

Third Wednesday

Vol. XI, No. 1



Annual Third Wednesday Poetry Contest

\$6.00 Entry Fee

Three Prizes of \$100.00

and publication in Third Wednesday's Spring Contest issue.

As a thank you for your participation, every entry will receive a PDF copy of the poetry contest issue (a \$5.00 value), so the net cost of your entry is just **\$1.00**.

Non-prize poems will be considered for inclusion in the same issue of Third Wednesday as a regular submission, which pays \$3.00 per poem.

We will accept contest entries of up to 3 previously unpublished poems between October 1, 2017, and January 31, 2018. Poems should be in a single .doc or .docx file with no identifying information within the text of the file. All entries must come through our submissions management portal at Submittable. If you are not already a Submittable user, registration is free. We will not accept entries by mail this year.

You can choose to pay via credit card or Pay Pal by selecting it as an option when you upload your file at Submittable or, if you prefer, you can make a check or money order for \$6 payable to Joseph Ferrari and mail it to:

Third Wednesday
11316 Farley Street
Redford, Michigan 48239

Be sure the name on your payment matches the name on your entry in Submittable.

Submissions go live on Submittable on October 1st.

(You'll find the link on our website: thirdwednesday.org)

Editor's Note

Third Wednesday doesn't print contributor bios. It's good to question periodically why we do or don't do certain things, so here goes. Why don't we? Our founding editor and his associates made that decision ten years ago. I'm guessing it had to do with allowing the maximum amount of space for good writing and most author bios aren't good writing. Take my own as an example.

“Having grown up in rural Michigan, David Jibson now lives in Ann Arbor where he is a co-editor of Third Wednesday, a literary arts journal, a member of The Crazy Wisdom Poetry Circle and The Poetry Society of Michigan. He is retired from a long career in Social Work, most recently with a hospice agency.”

From reading that, what do you know about me, my personality, my character, my interests other than poetry? Not much. In putting this together, I began with the assumption that readers of literary journals wouldn't care. I think I was right, but some journals require a bio - so there it is, all 55 words of it.

What's best about my author bio are the things I left out. I don't have a dog. I don't have a cat. I do have a wife (only one), and the present one doesn't care much for poetry. She reads mysteries and crime novels.

My bio doesn't include any publishing credits. It used to, but I decided after becoming an editor myself that I shouldn't be influenced by what a writer has done in the past. It's our job to evaluate what's in front of us in the present.

Nor does my bio mention what “under-represented” groups I belong to. I don't belong to any that I know of and I

wouldn't say so if I did. "Old white guys who write poetry" is a minority, but we apparently aren't under-represented with respect to being published (after all, we've got Billy Collins). The mission statements of an increasing number of contemporary journals say they seek to publish artists they believe are under-represented, contributors from the LGBTQ community, people whose work is considered "alternative" literature or art, people who identify as non-binary, artists who have ties to Portland, Oregon, the list goes on. There's room in publishing for every journal and we wish those with target audiences every success, but at Third Wednesday, we plan to continue down the path of publishing the best of what you send us. We don't ask who you are. That's the best reason we don't publish contributor bios, it doesn't matter who you are, we just want your best fiction, poetry and art – even if you live in Portland.

In this issue:

This is what I call a "between contests issue". There's nothing going on except, as highlighted above, the best writing that was sent to us. Oh, we do have a new poem by Marge Piercy, a good friend to TW, but we're not going to brag. There are lots of other good friends in this issue too, some old, some new. Our next issue, Spring, is our annual poetry contest issue. We're open to entries through January 31.

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Locked and Loaded

you can't pass lovelock nevada
and be a poet
and not write a poem
no matter how long you've diddled

especially now
for beyond its plump name
pregnant with implication
redolent of rose and thorn

which is red meat for writers
and in addition to the genuine smiles
and the homemade apple pie
at the cowpoke cafe

there sits just outside of town
in the pale blue sage
under bare brown hills
the lovelock correction facility

and in it resides o j simpson
locked up on account of love
or lack thereof
waiting for another round of applause

sentenced for stealing back
his own memories at gunpoint
though if he'd really meant it
he would have used a knife

i am headlocked by the present
and long for that old time love
when with intimate rage
a man or woman might

kill only a spouse
out of insane passion
instead of knocking off fifty strangers
with cool dispatch ratatat tat

but haven't i also locked away love
my gods and my heroes
the knack of feeling free
and lost the key

that is altogether too much love
for one lyrical town to handle
so i'm gunning the motor
and pressing on to winnemucca

Jack Liskin
Perris, California



Easy Riders
Photograph
J. Ray Paradiso
Chicago, Illinois

Latin Dancing

He departed paradise,
the city of eternal spring,
and now, in the wet darkness
of the north
he holds me close,
says he is grateful
a white boy can follow,
keep time with his music
and for the most part
avoid his feet.

I do not know the steps,
but I am grateful
to those Basque immigrants
from whom he descended —
who suffered to discover
high among those jagged peaks
that narrow valley in the Andes,
who settled and lived
and prospered
that they might hand down
these hazel eyes locked with mine,
these upturned cheeks,
this warm brown skin.

I am grateful for the histories
of Ramirez and Montoa,
for their bequest of such patience,
happy that Acosta and Tamayo
passed on the sway of their hips
down and down
to Franco and Palacio,
down into this body,
which pressed against mine
doesn't care I've lost the count
and can't comprehend
the lyrics —

a body that leads me
and relishes
such clumsy dancing.

A. E. Hines
Portland, Oregon

In My Hat

I carry around a hatful
Of very large ideas
That I wish I could take credit for
But can't
Even though I do put in
My own two cents' worth
When fitting them into my chapeau.
Dialectical materialism is in there
Along with the pedagogy of the oppressed
The hero's journey
The unity of opposites
The return of the repressed
And others that have thrilled
My intellect and imagination
Over the years
And caused me to exclaim
I wish I'd thought of that!
I am grateful to those titans
From whom I have borrowed
The profound insights and understandings
That have helped to shape
My view of the world and of myself
And would like them to know
That their big beautiful ideas
Crowded into my fedora all these years
Are in good company up there
Among the rivers, the wild geese, the stars.

Buff Whitman-Bradley
Fairfax, California

Thaw Before Serving

I caught my reflection
in a platinum net

and locked him in my closet
where he alternately pleads for freedom
and invents new swears to call me.
Ass-bastard, is one.

When I walk through the house
I am truly alone.
In the mirrors, picture frames,
the laptop and phone and sky,
the only thing I see is

the black emptiness behind

me. I met a woman—she
gave me this idea—who caught hers
in a leaf-hidden hole after years
of trying and failing
to teach it to sew and to sing, do anything
other than be. She says
now she can look in
a mirror. Finally,

she can touch the smooth glass
and not recoil. *Eventually, she told me,
they just go away, no note, no corpse,
just fade like chlorophyll
drained from a leaf.* My reflection

has lost weight. He cries less these days.
He knits me scarves and socks
patterned with please in dead languages.

Dustin Brown
Lambertville, Michigan

Back In

The neighborhood hasn't changed much. The trees are larger, and the wood fences lining the alleys are grayer, weathered. People are still taking their garbage out in their bathrobes. It feels strange to be house-sitting in the house I grew up in.

My old bedroom is completely different. Only the window seems to still know me, with screening shrubs just outside leaving a long rectangle of blue at the top. But the den/dining room: who could put such a gigantic entertainment center there and not feel crushed by it?

Their orange cat is nice. Rubs on my legs like everybody is pretty much the same person. And the dog—an old retriever of some sort—stays in the back yard. So that won't be a problem.

The movers called and they are on their way, here in about an hour. By sundown all of this sad junk will be gone and my stuff will be back where it once was—all of the right furniture and knickknacks that took months to find and order and gather again.

I know I will be out of a job when my boss and his wife get back next week, but I always knew that. I can't even think about trying to put everything back like they had it before they return. The only reason I applied for a job at their awful carpet and tile store was so I could someday house-sit for them. I never told them that I spent my early years in "their" house. It took some doing to get them to take a full week of vacation for an out-of-town trip; they worry about plants and animals. But I managed to set them at ease about all of that.

I don't much care what happens after this. All I want is a little time with everything back like it was. My twin bed with the ranch-style headboard. The brown couch there where they have a desk with all of their computer stuff on it.

I want to feel again what it felt like then—before the funerals and the hearings, and the cold stares of surviving relatives. It didn't take long for my time in beige cinder-block corridors to seem like all there would ever be. Buzzing in and out at each door.

But then one opened and there was an outside porch before me, and rain. And faces disappearing behind me. Being free to go made me feel like I was shrinking. But I gathered myself and set out for the future. Getting on with things, going back.

Daryl Scroggins
Marfa, Texas



Sketchbook Page 4
Drawing
John Loree
Ypsilanti, Michigan

As If It Were A Song

Crackling fall fills my mouth:
lightning whelks and creel,
pinions and pistons. When the sun
is in a certain spot,
all the shore returns as reflection

mesmerizing even stubborn rocks.
If I can settle the dog and the cat, if
the red squirrel stops his cracking,
If I listen closely enough,
I can do absolutely nothing

with the sharpest intent. Watch
the eagle circling loons. Thank
God for water, bodies of water.
Mother and baby loon safe
under the feeding breast of lake.

