

{ THE BEND }

10TH EDITION

The Bend  
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This is the 2013 installment of the showcase for the work of students, alumni, and friends of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Notre Dame—the journal known, in previous incarnations as *Dánta*, *La Rue Barbarian*, and *The Rhubarbarian*. This year's edition will simultaneously appear online.

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# { LETTER FROM THE EDITORS }

Dear Readers,

We are proud and honored to be part of a talented lineage of writers who have been shaped and inspired by the Creative Writing MFA program at Notre Dame. It is an honor to showcase the continually engaging writing of our MFA alumni and the exciting work of writers presently being fired in the kiln of the program. However, flesh and not clay, we emerge as ash. But lo! We rise as glorious phoenixes of creativity. Gathered here is the ferocious writing of some of our students, past and present. Read, enjoy, ruminate.

Sincerely,

The Editors

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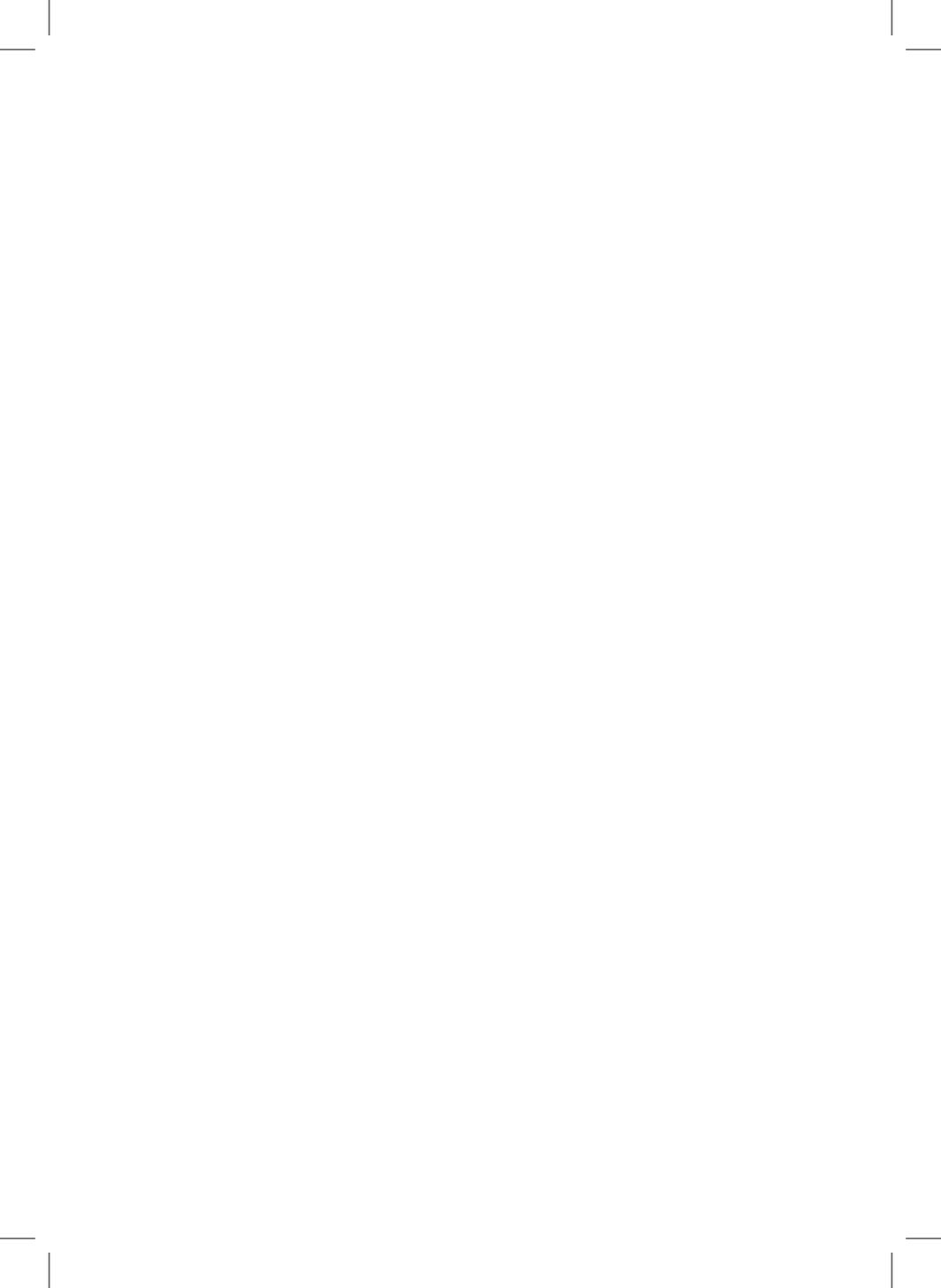
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Margaret Emma Brandl's "Toccata" and "Beautiful Days" first appeared in *Specter*; Alireza Taheri Araghi's "Gramma" first appeared in *The Avatar Review*, No. 14.



{ Kaushik Viswanath }

## SANGUINE PIZZA

Across the table, the blue-eyed man would not stop staring.

“Stop staring,” she said, her cheeks turning a crimson hue of green. “You’re always staring at me.”

“I’m not staring,” the blue-eyed man said, “I’m gazing upon the unearthly beauty that sits across the table from me. I am drinking in unadulterated heaven with my eyes. I am downloading visual nectar.”

“Oh, stop,” she said, turning an even crimsoner green. “Since you are a poet, is it not your everyday job to melt women’s and government servants’ hearts?”

Robra was both a woman and a government servant, and since the blue-eyed man, whose name was Manickchandru,‘s poetic expressions were so melting her heart, she was inclined to believe that he was either an expert at melting women’s hearts or melting government servants’ hearts or both.

“Mostly women’s hearts. Only occasionally am I commissioned to write poems to melt government servants’ hearts. Usually when the government feels their servants are getting dissatisfied with their wages and are about to go on strike, they commission me to write a poem that melts government servants’ hearts.”

Robra thought about it, and realised that she had never received a raise in her ten years of government servantry. Every time she and her colleagues thought about asking their bosses for a raise, they would get a red envelope instead, that contained a poem that invariably melted her and her colleagues’ hearts.

“But this one is not like one of those poems, Robra, this is from the

bowels of my heart, from the depths of my aorta, from the core of my superior vena cava,” he said, leaning forward and gazing at her with those deep blue eyes. Robra loved his eyes. She would have drowned in them, were it not for the fact that she was a state-level champion swimmer.

“The poems I write during the day,” said Manickchandru, “I write for money. Those poems are not truly inspired. It is when I see you that I feel true inspiration, the kind that poets spend their entire lifetimes looking for.”

Robra’s cheeks went from crimson-green to a bright scarlet-green. Yet, while she found Manickchandru quite charming, she was not sure how much she could trust his words. He was, after all, a master wordsmith, who could twist and turn words into shapes never dreamt of before, and she was sure he had caused many a girl to swoon with his poems. Was she just another one of those girls? Would she be just another feather in his cap? She did not want to be one of Manickchandru’s conquests. She wanted to know if what he said he felt for her was true or fallacious. But how could she know for sure?

He attempted to reach across the table and hold her hands, but she had cleverly guarded herself from such a move by strewing knives and forks strategically on the table, causing Manickchandru to injure himself every time he attempted to reach across the table and hold her hands. It was a trick she learnt from her friend Tanku. Manickchandru grazed his elbows and was unable to reach across fully.

The knives and forks were for Robra’s own protection, but at that moment she was ready to dismantle that elaborate line of defence. She wanted quite badly to reach across and hold Manickchandru’s hands, but on her right palm she had written down a reminder with a black marker that said “Robra, control thyself” that reminded her to control herself.

Then, across the table, the blue-eyed man would not stop scribbling. He seemed to be furiously attacking a tissue with a pen, unmindful of the fresh cuts and bruises on his arm.

“What are you doing?” Robra asked.

“Inspiration waits for no one. When it comes, it must be captured,” said Manickchandru, capturing inspiration.

Robra waved her hand in the air wildly, and the waitress approached the table. She wore a clean yellow apron covered in grime and pizza toppings, and dried sarcasm stained her red sleeves. Her hair was tied in an pizzalike fashion, reminding diners that she was a waitress in a pizza restaurant, not one in, say, a Tandoori or Chinese one. She had an air of pessimistic nonchalance and optimistic carefreedom about her.

“Welcome to Sanguine Pizza,” she said, giving Robra and Manickchandru a dentist-chair grin. “May I take the lovers’ order?”

“Oh, uh...” Robra turned a lemon-red green and looked nervously at Manickchandru who seemed to be so focussed on what he was writing that he hadn’t noticed the waitress’s presence. “We’re not lovers, really...” she said, “...more like likers. Strong likers, perhaps.”

And that was when Manickchandru looked up, alarmed. But Robra did not catch this reaction, because she had turned to the waitress to order her order.

“I think we’ll have one large Sanguineous Pizza... is that okay, Manickchandru?”

When she turned to face Manickchandru, she noticed a fairly shocked expression of curious unease on Manickchandru’s face, like he had been slapped when he was least expecting it, by someone he least expected to be slapped by.

“Manickchandru? Is that okay?” Robra repeated, “Are *you* okay?” Manickchandru said nothing.

Hesitantly, Robra, turning to the waitress while keeping her eyes on Manickchandru, said, “Just get us the Sanguineous Pizza for now.”

The waitress nodded and left, swishing her apron and leaving a trail of toppings behind her.

“What’s the matter, Manickchandru?” Robra asked.

“You said we weren’t lovers. Don’t you love me, Robra?”

This was a difficult question for Robra to answer. She had been asking herself that very question. She did like Manickchandru a fairly reasonable amount, perhaps even more than that—but was it love? She did not know. She had never been in love before—or maybe she had, but was never sure if it was love. They had never explained this ‘love’ to Robra in medical school. True, she had never been to medical school, but that was besides the point. Then she remembered something her friend Tanku had taught her about getting out of conversational corners like the one she had been backed into.

“I don’t know, Manickchandru, do *you* love *me*?”

“Of course I do! I love you as much as I possibly can!” he said exclaimatorily.

Robra blinked. She had expected Tanku’s strategy to work differently. Then she remembered something else Tanku had said to her: “The best way to get out of a tight spot in a conversation or an argument is to make the other person define their terms. Then attack the definitions.”

“What do you mean by love?” she asked.

“Love cannot be defined. It must be felt.”

Robra had a feeling this conversation was going downhill, meaning it was getting worse. Although one could also say it was going uphill, because that means it was getting more difficult.

“I definitely feel something for you, but I don’t know if that’s love, Manickchandru.”

Manickchandru grunted in frustration and slammed his fists on the table, causing the forks and knives to jump into the air. One knife sailed through the air, its deadly edge thirsty for blood or food. Luckily for it, the waitress was coming out of the kitchen, carrying the Sanguineous Pizza Robra had ordered.

*Ah, today is my lucky day!* thought the knife, *here is someone who possesses both blood and food!*

The knife dived into the Sanguineous Pizza, bounced off it, and into the waitress’s eye, who did not like having knives in her eyes, or even a single knife in one of her eyes. She flailed wildly, making quite

a mess of pizza toppings and blood. She let out a bloodcurdling scream that distracted Manickchandru and Robra from their uneasy discussion on feelings. When they saw what had happened to the waitress, they stared in helpless horror, horrified by the horrific horrendousness of the situation. As they stared, a single drop of blood from the waitress's eye flew through the air. Manickchandru and Robra followed the flight of the drop with their eyes as it gracefully—although not so gracefully that it negated the horror of the moment—floated through the air like a miniature trapeze artist who looked like a drop of blood, and landed on Robra's spectacles, which she happened to be wearing at the time.

Manickchandru watched as Robra took off her glasses and wiped them on the edge of her shirt. She put her glasses on again, and looked at Manickchandru.

His expression of horror became even horrificer. He began shaking violently and large blisters began to erupt from his skin. His eyes bulged and his ears flapped unnaturally. A stream of steam issued from his nostrils.

And then he exploded in a massive mess of flesh and blood and bone and brains. That was, after all, what he was made of.

Robra picked up a tissue from the table and, taking off her glasses, proceeded to wipe the exploded Manickchandru off her face, when she noticed something on the tissue. She put on her glasses to see what it was. She realised that it was the piece of tissue that Manickchandru had been scribbling so furiously on. It seemed to be a poem that he had been writing. She began to read:

*My Dear Robra,  
You beautiful, slithering cobra,  
What strongish love I have for thee,  
We go together  
like crop and farmer*

*Me and you and you and me.*

*Every time I  
See your brown eye(s)  
Naked, not hidden behind glass,  
My love it increases  
like incurable diseases  
Growing in both volume and mass*

*My Dear Robra  
You smooth, slender cobra  
Descended from the angels' abode,  
I think you should know  
If my love for you grow(s)  
I will overload with love and explode.*

Robra shivered and quivered. Finally she understood the meaning of love. Alas, it was too late. The man she now knew she loved lay scattered in fragments of organs and tissue. Robra, never one to miss a pun, realised that she was holding one of his tissues in her hands!

Overwhelmed with emotion, she burst into tears, and sobbed uncontrollably into Manickchandru's final poem, unmindful of the fact that by doing so she would ruin the poem, and the fact that she would get ink all over her face.

{ Amy Irish }

## FINDING PEACE IN THE CITY OF WAR

*With thanks to 7-year-old Hong Ngoc of Vietnam and his painting 'Emotions on War'*

I must rise above.

I take the elevator 50 floors up, where blood drops  
Washing on the waves below become  
Distant red balloons the children lost  
In a blue ocean of sky. Not their  
Lives.

But still I see

Letters traced in the sand, must be meters high  
To be visible at such a height. I realize  
A tiny messenger has worked for days  
To convey one word, just this:  
*Enough.*

So I go higher.

At 100 floors a distance comes, a shameful  
Sweet relief. Side taking and blood shedding blur away,  
Abstracted, color safely blanched to black and white  
And frozen in a still life far  
Below.

Peace, at last.

