

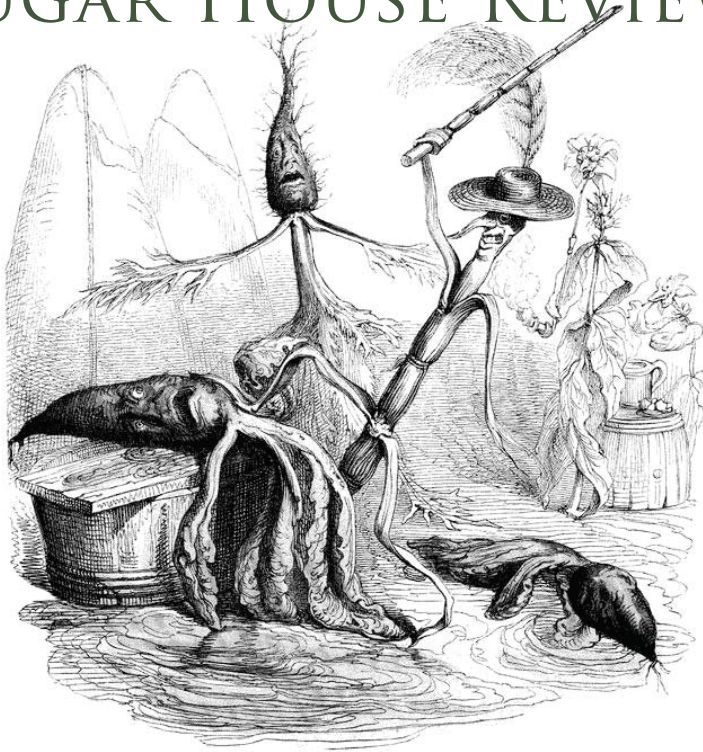


SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

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SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW



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SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY

WILLIAM NEUMIRE	
The Arctic Tern	1
MARIO CHARD	
The Regret	2
PIMONE TRIPLETT	
I Dream of Jeannie: Parabolic Lens	4
To All The Houseplants I Have Killed	6
ANDREW C. GOTTLIEB	
Ritual Leavings	7
JAN C. MINICH	
The Upstairs Lights	8
Wayne Bridge Road	10
DIYA CHAUDHURI	
Dynamo	11
Urban Gardening	12
Elegiac	14
HANNAH CRAIG	
Exhibit with Infant Mummy, Headrest, Canoe	15
PETER GOLUB	
Evil, Pannacotta	16
STEVEN CRAMER	
Versions of Mandelstam	17
From <i>Clangings</i> : "Why do we talk in you? We rant what's best for you.	19
From <i>Clangings</i> : I was twin pencils. A fit in one sex.	20
From <i>Clangings</i> : Then I left my apartment, got down where...	21
STEVE FELLNER & PHIL E. YOUNG	
Doctor's Note	22
Secret Ingredients	23

CURTIS JENSEN	
The Sun	24
JIM PETERSON	
Eye to Eye	25
Black	26
MARIA MELENDEZ	
Sapo Dorado—A Recent Extinction	28
Starts a Family After the War	29
DONALD REVELL	
Talons	30
TIFFANY BRENNEMAN	
Father, Mountain, Fire	31
ANDREW HALEY	
Inside the Sail	32
SALLY MOLINI	
<i>At Hera's Healing Arts</i>	33
Feeling Undeclared at the PO	34
EMILIE LINDEMANN	
Turning on an ice-blue Kitchenaid mixer [the first time]	35
Troubleshooting problems	36
SUNDIN RICHARDS	
The Hurricane Lamp	37
KATIE KINGSTON	
After Reading Lorca's <i>Romance Sonámbulo</i>	38
MICHAEL SOWDER	
When You Leave My House	39
Fire Sermon	40
Something Keeps Fixing Things	41

CUTTER STREEBY	
All Souls Cemetery	42
The Act of Capes	43
JENNIFER WHITAKER	
Rumplestiltskin	44
AMY PLETTNER	
Kissing Cousins	45
ROB TALBERT	
epistles. this country. sun like a pocket watch.	46
corrections officer with a DUI	47
NICK RIPATRAZONE	
The Plot of a Western	49
Farmer's Market	50
MARY CHRISTINE DELEA	
My Husband, Excited About Serfs	51
JOHN LAMBREMONT, SR.	
Variety Gala	52
MARIE GAUTHIER	
Sibling Bolero	53
VALERIE WOHLFELD	
Doll	54
DAN BEACHY-QUICK	
Epithalamium	55
Hum or Um (2)	56
Three Songs	57
JONATHAN H. SCOTT	
The Tangle	58

EMMA RAMEY	
The Proposal	59
Flash Mob Teen Violence	60

JAMES NORCLIFFE	
A pink dolphin, made of glass	61

ROB CARNEY	
Whatever Other Headlines Can Wait	62
Home Appraisals	63

ANTHONY OPAL	
On the Lack of Sirens Heard	70
Hades	71

PETE SIPCHEN	
Hamlet Redux	72

BOOK REVIEWS

MICHAEL MCLANE	
<i>The Book of Whispering in the Projection Booth</i>	73
by Joshua Marie Wilkinson	

CURTIS JENSEN	
<i>Duties of an English Foreign Secretary</i> by Macgregor Card	77

LIZ KAY	
<i>Meet Me at the Happy Bar</i> by Steve Langan	81

BIOGRAPHIES

CONTRIBUTORS A–Z	84
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SUGAR MAKERS

STAFF	92
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THE ARCTIC TERN

Fact: The tern sees more daylight than any creature on earth
as it turns at each pole before the end of each summer.
At both white ends of the world there is a warmest moment,
a courtship hour where the right dance
can catch the right eye. In therapy this flight
is called avoidance. In archetype this is called the quest.
In science, migration. In a song
this is the refrain.

Once, overwhelmed by a patch of strawberries,
I spent the whole day running
from the biggest berry to the next biggest, stuffing
them in my red-stained mouth with my red-stained hands
not for fear of their vanishing but for the taste
that was everywhere in me.

THE REGRET

How absurd the house,
the rooms, the boxes,
and the street of houses.
How we see nothing

but the face of a house
that borders a road
we've walked so long
both going and coming

back. Strange that even
the castaway starving
at sea, for whom the mental
re-creation of food has

become his food,
would not have entered
a house that each day
lines his way back.

Who began that first
morning in the water
with the restoration
of the meal itself, which

alone could not fill him.
Who later restored the plate
that held it, the table
and chair. How I've lost

nothing, but stay awake
in borrowed beds
to re-envision every latch
in my waking city.

How each time my
eyes close with fever
I still walk back
to the street, to the house

I only passed,
to the door unlocked
and the kitchen bare
except the table,

to the chair I pulled
aside, to the plate
I left unmoved,
the food I left to eat.

I DREAM OF JEANNIE: PARABOLIC LENS

A zoom through white latticed windows reveals
his coffee table, her bottle. Past mother of pearl cut
outs skimming the glassy one-lobed gourd she lives in,
she sleeps lightly astride the pink divan's

silken plumpness. Dreaming, our genie, en-
gendering ingenious edens on set,
circa '70, Hollywood, CA. What lowers
slowly is the boom. A dream inside the dream

slated for morning, her master. Also what lets
down along this gossamer imaginary,
a coffee pot that pours itself, a spoon
to sweeten his pick-me-up so he need not lift

a finger. Here to look is to labor.
Take the bowl itself, colorized an over-
boiled pea green that contains the sugar
first extracted by the girl's ancient

brethren, who ground the grains
into a fine powder in what's now Persia.
Inventing as well this same lens
whose arc bends over time to house

the parabola, the parable, the story
which keeps circling back like point A's
love at first sight for point B. Don't blink.
Don't miss the blonde spun sugar

ponytail coiling and twisting above her
beautiful head-of-a-pin living room that's
Russian dolled inside the bottle inside
the TV box, a homing beacon to millions

of homes where east meets west by way of
the tube. This framed square furnished us
the once-upon-a-place called Cape Kennedy,
dawning in the airspace what was and shall be

a new generation. We as a nation
“choose go to the moon not because it is easy
but because it is hard.” The dog in the capsule
called “Mutttnik” went up and never came down.

Others came home in bags or missing
arms and legs. A lot of it hazy as your dad
shoved the screen on its black castors
across the room until even you

saw and heard the era as a style
ready to be stripped down
that was. Rest assured, the window-shaped
rectangle of reflection just hugging

the buxom bowl is camera and camera only.
If you cut to the one where she blinks him back
to Babylon, taking on the beast turns out to mean
the giant has plans for more

torture, starring one tied up hero
and a red hot poker that turns on a blink
into peacock feather, the image sweetened,
the trick of crystal ball, disappearing.

TO ALL THE HOUSEPLANTS I HAVE KILLED

Paper-chapped, heavy fall frost not
banked on. Swerved out the rockery, a brittle
residuum. Hebe, e pluribus unum, liking
brights and light shade, moderate water,
no wet feet. I bring the thing in only
to watch it fail, some second impulse
scraping the land, nakedest, to stress.
Open, you lavender-blue cluster, what's left
of your busy luck. As in what eco of echoes
hollows this hearing amounts to: arrest me,
thing, or keep your place. Also, the mind, long
enough over-looked, seems less than to leave
your copper burnt curls snagged past the saying.
Dear dirt: bloom where you are, off the box.

RITUAL LEAVINGS

We went to your stone and waited.
The snow showed our past,
gave us away in our giving.

Block letters, bright sun, frozen grass.
Winter was listening
while we lined our things

along the short granite cliff.
Three chocolates in lockstep,
a latte, a small happy Buddha,

the three dollar kind in red plastic
with his bag and his look.
A small book of poems.

The only thing missing: the photos,
your smiling. This losing
dismantles our notions of wholeness:

cold fingers, a frivolous mingling,
a single crow hunched in an oak.
Who's not lonely in the cold?

The trees have retreated excepting the firs
with their green skirts and thin leaves.
Needles, the decline, goodbyes, pine

scent. You've left us behind
to a ritual leaving. A comb,
a coin, an orchid, bone whistles.

A milling of beliefs at the coldest
of stone, our clinging past
like a piling, a raft, and a rope.

THE UPSTAIRS LIGHTS

I put the bolo tie
back in the drawer that smells of cedar
and old watches and remember
carrying small animals
through a room in the home by ponds,
then alter in the night sky,
Venus and Jupiter to the southwest
just below the crescent moon,
the same dresser, same top drawer
but in this room in a farmhouse now,
my father, mother, and sister all dead.

