owner is at work. Last night, another of the wild kittens was trapped somewhere and crying all night for its mother.

Proofreader wanted: The ideal candidate will be a strong detail-oriented individual with a thorough command of English grammar and punctuation; we need a teamplayer with 3+years experience as well as conversant with Internet terminology.

At the gym, I try to read while pedaling to ward off fat and the accumulation of years. But the kick boxers are distracting. The class is led by a muscly man with a tiny head and delicate feet, and includes several women who take a little too much enjoyment from getting their hostility out on the punching bag. Thwap. Thwap. Try again. Thwap.

I think it odd that I work out with many of the same people every day, but rarely talk to them. Sometimes I'll nod and they'll nod back, or sometimes when I'm on the exercise bike a guy will try to hit on me by asking what I'm reading. Mostly, I enjoy having the time to myself to clear my mind, let the wind blow through the palm trees. The bite of straining muscles, smell of sweat, remind me that I'm still alive, still have a body capable of something more than sitting in front of a computer screen.

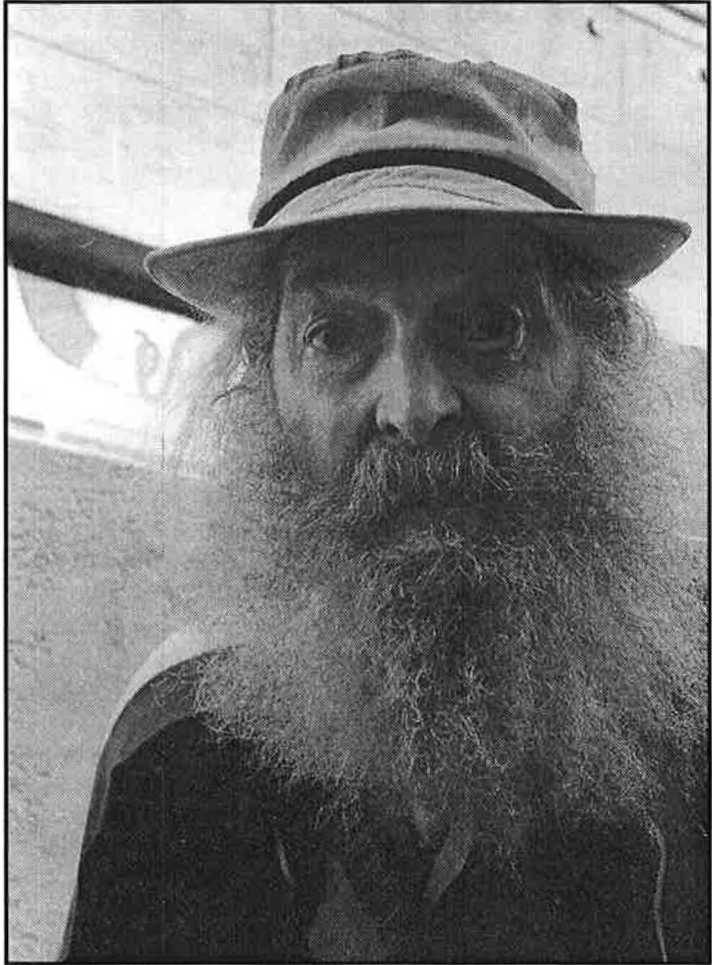
I have been thinking about the cat head and paws, recreating the blood and sinew in my mind, remembering how the entrails looked so carelessly tossed on the lawn. When I'm at work, its image will appear in my head, along with the other ones I create to keep my sanity. Why do I think about the dead cat so much, and all those animals whose bodies litter the sides of freeways? Maybe because it is the only thing in my life that is not moving too fast to comprehend, the only thing that seems real?

To: Zoey Rojas, administrative services

From: Cornelia Wilder, human resources

Your exit interview has been scheduled for 10 a.m. Nov. 20 in the third-floor salon in Corporate. Please bring your photo identification to be turned in to security and any personal belongings you wish to take with you. Kindly be prompt, as we have a number of interviews scheduled that day, and please be prepared to be escorted from the building following the interview.