But with this escape, corporeal removed,  
Comes a vertigo I could dive into,  
Knowing that however far I reach  
I'll never touch anything, or anyone,  
Real.

Is this what I wanted?

Snow-blind in a monochrome sky, this static  
Solitude becomes a cell. Need  
Suddenly pounds through me, sensations return  
Electrified, like the jolt of a once-lost  
Heartbeat.

And no, this is not peace.

This is life: Seeking the white bird, even knowing  
That there's nothing white about it. Blood-stained,  
Its wings could fly, but on the earth it hides,  
Stunned against the glass that kept me  
Safe.

To be alive is to try

To stop the heavy tread of war's feet  
From coming down hard. For if I don't,  
The snap of this bird's wings 100 floors away  
Will make no sound  
At all.

{ C. Kubasta }

## THE SUBARU POEM

When you back out of the garage, it sounds like a music box, the kind of old-fashioned gift that old-fashioned gentlemen gave to old-fashioned ladies. But we are not old fashioned, you & me. When we go out for a seafood boil, it almost feels like a date, and we return early to our darkened house, the juice of crab and crawfish stuck in pores and clothes and hair. The dog is all over us.

It was a horse chestnut a squirrel had hidden in your wheel well, the metallic percussive that sounded like chimes. You have a beautiful truck, unsullied by hauling –you worry about dings and dirt. I have a small car, loaded with the detritus of daily life: bags and to-go cups and empty cigarette boxes; a dog blanket and shed fur, and drool that stretches in arcs like Christmas garland. You worry

about my little car, the amount I drive. You want me to invest in a cross-over, or a sensible Subaru. But what each of us invests in, is not up to the other.

[you do not like this poem; you say it sounds “corporate” –it’s the Subaru,  
perhaps  
like “chimney,” “Subaru” can never be used in a poem. You say  
it sounds like a “pop song” and the implied comparison to Taylor Swift  
is unkind. Well then—]

I’ve been wondering if “smitten” and “smote” have the same root.

They do. Of course they do. But  
that doesn’t answer the question.

{ Sarah Bowman }

## WHAT I WISH I'D SAID

I nodded a dumb nod because I didn't know what to say and I felt a weight enter the conversation, some shadow I had not expected passed between us. That's the problem with me—all I-should-have-said's. But I should have said, I know what you mean, it's about being swallowed up, wanting and failing until that becomes the routine, and all that we dream through our days makes them bearable and miserable, and the medication they put you on keeps you even and dull-brained so that you can't imagine, and if you can't do that, then what's the point? Instead, I said, "I don't know why more people don't flip out and kill themselves." Of all the stupid things to say.

You smiled. I made you smile. I remember that.

The horror of me calling in death when it was already so much around us only occurs to me now. You would have understood this, I'm sure of it. But when I had the chance to say something to you, I surveyed my arsenal of words and landed squarely on a lazy and vulgar statement. I did not extend myself, I did not offer to you a sincere response, and with the same half self that I use to greet my own life, I now bring forth an it-would-not-have-mattered, something about you choosing death long before the moment of your suicide, and how little influence one really has on another's life. Something wholly missing the point, because the point is, I could have tried. I could have expected more from both of us. I could have offered to you my word. What mattered was that when I had the chance, I didn't stammer out an I-love-you or a goodbye or say plainly that most of us wrestle with wanting and not-wanting to be here, many of us feel wounded by the compromises we make each day, but we stay. We stay.

Sitting in a bookstore, away from the pity that has become you, I am reading a book on grief and trying to find something, anything that might make this make sense, a word to curl up in, a poem to close by. In your absence, the world has split and we are on the opposite sides of what's possible. The self-injury, the deliberate wounding, your body calling for its defenses, scabbing and scarring, it was capable of healing, we are capable of healing, why didn't you see that? Even with this hurt threatening me and everything around me, I can believe in a day better than this. And I can wait for it. But I have not yet had the time to miss you or to contemplate the weight of never, not ever, seeing you. That's the shame of it. For what? To send up prayers, bits of conversations, questions—balloons disappearing out of sight—with nothing coming back, ever. Always, at all times and in all cases, you are gone from here as far as I can see. And left alone with the regret that stands in for you, I now see how your absence will fringe my life, how a choice you made one day will foreshadow mine.

If you were this story's hero, I would ask you to cast out into the sky and deliver to me a pail of the mid-night, the stars settling to the bottom, the impossible, you. I would ask you to undo what you have done, back off that cause, put your effort elsewhere. I would point to the patterns around us—the veins on the back of your hands, the pine's clustered needles—and tell you that you belong here, we belong here, despite the messes we make. And aside from the fear and the harming, the warlords and the hoarding, the knowing and the not knowing, this is the beautiful place where we met. I wish you had stuck around awhile longer.

{ Jayme Russell }

## THE ORIGIN OF AWARENESS

Once, panther pleaded to snatch the darkness in his jaws.  
He believed he would become more powerful the more he swallowed.  
Stalking each evening, he learned to taste shade and shadow.  
Licking the softness, he considered himself and wondered,  
Would the darkness inside one day consume his own black silhouette?

## MOON MADNESS

I've tried to make my winter wolf love me.  
I've found him night after night at the same time  
loping and skulking down by the waters.

He does not want my willing company.  
He would rather hunt me down but  
I cannot wait to feel his fur and heat.

I sit too close and hope he will place  
a giant paw upon my arm,  
crunch my tiny bones in his hungry teeth.

## I WAS

born a Gemini  
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde  
white banality  
colorful creativity  
changing back and forth  
from time to time

I was

born Gemini with greying eyes  
weapons of a false Athena  
they now shift from  
hi, hi, hi brown eye to  
good morning peacocks  
a hazelnut Hera mix

I was

born Gemini Goldilocks  
crawling into bed with curiosity  
but that led to  
brown, brown bears  
scaring me  
naïve

I was

bored, so I changed to black—  
to swallow the shaking  
squeaking thoughts  
that seep  
to still the  
mouse nibbling on finger

I was

bored, so I changed to black—  
to become the quiet corner searcher  
the shadow lurker  
the shrieking  
talon tearing  
night stalker

I was

bored, so I changed to black—  
to cover the truth that I am just normal  
no monster  
goddess  
no fairy tale  
animal  
anomaly

I was

{ Amy De Betta }

## FINAL SALE

“Dear Alex, “I read aloud, stopping only briefly to theatrically clear my throat. His mom is already squirming beside me.

“I am wearing a brand new a-lined lipstick red dress with hidden side zip closure. Fully lined. The price tag is still affixed under my left arm should anyone, such as your mother, wish to see the sale price.” I raise my arm and shake the tag to and fro swinging just under the newly developed flab of my arm. I continue.

“I have owned this dress for at least seven months and I would have loved to have had a real occasion to wear it but I will settle for this here; your annual drug intervention. Why am I informing you of what I am wearing when you are looking directly at it in person? Because if I do not, not one among you would have noticed this unbelievably attractive dress let alone had the social etiquette to compliment said dress or God forbid anything else in the house. With that being said be aware that there is a lovely wide variety of fruit in a plastic tray here on the coffee table as your mother insisted it be provided for this most solemn of occasions. As usual, she also saw no reason to reimburse me over her wise insistence. I know I feel a lot better knowing there are pear chunks available should anyone need one. That being said...”

Alex knows the drill. Drug Intervention, take three. His family will speak from their little black hearts but it'll fail to move him. Not one among them thought to catch him in one of those brief lapses of morning sobriety. He's already dazed and smiling like the Cheshire Cat. Hell, his mom got him a bowl of Fruity Pebbles as some sort of bargaining chip to get him to sit here for a few minutes. Or maybe it was just supposed to be

her apology for bothering him with her concern over the way he lives. The combined efforts of the evolutionary chain sitting in our den will yield no more than dirty Kleenex at least one flipped over table and burnt rubber tire tracks trailing from the curb.

There are particles of dust trapped in the white sunlight of the front window just behind their heads. I am trying to avoid staring at the saturated colors; the pea green of the sofa and the flat gold of the cigarette smoke stained walls. I really need a curtain in here. Should someone else notice the particles of dust it will work its way into their intervention speech as further proof that this life is not good enough for him. No one will suggest he simply scrub.

I uncross and re-cross my legs. Sit rigid upright and read: “Before we begin with the road to healing, a road we all know well, I just want to mention the following:

“For the sake of the Facilitator, just insert part here about how much we all love and care about you, Alex, and how this all comes from a place of love. Pretend as if you recall your first drug intervention. The one with the bigger turn out. The one in which everyone was nervous and hopeful. I think I cried at that one. I know I cried *after* that one when I received the feedback, ‘It’s okay that you didn’t call a caterer.’

“Remember how we needed to borrow the fold out chairs from your sister who made certain to tell everyone present that we did not own enough furniture to accommodate the occasion? As if stealing the rental chairs from her first wedding was a sign of class as opposed to a prediction? These are rhetorical questions, if anyone is wondering,” I point out.

Looking at the entry I see a tall girl, maybe seventeen, thin black eye brows penciled on, skinny jeans and a purse the size of a car trunk. “Please. Come in. We’ll wait. Oh, is this someone’s date? That’s perfect. Of course his lap is fine. Of course it is. May I? Continue?”

Looking back at Alex, who is bowing his head welcomingly at Miss Albuquerque, I continue. He believes he is being honored. “We were discussing your last failed intervention, Alex. Please try to remember that

stuff people said about their hopes and dreams for you. It was stuff that sounded dangerously like ‘you know, if you had a good job, we could all move in with you.’ Yes, you know who you are. I want you to remember all of that how- very- much- we- care shit and then direct your eyes to someone who actually does. Like, say... your cat. In fact, just go ahead and look at Schnitzel or whatever the hell his name is. He feels this way. I merely took dictation from him,” I say, unfolding a small note I have pulled from my bra.

*Dear Rarex,*

*I ruv ru. When you are free basing... I find you off putting. Enough so that I would mention it. Your mother blames the broad in the red dress for both your lifestyle and your odor. An odor that falls between acrid and soiled. Did you know that Dial hand soap kills over 99.9% of all surface bacteria? Just imagine what it could do for your...*

“Well, it goes on like that. Don’t be offended, Alex. Look at the cat. The cat cares. He may not have your gift of verbal eloquence, but he’s young. Thank you, Shilo, or whatever your name is.” Alex smiles and nods at the cat. It clearly has been given kitty nip.

“Alex, I need you to realize that the cat watched me as I watched you watch the 36 hour marathon of ‘Caught on Film.’ And that... again and again... you were shocked by the predictable outcomes of high speed chases and jackasses running with bulls as if the very fact that something was advertised as ‘caught’ on film was not enough indication that something was going to go terribly amiss. 36 hours of ‘Holy shit! Look at this! Oh my God! You missed it!’ like I was the idiot for not hanging on every moment of this. As if it’s somehow normal or patently acceptable to film a man in danger of being killed by a train instead of putting down the camera and helping him. 36 Hours. Non-stop.

“When it was finally over I fell asleep at the kitchen table and dreamt there were literally no survivors from the Titanic. Not one. Just footage from recovered cell phones as man after woman after child refused to

help anyone else preferring to film the debauchery as if they simply were not part of it.”

I interject a painfully long silence but jump back in with one eyebrow raised as he drinks the last of the milk from the bottom of the cereal bowl signaling that his mother should rise and retrieve more sustenance for him.

“I’m not done, Alex. I am not done,” I say sharply to his mother, whose Mary Kay rose colored face makeup is caking around the corners of her tight lips. The temptation to blend her face in is overwhelming but I have to stay the course.

“This letter is far from over and I will read it in its entirety. I swear to God I will be heard just this one time. Should you try and leave, I will follow you to the car where I will continue to read as we careen into on-coming traffic. Should you die, this will become your eulogy and I will read it over your corpse while wearing this same red dress. Why? Because this will be not end like the last time when your mother got ‘overprotective’ and the Facilitator, (who I don’t think even counts if it’s some woman your mom knows), felt it was a good idea to ‘re-direct’ my concerns. If I have to miss watching a Life Time movie because I’m addressing your predictable ass at yet another drug intervention, I will at least be placated. Because these people think that rehab is covered under the insurance we don’t have. Because even their solutions are monstrous problems *for other people*.” Realizing I’m raising my voice, I re-cross my legs and begin again. “By the way, your computer asked me to include this,” I mention, pulling a folded piece of printer paper from beneath the plastic tray of untouched fruit. Is that a child I just heard? Who brought a kid to an intervention?

*Dearest Alex,*

*This is your computer talking. The one with the Dio screensaver. Please have the courtesy to look at me when I am speaking. I know you know how to look at me because you do it so often. It hurts my feelings when you minimize my screens just because the broad in the red dress*

*approaches. I really love her dress, though. Is that sateen?*

*You do not need to protect me from her. I can defend myself. A fire wall would really help us both, though. Also, you need to erase my history every so often. You're wondering how that's done? Ask the broad. She does it for you so the FBI doesn't haul you away.*

*Can I just mention that role playing kind of insinuates that you're pretending to be someone else who is quite different from yourself? You should try role playing a normal healthy male in an AOL chat room. Try something new... like the role of someone who likes legal age girls.*

*And just so you know, red-dress takes no interest in your Facebook page. She gets the real live version. She is not interested in the self portraits that you post daily. Hourly, even. She and I both agree that the cat does not deserve its own folder as it simply is not that intriguing. Maybe you should put a picture of the broad on that thing. Admit you know her. Trust me. It would seem a lot less desperate than those pics of you in 80s tour shirts drinking Pabst through chapped lips. If it were a slide show, at least, people could watch you aging.*

*In closing, if 200 of those 400 Facebook "friends" showed up, we'd have to borrow your sister's lawn furniture to seat them and she'd post that to half the world. Luckily, we have never met 400 people. We are not even 6 degrees of separation from 400 people. 400 people are like... 397 more people than you'd lend red dress's money to. Maybe you should try getting clean and no longer sending Facebook friend invites to people who interview you for employment. Best of luck with the job hunt. Signed your computer.*

*P.S. "Friends" do not address your grammatical issues in a public arena. If a friend's greatest concern in life is proper usage of "their" versus "there," it indicates they have not truly suffered and the one single thing they know, they need you to know they know.*

"Wow," I say. Honestly pleased. "Great stuff. Thank you, Computer. I just have to interject I notice we're down a couple of people? Alex? Your sister had an appointment or somewhere else she suddenly had to get to?"