Outside, sounds of another Ohio autumn,
a stillness, my brother who lost
his heart in the mines and the scotch,
who never wanted to know me
but wanted to hit me
when I kept saying “fuck”
in front of his teenage kids.

The drawer, like several inches of ice,
the strip-cut that should have been
a pond, will be the kind of pond
I used to skate on, the way loss
is understood as always a place
though not how you always remember it,
headstones in an unfenced clearing
in the forest. Curly maple? Cedar drawer?

My father walked as if he were
always afloat, the dry land
pulling him back, an easy gait
so he could tell me when I return,
about each tree on the island,

each rise of land over rocky shoals.
I walk farther into the desert
than ever before, but return to see
his last Ohio spring, the dogwoods
already beginning to blossom,
bullfrogs and spring peepers,
the bridge over one pond to the others.

Outside this farmhouse,
sumacs help hold the strip-soil,
a canyon of blue water
that one day will be wild again,
but slowly, as if moving backwards
I'll have to watch the healing,
ignore the recent scratches on my hand,
the scars like trails
circling the ponds, moving off,
at times into the woods I remember
looking in that drawer as a child.

I learned from my father
and grandfather why I would
have to be alone, why
I would marry and have a son
and prefer only their company,
and why I'll think of them so often,
hiking the Roost or the Swell,
or three days out on the boat,
how I'll slow down the last day away,
looking forward to seeing them
but slowing down still more
and returning home that much later.

WAYNE BRIDGE ROAD

The moment you lost control of the jeep
I must have been thinking what our
mother's loss must have meant for you.
You said you had been watching her
that morning before you left for town,
on her hands and knees
in the flower garden, how her dying
was as easy as her pulling off the road
because she'd dropped her cigarette again.
I think of you sitting there after her last breath,
listening to the woods she never passed
without saying how much she loved them.
After a few quiet moments, you opened
the passenger door and walked to town,
to the diner for breakfast.
"I didn't know what else to do,"
you said. "It's where we were going."

DYNAMO

Light sifts lazy as sand through cat-mangled blinds,
lies flayed across the desk. A pencil traverses the slanting surface:
stomach, back; elbows, knees. The page is blank, its collar
starched, its hem hitting the middle of the knee:
always with the moralizing. I'm calling back that romp
through Dover Castle—the secret wartime tunnels,
the secret wartime shitters. I'm restructuring myself
five years younger—slimmer hips, different boyfriend,
and we are in the middle of it, the gaudy, the staged,
this picaresque castle. Our tour guide is gerbil-pitched
and pock-marked, the audio track piped through these dark chambers
rumbling, comically interactive. I'm flickering through history,
irreproachable again; our titters scintillate through these concrete halls.
How poetic. How mercifully devoid of virtue.

URBAN GARDENING

I. Fourth Ward

Music growls up from the pavement here.
Up and down Boulevard,
the jobless gather, babies hanging
from their mothers' hips.
Men, bare-chested, settle deep
into their swaggers. Clusters of the loitering
bloom at street corners, passing the day
by the ebb and wane of shadows
now long and distorted, now too short.
The local saying goes
it's like playing Frogger, my drive
a daily reflex test. Men bound into my path,
their hands negotiating with falling waistbands,
or else they shuffle, their eyes set on drivers
in a dare. We detached observers,
we yuppies hurtling Camry-clad
past Dr. King's church,

we care too little to roll up our windows.
Every few blocks, a teddy bear
pinned to a post, bouquets of flowers
nodding their heads in the breeze.

II. The Milltown Arms

Terrence used to work the kitchen
with a joint wedged between his fingers
as he sipped on a beer stolen
from the back fridge. He'd sit at the bar
under framed uniforms of dead cops
and croon out some Springsteen
for the patrons, one or two
in our dusty corners. If the owner minded
the scent of pot drifting from his kitchen,
he never let on. He was curious,
and grotesquely so,

watching a man giggle his way
through a life, gazing for a moment
at his own daughter's face, tattooed
on his forearm, and wondering how he can sing
like that when they buried his daughter
with the bullets still in her.

III. Hosea L. Williams

At the gas station,
the race wars seethe on, the Africans peering
from their bullet-proof booth at this strange
and much feared cousin.

A woman's arm twitches wildly
from the elbow, her gait unnerving,
uneven. She stands in line
for her lottery tickets, tucks a Colt .45
between her legs as she fumbles
with loose change.

The police here have concerns. They pass
every five minutes. A hoopty weaving through lanes,
piloted by red eyes or whiskey-vomit breath
is a nuisance to be intimidated,
then released with brief warning:

not a concern. On this street
we fail every day in some way. We turn away
the early morning hookers from our shops.

We steal our breakfast from tip jars
and hotfoot it. Now, a letter addressed

*To the niggers: The next time
you come into my yard or walk down my street,
I will be taking aim, and asking questions later.
I do have a few shallow graves to fill.*

ELEGIAC

The repossession of my bones was not a pretty thing
or an easy one, fingers flung deep
into the forest's underbrush. They never found
my big toe. Settled into dirt, it looked like a cracked stone
dropped from the beak of a passing bird who forgot
and cawed, defiant, against the silence, winging itself higher
on the current of my creaking breaths.

I watched the police mark where they found the bulk of my skull,
saw them excavate it, smooth, without the troubled acne of skin.

He had placed me there so happily,
bringing just one bone on each trip. A single joint
from my left thumb set lovingly in the whisper
of a feeble stream born of a summer storm
today, the club of my right femur wedged high
in the branches of a tree the next.

I'd grown to feel whole like that, broad,
my body reached for miles then, my fingers rumpled feathers
on every bird in this forest.

EXHIBIT WITH INFANT MUMMY, HEADREST, CANOE

They placed my baby in Exhibit A,
x-rayed in its tiny bark boat,
with gold overlay and painted blue eyes.
Next to the display of tooth-picks
from 16 distinct cultures.
Bone toothpicks, jade, paper, stone.
All of these, and yet I find there's nothing
that can really crack the tooth from its meat.

Nearby, Exhibit B—
moths pinned to an underlay of soft light,
no longer drawn, really, but still so near.
Generations of green beetles reveal
genetic faults and figures—one set of wings
or three. What they don't say—these sorts

of accidents mean very little. A crack in the urn,
not ancient fate, but a technician confusing
her left foot for her right. Someone's spirit
is jarred loose. A little DNA departs
with a piece of heaven, walking away,
even now, on a lab tray. Our fires unlit

when the wood is brought inside, doused
with formaldehyde, covered in shellac.
The stones that ought to strike lie, instead,
side by side. The placard says it all—
the names of those who found, say
an entire grave. Date from. Age approximate.
But not anything about hope, which from
its first moment was just a howling.*

*The last line of this poem is from Rilke's "Jeremiah."

EVIL, PANNACOTTA

In the painting a couple sits under a tree by the sea
They are sharing a bottle of wine
The air is more beautiful than the sound of Finnish peasants

There is that darkness
Rising with the moon in the January sky
Between the stars
Melting into the nothingness of the universe
“What’s melting?
For Christ sake what are you talking about?!”
I don’t know

Scientifically I understand why I am destined to fail
But my ambition, which is equally scientific, locks herself in the bathroom
And when I finally fall asleep she begins to quietly cry
While a glass owl passes across the sky

“You should do something,” she says.
“I’m only beginning to understand,” replies the owl.

VERSIONS OF MANDELSTAM

1909

What should I do with this body?
I'm it and it's me. Who do I thank

for the quiet luck of breath, for being
alive: please tell me. I'm very good

at gardening and flowering. I'm
my own companion in the world's

solitary. Breathing on the window
of infinity, I can see a pattern

in the warm haze left on the glass,
a sign I hadn't recognized till now:

it condenses, gone; but the design
I love can't be effaced. That stays.

*

1933

We live numb to the homeland under our feet.
Get too close, our whispers disperse to mist.

But anywhere you stop to talk, the talk
gravitates toward the Kremlin mountaineer—

fingers fat as earthworms, his thumbs slugs;
his every word a gram, a pound, a ton.

Laughter wets his roach-brown upper lip;
it glitters spit-and-polish, like his boots.

His thuggish chicken-men encircle him.
One by one, as he dandles them, they croon

and simper, or miaow: Siberian cats.
But only he's allowed to bellow out

sentence after sentence, like horseshoes
flung at the groin, brain, forehead, eyes.

A firing squad floods his mouth with sweet
relish, his chest warm as a hug from home.

*

Voronezh, 1937

I'm still not dead, I have company
in a woman wearing the sort of rags I wear.
Across the tundra, bliss still reaches me
through fog, and squalling snow, and hunger.

My poverty's a miracle, what I lack
a type of wealth. Alone, heartened, at peace,
I kneel to the night and to the day. Work
that sings from a full throat must be blameless.

The sad man runs from snarling dogs
on a shadow's orders, into the wind's edge.
The poor man, waking from a coma, begs
his shadow: *can you spare some change?*

FROM *CLANGINGS*

“Why do we talk in you? We rant what’s best for you.
Others bring blockheadedness. Our voices chime
brainswoons. Snow carpets alyssum nearby the asylum.
Whippy Germans, we’re jumbo, you know, not mumbo.”

“Why do we talk in you? We’re wild sheikhs, amigo.
Little wrecked rex, what we preach with our shrieks
refluxes your inbred, steppe-tundra freeze reflex.
A good sniff, out snorts your inner wooly rhino.”

“Why do we talk in you? Synapses need grease.
Otherwise, you’re a fusty, erstwhile rapscallion,
runner-up misnomer, antidisestablishmentarianism.
Not much fruit in furrows shallow as a crease.”

“Why do we talk in you? Think it through—
you’re a souvenir? handiwork witchcraft from Salem?
horse-drawn monarch, comeliest in your kingdom?
Simple as simple dimple: devils, we bedevil you.”

“Why don’t we stop? Your agony, dumbo, to cop
to Dr. Hopeful. He’s fond of you, we know, frightfully,
but talks like a peep. We’re your perped-up psyche.
Our tongues exceed mouthings. Our viles go deep.”

FROM *CLANGINGS*

I was twin pencils. A fit in one sex.
Began half a sketch; half, thrown dice.
Out of Mom's armoire spilled my voice;
from Dad's tux, my polka-dot socks.