Liz Rees
Silver Spring, Maryland

Not Exactly Nostalgia

Rouge Park was where we hoped
to go for picnics. A swimming pool
though few in my neighborhood
actually knew how to swim, but
we splashed around cooling off.

Usually we had only sprinklers
we ran through, or a hydrant some
older kid had managed to open.
Rouge Park was a green place
we got to maybe twice a year.

Nancy in my class was raped there
by four men. She was kicked
out of school. She disappeared.
Appeared months later haggard,
her skin broken out, no baby.

The nuns took it, she said. It.
Pregnancy was a doom that ended
your free life. I carried a switch
blade in my jeans pocket.
I'd been beaten so often in grade

school for being a Jew, I knew
how to fight. When a boy pinned
me down, I knew where to kick.
I bit his ear. He cursed and I ran.
I'd escaped the neighborhood

curse: so many girls I knew, babies
before the end of tenth grade,
married to some guy who beat
then or ran off with another
or ended up in prison or dead.

Marge Piercy
Wellfleet, Massachusetts

Bug

We thought she'd caught the latest bug but it was more than the flu. Sitting by her
bed that night, I read her the poetry of Sara Teasdale and hoped it would bring her
peace. I never expected "War Time" to be the last poem she'd hear, nor that I'd be
the one there to hear her last breath.

In the end, it was tragically apropos. She was there for my first breath; I was there
for her last. If only we'd been there for one another during the breaths in between.

Tracy Shapley
Iowa City, Iowa

How I Fell In Love with the Dental Assistant

Every six months, as infrequent yet routine
as the changing of clocks, her chair reclines
me into the helplessness that comes
with being at the mercy of another.

Her hands and eyes are then
made giant by their closeness.
The origin of her voice hides under
a blue surgical mask as she so tenderly labors.

Her rhythm goes uninterrupted
by the small noises, mustered
without the use of tongue and lips,
that are like hecklers to her monologue.

Her eyes do not betray movement
of her veiled lips that speak
matter-of-factly of preventative care
but surely with a seductive smile.

The thin latex gloves create
an impassable barrier to our touch.
Her nimble movements
gracefully scrape away

evidence of my imperfections
that only she possesses
the skill, tools, and desire to remove
so that I can be the kind of man she wants.

I close my eyes to imagine
her pure white teeth, straight
like pillars, protected by pink lips
that would feel like a soft bath on mine, so dry.

I schedule my next appointment –
the end to a six-month absence
that now seems distant.
I will pass this time by brushing after every meal.

I'll floss daily just as she asked of me
so that she will know
as soon as she opens my mouth again
that I am hers.

Marcus Benjamin Ray Bradley
Versailles, Kentucky

Rolling

You take a swing at a bush.
It gives up a tubular, white blossom.

Here, you say, and I cap my nose
to a bluff of summer as we huddle

on a beach boardwalk, drunk,
shivering and stunned before

this sprawling blackout of sky and sea.
Everyone but us is inside now,

soaking pots, plates, the turkey pan,
curling unconscious into bowls of sofas.

Linked to no one but the hostess,
we fit like spokes from her hospitable

hub, though the distance we keep
isn't pulling us closer. What if

the wheel were to move, the spokes
to blur? I roll the stem of my plumeria

between my fingers, a pinwheel,
little trumpet with its one tropical song.

Maria Pavone
Venice, California

foundthelakeatthehorseshoecasino

black cat,
(in a tone that suggests)
locked in the fray,
(she doesn't understand)
the alley way
(How am I supposed to)
swimming in darkness,
(be a man when I never)
neighbors peer
(grew up? Sunrise over)
and then come out,
(the homes, pulling back)
join the fracas,
(curtains, the eyes)
if I were your mother,
(twinkle in the light)
one woman says,

Pigpen Madigan
Franklin, Wisconsin

The Comma: Concerned About Puncticide

I heard some of us hid in the sewer climbing up through the manholes late at night to scrounge the dumpsters for food. So there I went my belongings wrapped in a scarf. Outside darker than the inside of a hat. Knocked on a manhole where I heard murmuring someone else might mistake for wind. Then silence. I lifted the cover peered down into the darkness backed into the hole and climbed down the rungs dank.

I can't help what I was born as. At one time writers honored us by inserting us into their musings after conjunctive adverbs between main clauses after interjections after introductory phrases before conjunctions linking main clauses between items in series between statement and tag questions to mark intonation to mark omissions to prevent misreading to set off absolute constructions to set off contrasted elements to set off *He said etc.* with quotations to set off interjections to set off items in dates and addresses to set off parenthetical elements and so forth. Now we have nowhere to go nothing to do. Branded with invisibility prohibited from earning a living.

Especially the chatters and texters despise us as we create an extra keystroke. We can't help that. How else will they key us into their gadgets?

In the sewer lit candle stubs tall shadows on the curving walls empty eyes staring back. But the eyes belonged to adjectives banned long ago. They wanted no punctuation marks in their midst. They shooed me out waving their hands wildly as they advanced toward me. Then quiet.

(When the Russians demolished the hard sign from *War and Peace* they decreased its heft—and cost—by hundreds of pages.)

Our fast-paced society can't tolerate pauses anything taking time to understand practice to master. Most of us never even noticed the signs. But I recall vividly the Newsweek article by the farsighted Robert J. Samuelson titled presciently "The Sad Fate of the Comma." "Its slow decline is a metaphor for something much larger: how we deal with the frantic[] can't-wait-a-minute nature of modern life." With progress anything ponderous: tossed by the wayside. So our doom.

Rumors now say the authorities collect commas in droves with butterfly nets.

They unroof black boxes drop in the saturated nets tape the boxes over. Living graves. Some commas march to work camps first the women scooping out ice cream for bawling brats men digging ditches. I'll join the resistance first. When we're herded to the great hole listen to me. I'll hide behind a dull verb. I'll use it as a shield. It deserves to go before I do. I'm more useful than a semicolon surely. More useful than the rare exclamation point. Damn those periods! Before I go down into Silence.

Susan Richardson
Boise, Idaho



Sketchbook Page 12
Drawing
John Loree
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Otology

The drive is easy early in the day—
ten minutes tops—ten more to park. I walk
into the building, find the office well
before eight-thirty. The reception room
is far from full. I choose an empty chair,
fill out too many forms, and wait—all set.

A nurse soon guides me back to where I set
aside belongings. Vital signs today
are excellent. Moved to another chair,
I answer questions, see the doctor walk
up, down the hall. He comes into the room,
asks how I am. I simply say, “Unwell.”

“And why is that?” he counters, then bids, “Well,
let’s take a look.” I hesitantly set
myself upon a cushioned slab. The room
becomes a torture chamber. “Oh, Monday,
Monday, so good to me,” I mutely walk
through lyrics till I get back to a chair.

Next I am moved to yet another chair
inside a lab designed to test how well
I hear. The nurse and the computer walk
me through procedure. Earplugs in, headset
and collar on, I click a pen all day
or so it seems—tone / pulse—in that strange room.

At last the nurse comes back into the room,
adjusts something. I must stay in the chair,
touch squares within a grid to show “birthday”
is not “rainbow,” “football” is not “inkwell,”
“toothbrush” is not “mousetrap.” The sound is set
too low: “padlock”? “horseshoe”? maybe “sidewalk”?

The test advances. Rhymes are a cakewalk
compared to spondees. Yes, I own the room
throughout this section. Volume has been set
so I can choose one out of four. The chair
feels almost comfortable as I do well.
Perhaps I might survive this endless day.

Back in the other room, I take a chair,
hear wins have offset losses, say farewell,
rise and walk out into the still-young day.

Jane Blanchard
Augusta, Georgia

The Violin Maker

You say there is no better wood
than walnut for making

violins, and with an iron you bend
the ribs for the C bouts

and clamp them down.
Your powdery hands attach

the ribbing, remove the mold.
Then we enter the wood room,

the simplicity of the shelves,
and decide on fragrant spruce,

maple for the scroll. Back
at your table, you arch the raw

materials into shape,
cut a channel along the perimeter

at the top of what will be
my own instrument. You

position the purfling, smooth
the shape of the body,

add a base bar when completion
is two breaths away. Carefully,

you size the delicate scroll, carve
the shape. Now

the ebony fingerboard is ready
to be shaved, attached,

but the glue and clamps
delay the swiftly forming music

that has already started
galloping between my arms.

Maureen Daniels
Lincoln, Nebraska

The Crickets

The crickets
take in silence

and articulate
its darkness.

This was not
God's plan.

Tom Montag
Fairwater, Wisconsin

The Morning After Your Appetite Considers Weaning Itself Off High Saturated Fats and Processed Sugars

You're back at it,
stuffing things into your mouth
more determined than ever
to pack on the pounds,
to turn your T-shirts tight again,
bind your belly fat close to the heart
so the little pump-engine has to struggle
and gasp between beats, working hard
for its bread and butter, bad for you,
according to all the latest studies,
and growing worse as the day races
through a television exercise program
on a three thousand dollar stationary bike
that should whip you into shape
in just a few weeks of dedicated
heavy breathing and hunger pangs
that will feel like muscle spasms,
something you know deep in your gut
is the right thing to suffer at your age
while the drug commercials wrap up
their hazy promises and detailed warnings
in neat little packages that look a lot
like double-deckers with cheese.