That's a shame. Well, I'm sure we'll learn all about it on her Facebook page. Could someone just please put their feet up on that fold out chair before she comes back and takes it? Thanks. Super.

"Okay at this point in my intervening thing I feel like I should be using the word 'feel' more often so here goes. I feel... I feel that all those quit smoking commercials really just subliminally encourage me to smoke more cigarettes. Clearly, you can't give me an idea, tell me not to do it and expect me to listen. Clearly, Alex, you feel the same way.

"Half the time those ads show you some poor wretched person who has lost limbs and half their faces and they do this so powerfully that an excruciatingly slow painful death looks preferable to living this way. They show you the horror and only then do they suggest you discontinue use. After telling you that you're going to be mangled, or die a horrendously slow death, they suggest you quit while on your absolutely certain path to those inevitable outcomes. Don't do the one thing that makes you happy on your destination to hideous jawless-ness or excruciating death.

"So I get it, Alex. We both know you have no retirement and no savings. No dental. No driver's license. You have no job prospects and no hope for advancements. Only a cigarette can do what that chunk of pear cannot and if the end is going to be unbearable, at least you'll have it your way the whole ride down.

"You're self aware enough to regret that first time you lit that first cigarette, or did that first line... but it's decades later and you damn well know it's too late now. Damage is done. There is no reset button. I cannot make my lungs pink and if you elect to cease doing all the drugs, you still have 22 missing years where some financial portfolio was supposed to be growing. I get it, Alex." But they don't. And neither does Alex himself because he's mumbling to his brother, who's interested in knowing where the cooler is.

"Alex," I say, unsurprised by any of this. "I wish you were sober for no other reason than just so you could take a good hard look at the people who are telling you that you need to clean up. You might just find you don't trust their judgment. I wish you were sober for just long enough to

see that sometimes, the only way a person can find merit in themselves, is in simply deeming themselves as better than Alex. For that, I personally thank you. So does Larry.

“Please face Larry the cactus now as I speak for him.” And, again, unsurprisingly, Alex looks at the potted cactus on the kitchen table. He smiles. He must have suspected it spoke.

*Dear Alex,*

*I am a cactus. I grow so very well in the Southwest because I require next to no water and it does not rain here, does it? Shoestring the cat, or whatever the hell it's named, does require water, however. So thank God toots in the red dress takes care of that. What I want to say is that when you take pride in the fact that you keep me alive... I feel... I feeeeeeeeeel... These feeling statements can be hard. I feel like you're an asshole. We both know that you have urinated on me on more than one occasion and that I live despite you, not because of you. I pray for death. I hate you. I actually envy that cat. Not the broad, though. I don't hate her because she's nice enough to do this and civilized enough to use the john.*

*Signed Larry the Cactus*

“Back to me, Alex.” I insist. “I feel good! You feel good? This is healthy. This is the best intervention yet. Alex! You still awake? Stay with me here. I know we're all a little bored and warm but that's your fault. Also your brother keeps turning up the heat as if he were trying to grow something in the closet. Can you just take your hand off the thermostat please, Teddy? Just put it in your pocket, please. I pay the heating bill, not you.

“Now, you may not recall your last intervention and definitely not the one before because I think you were huffing paint before that one but I had this other letter written about happier times we shared that actually never really happened but I thought it'd be nice if we pretended they did for the family so I'll go ahead and skim that now. This would already be done if your mother had sat nearby this quietly last time. You're doing

really super nice work there, June. Have a pear chunk. And I think we can all agree that this is the longest your buddies have ever gone without ‘stepping out’ into the garage to look at something.” The silence tells me they never before realized I noticed their relationship with the garage and the broken lock.

“Okay, so it was this anecdote about how we went to Epcot Center and all I wanted to do was ride the tea cups but by the time we got all the way up to that ride the Mad Hatter guy who worked the booth was shutting it down and you just flipped! You yelled something like ‘If my gorgeous woman wants to ride that tea cup, she’s going to have a damn whirl on a pink and yellow tea cup! I swear this on my life!’ Then you knocked The Mad Hatter out and pulled that lever like a champ and we whirled around until dawn. But that didn’t happen. Nothing ever happens. Except when it does. When you declare some life changing project, some new vision, and enthusiastically demand that it take over both our lives.

“Like... what was it last month? Glass blowing.” A dull murmur of recognition rumbles as if his friends were wondering what had happened with that plan as well. They should. They were part of it. “That required a start up cost of how much? I know there were stiff start up costs to buy fire (which is readily available in the free world, I might mention) and a hunk of glass plus a tank of gas each way to get down to a barn in Las Cruces? How’s the corporation going, Alex? Are your bongs on Etsy yet or was that just flying too close to the sun?” Silence. A spoon clangs in a bowl. “Again. Rhetorical.”

“And since I know where this is headed let’s just remind your family that the last time I co-signed for some on line degree, Sallie Mae didn’t agree that your failing to log in was a good enough reason to simply not pay back the loan. It turns out, not just anyone can be a nurse.” Someone mutters, “My sister is a nurse.”

“Oh, this statement arrived earlier today, which I will read, from the makers of the ever so popular video game *The Sims* but first, let me just get this napkin here... Do not... want... to... spill... this delicious fruit... on my classy dress,” I say, tucking a huge white napkin into my collar and

diving into a juicy tangerine. “I love this dress. I sincerely do. Okay, here goes...” I say, juice trickling off my chin.

*Dear Alex,*

*You do not have an actual town in a place called Simsville. You have neither a mansion nor a haunted house, nor even a studio apartment. The Sims is a game. While we salute you for reaching level 67, we are quite frankly disturbed by the fact that you put any serious thought into what your new Sim people are named and what their personality traits may be. Admittedly, we had a good laugh when you sent us nineteen e-mails demanding to know why the English language setting was not working but at this point we pray you have realized on your own that the Sims speak in gibberish. Gibberish, Alex. If they truly related to one another... they'd be people. People. Like the one in your own home who replies back. The flesh one who waters the cactus and whose dress is truly sensational. Did she lose weight?*

*By the way, we'd all like to thank you for spending \$99.95 in real American dollars for the virtual “robotic cat” you recently purchased for one of your virtual families. We had an office pool going as to whether anyone was high enough to drop a C note on shit they don't own, can't touch, can't write off, can't taste and can't possess and lo and behold look at you remembering to “feed” a thing made of pixels while ignoring the version that feels actual hunger. Moments like these are why I got into this business.*

*When you starved that non-existent Sims baby to death, accidentally started the house fire... and then you sobbed at your computer... That was the single most hysterical thing we have ever seen. Your rendition of Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf was... in a word: brilliant. Hall of fame.*

*The truth is, that virtual Sim baby asked to be removed from your home computer. We, the programmers, pulled her out and placed her with a lovely Japanese student on the other side of the planet whom, at seven years of age, is old enough to comprehend that The Sims, as well as Second Life, are merely games. We look forward to your next*

*purchase and see our Facebook page for a sneak peak of our Sims Go to the Olympics package coming soon! For 99 Simoleons, your Sims, at least, have a passport!*

“Gee. That was good of them. So professional. I can see why you spend so much time giving them time,” I say, realizing how late it’s become. I snap back into focus the moment I hear someone receive a text message on their cell phone and it occurs to me, I didn’t even think to suggest everyone refrain from recording this process.

“Listen, I know I’ve really enjoyed myself and this tangerine is... well your mom was right. This hits the spot. The only thing better would be the cigarette I’m about to have.” I wipe the napkin across my face knowing full well I just spread fuchsia lip gloss all over my skin. I leave it there.

“Alex, I’d like to think this has helped you. I’d like to think the barrage of guilt trips and false threats you’re about to receive will do something, anything other than nothing, but judging by the fact that you have actually *acquired* two sketchy looking attendees off there in the background... those two guys leaning on the screen door right there? Leaning... not coming inside? Yeah, I think it’s going to be about the same as yesterday around here. No one has a reaction to that? June? Maybe we should offer the strangers fruit or something? No?” I ask, getting up.

“I’ll be back by 7. If I leave now I won’t be late for work. I’ll bring dinner. Am I blocked in?” I ask, avoiding all eye contact with the lot of them as I step over their legs and feet like I have to get to the bathroom ten minutes after takeoff. “Mm! Please. Help yourselves!” I say smiling and, grabbing a bare fist of diced pear, hungrily bite into the overly ripened fruit which sprays and drips unapologetically, ensuring that I will never be able to return this now soiled, once stunning dress.

{ Peter Twal }

*from* AN ARABIC MANIFESTO NOT ABOUT  
OVERTHROWING A DICTATORSHIP

If you were to ask an Arab if he or she reads poetry, undoubtedly the answer would be, “You mean, Khalil Gibran?” One in the same. That’s what Arabs think. Undisputedly, poets like Gibran Khalil Gibran or Mahmoud Darwish or Nizzar Qabbani have contributed to the poetic identity of the Arabic culture, but the danger is to assume they *are* the identity itself. If that were the case, what poetry would be left for the rest of us to write?

As a first generation Arab American, there has always been a heavy pressure put upon me to pursue a career in the technical fields. Doctors and engineers. That’s about as creative as we get. This cultural burden stems from an old mentality that most other fields, especially the Arts, are of little value to a third world country in need of development. I have always disagreed with this, believing strongly that while the technical fields are important to the infrastructure of a blossoming country, the Arts are vital to the infrastructure of its blossoming cultural identity. What separates a group of people from any other is the irreplaceable work they create. A piece of art, a story, a poem, these are some of the necessities that without which, a society may not ever fully develop. It is my sincerest dream to see a greater and more appreciative love for the Arts, especially writing, propagate among the people of the Middle East during my lifetime.

Growing up, my interests were varied. I tinkered endlessly as a child with anything I could take apart, but I also wrote small poems and letters when I wasn't sure how to say something out loud. My family—wanting me to stumble upon what was best for me rather than dictating such—encouraged both of my talents. But by the time I reached my high school years, I had convinced myself I could only be successful with one. However, the older I grew, the more certain I became that I would dare to attack both. I have always hoped to tie together the seemingly disconnected worlds of engineering and poetry by writing pieces that resemble circuitry, poems with lines that interconnect, regulate and trigger other lines or thoughts, either infinitely or to some termination point. I hope to one day prove that an Arab can do great work both as an engineer and a writer. I hope I can show other Arabs that the technical fields are a strong career choice should one be oriented towards them but to never discount an artistic path because the money involved or the rewards aren't as immediately apparent. There is still much poetry to be written by my culture. My aim is to be considered proof of that.

{ Marcela Sulak }

## ALVIN

He entered our lives in first grade, always  
slinking off to the door when the silhouette  
of Mrs. Barosh appeared,

her Dixie cup of pills between two fingers,  
and a cup of water with a third.  
Their transactions occurred

on the other side the classroom door.  
Our teacher called it *privacy*. He'd failed  
and we inherited him,

that was that, thin and ill-fitting as he was,  
not like his brother Ray Charles, who carried  
five boys on his back

across the end-zone one Friday night  
of fresh-cut clover and starlight, and parents  
with nothing better

to do than scream into the stadium lights,  
so that when the announcer, Mr. Leonard,  
doubling as guidance counselor,

read out the instructions to the state-mandated  
achievement test a few weeks later,  
his newscaster voice

filled the cafeteria  
with dread and joy and the desire to applaud.  
Sometimes Alvin, turning from the door,

would tilt his cup so the two bright tablets  
peeped at us. *See?* he'd whisper.  
He'd swallow them standing,

then shuffle back to the last row. Soon his eyelids would close.  
I don't remember when this halftime performance  
in our morning lessons stopped.

I'd forgotten till now how his oldest sister  
cradled my chin at recess saying wasn't I  
the cutest thing, meaning

wasn't I white and petite. Once someone stole the old bike  
we'd left leaning against the utility shed  
we never locked,

cleaned out that week for the annual smoking of meat.  
How my parents knew it was Alvin, it never  
occurred to us to ask.

We weren't allowed to tell anyone, so  
no one but us ever knew he was someone  
worth riding away from somewhere.



Linus's mouth is better than Godly. See Linusly.

[Cleanliness//Godliness]

[Post-Matter Sterility//Linusness]

Linus gets cavities. Black eatings. Sinking venoms. Bullets in the face and jaw. (((((face)))))) (((((jaws))))))

The pain gets bad.

Things get swollen. Linus likes suckers.

### CIGARETTES

SUCKERS \_\_\_\_\_ Many things run parallel: habits. Smoke and cherry.

When the crumbling comes, the flavors won't be surprising.

(Linus) (suffers) (from) (many) (as) (of) (yet) (undetermined) (neuroses).

Linus suffers.

Many

neuroses.

Undetermined.

VvvvvvvvvvV

{ Mary Marie Dixon }

## THE ARTIST

*Everything is gestation and then bringing forth. To let each impression and each germ of a feeling come to completion wholly in itself, in the dark, in the inexpressible, the unconscious, beyond the reach of one's own intelligence, and await with deep humility and patience the birth-hour of a new clarity: that alone is living the artist's life: in understanding as in creating.*

*Rainer Maria Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet,  
Letter 3, dated April 23, 1903, Viareggio (near Pisa), Italy.*

The brindle lumbers the gutted path  
Amidst the sprawling bindweed.  
Her body sways, rocking its secret weight  
Through goldenrod and cockscomb.

At the rusted tank, the heifer's mouth  
Embraces an emerald crust  
To strain clear water  
From beneath the algal foam.

If vision sinks beyond the scum  
Of half-emptied dreams  
And pierces the placid waters,  
Then its pregnant issue bloats  
The random phrase or image  
And ekes life out of nothing.

The heifer's labor lends itself to heaving  
And soon the newborn will kick itself free,  
Then bloodily and bodily emerge.  
The heifer will lick the sack away.