Being man-made's made me mad.
I'm dandled by a teeter totter—
no fulcrum; a hammer-haft dare.
If in me's a war, am I a war world?

Up goes an end, another comes down.
When others saw grace, I saw oafs
loafing on glittering snow-loaves.
Down goes the other end; up came

a splintered-out, iced-on ladder.
Bindweed bound pine twice its size.
If that's all that's left, set it ablaze.
No chance this fever gets better

just because birds say it's summer
in winter. Maybe it isn't. Anyone
ever scribbled so off a pencil's plan
to explain its eraser? No, but not never.

FROM *CLANGINGS*

So I left my apartment, got down where
I tried getting going outgoing. You know,
taking control, like when you say “hello
there, Blue Beautiful.” Bossed me over

to the bar to make noise out of nonsense.
Why do people love hair? Because it twirls.
Why does my stucco computer store girls
who say o god not him? Frankensense,

my eyes bled resin, hardened to tears.
Out of her rocks, or at least rocky soil,
I wanted the quality of her bloom; smell,
aroma. How *her* was mine; *mine*, hers?

Since you asked, please remember not
answering is no odder than Nevada’s
name. Nevada, my muskalot sonata’s
non grata. Called her after her street.

Goodnight kisses, traded in ice trays.
What’s my touch? A zillion electrons
rejected by somebody’s other zillions.
Lay down light, dear gone-as-always.

DOCTOR'S NOTE

His doctor told him that he was allergic to music. This explained the sudden rashes at the Scottish bagpipe festival, the nosebleeds at the high school chorus recital of Carmina Burana, the deep red welts that appeared halfway through a set by the band Sparklehorse at the 40 Watt club. But the incident that finally caused him to go to the doctor was when he joined his wife and his mother in singing "Happy Birthday to You" to his newborn daughter. Once he joined the chorus, he started to have a seizure so severe that everyone froze until his wife called an ambulance and his mother knelt next to him, doing her best to make sure he didn't bite his own tongue. She began to softly hum what she thought was an old Portuguese lullaby, partially to soothe him but mostly to calm her own nerves. It proved to be a terrible mistake. "Oh meu bebê na floresta/ Meu bebê precioso na floresta/ Meu pequeno na sombra/ Na sombra da floresta." He vomited blood. That incident seemed like nothing now, nothing compared to his anxiety in protecting himself from this affliction. The doctor tried to stifle his laughter when he asked if there was a shot or a pill he could take for this sort of thing. "What do I do, doc... what do I do for a life without music?" The doctor shook his head. "With every allegry there is some synthetic. Some miraculous substitution. For those who cannot smell flowers without their eye ducts swelling shut..." he opened a drawer, pulled out an aerosol can, sprayed the air. "Voila! The synthetic rose. Inhale! Safe, fake, and nothing like the real thing. But, at the same time, just enough." The doctor rose, obviously eager to bring this meeting to an end. "You will find enough to pretend. Songs without music, stories without cadence, poems without rhythm, beat, or open throat. Great humanitarian committees are working in droves to produce such fabrications as we speak. In blue ribbon batches, with only a minimal application fee. I understand there's a whole cottage industry..." And with that, the doctor pushed the man out the door, to the waiting room, and in front of the receptionist, who, with probity, produced the bill. "But, I don't..." began the man, and then realized he had nothing to say. At least the doctor was kind enough to simply shake his head and then make a call to the management of the office building, asking if the elevator music could be shut off until the patient made it safely outside, where no birds ever seemed to be around, singing unnecessarily.

SECRET INGREDIENTS

By the time she died, she'd only learned how to cook one thing. This didn't cause her any shame. Everyone loved her dish. "What's the secret ingredient?" they'd ask, and she'd tell them, and then they'd say, "Really?" and go home and try it themselves. It never turned out, no matter how many times they attempted it. Frustrated, they'd call her and ask, "We used your secret ingredient. Why didn't it work?" to which she would say, "Oh. I should have said, There are two secret ingredients. I'm not giving the second one up." But the truth was, there was no second secret ingredient. The trick was simply in combining the original ingredients in just the right way, and it could only be done by intuition, not by plan. Of course they'd all get it wrong. She took perverse pleasure imagining her friends plumbing the spice rack, wracking their brains with each new bungled try. What was missing? Was it sage? Was it cinnamon? Was it (god forbid) anise? Tasting and tasting, and every taste wrong. It was none of these things. It was nothing. No one, she'd laugh to herself, thinks of nothing. But nothing was going to stand in the way of her best friend, who was determined to find out that secret ingredient, no matter what. Her best friend dropped by, e-mailed, called at all hours, first with guesses, then with pleading, finally, with threats. "Look," said her friend, "if you don't tell me the ingredient, our friendship is over." Their friendship was literally going to end over nothing. And, still, for some reason, she discovered that she could not, would not, tell the truth. One night, after their children and husbands had fallen asleep, they both snuck out of their houses and met at the local park. "This is it," said. It was like the climactic showdown in a spy novel. The air was so quiet outside that all you could hear was the emptiness of an ultimatum, the dumb show of refusal. Standing here, so silent for so long, the women grew tired. They called a truce and laid on their backs. With still nothing much to say, they began to admire the stars. Those dumb ornaments! Those useless things! Things that begged to be snatched from the sky, that ever-present nothingness. Why not be as shameless as they were in their kitchen, grabbing whatever they needed from their cupboards and cabinets, pretending it solved, for the time being, the answer to whatever secrets they kept just for the sake of it.

THE SUN

Two mules marking one spiral of a mill's
Archimedean scrollpump have frozen themselves,
Their muleselves, in a pumpeddy this winter.

At one time these mules moved magnetically
Through wholly other fields in the burning mill,
Through spicule pools, through flaring filaments
At the surface of the mill's incandescent currents.

Now at the quicker turnstyle of death and of birth
Our mules are former treedwellers on a plain of ice
In another time, in our time, we lift our mule snouts
And we wonder at the mill reflected in the moon.

Surely we thought the spiral would freeze with us;
Slowly in from the sides we mules have frozen,
The scrollpump has not—the mill has not gone dark.

EYE TO EYE

on a photograph by Harriet

Holding up the camera
close to that long face,
you capture your reflection
in the horse's eye.
You are looking out
of the horse's eye
as well as in. And I am looking
at the black-framed photo
into the horse's liquid eye
over the camera
past your right shoulder
into the open white barn
down the long aisle to the far blue door
where light and darkness
spin like yin and yang.
On the day you took that picture
the horse swayed
and drifted in his cross tie
like a boat within a slip.
You are the one
who sends your energy deep
into his mind and muscle
and bids him to travel
through gates and fields,
over forest roads and trails,
sun in your eye or behind the ridge,
days full of birds and wind.
I see you in his eye
and I am in there with you,
mountains rising up in their gray-blue grace,
the cloud-riddled sky beyond.
We are everything, and nothing.
The horse's eye contains us,
and releases us.

BLACK

They are talking to each other again
like a gang of kids on Saturday night.

Notice their eyes
as they notice you,
how quick they dismiss,
those skinny legs and gray feet
like charred branches,
beaks black as the sole
of a basketball shoe.

They're all about the same size,
big enough to scare the black-hearted ghost
right out the top of your head
if you happen to surprise one
busy with its carrion feast in the beargrass
beneath some lonely cottonwood,

although the last one truly surprised by a man
died a hundred years ago
in the company of an old medicine woman.
He knew how to tell three stories
in his sky-scraping language:
you know, the one about making the world
out of barbed wind and solar dust—
testy ingredients at best—and the one
about calling forth rascal man
and rascal woman from the black mud—
much more willing material—
and the one about jumping from some cliff
to catch a cold current into the canyon
so black with its own inner shadow
the river became only the sound of rushing water.

And he was blacker than the black dirt you can still find
in those creek-running hollers deep in the woods.
More the black of a beetle's back
in a country where the trees still grow so tall
that when they disappear in the sky
they are black and moving
like the crow in your memory's eye.

SAPO DORADO—A RECENT EXTINCTION

One thousand day-glo toads appeared in a handful of muddy seeps that spring, los machos stretching their tiny orange suits in a clamber to get at las hembras, who lay like glistening yellow buddhas of the mud. No one knew the toad count from all the Monteverde mountain-puddles together, but you just missed them. A few years back, a couple cloud-forest kilometers higher, you almost could've touched them. They were just here.

Back through a little drizzle and fizz of time, you'll find a writhing "toad ball," ten males throwing their two-inch selves all over a female's softball-sized back, slapping and shoving each other, wanting to live, as much as they want the next guy to get nailed by a bird. Don't be fooled by the females' sanguine refusal to rouse themselves, their sedentary meditation amidst the frenzy. They want to live, too. They spool this want

through their perfect insides, globe it to tan and black pearls, sphere it out to the fates. They've made enough spawn, so their natural histories say, for each clutch to withstand depredation and still live on. Squirt-and-go parenting's no less urgent than what passes, in our case, for nurture, mind you—if the Maker had ordained teacher conferencing and soccer game snack rotations for *Bufo* species, they'd carefully mark

calendars, insist their little ones practice goal-kicks, and they'd read aloud twenty minutes each night to support the tadpoles' fluency. But such is not their strategy. After a blazing crossfire of the sexes, the golden toads plowed back into mud. The next green season eleven came out, the year after, only one. Stretch your fingers into the drifting mist and you'll almost touch him, the last sapo dorado, spotted a little ways higher, a year or two back.

STARTS A FAMILY AFTER THE WAR

Of all the things he gave me—

growl, prowl, patrol

for control of our hallways, furnace, windows,

an MP's dark suspicion, and machismo's

spit and boot-heel for the female

itch and urge that I took after, as a teen—

of these, the greatest gift is trees.

Wash of coastal fog

sends green tones one note lower—

valley oak grove in coast foothills,

Sunol Regional Wilderness.

I'm ten and hiking Flag Hill with my dad

who can't stand keen-edged noise,

daily dish,

prescrip- or subscrip-.

Perched at the top of a tree upslope,

a golden eagle means

breathless regal blessed we:

let's see how close we can get.

TALONS

Somewhere between Jew and free
Animal my Jesus makes a way
Narrow as the wind's space
In roses over thorns

Fig-tree
Disappointed money-changer
Soul most of all a domestic animal
Dreaming at the soft edges of death
Wilderness when eagle means no harm
And prey adores
The perfect talons

Nothing follows any of those
Roses are torn and the wind
Passes through them all alone

FATHER, MOUNTAIN, FIRE

After "Abraham Sacrificing Issac" by Laurent De La Hire, 1650

1.