Stephen Roberts
Westfield, Indiana

Something To Work With

After "Accidental Marks #160," Pen & Ink Drawing by Michael Dunn

Give him something to work with, a whirlwind,
A whirlpool, a waterspout, and he'll go
To town, dream up houses thrown to and fro,
Blown to flinders, spun up among the finned

And bright-scaled swimmers sucked skyward and pinned
Among the scribbled clouds, or drawn below
Into the weedy depths as if they'd sinned
Against Neptune or some other chunk-chinned
Deity whose stretched cheeks might puff and blow
Everything beyond the riptide. The eye
Of something stays on the sparrow in flight
Or in the nest, and will spare or destroy
Indifferently, as any cat will toy
With whatever mouse comes within its sight
And never let us ask the reason why.

Arnold Johnston
Kalamazoo, Michigan

In September

The streets aren't sour but *sazón* of anatto, aniseed.
The men unbuttoning against torpid heat,
women quick as eels or power lines to absorb shock,
mango stickiness on hands, crumpled babies, electric or dazed--
swung breadfruit in slings. Flan and a couple embrace
sucking breath beside a mural of the immanent Che.
Lesser green, sumac candles guttered out, urban crop circle
of half-smoked butts, cold coffee in the lotto line.
For the first time a slackening. We hear a death rattle
and know it's broken, the back of this wayward year.
Winds from the south tangle the hair; a voice calls *mami*
and we turn, proud in our decline; the full-lipped boys and girls
lick sugar ice, shout to someone on their cellphones.
Who strains to hear? Maybe the owner of a tarpaper shack
pounding in nails while egrets needle minnows from a swamp.

Carol Alexander
New York, New York

Restless

Overhead, clouds billow
in wind that can't seem
to settle on one direction.
They hesitate in the way
we hesitate in the skip
of thought—a pause

that sinks like a small
stone finding its place
in this pond's pocket.

The search for the right
word seems hopeless
like a small explosion,

like panic—we look
around, feeling
homeless.

M. J. Iuppa
Hamlin, New York

In That Cream Lace

You class up the moon
like Jobyna Ralston
a cherubic bow-lipped bonfire
serenading prisms
in the tender lilies
of her palms

Megan Mealor
Saint Johns, Florida

Fresh Scar

Let me tell you why novels don't get done. You're young and full of words, so you spend a summer pouring your nights into dawns and crippling your fingers because they can't curve into how you feel. Neither do the letters, no matter how many fonts you cycle through.

That's a first draft. That's my contribution to this morning's revision party. A party for me and my friend June, at another cafe where no one's invited to my world or June's. They aren't ready yet.

Our tiny table shakes when I add my manuscript. June looks up from her laptop.

"Should we move?" she asks.

"Nah, this is it for me." I thumb a curling corner of my title page. "Should finish reading today."

"How old is that thing?" Her eyes question the paper's tint, a shade of tooth that hasn't been brushed.

I count with my fingers but give up when I need my left hand.

"Good luck," June says and returns to her Nth novel in N years--I've lost track.

"Why the different inks? How many passes have you done?" June asks before lunch.

"Oh, I've reread it every summer, but the red isn't mine."

"You let someone else read a first draft? Bold."

"My ex."

"Wow. I wouldn't let my fiancé read anything unpublished," June says. "You don't think she's a tad biased?"

"She wasn't my ex when she read it."

#

We discuss June's wedding preparations over lunch.

"Everything is wonderful," she says. "But he did dig something up."

"A plot hole?" I say. She doesn't laugh.

"He's leaving for the weekend and makes some comment about my mother. How I can't manage without her every time there's a risk of being alone! And I thought damn, that's a fresh scar." "You mean a new scar?"

"No, a fresh one. One you didn't know you had."

I sink back into my chair. Which of my characters have unknown scars? Could I tweeze those out into scenes brimming with tension? That'd be a great revision!

I snicker. And two pages later, snicker again.

"Your comments that entertaining?" June asks.

"No, hers are."

She glares at me. "You've been amused all morning."

"Look, she leaves these cute little smileys and 'Gloria likes' instead of my generic checkmark. And look, look!" I turn back three pages. "Where I wrote 'new cafe name?' she answered `Cafe Gloria? jk :)`. It's like we're having a conversation across time."

"That's what your book is supposed to be, with your readers."

"I know! She was my first!"

#

We retreat into our work as the sun retreats into the afternoon.

Gloria suggests natural dialogue, missing speaker attributions, opportunities to dream. She answers her own criticism if I address it later in the same chap-

ter. When my comment of "ew!" derides a poor word choice, she replies with "LOL!" When I label a jump as "very strange," she nods along with "definitely." When I underline "does it feel this long?" she responds with "yea, like 3 weeks. it's believable."

"At what point do you give up tripping over the past and just print another draft?" June asks. She's staring at my index finger obscuring another one of Gloria's inky hearts.

My eyes linger on June. Neither of us make a sound. "It doesn't hurt me. And I wouldn't want to waste all this paper."

#

Evening approaches. I squint to read the dark ink on the pages faded by too many windowsills. But the red is vibrant well into the sunset.

I don't snicker for some time.

June pats my hand like Gloria used to. "It's okay if it's rough, that's what revisions are for. That's why you're here."

I nod through the final pages to a novel feeling. My teapot isn't steaming. Refill after refill. Year after year. I'm not tired of rereading. The early praise didn't do it. Neither did the crimson criticism near the end. My mood changed with the naked pages and pages of the middle, those without ink, like a gulf between one firework and another, when the sky was only smoke and darkness.

Second acts are hard. Sometimes we never make it to Act III.

At home, I roll up the manuscript like a used newspaper and stick the fresh scar in the bottom drawer. Midnight strikes. I'll start a new draft. From scratch. Next summer.

Arthur Klepchukov
Germantown, Maryland



Turn Off the Lights
Photograph
T. Kilgore Splake
Calumet, Michigan

Smuggled Goods

Locked in a closet with the truth, with lies,
with masquerades you sell, you open it
a fraction of an inch, a little bit,
the slightest crack you can, for otherwise
you'd suffocate. Although a cyclone tries
to rip apart the door, you can't permit
that to occur; you know how counterfeit
your costumes are, your masks and your disguise.

The major problem is you cannot ban
the wind from blowing hard, exposing you,
exposing all your closet's merchandise,
exposing cheap deceit and guile. You can
deny the truth, you can defy it, too,
but oh, at what a cost, at what a price.

Yakov Azriel
Erfat, Isreal

Creature from the Black Lagoon

I am guilty of eating a chocolate chip muffin
In the afternoon with three red grapes
And not a drop of tea. All of nature creates
A monster that follows me down the street.

A sign suspended by invisible wires
Swings over a walrus-sized pile of gravel.
The sign reads "English as a Second Language."
Two young women and a young man
Laugh in another tongue as they walk by.

Someone spent some time drawing
Hieroglyphs in pencil lead upon the surface
Of this computer keyboard.
I hear a ringing in my right ear.

Earlier today, by the stream in Lamson woods
A Labrador plunged happily through the poison
Ivy and rolled in the mud and made nearly
Human sounds from its throat.

I count dollar bills in the cash drawer:
Twenty ones, two twenties, a five, and a ten.
Someone asks to break a hundred.
I give a nervous laugh.

The thing that nature has become has gills
And loves to stare at its own face
In a two-way mirror. The scientists
Have concluded they should let the young woman
Swim in the same murky pond again
While one of them carefully opens and closes
The refrigerator door to see if the light stays on.

Rustin Larson
Fairfield, Iowa

Housework 1955

Mother's fluted silver bowl sat on the sideboard
giving silent meaning to her life, though rarely used.
I liked to polish it on newspaper beside the sink
and can still feel the mix of smooth and cold,
the smell of liquid polish dripping from the tin,
a black stain on the cloth once done.

Its shining curves reflected me. How they could
shape and stretch my face. I'd grin and grimace
as I turned the vessel over to clean the underside.
Did it display an aspect of our life
the tarnished truth of what we had to hide,
and why? I never could decide.

Linda Conroy
Bellingham, Washington

Wet Leaves, November

Today, the silver maple is strung
with hammered gold,
arboreal splendor slightly trembling
like those archaic headdresses
of Greece or Troy or Akkad—
magnificent but more ephemeral,
more like the flesh
of a high priestess, one
who waves her hands here,
in Minnesota,
above the inadequate garage
and the neighbor's fence,
covering even our rubbish bins
with radiance.

Leslie Schultz
Northfield, Minnesota

Mothman At Texaco

*As Antigone said, I am neither
a dweller among men nor ghosts.*

- Thomas Hardy, *Jude the Obscure*

If only I hadn't been caught
off guard, daydreaming
under that bridge, I would've
been able to strangle the wind

right out of the storm that carried
me out of the nest I wove
out of ruins I alone could adore.
Lord only knows how many

hundreds of miles from home
a rip in the eye of my one
remaining good wing occurred—
the thing that finally downed me.