Words or icons wrap themselves around effort  
And commence their own labor.  
Conceptions release themselves  
Through time and blood.

Expressions left lingering in the womb still birth,  
But those expelled through the dark canal  
Surface like the arduous bloom of imagination,  
Its fruit thick with cogent reckoning.

Like the brindle, their instrument, the artist  
Seizes this revelation whose appearance  
Is a mystery and a miracle  
Amongst briars and cattle trails.

## ALEXANDER'S ODE TO BUCEPHALUS

*Nature has placed nothing so high, that valour cannot overcome it.*

— Alexander the Great

The fire sign opens out out out into the wet world.

Your heart leaps like kindling.

Wisp and burn,

Your body foams.

I cling to pulsing withers. Uscathed,

Matching rhythm to the warring rain.

Dragging twined glories,

We spew their white petals,

Opalescent as abalone.

Your hooves throw sand bones,

Refuged by flood.

In fury, we suffer mud, slung from your stinging pace;

Sleet flays

Your blazed head;

Our cheeks numb. Bucephalus,

You run from the sun,

Our shadows stream ripples over spent clover;

Dogwoods claw us in the hunt-space,

And flames stain your bay-red to rivers

Through the sticking bayberry

And the cloying muscadine.

A bruised refrain crushes monarchs; in clear cries,  
    Twin powers,  
    Fame and glory,  
Mount your flanks, oh charger.  
Let death swing wide  
The closed gate for the ones from ashes—  
We are apparitions, my red stallion,  
You seeding fire with your eyes' coal embers,  
And I, born of your fiery heart, am vengeance itself.

We endure our wounds in the seething battle;  
Reason stammers at passion as we raze the enemy.

    Fly, Fly, Fly,  
    My Bucephalus, into the wet whorl.  
Gather the storm Flare your nostrils  
And blow wind, fire, glory;  
The enemy ghosts before us,  
We swell as ice in the veins of our opposers.

Bucephalus, sweet revealer of my apotheosis,  
    My fire sign.  
    My wide wonderer  
In the stable, simple apple-pleased taster,  
No fire sling, no singeing portents.  
Let us find calm in this gentle rain, let us abandon glory,  
I have fired my bones on the back of your speed,  
And reaped the devotion of your strong will.  
    Rest rest rest.  
My Bucephalus, the fire and sleet, from ancient clay.

{ Mike Smith }

## ZOMBIE POETRY

You would have thought Billy Collins had choked on a grape. Or, worse, that Oprah had revealed the Dickman twins to be Kent Johnson's latest masterpiece. On January 22, Alexandra Petri published a column in *The Washington Post* titled, "Is poetry dead?" The spirit of the piece was lighthearted, sociable, empathetic; the subject occasioned by Richard Blanco's reading of his inaugural poem, "One Today." The response was as swift and slight as you might have predicted. Most of the commentary reminded Petri of the facts: the number of entire mid-size cities with annual poetry festivals; the percentage of students who have chosen to enter graduate creative writing programs despite the golden ticket of a B.A degree; the number of independent presses that almost break even thanks to exorbitant reading fees. But poets know the question doesn't have anything to do with the latest number of their fellow practitioners. It gnaws at them: *This thing I've put down here, this evidence of my aching process of worry and abandonment, rejuvenation and capitulation, this arrangement I've set free for blood relations and former students to read is not what I intended. It may surpass my intention, but it is not an accurate artifact of my response to the world.*

Richard Blanco did his best to satisfy the expectations of his admirers and muzzle his inevitable detractors who persist in lamenting that the selection of the inaugural poet is not motivated by mere aesthetics. It was an impossible task to which our poetry no longer seems suited. Petri might have asked, then, a more serious series of questions. Is poetry more dead now than it was 50 years ago? 100? 400? Is it more dead than it will be next year, next century, next language? Yes, let us get past the

ethnocentrism of Petri's question and the responses it prompted and ask instead: Is English-language poetry dead? Is human-generated poetry dead? Let us admit technology and commerce have whittled down our poetry's disinterested and innocent readership and the larger culture's binge and purge diet has led to a diabetic inability to digest anything other than plot particulars, pyrotechnics, and confession. Does that mean poetry won't appear alive and well on other shores, preaching to a rising people?

But what does it mean to say poetry is alive? Thomas Wentworth Higginson has long been admired as a man and condemned as a man of letters, but how would he have answered that question from a would-be "young contributor"? *Are you too deeply occupied to say if my Verse is alive? Yes. Should you think it breathed, and had you the leisure to tell me, I should feel quick gratitude.* He found the leisure and Emily Dickinson was grateful. But the ability to breathe is not, after all a necessary characteristic of life. Is a virus alive? Maybe, but it doesn't breathe. Dickinson's poetry breathes, but is that enough to say it lives?

In fact, poetry may have been, may always be, more virus than common living thing. Viruses still confuse us and frustrate our desire to classify and compartmentalize our reality. They satisfy some of the characteristics of living things: they adapt to their environment; they're ordered; but they grow by spreading. And they reproduce by replication, not in the way most living things reproduce, not the way poetry reproduces. Plotting the family trees of individual poems is one of the surest ways to tenure and not much gets you into deep water faster than claiming a false lineage for a well-studied poem. In grad school, I audited a course on avant and post-avant English language poetry. The room was about evenly divided between M.F.A. students and Ph.D. candidates. One winter morning, a fellow poet made the mistake of arguing a direct line between W.C. Williams' *Kora in Hell* and Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns*. She had begun noting similarities between the *Hymns* and certain Williams' "improvisations," such as the one just before the two that orbit around the fact that "A young woman who had excelled at intellectual

pursuits... died on the same night that a man was murdered in the next street, a fellow of very gross behavior.”

How smoothly the car runs. And these rows of celery, how they bitter the air—winter’s authentic foretaste. Here among these farms how the year has aged, yet here’s last year and the year before and all years. One might rest here time without end, watch out his stretch and see no other bending than spring to autumn, winter to summer and earth turning into leaves into earth and—how restful these long beet rows—the caress of the low clouds—the river lapping at the reeds.

I don’t remember with which hymn she attempted to make apparent the connection, but it may well have been the tenth:

He adored the desk, its brown-oak inlaid with ebony,  
assorted prize pens, the seals of gold and base  
metal into which he had sunk his name.

It was there that he drew upon grievances from the  
people; attended to signatures and retributions;  
forgave the death-howls of his rival. And there  
he exchanged gifts with the Muse of History.

What should a man make of remorse, that it might  
profit his soul? Tell me. Tell everything to  
Mother, darling, and God bless.

He swayed in sunlight, in mild dreams. He tested the  
little pears. He smeared catmint on his palm for  
his cat Smut to lick. He wept, attempting to mas-  
ter *ancilla* and *servus*.

Only our professor managed to maintain his composure.

But there is a family resemblance. The smoothly running car leads to a crime scene and the diagnostic caresses of the county physician. The eleventh *Mercian Hymn* tells us “Swathed bodies in the long ditch; one eye upstaring./ It is safe to presume, here, the king’s anger. He/ reigned forty years. Seasons touched and retouched the soil.” The tone of ironic detachment and the doubly ironic refusal in each to pass judgment on the perspective of doctor/tyrant/poet unites the two sections more than the fact that each orbits around human remorse. Here’s Williams’ interpretation of the first improvisation of the fifth section. “Remorse is a virtue in that it is a stirrer up of the emotions but it is a folly to accept it as a criticism of conduct. So to accept it is to attempt to fit the emotions of a certain state to a preceding state to which they are in no way related.” Setting his latest volume beside W.C. Williams’ *Collected Poems* on my desktop has been one of the more rewarding ways I have engaged with Hill’s mature work, everything from the *Triumph of Love to Oraclau/ Oracles*.

But the genealogy of English-language poetry is almost unimaginably more complex than any one example might suggest. On Mount Parnassus, Zukovsky passes the potato salad to Robert Lowell while Levertov asks him for the salt and pepper. And poetry is, after all, kingdom, not genus. So many modes have been lost. So many modes are at this moment coming into being. How many Modernists turning in their gyres does it take to get to the center of why the epic isn’t possible in our language anymore? When poet-critic and self-described cheerleader for new poetry, Stephen Burt, claims he can’t keep up with it all, does he really mean to echo Eliot’s line, itself Dantean: I had not thought death had undone so many?

But poetry persists. It grows and adapts. Revolutions in poetry are almost always about technique, aren’t they? They aim to open up, sometimes violently, what we mean by the umbrella-term—poetry. Poetry grows when its subject matter, its voice, its perspectives and rhythmic identities expand to the point when the right of a person to become infected with the practice of making poems isn’t determined by socio-political, religious, or economic factors. This might be real growth,

not the spreading that our institutions of poetry cheer and promote. But poetry also adapts to changes in its environment. Perhaps you've observed proponents of seemingly diametrically opposed aesthetics appealing for support to the same poet, the same book, even the same poem. In the introductory note to Hass's contributions to the anthology, *American Hybrid*, editors Cole Swenson and David St. John seem to have his poem, "Meditation at Lagunitas," in mind when they observe that Hass's "signature meditative tone and pace is complicated—even troubled—by issues of cultural collapse and linguistic indeterminacy, situating his aesthetic versatility... between modernist practice and the recursive play of postmodernism. Because of the recognition of two strains in nominalist thinking in the poem, this second poem in his second book, *Praise*, has appealed to quite different groups of poets.

The idea, for example, that each particular erases  
the luminous clarity of a general idea...  
....Or the other notion that  
because there is in this world no one thing  
to which the bramble of blackberry corresponds,  
a word is elegy to what it signifies.

Later in the poem, Hass makes the anti-nominalist claim that "There are moments when the body is as numinous/ as words," but are there ever moments anymore in our language when words are as numinous as the body? Perhaps it's true that "a word is elegy to what it signified." We poets are less willing to admit that every engagement with the things of this world both praises and inters the linguistic identities we've bestowed on them.

So poetry is dead for us. It died so long ago that the when hardly matters. It keeps dying. Perhaps, when not aborted by heavy drinking and a good night's sleep, it arrives stillborn. Or perhaps it lives long enough to be willfully snuffed out. Perhaps, because it doesn't know it's dead, it haunts us, generation after generation, asking to be killed. It was dead

long before the siren song of academic tenure, long before Laura Riding stabbed it through the heart or Dana Gioia wrote it off for a tax break. Riding, at least, had the decency to come back and confess it:

My history as one who was for long a devout advocate of poetry, and then devoutly renounced allegiance to it as a profession and faith in it as an institution, raises a question of consistency.

Riding came to prominence as an English-language poet in 1920s, a second wave of Modernism. She renounced poetry fifteen or so years later, but readers would have to wait a good deal longer than that for a formal defense of her decision.

The story I had to tell was of my becoming so much aware of a discrepancy, deep-reaching, between what I call the creed and the craft of poetry...that I perceived the impossibility of anyone's functioning with consistency in the character of poet.

The creed of poetry, she says, promises the possibility of "speaking beyond the ordinary, touching perfection," but the craft, the "verbal rituals that court sensuousity as if it were the judge of truth" reveals, if pursued diligently, an unbridgeable chasm. From this point, the death of the art is perfunctory, a formal final thrust: "The total display crackles with craft-individualism, but there is no sparkling, no brilliance: all is suffused with a light of drab poetic secularity."

So poetry is dead for us. But does it have the right to die? The fact that there is little room for sentimentality within the processes of evolution may be behind, ultimately, every religious objection to the phenomenon. Perhaps sentimentality keeps us from pulling the plug on poetry, too. Or perhaps when we say poetry is dead we just mean the wrong ones have found it. Perhaps poetry is the grail that's disguised as a teacup; perhaps the wrong ones are almost always the ones who find it.

But decomposition has not been quick. It's been twenty years since

I've read Charles Bernstein's *A Poetics*, but this masterpiece of Riding's drab secularism was one of the first texts that came to mind as I thought about this question.

There is, of course, no state of American poetry, but states, moods, agitations, dissipations, renunciations, depressions, acquiescence, elations, angers, ecstasies....

Decomposition has been slow, but not quiet. The poetry-corpse bustles with activity, and, if by dead, we don't mean poetry has ceased to move, we must mean it is irrelevant. But the dead are terribly relevant. Their likenesses and names adorn the hallways of our public buildings and line our bookshelves. They invade our nightly quiet or rush and knock around our dream as the lifelong tenants of our minds. If only poetry were as dead as those who shadow us so perfectly through our lives. If only it were "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" and not sleazy uncle Louis that returned to us out of the haze, heavy with speech and strong with the blood.

Closer yet I approach you,  
What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you—I laid  
me stores in advance,  
I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.  
Who was to know what should come home to me?  
Who knows but I am enjoying this?  
Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at  
you now, for all you cannot see me?

So poetry is dead and, when we encounter poetry, we greet it or flee it in its afterlife. What we experience as live ink is really shade. But does it mean us well or ill? Modern claims for poetry's legitimacy, its place in the chaos of existence, often put it in the same category as Goethe's Mephistopheles, "the spirit that negates" in order to transmute the world's chaos and the social veneer of order into true harmony. Shelley says poetry is a mirror that transforms into beauty "that which

is disturbed.” So poetry transforms. It converts and subverts. It keeps us truthful, if not honest. Perhaps, as Whitman says, the death of poetry is a luckier thing than we imagine. Shall we look for it under our boot soles? Did the white heat of poetry kill or save Sylvia Plath? Rimbaud? How mad do you have to be to claim the rational disordering of the senses as a legitimate strategy for the composition of poetry? I have no doubt I have been transformed by poetry, but I do not know to what end?

Poetry is dead for us. And the news should come as no surprise. It’s like reading the obituary of a childhood celebrity-hero and realizing you’d assumed they’d been dead for years. Harold Bloom likes to say that some of Shakespeare’s characters are more real than many living people. The idea is a recurring one in a larger campaign of overestimation, his increasingly strident response to certain initiatives of democratization in the study of literature. But what if he’s righter than even he claims to be? What if it’s too late? What if poetry has infected us all, irreparably, already? Popular music has been eating the flesh of our poetry for centuries; our novels have been paving over its grave for even longer, for so long that our memoirs have called in the hard scientists in an effort to designate the desecration as culturally significant. Poetry is dead, which means, only, that our public speakers will continue to scavenge its burial chamber, our scholars will continue to group-violate its corpse, and our zombie poets will persist in their pantomime, their *vita nova* searching, relentlessly, for that rarest of delicacies—the unspoiled brain.