See Abraham's hand touching
his son's neck, as if checking his pulse,
knife behind his back, how De La Hire
captured the tragedy of being human by hiding
even the wings of the angel in shadow.

2.

And this is how some try to explain the desire
that would cause a father to bring fire
up a mountain to sacrifice his son.
A man and a woman ate an apple
after they lay together, because even then,
we loved the idea of hunger.

3.

In the end of the story, an angel
is sent to keep us from the only place
on earth where in the cool of the evening God
can be heard walking.

4.

And so De La Hire tells a story long
withheld from us: dark on the mountain,
somewhere in the distance, an angel whispers
that God has relented. But all Abraham can hear
are sounds that hurt his ears: wood burning, an animal
trapped in a thicket, struggling endlessly,
a boy's heart beating.

INSIDE THE SAIL

Inside the sail the creatures without sea's tenure fasten their inscribed amulets around each other's necks, sharing wildness ascribed to prophecy: ruin assured where mauve spreads across the vast belt of the horizon, a good lunch if the gulls whirl clockwise against the counter-clockwise wobble of the mast. We had oysters pulled up from a dinghy two Africans rowed out to where we are—far from the horizon. The officers are laughing behind closed doors. Bach and claret are nameless in the sty. The pigs fattened. The goats a good lunch.

The center of the ship bears the mainmast in its gyration holding it outward as it wobbles counter-clockwise, as one holds a gold doubloon. Far from fixity, we wake to gulls and the sky thick with light in the salt of the air in the hours before the sun. It is like the fixings of a good lunch: this permeable salty air filled with the beginnings of light. We are in time for the change of wind that beats us flapping against the turn of the tide. We are hungry. Our amulets swinging with each wave.

AT HERA'S HEALING ARTS

Not sure why the name, maybe it's an allusion to the doctor's chronic *hubris*, the real Hera probably on some lonely Pindos peak not healing anyone, still mocking her husband's lightening-stubbed bunions while I wait for those whispery metal threads, sharp snarkish points mapping the body's secret channels, subtle flow no microscope can find. On the wall, signed photo of a rock star happy with his thick beard of needles, each long pin a gleaming hair. Louisa talked me into this, thinks her level of expertise is a kind of East-West divinity: *Don't worry. I'm the best. I know everything.* Can't believe she says that to her patients, makes me want to run but who doesn't suffer from a little blind omniscience.

FEELING UNDECLARED AT THE PO

Standing in line half dream, half deferred
will, a null shuffle, afternoon news as trance,
tv tilted above our heads a weighted sleep,
a series of collect-and-empty segments.
Between greeting cards and trashcan lids
marked *Waste*, the endless wars seem all
one war, humanity's ongoing helplessness
with itself. Here where the strange
lagging trail of the mail ends and begins,
even simple communication takes too long
though what do I know, another disaffected
mote in the vulnerable careen. Our line
now reaches back to the automatic doors
that open and close as we shift from
one foot to the other, waiting to get out.

TURNING ON AN ICE-BLUE KITCHENAID MIXER [THE FIRST TIME]

This is like wearing your first bra. Only the Kitchenaid mixer is the start of a *partnership*. Steve marvels at the ice blue body. I sleep with the spiral-bound Kitchenaid cookbook and the universe holds out codes for me: shortening, sugar, eggs, milk. There are only so many characters. It is like reading Fraktur. Everything comes into focus and I see my hair turning gray and brittle. Steve slouching into our inherited sofa.

If your stand mixer should fail within the first year of ownership. You can stir, or not. You can mix your little heart out until your countertop is one rectangular mass of dough. An elaborate biscuit you could store into eternity. Steve takes one of the first cookies and agrees that it is good. *If your marriage should fail within the first year?* You can accelerate the speed of the mixer. Re-read the Kitchenaid instructions. Sometimes it is only the stainless steel bowl. A streak in the finish.

TROUBLESHOOTING PROBLEMS

Is the fuse in the circuit to the Kitchenaid Mixer in working order?

Is the Mixer plugged in?

Which one of us is the stainless steel bowl? Someone is the motor, propelling the beater through the thick dough. We could be making bread. He watches

History Channel specials on artisan edibles. He is the one on the sofa. Men with Varicose veins need extra attention. *The stand mixer should not malfunction. Please check the following:*

Were you asleep when he told you he loved you? Or did you rub lotion into his hands?

If the problem cannot be fixed.

If you wash his white t-shirts and he is unresponsive.

If he wants to see you hula hoop. *There is a pivot. Allow it to cool for 30 minutes.* What did you say back to him?

Did he warm up during use? Under heavy loads and for extended periods. He could use the entire stack of pink towels, couldn't he?

Without banana bread or with. The same countertop.

THE HURRICANE LAMP

Savages out
last savagery

Matching the acceleration curve
the music will only follow sleep

Plus gentle
plus violent

Satisfying certain
conditions we waltzed
our waltzes contingent

Seeing survives sight
a plum in the ivy

The blood in my
right eye test
ifies to

Year zero
its syllable

I awoke in a different
place my wounds all
healed

Both aim
and anchor

A Ferris wheel
half in snow is
mappa mundi

Sit in the last
car of the train

It's where
the ride is
roughest

AFTER READING LORCA'S
ROMANCE SONÁMBULO

Living on this river
called Chalk,
has taken a piece
of my turquoise
heart and rendered
it malleable.
Everything I touch
creates a spear
shadow from my elbow
to the tip of my pen.
Colors have entered
my retina like orphans.

Burnt orange
and aquamarine
live in the bold
thread of my autumn
shawl, the one that blends
wool with nostalgia
and keeps me humming
gypsy ballads.

Sleepwalkers never
had it so good. Why not
love green as if it were
a dreamer drifting
through the kitchen
with a butterfly net?
Lorca leaves
his penumbra footsteps
on the porch.

Pen of a thousand
cartridges, I offer you
my silk sun,
trailing shadow
like a woman of strong
hair, released.

WHEN YOU LEAVE MY HOUSE

When you leave my house in the night without a word
and I don't know if you are
ever coming home—
can't you understand what it's like?

I know you think I'm dramatic—but remember
Herzog's film, *Nosferatu*,

and the ghost ship that slides up the canal
of the medieval Dutch village breaking
the branches of the sycamores
as it comes to its dead stop?

Who can say how it got there?
There's no one on board.
No one at the helm. Only a coffin
and a thousand starving rats bringing
the Black Death to another unsuspecting town.
My house is that town.

FIRE SERMON

The world is burning, Heraclitus noted
as did the Buddha,
and Jesus, in his way,
and before them,
the *rishis* of the *Vedas*.

Outside the tent my son and I huddle by the fire.
Scarlet coals, gold flames, blue,
hold our attention. Draco
loose across the horizon.

I say to Aidan, two-and-a half-years-old,
Hold out your hands and feel the warmth.
Don't grab at the flames.

The world is like this.
Though I don't say that.
Love with its own fire.

Simone Weil said the trick
is to learn the difference
between looking and eating.

A *sannyasi* puts on a saffron robe
and becomes
a walking flame.

SOMETHING KEEPS FIXING THINGS

missteps, miseries, malapropos, misanthropies,
coverings & cringings in sage and cheat
grass, turnings back, turnings 'round, turnings
coat (and, Em, the other frigate is *fear*.)

Free-will? Just some fine friggin'
at the Edenspot, O *felix*
culpa, Mendelson, and cat. My errors line up,
lie down, curl along the snake, tattooed one,
poison becoming my medicine.

The middle way ain't straight, turns
out, a tangle of switch-backs, blades,
alleyways, bawlings, brawlings,
boudoirs and barroom stench.

So turn around. Look like Lot's wife:
your old camel's zigzag wends its way
across the sand like a constellation
on a map in the lap of Zarathustra.

ALL SOULS CEMETERY

All under winnowed skies, the cobblestones slant at odd angles and reach for a fleeting cloud. Gathering around the Coliseum, silent stones of a prayer line frozen in mud bow between crowded angels. The white-wash and red flowers not yet blessed by black moss still face the north. And all are honored with names. An ancient bell, moved by an August breeze, sends ripples through the grass reaching into the empty branches of a white birch. A story unfolded in black scars; Judas' kiss, Magellan's map, even the fountain, all forgotten on its trunk. At the pinnacle of the Mausoleum, a carving placed high looks down over its Seven Watchmen, the Long Guardians of Crow. Marble cheeks slick with an absent mist, their congregation melts into grays as the train slides by: a history told over and over by the click of tracks.

THE ACT OF CAPES

*Enter Luck,
grinning. Angular.
Cross down stage right—
cue
The Flying Dutchman.*

Luck: (opened-mouthed)

(pause, listening)

*(slapping at fly,
eyes and head
mimic flight path)*

*Enter Bat, bouncing from ceiling,
obviously cardboard,
sequined wings of marker-black,
wax paper.*

Luck: (falling backwards, scrambles up)

*Bat dances on
fishing strings
revealing
the marionette.*

Luck Flees.

Exit stage left.

RUMPLESTILTSKIN

She suspects a name for him packed with ill vowels—
one that begins with a curling tongue
pinned to the palate, a punch to the gut,
plosives and spit and hiss, the mouth cracking
open to a forced smile at the end—
but it is always just out of reach, the taste
of peach in winter, the old river's copper rot
upon waking. The livery of his sin
marks the path she'll follow out:
denim wasted and stained,
belt and buckle threading tightrope-thin,
t-shirt a wrinkled defeat on the floor.
As he labors over some anonymous want,
she worries the augur of another morning:
she'll follow the path to the field,
the wild sway of wheat. The ever-darkening sky.
Her dreams twist and bind.
Waking later, she watches the spider silk
twinkle gold on the sill, with no recall
of the render, the unctuous, nameless pact—

KISSING COUSINS

I always take him in, in where we soften
outside the circles of stones. Leave clothes
near fire as our bare feet mingle and mimic.
We try to hear past our skin to the steeple,
but our hands shelter the other's ears.
How were we to know not to follow?
Not to drink the potato wine?
Before we sucked oxygen into our lungs,
we were related, our genetic cord,
a jump rope hissing like grandmother's geese.
We climb fences, post-holes dug deep,
scurry to our ancestor's mating grounds.
I loved him before our greatgreat
Uncle Heinrich survived the shipwreck
off the shore of Deal Beach
and the Atlantic tossed the family Bible
against jagged stones until the binding gave
and the scripture scattered like spilled semen
among the dead. I loved him even then,
with the pull of tide, his face not yet alive.