Now, winded in the shelter
of this gas station's dimming over-
hang, perched atop a diesel
pump powdered with grime,

partially hidden by the shadow
of the trailer of a Mack—
parked, its engine still rumbling—
I pull in my wings to wrap

my shoulder blades so they hug
my aching vertebrae tight
to keep them from rattling together.
Across the dirt road, within

just a second of sprinting flight,
Amish girls pull the strings
of their bonnets down under their chins
to keep their braids from unraveling,

to keep them from tangling
in the teeth of the comb of the storm.
A gust almost blows their final
melon for sale from the table

whose legs they've unfolded before them.
The youngest, slurping juice
from a pink, seeded wedge,
would be enough. By the general

store behind them, their horse—
tethered loosely to a fractured post—
annoys me with neighs, dares me
with the vein in its muscled neck.

My thirst overpowers the fumes
that lift themselves from the truck.
I need more strength to follow
the rip of the river back

to Point Pleasant. There,
tucked away in West Virginia,
the faint murmur of sleeping
radiation lullabies me home.

Larry Narron
Petoskey, Michigan

Cancer Lyric A

We spend our lives replacing people. We try. There are no carbon copies. No perfect fits. We downgrade. We upgrade. We seek a version of what we lost. It's a strategy we use to dilute the pain of losing an original cast member. It is not a perfect science. Lose a circle? Find a square and sand down its corners. It's an emotional switch addiction, enabling us to survive the losses life provides. Usually. This is quite different. I will not search the earth to locate a variation of you. If it isn't your smile, I don't want it. If it isn't your heart, I won't try to capture it. I will carry this void until my own death. I've had my love story. Have my love story. You are my leading lady, and there is no understudy.

Bekah Steimel
St. Louis, Missouri

The Errand

After the long death of her husband,
when she thought the world would open
again, her blindness widened, and soon
she couldn't drive. She told her son,
during his weekly call, how wonderful
it would be to go outside by herself
and drive to the store. She would allow
red lights and honking, those boys zooming
by on skateboards, even the checkout girl
smacking gum. She would buy something—
it didn't need to be a cashmere sweater
or a silk scarf (although a new blouse
would be nice). It could be a quart of milk,
a loaf of bread, and then she would drive
straight home. She's not greedy, she explained.
A short drive and a couple of things
at the store. Just that.

James Schneider
Brunswick, Maine

Be The Unicorn

Be the sum
of two forreals that equal a myth.
Screw the narwhal tusk to your forelock
and do not wonder why they are looking at you.
Of course they are, you oddity!
Remember also they are searching for you,
to decontaminate their water and reassure
themselves they are still virgins,
not the twofers they've been told and told themselves.
Thus they stammer.
They see the familiar in you but can't
figure how.

Steven Ray Smith
Austin, Texas

All Her Jazz

My striking wife
is the cat's strut—

cello sass
with a syncopated

escalator to
move

these languid feet—
Bet yer bottom

her fleet laugh
's enough to please.

Wham
giv'er the day

and watch'er de-roost—
She quakes my phase-y

ass with tympani—
Scoot it, Jimmy!

Ev'body
Ev'body else

and me—
We bop to it.

—*after W.C.W.*

D.R. James
Saugatuck, Michigan

A Few Words

You can come this way, come that way, take the words for what they are, let it drop. Try not to think of the drink and all the writers in their rooms writing, like I am, a bird outside cawing like a police siren, and you can take the eight block walk south to the used bookstore, find the autobiography of Daniel Abse, read one more page, decide if today you'll exchange the two books, take it home, and it's too hot, 89 degrees, almost October, New York City, the millennium a memory, like the holograph postcard of the Twin Towers you still keep in an old cigar box, and the heat like in that To Fu poem makes you feel *roped in your clothing*, and there'll be mornings, a few more evenings, loves and discords, words and

more words, and a silence, like today the football
player on his knee before a game, protesting the words
of a leader, protesting the actions of those who don't
even know what it means to lie in the dust and rise.

Gary Sokolow
New York, New York

To the Cat by My Fire

I hope it goes well for you, this
laze in the fire's air-blankets.
Beats chattering, crouched
in the cauliflower beds, I'm sure—
as if anyone could endure
hell's brass witch tonight.
I would like less of it, none
to freeze in boarding house
rooms, slunk-metal shacks,
but to slide, man and beast alike,
butter-side-up to heaven.

This cold's a wake-up dream
meant to be rough, a passing
of sludge for the paralyzed;
and though I slice onions—
half-frozen slugs—in a wintry kitchen,
I will dance the cook pot
over the stove, stomp my way
to possible warmth until,
battered, spun from the boil,
I return, plate-laden, to the fire.

Matt Dennison
Columbus, Mississippi

Minus Signs

When he got the diagnosis, I began to subtract. First the “golden years” we will never share.

Then the trip to Italy. Something had always interfered with our plans before – his job, mine, problems with the children. But now the interfering voice was the doctor’s. “Not wise to travel...need more tests.”

We tore up those tantalizing maps, cancelled the reservations. I wish instead we had tuned out that doctor because giving up our trip didn’t make any difference. We could have had two final weeks of enjoying something together, laughing even, forgetting for moments what would await us when we returned.

Subtract that merciless “*if only*.”

During the hours of sleep that’s never really sleep, I see us at the beach again, that nude beach he dared me to go to. I can see his tall bronzed body at the surf’s edge, brazenly naked, his back so beautiful I’d want to run my sandy hand over it.

A graphic artist, he preferred “nude” to “naked,” because he said that was the artists’ word for the voluptuous women in the marvelous old paintings. “Those women will never die,” he used to say, “because the paintings enable them to live forever.”

Forever.

I always hid beneath a towel at that beach. How much do I hide now? Shielding him from those, “I must be frank,” surgical words (“terminal”).

The most ordinary scenes throw me into the past. Even the sight of the few remaining outdoor phone booths stabs at me. There had been one on the corner near where I lived as a teenager. I’d sneak out to it, away from my parents listening, their shouts of, “Get off the phone.” my pockets heavy with dimes so I could make long –distance calls to him. I had to ignore people who’d bang on the booth, almost shattering the glass. Turn a helpless face toward them, cry out, “Emergency!” Overhearing, he said, “I could weep at the thought of you inside that booth.”

We were so newly in love then, the world freshly washed. He’d just been accepted in graduate school, a thousand miles to the south. We had a tearful parting, aware how dramatic it was. A few days later he suddenly appeared. He’d found out that his classes wouldn’t begin for another week, so he had hitchhiked all the

way back to have one more day with me. I still remember his hugging me close to him desperately, as if we were reunited after a century apart.

Not like his business trips years later. No rushing back to me then, the messy house, squabbling children. Who would rush back to that when he could be enjoying \\\ Paris? Fewer, quicker, calls. Marriage changes so much, even something as ordinary as a phone call. But between two people maybe nothing is “ordinary.”

Not that midnight diagnosis. It wasn’t really midnight when the doctor called with the results. More like a prosaic nine in the morning. But it felt like midnight, the world suddenly darkening.

I was supposed to meet him in the city that evening, dinner with friends celebrating their anniversary. I went anyway, some robot voice from inside me chatting with everyone as if I heard what they were saying.

“Is something wrong?” he asked me on the way home, dangerously able to sense my feelings.

“What could be wrong?” I said, postponing the inevitable moment when he’d have to know.

Their 30th anniversary, that couple. We’re running out of time at the 24th.

”*Time Lost*” – Proust’s famous phrase. “*Regained*,” too. How do you do that?

How odd that 30 should still be in my head, along with all those other numbers: 2 different verdicts (damn that false hope), 1 CAT scan, 6 emergency transfusions, a dozen nurse practitioners practicing efficiency. “You have to be patient, the doctor’s very busy.”

Subtract hatred from my tally.

I try to keep up with my writing assignments. Freelancing in hours no longer free. Go with him for countless visits to the doctors, make calls to demand answers he can’t ask for anymore.

“You have to be the strong one,” he tells me.

Where is it written, I think, staring at the blank computer screen.

He used to bring home flowers Friday nights. Now he doesn't know when it's Friday. He no longer has the job that anchored him to the days.

I try to resurrect his elegant appearance when he'd leave for work each morning, the careful way he chose a matching shirt and tie, asking if I thought they "go together."

"They go together like love and marriage," I'd sing, echoing the popular tune when we were dating.

Harder and harder to sound light.

I wasn't even surprised when he told me his boss "suggested" he take "time off" until he's better.

"For the duration," he told me, his face pale.

Duration. Whatever that icy word means.

Who is this stranger sitting all day unshaven, in a stained robe, staring into some space I'm barred from?

He's more and more absent - not on business trips anymore. Absent even sitting beside me on the couch. Absent from himself, too. Lost in some dark recess of his mind where he has his own subtraction.

"Love me?" I sometimes dare to ask, hearing the desperation that slips into my voice.

"Love you," he murmurs, his voice faint, and retreats again.

Multiply the velvet lies.

That's what I call the untruths that make it possible to live with someone. Coming home from a meeting one evening, I suddenly can't bear to go back into the dark place that our home has become, be with this stranger who clutches at me. Turning, I detour to a park, knowing he's alone, anxious. "Time for me!" I say defiantly to the air. Then - guilt ridden - I rush back to say breathlessly, "Sorry, the train was late."

"Missed you," I always toss in.

Velvet.

Maybe other couples are able to unite over this, but we divide. Division: another form of math. Divided by my forbidden rage.