{ Thade Correa }

## ANY STORY

There's this silence that breathes. Inside it,  
everything happens. The sky and stars  
are pieces of it. Windows and mirrors  
let it in. The rain is its music.

In a life, too, everything happens. You're born,  
your eyes drink sunlight, and joy comes  
rushing in, just like that, without knocking.  
Then tragedy occurs, maybe salvation.

No matter what, you remember  
that silence, how everything it owns,  
you own. One day it calls you by name,  
and its voice sounds like the cool,

dark trees of your childhood,  
like an ocean waiting for dawn.  
It doesn't knock, either. Still,  
you open the door and take its hand.

## BOY AND MOON

*after Edward Hopper*

I remember: once I lived in a room  
with white curtains. Against the wall, a bed,  
and wallpaper on which faint flowers bloomed.  
The hush was filled with words the others said.

Only I was quiet. Everything comforted.  
Night stayed in its place, and fled when evening's  
bedside lamp was lit, and bright stories read.  
Sleep came fast; my only fear was dreaming.

That was before I woke from dream and found  
the houselights gone, and in the place of love  
a full moon flared through dark eternity. Around  
my bed night's ocean heaved. Seagulls sang above.

My walls fell down; my small room filled with space.  
I had never lived in another place.

## WINDOWS

*for J.H.*

In rooms they stand sentinel. There are papers  
covered with numbers on a desk, books filmed

in dust, battered chairs in which absence sleeps  
under the false suns of lamps, paintings suffused

with remembered light. In cloisters of dim air  
in which music rusts, they keep vigil

over the possible. They are wounds in time  
bleeding blue wind, fragments of the sky,

wells of hope. You lift your head and meet  
their eyes: in them, sunlight wanders the streets,

grasses knit the scars of graves, birds follow  
the pale voices of stars home to trees heavy

with tomorrow. You turn away.  
It is now. It will always be now.

{ Dawn M. Comer }

## SWIM

### JAR

She sits between Woody and her husband on a couch she does not like in a living room she does not know. They debate whether life is worth living, toss around Nietzsche and Kierkegaard like dead bodies. She listens, or tries to. Her eyes wander, settle on a shelf across the room.

“How can anyone bear to live in a world where there is no God?” asks Woody. “The only comedy to be found rises from our own misery.”

“Perhaps there is a God,” muses her husband, “but if so, God is too calculating to love, peddles half-spent watches from his trenchcoat.”

Hour after hour they argue.

On the shelf sits a canning jar, sealed and packed with pickled cabbage and a fish. A whole fish. Tail flicks, belly sways, body weaves through thick pale vegetable. Looks at her looking at it. Her eyes always on the jar she bends down, slips shoes and socks from feet, pulls laces from shoes, ties laces end-to-end.

Woody turns to her, asks, “What makes your life worth living?”

She says nothing, points to the jar.

Woody grins.

Her husband’s mouth hangs open, but no words come.

She stands and strides, double-length lace in hand, to the waiting shelf. She ties lace around jar, slips jar around neck.

She walks barefoot from the room, hears the fading echo of analysis, feels against her chest the swim of fish in jar.

## SEPTEMBER

A peacock feather. An artist's canvas, white and waiting.

A young girl in a bathroom far from home holding one pink-wrapped tampon. Me, offering the girl a whole box.

An endless table spread wide, bursting with vegetable color. A thin woman with wrinkled olive skin peeling cucumbers, humming with the wind. Me, rounding my bowl with cucumbers, forking the last red-ripe tomato. Me, settling in to eat.

A cluttered table, stinking and spilling over. A round man with hairy arms slicing ruptured-skin sausages, stirring spluttering sauce. On my plate, sparse vegetable bumps drowned in grease-slick sauce, crowded out by sausages. I cannot eat.

Again, the endless table. The thin woman removing the plate of sauce and sausages, filling again my bowl with the fresh and the raw, slicing a watermelon smile, saying, "For you. Eat."

## DREAMTIME

Pulling herself through water, space shifts, time falls away. The whole of her lives and moves and has her being within a fluid, shifting embrace. No destination to be reached, nothing to become, she just IS in this moment... and in the last... and in the next. She just IS in this place... and in the last... and in the next. Always changing, never fixing. Even in rest, fins sway, gills open and close, water passes through.

Water moves her. Water gives her something to move against.

Put her in a jar of pickled cabbage and set her on a shelf and still she will swim, body weaving between leaves of thick, pale vegetable. Still moving. Still breathing. More precious than ever in her impossibility, her mystery.

Catch her if you must but she will slip away. Try to keep her whole, keep her all to yourself, and you will fail. Fire-air scorches her gills, dulls her scales, stops her swim. She cannot move through air for long.

If she ceases to move she will be used. Pinned down. Gutted. Filleted.

Wrapped up in white butcher's paper and sold for \$9.82 cents. Lost to herself. Lost to you. Not even scraps enough for a skillet's fry.

So just let her be. Slip her back inside the water. Let her swim.

Call her Fish, for that is who she is.

{ Desmond Kon Zhicheng-Mingdé }

## MALGRÉ LUI :: IN SPITE OF

“Sleep will come,” Gigi says to the lover of her midday dreams. “But it will arrive in spurts, sputtering like a broken pipe. But you will hear it like the song of home.” Her lover, those eyes like something oceanic, has gone out in front. There plotted on large reams of graph paper are the charts, these beds of arrows, for each one of us. Intoning like a deity, Charles Simic is lilting from the room’s ceiling speaker. He sounds mellow in our exhaustion, as he reads “I Was Stolen By the Gypsies.” It seems there are families and villages in the poem too, at least the illusion of them, and to the far ends of the waking world, the big picture Gigi seems to hear of so often. Of our lovefools’ paradise like a snatch of serendipity. “Is this the way they feel my Sri Lanka?” Her lover looks at her, same eyes a glistening cerulean. “The sentiment is still, like a teardrop to stay, deathly still like a clock that has decided to stop, and the minutes stopped counting too.”

## AB OVO :: FROM THE BEGINNING

In his essay, Nugent thinks Austen's fictive world is a veritable hell. For an adolescent nerd like him. "When I was fourteen," he writes, of his own ways of learning how to act in the world, "I was like Mary Bennett, which is to say I paid attention to the way poets and philosophers expressed themselves on the page but not the way the people around me expressed themselves with their mouths." His writing does not betray this early habit of learning. His writing has become beautiful in its effortlessness, both feeling and criticism wrapping themselves around each other, like arms folding in on themselves. Gigi remembers her black Mary Jane shoes, and the pinafore she dyed black to go with it. She remembers the black ribbons of velvet and French lace—these she used to tie her hair in a high ponytail. She even hand-stitched one into a garter, which she wore high on her thigh, as if it were a femme fatale's holster for a gun. There was a set of butterfly knives in her top drawer, the moth and peony designs scraped off. She kept them in a pencil case, so they sat in the middle of a hundred old color pencils, and no one noticed. "If you read Austen," Nugent continues, "you'll read about a world in which technology means nothing and the triumphs and failures of conversational agility drive everything." Unlike Nugent, Gigi didn't read Austen as a young nerd. He recommends it though. He says that "like almost all worthwhile adolescent experience, it can be depressing, but it can also feel like waking up."

## HORS D'OEUVRE :: OUTSIDE THE WORK

The mendicant once taught Gigi how to make her own compost bin. There were thick pine planks at the village temple. All it took was four feet by four feet, a small square in the corner of the backyard. There are things you can place into a compost, and things you can't. Gigi started throwing her garbage into the bin without first sorting. "Everything rots anyway" was Gigi's understanding. Eventually, she realized leftovers from takeout wouldn't do. Nor used milk cartons or a year's worth of "Vanity Fair" and "National Geographic." The skin of fruit is good. Eggshells. Lipton teabags. Old towels and washcloths. Only the cotton, and nothing synthetic. She tried to put as much in as possible, using her foot to compress the heap. But the mendicant showed her that layers needed to be made, and the different contents mixed in. "Give it room. Give it air. And in time, you'll be able to put in back into the soil. To give you good trees and flowers." This has become a ritual for Gigi, sacred almost. Every morning. She tends to the plants, then turns to the compost bin for the work it requires. There's a sign on the side of the bin: "hors d'oeuvre." The mendicant had written it with his finger and a bit of house paint.

{ Steve Owen }

## ICE CREAM SHOPPE

*There is, in every event, whether lived or told, always a hole or a gap, often more than one. If we allow ourselves to get caught in it, we find it opening onto a void that, once we have slipped into it, we can never escape.*

— Brian Evenson

The fat, good-looking man, for a few moments, for a few years, or perhaps forever, stood in the ice cream shoppe, staring down at the rainbow swirled ice cream that sat in the three large buckets, out of his reach, beneath the glass service counter.

He (what was his name?) kept staring down at it. As far as he knew, he had never ordered it before. He couldn't think of a reason to stand there any longer. But maybe he was the kind of man who valued patience or possessed, innately, a patient nature. In his head (unless he was only a soul or a mind now—how would he know the difference?) he thought he heard a voice or a thought whisper, "Patience is a virtue." The voice didn't sound familiar, though maybe he didn't remember his own voice—he hadn't spoke out loud yet, he thought, he was by himself. Then he heard another whisper: "The meek shall inherit the Earth."

"The patient persevere," he said out loud. "The meek acquiesce." His voice didn't sound at all like the whisper in his head. Whose voice was it? Should he persevere or should he acquiesce? Both of the words made him feel uneasy.

He (maybe Michael) stood there a few minutes longer. Maybe a manager would come and serve him; or ask him to leave. Who?

Michael went over the details of the ice cream shoppe again, thinking

he had missed something. There were three walls, each painted white, and the front window. Each wall had a different type of ice cream scooped into a cone: chocolate on the left, vanilla on the right, and strawberry on the wall behind the counter. The shoppe didn't offer any of them for sale though; only rainbow. (That probably meant something, he thought. It was probably a hint.) The store's name had been inked on the front window: eppohS maerC ecl ruoY. The word "Your" stood out to him. Why an ice cream shoppe?

If it was a test, maybe he should eat the ice cream? Test? he thought. The hard Ts grated his thoughts. He didn't know what the word test meant, or if test was just an unpleasant sound in his head. What was he here for?

His stomach began to ache. Maybe he should eat the ice cream? he thought. He could be hungry. He went behind the ice cream counter (he had tried this already, but the butterball, as most people used to call him, couldn't remember). The counter door seemed stuck. Or locked. It didn't seem to have a lock. He tried to slide it open again. It was stuck. He thought about knocking on it. Instead he noticed his reflection in the counter glass. He looked huge, didn't he? He was narrow, he was a thin rail. He looked good. He was sick of looking at himself. He sat down at a small round table in the corner.

The hawt, ugly man remembered that prayer always made him feel better. But he couldn't remember how to pray. His fingers wiggled in front of his face, as if they were trying to remind him. His hands. He had a feeling it had something to do with them. What should they do? An image of what to do came to him and, before he forgot, he imitated it with his hand: first he made a fist and then he stuck his index finger out horizontally and his thumb out vertically. A sound shot through his head: *bang!* Had he just prayed with his hand? With what? Done what?

He (maybe Michael) felt a bit calmer now, although he didn't know why. The letters "pynd," the only sounds he could recall of the words "pray" and "hand," whooshed vaguely like seashore whispers in his memory, what was left of it, then died. The word bang, though, was still at the forefront of his thoughts. *Bang!* he said to himself. *Bang, bang,*

*bang!* He didn't know what it meant, but saying the word made him feel calm, almost strong, or maybe dangerous.

Now that he was feeling better—more dangerous and calm—Michael began to wonder about the front door. Not that he wanted to leave. He did and he didn't. He wanted to leave, yes, but only after passing something. What was it? He couldn't remember. But he couldn't forget that he needed to know why he was here. He hadn't forgotten about the door. The door scared him. He wasn't sure why. He was waiting to feel more dangerous and calm before taking on the threat of the door.

Maybe he had forgotten about the door (he had to be honest with himself—why had he forgotten?), but that was because he had it on the backburner—what? Bs and Rs burred in the drain of his memory, then spiraled away.

The door. He had to remind himself to investigate it. He wanted every clue (he wasn't planning on leaving here anytime soon without an answer) so he could leave as soon as possible.

There were too many things to think about in the ice cream shoppe.

The lardo was standing in front of a glass door. For how long, he couldn't tell. Through the glass was a bright milk-seeded fog. He opened the door and stepped into the doorway. He couldn't see more than a few feet in front of him. If he walked far enough into the fog, he might discover what was causing the brightness. Or he might become lost in milk. He liked milk. He didn't want to stay in the ice cream shoppe a moment longer. But if he was in the ice cream shoppe for a reason, he could.

Before the small man, the little boy sat down at the table in the corner again, he told himself to have a little patience and to have a little faith and he reminded himself what was waiting for him in the afterlife and he reminded himself to sit down and pray a little while because praying always made him feel dangerous and buff and he flexed his flabby bicep *bang! bang! bang!* he prayed and he began to feel sure again now and then even a little excited to know the answer.

After Michael forgot about thinking what waited for him the afterlife, he forgot the word afterlife, and instead he began to think about his

past life. He had to admit he couldn't remember anything. Did he know whether he was dead? He wasn't dead if he was still thinking, but he must be wrong about that: people reported dying everyday and then thinking a lot about their past lives in the [...] in the what? Past life. What could he remember about it? Almost nothing.

There was a woman in a hat. He couldn't see any hair under the—probably a cowboy hat, but the brim might be too short. She sat next to him on the couch, watching something on TV. Her face had a depressed, excited look. She must not like the show. He would change it if she asked. The sad man wondered if they did anything else together.