EPISTLES. THIS COUNTRY.
SUN LIKE A POCKET WATCH.

The sun and I-95 are lovers. They kissed across
Florida shamelessly and unconcerned with gas
mileage or sunburns. The ferocity of each is a lord
of travel.

The windows stayed down to air out the linen
of conversation. Another banal town, courthouse, main
street. We moved in and out of each other's history.

Florida is the patron saint of vertical spaces. Air was
born in Florida. A state where, for once, the sky was
curving away.

Tell me again about your mother, what you're scared
of becoming when there's no more time and you have
to become something at all.

There has to be a moment when the space shuttle wants
to give it up. High in the lens of atmosphere and the sun not
getting any bigger or offering help. How easier it must
be on the road, with the closer lover and shoulders ready
for rest.

The cursive of the country is written in tar and gravel.
Arteries supplying the scene. For hours we talked about
only where we were.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER WITH A DUI

The drunk tank smelled like piss
and was cold. The etched and stained
cement walls cradled me and the three
other men. I was the only one awake
and stood for hours leaning
my forehead against
the bars, staring at the clock on
the adjacent wall. The clock was
beige and the color of the wall.
The guard hummed Bob Dylan
all night from somewhere
I couldn't see. Papers ruffled.
He didn't remember how all
the songs went. At 4 am a trustee carried
Styrofoam that carried breakfast
into the cell. Habit took the wheel.
Trays! Went off in my head, but I
didn't say it, like how I didn't
tell the 3rd shift Corporal he didn't
fingerprint me correctly. Jail food
is always soft: biscuits, gravy, apple
sauce. They don't want to remind me
that I have teeth. I didn't eat, and placed
all four trays on the ledge by the metal
toilet. A man snored like he'd been
to war, he never stirred but the other
two did and eventually got up.
They quickly started talking about
how fucked up it all was, and how
they *weren't doing nothing* when
they got arrested. The night shined
like coal through a window
cut out of the exit door. I never craved
the barren February night more. And not
for its beauty, because it has none,
it was for the lack of clocks in the air,
the ability to walk six feet without hitting
a wall or a guard. For the moon glowing

and silver as a badge pinned on the chest.
And it's a strange thing
to want anything else, anything but what
I already have or have done.

THE PLOT OF A WESTERN

Character A, grease-bearded, pivots,
shot focused on crotch, then spits
in direction of Character B, one boot
on wooden porch, other on sand, green
vest buttoned halfway. Character C
rides Horse A from horizon. Cue
Morricone rip-off, cue background whips.
Character A looks at Character B.
Character B looks at Character C.
Character C is too far to tell, but we
assume he's here to beat the shit
out of somebody.

FARMER'S MARKET

This weekend we stopped at the market on 206
and I wanted to buy some rotten apples
as a joke, to find them mashed and purple,

raise my hand and scream what the hell is this,
my fingers indigo and sticky, wiping them on my khakis,
asking who was going to pay for these stains,

looking at my wife, too nervous to react, quinces
in both her hands, but before I could reach into the pile
the farmer recognized me from all those other weekends

and asked me to leave.

MY HUSBAND, EXCITED ABOUT SERFS

He wants to consume all of Russia,
sleep on the Caspian Sea and dream
of Tolstoy, Akhmatova, and Pasternak.
His reading is expansive, started in the 1960s
when he was told to fear this country,
this place that would fly planes
just to drop bombs on his elementary school.
Literature, history, art: he cannot help
but memorize facts and odd trivia.
Dates swim in his head—
rebellions small and large, famines,
the tragic lives of queens and armies.
He studies it all—June 12, the flora of the Volga,
the artistry of balalaikas—
but it is serfs who truly capture him,
mesmerize him as if Rasputin
were controlling his mind. Serfs: like slaves,
but different. Like sharecroppers, tenant farmers,
indentured servants, but different.
He rereads the history books, looking forward to
Tsar Alexander's 1861 proclamation,
and although he knows all is not perfect,
their freedom brings him joy,
as if he were standing in a field outside Odessa,
holding a hoe, being told the news
of independence, able in an instant
to see a future and know who he really is.
My husband smiles, and wanting to read no more,
to savor this occasion, he closes his latest book,
and falls to sleep to dream of revolution and beets.

VARIETY GALA

Watch the fishes walk their bones
and shake them down below.
The yellowfader elfin hands
make broom-stands on the swaying stage,
their seven kneels to the peacocks' three,
the larvate magnates praised.

The excesses of fetch and rend
have spent the fish in somberness,
the strings cut loose from the pupas,
the audience transfixed, as two denuded apples
stare out foolishly, stripped to the core.

SIBLING BOLERO

One minute giggles chime
from the taffeta rustle of leaves
dancing their decay. In the next

the baby's screech hacks
at my heart: shoved by his brother—
firstborn, deposed monarch, renegade

buccaneer—just the crown
of his head peaks from the pile:
panic's shrill arpeggio, not pain's.

Then boy-pirate lifts toddler through the tide
like one clutching a broken egg,
or tarnished pieces of eight—

O protean child!
Will every moment of youth be so twinned?
Raised one of many, a family full

of roustabouts, cast-offs, and clamor,
I never knew a speck of care
not shared.

Some resentments linger still,
but there's no fury in it—diluted,
perhaps, by sheer arithmetic.

Yet however wholly spite's sharp bite
owns you, my boy, it never quite
breaks the skin: compunction tastes

of balsamic vinegar, sour milk,
sun-spoiled and vital.

DOLL

Once my mother gave me a porcelain doll.
But the left hand was missing. I thought
for a moment that I, too, might only have a small
right hand made of china. Once my mother bought

me a book of poetry stamped in gold
bindings, but inside the covers the ink
was blurred and impossible to read. Whole
in the nimbus of the mothball smell of her mink

stole, Mother's hair was dyed blond as the doll.
I held the useless poetry book in its watery silk
of paisley endpapers. I didn't know what was real:
once, standing in the mental hospital halls, sick,

I looked in surprise at my left hand—skin,
blood and bone, the doll and I no longer twin.

EPITHALAMIUM

for Jamie & Wael

a circle forms a hole in emptiness
and what is empty becomes a form
of love as is the iris love's oldest
form through which the beloved walks
into the empty mind and there blooms

*

into the empty mind there blooms
the unguessed at one refusing zero
as the final sum, the eye prefigures
the ring's circumference whose promise
bounds nothing so nothing can be full

HUM OR UM (2)

To protest with my voice what is my voice
Place-names words cover

“Little Big Horn Museum” in the back of a Texaco

what it is is in my voice

This lamb asleep in the ewe’s shadow Trivia

Lit up in the signs that litter the side of the road

No “thorns of life” on which to fall
Save the bramble *Flags 20% Off* Save the roots

rest, voice—
then take aim, then sever—

limn lack it is what is

a-leap in low light—
these rambles sough off soot

THREE SONGS

the granite dove
by which I meant the color
gray of the bird's
flight ending in this weight

*

wait, or please will you wait

clay & clay-oven & clay-pigeon
good lord, keep these words from—

clay-pigeon, clay-oven, will you—
wait, consequences

*

o, clever granite is it how I also
arrived the faults all in
place inside the complete stone

THE TANGLE

He has a picture of her in a book
 He cannot find; but it's a book
About birds—how they were fish
 Until one day, after many of *not* flying,
 They flew.

In the picture her hair is braided
 Poorly plaited with wiry strands
Spraying out—the work of his own hands,
 The tangle, the painful tugs, the welled-
 Up tears.

He ransacks the shelves in search
 Of the book about birds—how
Some of them, for never knowing better
 Or needing more, sport useless
 Little wings.

THE PROPOSAL

The bonsai tree died.
Years ago, when the mastodons
showed me their nipples teeth.

So much of the world
is disconnected,
made up.

It's all my fault:
the bucket I used as a pot,
the ring left on the table.

Somewhere, there's a couple
posing for a photograph,
their arms around an orphan, a tree.

I watered every day.
Once a month. I slept
with the Neanderthals,

under the stars. Years ago.
I still remember the landscape
of their skulls.

Somewhere, someone's whispering,
maybe the Ice Man,
the empty bucket:

It's all your fault.
I spoke to its branches,
misted it with water.

You need to know this,
need to know how all I did was breathe
and the branches crumbled.

FLASH MOB TEEN VIOLENCE

The teens are assembling. They climb through windows while families sit down to eat. Help themselves to potatoes, then throw plates. They spear forks through walls and swing on chandeliers. They grab wine after polite request, then let it pour on white carpets. And laugh. *This is a blood stain* one screams. *This is Jesus* says another. *This is your future*. So many teens in one room, they are like rabbits, gnawing on their own feet. They move from dining room to living room, fine china on heads, until plates become discs sent through television screens. Some grab lamps others cushions, on the way to the store. *Come one come all!* Lamps through windows, cushions as shields. *Take hangers! Take carts! Take chocolate bars, take index cards! Take take take!* And they multiply. In the jungle in the field, they have cuts they have bombs. They have fists they have babies. They have the numbers.

A PINK DOLPHIN, MADE OF GLASS

When the question was asked
“Who comes from farthest away?”
thinking the question existential,
I raised my hand hoping for the prize.

The question was geographical as
it happened, so I would have won
anyway—had the Uruguayan not lied
to win the whisky—but I did get the fish,

the runner up glass fish, which turned
out to be a pink dolphin rising from
its caudal fin into a blue Midwestern sky.
It was the sort of thing a cowboy might

ride if there'd been a marine rodeo nearby,
one hand gripped beneath the glistening
neck, the other waving a ten gallon hat.
He wouldn't have lasted long—the flanks

were too smooth, too glassy for that.
He'd have been quite out of his element,
dropping to the dust far from any dolphin's
undreamed waters and unpath'd shores.

I'd murmured my thanks with a glance
at the Jack Daniels and later, out of my
element myself, pressed the dolphin into
the protesting arms of a fellow-traveller

expressing the hope she had a mother.
It would have weighed far too heavily
in my bag. Her mother might like the lift
of it, the shine, might even like the colour.