It is not always dark at 3 a.m. This I learn from sitting out on my front steps looking at the houses across the street. By 5 a.m., a slight radiance begins to hover at the edges of the horizon, although I have to imagine what a horizon looks like without houses and buildings and trees. I learn this from sitting out on the front steps, looking up for signs of light. I have seen the sun come up in the desert, watched the light playing at the horizon's edges, teasing away the dark, occurring so slowly that it is almost imperceptible. Then suddenly the sun pops up in a bright birth of light, the hummingbirds come out and drink nectar, the insects buzz and the awe of morning explodes in fresh possibility. This morning is like this. I hold its promise in my hand and lick it like a cat washing its paws.



Preacher-Man

-daryl glinn-tanner

Bead by Bead

kitty nard

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you,

And these women have shared stories
confessionally; told another
of a virgin birth and a violent death;
with finger and thumb from pearl to pearl
they recite rote prayers of childhood.

blessed are you among women,

They chose me, invited me
to heal my wounds,
to let Our Mother comfort me.
I was one of them now, a widow,
by court decree; they told me
divorce mirrored mortality.

and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

Welcoming companionship,
I joined them, bowed my head low
before the altar where I'd been married.
Bead by bead, a muffled mantra rose
like smoky voiceless frankincense swirling
around the twisted crucifix.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

It's Tuesday, you may weep shard tears,
listen to their prayers, forget your pain,
and I will try to know you more than a statue.
But I want to scream, want you to
make the muted saints trapped in glass
stop staring, make the women whispering words
speak out loud.

pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.

Speak to me, please, before my death;
within such quiet this soul cannot rest;
I need to hear a chorus of women
publicly proclaiming their lives,
revealing their own mysteries.

Until that hour, I'll stand with rosary
in open hand, unwilling to bead
one more woman into silence.

Amen.

When I get a chance to think beyond the crowded interiors of my life,
and think what out there makes me write, my han catches fire to realize
mothers are still suckling their babies and adjusting their caps,
carrying whole carriages down subway trains. Some young girl lays breathless
in the night over the heat in her chest because I am struck dumb by tiny revelations
Because a thousand birds are flying
and women are braiding each other's hair and the fall of light
against the back of a lake somewhere must be breathtaking
and sunsets break over so many glittering and broken horizons
and fruit contains the shape of a star inside them and people stand
on sidewalks, church steps, stages painting singing and crying,
because someone out there is trying their best to raise a child
that isn't theirs because many are trying to do their best with one that is,
because someone is cooking galbi and kimchee bibimbab, because someone
is diving while another is falling through the air because someone is rhyming
on a corner, someone is levitating, someone is writing on a fire escape,
someone is holding another's mouth in their mouth,
someone is holding another someone crying, because there is rocking,
because there is motion, because there is light.

Ode to Sesshu

ishle yi park

Poison bum breeze wafting from the corner seat eyelids crusted in green sleep
but we sit tired enough to stand it. The chunky Mexican who eyed me on the platform
now stands dick-in-my-face in this half vacant car,
glazing me with half vacant eyes
while it pulses sideways in light denim

the floor is a dance of muddy footprints

I do a slow profile of the row rumbling across from me

feet	Nikes	worn leather	gold plastic
legs	jeans	black pants	embroidered lace light filmy gold with orange on the trim, an open eyelid to the floor
eyes	bloodshot	closed	downcast
head	capped	thin	bunned

the transfer is a mob of shoes, elbows, palms pushing strange backs.

9:45

wrong time frozen on the platform clock

furious beast in black liner,
enraged by the sight of an olive brown
palm at the small of my back
she holds her crotch and calls my man a sellout
vietnam VIETNAM she spits from toast-of-new-york stained lips

*in my dreams I flatten and square her face into a bloody Cubist sculpture with chunky
three inch heels*

But Christmas wine spills over rock
Five dollar fruit basket kicked to rails
Torn cover sheet of my discarded book lies
And the flight of green crystal is magic glitter dazzling
before it cuts my eye

My boyfriend coaxes me from the tunnel
its mouth as open as any grave
blackness brilliant and smelling deep
the rumble of approaching wind.