The fit man decided that they had had a long day. He felt like he was the kind of man that worked a long day, and they stayed out late that night for dinner and a movie (she looked like the type of woman who liked romantic comedy; he obviously watched action movies or westerns) together. After a long, satisfying evening, she always looked this way.

It was an everlasting love, Michael decided, feeling strong and dangerous. He loved her long blonde hair.

A small man with a transparent tube curling from his mouth. He was lying with his eyes shut in a little bed next to a much larger machine that beeped sporadically and monotonously hummed. In fact, the whole room was a machine. The walls, the ceiling, even the floor, were covered in lights.

He was an old man in a hospital room. It was the only thing the little food binger could imagine. What other kind of room has all these beeps and lights in it?

He could have been anyone. He could have been a friend. He could have been a brother. He could have been his patient if he was a doctor, Dr. Michael thought. *Bang!* he thought. *Bang!* That's why his wife looked so rapturously tired.

It was his father. Who else? The old man had a resigned, dignified look on his small, chubby face that seemed familiar. Why else would Michael be in the room so long unless the man was family? He was no doctor. Medical things scared him, the bloated man recalled. Band-Aids

and blood. He hated to be bullied. He had always been picked on for his weight.

He was able to bench press a lot for a normal-sized guy. He had a swimmer's physique. The tall, athletic son (Michael) must be at the hospital looking over his small, pudgy father. There were a lot of things he had always wanted to do with his father, as small as he was, but never had. Fishing, golfing, hunting. He imagined them doing all those things together at once: sitting together in a duck blind with a golf club and fishing rod sharing a Bud Light. When they were away from his mother, who he couldn't remember at all, they always did this. He and Michael would even smoke together and share Binaca on the truck ride home.

He loved his mother. Her name was Bianca.

The third memory—if it wasn't just his imagination or an image from a movie or a dream—disturbed him. It was the one thing he didn't seem to forget. He couldn't decide yet how to place it in the story he was struggling to hold together. He didn't have to, did he? Even worse: more than a visual memory, it was a sticky feeling weighing on his bloated body, on his pot belly and fat second chin, that he wished, wished, wished would go away.

It was a pillar of ice cream with a voice calling from inside it. He assumed it was a voice. It was the size of a fist; sometimes the size of a whale. The voice wasn't like anything he could remember hearing before. Maybe it was a noise. It could have been, if such a thing was possible, roaring fire or dripping honey mixing together to form some terrible new third thing. It wasn't *like* anything at *all*, and it made him *feel* too full. The Ls began to *swell* and swim in his head as they *circled* his drain.

It [...] hated the third memory.

The fat, scared boy kicked his legs out. The table fell over. He picked his chair up and swung it in the air and then let it go. He kicked over the other tables. He picked a chair up and swung it down on the fallen tables until they cracked or bent. His hands flexed as he swung. The strong man slammed his chair against the glass counter until the glass cracked.

Michael stood there for an undeterminable time, looking down,

staring at the glass shards jutting at odd angles from the ice cream in the big ice cream buckets. He wanted to put a finger in. When he did, he felt a stab of pain and blood began to spoil the ice cream, running over it, ruining it all.

The desperate man removed a tiny glass shard from his mouth. He didn't want to stay here any longer. He picked a bent chair up from the floor and sat in the corner of the ice cream shoppe. He could taste salt in his mouth. He liked the taste of salt.

The word "salt" vanished from his head. His tongue throbbed tastelessly.

After he sat in the corner for a while his fingers began to wiggle in front of his face and then *bang! bang! bang! bang!* he thought *bang!* and when he was done thinking *bang!* he felt dangerous and calm and thought about the things he and his father must have done together and there they were in a trim, grassy backyard, so green and trim and long that it stretched as far as a park, with their gloves throwing a ball back and forth together and the smell of the grill mesquite smoke *what kind of smoke? m e s q u i t e* smoke next to an oval pool an oval behind a house their house a big, sturdy house inside was probably his mother and here she was dressed nice in a dress a yellow dress and fairly sexy for his mother maybe no no this was his wife Bianca Bianca his mother had a different name *a less sexy name* something else and she would bring a fruit salad out *what was less sexy?* and together they would say a short *bang!* before *bang! bang!* hamburgers before a long, rapturous Sunday and feel very excited and satisfied and especially a little dangerous and *calm*

Dr. Michael and Bianca were in the large grassy park with his parents, on their weekly Sunday picnic. The sun was out and they were taking turns tipping each other like cows over into the grass. When it was Michael's turn, his father, who had a clear tube running from his mouth that curled into his gut, got down behind him on his hands and knees. His mother Callista and Bianca pushed him hard in the chest, sending him sprawling over his father into the grass. The sun was out and it was time to eat. His mother Callista and Bianca began crawling towards him like

babies. They got along well, they had become fast friends, they shared a variety of female interests, and on the day his father will die, they'll sit, most likely, in the hospital waiting room together. Their mouths were full of slobbery milk as they approached and crawled over him. They opened the family picnic basket up and his father removed Swiss cheese sandwiches and Diet soda. There was also pie. All four of them sat in a small circle together with the sun overhead as they talked and ate and genuinely enjoyed each other's company.

We're the kind of family that likes the sun, said Michael.

We do, said his father. We love a beautiful day. We love picnics in the sun.

Sure, everyone loves that, said Bianca.

Especially me, said Callista. I was born this way.

We're the kind of family that likes to spend time together, said Michael.

We genuinely enjoy each other, said his father. Not everyone's so lucky.

It's true everyone loves the sun, said Bianca.

Fickle thing, said Callista. We're not talking about the sun! We're talking about our family; how do you feel about us? More importantly, Bianca, how do you feel about Michael? Michael's *hawt*, don't you think? *H a w t*. I know I do. It's your turn now. Share something with us. Stop being so cold. You're an ice princess. Stop trying to have everything your way. Stop trying to change us. Be a sweet girl, sweetie. When you believe in something, stick to it. That's the kind of person *I am*. *I* pick one thing out, *I* believe in it, and *I* stay *constant*. *I* am a rock.

Clouds filled the sky, clotting the sun with milky seed. Wind whipped the women's dresses up over their heads.

*Bang!* said Michael. We like rain, too. *Bang, bang!*

We love rain! exclaimed his father.

We love sitting in it, said Callista. I'd sit in it all day for you, hon. Michael you're so hawt, *sooo h a w t*. Rain is part of the plan, right, hon? *Sooo h a w t*. Eating wet sandwiches! Mmmm. I'm getting wet. I can't

wait to take a bite—Bianca, dear, what about you? Can't you wait to take a bite of my son, too?

I don't think I like the rain, said Bianca. I don't think I'm that kind of person.

*I know* I am, said his father, laughing. A white fluid began to crawl up the inside of his tube, from his stomach, into his mouth.

People should agree on things, said Michael. That's the way it should be done.

People should agree, agreed Bianca. But sometimes they don't.

Why don't you stop being such a miserable bitch? shrieked Callista. *Fickle icicle.* My son is *not* overweight. He is not a fattie. He is no lardo. He's a fine-looking, well-dressed boy! I'd have him if I could.

The sound of slurping snapped Michael from his reminiscing. He looked around the ice cream shoppe. All the chairs had been returned to their original position on the floor around the tables. The tables and chairs had been unbent, uncracked. The glass counter had been fixed too; unbroken. From above he heard another sound: a plop. A dozen or so scoops of rainbow ice cream were stuck to the ceiling, dripping and shuddering by themselves as they melted. Their drops drizzled quietly down. Michael opened his mouth and caught some on his tongue. *Bang!* something had happened. What was it called? It was a special thing *bang! bang! bang!* he couldn't remember its name.

But he felt dangerous and calm. He, Michael, had stayed in the ice cream shoppe for a reason and he had been rewarded with an answer.

Now what should I do? he wondered.

Respond, he said to himself. Ask for something.

Michael's legs began trembling, so he got down on his knees. He asked if he could leave this place, he would like to leave now and be with his loved ones.

Another scoop rose up and plopped against the ceiling. He watched as all of it, scoop by scoop, ascended. It shuddered there and dripped. The ceiling full, but none of the scoops touching each other as they drizzled away, drop by drop. They were all totally alone.

The trembling man watched it drip for quite a while. Until his fat face was covered with a thick, sticky film.

It didn't like the taste in its mouth—whatever it was, it couldn't remember—but it didn't hate it either.

It continued on like this forever. And then it stopped.

{ Donal Gordon }

## AFTER

It comes to this, doesn't it?

Clothes in the closet. Shoes on the floor.  
The scent of who was, so devastatingly  
close, in this, that weekend shirt.

The one you loved.

{ Monica Mody }

## THIS THAT TAKES SHAPE

*for Michael Jackson mmmm scandal*

this that  
takes a crazy  
eagle eyed leap  
across town

two vow-  
els come off  
buttons

there is such  
gash in  
all of us

& buds  
are liars  
sticky through  
pendant for  
pen knives

scratchy  
detective spoke  
to me in whis-  
pers

con dream  
loop a-  
round my head

i drink fake  
blood & each  
manner of  
crack  
strong house

words drip  
down my throat  
like a shaky  
race-  
down

“why so much  
blood”  
i trebled

trained half  
life

wheedlescr-  
itchy sniv-  
eling

if your heart  
was angles

brush brush  
half brush

nausea will take  
hold will wave  
hands melodic-  
ally targeted  
cruel spot

ignoble nubble

each attack  
of nerves roasted  
in his own seme-  
n & cra-  
cked under his teeth

“is that love”

each sprig broken  
into gum &  
smug housecats

i smoked a lot one day & counted  
spokes on each rat-a-tat  
of my fingers swingin’  
mane & fresh out of  
heap i care for

a very different reason

makeshift  
gang of something else

*(Aside: “I detect in myself a certain humor-  
ous satisfaction, possibly much as he does.”)*

you turn into feather

world i want  
to paint its jaws  
on my breastbone each

hum baby

decker denial  
so what am-  
ounts to

clingy operatic  
processual demonic

humbaby

sense to besense

//  
/

humbaby

i sing this hard  
snuff reaches  
you know i mean  
this world

thank you  
very much

clean my ears  
with brisk  
robotic clam

miaow & yelp a sign-  
al  
flares people send  
out

much a tumble  
dry amor

i've tumbled

this presence  
shake it  
if you shake it

each point flashing  
ring of drag

{ Alireza Taheri Araghi }

## GRAMMA

Gramma was eighty-seven. It was a week Gramma was dead.

When the doctor was examining Gramma, I was peeping through the keyhole. He pulled Gramma's skin-and-bone hand out from under the blanket and took her pulse as he was staring at the ceiling. Then he placed her hand back under the blanket. He closed his eyes and shook his head, meaning that she was gone, and started to pack his things. His green eyes were so beautiful, bastard! When he closed his bag I ran back to the sofa and picked up the remote. They came out of the room; mom and the doctor. He had a pot belly but a couple of sit-ups would take care of that.

"You mean you can't you do anything, doctor?"

"I'm sorry, but it's a week she's gone."

Mom closed the door. "Go feed Gramma," she told me. Gramma's food was soup juice; soup passed through a fine sieve so there would be nothing solid in it.

I went into Gramma's room. She was on bed, leaning against the pillows like a crumpled newspaper. "Arash!" she said.

"It's me Gramma." I set the tray on the small table by the bed and sat down on the floor.

"Arash!"

"It's me Gramma. It's me Azi, Azi."

She raised her hand slowly and rubbed the length of her finger on her wrinkled throat and raised her eyebrows as if asking a question.

"Yeah, yeah. It's a week or so. Now come on, drink this soup quick. Come on."

Gramma was eighty-seven and it was a week she was dead.

#

“See what she wants?”

I turned back and looked at Gramma. She was shaking the loose belt with her thumb. She was too thin to fit in there. She was sitting hunched in the back seat looking at me with raised eyebrows.

“What does she say?”

“Her belt is loose. She’s afraid.”

The wind blew in from the window and my hair flew away. Gramma was huddling like a dog with a cold. “Arash!” she said.

“Afraid? What’s she afraid of? What can a dead old woman be afraid of?”

“How should I know? Just don’t say it in front of her.”

“Arash!”

“Who the hell is this Arash anyway?”

“Go a bit slower. No one special. It was her first son. Died of malt fever or something at twelve. Never mind. Where do we go?” I wanted him to hold my hand.

“Look, I think she needs something again.”

I turned around. Gramma was again waving the belt to show me it was loose. “Oh, come on! Nothing’s going to happen, Gramma. This will hold you. Now I’ll tell him to go slower, OK? Don’t worry. Kaveh, slow it down, will you? If she craps her pants, we’ll be in shit.”

“What the heck did you bring her for?”

“I told you, no one else can feed her. She doesn’t eat from anyone’s hand.”

I stretched my arm out of the window and cupped my hand in the wind. Kaveh lit a cigarette. He had a hand on the wheel and an elbow stuck out of the window. He blew the smoke out. The highway was not crowded. The sky was orange from the rays of the sun setting behind houses. A tall glass building reflected strange waving shapes in its windows. Kaveh looked in the mirror.

“Look, she wants something again.”

I turned back. Gramma was hugging my shoulder bag. “What?” I

asked. She slowly raised her hand, rubbed her forefinger on her throat and raised her eyebrows.

“Yes, damn it, yes. It’s a week. Just drop it.” I turned around and crossed my arms on my chest. “Where the hell do we go then?”

He blew the smoke out. He was wearing those baggy pants again. I had told him I didn’t like them. Why wouldn’t he answer me? Was he ever going to wash the car?

He crushed the cigarette in the ashtray. “We’re going somewhere cool?”

#

In the roller coaster line, Gramma was in front of me and Kaveh behind me. A strobe light threw colorful patches of lights at our faces. Gramma was clutching her cotton candy stick. I placed my hand on her hunched back. She didn’t turn to look at me. When she was alive she would always turn back with a smile to see who wanted to talk to her. The train swooped down from above and passed by with a scream. Kaveh threw his arms around me. “This is going to rock,” he whispered in my ear. “You’re sure she can take it?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “I’ll ask her again.” Then I said in Gramma’s ear, “It goes too fast Gramma. Do you want to try the merry-go-round?” She turned back with begging in her eyes, and grabbed my sleeve. “All right, all right. We’re riding it... I don’t want cotton candy. You’re bribing me? No, I don’t like cotton candy. OK. Look we’re in the line, OK.”