WHATEVER OTHER HEADLINES CAN WAIT

Come summer, the dragonflies mistake us for a swamp. It's an easy one to make. Snowmelt finding its way down the canyon—'round boulders tumbled into creek beds, past knots of broken tree stumps, under ducks and sometimes pelicans in the pond at Fairmont Park—on Mondays that water gets diverted to our yard, flows out of the ditch like a gift, and those dragonflies hover above it like a kind of blue bow. We're on city irrigation. It doesn't sound like much, but it is. All that runoff submerging the grass and the garden . . . all that music from water over rocks . . . it makes for a pretty good morning, let me tell you. It makes me walk around barefoot, ankle deep. And then there's this part of it too: The peas and tomatoes and carrots and melons, all the peaches hanging like a solar system—in every bite out of our garden, there's a trace of the taste of snow. Just enough so you notice. Just enough to bring you closer to dragonflies. On Monday mornings in the summertime, they mistake our yard for wetlands. You can stand out back and watch them doing magic with the color blue.

HOME APPRAISALS

1. TWO-STORY, STONE AND BRICK, SINGLE-FAMILY DWELLING

If there's added value in a ceiling fan,
then there must be value in a hawk. They come

for the doves, the ridiculous quail, and quick sparrows
squabbling daily on our neighbor's lawn,

suddenly plunging from nowhere, suddenly gone—
launched off before my eyes blink open.

And there must be value every time they miss
so *plunge* becomes *pursuit*, becomes a game

played out in fan-tailed figure-eights; it's wild:
your heartsong humming, the sky brighter blue. . .

I know this won't go into the appraisal—
just bedrooms, baths, etc.; two-car garage.

There isn't any math that factors this.
No box to check if the front yard comes with a hawk.

2. TOOL SHED, WORKSHOP, FULLY FENCED BACKYARD

Tomatoes can be yellow! Also small
and shaped like ovals! We're learning things here:

that leaving out a shovel equals rust,
that seeds and dirt can make food out of air,

that carrots follow their own thoughts underground—
they must, or why so many knots and curves

and none of them the same? We're learning sounds:
how August wind chimes mean a break from heat.

We're learning smells like *rain on dust*. It's too much
to count, to fit inside an estimate.

I'd measure me carrying the baby around
before I went in, verified square feet.

I'd measure me holding up things for him to touch,
saying *This is a pine cone, Jameson. This is a leaf.*

3. .17 ACRES. CULINARY WATER

Not every decimal point is accurate.
They sometimes miss dimension, overlook

the sweep a peach tree adds to the backyard
just by moving in the wind. . . Imagine it

gone now, downed by a storm. Imagine books
with missing pages . . . you know it's more than words

that disappear. So don't discount the tree.
There's more to calculate than area.

Last summer, for instance, in the kitchen—peaches peeled,
the crust rolled out—who knows what she saw,

exactly, as I stood there making pie?
But she flashed a smile as bright as cinnamon,

and I could tell *exactly* what she meant. . .
Best one-point-something hours that whole July.

4. 2,140 SQUARE FEET

says nothing at all about the *unsquare* angles.
The living and dining rooms are heptagons—*amazing*—

I didn't even know that was a shape.
You pass between the two through an open arch

but not the kind of arch you see in church,
the kind you find in women: rounded hips,

the small of her back, her somersaulting laugh,
her slow smooth way of coming 'round from sleep.

Upstairs follows the roof line—trapezoids,
odd polygons. Three windows look out

at the mountains—more angles balancing the sky. . .
Once when I was seventeen, the moon

looked close enough to walk to. Right there. Huge. . .
The archway makes me think of that sometimes.

5. JANUARY 26, 2009

Forty-three thousand job cuts in one day,
in just one morning. Thirty thousand more

by late-afternoon. Mine wasn't one of them.
We're not part of the millions since last May

who've lost their homes—lost porches and front doors,
the mantel 'round their fireplace, the trim

they painted 'round the windows one April:
pale green to go with her flower garden.

Or the place where he first saw her naked.
Or their kids' favorite hiding closet. All. . .

whatever the details, whatever their plans. . .
How do you fit that in boxes, tape-gun it shut?

I don't know; the news didn't answer. Instead they ran
the weather: *Cold*. Then a story about a duck.

6. 3 BDRM, 2 BA, KITCHEN, FRML DINING

The baby has a bed but likes ours more.
He lets us know it, too. He lets it fly—

like crossing two cats fighting with a war
between accordions—but *he is cute*, for sure.

And he'd eat everything if he had teeth,
eat all the foods his sister won't: the fruit,

the eggplant parmesan, whatever's there;
already he's reaching like a quick-draw artist.

And here is where he'll learn to walk, then run,
then go out back in our sun-fat garden. . .

Yes, the house has a crawl space underneath.
Yes, the radiator's certified. . .

I'm picturing him with his brothers and sister:
all that noisy tangle in the yard.

7. UPGRADES TO THE PROPERTY: N/A

So none of what I'm telling you applies;
it's all *not applicable*. I'm not surprised;

it's just another headline like the rest:
like *Economic Crisis Faces Pres.*,

like *More Firms Pressed to Liquidate*,
like *Home Sales Sluggish, Price Decay*, that's all.

My cat, for one, could care less. He's focused
on squirrels: right up the tree trunks, onto limbs.

He's pretty bad-ass. He'd stretch out on the news,
or credit report and appraisal, and go to sleep. . .

I think that's worth a note or two, don't you? . . .
And the grape vines, hawks, the backyard corner

where the swing-chair hides behind camellias? . . .
And how, when it's still, you can hear the whole house purr?

ON THE LACK OF SIRENS HEARD

My brother walks toward the street,
flicking his cigarette at a passing car

as I wait in the alley, shivering. All the while
a small black dog on a long leash

is clawing at my knee. But I will not speak
of the moon. I will never again hold a mirror

to the sun. For now it is night and the snow
is compact under our feet, and people

are not dying, and no one is being born.
I need to say that again: right now people

are not dying, and no one is being born.
There is no death and no birth, only burning.

The steel bodied cars are burning. The unlit
windows are burning. The snowy streets

are burning. My brother is burning.
And so am I, left standing below this humming

other bulb, my mind ablaze, flickering,
asking whether God is the fire or the ash.

HADES

Like a slot car
I hated: smooth

and electric,
though tight around

the edges.
But the fingers want.

And the steel arm
sparks against

the coil. A spring
pulls—

HAMLET REDUX

The debate seems lopsided. So many reasons
berm up, like snow drift, for the “not.” My

drama appears overwritten, too melancholy
by half, understocked with comic relief, rotten

with betrayal, no deus ex machina in the wings.
Impersonal forces? Everywhere. The steel gears

of chance churn, and day by day the eye blinks
open on a sterile plain, ears awaken to the low

hum of confusion. Snow. Not the charming,
Christmas card kind. A whiteout. I’m cold,

and as the mountaineers say, it would be so
pleasant to sit down and sleep for a while.

But I step outside. In the grass, a dandelion
makes its small, bright argument for living.

THE BOOK OF WHISPERING IN THE
PROJECTION BOOTH
BY JOSHUA MARIE WILKINSON
(2009, Tupelo Press)

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL MCLANE

“What you lose/cannot be recovered if the light is wrong. What you speak will always have/the capacity to break you. If this is clemency, I’m learning to be aligned with/its torque & needles, with the glug of its voice through water.” So begins *The Book of Whispering in the Projection Booth*, the fourth collection by poet Joshua Marie Wilkinson. As the passage above implies, light is crucial to this work and the modifiers of light in the poems are many—jewel light, copper light, sleepwalker light, undoable light, thimble-light—just to name a few. Over his first three collections, Wilkinson, who is a filmmaker in addition to being a poet, has slowly built a projectionist’s mythology, a mise-en-scene created with idiolect and parataxis, held together with, ironically, an emotionally volatile and fragmentary aesthetic that is unmistakably his own.

These elements coalesce in *The Book of Whispering*, where Wilkinson has honed his craft to the point that he is now cutting, editing, and hand-painting the brief frames of his poems not before the screening, but as the reel is spinning. The transitions are sudden, dramatic, and yet in Wilkinson’s hands they occur with a seamlessness that is eerie, not so much like dreaming as they are like sleepwalking (a theme that recurs throughout his work)—the unsettling and yet strangely enlightening experience of waking up again and again in a strange place without knowledge of how one got there but knowing all too well that the body or the guide has motives and motions of its own. Such moments are many in Wilkinson’s work as in “light blew open the hutch & a boy saw it,” which ends:

*Coin-operated telephones, Laundromat pinball, & airport televisions
attached to their seats. What of this will we remember with our hands?
What tent will find you as warm night air? How many stories were you
asked to bury & which ones did you bury?*

*The plants grew a hutch around the raccoons & the children grew a city
around the hutch.*

Or in “a brief history of the developer” where we are given a brief look inside the darkroom only to be redirected again and again:

*... This happened before the fires took
the trees to charcoal, before the white fish were locked in the ice of the
fountain. I am the boy who took the pictures you’ve seen. This is my sister
who developed them without her gloves on. These are her hands.*

The cinematic quality of Wilkinson’s poems cannot be stressed enough. His work is visceral, compacted with imagery that vacillates between mundane and surreal. In the prose poems, he relegates abstraction to the spaces between sentences, leaving it up to the reader to make the leap of faith across them. He further reinforces the episodic qualities in the shorter, syntactically broken poems that appear periodically throughout the book. These poem series, like frames on a filmstrip, are separated ever so briefly by a break, a dash that reminds the reader these are the briefest of still moments strung together into a storm, a life lived in minutiae but relived in a flurry, as in the sequence:

*Four days
 since I found
the clawhammer in the mailbox
attached to a note
which read,
You will need this when I come back*

The wind too will eat the scars from your face.

*Nest of possums in the orchard,,
skunk grasses lay flat, & a mare
sniffed them, spooked them.*

*Photographs of where the river
tugged our laundry line down*

*& it brought the edge in
off the edge.*

These shorter sequences, while not as strong overall as the prose poems, provide welcome breaks to the longer pieces in that they provide a kind of reverse exposition or abbreviated flashbacks. Rather than providing the reader literal and exhaustive contextual notes, these poems are condensation and distillation of shared experience, the serifs and flourishes that, like Wilkinson's "letter where I already/concealed you" make the moment and its mislaid emotions recognizable.

Despite the fragmentary framework of Wilkinson's work, its emotive quality is remarkable. These are not confessional poems and one would be hard-pressed to confuse the anxiety and disorientation that frequents the poems with pathos or anything even bordering on catharsis. It is both easy and enjoyable to make the authorial fallacy in these poems, to make them biographical and place Wilkinson in his "kingdom of the phonebooth" or his "city of ferns and copper light." It is all too tempting to see him as the boys listed in "deer & salt block."