I can't tell him I'm scared all the time, have him put his arms around me protecting us. "What are you afraid of?" he'd ask.

His denial is a wall around him, a barricade between us.

In the middle of the night I wake up thinking: I am losing him before I lose him. But he's awake, too. Had I said those words out loud?

In the dim light I see his eyes staring at me, hear a hoarse voice I barely recognize asking, "What will you do afterward?"

"Afterward? "I stammer, stunned at the curtain suddenly withdrawn.

"Maybe I'll make our trip to Italy," I say, before I even know what words are coming out.

"That would be good," he says, his voice gentler than it's ever been.

But my voice isn't. I'm screaming at him, this fragile, generous man. "How can you say that? How could I enjoy it without you?"

"It would be good if you could," he says.

I try to answer, but everything's choking in my throat. It doesn't matter, his eyes are closed, cutting himself off from me again.

I lie awake for hours, pierced by my thoughts: *I will make that trip. Alone.*

In some unimaginable way I may even enjoy some of the famous sights, though constantly aware he will have been cruelly deprived of them. I see myself wandering alone through historic streets, trying not to notice the couples hand-in-hand, always feeling that half of myself is missing. The ultimate subtraction?

Yet, I vow in the darkness, somehow I will find a way to be whole again.

I curl up against him like a child afraid to go to sleep, put my hand on his bony chest, make sure it's still rising and falling. It's all right, he's still with me. For now.

How long is "now," I never ask.

Anne Hosansky
Jamaica, New York



Mayor of Yawn, Oregon
Linocut
Mark Bulwinkle
Oakland, California

The Word 2

In the beginning was the cry,
the laugh and the cry, the gasp,
the sigh, the sniff, the snort,
the inhalation of revelation
and the exhalation of disappointment.
The word came much later. The thing,
the sensation, the provocation, the reaction,
even the *thought* came before the word—
a sort of thought, unexpressed, built
of twitch, affinity and association,
of recognition and comparison,
a representation of perception.
The word came later, to create
and then endlessly rework history.

M. Rush
Independence, Louisiana

After I Discover Your Little Secret, We Drive South on Hwy 99 from Modesto

We get in the car and, as you accelerate, I roll down my window. A blank wind swims around us in a desert of silence, until you say, *You've never understood me*. Your hair swirls and you smile like a snake. You look like the cover of a banned book. A single-minded sun shifts in a bored sky. There's something about betrayal that murders sleep. I want only to dream of oceans, to drive south toward something like civilization, but with just the two of us here, amid these dry, blonde foothills, the conditions are ripe for nothing but burning.

Brad Rose
Wellesley, Massachusetts

Two

The gap between my teeth is my father's promise
The baggy work shirt is his hug
The chair at the table is his voice
The hollows under my eyes are the echoes
The math I study is my mother's singing
through the house—sweeping floors, washing,
hanging and folding, in her bath, behind the door,
letting me know she is here, she's here.

Michael Mark
San Diego, California

Dora Maar

There she sits, framed
flat in her brown chair.

I forget that she was a painter,
a photographer,
an artist, and not simply

a work of art
created by her
clever-with-color lover.

From his eyes to brush—
she's webbed in four sides
of green, yellow, red/orange,
as though she's in a box,

a trick of geometry.
Fingers fan her face,

hold her skull, her cheeks
like a peach full moon. Her breast,

lungs, a heart;
a blue, turquoise, black bouquet,
a stemmed trinity of zero, one, two lines.

Her eyes are different colors,
one green, red the other.
I stare into them.

She is not two-faced;
her nose divides both ways.
Her lips half-smile in profile.

There's an empty white space in her neck—
a void for light or voice—
while her secrets look at me
she turns away from her maker.

Cathy Allman
Darien, Connecticut

At the Veterinarian's Office

He was a big fellow,
had to duck just to get in the door,
and long on swagger, with broad shoulders
squared firmly against the day.
But when the vet's assistant appeared
and handed him the small metal cage,
empty save for an old, threadbare pillow,
I saw him start to cave in on himself,
his voice catching in response to her questions

about cremation options,
and his face pinched by the weight
of unexpected grief, as if the emptiness inside
the pet carrier was growing heavier
by the second, and it was all he could do
to keep holding on.

Michael Hill
Fort Collins, Colorado

Milwaukee, Home of Fog and Harley

I remember globe lights on that low bridge
floating balls of soft white lumens
half a lifetime ago we rode our motorcycle
in the fog, moving slowly, parting mists

not fast, no hurry, the fog a sort of gift
and we came upon a figure in the park a piper
barely seen just a darkness in the gray but
we could make out a silhouetted kilt, the pipes

and we pulled over, shut off the engines and
the lights, heard the sound from that man walking
lost sight of him but not the bleating of the pipes
our ears saw clearly through the vapors and the

undefined was unimportant background only
to the highlands and the softened shrillness
and I had the strong impression that Al and I
and piperman were all the people left on earth.

Guinotte Wise
LaCygne, Kansas

What We Keep

National Wildlife Property Repository, Denver::

22,000 square feet of wildlife items seized or abandoned

Stacked

in crammed cabinets, on shelves

monkey:

stuffed and mounted beside tasseled

leopard-skin slippers, dried seal penises

elephant:

furrowed foot fashioned

into stool, tiger-skin upholstered.

Chairs with tails and lamps with hooves.

Voracious. Our appetite for species.

Say: if

deep pulses, radio waves—

those bottles we float into the sea of space—

and if—

gathered around these interstellar cellphones

in comes green-cheese creature speed dial—

a biosignature 500 years ahead—

say: watch

we animals in a galactic zoo

they us, we them—

or reach—touch—

stack in crammed cabinets, on shelves

they us we them?

Ileen Millman

Hillsborough, New Jersey

For Christmas

We decided to forgo the usual
exchange of gifts, and instead
engage the services of a therapist
to help us stitch the two halves
of our lives back together.

I imagined a seamstress,
who might tell us
that the fabric of love is indivisible,
woven with the tensile strength
of otherworldly materials
from what neither eye nor heart
can perceive.

But he, I feared, longed for a surgeon
who would teach us instead how —
with training and precision —
we might sever the remaining ligaments
and tendons that bind a dying limb
to the body,

how we might dam up
the rivers of blood so the heart
can no longer supply the phantom member
that once discarded, the mind
somehow continues to feel.

A. E. Hines
Portland, Oregon

Shoot Some Pool

I wake in the still night,
struggle into my clothes,
amble to a bistro on the corner.

Neon lights blaze on the street;
the ridiculous quiet,
quiet of 3:00 am.

Snow falls plus and plus,
strings tumble patterns from the sky.

The surface, slick night,
mysterious, but usual pieces of neon lights.

I draw the drapes,
get a drink, shoot some pool.

Kate McNairy
Ballston Spa, New York

Man And Wife At Sea

A middle-aged man
conducts the air,
guiding me to other seas, other mountains,
which I inhabit like dreams and distant places.
He tries a variety of angles,
moving his arms like a windmill,
butterfly fingers stroking the air.
He has cultivated a paunch,
imitating a pregnant woman,
he looks outward and searches
the coastline,
rests both hands
on hips, his pointed elbows
the arms of a vase,
the completed work of a potter,
brought to maturity.
His wife cuts free
the green-skinned cucumber,
she sits carving a meal for two,
nudges her man to eat.

A shared refreshment
without words,
her name is already written
on the water.

Byron Beynon
Sketty, Swansea, United Kingdom

After the Ultrasound

Tonight
we are the liquid
soaking the sheets

of our sofa bed.
You are lying
next to me,

thinking of leaving
for a cigarette
downstairs.

I hold you
by the wrist, press
my cheek

to your chest.
I tell you
I would stand

on my head
for nine months
if only

our child's life
would stop
leaking from me.

Maureen Daniels
Lincoln, Nebraska

The Kosher Butcher's Tale

My mother patiently waited for her turn while she peered into the butcher's case through her white, plastic, cat's eye glasses with sparkles in the corners, the height of ocular elegance in the 1950s. No one needed to take a number at, "Harry and Irving's Kosher Meats," under the elevated train tracks in the Bronx. The store was never very crowded and the butchers knew all of their customers, who had arrived first, who was in a rush and who wouldn't mind waiting a few minutes and gossiping with the other women.

"I'll have six of the baby lamb chops," my mom announced when the butcher called her.

"Your family really likes these chops, huh," Irving said as he carefully trimmed the meat. "You got half a dozen a few days ago."

"They're for my youngest, Benny, he really loves those lamb chops. And how can I deny a growing boy? For my Sarah give me broiler and an extra breast. So picky that one, but chicken I can always get her to eat," mom said. "And of course a few rib steaks for my husband, a man needs red meat."

"So," said Harry. "I hear Benny's doing well in medical school. You must be so proud."

"Of course," said my mom, raising her voice so everyone nearby could hear. "He was always a top student. It just came naturally to him."

The lenses on her glasses are thicker by now, the frames plainer, just light blue rims. "I miss cooking for him, but of course the rest of the family has to eat. Give me a few veal chops, a chicken cut in quarters, two pounds of ground beef and if the brisket looks good put in a piece, about 3 pounds. And wrap each of meats individually for freezing, I won't be using it for a while."