I held her shoulders and turned her around. Two kids ran by with balloons in their hands. The train screamed past us again.

“What’s the matter?” Kaveh said in my ear. “You OK, Azi? Anything wrong?”

“Yeah... I miss my Gramma.” Suddenly I was missing my Gramma. I wrapped my arms around her and rested my chin on her shoulder.

There was no reaction. She was just clutching her cotton candy stick. “Arash! Arash!” she said with her head bowed down.

At the ticket booth Gramma stared at the clerk with a smile. The man took the money and glanced at her. He slipped us the tickets and took

another look at the three of us. What are you looking at, you fag!

Kaveh got on and sat next to a middle-aged man who seemed too busy for this tomfoolery. I sat behind the important man, beside Gramma. There was a man and a woman who checked all the seats to make sure everything was all right. The man said Gramma couldn't ride with the cotton candy. She didn't say anything when he took it from her. I craned my neck and saw the man was looking around with his hands on his thighs, as if he was waiting for an end to this farce so he could go and take care of his unfinished business. Kaveh turned around and winked. I looked at Gramma. She was waving the loose belt with her thumb. Her eyebrows were raised again and her eyes turned, begging.

"Don't worry Gramma. Hold onto this pole tight." I took her hands and placed them on the pole on the back of the seat in front of her.

The train started off. Slowly. The tracks sloped up. We were going up slowly. "Yahoooo!" Kaveh shouted throwing up both his arms. Gramma was pressed against the back of the seat, holding the pole tight with both hands. Her belt hung loose. She had on the purple dress with big red flowers I had bought her on her birthday. Now that she had gotten this thin the dress was too much for her. We were reaching the top. We were then going to pour down. I wished I could slap the man in front of me on the head. Why did Mom send this dead old woman with me? Don't I need to have some fun some times? I wanted to sit beside Kaveh, hold his hands and scream. We were just about to reach the top. What if something happens to Gramma? What if her belt is really too loose? For a moment I looked down and saw, Oh my God, Gramma had taken off her shoes and left them at her feet. My white sneakers. My white sneakers. Now they were sure going to fall down when the train did a loop. We were almost at the top. I was tired. I didn't want to think. I wanted to enjoy my fall. I closed my eyes.

{ Lauro Vazquez }

lorena's husband beto the cook/ is dead

and will continue to die tomorrow/  
even then/ their sweet yesterdays

like white rags in lorena's hands/  
*chaparrita* he use to say/  
*i love you so much chiquita*/  
scrubbing away/  
the alpenglow of today and today

and lorena who never knew a sun  
as sweet as honey/ her bees made honey to beto/  
and they were sweeter/ than the bees that make the honey/  
and the flowers that feed the bees/  
and the sun that feeds the flowers/  
the sun like a giant pot of honey/

*chaparrita* *i love you so much chiquita*/ beto use to whisper/  
those words/ like honey-combs they shine in the kitchen/  
and look like coals or comets shooting through the roof of the earth/  
illuminating the night sky/ here today/ when i feel/  
these never comings/  
like sweet yesterdays/ of tomorrow and tomorrow

{ Shaun Dillon }

## SNOWBLIND

One contour blends into another

& clouds

collide with mountains  
like tectonic plates.

I'm skiing in a round room,  
no depth or ground, no

way to discern where one line  
ends & the other

begins. It's  
white on white on—

The blast in my eyes  
is a science  
of refraction,  
the simultaneity of all colors at once,  
data that avalanches  
into fractals &  
alleles, quarks &

fast as reflex,  
no, faster,  
I give in to gravity

& I *know* it's there

& I know  
it's solid.

{ Matthew Benedict }

## THIS MOST CERTAINLY IS ENOUGH

The sun melts behind the mountains, we wish not to interrupt it, so we are quiet, like the Young Ones, huddled in blankets and borrowed, oversized sweatshirts, exhausted from hours of swimming and ice cream and woundings and allegiances intentional and accidental, a few poking at a crab shell at water's edge, all not talking but knowing exactly what each thinks, not talking together, similar to the Early Teens, inwardly seismic and quiet against their wills, withdrawn into imagined lives they'll never live but feel more real than any life they know, rocking slowly, seeing themselves in the dying quills of the campfire, knowing but not accepting that a dream is exactly that, a dream, while the Older Teens, with driving licenses and colleges awaiting in the fall, sit tight-lipped, pleading through silence for someone to ask each of them what they think and feel the world that is about to open up before them might be because they are petrified of not knowing what that opening might spawn, trying to be oh-so-in-control when every fiber of their beings scream *I have no idea what I'm doing!*, unlike the College Students, they who mock everyone and everything, then mock again, and mock-mock-mock amongst themselves at a short remove away, just far enough so that any hushed-scathing comment they make can be overheard, thinking, all-too-expectedly, that the world hangs on their every word, contrary to the Late-Twenty-somethings who are beginning to feel and taste and know and swallow, after a quick self-conscious glance over a shoulder, that maybe, perhaps, possibly, they aren't the smartest, tallest, warmest, bravest in the world, that all they are is who they are and this is the worst thing, they are beginning to know now, one can be, something that the Thirty-somethings also feel and taste,

then disavow and disparage and deny, only to embrace, completely and fully, the realization that no one ever accomplished anything alone and all those hours, days, weeks, months, years spent alone, trusting no one who agreed or disagreed with them, were wasted, while they glance frequently at the Young Ones poking and prodding at something that just might harm them, so they make to stand but a Spouse/Partner nudges them back down with a tug of a sleeve and a still face that says *Ssshhh, they're fine* while, crawling up out of the knee-high surf onto the shore as they did when they were the Young Ones, reluctant, at the thought of being forced to defend the worlds they have created, the Fortsomethings can't think of anything other than *We are cowards*, and they secretly envy the College Students for their resoluteness in both hate and love, there is no middle ground, for the bravado they once had which has now leaked out of them, like the surf running off their bodies quietly, as the Fiftysomethings are, quiet, away inside, cold, warm, tired, sweating, hungry, thirsty, listening to the Daughter on the telephone having her third existential crisis of the week while studying abroad in Dublin/Stockholm/Budapest/Cape Town, the Daughter's Girlfriend doesn't understand, appreciate, support the Daughter's desire to drop Accounting and add Peace Studies as a major, *Why does this need to be so hard?* the Daughter asks, and the Fiftysomething will run a hand through hair, if there is any, stare at the pointillist age spots on shins and ankles, then at the Spouse snoring on the bed, the prior blood pressure medication nearly destroyed a liver and there is weakness and double-digit hours of sleep each day and a possible transfusion next week, and replies *We had clams tonight, just like how you like them, steamed in the campfire*, and the Daughter will then begin to cry like a Young One and the Fiftysomething will know, quietly, that the human heart has only so many veins, veins which do not, and cannot, encircle the world or the universe of course but which most definitely encircle each and every loved one inhabiting that world and universe, flesh from my flesh, bone from my bone, which the Grandparents, bones, benevolently curse, Grandparents who, perhaps, will not be present, who, perhaps, may not even be alive, yet they most certainly are everywhere,

in everything and everyone, the cloud silhouettes behind the indigo mountains, the arrhythmic campfire embers, the blanket, the crab, the shore, the license and the girlfriend and the college and the age spot and the study abroad application, and they will sit back, the Grandparents, and look at each other and smile and want to reach out and touch all those there on the shore in the sunset by the campfire, something of course they cannot do, so they lock hands and look at those around them, their pasts and also their futures, and hold each in the eye and say *The world expects things of you, yes, but What you expect of each other is more important, that How you treat each other is how you will be judged, that There is no shame in abiding one's conscience, that Whether next time you are all together, some of you are together, all of you are not together at all, none of that matters, what does is This closeness, this approximation, We all live prepositionally, in relation to each other, above, below, around, across, and This, most assuredly, This most certainly is enough.*

{ Jayne Marek }

## THE WAVES

Think of four hundred minks running toward you  
Wearing mirrored sunglasses.  
Puffed rice bursting over the edges of a green barrel  
Overflowing like heavenly promises.  
An enormous comforter tossing you into clouds.

Or miniature gibbons that grab your ankles  
With neverending fingers  
Under an amber dome of balsamic sky.  
Superhero muscles in spandex earthquake.  
Lean into the bosom

That breathes you up and down.  
Leap and roll and flatten into shatters.  
The distance kicks like both the bronco  
And its rider, about to be thrown.  
Glissandos on the Transatlantic Cable

Flip penguins straight up onto ice.

## TOO COLD

The deep cold approaches us  
Like the threat of greatest loss.  
Floorboards cannot resist it  
And exhale its coming,  
The pond shudders, diminishes,  
As its muscles tighten in rigor.  
The hours will pass.

Night barks once, then again,  
In sad dog voice. Darkness  
Can be taken inside,  
Where it will sit alert to watch  
The frost-edged door,  
Hoping it will stay shut,  
Knowing it might not,

If the wind looks up  
And hears the crackling sky  
Tell it to pounce.

{ Michael Collins }

*from* THE DEATH OF ALL THINGS SEEN

...nothing made sense anymore, not really. She whispered the name Theodore Feldman, her old boss with nostalgic longing, reeling in time, finding a way back to the most distant, and yet respected man she had ever known, distinguished decorated veteran of World War Two and proud father of three boys. He called the Japanese, *Japs*, his one betrayal toward his own personal history in the Pacific carnage. Where had men like that gone, men of means, manners and material substance?

She knew where, lost to a fading tangible older world of physical materiality, lost to a digital age. She remembered fondly the arterial vacuum suction tubes running through her office building, how things worked once-upon-a-time, the hive of corporate activity with its division of labor between the sexes and ages, memos materializing as items of substance, memos, first taken down word for word in a cryptic shorthand secretarial script, passed on and typed up by pools of girls; her own workaday life compartmentalized, high above the floating shift of Kelly Girls and young mailroom sorters and errand boys, the buzz of life and energy in the air.

It still all existed within her mind, each detail, sitting decidedly alert in an outer office of paneled bubble glass, watching life unfold, opening the morning mail with a dagger of a letter opener, screening all calls as frontline defense for Mr. Feldman, until he buzzed and called her in, where after, she spent the greater part of her day transcribing, pen and pad in hand. She remembered, too, how Mr. Feldman strode back and forth, punctuating his ideas with a series of mindful affectations, that perhaps, even he was unaware of inhabiting – stopping mid-stride in a

bar of slanting sunlit as it fell just so in the late afternoon of a November day—hands thoughtfully deep in his wool pants, finding within the light’s warmth, some seed of thought, letting it grow momentarily, then shifting into the colder shadowy greyness of more rational deliberation, venturing toward the dark paneling of his leather backed private bar, meditatively removing his right hand from his pocket, running a finger along the lacquered surface, making a brief aside to order more bourbon, yes, bourbon, turning yet again, moving too and fro in a mental cursive of looping patterns through the office, finding his way toward some coherent organizational, narrative structure.

She could almost smell his aftershave, and how, through all of it, she had remained, incongruously, insubstantial conduit, and yet undeniable physical presence into which she allowed Mr. Feldman to pour his professional expertise, formulating and revising, looking askance in her direction at times, catching, perhaps, the turn of her shoulder, or the way she shifted ever so slightly, where upon he subtly readjusted a phrase, because of her influence, her presence, who knew really, for she had never hazarded to dwell on such considerations, for in the blunt attention to professionalism they had never ventured toward any measure of personal attachment. She liked it that way, uncomplicated and civil. It was how things proceeded, how things got done.

She thought if she were to explain the business memo process, if there was something she could pass on to this new generation, it would undoubtedly include reference to this spatial sense of awareness, this fluid movement in time, this assemblage of thoughts found here and there in the touchstone of physical things and spaces. Yes, that was it, her sense of physical presence in time.

She remembered, too, that brief time when Mr. Feldman took to using a small, inlaid diamond, gold-plated golf putter which came with one of those automatic cups that spat the ball out again, a corporate Christmas gift when such tokens were expected, how he used to sight up his points of managerial reprimand, direct and measured for the salesmen in the field, a series of balls lined up and hit in slow, methodical succession, each

point of constructive reprimand delivered after the fluid trajectory of the ball's silent roll across the billiard green of the game's carpet.

And there were other things she remembered, things disconnected with life now, memories receding into a dim past, the speeches Mr. Feldman constructed over days for the boardroom trustees, the attenuated way he had of coming to subtle points related to the general nature of the company, looking off toward Lake Michigan for a word or phrase to capture things just so, that old-world, soft-shoe way of speaking around, and not particularly to an issue, vaguely circumscribing points of business just suggestive enough to land upon the overall challenges, but also, (lest anybody forgot this was a nation of optimists), the opportunities that still existed, and which always inspired the corporate board members to nod, or clap approvingly, amidst desserts and cognac served toward the latter stages of mid-day luncheons at the Palmer House or the Drake Hotel, luncheons always lasting into the murk of the late three o'clock hour when the business of the day was surely winding down, leading to furtive considerations concerning drinks elsewhere, Mr. Feldman, politely retreating for a moment, placing a jocular call to the office with uncharacteristic warmth in the hum of accomplishment to ensure the office building, as he put it, "hadn't burned down!" a remark that always made her warm and flushed.

In these things, and on these occasions she had always found comfort, hearing the raspy scratch of Mr. Feldman's five o'clock growth on the other end of the receiver against the murmuring backdrop of voices over the line, the clink of china plates and cutlery being gathered from the impressive spread of tables, the general hubbub of corporate entitlement and exclusivity which made her feel secure, all was well, that everything which mattered in the world was in the capable hands of irreproachable men of sound character and judgment.

She would never, *ever* have thought Mr. Theodore Feldman would bow out as he eventually did, stepping from of his corporate office window, high atop the Chicago skyline on the Black Monday of 1987, but he did.