*One boy is a liar & says there's a block of salt under his bed to draw deer
in from the orchard. One boy says the pantry wall will open if you say
an untold anagram of his name...*

*One boy took a long time in the bathtub reading the
comics. One boy loops a tractor chain to the ceiling fan & tears the
whole roof down.*

This effect is emphasized by the strange disparity inherent to the speaker in much of Wilkinson's past work that is carried over into *Book of Whispering* as well. The speaker, while reasoning and speaking like an adult, often possesses an unmistakably childish or adolescent air and seems to constantly oscillate between awe and trepidation of the strangely lit world around him, as in "the thunder makes its easy way into your whole family":

*You must take the boat on your back & then onto your bicycle. You must
carry the news in your top hat. You must reckon with the autumn's sorcery
& take it to school in your thermos. You mustn't clear the table with your
crows & you must remain asleep in the bunk no matter who arrives*

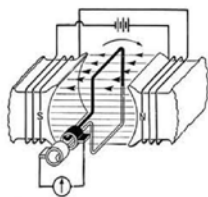
The speaker is accompanied through these pitfalls and curiosities by a series of totems that recur not only in this book, but throughout Wilkinson's works. Rabbits and projectors, messenger girls and moonscapes appear again and again in the poems playing both ominous harbingers and luminaries for the conflicts that remain unnamed throughout the text.

Like the figures and landscape mentioned above, *The Book of Whispering in the Projection Booth* is ghostly and transient. Like a voice on a cell phone or radio that is slightly out of range, we catch Wilkinson's missives in fleeting, crackling whispers only to have them disappear and materialize again a few feet later and hundreds of miles away. The book's true grace is in how fluid the text feels and how it embraces its interruptions. We continue pursuing Wilkinson's sleepwalkers, despite their irrationality and the instability of the ground. Like the speaker in "sparrowfield,"

*...we are standing in that field. The
light is falling all over, developing us in the sounds of the chase.*

DUTIES OF AN ENGLISH FOREIGN SECRETARY
BY MACGREGOR CARD
(2009, Fence Books)

REVIEWED BY CURTIS JENSEN



An electric generator is a device that transmits mechanical energy into electrical energy. A simple AC generator consists of a strong magnetic field, conductors that rotate through that magnetic field, and a means by which a continuous connection is provided to the conductors as they rotate. Each time a complete turning-over is made by the rotor, a cycle of alternating current is created. Thus a rotational energy is converted into an electrical energy. Rotation over time can be graphed as a sine wave, fixed points along the wave's curve corresponding to events along a rotation's unfolding in the flow of time. If such a waveform is centered on 0, its point of equilibrium, and its high peak is 1, then its low peak must be -1. The line of a sine wave turns and returns (or returns and turns) to its high and low peak as it unfolds in time.

In the poem, "Nary A Soul" in Macgregor Card's *Duties of an English Foreign Secretary*, Card's speaker states:

If I could
If I no could

If I could: high peak. *If I no could*: low peak. Here the waveform is centered on *I*, the couplet's subjective equilibrium. The peak to peak voltage of the couplet is something like the relative value of *could* + the relative value of *no could*. In this case, the peaks are understood to be of a class of subjective possibilities, *If I could*: the speaking subject in the conditionally possible mode; *If I no could*: the speaking subject in the conditionally impossible mode.

As the figure rotates its conductive high and low peaks through

the charged field of the poem unfolding in time, energy is generated. Of course various devices might be operationalized to conserve and/or also generate more energy:

If I could
If I no could...

If I could could could
No, could NO could could...

The figure of the first waveform is present in the second couplet, but its material spine has been reordered in rhythm, repetition, and variation. If oscillation can be understood as repetitive variation in time about a central value (a point of equilibrium) or inversely between two or more different states (in this example *could* and *no could*, but the states need not be opposing), then oscillation is what's happening here.

From "The Merman's Gift":

"Take care."
"Take care forever, no!"

Another reversal, another oscillation. From "The Libertine's Punishment":

Something is moving beside me
Nothing's supposed to be there

Equilibrium here is the position between the *something* that is and the *nothing* that is not. Oscillation occurs in the charged field of presence, absence, expectation, fear, doubt... Cartesian geometry is insufficient to the task of this field's mapping as there are too many planes for it to express.

In *Duties of an English Foreign Secretary*, Macgregor Card searches for (and *finds*!) those figural planes capable of expressing and so transmitting the energy of his nimble, terrifying, hilarious, melodic and significant poetic oscillations between sets of peak values: contemporary cityscapes to depth charges of historical conventions and texts; plunges into the complexities of a relationship (romantic and platonic modes both) to recoilings back from the social milieu; the

subjective plane of present earth to the objective heights of the air, which turns out to be just as contingent in its flickering phenomena as anything perceived at the firmament. In the wash of the work's music, points of equilibrium blister out of the text as certain subjective perspectives. Often roles such as *juror*, *maudit*, and my favorite: *the sun's own paned adjudicant*. Roles are taken up or avoided, embraced or shunned, constituting another oscillational plane of the text. Oscillations set into the fields of other oscillations, e.g. in "Gone to Earth" a social interaction in the air permutates to a private kind of night in the tomorrow possible on the ground.

*Often feeling talked about
or bored
I'll start to count, but it will pass
Haven't seen one beast today
Gone to Earth
It is too near-maybe I can tell
It's difficult to clear the air
Tomorrow I will find a kind of private night*

Card is at all times clearly conducting the oscillations of the poems in *Duties*. He does not do so from behind a shroud, like an idiot tractor-driver with a paper bag over his head expecting the children at the field's edge watching him to believe the field plows itself; nor is he standing on one foot on the tractor seat, with his scalp dyed red and his clapping hands, screaming at the children over the knocking engine to collectively acknowledge a projection of his self. Card is clearly present as the conductor within each poem of *Duties*, driving the works' turns and returns phrase by phrase. Card shows the movements of his hands in his struggle with the material of the text in its necessarily non-Cartesian geometry, and Card's secret suit lies in this open handling of the poems' material. Furthermore, through motif, melody, pathos, humor, rhyme and theme and variation, and other devices, Card beckons the reader to join him in the poems' oscillations and transmission of energy, in the working out of its movements. It is in this aspect of his work that Card draws his cues most significantly from the Spasmodics, the group of Victorian era poets characterized by their verse dramas and lengthy introspective soliloquies. The Spasmodics ascended quickly to popularity, and just

as quickly to derision, their namesake taking on a derogatory aspect in most modern criticism in spite of its link to canonical figures like Tennyson and Browning. Sidney Dobbel is a Spasmodic Poet who Card has promoted outside the text at firmilian.blogspot.com and acknowledged within by *Duties*' title and inscription.

Card's struggle to manage the sonic/linguistic material of the poem is something that can be heard and read throughout *Duties*. In essence, Card shows his work at every turn (or return), thus his authority is transparent in his open struggle with the text's material. We see, in fact, we hear and therefore feel, phrase by phrase, how Card made his compositional choices. Paradoxically it is Card's quickness and poetic skill, his nimbleness in music, word play, and phrasal movement that makes the book wholly his own. So we have another oscillation, between transparency and mastery. But at certain moments it is this mastery that can sling the reader from the text. Certain moves perhaps might be considered over-nimble, moves so quick as to wrench the reader from the poem and into the dirt of pragmatics' arena. Perhaps that is the cost of such productive experiments in the generation of energy through poetic oscillation. Nevertheless, through his precise management of affective devices, the motifs, melody, pathos, humor, rhyme and theme and variation mentioned previously (devices of which Dobbel was a master), Card by in large supports the reader through *Duties*' interrelational unfolding, and in so doing he harnesses *Duties*' high-charge oscillations to powerful poetry.

What geometries then *could* describe the energy dynamics of interrelational oscillations such as those that Card executes in *Duties of an English Foreign Secretary*?

MEET ME AT THE HAPPY BAR

BY STEVE LANGAN

(2009, BlazeVOX [books])

REVIEWED BY LIZ KAY

Steve Langan's obsessions are many: the body, as both an object of beauty and a decaying form, reappears in poem after poem; death and its compatriot, time, wander the pages; language, visual art, and music leave their marks. Still these are not the subjects of the *Meet Me at the Happy Bar*, merely landmarks that remind us where we are within its landscape. From the opening poem "Landscape with Pony" through repeated meditations on exile and home, the primary obsession is space itself, both literal and psychic. Leading us on a quest for that perfect confluence of time and place, that "Happy Bar" where we're all two drinks in and completely at ease, Langan invites us into a world where he tries out every space he can imagine:

Landscape with promises.

Landscape with malcontents.

Landscape with syringes in a shoebox.

*Landscape we've lived here so long clawing
after privilege you told me you would bring me
back to the sea before I die.*

Still, none of these places ever really fit, and so the search is on through the beautiful and the mundane, the absurd, and the achingly normal, the ordinary dullness and the absolute rebelliousness of both life and love. In Langan's hands, these moments feel recognizable. Ours is an age both overstimulated and seemingly lacking significance, and so we recognize ourselves in the speaker who is "already tired of this century. / Mothers, children, their forgetful children. // I can't keep them all straight."

Langan's is a speaker admittedly in exile, though whether this is literal or psychic, self-imposed or otherwise seems always in flux. Admiration is juxtaposed with contempt, affection with disgust. Still, in his quietest, most fragile moments, he longs for the mother tongue, asking:

*Will you hold me a while?
Until morning.*

*And speak only in English,
please, in plain flat
stupid midwestern.*

So I cannot forget you.

Interestingly, it is in these moments, with these people who have not been forgotten, that our speaker seems most at ease. He is intent on preserving the characters of his memory, even those of whom he says:

*Pay him no attention. He was the neighborhood
bully. Undocumented, suffering lapses,
certainly he's come a long way,
but he's still dangerous...*

and this remembering is a dangerous exercise, as our speaker freely admits "It takes nerve, gumption and moxie / to remember all we've been through / and document it for the next generation." There is great intimacy in this act of remembrance, and yet it is an intimacy that is portioned out with controlled detachment, as in the poem "Meditation on the Cabin (and Beyond)":

*You flash into my mind, dear one,
and are exalted then extinguished.*

Safely tucked away, returned to exile.