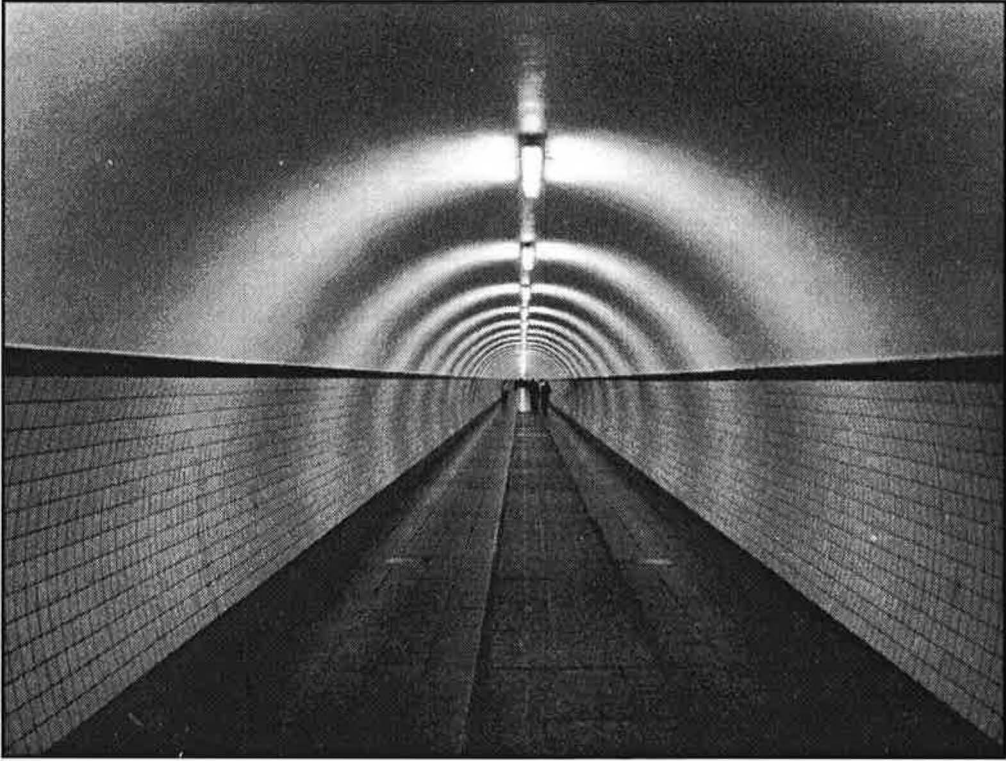
being double jointed, I listen to the roll and click of bones at night, vaguely waiting for
the first real crack.

Nighttime Loneliness

angela cirocco

In her sleep, the two year old
kicked and tossed.
The seventy-five year old widow,
lay next to her -
felt her kicks and restlessness.
She held the child close, but youth even in sleep,
wiggles and wrestles for freedom—
movements like a Van Gogh painting,
unsuppressed energy

The child kicked and tossed, and
the following morning,
a purple, coin-sized bruise,
colored the old woman's thigh.
The mother apologized.
The old woman said it was wonderful—
to share her bed again.