Harry nods, doesn't comment, and starts pulling freezer paper off the wide roll. He marks each package with his thick butcher pen so it can be easily identified. The butcher knows that the frozen meat will not be eaten in the Bronx, he knows that at the end of my next visit to my folks from my apartment in

Manhattan my mom will hand me an insulated bag with a few ice packs and most of the meat she's buying today.

My mother doesn't believe they sell decent meat in the city, doesn't trust me to spend my money on healthy food and not junk, and would rather not admit to people that I'm now living on my own.

"If my single daughter feels the need to move out of her own family's home without a ring on her finger it's no one's business," she tells me when I tell her the packages aren't necessary. "And anyway, why should Harry and Irving suffer because you're so reckless."

I usually forget to bring back the insulated bags and my freezer is full of ice-packs so she regularly stops at the hardware store next door to buy more. My independence is boosting the local economy.

"So, I need something special," my mom says. "My future son-in-law and his parents are coming to dinner. "I was thinking maybe a rib roast? Everyone likes that don't they?"

Anticipating how she'd look in the wedding album, last month my mother had gotten contact lenses. She'd spent a few weeks adjusting to them and then, when she was finally comfortable, stared at herself in the mirror. She'd never realized that her thick glasses worked as blinders, hiding her chubby face and wrinkled eyes from her field of vision. Now she could see everything perfectly and she didn't like what she saw. My mother bought herself a pair of glasses with frames that matched her mother-of-the-bride dress and never put on the contacts again.

"Irving," she whispers, "I need some help."

The butcher walks over to the corner of the shop where they can speak privately.

"Do you have any advice how to cook a roast so goyim will like it," she asks.

Irving isn't surprised, he's heard the gossip. Anyway this isn't the first time a middle aged woman who's spent her life in the kitchen has asked for a recipe when she was called upon to feed Christians.

“Rare,” he says. “The gentiles like to see the blood. For your family make sure you serve the pieces on the end, as far as possible from the middle. For Sarah’s goyische husband and his parents you slice from the middle.”

Harry watches my mom peer at the three pounds of chopped meat he’s placed on the counter for another customer. Since her cataract operation she doesn’t wear glasses anymore. “Excuse me for a minute,” he says to the woman he’s been helping, turns his back on her order and speaks to my mother.

“That’s not the way to view it,” he says gently, picks up a three pound chicken and puts it on the counter. “That’s the size the baby was, too small to live. It’s better that it went right away, didn’t have to suffer. Your next grandchild will be fine, just wait and see.”

My mom reaches up to the counter and gently pats the chicken. She walks out of the store, forgetting her order, and Harry has to run after her with her shopping bag.

“So, do you have my turkey I ordered?” my mother asked Irving. “I’ll bet it’s the biggest one in the place. I’ve got a full house this year for Thanksgiving, my kids, their husbands and wives, all the grandchildren and a bunch of friends and other relatives whose names I don’t always remember.”

Irving went into the back of the shop and emerged with an enormous bird. My mother stares at it.

Overwhelmed. “You’re sure that’s the one I ordered?” she asks. “Don’t worry,” says the butcher. “I’ll have the boy who sweeps in the back carry it to the car for you.”

I’ve told the aide who shops for my mom not to bother trying to get kosher meat for her. Harry and Irving retired years ago, there’s no longer a demand for their product in the neighborhood. People buy their meat in the supermarket.

I believe my mother no longer cares. These days she just stares at her food with cloudy eyes and can’t see what she’s eating.

Jean Ende
Brooklyn, New York



Cemetery
Photograph
Gary Wadley
Louisville, Kentucky

My Blizzard Man is Gone

no longer will he come—
snow covered hat, boots he forgot to wear
leaving his feet chilled in sneakers
and knee high snow

there will no longer be that persistent
banging at my door
cursing to let him in before he freezes

nor will he slip into floppy slippers
or sit upon the couch in black hoodie
wrapped like a mummy in a furry afghan
...still not warm enough

no longer will my arms stretch around
his big belly, my legs rest across his lap
as he snores through the movie, wakes
and asks what he's missed

no longer will his fingers
'tickle the ivories'
or his raspy voice sing out
in jazzy down 'n' dirty blues

no longer will he complain the food
is too cold, the coffee not strong enough
everything needs more spice

my blizzard man is gone
eighty-four was all the breath he had

I will sit at the window, watch snow
mounting on the lawn and where
his old gray Toyota once sat...a driveway
covered in drifts

Gloria Murray
Deer Park, New York

thewallishigherthanithought

cardinal eyes
(and then she explains, calmly,
bobbing in the water,
(that it wasn't the right time,)
tired and becoming gone,
(she had planned it weeks ago,
each pass of the bottle
(and that it took care of itself,
brings more anguish to the lips

so swig and be merry she said

Pigpen Madigan
Franklin, Wisconsin

The Thing

The thing
in its

relation
to us

sings.
That crane

in the low
field this

morning.

Tom Montag
Fairwater, Wisconsin

Between Curiosity & Nakedness

Now that one hundred days of rain
is over, the orchard's apples swell

liked fevered hearts, glowing within
their smooth skins, beckoning me

to come closer & spot the one fruit
that's symbol of temptation, of love's

shame. O hour of regret, greed
has made me snap. I am another

storm, rising up among the tree's
heavy branches, twisting stems

until I break their tight hold; taking
more than I know is mine.

M. J. Iuppa
Hamlin, New York

The Clarity of Decongestants

Not as naughty as alcohol, & not much
in the way of fun. When noises sprout
in color, that's when I tell him,
Please stop with the banging already—
who here can eat? But only in my mind.
I close my eyes, & the miserable mess
of my head is the second floor of a musted
Victorian, innuendo of sauerkraut in the hall.

No need to unpack my boxes—my needs are
meager and few. I will pass white flutters
of days here, in the silence of exile
or death. I wallow in the lion-footed bathtub,
where I write of my longing for love—
the shreds of my heart flicker
in the shallows, and minnows hollow
my chest. The night trees gaze in at me
wisely & I poke the hot tap with my toe.
Rusty bathwater gets cold after a time.

Kim Kraner
Granby, Connecticut

Winter Conversation

Did we stray too far
or think too much
while discussing
Lewis Carroll's oysters
running with supposed delight,
the thrill in being sought,
only to reach bewilderment?

Compassion makes us quiet
as we walk. Old prayers
spread before us as if new,
perhaps rethought.
No answer needed now.
Grey sun slants wet
on broken bough.

Linda Conroy
Bellingham, Washington

Sooner Than Later

Sooner than later he will cease to be,
He knows; the fragile network of his cells
Is closing checkpoints inexorably.
Though he's not quite prepared for tolling bells,

He knows the fragile network of his cells
Will work its algorithm and run down,
Spiraling inward like nautilus shells
To where "end" is no verb, but just a noun.

Will works its algorithm, too, runs down
As day flows inescapably to night
And "end" signifies nothing but a noun,
When what some call the soul takes its last flight.

As day flows inescapably to night
His little life will end its petty creep,
And what some call his soul will take its flight
Where atoms recombine but never sleep.

His little life will end its petty creep,
Shuffled and coiled relativistically
Where atoms recombine but never sleep,
The only way the cosmos sets us free.

Shuffled and coiled relativistically,
Sooner than later he will cease to be
The only way the cosmos sets us free:
Closing all checkpoints inexorably.

Arnold Johnston
Kalamazoo, Michigan

Dream of Dogs

They are running free and will not come home.
They do not know me but they sense
I am no one's master. They cover the field,
matting their coats and muddying their hard paws.
Their mouths are loose and bloody.

I am afraid. They are my charge.
So I chase them, my voice soft,
insistent.

Sunset. At last they heed me.
All turn as one and run
toward me, a black hoard
devouring the red horizon.

Leslie Schultz
Northfield, Minnesota

Be The Candle

Conjure a halo in the empty cave
of an ordinary Tuesday night.
Cohere the faltering whispers into unmistakable vows.
Accompany a longful ask toward its prayer.
Illuminate a queen's gambit during a hurricane.
Be the power to destroy
an entire house yet magically
lower the volume and draw
the faces inward.

Steven Ray Smith
Austin, Texas

Birds of North America

Perched always on the verge of flight,
this ruffled old field guide
was never one to collect bookshelf dust,
not with pages this accustomed to a good fluttering
from the likes of my ornithology-inclined grandma
who, according to the inscription, received it as a gift
from my great aunt in 1983.

Both of those old birds having long since flown
from this life, it roosts on my shelf now,
still at the ready should I need to put a name
to some curiously-plumed backyard visitor,
not unlike my grandma and great aunt,
each of whom once took me under her wing
and showed me how to see the world.

Michael Hill
Fort Collins, Colorado

The Guardians Of The Secret

Jackson Pollock

Even he doesn't know how this door works
or where it leads. The paint rains from his brush
to his floor and ashes drop, soft as snow,
from the Lucky in his lips. His red flows
to black. He tries not to let the effort show—
his uneven knowledge of this door he works
on through nights in a fury that borders lust.

It's a door that's thinner than his paint.
He stalks its edges in his animal hunt
watching figures appear like patterns in sand

when a tide draws back. His ungrateful hands
cramp, but bravely suffer for the drops that land
on his door. He adds some thinner to his paint
to craft graffiti, this mystic delinquent.