All these forms of courage the mind enacts.

A wish followed by a denunciation.

This is a book with a great deal at stake, and yet there is a certain humor, too—a sense that our speaker recognizes the absurdity of the exercise, and a playfulness of language and musicality that enlivens the poems, offsetting their darker tendencies as in the poem "Where Is the Cigar I Left Burning" in which the speaker ruminates over his misplacement of:

*...the journal
with the article I was reading
about the misconstruction
of deconstruction? The TP,
your famous IUD, the brochure
from the cemetery where we
can buy our plots now*

For all his misanthropic quirks, or more likely because of them, Langan's is a speaker we ultimately trust, a speaker we believe when he urges "Will you call me? You can count on me. / I will not omit triumph or disaster." This use of the second person "you" is important. In poem after poem, we are directly addressed, invited to enter, confided in, and we trust what he has to say because, with the unparalleled intimacy of the stranger on the next barstool, this speaker hasn't bothered to lie to us. We get the sense that we are both too important, and not important enough, to lead him to varnish the truth. Thus, our speaker's admission of isolation is precisely what allows us to feel so connected to him when he says to us (and it really is to us, it feels):

*Let's make a wish, too, and let's not cry
at all, not one tear, even though the darkness
has arrived, you remember light, don't you,
and being moved to rapture by the singers,
their birdlike pronouncements in the final movement—*

Langan's is a voice both disconnected and discontented—searching, fully aware of the irony—for that which might connect and content. Who else could speak for us so fluently "in plain flat stupid Midwestern"?

BIOGRAPHIES

DAN BEACHY-QUICK is the author, most recently, of *This Nest, Swift Passerine*. In the spring of 2011 Milkweed Editions will publish *Wonderful Investigations : Essays, Meditations, Tales*, a collection of essays, meditations and tales. He teaches in the MFA Program at Colorado State University.

TIFFANY BRENNEMAN is a third-year candidate in Minnesota State University's MFA Creative Writing Program. When she isn't selling books at Barnes & Noble or writing, she daydreams about living in Ireland and acquiring a golden retriever.

ROB CARNEY is the author of *Weather Report* (Somondoco Press, 2006) and *Boasts, Toasts, and Ghosts* (Pinyon Press, 2003), both winners of the Utah Book Award for Poetry—and two chapbooks: *New Fables, Old Songs* and *This Is One Sexy Planet*. His newest book, *Story Problems*, is out this fall (Somondoco Press, 2010). His work has been published in dozens of journals and in *Flash Fiction Forward* (W.W. Norton, 2006). You may write to him at rob.carney@uvu.edu.

MARIO CHARD is the poetry editor of *Sycamore Review*. His poems have appeared in *RATTLE*, *Poet Lore*, *South Dakota Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *Western Humanities Review* and elsewhere. He currently teaches creative writing at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, where he lives with his wife and son.

DIYA CHAUDHURI received her BA from Emory University and is currently in the MFA program at the University of Florida. Her poems have most recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Harpur Palate*, *Rougarou*, *Redivider*, *Zoland Poetry*, *elimae* and *anderbo*, among others.

HANNAH CRAIG lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with her husband, daughter, and a parrot named Milo. She's currently in search of a baseball team to support, because the Bucs just aren't cutting it. Her work has recently appeared in *Fence*, *Post Road*, *Redivider* and *Columbia Review*.

STEVEN CRAMER is the author of four poetry collections: *The Eye that Desires to Look Upward*, *The World Book*, *Dialogue for the Left*

and Right Hand and *Goodbye to the Orchard*, which won the Sheila Motton Prize from the New England Poetry Club, and was named an Honor Book by the Massachusetts Center for the Book. He directs the Low-Residency MFA Program in Creative Writing at Lesley University in Cambridge. More information at: <http://stevenecramer.com>.

Note: Section II of “Versions of Mandelstam” first appeared in *AGNI* 65.

MARY CHRISTINE DELEA is the author of *The Skeleton Holding Up the Sky*, two chapbooks, and numerous published poems. Most recently a Poet-in-the-Schools and a university professor, she is currently a stay-at-home writer. Delea is from Long Island, and now lives in Oregon.

STEVE FELLNER has published a book of poems, *Blind Date with Cavafy* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2007) and a memoir, *All Screwed Up* (Benu Press, 2009).

MARIE GAUTHIER'S poems have appeared or are forthcoming in various journals, including *Cave Wall*, *The MacGuffin*, *The American Poetry Journal*, *Weave Magazine* and others. She was the recipient of a 2008 Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize, and is the author of a chapbook, *Hunger All Inside* (Finishing Line Press, 2009). Gauthier lives with her husband and two young sons in Shelburne Falls, MA, where she co-curates the Collected Poets Series and works for Tupelo Press. Thus, she has sold her soul to poetry.

PETER GOLUB is a Moscow born poet and translator. In 2008 he edited a collection of new Russian poetry for *Jacket Magazine*. He has one book of poems, *My Imagined Funeral* (Argo-Risk, Moscow 2007). He is a translation consultant for *St. Petersburg Review*, and teaches at the University of Utah.

ANDREW C. GOTTLIEB works and writes in Irvine, California, and loves the southwest climate, though he spent 9 years in Seattle and misses the rain and ferries. His work is published in many journals and in his chapbook, *Half-lives* (New Michigan Press, 2005). These poems are from *Ritual Leavings*, a recent semi-finalist for the Philip Levine Award. Andrew does a pretty good job at his day

gig, but avoids it as much as possible; instead spending time outdoors with his wife and two stepchildren, or with his books: reading and writing.

ANDREW HALEY'S poems, translations, and short stories have appeared in *Girls With Insurance*, *Otis Nebula*, *STOP SMILING*, *Quarterly West*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Zone* and other journals.

CURTIS JENSEN is an MFA candidate in the Creative Writing Program at Brooklyn College. His work is forthcoming in *The Equalizer* and *The Bridge*. He is the author of five chapbooks, and he co-curates the Prospect literary series. Previous to Brooklyn, he has lived and worked in Utah, Wyoming and Ukraine. He maintains a blog at <http://theendofwaste.blogspot.com>.

LIZ KAY holds an MFA from the University of Nebraska, where she was the recipient of both an Academy of American Poets' Prize, and the Wendy Fort Memorial Prize. In 2008, she was awarded a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize for excellence in lyric poetry. Her work has appeared in, or is forthcoming from, such journals as: *Margie*, *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Whiskey Island Magazine* and *The New York Quarterly*.

KATIE KINGSTON is the author of three poetry collections: *Unwritten Letters*, *El Rio de las Animas Perdidas en Purgatorio* and *In My Dreams Neruda*. She is the recipient of the 2010 W.D. Snodgrass Award for Poetic Endeavor and Excellence and has recently completed a fellowship residency at the Fundación Valparaíso in Mojácar, Spain. Currently she lives and writes in Trinidad, an area known as the coal fields, located in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountain Range.

JOHN LAMBREMONT, SR. is a Pushcart Prize-nominated poet from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. John has a BA in creative writing and a JD from L.S.U. His poems have been published or accepted by over thirty literary reviews and journals, including *Red River Review*, *A Hudson View* (2009 Pushcart Prize nomination), *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Lilliput Review* and *Poets For Living Waters*. John's full-length volume of retrospective poems, *Whiskey*,

Whimsy, & Rhymes, is available on Amazon.com, Google Books and all major bookstore web sites.

EMILIE LINDEMANN lives in Newton, Wisconsin where the view out her kitchen window consists of cows grazing in a single-file line. Her chapbook, *Dear Minimum Wage Employee*, is forthcoming from Dancing Girl Press. She is a Ph.D. candidate in Creative Writing at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

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AMY PLETTNER'S poetry has appeared in the anthologies *Nebraska Presence* and *Times of Sorrow, Times of Grace*, both from Backwaters Press. Other publications include *Plains Song Review*, *Nebraska Life*, and *Celebrate: A Collection of Women's Writing*. She has also been Bill Kloefkorn's guest on Nebraska's Public Radio Broadcast of *Poetry of the Plains*. Plettner is a student at the University of Nebraska MFA in Writing program.

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DONALD REVELL is the author of eleven collections of poetry, most recently of *The Bitter Withy* (2009) and *A Thief of Strings* (2007), both from Alice James Books. Winner of the 2004 Lenore Marshall Award and two-time winner of the PEN Center USA Award in poetry, Revell has also received the Gertrude Stein Award, two Shestack Prizes, two Pushcart Prizes, a PEN USA Award for Translation, and fellowships from the NEA as well as from the Ingram Merrill and Guggenheim Foundations. He lives with his wife, poet Claudia Keelan, and their two children in the desert south of Las Vegas and is a Professor of English and Creative Writing Director at UNLV.

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MICHAEL SOWDER'S poetry collection, *The Empty Boat*, was chosen by Diane Wakoski to win the T. S. Eliot Prize, was a finalist for the Utah Book Award and several of its poems were nominated for Pushcart Prizes. He is the author of a study of *Walt Whitman's poetry*, *Whitman's Ecstatic Union*. His essays and poems, which tend to explore the human relationship to the natural world and intersections between religious mysticism—often Buddhist—and daily life, appear widely. Recently featured in Ted Kooser's nationally-syndicated column, "American Life in Poetry," his poetry is also forthcoming in the anthology, *Poets of the American West*. He is presently completing a poetry manuscript titled, *Prayer and Practice*.

ROB TALBERT is a native Texan and currently pursuing his MFA at Virginia Tech University. Yesterday, he broke his sunglasses.

PIMONE TRIPLETT is an associate professor at the University of Washington, where she is currently the director of MFA Program in Creative Writing. The author of three books of poems, *Rumor* (2009), *The Price of Light* (2005) and *Ruining the Picture* (1998), Pimone Triplett is also coeditor, with Dan Tobin, of the essay anthology, *Poet's Work, Poet's Play* (2008). She lives in Seattle with her husband and son.

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VALERIE WOHLFELD'S poetry book, *Woman with Wing Removed*, is forthcoming in October 2010 from Truman State University Press. Her first collection, *Thinking the World Visible*, was chosen by James Dickey for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize. Wohlfeld is widely published, including: *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *Antioch Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Indiana Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *New Letters*, *Western Humanities Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Greensboro Review*, *Indiana Review*, *The North American Review*, *Connecticut Review*, in the anthology *Poets of the New Century*, *The Yale Younger Poets Anthology* and elsewhere.

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