Tunnel

-jeff kilpatrick

contributors

allan aquino, currently a UCLA grad student and dharma-boy recklessly problematizing the pretentious hoey of academia—now considers himself a poet, or, as he puts it, "a keeper of a commercially dead language." But, all cynicism aside, he is proud of (at least) a few things: 1) being old enough to remember watching "Uncle Andy's Funhouse" on TV; 2) being a CSUN alumnus and Asian American Studies veteran; 3) being taught by Russell Leong and NVM Gonzalez; and 4) being declared "bona fide loony" by the Emode.Com online personality tests. (Incidentally, his ideal "celebrity mate," according to Emode, is Jennifer Lopez. Go figure.) **carl bramblett** has published sporadically including previous issues of this magazine. He works as a technical writer in Agoura Hills, California. **heather brittain bergstrom**: I have had poems published in *Hawaii Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Earth's Daughters* and *Permafrost*. I am currently in the California State University Consortium MFA program. I am married and have a daughter and a son. **rebecca brown** is not sure what a story or a poem is anymore. she is thinking about how the absence of a universal truth makes reality arbitrary for each individual self. her self is confused and lost and can rightly think of itself as a frog, and would be correct in doing so. she is currently trying to establish an organization called 'the society for the totally confused' or 'i am a frog and nobody can tell me otherwise.' all interested participants please email hbbus856@csun.edu so we can talk, but not really understand each other (this is impossible.) **angela cirocco**: I've been teaching English to foreign students since October 1988 and enjoy my job because of the students' enthusiasm in learning and their interesting stories about their country. Both my husband and I love to travel and being in that environment is like bringing the world into my classroom. This May, my husband and I will be traveling to England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and France. I hope some of my future poetry will reflect on this trip. We'll see. I'm a very active grandmother and enjoy being with my grandkids. In fact, while I'm writing this, I have one year old Ryan's little fingers competing with mine on the keyboard. **daniel de sailles** is one of the Fall 2000 editors of *The Northridge Review*, which will actually come out on time because he's learned from Rebecca and Susan's mistakes. **james doyle** is retired after a career in teaching. His book of poetry, *The Silk at Her Throat*, was published in 1999 by Cedar Hill. He has poems forthcoming in *The Ohio Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Chelsea*, *Passages North*, *The Alembic*, and *Poetry International*. **scott helfand**: I received my BA in English from the University of Pittsburgh, in December 1999. Currently I work as a staff writer/reporter for a local newspaper, and I'm enjoying the weird and wonderful concept of being paid to write! I plan to attend an as yet unidentified MFA (fiction writing) program, beginning in the Fall, 2001. **marguerite kathleen hill**, born Aries—damn proud of it. Obsessed with "Days of Our Lives" and the theme from "Moonlighting." Pantheist. Future goals: precision, organizational skills, Michael Trent Reznor, and an obscene amount of money. Personal mantra: "Today has never happened, but it doesn't frighten me"—Bjork. Favorite color: red. **rosa arjelia javier**: I often wonder what makes a work good. The presence or absence of one specific thing? Many? Workshopping shows it's often a combination. Something present in our journals and on the straw wrappers we write upon. I created PortalUno.com's Blood & Ink poetry site because we all have unpublished wrappers. **ellen kelley** and her husband live with their cat Antoine in Santa Barbara, CA. Ellen's poems appear suddenly and without warning. Her children's book, *The Lucky Lizard*, will be published by Dutton in Fall, 2000. She enjoys singing with Mick and Little Richard while driving the freeways. **jeff kilpatrick**: Film Production major here at CSUN. After graduation next year, I hope to pursue a career in nature documentary filmmaking and possibly a nature photography career as well. This is my first published material, and hopefully not my last. **lucie kim**: i'm a 27-year-old single Korean-American female Sagittarius living in Los Angeles with a BA from UC Santa Cruz and now trying to be an aspiring writing student at CSUN. I am moody, arrogant and love to be the center of attention. I also have writer's block. **susannah lebaron** is a grad-student at CSUN. She has two dogs. She recently remembered that the Oviatt library will let you take books home for free. Today she wrote a pantoum. **margo mccall**: Sometimes life is a story and at other times a story is life. "Dissatisfaction" is a story that is coming true. Margo McCall (who graduated from the CSUN MA writing program last semester) is quitting her job and moving away, just like the story says. Only she didn't know it was going to happen when she wrote the story, only that she was waking up at 3 a.m. many nights and sitting on the front steps and feeling vaguely dissatisfied for no clear reason. So if anyone's looking for her in the