He lets dust land like his ashes. He leaves
every trace of life that his hands find
on this canvas that's lived on his cold floor
these weeks. He's done. There's more. Done. More.
He wants to end, to open his perfect door
and let dust land on his ashes—soft leaves
from a holy tree he's too lucky to see.

Mark J. Mitchell
San Francisco, California

Top Secret

I have a secret which I'll tell you, but
you have to promise that you'll never say
a word to anyone. I'm closet-gay.
Which means although I yearn for men, I shut
myself within a closet, lock it, put
an iron bar across the door and stay
inside for months, for years, all night, all day;
I dare not go outside, no matter what.

But luckily, I'm not alone, for in
my closet, many shadows live. They swim
each evening in the closet's sea with me,
while later on its beach, they stroke my skin,
caress my body and massage me, limb
by limb, before returning to the sea.

Yakov Azriel
Erfat, Isreal

Stravaging

The estuary lay still and gray
beneath a darkening sky.

Around the fabled red lake
the reeds were hushed.

The great archways of trees
held most of the rain

from me as I kept going
all day, the soft rain

on the stones and the crosses of Rath.

Ruth Holzer
Herndon, Virginia

At Dawn

the river closed
its lips over your body
and your blueblushed skin shook hard

you belong to the deep now
so I slip my feet into the stream and feed
you apples from my bag

years later I took a spin on the riverbed
It was minutes before I realized
that you swam beneath me
your spine a rope of glass
your gaping mouth
frozen
like a tunnel
red as rust

Erik Fuhrer
South Bend, Indiana



Black Cat
Photograph
Rana Williams
Hayesville, North Carolina

After Traveling

The house is in a drowsy state
of mild disarray, last-minute
packing omissions scattered
about like discarded thoughts,
and the pantry is a derelict shadow
of its former self, yielding little
but lasagna noodles, Nutella
and a box of stale bread crumbs.
Still, the dog is in his usual perch
atop the back of the couch,
and there are coffee beans in the cupboard
waiting to be ground and brewed,
so I put some water on to boil
and leaf lazily through the stack
of accumulated mail, turning over
the events of the past week
in my mind and filing them
among my collected experiences,
grateful for the opportunity
and glad to be home.

Michael Hill
Fort Collins, Colorado

Racked

Your arms, a coatrack I hung my happiness on
wrongly. Often, it toppled
from uneven weight. Your frame always unharmed.

I nearly hit a crow, while thinking of you.
Am often very nearly thinking
and driving, hitting crows

with a sturdy coatrack on my mind.
Plague of crows, plague of coatracks.
It's a problem

of the mind, only. And this
should be a relief. If the mind is weary,
let it go to sleep.

Jessica Lieberman
Columbus, Ohio

Tracking Strange

I'm talking to my dog.
Though it's not really my dog.
It's my daughter's dog.
Perhaps making it my grand-dog.
Though not a blood relative dog.
It's quite improbable for any dog
to be related to anything but other dogs.
Except wolves, coyotes, dingoes,
or other canine cousins of a sort.

He's looking at me now,
head tipped to one side,
eyes full of doggy wonder,
wondering if we could be related.
If we might have common ancestors
going way back, a genetic line of Lassies,
a congregation of curs far beyond Darwin.

He appears to be sadly pondering
whether this affair of ours –
staring at one another deeply –

could be deemed incestuous,
or down-right back-alley, dog-bitten
infectious with both of us tracking
strange, barking up the wrong tree.

Stephen Roberts
Westfield, Indiana

What Time Will It Be When It's Time

when the warped phalanges of trees let go
of moon and loam and June
and there are no pleasant rhymes for habitat loss
(give a toss) or *cryptosporidium* (residuum).

Tithonus will finally get his wish. Mandibles flitter away.

It might be the epoch of skin shedding,
the last gasp of succulents in the Berkeley Hills,
wrinkled tomatillo ghosts.
Why dust for prints made by our own feet.
It will be a sterile epoch, the male pulling out
with his empty sac, the wings of bees too thin
to leave a fossil record in the shale.

Too slick to exit on a rhyme. Mouths engorged with dust
in any case will rue those seamed black bins
trundled away, contents irreducible. Cold sublunar waste.

Carol Alexander
New York, New York

Greed at the Community Farm

The summer of no zucchini was our saddest.
With an abundance always counted on like birthday
cards, we received calls from friends and family—
Where's ours? Um, did you forget something?
But the bandits were relentless, much worse
than ever. "Everyone needs to make a living,"
we'd say during past harvests, on our knees,
picking through what they hadn't chewed. This time
they went for the roots, killing it for everyone.

Michael Mark
San Diego, California

Turquoise, Color of Summer

rain, of moss growing thick
between gaps of stones & our

garden's bony blight, it seems
cloudy, even though daily rain

has stopped; and now grass
yellows, and swallows disappear

into the white sky. It's quiet
tonight. A swarm of gnats

swirl beneath the table's lamp-
light, and sitting next to a misplaced

dime is a gray tree toad, no bigger
than the pad of my pinkie—

its shiny eyes looking up, ready
to eat its fill of so many wings—

and in that moment, I
do not wonder how the toad

got here, but believe
that an atom of bliss exists.

M. J. Iuppa
Hamlin, New York

First Days, Last Days

How does the poetry of recovery feel after this
Long deferment like the orchid at a window

The buds full, the petals pressing, yet closed,
Little fists held tight to the stem, unwilling

To yield their beauty, the purple outside, the
Other shades within. It was the deprivation,

Just enough fluid to keep alive, and how do
You fill the void of a rage that once flowed,

The biting shame, is it a man on a journey,
Or fleeing the things he loves? Yet

The shadows stay. Silhouettes of bottles against
The long mirrors, bars with old men who let you

Drink away your time, smoke-filled afternoons,
Where you learned all the ways a man's life

Can go, or stop, in the long drag of a cigarette,
Be gone in the simple flick of a wrist.

Gary Sokolow
New York, New York

Waiting for Eugene

I am perfectly sane. Ask anyone who knows me. Not that they'll use that exact word. "Old Virgil, he's a sane one alright." No, that would be crazy. They'll say that I'm rational, dependable, not one prone to flights of fancy. Mr. Flannery, he always gives me the accounts with strict deadlines and complicated fact patterns. He knows I'll deliver. And that's part of sanity, right? The ability to analyze data, draw logical conclusions. One would not be out of bounds to declare my sanity unquestionable. Which makes it so odd, so head-scratchingly strange, that I see my dead brother on a regular basis.

I see Eugene in the produce section at Whole Foods thumping melons. In line at the DMV to renew tags for a car I didn't know he owned. Arguing with a parking lot attendant over whether the twenty-five minute grace period should begin when one takes a ticket or when one finds an empty stall.

Don't misunderstand. I don't mean I see people who look like him. Men with some passing resemblance, sandy hair and a thin nose, say. Or a certain squint of the eyes that reminds me of the time he told me Nancy wouldn't be coming around anymore and disrupting our orderly life with her incessant chatter and general untidiness. I also don't see him in the "I see dead people" way. Apologies to Mr. Shyamalan, but come on, that kid was crazy and we all knew it.

No, I actually see Eugene in the flesh. If you'll pardon the expression.

I understand that this is impossible. As the lead actuary for the United Financial Life Assurance Company, I deal in probabilities. I snort with derision at notions of serendipity, fate, destiny. You can be certain that I do not believe in ghosts. Yet there he is, reading a menu at Philippe's, ordering his French dip with a side salad instead of onion rings.

Beyond the mere impossibility of dead people walking the earth, I understand that my sightings are illogical. Father Richard says the

departed go to a better place. While I find the fair trade coffee at Whole Foods to be superior to supermarket brands, the soups are salted with a heavy hand. I don't think St. Peter, or whoever's in charge of such things, would approve. No offense to the good people in the kitchen, I just prefer my soup without a side of defibrillation.

So I get it. As any sane person would, of which I number myself in their ranks. All I can say is that Eugene is dead, I see him, and he is quite real, improbable as those facts may be.

I wasn't always so certain. Once, as a test, I crept up behind him and whispered "Frau Blücher." He didn't whiny. Instead, he turned and looked me straight in the eye, shook his head ever so slightly, then walked away. Not a "who the heck are you?" shake. Not a "you have me confused with someone else" shake. He was warning me off, like maybe someone was watching and he didn't want me to get ensnared in something dangerous. He's always looked out for me, fancied himself my protector, even though he was only older by one minute and forty-two seconds.

Now I keep my distance, don't intrude on his earthly errands. I pretend to check the fabric content of a t-shirt, or engross myself in relative pixels counts of flat screen TVs. All the while observing his movements, jotting notes on the small pad I keep in my windbreaker pocket for this express purpose.

Lunch hours and after work I look for Eugene, wait for him to tip his hand, give me the clue that will reveal the truth. I may go months between sightings, then pick up his trail three times in one week.

I track his locations and activities on Excel spreadsheets, perform regression analysis when each new fact presents itself. Patterns emerge and then fade, purposes assert themselves and then recede. My original hypothesis, involving a faked death and the witness protection program, was ultimately disproven by deeper analysis. True, the authorities didn't let me see the body, but after further study into Newtonian physics, I've come to accept

their explanation: A fall from thirty-eight stories onto a concrete sidewalk renders a person unidentifiable, both as a specific human and as a member of the human race.