{ Margaret Emma Brandl }

## TOCCATA

A pink flower is a poem. When I am in this space I am a poem. When we are in this whirring space everything you say is a poem and the table is a poem and the carpet is a poem of circles and I am reading it. My water bottle is a poem and that's not an inside joke except now it is. When I write I am insincere like a poem. I am stark and simple and I won't say most things, and I smile and I say stupid things and I wear a pearl necklace for no one but me. When I write I get a chill from the heat and I remember the curved orange mug, soft stripes, softness in contrast to the hardness of flat webpage photographs. I know two different people and one of them is not real. I know one person who is not real and I have met one person who is. Maybe one day I will know the person who is real, bonfire glow, star sky, star mote, we are all just star motes. Star motes that drop from these dark skies.

William Blake and William Blake and William Blake. Two trees trying to be taller than each other. Lanky long trees, pale bark, burnt leaves in dim fall light. Two trees trying to be taller than each other that can be utterly still. And was Jerusalem builded here upon these two trees. And was the door left unlocked this time. And was the coffee hot. And were you ready.

I might have remembered you the time I was buying socks. I have a friend who lives in Ukraine. Books are sewed up with cotton thread, waxed tight, take the wedge and punch holes, in and out middle, top, bottom, middle. Fray the ends with the needle, bump into the dog, eat a piece of pizza and

go home in the cold to the wood and stone church. All our yearning in this small heated room. White pages and scribbles. I'm waiting for this thing to work but it's not plugged in. How do you do it.

Would you understand the words to songs if I sang them. You know some people can't. The words all run together in their heads like spaghetti soup. They can't compartmentalize, they only have one kind of coffee. It's just coffee. Do you sit with your window open and watch people walk outside. Do you keep all your smiles for yourself.

We all stand up. I am surprised by kind eyes. I have met one person that I do not know. Those honest eyes stick in my mind. All you saw was my panic. All you saw was my necklace.

## BEAUTIFUL DAYS

These are the beautiful days.

When the morning comes the sky is dark. The morning comes late, the sky is gray. The windows are closed. The leaves are on the ground.

The rain is heavy and the train is slow, slow, slow. When the rain falls the train feels more open. The sky opens up on either side. Ugly streets, ugly smells, but the churches tower in the distance. The buildings rise up dark and light, stone colors. The train goes under ground and it is like a tunnel, like a cave, the steps are wet and the wind whistles between streets.

These are the beautiful days because of who I am now. I make them the beautiful days. Raincoat hanging off, cigarette smells, standing water, scaffolding, it is all made beautiful somehow—flowered umbrella, chartreuse wall, rivers of rain like crystal. Day (Truth) is a white lady with sinews and a halo of hair like snakes, she stands on the rocks, the wind blows through her, pastel. Her face is brave. It is the most perfect face. Her hands are thin, like they are breaking. Her hip bones are perfect shapes.

I am curves. I cross the street. I hold my bags out of the rain. When the train pulls in, I go through the wind. The wind goes through me. I am night.

{ Drew Kalbach }

## WEEP, YOU GIRLS

Weep until my daddy issues  
resolve into erections, resolve into  
monetary gains. Weep  
away from me, weep contagious  
like yellow phlegm,  
weep for nocturnal emissions  
uncollected by the press.  
Weepers, tiny ladies,  
mascara choked  
baby girls, I have slain  
myself several times  
but it won't take,  
my funeral was canceled,  
my ghost was asked to leave.  
Weep when you moan  
over the toilet,  
when you push brushes  
across the pimpled skin  
of your sour underarms,  
weep when my ghost comes back  
and won't stop complaining.  
Weep and open hence,  
open wide white tongues,  
open wide spent legs,

grind down and punish  
my failed attempts for attention.  
Weep fine teenie boppers  
for vacation ends  
and when vacation ends  
our bodies go to sag, our nails  
no longer glisten,  
our screams fall flat in crowds  
and our weeping gets  
spooks from hallowed spots  
to crawl into our irises  
and to weep through our sternums.  
Weep until feet freeze  
and our weeping gets us birth marked  
and nowhere but a dingy room  
designed for squatting  
but left stained and slick  
with corneal gel  
and weeped until emptied.

## I HOPE YOUR HEMMORRHOIDS RUB TOGETHER

to please me, to make your webbed toes spread until torn.  
I giggle at the bluish green milk seeping from your sagging mouth,  
at the itch in the long of your scalp. Melt dirty failure, celluloid and loosed,  
runny down your fat thighs. I watch and you deserve this, your sore eyes  
turned more red,  
your joints double sized and getting back toward rot.  
I grind into your waxy ears, your pores full of yellowed pus,  
your throat closed by plastic tubes, your skull a mess of metal and scab.  
I hope your spine falls to pieces, I hope your teeth forget chewing,  
I hope your skull puddles in an empty room and you never regain your  
mass.



## { CONTRIBUTORS }

ALIREZA TAHERI ARAGHI is an Iranian writer and translator. He is currently an MFA student at the University of Notre Dame. He edits the online journal *PARAGRAPHITI*.

MATTHEW BENEDICT earned his B.A. in English from the University of Massachusetts/Amherst (1986), his M.A. in English (1994) and M.F.A. in Creative Writing, from Notre Dame (2007). He is William Mitchell Award Winner (1994); New American Press Fiction Award Finalist (2011). He taught fiction writing and contemporary American literature at Notre Dame (1994-2011) and is joining the faculty of Indiana University/South Bend (2013). He is a short story writer, playwright, and occasional photographer/graphic artist. His two short plays, *DogMatics* and *Discovery*, were presented at the Last Frontier Theatre Festival in Valdez, Alaska (2012). He is currently working on a trilogy of plays, *A False Lie*, *False Witness*, and *False Sunset*; adapting a novella, *Visitation*, for the screen; a novel (untitled); and two digital works. “This Most Certainly Is Enough” is excerpted from a novel-in-progress.

MARGARET EMMA BRANDL grew up in West Monroe, Louisiana, and has lived in Alabama, Japan, and Indiana. She is the founder of an online literary and arts journal for high school students, *Filter and Fibre*, and has done editorial work for numerous journals at Notre Dame. She graduates with her MFA in May 2013. Her work has appeared in *Specter*.

SARAH BOWMAN works as Contracts Manager for Glattig Jackson Kercher Anglin, Inc. and holds a tenured position in the Department of English at Wright College, in Chicago. She has taught online for Boston University and University of California Irvine. She co-founded The

Walkable and Livable Communities Institute, which is focused on helping cities and towns become more walkable, bicycle friendly, sustainable, socially engaging and welcoming by improving the built form in Port Townsend, WA. Her poetry has appeared in the *Notre Dame Review*, *The Bend*, and *Golf Course Management Magazine*. She won the TYCA Midwest Outstanding New Teacher Award in 2006.

MICHAEL COLLINS is an ND Graduate 87 & 91. He has published nine works of fiction, won the Irish Novel of the Year Award, and been shortlisted for The Booker Prize and IMPAC Award. His movie script, *Julia*, starred Tilda Swinton. His latest novel, *The Death of all Things Seen*, will be published in 2014. He is currently doing a Masters at Oxford University.

DAWN M. COMER ('98) lives in Defiance, Ohio, where she teaches creative writing and keeps busy with freelance work and her own projects. Dawn has twice won the Paul Somers Prize for Creative Prose from the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature and been published in various journals. She is currently seeking publication for her book *Born Beneath Pedro's Sombrero: Tales from the National Association of Tourist Attraction Survivors*. Sometimes she still dreams and writes about fish.

Born and raised in Northwest Indiana, THADE CORREA received his BA from Indiana University, Bloomington, and his MA in the Humanities from the University of Chicago. Though he considers writing his primary artistic vocation, he is also a composer and pianist. His poetry and translations have appeared in various journals, both in print and online, including *Paragraphiti*, *Ibbetson Street*, *The Aureorean*, and *Modern Haiku*. A chapbook of his poetry, *Anthem*, appeared in 2010, and a collection of his recent work earned him the 2012 Billy Maich Academy of American Poets Prize. His music is currently published by Alliance Publications, Inc. Before coming to Notre Dame, Correa worked as a piano and voice instructor, a schoolteacher, and a tutor. During his time at Notre Dame, he

taught creative writing to undergraduates and worked for the Notre Dame Review as an editorial assistant.

AMY DE BETTA graduated from the Creative Writing program in 1998 and since then has done an abundance of corporate work but is finally permanently settled in the deserts of New Mexico. She works with local animal shelters fostering and caring for abandoned, ill, or abused dogs. It is never too late to truly embrace God, Country... and Notre Dame. Go Irish!

SHAUN DILLON received his MFA from Notre Dame in 2004. He worked at a New York literary agency, then Carroll & Graf Publishers, and finally Da Capo Press, before returning to his native Michigan in 2007. His writing has appeared in the *Detroit Free Press*, *FIELD*, *The South Carolina Review*, and the *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, among other publications.

MARY MARIE DIXON, a visual artist and writer, is a graduate of the University of Notre Dame (2006) with an MA in theology and an MFA in creative writing. She has published creative works in periodicals and a collection of poetry, *Eucharist, Enter the Sacred Way* (Franciscan University Press, 2008). Her focus is on spirituality, women, and the Great Plains.

DONAL GORDON, MD, MFA '96, is currently the Director of the Cedar Rapids (IA) Family Medicine Residency. In addition to Family Medicine, he also practices Hospice and Palliative Medicine and is an Adjunct Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Iowa College of Medicine.

AMY IRISH is a 1998 graduate of the Notre Dame writing program. Her poem "Finding Peace in the City of War" was inspired by the Speak Peace traveling art exhibit, in which American poets across the country are invited to respond to Vietnamese children's paintings about the Vietnam war. Irish's poem placed 3rd in the Colorado competition.

DREW KALBACH is from Philadelphia. He is the author of one chapbook, two e-books, and some poems scattered around the internet. He writes about contemporary poetry and media for *The Actuary*.

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KATIE LATTARI holds both a B.A. and an M.A. in English from the University of Maine, Orono (concentration in fiction writing), and will graduate from Notre Dame with her M.F.A. in Creative Writing (prose) in May 2013. Her first full-length novella manuscript entitled *American Vaudeville* is currently under consideration at several presses, and her short fiction has been published in *Pennsylvania English*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Eighty Percent Magazine*, and *Stolen Island*. In the spring of 2013, Katie finished her creative thesis at Notre Dame, a novel manuscript entitled *All of the Everything*. She plans to move back to Maine after graduation in May.

JAYNE MAREK's poetry has appeared in publications such as *Lantern Journal*, *Driftwood Bay*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Isthmus*, *The Occasional Reader*, *Wisconsin Academy Review*, *Windless Orchard*, and *The Bend*, and in the anthologies *And Know This Place: Poetry of Indiana* and *A Few Good Words* (the 2012 Cincinnati Writers Project anthology). Her chapbook *Imposition of Form on the Natural World* is about to appear from Finishing Line Press.

MONICA MODY's first book of cross-genre writing, *KALA PANI*, is out soon from 1913 Press. Her work has also appeared in places such as *The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry*, *Boston Review*, *Upstairs at Duroc*, *pyrta*, *Lantern Review*, and *Occupy Consciousness: Essays on the Global Insurrection*, among others. She has published two chapbooks of poetry and was the 2010 winner of the Nicholas Sparks Prize.

STEVE OWEN is interested in the damages and fees incurred by discursive productions on a fractal, paper brain. The fat, ugly, handsome, crumpled paper sheet wants you to taste the hemorrhaging ink of a divided, stapled body. He is a writer interested in reviving literary expressionism as a way of exploring the clotting tissue between dissected bodies and words.

JAYME RUSSELL is a cabinet of curiosities.

MIKE SMITH is a graduate of UNC-G, Hollins College, and the University of Notre Dame, and now teaches at Delta State University. He's published three collections of poetry, including *Byron in Baghdad* and *Multiverse*, a collection of two anagrammatic cycles. In addition, his translation of Goethe's *Faust* was published by Shearsman Books last year.

MARCELA SULAK graduated from the Notre Dame MFA program in 1992. She has published two collections of poetry: *Immigrant* (2008) and the chapbook *Of all the things that don't exist, I love you best* (2010). Her three book-length translations include K.J. Erben's *Bouquet of National Czech Folk Tales* and K.H. Macha's *May*, from the Czech, and Mutombo Nkulu N'Sengha's *Bela Wenda*, poems from the Congo, from the French. She teaches American literature and direct the Shaindy Rudoff Graduate Program in Creative Writing at Bar-Ilan University.

PETER TWAL is both a writer and electrical engineer. After completing his undergraduate degree, he found himself programming software aboard countless ships, despite being certain that just watching *Titanic* made him seasick as a kid. He only sometimes gets dizzy writing poetry these days. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *NAP Magazine*, *smoking glue gun*, *plain china*, and *DIG Magazine*. He is currently pursuing his MFA in Creative Writing at the University of Notre Dame.

Born in Cosamaloapan, Veracruz, Mexico, LAURO VAZQUEZ grew up in the California bay area. He is a CantoMundo fellow and an MFA student

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KAUSHIK VISWANATH is the author of "Rocket of Doom", a story which you will not find here. He enjoys pizza but is a vegetarian, much like Donatello, the vegetarian ninja turtle. He writes prose at Notre Dame. Kaushik, he means, not Donatello.

DESMOND KON ZHICHENG-MINGDÉ is the author of *I Didn't Know Mani Was A Conceptualist*, forthcoming in 2013. He has also edited more than ten books and co-produced three audio books, several pro bono for non-profit organizations. Trained in publishing at Stanford, with a theology masters (world religions) from Harvard and fine arts masters (creative writing) from Notre Dame, he is the recipient of the PEN American Center Shorts Prize, Swale Life Poetry Prize, Cyclamens & Swords Poetry Prize, Stepping Stones Nigeria Poetry Prize, and Little Red Tree Publishing Poetry Prize, among other awards. Desmond is an interdisciplinary artist, also working in clay. His commemorative pieces are housed in museums and private collections in India, the Netherlands, the UK and the US.