third person, she'll be in Boulder, Colorado and will probably be missing the palm trees and many other things. **s.a. murray:** I didn't know that I was an "Artist" until I started creating Expressive ART in 1990 during a life crisis. I had drawn realistic animals prior to this but, did not enjoy it. I have been prolific since 1990 and my "Surreal-Expressionistic ART" is no longer just therapy for me. Now I am able to have fun with my art and find myself happily "addicted" to the process of creating. **kitty nard** is presently completing an MA in creative writing at CSUN and is concurrently enrolled in the CSU Consortium MFA Program. She lives in the High Desert with her four daughters. **ishle yi park** is the Arts-In-Education director for the Asian American Writers Workshop. Her work has been published in *New American Writing*, *DisOrient*, *Icarus*, *Slam*, *Sarah Lawrence Review*, *The Asian Pacific American Journal*, *Dark Phrases*, *Koream*, *SoulSpeak*, *Hanah Journal* and *The NuyorAsian Anthology*. **b.z. niditz** is a poet, playwright, and teacher. His work appears in *Anthology of Magazine Verse & Yearbook of American Poetry*, *Columbia: A Magazine of Poetry and Art*, *The Literary Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *International Poetry Review*, *Hawaii Review*, *Le Guepard* (France), *Prism International*, *Jejune* (Czech Republic). He will soon be featured in *The New Novel Review*. A new collection of his poetry, *Crucifiction Times*, has just been published by University Editions. **gabriel antonio paez** is influenced by Miles Davis, James Worthy, Toshiro Mifune, Mother Theresa, Russel Means, Martin Scorcese, bell hooks and his family. Poetically, he prefers the stylings of Aceyalone, AWOL-one, and Chuck D. You can catch him playing basketball in the park singing James Brown hooks. He urges all to "Do the Right Thing." **steve iglesias provosté:** I am a graduate student in the English program here at CSUN and I am also Chilean-American. As a result of my parents' origins, I have inherited both the legacy and the curse of Chile. That is, in Chile there is a saying that states, "Turn any stone over in Chile and you will find a poet." The multitude of poets in this country is extraordinary. But, what is even more extraordinary is the high quality of poetry that these poets have produced and continue to produce. That is why Chile is known as the country of poetry and why I am honored to declare this country as one of my homelands. **al robles:** Dishwasher, Janitor, Bus Boy, Waiter, Houseman, Caddy, Cook, Kitchen Helper, Pot Washer, Window Washer, Toilet Cleaner, Street Cleaner, News Paper Delivery Man, Junk Man, Longshoreman, Laundry Worker, Baby-sitter, Farm Worker-Laborer, Poet. **tony robles:** When Tony Robles is not writing his bad poetry, he enjoys boxing, doing Elvis imitations in the shower and eating Chinese food. **jenni rosenhaft:** i was a grad student at csun for about 86 years. i have finally finished my thesis and now i'm hiding in a redwood forest communing with faeries. **purvi shah** was born in Ahmedabad, India and currently lives in New York City. Among other places, her poetry has been published in *Descant*, *Weber Studies*, and *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America* (1997 American Book Award winner). She also volunteers with an organization fighting domestic violence and learns Kathak dance. **ara shirinyan** was born in Armenia, raised in North Hollywood. He writes everything, reads anything, loves movies, hates contact sports, has war fantasies, teaches first grade, obsesses over Roland Barthes, plays music and doesn't believe in god. When told about this bio, he said, "people from the third world kick ass." **michael stephans** is a professional musician, and has performed and/or recorded with many great artists. As a writer and poet, he has authored three books with a fourth on the way. He has a Ph.D. from the University of Maryland and is on staff at Pasadena City College. **virgil suarez** is the author of a dozen books of fiction and poetry, most recently the poetry collections, *In the Republic of Longing*, *Garabato Poems*, and *You Come Singing*. He teaches Latino/a Literature and Creative Writing at Florida State University. **eileen tabios** books include *Beyond Life Sentences* which received the Philippines, National Book Award for Poetry; *Black Lightning*; and *The Anchored Angel: Selected Writings of Jose Garcia Villa*. Most recently, she co-edited with poet Nick Carbo *BABAYLAN* (Aunt Lute Press, 2000), the first U.S. anthology of Filipino women writers. **darylglinn-tanner** has been a Fine Art Photographer since 1994. She won the William Payden Scholarship in Photograph in 1995. She looks for images that transpose the heart and double exposures that express the unconscious soul. She is in the MA program in Creative Writing at CSUN, looking to connect image and text. **maria mami turnmeyer** is ready to fly. where do we fly when all the birds have flown? will miss csun. kisses and thanks to: (in order of teaching), krusoe, houghton, ramjerdi, lopez, gibson, haake, uba, and J.S. and D.S. **tanya quin** is a CSUN student.

last words

STAFF

Canan Tasci: of the universe ((Canan)) is the center. **Lorita O’Leary:** It’s never too late to be who you might have been. **Ozden Oztopcu** is dedicated to art thanks to my artistic family. **Helga Newman:** Although I am not Schiller or Goethe, I appreciate poetry in all the wrong places. **Scott B. Maizland** is on the road. **Grant Marcus:** With its thorned and opened arms, the cactus stands firm to the rooted plain, welcoming twilight tumbling through the burning desert. **Mitch Lindenbaum:** This is the impossibility for the existence of anything. **Mandalyn Kuntz** wore red shoes. **Christine Kuyumjian** is dancing with poetry in the universe. **Steve Kochak** is a loser. **Carol Gallegos** sabe bailar la cúmbia. **Daniel de Sailles** is tryin’...tryin’ real hard to be the Shepherd. **Samvel Davtyan** is enveloped in the tranquil essence of creative thought. **Susan Caggiano** never tired of hearing, “whatever, man, as long as it’s consistent.” **Rebecca S. E. Baroma** is somewhere else.