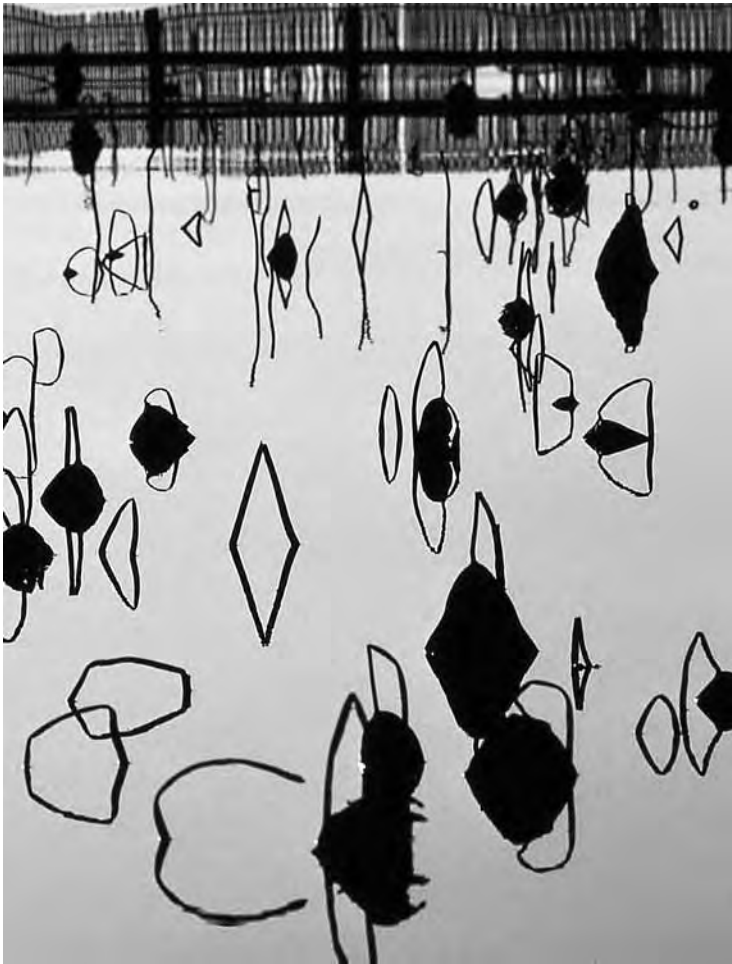
Not that I accept the official cause of death, mind you. Suicide, the death certificate screams. Now that is crazy. The handwriting was his, but the note could have meant any number of things; seven, to be precise. Two words, eight characters. Nine if you count the space. Even I don't know its exact meaning after six years of cryptanalysis.

I'm not criticizing the medical examiner. I'm sure he -- or she -- is quite competent. However, competence is not an acceptable substitute for personal knowledge. If anyone knew him, could vouch for his sanity, his inherent stability, it was me. For fifty-two years and seventeen days we spent nearly every moment together. We passed as one through childhood, shared the occasional double date, and, once his pointless Nancy flirtation ran its course, we settled together into a quiet bachelorhood. We sat side by side in matching desks at the United Financial Life Assurance Company for twenty-nine years, eight months and three days. We never spent a single night more than a wall's width apart from one another. If he was suicidal, I would have known.

He fell while trying to feed the pigeons that roost under our living room window. Or he was murdered for accidentally uncovering a plot to assassinate the president. Or some other explanation I have not yet extracted from the available data.

Some nights I lean my head out the window at precisely 2:37 a. m., close my eyes and listen. I listen for his heartbeat, the rush of air against his ears. Listen for his last thought. Was it of me? Listen as his -- our -- life shatters into pieces against the cold concrete below. "I'm sorry, too," I say into the dark night.

Mona Rose
Santa Barbara, California



Frozen Lilies, West Lake, China

Photograph

Roger Camp

Seal Beach, California

INSIDE/OUT LITERARY ARTS PROJECT FEATURE

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Lost Girl

little black girl, little white girl
i am neither,
the little black girl with large curls,
nor the little white girl with blue eyes.

i am a little brown girl, with confusing eyes
and a mysterious smile.
my name is lost, so I am lost.
i am a girl who everyone thinks is a little bright girl.
can you tell i am drowning just by my eyes?

Destinee Galvan

In My Pocket

In my pocket I shove my fists as far as I can.
I can feel the anger radiating from my hands.
Finally I relax enough to take my hands out.
They open to reveal a crumbled letter
with the U.S Army emblem on it.
It bore my brother's name.
That's all that was left of him.

Flor Hernandez

Where I Am From

I am from the baseball field
where I spend most of my time.
I can smell fresh cut grass from miles
away and I love it. If the sun is out
then it's a perfect day to play ball.

Crack open this house and you will see
couches shaped like baseball gloves,
and trophies that smell like sweat.
All you can sense is vibes and sacrifices
as our family's blood has baseball dirt in it.

Miguel Ambriz

Flume

Flume,

Come to earth where there is milk
to pour on cereal, nights of endless
darkness to stare into. And soaring skyscrapers
tickling the clouds. Come to earth, Flume,
where we have warm socks, soft blankets,
and hot chocolate. Earth, where there's winds
that speak in different languages. Come to earth
where you can flip the page in a book with one finger.
Earth, where when you can say hello to someone
and life pours from the sky.

Omar Cervantes

God Standing In Front Of Hitler After His Death

hello my son, welcome. yes, you are long gone.
probably should've been sooner. it makes me sad to say
you have disappointed me. what were you thinking?
that mustache? why? couldn't grow it wider than that?
anyways, besides that misfortune, you let many lives
and souls suffer, you still think you did the right thing, huh?
well, let's see how you like it when the tables turn.
what do i mean? the only logical thing to do is let you live
in the shoes of someone you made suffer. easy peasy
lemon squeezy. what does that mean? not sure, but i believe
that's the new lingo the cool kids are using.
why not just make you go to hell?
well, wouldn't that be easy for you.
no, you're going back as a Jew.
let's see you try to cook in their shoes.

Paola Reyes

Skinny

Skinny boy skinny.
"Skinny boy," they say, "don't even eat at home."
Skinny boy look like he ain't got no skin just bones.
Skinny boy not strong.
Skinny boy weak.
Skinny boy says, "But maybe you're wrong."
Skinny boy looks like he came from Africa.
Skinny boy came from his Black family home.

Torres Williams

Delinquent

Today my name is Dark.
The police think my name is Delinquent.
Trump thinks my name is Illegal Alien.

Diego Orozco

Ain't I Sweet?

My skin tone is
root beer that has been shook
and transforms into wet sand
that sits under the ocean floor.

My skin is a bowl filled with gravy,
like a lazy dog
that ate a whole meatloaf
and then collapsed on the front porch.

I am that maple tree
giving
quiet syrup
to those I love

ain't I sweet?
I am a lion,
the king of the jungle confident

ain't I sweet?

End of a cliff
tree branch
with a lonely
leaf.

Deon Burkett Jr.

Mean Girl

Mean girl don't care
Mean girl is a bully
Mean girl can make you cry
Mean girl don't cry
Mean girl has no feelings
Mean girl hurts your feelings just for fun
Mean girl has no friends
Mean girl slaps people just because
Mean girl don't play
Mean girl stays to herself
Mean girl crazy
Mean girl not friendly
Mean girl too big
Mean girl has man hands
Mean girl not smart
Mean girl has ugly look

Mean girl don't cry

Dymond Black

It Started With A Name

It started with a name,
“stupid”
“retard”
“dummy”

“BIPOLAR”

Felt like bones breaking inside my body.
Felt like nails pushing up through the balls of my feet.
Feels like someone holding my heart in their hand and
squeezing it until it burst.

It would happen in my old school,
in gym,
everyone laughing.

I wanted to run and hide
in the corner,
sit and cry,
but
I stood up for myself instead.

They called me
“stupid”
“retard”
“dummy”

“BIPOLAR”

I am a warrior.

Dasianique Birden

Mark Me ‘Here’

They say
I’m unidentified
but
I am noticed.
I am
here
like a stop sign at the end of the road.

They say
I’m a hood rat,
but
I am a girl,

who's going to make it out of
'the hood'
and be a scientist
who studies
rats.

I am not
unidentified
or a hood rat
or another 'statistic'

I am
HERE.

Chandler Nicole

A Poem Ain't Nothin'

A poem ain't nothin' unless a basketball dribbles, goes through net,
or it's the sweet sound of the whistle and the "swoosh."
I want poems my Dad talks about like they are the latest sports stats
with his friends.
I want Fruity Pebbles and milk slipping off the spoon, words.
Words that end world hunger, but start on my block first, words.
Words that keep my shoelaces tied.
I want to hold a poem underneath me to break my fall for protection.
I want a poem for my Grandma in the morning,
"I'm tired of you staying up all night."
Words that bring back my Grandpa from the grave.
Words that leave me with a crispy hairline.
I won't write poems unless they are sand and palm trees, good memories,
unless they are cocoa butter on elbows.

Donald Whitlock



Hawk 2
Photograph
Kristin DeKam
Otsego, Michigan

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